

# “Doing it for the lulz?”: Online Communities of Practice and Offline Tactical Media

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Ray Vichot

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“Doing it for the lulz?”:  
Online Communities of Practice and Offline Tactical Media

Approved by:

Dr. Celia Pearce, Advisor  
School of Literature, Communication, and  
Culture  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

Dr. Jay Bolter  
School of Literature, Communication,  
and Culture  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

Dr. Carl DiSalvo  
School of Literature, Communication, and  
Culture  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

Dr. Fox Harrell  
Literature, Communication, and  
Culture  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

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## GLOSSARY

B& - “banned”. Being barred from a forum or other virtual space. Anonymous sometimes refers to being arrested or “v&”(vanned) as a real world equivalent

forced meme – an attempt to “create” popularity with an image, catchphrase, or activity. Usually seen by Anonymous as poor form.

grief – The activity of entering an virtual space, usually a multiplayer ‘virtual world’ such as Second Life, with the express purpose of disrupting gameplay in some fashion.

image macro – a popular medium for distributing memes. Relies on a specific sort of juxtaposition of image and text. One example of an image Macro is a so-called ‘demotivational poster’.

lulz – a nominalizing of the acronym LOL. Essentially laughter (usually and someone or something’s expense

meme – a unit of cultural knowledge that is repeated and passed on many times. Examples of memes range from catchphrases and songs, to fashion trends and activities. Online, it has come to symbolize any popular media online that is, at least initially, user-created.

morfag – an Anonymous member who displays either too much compassion or is seen as not being as “Anonymous” as they should be.

raid – What in other contexts may be called hacking or cracking. It is an activity where people post personal information about a person or organization and then hack, harass, or otherwise target on an individual using online methods of communication.

Scilon – A Project Chanology term for Scientologists. From Cylon. Sometimes, especially online among Anonymous members, “Scifag”.

troll – Usually used in the context of message boards or synchronous chat, the activity involves either posting shocking content, feigning ignorance, or faking an identity with the intent to rile up a crowd or convince a person to reveal private information.

win – a perceived victory, usually in the context of raiding/trolling. Sometimes treated as though it was a countable noun (i.e. “many wins”, “much more win”, “epic win”)





## SUMMARY

What happens when an online community moves to a real space? Take the case of Anonymous. For several years now, this, loosely connected, entirely internet based group has been known for online pranks and grieving, often being labeled by the media as "hackers on steroids" or "the Internet Hate Machine". However, recently a significant portion of the group has taken up the cause of protesting what it sees as criminal injustices of the Church of Scientology. This move into the real world sparked various discussions which are relevant for online communities as a whole. What negotiations, compromises, and changes took place in order to move into the real world space? In what ways has the group succeeded (or failed) in maintaining the momentum needed for long term real-world protest and what can other online communities gain from this history?

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*“RESOLUTION Declaring that a state of war exists between the "Church" of Scientology and the Internet and making provisions to prosecute the same.*

*Whereas the "Church" of Scientology has committed unprovoked acts of war against the Internet and Society as a whole; and*

*Whereas, such acts continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the security and freedom of the Internet and its users; and*

*Whereas, such acts render it both necessary and appropriate that Anonymous exercise its rights to self-defense and to seek out lulz: Therefore be it Resolved by Anonymous in /i/ and /b/ assembled,*

*That the state of war between the Anonymous and the "Church" of Scientology which has thus been thrust upon the Internet is hereby formally declared; and*

*That Anonymous is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire force of Anonymous and the resources of the Internet to prosecute war against the "Church" of Scientology; and*

*To bring the conflict to a successful termination, all of the resources of Anonymous are hereby pledged.”*

-“The Formal Declaration of War”, /i/NSURGENCY

What happens when an online community moves to a real space? Even further, how does the self-identity of the group change when the purpose of the group changes in this remediation back to the real world?

Take the case of Anonymous. For several years now, this, loosely connected, entirely internet based group has been known for online pranks and grieving, often being labeled by the media as "hackers on steroids" or "the Internet Hate Machine". They are also regarded as a generator of various memes, usually catchphrases or images

that circulate quickly through various online communities. Sometimes the meme is an activity, such as 'rickrolling': the act of misleading someone into viewing a music video of Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up."

The group itself is very loosely structured, if at all, which is a consequence of the use of Anonymous as its moniker. This is due to the fact that the site where Anonymous is typically regarded by online communities to have originated from doesn't require logins or specific handles or avatars, but allows anonymous posting (this practice itself is a holdover from well known Japanese message board 2ch.net).

People who claim the Anonymous title may also belong to a number of interrelated online communities. As such, it has taken the concept of anonymity to a logical extreme, creating a capricious figure at once a singular entity and a ether-like presence. While the group grew out of fan-based communities, especially those of Japanese animation, video gaming, and technology, the activities of Anonymous are dissimilar to fan-based communities. Much of the actual activity of Anonymous stems in meme creation, multiplayer game griefing, hacking, and, in some cases, harassment of individuals seen as "innocent targets" or as "people deserving of it" for various reasons. Again, due to the messy nature of this group, it would be a mistake to assume the same sets of activities are being done by the same sets of people.

Much of the discourse of the group seems to be an emphatic criticism of the Utopian ideas once held about the potential of the internet. Simply put, their argument is that some people take the internet too seriously. Ironically, some in the group also seems to hold the notion that they, or people similar to themselves, are a vanguard of

the internet, citing things such as successful memes, various hacking or griefing exploits, and a knowledge of network systems. This is a call to both earlier hacker culture as well as the notion of “console cowboys” from William Gibson’s Neuromancer. However, recently a significant portion of the group has taken up the cause of protesting what it sees as criminal injustices of the Church of Scientology. This move into the real world sparked various discussions which are relevant for online communities as a whole. What negotiations, compromises, and changes took place in order to move into the real world space? How has the idea of Anonymous adapted to the more concrete space of the protest? In what ways has the group succeeded (or failed) in maintaining the momentum needed for long term real-world protest and what can other online communities gain from this history?

### *Research Questions*

- *How does an online community move to a real space?*

What is asked by this question is “what are the ways in which a group that is primarily digitally-based 'decides' to move into the real world space?” In some sense, this answer is obvious: they have always been in the real world, if not as a whole group, then as small parts of the group based on geographic closeness (i.e. friends watching anime in a dorm room versus a large convention space or separately as part of a mass bittorrent release). However, a digitally situated group like Anonymous (or earlier groups such as hacker subcultures and early Usenet communities) don't necessarily concern themselves with moving their culture to the more mainstream world. Is the

move then prompted by outside forces? Or is it a more intrinsically internal move to "take it further"?

• *What negotiations, compromises, and changes took place in order to move into the offline space?*

Ultimately, in this move to the offline space, which was conducted within the space of a month, there was much coordination and conversation with individuals who felt like they belonged to Anonymous. In his article, "A Group is Its Own Worst Enemy", Clay Shirkey argues that an online communities is built in three tiers: a closely knit "core audience", a larger, committed, but much less vocal audience, and an even larger, but virtually silent lurking community. A consequence of this three tier structure is that most of the decisions are made by the initial group. However, this may not be the case, especially in the case of Anonymous where conversation is not limited to one website, mailing list, IRC channel, or Usenet group. Thus, the research needs to inquire who was it that was most vocal in the move to real-life protest of Scientology.

Additionally, one must look at the various narrative threads that were formed. Since the group is large and nebulous, how much of what could be called Anonymous is participating in both the conversation about and the actual protest? What amount and kind of dissent or dismissiveness for Project Chanology exists among the members of Anonymous as well as similar online communities of practice?

- *In what ways is the group succeeding/failing to maintain the momentum needed for long term real-world protest?*

One of the big questions that should be asked of Anonymous and Project Chanology is whether this shift can not only provoke change in sentiment towards Scientology, but also whether the community itself can survive both the shift in focus and the maintenance needed for the long term. Preliminary research seems to indicate that while the physical protests may not necessarily be lasting, the media and information campaign may very well. However, more research is needed in order to properly gauge the progress made and the perception of that progress.

- *What can other online communities gain from this history?*

Finally, it is important to be able to, after understanding the specific case study, to be able to extrapolate for a more general purpose. Whatever data develops here has a clear application in the study of online communities, especially future communities which may exist in a multiple virtual sites as well as geographic ones. It also may shed light in how communities grow, change, splinter, and merge in the light of internal or external events. Finally, it may answers questions of offer a data point for constructors of both online communities as well as designers of platforms meant to serve either specific online communities or be a means where multiple communities of practice may operate.

## *Research Methods, and Resources*

While a more detailed explanation of Research methodology will be explained in Chapter 5, it is good to summarize the research techniques employed for this project. The research will use two primary forms of analysis. First, there will be an emphasis on ethnographic research, primarily digitally, in the vein of Christine Hine's methodology outlined in her work, *Virtual Ethnography*. In earlier research I conducted on fan-based communities, I noted and have written on the importance of ethnographic techniques in understanding these communities of practice. In these communities of practice, I focused on what I consider a two-part ethnography: The first part focused on being active in, observing, and interviewing participants in these virtual spaces.

The virtual ethnography would utilize techniques similar to Christine Hine's use in her ethnography. I will accomplish my study by researching archives of discussion boards, noting important threads of discourse in the various forums and boards that the community uses, and seeing various productions and their reception by both the community of practice and the larger culture. Of note would be discussions and representations of Anonymous as well as the ways in which Project Chanology is portrayed both as separate from and as part of Anonymous.

The second part of this ethnography focuses on the real world protests and its media products. In order to conduct research, online surveys of protesters native to the Atlanta area was conducted, asking participants questions about their views on Scientology, the ways in which they come across and disseminate information, and their relationship and personal view of what they do and how it is similar to or different from



the way Anonymous acts in the online space. The goal of this part of the research is to determine in what ways is Project Chanology similar to Anonymous and the ways in which it is a spin-off or side-group of the larger Anonymous. Ideally, this research would incorporate physical ethnography, visiting protest sites and interacting with and observing in the ways protestors operate in the space of activity. However, due to Institute Review Board guidelines, this has been deemed high-risk research and thus could not be done at this time.

Since ethnographic research invariably involves observation of humans, I am writing a proposal for IRB Research approval. The Proposal will be looked at and approved by my thesis advisor before submission to the Office of Research Compliance. Preserving anonymity is of great importance in a study like this, especially since members of Anonymous are much more protective of their privacy than the average person compounded with the very real fear of litigation by the Church of Scientology if their identity is revealed. I will attempt to gain a signature waiver, so that participants will not need to sign any documents with their names. As far as the online component, the use of "double anonymized" screen names will be used as needed, though given the peculiar nature of the group, is of less concern.

Separate from the ethnographic component of this research, I will try and analyze the various discourses generated by both protest materials as well as the various sorts of typically "Anonymous-like" cultural productions (images, videos, and "memes") that may either support or criticize the Chanology movement.

## *Focus of Inquiry*

The thesis will break down into six chapters:

Chapter 1 provides some preliminary background on the Church of Scientology, Anonymous, and the Project Chanology movement and a brief history of events. This will provide context that will be further fleshed out in subsequent chapters. It argues that this case study is a worthwhile model of studying not only the ways in which online communities engage in protest, but in the ways in which online communities change in their migration to real world space.

Chapter 2 provides a foundation to my analysis from the perspective of online communities, as well as in online multiplayer games. It reviews previous scholarship on these spheres with focus on grief play, hacker culture, and organization and online community. It also touches on the notion of “online disinhibition” in online settings as well as emergent behavior online.

Chapter 3 continues this analysis, but instead refocuses on research and productions of tactical media as well as the practice of culture jamming and its use in counter-hegemonic discourse.

Chapter 4 provides a deeper context regarding Anonymous and its activities. Here, much of the digital ethnographic work here will be used to discuss the various

activities of the group. Much of the focus here is both on the practice of meme production as well as on various forms of harassment and hacking. The chapter will also focus on how these activities are perceived and discussed within the community of practice.

Chapter 5 goes into detail regarding the transition from online to real world space as well as the discourse surrounding that transition and current narratives built within the group by both active participants in the Chanology movements and members of Anonymous who are either dismissive or actively against the project. The chapter will focus on both the online and offline activities of Project Chanology and how Anonymous colors both perceptions of Scientology and their approach to protesting.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis, offering a synthesis and restatement of the possible solutions to the research questions. It also highlights and points out how this case study can offer lessons to nascent online communities as well as those who are attempting to build one. It will also offer directions for further inquiry into the nature of online communities of practice.

## *Background*

*“Anonymous is not a person, nor is it a group, movement or cause: Anonymous is a collective of people with too much time on their hands, a commune of human thought and useless imagery. A gathering of sheep and fools, assholes and trolls, and normal everyday netizens. An anonymous collective, left to its own devices, quickly builds its own society out of rage and hate. Anonymous can be anyone from well-meaning college kids with highly idiosyncratic senses of humor trying to save people from Scientology, to devious nihilist hackers, to thirteen year old boys who speak entirely in in-jokes on an endless quest for porn...*

*As individuals, they can be intelligent, rational, emotional and empathetic. As a mass, a group, they are devoid of humanity and mercy. Never before in the history of humanity has there once been such a morass, a terrible network of the peer-pressure that forces people to become one, become evil. Welcome to the soulless mass of blunt immorality known only as the Internet.*

*Anonymous are the Monsters from the Id. “*

*-Encyclopedia Dramatica entry on “Anonymous”*

## *Why Anonymous? For the lulz?*

Anonymous is not a group or community in a traditional sense. Even for an online community of practice, there is not much that ties it to say, fan-based communities. Its focus is not on any media, any book, film, or television show. It's not based on an artistic practice or political ideology. If there are any cultural assumptions, it may be those co-opted from hacker culture, but even then there is not much that would be agreed upon 100 percent. Perhaps the mindset is closest to that of a griefer in an online multiplayer game, except the group itself doesn't inhabit a game space as its primary mode of communication.

In actuality the name “Anonymous” is a happy accident of the location where people now associated with the group hang out. By all accounts, the group known as Anonymous shouldn’t really exist. It definitely shouldn’t have become a center for a certain type of internet cultural production or, even more improbably, moving from online to offline to promote a social justice cause that has been entrenched as a separate online culture, but a rather marginalized one compared to the legal and financial power wielded by the dominant party. And yet, somehow it has. Is it possible that by understanding the processes by which this occurred we can understand more deeply how online communities function?

In order to understand the process by which online communities change or migrate offline, I am using the incidents of Anonymous and Project Chanology as a case study and examining, from various theoretical and disciplinary angles, the ways and means online communities negotiate events that constitute changes in the size, makeup, and activities the community engages in.

Anonymous makes for an interesting case study since for its existence as a community, it has focused its attention not just on production and communication over the internet, but also in a meta-discussion about what the internet is and how people use it in their daily lives. This paper hopes to elucidate the processes of online communities of practice, especially those that have little to no organization. It is probably a safe bet that similar communities of practice will emerge, if they have not already, and in looking at this case study, we can hopefully gain information about how the group itself acknowledges the change in communities.

To grasp the dynamics of the relationship between Anonymous as an internet-based community and its developments in the real-world, some context needs to be established. Therefore, this chapter is focused on providing a historical account of Scientology and Anonymous and how their paths crossed in the early part of 2008.

### *A Brief History of the Church of Scientology*

The Church of Scientology was borne from the mind of science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard. In 1952, after having created the self-help system Dianetics four years previous, created Scientology as a set of beliefs. These beliefs were organized under a complicated series of abstractions of the self which are confusing and, at times, self-contradictory. However, the core belief of Scientology is an unwavering faith in the writings of L Ron Hubbard.

Scientology was recognized as a tax-exempt religion in the United States in 1957. On January 4th of 1963, the US FDA raided offices of the Church of Scientology and seized hundreds of the Church's E-meters as illegal medical devices. The devices have since been required to carry a disclaimer saying that they are a purely religious artifact. In 1966 Hubbard stepped down as executive director of Scientology. In 1967 the IRS removed its tax-exempt status, asserting that its activities were commercial and operated for the benefit of Mr. Hubbard, rather than for charitable or religious reasons.

During this period, Hubbard left the United States and traveled to various countries that were holding hearings on Scientology. Following a failed bid to invest in the new Rhodesian economy<sup>1</sup>, he spent much of the late 60s on a boat in the Mediterranean Sea, no longer “executive director” of the church, but a “Commodore” in

the newly founded Church's Sea Organization or "Sea Org". Hubbard spent this period attended to by "Commodore's Messengers"<sup>2</sup>, taking drugs, and receiving emoluments from the Church of Scientology. In 1969, the Greek government expelled the ship Hubbard and Sea Org were using, which was docked in the island of Corfu since the year before.

In the 1970s, the Church instituted a planned infiltration of the United States government offices. Dubbed Operation Snow White, it was an attempt to purge unfavorable reports and records about Scientology, in particular on Hubbard. Several people are thought to have been involved in the project, under the leadership of Mary Sue Hubbard, third wife of L. Ron and second in command of the church at the time. In 1979 as a result of FBI raids during Operation Snow White, eleven senior people in the church's Guardian's Office were convicted of obstructing justice, burglary of government offices, and theft of documents and government property.

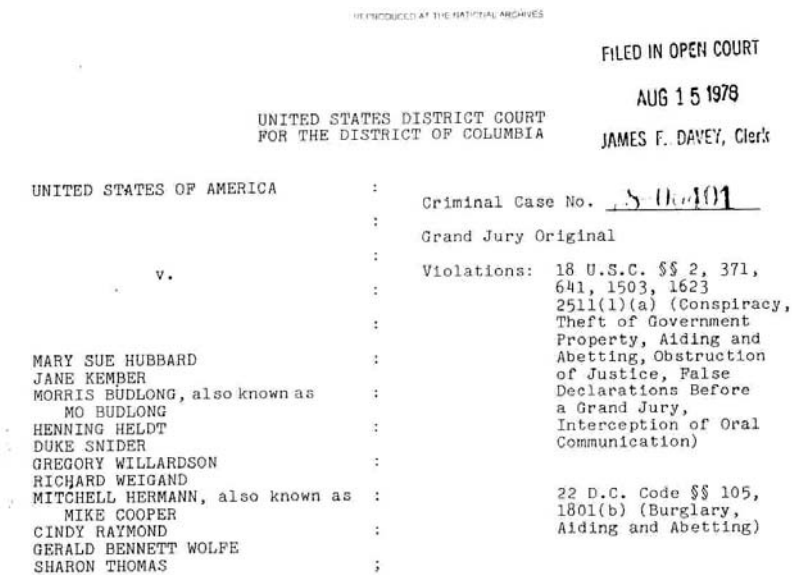


Figure 1.1: Grand Jury Charges Against Members of Scientology participating in "Operation Snow White"

In January 24th, 1986, L. Ron Hubbard died at his ranch near San Luis Obispo, California and David Miscavige became, for all intents and purposes<sup>3</sup>, the head of the organization. Starting in 1991, persons connected with Scientology filed fifty lawsuits against the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), a group that had been critical of Scientology. Although many of the suits were dismissed, one of the suits filed against the Cult Awareness Network resulted in \$2 million in losses for the network. Consequently, the organization was forced to go bankrupt. In 1996, Steven L. Hayes, a Scientologist, purchased the bankrupt Cult Awareness Network's logo and appurtenances. A new Cult Awareness Network was set up with Scientology backing, which critics claim merely operates as a clearinghouse for potential new Scientologists.

In a 1993 U.S. lawsuit brought by the Church of Scientology against Steven Fishman, a former member of the Church, Fishman made a court declaration which included several dozen pages of hitherto secret esoterica detailing aspects of Scientologist cosmogony. As a result of the litigation, this material, normally strictly safeguarded and only used in Scientology's more advanced "OT levels", found its way onto the Internet. This resulted in a battle between the Church of Scientology and its online critics over the right to disclose this material, or safeguard its confidentiality. The Church of Scientology was forced to issue a press release acknowledging the existence of this cosmogony, rather than allow its critics "to distort and misuse this information for their own purposes." Even so, the material, notably the story of Xenu, has since been



widely disseminated and used to caricature Scientology, despite the Church's vigorous program of copyright litigation.

In 1995, Church lawyer Helena Kobrin attempted to shut down the newsgroup alt.religion.scientology by sending a control message instructing Usenet servers to delete the group. However, because of the way control messages work, there was too much traffic for the message to be implemented by the system. However, this led to criticism, which continues to this day, that Scientology's true goal is to suppress the free speech of its critics. Similar to the Fishman trial, the Church sued internet sites which posted copyrighted material about the church's tenets, citing the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, at a level which was unprecedented at the time. Along with the litigation, the alt.religion.scientology newsgroup was attacked by forged spam messages in a technique which was dubbed "sporgery". The attacks were traced back to church members and, later on, a former Scientologist claimed responsibility, claiming she used Church money, specifically from the Office of Special Affairs<sup>4</sup>, to open up accounts on various ISPs in order to distribute the spam messages on a.r.s.

Today the Church of Scientology is organized into about half a dozen distinct legal entities. Apart from these entities, there are various organizations which are known to be ties to Scientology. These range from substance abuse counseling (Narconon), anti-Psychiatry Movements (Citizens Commission on Human Rights), education methodology (Study Tech), and business management methods (World Institute of Scientology Enterprises). Critics argue that this level of organization and

diversification, critics is too complicated for a religious organization and is more in line with a multi-national corporate entity. Indeed, this was the reasoning behind the IRS's initial revocation of tax exempt status in the 1960s and its dubious status as a religion in several countries.

Scientology's status as a religion is contested at best. While certain countries, such as the United States, regard Scientology as a religion with tax-exempt status and other rights that religious groups enjoy. Other countries, such as Japan or Greece, tolerate Scientology, but do not consider them a religion. Yet still in several countries, though perhaps most extremely Germany, actively decry Scientology as little more than a corporate front masquerading as a religion. Stephen A Kent argues the case that Scientology is not a religion. Instead

“the more appropriate position to take is that the organization is a multi-faceted transnational corporation that has religion as only one of its many components. Other components include political aspirations, business ventures, cultural productions, pseudo-medical practices, pseudo-psychiatric claims, and (among its most devoted members who have joined the Sea Organization), an alternative family structure.”

### *A History of Anonymous (what little there is)*

What has become Anonymous can be traced back to Japanese message board 2-Channel (“ni-channel”, 2ch for short). Established in 1999 by a Japanese expatriate Hiroyuki Nishimura who was a student at the University of Arkansas, the board has grown in the largest message board in the world with an estimated 8 million posts daily.



Figure 1.2: The opening graphic for 2ch.net. The images are derived from various 2ch derived memes, with many of them evolved from Shift-JIS Art

The major difference between 2ch and other message board and forum post software was two fold. First, forum posts fall into one of hundreds of boards dedicated to topics as wide ranging as cooking, venture capital, and social news. Among these boards are several topics. These topics are organized around an original posting, usually centered around topics such as “iPod Touch Part 71” or “Best Wheat for Pizza: 3rd Slice” were organized vaguely by topic, without any threading of replies and with a topic limit of 1000 messages, organized by tripcode<sup>5</sup>. When a topic reaches the limit, a new post must be made to continue discussion. These topics are then 上げ(aged or “bumped”) or 下げ(saged or “lowered”) depending on whether participants like the topic or not.

Secondly, and perhaps most important, all posts not made by the forum owner or moderators are done anonymously. Nishimura claims the reason for this was the he

wanted to “create[d] a free space, and what people did with it was up to them... No major corporations were offering anything like that, so I had to.” The result of the anonymization was that people on the boards felt free to comment on everything from celebrity gossip, to politics, to teachers and classmates. Many writers on 2-channel and Japanese internet culture feel that it is the anonymizing element of 2channel that affords it its real power. The Japan Media Review describes this dynamic thusly:

Channel 2 has become an anarchic and free alternative to Japan's mainstream press and uncompromised by the main media's networks of press clubs, political and corporate allegiances, and consensus-minded stances. Channel 2 can't rival the mainstream media for authority or accuracy, but it is obvious why the Japanese media sense a threat.

Nishimura, when talking about the site, also uses this rhetoric of free speech and criticism as the motivation behind forced anonymity. He notes:

There is a lot of information disclosure or secret news gathered on Channel 2. Few people would post that kind of information by taking a risk. Moreover, people can only truly discuss something when they don't know each other. Under the anonymous system, even though your opinion/information is criticized, you don't know with whom to be upset. Under a perfectly anonymous system, you can say, "it's boring," if it is actually boring. All information is treated equally; only an accurate argument will work.

As a spin-off to 2-Channel, Futaba Channel<sup>6</sup> was created August 30, 2001 as both “an image-based counterpart to the text-only 2ch” and as a refuge from 2-Channel when the site was threatened with closing down. Similar to 2ch, Futaba-Chan operates using boards that range in topic from local and international news to toys, ramen, and insect collecting. Unlike the text only message board of 2ch, Futaba-Chan is an imageboard, which means that posts on Futaba-Chan are concerned with sharing

images and using text only as a secondary tool. However, Futaba-Chan, as well as other imageboards to follow, borrowed from 2ch the system of anonymous posting as the default method, though not requiring it as 2-Channel does. Also an important difference is the creation of the 二次元裏 (nijikenura or “underside”) board, which is a collection of random, off topic discussion that is fast paced and carnivalesque in content and tone.

In 2003, the imageboard concept jumped oceans with the founding of 4-chan. Created by a then 15 year old Christopher Poole<sup>7</sup> using his mother’s credit card, 4-chan was essentially an English-language version of Futaba Channel. Going by the pseudonym of moot (from his days as a regular poster in the forums of Internet humor site Something Awful), he created the imageboard and separated topics between “worksafe” and “not worksafe” sections<sup>8</sup>.

Of the various boards on 4chan, who like its predecessors range from the whimsical (/po/, papercraft and origami) to obscene (/d/ “Alternative” Hentai porn), the one that has drawn the most coverage is the Random board, otherwise known as /b/. As with the Futaba-Chan version, the board is filled with random discussion topics, ranging from questions about consumer electronics, requests for pornography, to amateur philosophy<sup>9</sup>. Members of the board, who are referred to as /b/tards, often use the mostly rules free board<sup>10</sup> as a testing ground for offending each other, posting images meant to shock or provoke anger or humor. This activity is usually limited to /b/, but seeps out occasionally to other boards for the purpose of trolling<sup>11</sup> non-/b/ readers.



Figure 1.3: An Image Macro which Anonymous has incorporated as a “motto”

From 4-chan, many spin-off imageboards were made that specialized in certain aspects covered only broadly by 4-chan such as moe<sup>12</sup>, drug culture, and pornography. Usually these boards had an analog to /b/, though these ranged from iterations of /b/ that were simply off topic conversation to boards such as 7chan's /i/ or invasion board where many of the more well known raids (such as the Habbo Hotel Raid<sup>13</sup>) were planned out. These raids range from organized grieving of online games and virtual worlds, to online and off-line harassment and trolling of specific people or subcultures<sup>14</sup>.

At one point, on the /b/ board a “Declaration of Independence from /b/” was written. This message, while not carrying any significance on its own, echoed the sentiment that, due to various factors, /b/ would not be the only, or even primary home to Anonymous. While it was a trend that occurring anyways, the declaration solidified

Anonymous as a multi-sited internet community, existing in the whole host of \*chans, various websites, and other corners of the internet. This multi-sited nature is used in much the same way as the Anonymous label is used. When Anonymous members raid or are blamed for raiding, they will often times claim to be from unaffiliated sites, specifically hated websites such as EBaum's World and Gaia Online in order to divert attention away from Anonymous sites.

*Tom Cruise, "A Message to Scientologists", and a.r.s.*

In December of 2008, a video meant for internal distribution among Scientology churches was leaked onto YouTube. The video consists of an interview of perhaps the most well-known celebrity Scientologist, Tom Cruise. In the interview, Cruise makes wild claims such as that Scientologists, "are the authorities on getting people off drugs. We are the authorities on the mind. We are the authorities on improving conditions. Criminon [sic]<sup>15</sup>. We can rehabilitate criminals. We can bring peace and unite cultures." After the video was leaked, the Church of Scientology asked for the video to be pulled from YouTube and claimed the video was taken out of context from a supposed 3 hour version.

The removal of the original video from YouTube prompted various others to simply re-upload the video onto YouTube several times, giving various titles in order to make permanent removal nigh impossible. Certain blogs, most famously celebrity news blog Gawker posted it and its editor, Nick Denton, rebuffed Scientology's demands to remove it by stating the video "[is] newsworthy, and we will not be removing it." On

January 16, 2008, the Church of Scientology issued a copyright violation claim against YouTube for hosting material from the Cruise video.

This was the moment in which Anonymous took notice of the situation. The video was spread among the various imageboard sites during the month of December and many readers of the board were among those who helped to re-upload the video on YouTube and other online video sites. The consensus to begin what would be called Project Chanology has been attributed to readers of 4chan, 711chan, the Anonymous-related wiki partyvan.info, and countless IRC channels. At the same time, other members of Anonymous were reading information on established anti-Scientology organizations online, such as Xenu.net and Operation Clambake. During this period, noted anti-Scientologists published videos and posts to Anonymous<sup>16</sup>. While some were intrigued at the new influx of attention towards Scientology, others condemned their methods<sup>17</sup>.

These methods included several standbys that Anonymous members have used for previous episodes of harassment. Distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks on Scientology servers were made. Prank phone calls were made using VoIP services such as Skype. Unending “black faxes”<sup>18</sup>, pizzas, and other services were directed at Scientology. These activities brought down Scientology’s servers for more than a week<sup>19</sup>. These attacks were haphazard at best and, while the main Scientology servers were attacked, some innocent people were mistakenly targeted<sup>20</sup>. The Church has attempted to find and press charges on the perpetrators of the DDoS attacks, but to date only one person, who pled guilty, has been convicted.



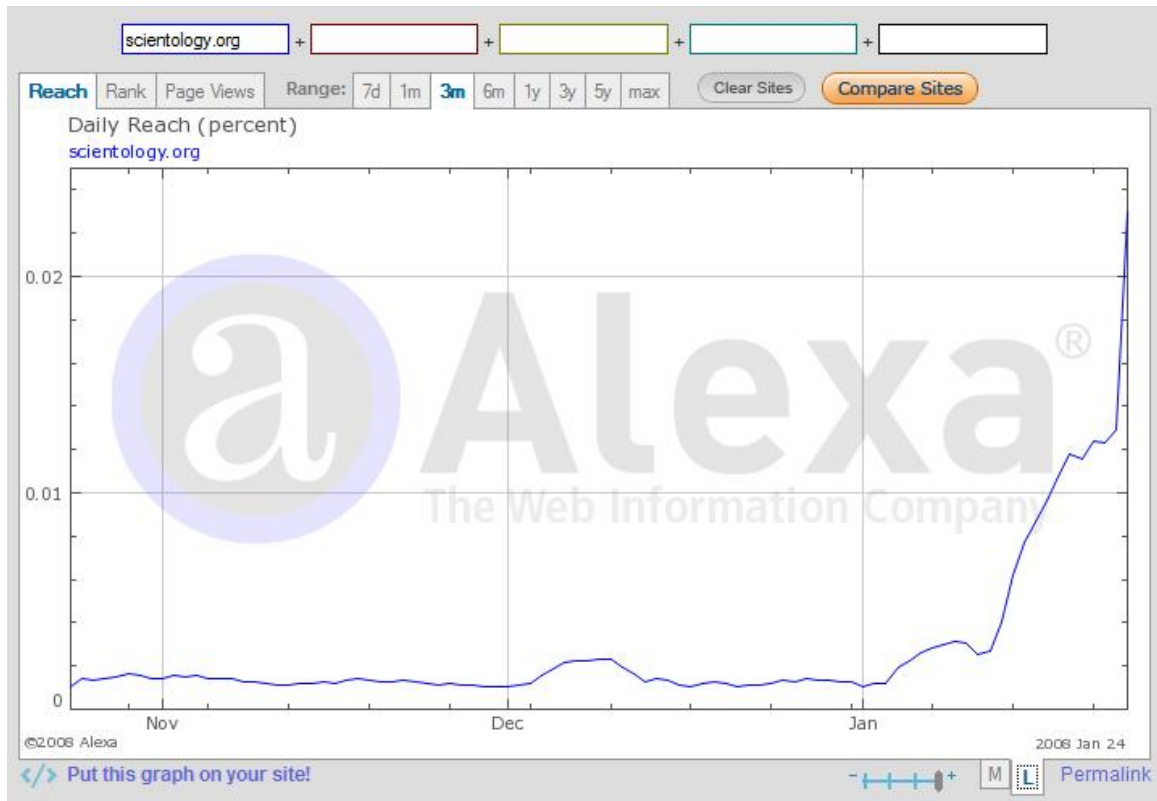


Figure 1.4: A Graph showing the web traffic for Scientology.org. The right part of the graph shows the effects of the DDoS attacks during the end of January of 2008.

Beyond the initial direct attacks on Scientology, There were several attempts at raising general consciousness over Church and its practices. There was a campaign to highlight Scientology information sites on aggregation sites such as digg. A “google bomb”<sup>21</sup> was used to make Scientology the first hit in a search for “dangerous cult” and anti-Scientology site Xenu.net the first link to a search for Scientology.

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, A group of people speaking for Anonymous and calling themselves “Chan Enterprises” released a press statement declaring that Anonymous was prepared to engage in a long-term war with Scientology. The statement explained the rationale behind Anonymous’s attacks as such:

The video caused much controversy, and members of Anonymous posted a message to several of their websites proclaiming war against Scientology. Soon after, Anonymous struck at the church; they blocked access to its website, made prank calls, organized protests, distributed anti-Church pamphlets and information, and extracted secret files from the Church of Scientology and its parent company, the Religious Technology Center.

Anonymous' members cited several reasons for their actions against the Church of Scientology: many have stressed the alleged human rights violations under the auspices of the Church. Others accused the Church of fraud due to its costly ceremonies, while some merely sought the entertainment they refer to as "lulz," a corruption of the Internet slang "LOL," or "laugh out loud."

Most members, however, were concerned with the threat to free speech that the Church posed. This was most evident in the recent attacks on websites such as Digg and YouTube, where the Church filtered anti-Scientology comments.

Concurrently with this press release, a video, entitled "A Message to Scientology", was placed on YouTube. In it, a computer generated voice, over stock footage of clouds moving, described the Cruise video debacle as but a first step in a war between Anonymous and Scientology in the name of free speech and liberation of members who were being financially exploited by the church. By February 8, the video had been seen 2 million times.

However, the computer-based attacks on Scientology quickly ended. By January 28, moderators of 711chan asked that that DDoS attacks, black faxes, and other online-based harassment cease. Instead, a call to non-violent legal protest was made. A new video, "A Call to Action" was released, espousing the same sentiments. During this period, it was decided by people involved with the Scientology protests to organize a global protest that would take place in the middle of February. Partyvan.info used it's

bandwidth to act as an information clearinghouse, informing Anons who may not have been keeping up to date of the events since December as well as provide links to sub forums on Enturbulation.org, an anti-Scientology page previously unaffiliated with Anonymous, with which local planning and discussion could occur.

On February 12, 2008, the first set of “global raids” took place, with protests occurring internationally, with most of the protests occurring in North America, Western Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. This pattern has been repeated monthly ever since with smaller protests and events planned on a local or regional level.

February 14, 2009 was the year anniversary of Project Chanology in its present form.

While this timeline has attempted to show the history and actual events that occurred in the early part of the Chanology movement, I have not yet shown the context with which both Anonymous and Project Chanology draw their ability to organize and create an environment for protest. In the next chapter I will discuss Anonymous within the context of fan culture, online protest (in particular the “Hacktivist” movements), and online grieving. I will also go into detail about the formal elements of Anonymous “raids” and how these techniques have been applied to project Chanology. Additionally, the chapter will go into the various technical differences in the way both anonymous and Project Chanology operates.

## Chapter 2

### Online Communities, Hacker Culture, and Online Griefing

*“They call themselves ANONYMOUS. They are Hackers on Steroids, treating the web like a real life video game. Sacking websites, invading MySpace accounts, disrupting innocent people’s lives. And if you fight back watch out. ”*

*-Fox Affiliate KTTV 11*

Since Anonymous is primarily an internet-based community since its inception, it is important to look at the dimension with which the group maintains a presence online. To that end, there are three views of Anonymous as an online entity. One is Anonymous as Hacktivist, using their technical knowledge for counter-hegemonic practices. A Second is Anonymous as a “Fan Culture” of the internet, engaging in a community of practice. A final view is Anonymous as griefer, who disrupts the flow or “grid” of various online spaces for various reasons, primarily for “lulz” (humor).

#### *Anonymous as Hacktivists and Fans*

Looking at Anonymous, the group lies at the intersection of several studies, ranging from studies of online communities of practice, such as fan-based communities, grief play in multiplayer games, ideas of Hacktivism and maintenance of a “hacker culture”, and as a generator of media (which is usually remediated and repurposed) to be circulated as memes both for entertainment and as tactical media similar to various artistic and political movements that have used similar techniques as critique of hegemonic discourse.

Much of the work during the late 80s and early 90s centered on the looming internet and the various ways that the form could be used as an agent of change in the relationship between media and individual. Leah A. Lievrouw summarizes this early idea that the Internet “would allow [ordinary or marginalized groups] to extend their ideas and influence in ways that the few-to-many, top-down, content-distribution model of mass media had prevented.”(392)

However, over the course of the 90s, this proved not to be the case. Broadcasters and Publishers, in part as the logical extension of media conglomeration already taking place, “recast themselves as ‘content industries’,” (392) and were able to gain control of the medium through alliances with telecommunications firms and anticipating the growing demand for content delivery (392). Passage of the DMCA and the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act further added a level of control of the technology to large top-down structures. The dot-com bust of early 2001 also solidified control by wiping away smaller startups, leaving behind either startups that had acquired enough fiscal and cultural capital to remain viable (eBay, Amazon), or those that had been bought by and were eventually swallowed up by large media and telecommunication firms (Cingular, AOL). Additionally, the increase in acceptance of “surveillance culture” following September 11th seems to have further solidified the presence of the very top-down mass media that ten years prior, seemed to be on its way out (393).

Of course, it isn't as though this is the only narrative regarding the spread of the internet we can look at. Indeed the internet has been used as a site of oppositional

discourse. Probably one of the most dramatic examples of this is the use of the Internet in planning, coordinating, and, afterwards, distributing information regarding the WTO Protests in Seattle in 1999 (Eagleton-Pierce, 331). Additionally, while the Internet is a space for hypertextual discourse, it is also a space of technology and technological literacy. It is a space where the space of a "hacker culture" initially developed in the 80s which has a solid belief in the necessity of free information and a fundamental distrust of gatekeepers of that information (Thomas, 10).

Thus hacker culture lives in its opposition to technical control that corporate or other hegemonic forces may try to wrest from them, which was made manifest with the passage of the DMCA. One example of this was the controversy surrounding the decryption (and dissemination) of DeCSS by 2600: The Hacker Quarterly editor, Eric Corley (Lievrouw, 398). This incident where the dissemination of information (the encryption algorithm) is in opposition to the protection of corporate intellectual property is indicative of the sort of oppositional discourse that the internet and specific subcultures can address against corporate interests.



Figure 2.1: Items such as Posters and T-Shirts with the DeCSS code were distributed following the initial Cease and Desist against 2600 by the DDCA.

Even though the initial court ruling made the dissemination of the algorithm illegal, Hackers and other activists created shirts, artwork, and other cultural products that contained the algorithm and people on the internet disseminated the decryption code embedded in forum posts, listings on popular websites, and in their personal pages as a testament to the belief in free information. Similarly, the "culture of piracy" as described by Ian Condry, outlines the ambivalence online users of P2P networks have towards media companies (343-345) as well as alternative, more harmonious models, such as the relationship between producers of doujinshi (fan comics) and publishing

companies, of that relationship between a fan-based community and owners of intellectual property.

Fan-based communities have been examined since many of them were early adopters of the internet, which allowed them easier access to other fans to discuss the object of fandom. It also allowed faster and more streamlined dissemination of fan-based productions, such as fan fiction that previously relied on 'zines and the limited time and space of the convention.

Similarly to the struggles of hacker culture, fan-based communities have come under pressure at times from media corporations for what it sees as copyright infringement or "watering down" of trademarks. Henry Jenkins argues that these fan-based communities provide a space for creators to "do bad art, get feedback, and get better". He further argues that fan-created activities are the outgrowth of an older folk culture aesthetic where popular narratives are reworked and remediated into what he refers to as "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 136-37).

While Anonymous isn't a fan-based community, much of the cultural production created is very much in this sphere of borrowing from commercial culture through images, text, and other media. Much of the formal structure of these cultural productions will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### *Anonymous as Players/Griefers*

Because of the unique nature of Anonymous and its activities, it is also relevant to examine related online practices. For example, grief play in multiplayer games as well as the practice of "trolling" (harassment and pranking in a space such as Usenet or a



message board) and “raiding” (actively harassing a website, online game, or virtual world and attempt to either harass an individual or group or shut down a server). This also begs the question: what is “lulz” and what role does it play in the grieving activities perpetuated by Anonymous?

A griefer is typically defined as a player in an online multiplayer game who tends to subvert play, either by preventing others from playing the game as intended (i.e. multiple killing/team-killing of avatars, blocking an entrance, slowing down a player's machine with many added polygons) or by harassment of players (pornographic or mocking images inserted into the game space, trolling conversation channels).

One approach to understanding what rules griefers apply is to look at Bartle's player types and see the griefer as a killer type. While these player types are simplistic, Bartle does argue that Killers "... get their kicks from imposing themselves on others". While a simplistic notion, I don't think it is too off base to suggest that, like Bartle's Killers, Anonymous raiders feel that "only in the knowledge that a real person, somewhere, is very upset by what you've just done, yet can themselves do nothing about it, and is there any true adrenalin-shooting, juicy fun." In fact, in a recent New York Times article, one person who identified as a member of the community noted: "You look for someone who is full of it, a real blowhard. Then you exploit their insecurities to get an insane amount of drama, laughs and lulz," (Schwartz, 1).

In the seminal Anthropological work, *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga explores the ways in which play is ingrained within human culture. One of the key terms Huizinga describes is that of the “magic circle”. Coined originally from the *Mahābhārata* (57),

Huizinga uses the term to signify the space wherein cultural norms and expectations are altered. Spaces where the magic circle takes effect includes things such as rituals like the potlatch (58-61), but Huizinga mostly focuses on spaces of play, such as the dice game of the *Mahābhārata* or the tests of virtue and strength which many cultures have (60-70). Therefore, one can view behavior such as griefing, as an attempt to recast the magic circle within a play space. Simply put, griefers can be seen as creating a new set of rules by which to play.

This construction of griefer as rule re-writer is supported by Holin Lin and Chuen-Tsai Sun's study on Taiwanese MMORPG players'. The study accounts for a specific type of griefer: the self-aware griefer whose intention is to "create their own rules" and indeed establish a set of guidelines for acceptable grief play (Lin et al, 7-8). What is interesting about this approach for understanding griefing is that it casts griefers as something more than mere troublemakers or system breakers. If the idea of a game is to have fun, it stands to reason that the manner this is achieved differs from person to person and that, as Bartle player types suggest, these ways of having fun can overlap in ways which can be complimentary or dissonant (Bartle, 11-17). This seems to be the sense in which Anonymous performs its activities, such as the "Great Hotel Raid" incidents and other such "raids" in the multiplayer game space.

This idea of griefing as "creation of own rules" is contested by Burcu Bakioglu in an article in the *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*. Bakioglu argues that the aim of trolls, at least in the space of virtual worlds such as Habbo Hotel and Second Life is twofold. He references two specific groups which are considered part of the Anonymous

network or, at the very least, exhibit “more overlaps... than each group would care to acknowledge.” (10) Specifically, Bakioglu looks at Goons, who originated from the forums of Something Awful, and at the Patriotic Nigras (PNs), a grieving group established on the /i/nvasion subforum of 7chan.

One on hand, there is the sense that the grievers are making grieving a game unto itself by creating “specific, yet temporary, magic circles” (10) that are purposely obscured to the targets. This is an attempt at creating a “blockage” (12) that is meant to disrupt the activities of other and provide noise to the system. This system of noise creation is intensified when the targets criticize Anonymous grievers. After one incident where they are called cyberterrorists, these grievers responded by co-opting imagery and artwork associated with the early Soviet Union. This sort of grieving he attributes more to the Goons, whose purpose overall is more aligned with the Anonymous aphorism “the internet is serious business”, which mocks individuals who take offense at their activities.

On a second level, these grievers adopt a counter-hegemonic stance with the operating grid and, in their efforts, do not merely attempt to introduce noise, but to bring the grid down. Bakioglu describes this activity as more the province of groups like the PNs. The “magic circle” this activity creates differs from the former in that it is “unstable, spontaneous.... That do not require a certain number of participants and do not need a well-defined space in order to sprint into existence,”(14-15). Grievers like the PNs then aim to enter a space and, through use of various scripts that copy hundreds of items onto the space or some other activity, overwhelm a grid, crashing it temporarily.

This activity is also different from the first type of grieving in that, since their activity threatens the stability of the n-game world, it threatens the economic stability as well. These activities “do not just playfully attack some people who take the internet seriously, but also hurt the virtual economy at large... [it] transforms into an initiative against capitalistic ideology,”(18).

The goal of much of this activity for Anonymous is codified in terms of “lulz” and “win”. While the conditions or pre-requisites to gaining “win” differ depending on the user or context in general, “win” or “lulz” is interpreted as the moment when a previously operating system breaks or come to a point of dissonance. In other words, the goal of trolling, raids, and grieving is laughter at someone or something’s expense. Usually the laughter comes from seeing a system break, an individual deemed treating the “internet [as] serious business” panicking or breaking down, or having a meme or message pass through to the mass media. The next section details three examples of these activities and how Anonymous treated each activity

### *Some Examples of Anonymous Raiding and Grieving*

Anonymous had been credited and/or blamed with various instances of trolling, grieving, and raiding activities. These acts range from the malicious to humorous, to beneficial in one case. In examining these actions, we can see the ways in which Anonymous has been learning and refining techniques that have proven useful in its anti-Scientology activities on the internet.

One example of Anonymous trolling involved sending particularly inflammatory messages to the messageboard of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. The board was asking for information about child pornography, as Oprah was advocating for stringer anti-child pornography laws. In a post entitled “Internet Predators: How Bad Is It?”, the how asked people to discuss the topic. One post read as such:

WE DO NOT FORGIVE

WE DO NOT FORGET

WE HAVE OVER 9000 PENISES AND THEY ARE ALL RAPING CHILDREN!

The post utilized two popular Anonymous memes. The first part is a common motto used by Anonymous to describe the group and, because of its unknown numbers, its persistence and its capacity for cruelty. The second part utilized the popular “Over 9000” meme which was taken from a popular Japanese anime series and used to represent a large number. Even with the all capitalized text and the calls to these memes, the post was not only taken seriously, it ended up being read on air by Oprah herself. At the end of the episode on child predators, she says:

*“Let me read you something that was posted on our message board from somebody who claims to be a member of a known pedophile network: He said he does not forgive. He does not forget. His group has over 9000 penises and they are all raping children... So, I want you to know: they’re organized and they have systematic ways of hurting children.”*

The apparent misreading of the post by Oprah led to many members of Anonymous re-appropriating the clip, re-mixing the audio with music or using the image

of Oprah in the episode and mixing it with other elements familiar to Anonymous such as the “Over 9000” meme and the “pedobear” meme<sup>22</sup>.



Figure 2.2: The Oprah Winfrey Incident prompted the mixing of her image with the relevant meme.

An example of Anonymous as a grieving group is the event which has become known as the “Great Habbo Raid of 2006”. The event, which took place July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006<sup>23</sup>, was organized by a grieving group based on the site 7chan, the Patriotic Nigras. As Bakioglu describes in his piece, the Patriotic Nigras grief in order to shut down systems and break gameplay, instead of creating noise or disturbances in the system as other grievers do. The Nigras took advantage of the fact that, at the time, Habbo Hotel avatars had collision detection active so that avatars could not “run through” one another in the virtual world. Taking the avatars of young black men wearing suits and large Afros. The grievers filled the various “pool rooms” of the virtual hotel, preventing players from

easily traversing the space. In addition to physically blocking space, the group spammed messages which utilized messages such as repeated uses of the word 'desu'<sup>24</sup> and "developers", racist jokes, several memes, and the arrangement of the aforementioned black avatars into swastikas.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the raid involved the creating a narrative around the "Pool's Closed" meme<sup>25</sup>, explaining that the pools in Habbo Hotel had to be barricaded because of AIDS and that only the black avatars could be in the pool to "guard the safety" of the white avatars. Also part of the rhetoric was combating racism in Habbo Hotel, though it seems that rhetoric is merely there for humor's sake<sup>26</sup>. Similar activities were repeated in 2007 and 2008 as well as other occasions such as World AIDS Day. Recently, with the implementation (or rather the downgrading to) of avatars that can run through each other, the method of the raids on Habbo Hotel will be vastly different if they occur at all again.



Figure 2.3: A screenshot from the first Habbo Hotel raid in 2006.

While much of Anonymous’s actions on the internet have been benign at best and illegal at worst, there is a precedent for members of Anonymous working for a benevolent cause, albeit in a manner in keeping with Anonymous’s methods. One example of Anonymous as an “internet vigilante” group involved an incident wherein members of anonymous identified, trolled, and gave information about a pedophile to local police.

In October of 2007, Chris Forcand, a citizen of Toronto and self-described devout Christian, was chatting with an assumed 13 year old girl on a synchronous chat software (MSN Chat) named “Jessica”. However, this was simply an Anonymous member who was trolling MSN looking for pedophiles to humiliate. Throughout the



course of two months, members of Anonymous, posing as young women, tricked Forcand into posting nude photos of himself online, personal information such as his address and hone number, and describe in chat various sexual acts he would want to perform with the supposed young girls. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, the information was forwarded to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who arrested Forcand and charged him “with several sexual and weapons related offences.” Besides the goading of Forcand to incriminate himself as a sexual predator, various quotes were appropriated as memes, specifically phrases which referred to his religion , which many Anons saw as dissonant with his sexual proclivities<sup>27</sup>.

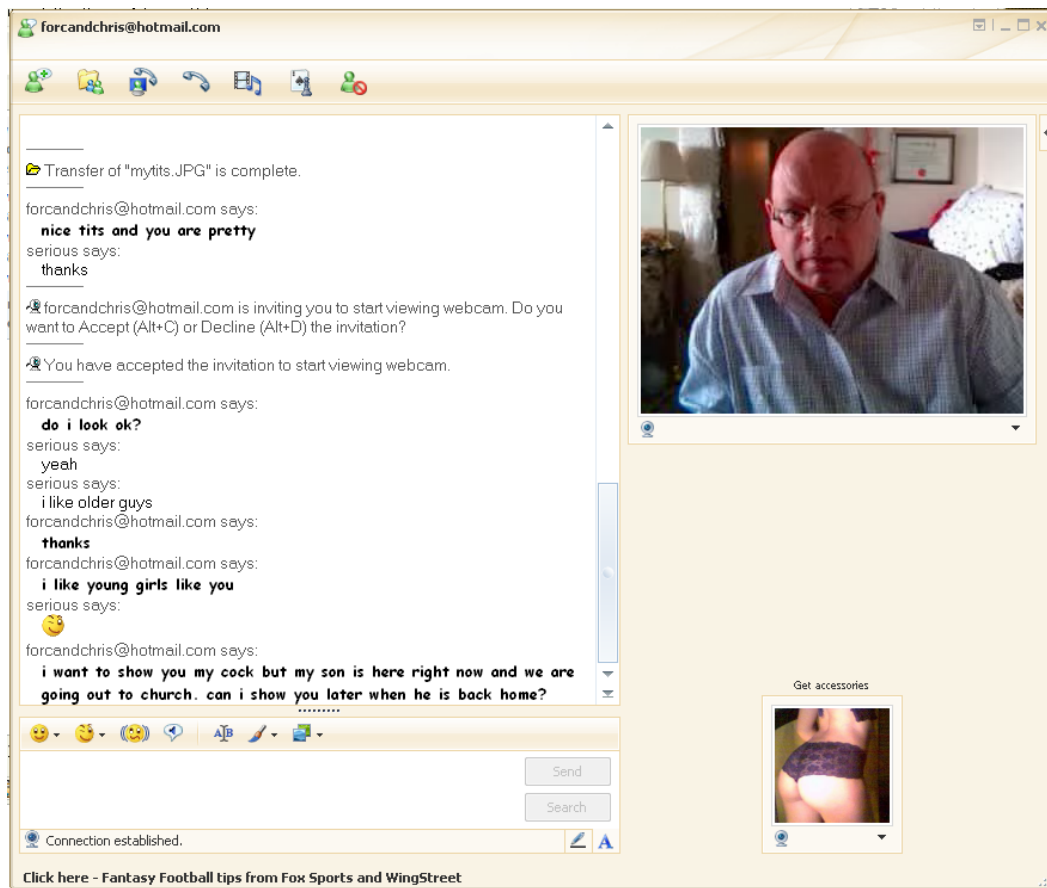


Figure 2.4: Part of the trolling process involves posting screenshots of chats such as this one from the trolling of Chris Forcand

While the griefers can be said to have trolled Forcand into incriminating himself, the fact that the griefers ultimately turned him in to the authorities suggest that, at least a part of Anonymous, acts in ways which can be seen as benevolent, if not lawful. In writing on the results of the case, one person noted a quote from a Toronto detective in The Toronto Star regarding the Anonymous vigilantes which stated “although intentions can be the best, they're not police officers, they're not trained in online luring and online child exploitation investigations. They shouldn't be conducting them,” (Jenkins, 2007) to which the response on Encyclopedia Dramatica was “the notion that anonymous is not the leading, and undisputed expert, in online luring is ripe with lulz.”

These various examples are meant to distinguish the ways in which Anonymous acts as an internet centered community. The reasons behind trolling, grieving, and raiding spaces on the internet are varied, ranging from wanting a cheap laugh, to breaking down systems, to even performing vigilantism online. In this way we can get an idea the context and history Anonymous had as a community before the Scientology issue came into being.

In the next Chapter, I will discuss the way in which Anonymous's activities can be linked at an earlier tradition of *Détournement*, Tactical Media, and Culture Jamming. I will also talk about the various media productions and activities used by Project Chanology. This will lead into discussion of the various roles Chanologists take on in order to engage Scientologists as well as the general public.

### Chapter 3

## Pranksters, Culture Jammers, Tactical Media Makers, and Anonymous

*“Anonymous is not a person, nor is it a group, movement or cause: Anonymous is a collective of people with too much time on their hands, a commune of human thought and useless imagery. A gathering of sheep and fools, assholes and trolls, and normal everyday netizens. An anonymous collective, left to its own devices, quickly builds its own society out of rage and hate. Anonymous can be anyone from well-meaning college kids with highly idiosyncratic senses of humor trying to save people from Scientology, to devious nihilist hackers, to thirteen year old boys who speak entirely in in-jokes on an endless quest for porn.”*

*-Encyclopedia Dramatica*

Since Anonymous as an internet-centered community, it makes sense to view its activities within the framework of similar online communities and activities. However, with the formation of Project Chanology, it is useful to examine other forms of discourse and protest that use media creation and repurposing in order to create a counter-hegemonic discourse.

While the context that Project Chanology exists in is a recent phenomenon, the techniques utilized by the group hail from a tradition of counter-cultural protest techniques, which were developed in different social and geographical contexts, but stem from anti-consumerist rhetoric. Three such practices that have been utilized by Project Chanology are Culture Jamming, Détournement, and Tactical Media. These techniques are exploited by Anonymous because of the group deep knowledge of media and cultural artifacts as well as the fact that the group’s collective knowledge of meme production, which is outlined in Chapter 4, offers extensive experience in repurposing cultural messages for unintended purposes.

## *Détournement, Tactical Media, Culture Jamming, and the “Streisand Effect”*

Culture Jamming as well as Tactical Media are catch-all terms for various techniques which have traditionally been applied by protest groups in order to have a voice against larger, more monied targets. Specifically, while efforts that have been launched for both political and artistic purposes, the usual targets of tactical media and culture jamming have been multi-national corporations, neo-liberalist countries, and the mass media, which protestors claim merely broadcast government and corporate propaganda without and analytical of journalistic scrutiny. The roots of tactical media can be traced back to the French Situationists, in particular Guy Debord, and the use of *détournement*. *Détournement* is the act of “deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning something aside from its normal course or purpose,” (Debord and Wolman, 6). The purpose of this act is to create new meaning and cultural commentary using previously created media artifacts. However, this act is not meant to be a mere act of creating references to other work, but using the images and half-remembered contexts of the original media to understand the new context the media has been placed or to understand the way it has twisted or hijacked. In *The Society of Spectacle*, Debord writes:

Ideas improve. ... It sticks close to an author’s phrasing, exploits his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one. *Détournement* is the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority that is inevitably tainted by the very fact that it has become a quotation — a fragment torn from its own context and development, and ultimately from the general framework of its period and from the particular option (appropriate or erroneous) that it represented within that framework. *Détournement* is the flexible language of anti-ideology. It appears in communication that knows it

cannot claim to embody any definitive certainty... On the contrary, its own internal coherence and practical effectiveness are what validate the previous kernels of truth it has brought back into play. Détournement has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as present critique. (Debord, 9).

While Debord links the ideas in détournement to Dadaism and Surrealism (Debord, 4), the principal goals of Détournement is situated within the context of the student protest movements of the late 1960s and, in particular, a protest of both neo-liberal capitalism and bureaucratic, leader-filled socialism (Ray, 9) which were instances of the “spectacle” Debord criticized as clouding people’s perceptions and erasing the relationships between people in lieu of a relationship between people and commodities.

Debord defined two types of détournement: minor détournements and deceptive détournements. Minor détournements utilized works that were, in a sense, “common knowledge, or otherwise carried no particularly strong prior context of their own, such as “a press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph.” Deceptive détournements, on the other hand, rely on knowledge of prior context and the way in which the détournement contrasts the two meanings and “derives a different scope from the new context.” (Debord and Wolman, 2-3). Most works thus consists of various minor and deceptive détournements. Debord and Wolman also outline four “laws” of détournement. These laws relate to the elements of détournement and, more specifically, how the elements can create more lasting impacts, with more “distant” and “simplified” elements creating more powerful impressions and messages than “rational replies” and “simple reversals “(3).



Figure 3.1: A detourned leaflet from December 1981 publicizing the Situationist International Anthology

It was with a similar unease that the Tactical media collectives appeared in the early 90s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the assumed victory of Neoliberal Capitalism over Communism. With the end of the Cold War and the United States as sole superpower, fears over the excesses of Capitalism and consumer culture emerged once more and in this context, several art collectives rose to create messages which, in a manner modified for a new context (Ray, 9-10) employed the ideas of détournement.

The Critical Arts Ensemble or CAE was an early Tactical Media art community. Composed of five artists and based in Buffalo, New York. The group has created various installations to draw attention to and criticize various politically sensitive topics, such as biotechnology (“The Cult of Eve”), electronic surveillance (“Electronic Civil Disobedience”), mindless consumerism (“Useless Technology”), and the lack of adequate healthcare in the US (“The Therapeutic State”). These pieces use the tropes of media, advertising, and government to draw attention to these issues. Some of the pieces, such as “Radio Bikes”, explicitly use multiple détournements to emphasize the contextual shifts of the pieces.

Another example of Tactical Media practices at work include the efforts of The Yes Men, who successfully impersonated executives at Dow chemical and "admitted" to having been responsible for the 1984 Bhopal India disaster. This approach garnered much media attention, as well as a lawsuit by Dow Chemical. The Yes Men's statement about the reasons for their actions was explained thusly on their site:

There are some risks to this approach. It could offer false hope—or rather, false certainty—to people who have suffered 20 years of false hopes that Dow and Union Carbide would do the right thing. But all hopes are false until they're realized, and what's an hour of false hope to 20 years of unrealized ones? If it works, this could focus a great deal of media attention on the issue, especially in the US, where the Bhopal anniversary has often gone completely unnoticed. Who knows—it could even somehow force Dow's hand.



Figure 3.2: A member of the Yes Men, posing as a DOW Chemical executive, is interviewed on BBC world news after the Bhopal incident

Similar efforts have been made to protest the use of closed circuit camera in the streets of New York (Surveillance Camera Players) as well as protesting policies of the Republican party that are seen as favoring the wealthy (Billionaires for Bush). These media movements whose goal is social change bear a striking resemblance to Project Chanology's mission and should be examined more closely to see what ways Tactical Media groups can increase information and/or enact change.

Another Tactical Media Group with a decidedly different (and shorter) history is the Women's Action Coalition. The history of the group, as described by Melanie Yolles, began as a collective of 10-15 members from the New York art scene called a meeting entitled "Women Strategizing in the 90's." The meeting came about for several reasons, though the catalyst is cited by Yolles the appointment of Clarence Thomas despite Anita Hill's testimony that she was sexually harassed by the new Justice. Almost one hundred women showed up to the meeting, which prompted the creation of the Women's Action



Coalition. The group was formed as a direct action organization, such as contemporary groups ACT UP and WHAM.

The group demonstrated a week later, at a rape trial involving students at St. John's University. A drum corps was created, as well as the group logo, a blue dot, meant to evoke one way a face was censored on television at the time. At this action, and as part of subsequent actions was the slogan "Let women define rape," which echoed the sentiments felt from the initial meeting. The group became well known for its tight organization and its use of facilitators to keep the group on message. The group was also known for its "timely and thought-provoking" graphics and actions that demonstrated a "flair for the theatrical". This led to much press for the group in mainstream magazines and correspondence from women nationally.

As Yolles describes, the group soon swelled "to thousands," slowly making the group unwieldy. Also, the group suffered criticism because while united in common interests in women's issues, the members tended to come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, in particular white, well educated women who were artists or freelance workers. As a result, despite efforts to address concerns from other members who were from more diverse backgrounds and lifestyles, the group imploded in late 1993 when it could not resolve these internal issues and by November of 1995, the group was disbanded.

This history, while notable in itself, is useful in the study of project Chanology as one of the concerns for the group is maintaining the effort needed to sustain protests and actions to resolve the group's ultimate goal: the bankruptcy and shutting down of

the Church of Scientology. While that goal may not necessarily be tenable, both Chanologists and members of Anonymous are looking at the long term effects of Project Chanology and if the results are seen by the community as positive, it may result in further real world actions taken by Anonymous, whether as a cohesive group, or as yet another offshoot project, such as Project Chanology.

Another sort of cultural production that is worth examining, that of “culture jamming”, has existed for espousing an anti-consumerism, anti-corporate message. Similar to tactical media, except taking place in the context of media production as opposed to the context of physically centered demonstrations and installations. Also, compared to Tactical Media, Culture Jamming has an element of humorous juxtaposition. The term was originally coined by the band Negativland in 1984. They likened the term with radio jamming, The term however has its roots in the détournement focused Situationist International, which similarly likened their activities to radio jamming. Mark Dery's, in his articles for *Adbusters* in the early 90 and in his pamphlet, "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of the Signs" expanded on the term, identifying the ideals of what culture jamming should signify. The practice involves taking corporatized, hegemonic, or mass media images, which have entered the collective consciousness in a meme-like fashion, and twisting the imagery or the meaning in order to bring criticism allows. Culture Jamming, as Dery notes:

Introduce[s] noise into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, encouraging idiosyncratic, unintended interpretations. Intruding on the intruders, they invest ads, newscasts, and other media artifacts with subversive

meanings; simultaneously, they decrypt them, rendering their seductions impotent. Jammers offer irrefutable evidence that the right has no copyright on war waged with incantations and simulations. ... they refuse the role of passive shoppers, renewing the notion of a public discourse.

Also critical to the discourse of Culture Jamming is Naomi Wolf's *No Logo*. The book details much of the anti-globalization and anti-neoliberalism that culture jamming groups espouse as well as detail the ways in which corporate images and rhetoric are used in order to subvert the messages espoused by advertising and marketing. The book details three processes by which corporation use imagery to control populations. One, in targeting the youth market, corporations are hoping to brand products with the idea and lifestyle that is "cool". This results in the brand name and reputation being worth more than the products itself. Secondly, this emphasis in brand name disrupts fair competition since larger brand names generate more cultural capital. Finally, with the focus on brand name over product, the actual manufacturing takes place in areas where fair wages and employment laws are non-existent.

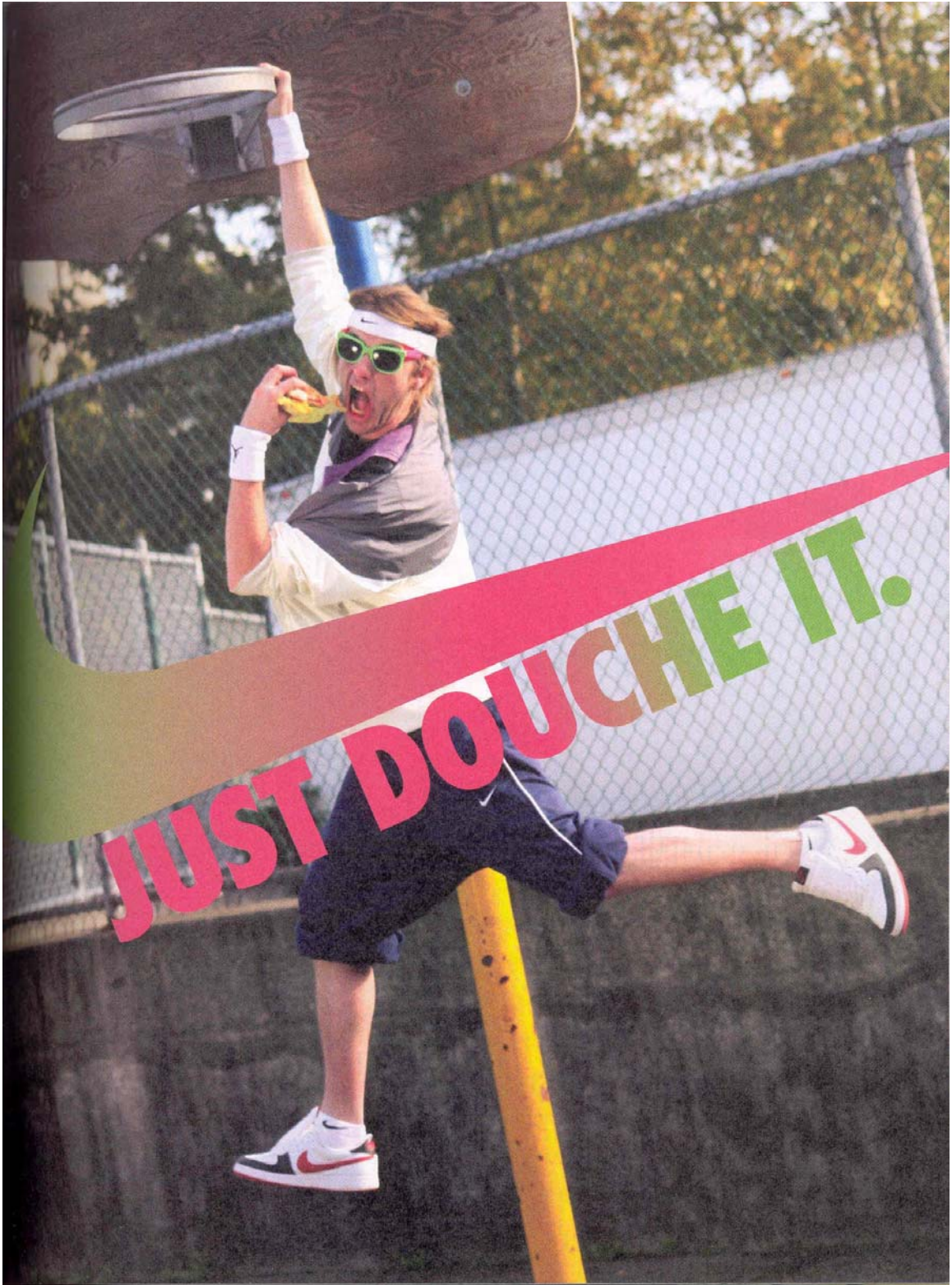


Figure 3.3: An example of Culture Jamming from the March/April 2009 issue of AdBusters

The book outlines various threads, focusing on the culture jamming movement with which consumerist messages can be countered. In particular is Adbusters, which is a magazine, devoted to culture jamming and tactical media art and text focused on anti-consumerism and anti-globalization. Also of note is the so-called “McLibel Trial”, the “the longest trial in English history” (Klein, 389) where two British citizens were sued by McDonalds for passing leaflets they claimed to be libelous even though much of the information was confirmed to be fair statements either by judges or by medical professionals at the trial<sup>28</sup>.

In a sense, this is a real-life analogue of one of the forms of grieving that was described in the previous chapter. The aim of culture jamming, however, is not to primarily offend, but to introduce meanings and interpretations of hegemonic messages in an effort to cause individuals to re-examine these transmissions from government, corporate, and mass media. These practices have been incorporated by Anonymous to become a very important framework for the actions of both Anonymous and Project Chanology.

One particular goal of this work that is worth examining is what has become popularized as the “Streisand effect”. The term comes from an incident in 2003 when, as part of a project documenting coastal erosion in California, a picture of Barbara Streisand’s estate was taken. Though initially part of a 12,000 photograph collection, Streisand sued the photographer and, in doing so, generated publicity and more attention to the photo in question. Thus the overall effect is that, in unfairly or

unsympathetically protesting or threatening legal action on a party, public opinion can backfire, leading to even more exposure and scrutiny than initially.

This backfiring strategy was evident during the controversy surrounding the Tom Cruise video that was released in December of 2007. When Scientology's threatened sites such as YouTube and Wikileaks to remove information about the video or face legal action, the attention placed on the video not only increased, but the number of copies of the video available increased and spread out over many different sources. Indeed, one can argue that much of the goal of Anonymous's activities is to drive the Church of Scientology into performing acts that could create this very effect. This is one of the reasons Project Chanology has adopted Tactical Media Techniques in their protests.

### *Anonymous as a Tactical Media Group*

While the goal of Anonymous's protests is not to convey anti-neoliberalist or anti-consumerist messages, the methods used by the group are very similar. Anonymous in general and Project Chanology in particular have utilized these practices in their efforts against Scientology. The goal of these efforts is to shape public opinion against Scientology as well as inform the public about the system of belief and the various costs and abuses perpetrated by the church.

Much of the media produced by Anonymous can be said to rely heavily on détournement for its impact. One example is the use of film posters or propaganda art styles in its flyers advertising protests. In one example, in a flyer advertising the February 2008 protest, the use of Maoist era propaganda art is used to rally protesters.



Another example involved the media for the June 2008 protest, which targeted the controversial Scientology group SeaOrg. Using pirate and sailing imagery, ranging from simple juxtapositions or reworkings of the Jolly Roger sign to screenshots of the Pirates of the Carribean films and images of pirate ships made from Lego blocks.



Figure 3.4: A Project Chanology poster for the February 2008 protest

One example of Anonymous as a Tactical Media Organization occurred at a London protest in April of 2008. Outside of the Church of Scientology, the protesters, which numbered in the few dozen, played Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" and singing the lyrics in front of the church. This use of détournement turned the original context and use for the song (generic love song which, with its synthesized sound and

drum loops, echoes the late 80s/early 90s pop aesthetics) into a message that the Anonymous protest would not be a short-lived phenomenon.

A second example of tactical media usage by Project Chanology occurred in the October protest. In London, members of Anonymous announced a “Day of the Dead”. Chanologists appropriated the imagery of movie posters for the George Romero film of the same name as t-shirts and signs. These protesters then carried a coffin down the street, which represented the various people anti-Scientology protesters claim have been killed by the church and its practices. The invocation of the Romero film was enhanced further, with signs proclaiming that the church brainwashes people into zombies, mindlessly attacking Suppressive Persons.

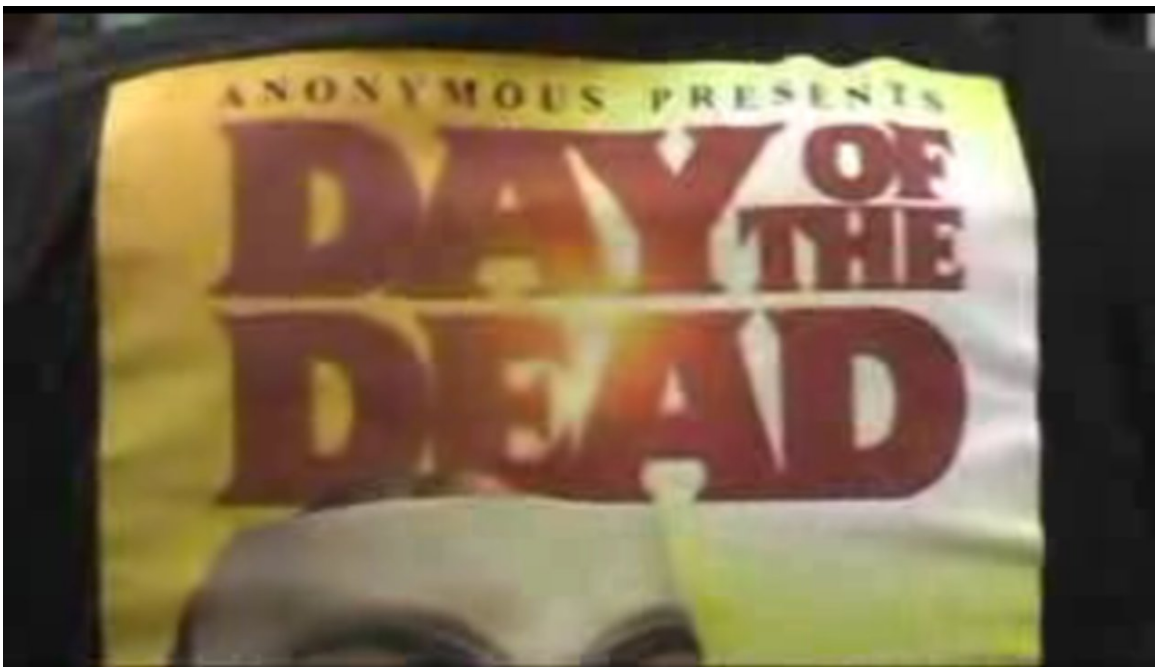


Figure 3.5: Footage from the October 2008 Protest in London using the Day of the Dead Poster



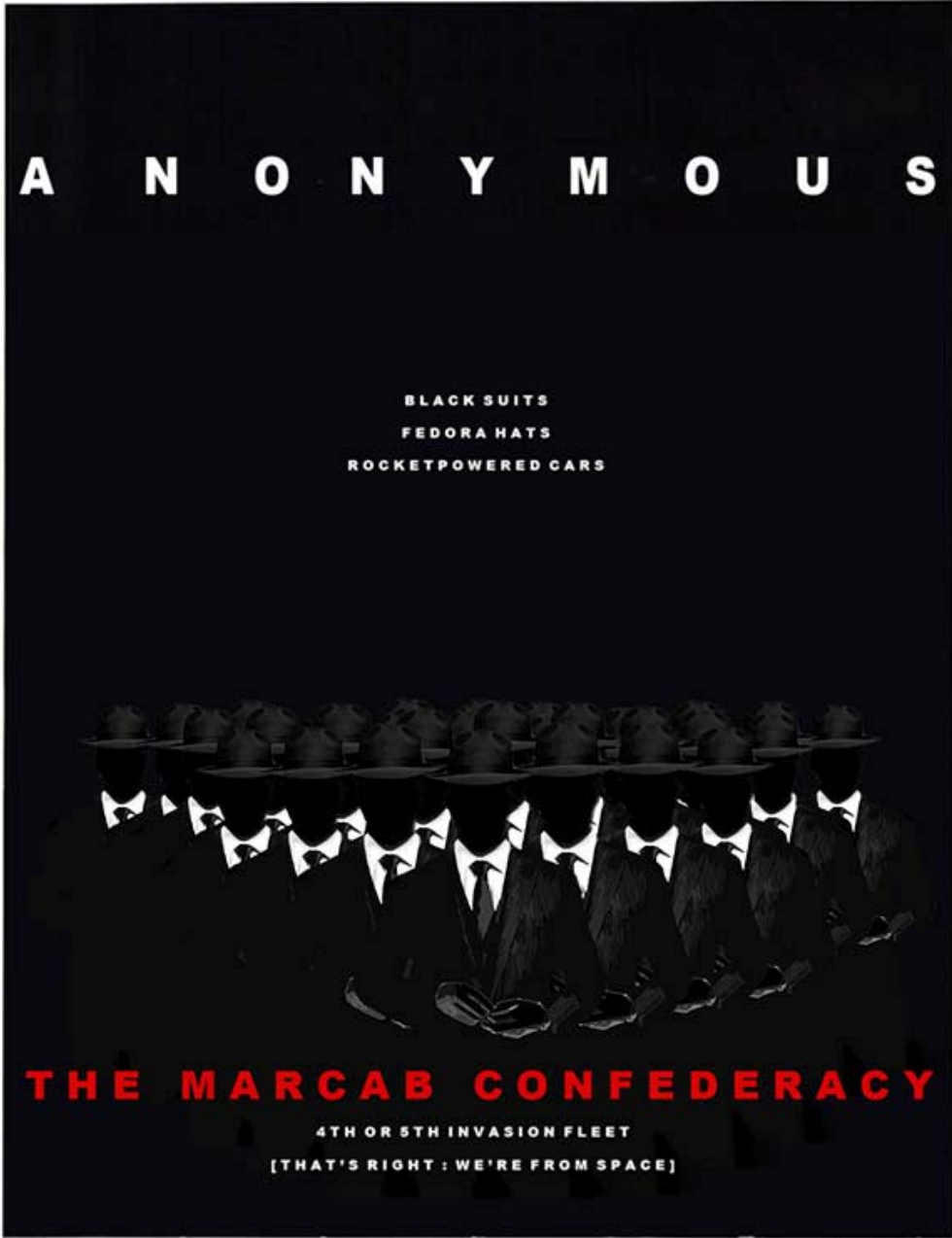
A third example is the use of YouFoundTheCard.net. Protesters, using printed business cards, hand these to passersby. On the card is the phrase “You found the card”, a small snippet of information about Scientology, and a link to a clearing house site which offers links to most the various online sites for information about abuses perpetrated by the church. This technique is useful because it relies on its iconography as a marker of importance and business and relatively small size of the to make it a more effective, not to mention longer lasting, object to give out information than a flyer and its relatively dismissive iconography and bulky size.



Figure 3.6: A scan of a “You Found the Card” business card from an Atlanta-area Chanologist

Aside from these specific moments, the project Chanology group in general uses a wide variety of popular imagery to further their cause. This use of imagery evokes the patterns and usage of Culture Jammers, particularly in media produced for the protest such as the business card mentioned above, but also in flyers and posters advertising the monthly protests. Of note is the use of the Guy Fawkes mask. Invoking the anti-totalitarianist V from the V for Vendetta comics and film, Chanologists utilize that role as

an agent for compelling people to question and free themselves from the church. Similarly, Project Chanology uses elements from the Scientology scripture itself. For example, some Chanologists have referred to themselves as the “Marcab Confederacy”. In Scientology<sup>29</sup>, the Marcab Confederacy is the organization led by Xenu who, as galactic overlord 75 million years ago, killed various alien races by throwing them into volcanoes on earth along with hydrogen bombs from spaceships which looked like DC-8 aircraft. The use of this bit of theology began when a post on [alt.religion.scientology](http://alt.religion.scientology) posited that, based on sources inside the church; David Miscavige had accepted an explanation for the Anonymous protests: that they were acting as an advance force for a incoming fleet of Marcabians. The humor in this possibility led many members of Anonymous and Project Chanology to assume this role. By using the rhetoric of the Marcab Confederacy and embracing that theology as their own, Chanology is not only assuming the role of enemy of Scientology, but also promoting the theology of the church which can be construed as tenuous at least and patently absurd at worst.



Twentieth Century Fox Presents **A N O N Y M O U S** © 2011 Twentieth Century Fox  
**TOM CRUISE DAVID MISCavige KIRSTY ALLEY HARRY DEAN STANTON**  
**JOHN HURT IAN HOLM YAPHET KOTTO**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER RONALD SHUSETT PRODUCED BY GORDON CARROLL DAVID GILER AND WALTER HILL DIRECTED BY RIDLEY SCOTT  
STORY BY DAN O'BANNON & RONALD SHUSETT SCREENPLAY BY DAN O'BANNON MUSIC JERRY GOLDSMITH PANAVISION® EASTMAN KODAK COLOR®  
R RESTRICTED PRINTS BY DELUXE® 70MM DOLBY DIGITAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON BOTH COMPACT DISC AND TAPE

Anonymous: Attacking Scientology under the direction of the Psychos immediate Lieutenants: ARSCC since 2008

790019

Figure 3.7: An image meant to play up and mock the rumor that Scientology believes Anonymous were members of the so-called Marcab Confederacy

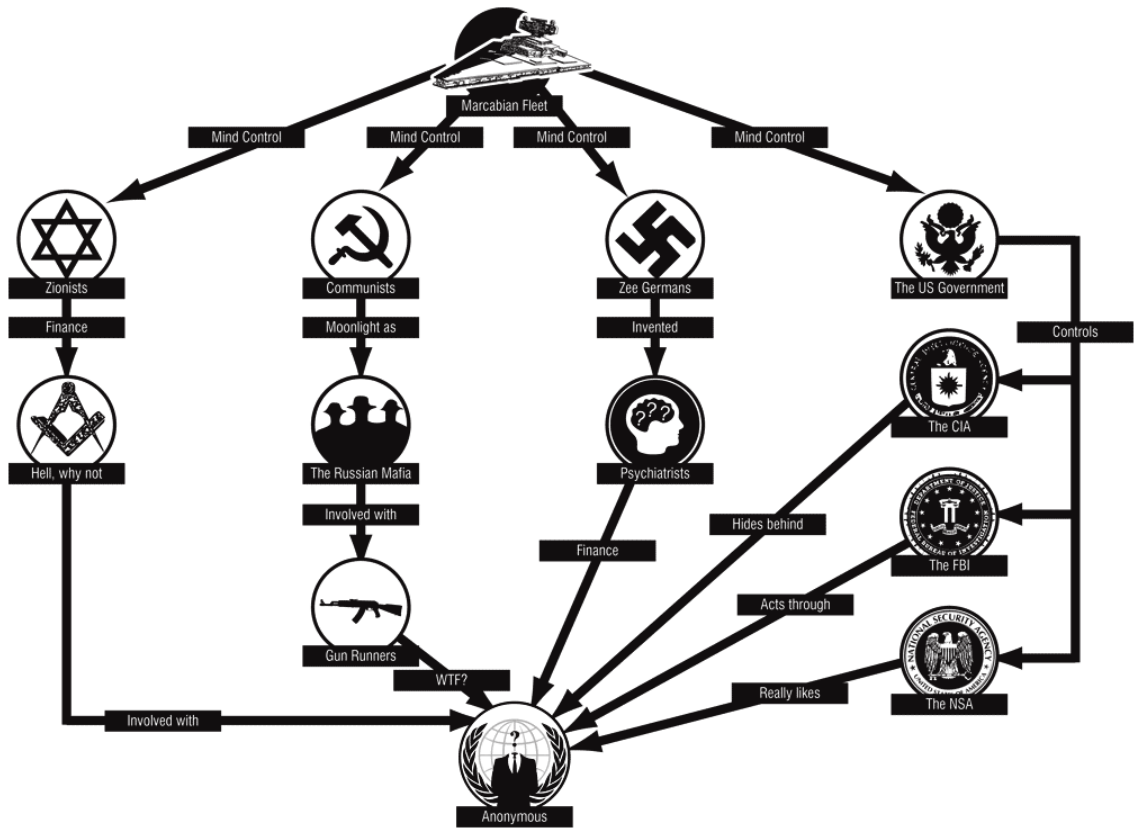


Figure 3.8: Another image meant to highlight the “conspiracy nut” aspects of Scientology while also using the tropes of Anonymous’s identity

The techniques of both grieving and tactical media here are particularly effective protest against Scientology, since the religion’s tenets involve actively attacking so-called Suppressive Persons or SPs. In practice, at least in the Atlanta-area protests, the Church attempts to ignore with Chanology participants referring to “Curtain Tech”, or the act of drawing blinds and turning off lights during protests. This use of Scientology scripture against them is an attempt to make ignoring Project Chanology participants and untenable strategy. Chanologists use it as a derisive dismissal of the Church’s attempts to ignore to dismiss them, much in the same manner of trolling someone online, where the goal is to goad or further push someone into acting irrationally.

Tactics such as the Marcab Confederacy further push Scientology into paying attention and to have members of the church question both the tenets of the religion as well as the economic, legal, and human rights practices of the church.

The ultimate goal of these actions by Project Chanology is the revoking of tax-exempt status in countries where it enjoys the privilege, such as the United States, and, ultimately, bankrupting the church and its collective organizations. The use of these techniques, whether it be various amounts of détournement, tactical media, or culture jamming, have been crucial to both shaping Project Chanology's message as well as exposing Scientology's real belief system. These have been constructed in order to gain public support for Project Chanology's cause. Whether or not these goals can be achieved by Anonymous remains to be seen and, in Chapter 5, I will discuss the ways in which members of Anonymous as well as members of Project Chanology feel that progress is being achieved.

In the next chapter, I will talk about the major means of cultural production and communication for Anonymous and Project Chanology: memes. The origin and use of the word meme will be analyzed as well as the ways in which Anonymous gauges the success and failure of memes and the ways in which memes can shift context.

## Chapter 4

### Anonymous, Meme Creation, and Other Product(Provocat)ions

*"Anonymous is difficult to define — less an organised group than a loose affiliation of certain websites. When enough of these users decide to take action against something or someone, they will do so in the name of Anonymous. The group has no leaders, no set agenda and has a tendency to focus on soft targets for its own amusement."*

—MSN News

*"A bunch of quirky middle-class kids."*

—The Times of London

In the previous chapters, I looked at Anonymous from various perspectives. On one hand, Anonymous acts and participates in various disruptive online social activities such as trolling, raiding, or grieving. On another hand Anonymous, and its offshoot group Project Chanology, are versed in repurposing old media and images into new messages that have been applied to various contexts. In this chapter, I wish to expound on the major form that this message making process takes place: That of meme construction. I will discuss the origin of the term meme, its study in various academic disciplines, and the ways in which Anonymous views, creates, and adapts memes for various purposes

#### *Memes and Memetics*

Perhaps most important to understanding Anonymous is an understanding of its use of memes. The idea of memes, as well as its construction and critique, is central to much of the discussion and cultural production done by Anonymous. The term itself

has gone beyond its initial biological context of 30 years ago<sup>30</sup> as it has wound its way to more technocultural contexts as The Hackers Dictionary and Wired. It is fundamental to understand the role memes play in online culture and within Anonymous.

A meme, as originally defined, is a unit of cultural information that is passed from generation to generation. Dawkins clarifies, saying memes can take the form of “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches.” Dawkins describes how memes propagate, broadly through imitation and repetition, in an analogous manner to the ways in which genes are transcribed and replicated. Similarly, like in rRNA transcription, memes can change or be forgotten over time.

Longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity, which are described as the key elements for successful gene propagation, are used here to describe the way memes spread. As with genes, the longevity of any one copy of a meme (Dawkins here uses *Auld Lang Syne* as an example), such as your personal recollection of a tune, is unimportant. However, there are several copies of the same tune, either written down or in the memory of many people.

As with genes, fecundity helps determine a memes reach. In the example of a song, a popular song will be spread to more people, who will remember the tune and spread it (through whistling, humming, karaoke, covers, etc.). Similarly, there are many instances where popular memes are also short lived. Just as a mutation or adaptation is no longer advantageous after enough generations, a song or fashion may be declared passé after enough exposure.

Memes, while possessing great fecundity, have poor copying-fidelity. As ideas are passed, different parts of an idea are emphasized, or even changed, based on the person's thought and opinion of the idea. Even re-phrasing an idea, as I am doing here with Dawkins's work, is proof at the relatively low copying-fidelity of the meme.

This model of memes, where they are seen as discrete units of culture, prompted an academic shift into their study in the 90s. Dubbed "Memetics", the discipline aimed at examining memes and memetic propagation in an empirical manner. While the discipline is still active, with several active scholars publishing, the only journal focused on the discipline, The Journal of Memetics, ceased publication in 2005.

Two of the key scholars of memetics are Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson. Their works on memetics: Culture and the Evolutionary Process, The Origin and Evolution of Cultures, and Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution. While Boyd and Richerson do not explicitly agree with the use of meme as an explicit unit of cultural reproduction, they instead note:

Adopting a Darwinian approach to culture does not mean that you have to also believe that culture is made up of miniscule [sic] genelike particles that are faithfully replicated during cultural transmission. The evidence suggests that sometimes cultural variants are somewhat genelike, while at other times they are decidedly not. But –and this is a big but – in either case, the Darwinian approach remains Useful (Boyd and Richerson, 80).

Instead, as Alex Walter notes in his book review, Boyd and Richerson use the term *cultural variant*. In this way, they skirt some of the problems with adopting the meme analogy. However, as Walter notes, the "Darwinian approach" may perhaps "the wrong toolbox" as the approach does not does not "[draw] a useful distinction between



proximate and ultimate causes,” as say the field of Evolutionary Biology does (Wlater, 707).

This is not the only criticism the discipline have received. On one end, evolutionary biologists dismiss memetics’ claims of scientific rigor, thinking that memetics somehow overstretches the analogy and does not provide enough objective proof to be considered scientific. Luis Benitez-Bribiesca writes in the journal Interciencia, that because there is no observable scientific presence of memes. That is, since memes do no manifest themselves physically as genetic information does, to study memes in a similar manner is “pseudoscientific.” Bribiera claims, “memes, if they exist at all, are a set of heterogeneous imaginary entities that cannot in any way be subjected to rigorous investigation and experimentation,” (30).

One the other, semioticians claim that the objects scholars of memetics call memes are merely degraded signs. Terrence Deacon, in the Journal of Semiotic Studies, described four issues with memetics (2-3). One is the assertion memes, as we recognize them, do not posses sufficient copying-fidelity to be transmissible. That is, an idea is never transmitted from one person to another in exactly the same form or manner. There is always a degree of difference in the idea, which is different from the genetic analogy of the gene mutation where differences in transcription are discrete. Second is that the description of the meme is not precise and how memetic information manifests itself physically is still unknown. Third, the “size” of the “unit of cultural information” a meme purports to be is unclear. For example, is a meme a bar of music, a familiar chorus, a whole song, or a whole genre of music? Finally, Deacon notes that it is unclear

whether the thought (a memorized song) or the produced result of the thought (a performance) is the meme itself.

Thus while memes are a good term to describe the cultural production, I do not wish to investigate their creation and propagation in the manner of the memeticists. Instead, I will take an anthropological and textual analysis approach and look at memes as both a means of communication and criticism among members of Anonymous as well as cultural artifacts.

### *Internet Memes: A “Life Cycle”*

As with memes in general, internet memes can be drawn from both artifact and practice. What I mean is that the generation of memes can be the result of discovery, when a piece of media, whether it be an image, text, audio, and/or video is discovered and passed around quickly. Meme generation can also occur as a result of deliberate manipulation of these forms, where it is in the mixing of media, or, sometimes, the call to an activity that lend vitality to a meme.

In Anonymous’s case, some of the most common meme take the form of the image macro. An image macro is an image wherein text has been superimposed to either give the impression the person or thing in the image is speaking, or to offer some sense of commentary on the image. The Caturday/LOLCats meme<sup>31</sup> has proven to be emblematic of all image macro based memes. The popularity of the image macro most likely stems from the fact that the \*chan sites where much of Anonymous resides are primarily image boards where pictures are meant to be posted, rather than plain text.

Of course, Anonymous is not the only place where memes are created. The first meme to break through to mainstream media consciousness, All Your Base, was created in the forums of internet humor site Something Awful, for example. Similarly, memes that involves a mix of image, text, and audio have arrived from sites such as YTMND<sup>32</sup> or through practices such as that of “animutations” or “fanimutations”<sup>33</sup>, which draw on various sorts of memetic imagery, sound, and text to create entirely original works.

Internet memes move through a period of innovation, growth, stagnation, and, ultimately, disuse. A more successful meme, in Anonymous’s view, may be considered either over or dead once it captures mainstream attention. Sometimes, old memes, such as the “Pool’s Closed” meme find lasting currency or even new popularity with shifts in context. Usually, however, a meme ends its life as simply a disused idea of phrase.

It is helpful to look at some examples of memes produced by Anonymous in order to give a sense of the range of possibility memes can cover. In the next section, I will cover three memes that have gone through this life cycle with strikingly different results.

### *Anonymous’s Memes: Pool’s Closed, Rickrolling, and Milhouse (is not a meme)*

The “Pool’s Closed” meme<sup>34</sup>, as mentioned in Chapter 2, originated with a piece of clip art. The clip art depicts an African-American man in a suit, with his arms crossed. At One point, a large Afro was drawn in and the text “Pool’s Closed” added. While the original context for the meme involves the raids on Habbo Hotel and the PN’s attempts

to block the physical space of a virtual world, the meme itself has grown, with members of Anonymous finding “IRL Cases” of the Pool’s Closed meme<sup>35</sup>, re-enacting the meme by dressing up as the figure in the image, or variations on the meme such as a graffiti stencil version or a version that incorporates famous African-Americans such as Bill Cosby or Barack Obama. Currently the meme is deemed a “classic” by [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#) and is one of the most used and referenced memes, especially by Anonymous grievers and raiders.



Figure 4.1: The Original “Pool’s Closed”

Rickrolling has a somewhat different history. The idea behind the practice is pure misdirection. While giving people false links or tricking people into viewing content

online they do not want is a fairly well-worn practice, especially among internet-centered communities<sup>36</sup>, Rickrolling became a fairly harmless, worksafe form of such online misdirection. The idea is that a user will entice someone to click on a link only to have the person sent to a page where the music video for Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" was hosted, usually on YouTube. Because of the participation involved in the meme, such as setting up the misdirection, as well as the worksafe nature of the prank, as opposed to earlier misdirection memes, it enjoyed great popularity, with the two most common links to the "Never Gonna Give You Up" video receiving a total of 34 million views.

The Rickrolling meme has spread beyond misdirection. Internet users have attempted to vote the song and its singer as winners in various online contests<sup>37</sup>. Users have placed the music over other video, most notably that of Barack Obama dancing on the Ellen Degeneres show to create a "Barack Roll". Additionally, for April Fools Day of 2008, many people wrote scripts or utilized various web applications to misdirect people through their phone or web browser into either hearing the song or watching the video<sup>38</sup>. At this point the meme was considered by Anonymous to have become boring since it was enjoying too much mainstream popularity and had slipped past the point where anyone in the community could shape it further. The height of the meme's popularity was probably in November of 2008 when, as part of a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, a song was interrupted by "Never Gonna Give You Up", with Rick Astley himself emerging from the float to perform it live. Currently, the meme is considered dead by Anonymous, the joke being longer funny and, perhaps

even worse to the community, has become funny to people outside the community who, initially, viewed it with incomprehension<sup>39</sup>.



Figure 3.2: A variation of the "Pool's Closed" meme. Using the screenshot of the 2008 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade rickroll to indicate the meme has reached peak popularity

The third meme is not a meme or, at least, did not start out as such. The meme, such as it is, was considered a "failed" or "forced meme, discussed in the next section. The fact that the image is of a character who, from its source material, is inherently uncool enforced this perception. However, in its use as a representation of a forced meme, it became a meme. As a humorous attempt to narrate the shift in tone, the [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#) article about Millhouse:

" **Milhouse** " is not a meme.

**" Milhouse is not a meme "** is a meme.

**" Milhouse is not a meme is a meme "** is also a meme.

**" Milhouse is not a meme is a meme is also a meme "** is not a meme, you fucking queer.

**" Milhouse is not a meme is a meme is also a meme is not a meme, you fucking queer"** is not a-- OH FUCK MY HEAD HURTS

This quote, which is the only text in the article, is meant to satirize both the attempts at forcing a meme into usage and the ways in which the incessant argumentation of its place as a meme inevitably makes it a meme in itself. The meme usually is in the context of what is or is not a meme. Usually, as a list various memes are presented with "Millhouse is not a meme" presented at the end. Alternately, the post takes on a form of proclamation with an image of Millhouse placed with the message "if this post ends in [a specific number], then Millhouse is a meme". As with other imaged based memes, variations of the subject occur, mixing the image of the character with other memes or appropriating the "'X is not a meme' is a meme" construction. The meme's status among the Anonymous community is a very interesting look at what the limits of meme consideration and construction are and it points to the ways in which the community views meme construction and critiques new memes. In the next section I will talk about perception of meme construction and the discourse surrounding memes and their "naturalness".



Figure 4.3: A Demotivational poster meme which shows the conversation among Anonymous regarding the Millhouse meme

### *Perceptions of Meme Construction*

Anonymous views the creation of memes through metaphors of growth rather than those of construction. Indeed, describing a meme as “designed” or “built” is usually used as a slur, bemoaning it for lacking a “natural” or “organic” quality to it. In attempting to describe a forced meme, Encyclopedia Dramatica outlines two criteria for a meme to be forced: that is it “Often unfunny” and that it lacks a humorous context



surrounding it. As the description goes, a forced meme differs from an actual meme in that “A forced meme is an attempt at making one's attempt at humor a part of interweb history, or a meme.” This is stark contrast to an “actual meme” which is both humorous on its own and posses a context, usually a story, or fictional ‘coppypasta’.<sup>40</sup> In this way, the attitudes expressed towards forced memes are akin to debates regarding viral advertising versus original work that is meant to either be ‘informative’ or ‘artistic’ in nature.

### *Mememes in Different Contexts*

Mememes are adapted to suit various contexts. Often these shifts are self-referential, combing two mememes together or using the formal qualities of one mememe with the imagery of another. For example, taking the aforementioned Millhouse mememe and merging it with the image of Seaking<sup>41</sup>, another “forced mememe” or creating a so called “demotivational poster”<sup>42</sup> using the imagery associated with the “Facepalm”<sup>43</sup> mememe. However, sometimes mememes adapt different contexts altogether, removed from the self-referential pool of mememes.

One example of the mememe shifting uses the “Pool’s Closed” mememe described earlier. At the end of the 2008 election, an image of Barack Obama standing outside the Capitol with his arms cross was doctored with a crudely pasted Afro with the text “Poll’s Closed” on the bottom of the image, in reference to Obama’s win of the election. Similarly, for the Project Chanology campaign, a scientology sketch of Xenu was altered to give the alien the head of a young black man with an afro with the text “scientologys

closed due to THETANS”<sup>44</sup> placed below, as a symbol of the protest and the goals of Project Chanology. These shifting contexts allow memes to be flexible in their usage and to give them a sense of “freshness” that the new context gives to the familiar images.

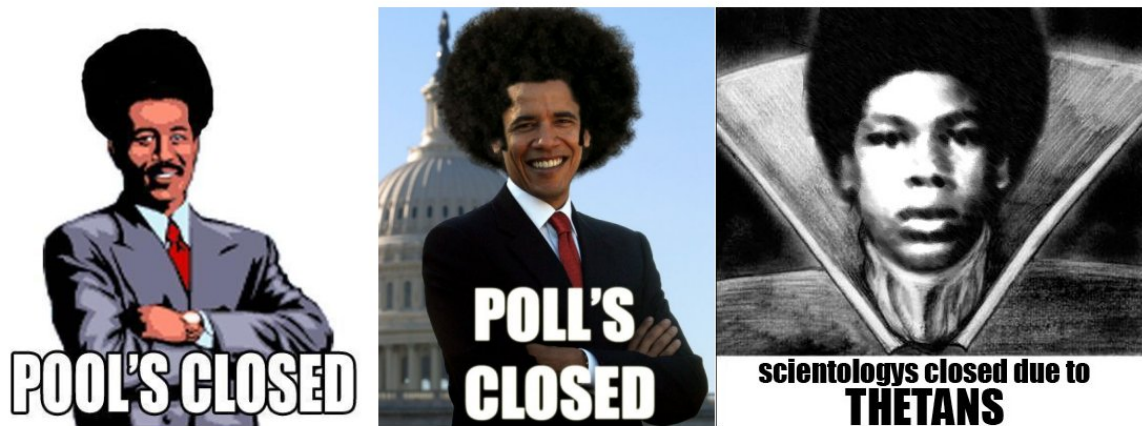


Figure 4.4: The Pool's Closed meme and its adaptations for various contexts

In the next chapter, I will look at the relationship between Anonymous and Project Chanology and the way in which both groups represent each other and themselves. I will mention my methodology in detail, analyze the various archived conversations that led to the formation of Project Chanology, and talk about the perceptions Members of Project Chanology have about Anonymous and their position on being Anonymous themselves.

## Chapter 5

### Project Chanology and Anonymous's Transition to Social Activism

*"Gentlemen, this is what I have been waiting for. Habbo, Fox, The G4 Newfag Flood crisis. Those were all training scenarios. This is what we have been waiting for. This is a battle for justice. Every time /b/ has gone to war, it has been for our own causes. Now, gentlemen, we are going to fight for something that is right. I say damn those of us who advise against this fight. I say damn those of us who say this is foolish. /b/ROTHERS, THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO RISE AS NOT ONLY HEROES OF THE INTERNETS, BUT AS ITS GUARDIANS.*

*/b/ROTHERS. LET THE DEMONS OF THE INTARWEBS BECOME THE ANGELS THAT SHALL VANQUISH THE EVIL THAT DARE TURN ITS FACE TO US.*

*/b/ROTHERS....*

*MAN THE HARPOONS!"*

*"This is gay. I just want to fix my code and shoop things onto Dakota Fanning's face. Idiots...."*

*—Conversation by Anons regarding the formation of Project Chanology*

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to describe Anonymous's community through very frames of reference. Using the appropriate research literature, I attempted to analyze Anonymous as a trolling and grieving organization, a tactical media unit, and as a community of practice specializing in meme creation and distribution. While these separate looks at Anonymous are important in trying to come up with an adequate composite sketch of the community, this chapter hopes to look at Anonymous using ethnographic methods.

Secondly, I wish to describe the point of growth of Project Chanology and how this offshoot group is at once affiliated with Anonymous and yet is held in a level of

contention and even contempt by some members of Anonymous. Again, I wish to describe this relationship through the use of virtual ethnography.

### *Research Methodology*

Since Anonymous and Project Chanology are communities, there were several quantitative and qualitative social science research methods available for use. However, given the various challenges to trying to survey the large number of persons online as well as the fact that many of them are purposely hiding themselves with the mass of anonymous posts and virtual space, it made sense to look at ethnographic research practices in order to extract meaningful data from the relationships between members as well as get useful data on the ways in which members of each group view themselves and each other. It was also useful to use ethnographic techniques when looking at members of Project Chanology as this would allow me to suss out various concerns and techniques that could not be fleshed out using more quantitative models such as numerical surveying.

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology primarily used in Social and Cultural Anthropology, but which has been adapted to related fields such as Cultural Studies, Ethnomusicology, and Performance Studies. The techniques surrounding ethnography were developed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically with the works of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson. The primary methodology of ethnography is centered on field work, that is, to go out “into the field” to live with and participate in the rituals of the people and the

culture on which they are studying. This act, known as *participant observation*, is useful in studying because it helps with understanding the behavior and thought of the culture in question. This is in stark contrast to earlier Anthropological works, such as the work of Emile Durkheim, as well as the techniques of ethnology which, while foundational to the discipline, was completed from second-hand historical accounts and ethnographic sources.

While traditionally, ethnographic research (and, indeed, the discipline of Anthropology) focused on non-Western “exotic” or “primitive” cultures<sup>45</sup>, modern ethnographic works have been pivotal in stretching the understanding of what a culture is and what types of groups or communities are suitable for ethnographic research. For example, Lisa Rofel’s Other Modernities looked at female Chinese garment factory workers and the ways in which they inhabit “the overlapping projects of modernity” (xiii) as women, industrial workers, and as part of the emerging Chinese economy. Additionally, Gary Alan Fine, in his book, Shared Fantasy, looks at a group of fantasy role-play gamers and the ways in which they collaborate in order to create a shared narrative as well as a “cultural system” (2) with which the game operates. Finally, Tom Boellstorff’s book Coming of Age in Second Life, he details the ways in which a virtual world, Second Life, can be a setting for real culture (5) and the usefulness of the ethnography as a tool in understanding the culture that users of Second Life have created (5-7).

Boellstorff’s work is a more recent entry in the literature of virtual ethnography. With the growth of the Internet, specifically the World Wide Web, there has emerged a

space for various online communities to form. One of the earliest works dealing with Anthropological work in this setting is Christine Hine's Virtual Ethnography. Ostensibly an ethnography about the online culture that sprang up during a controversial trial, the book attempts, in great deal, to describe the manner in which a "virtual" ethnography is conducted. Her approach is interesting in two ways. On the one hand, her method strictly uses online methods of communication to talk to members of the community as well as observe the community and its works (discussion, various websites on both sides of the case, etc). This is due to her view that, in a virtual ethnography "the object of ethnographic inquiry can usefully be reshaped by concentrating on flow and connectivity rather than location or boundary as an organizing principle,"(64). On the other, her use of "virtual" is two-fold; aside from the technological meaning, she uses "virtual" ethnography to mean that it is necessarily an incomplete and partial ethnography (65). Specifically she notes "'A holistic description of any informant, location, or culture is impossible to achieve... Our accounts can be based on ideas of strategic relevance rather than faithful representations...'"(65).

A second method for conducting virtual ethnography is laid out by Daniel Miller and Don Slater in The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach. The book is an ethnography about internet use in Trinidad and Trini Diasporas. However, the approach taken is markedly different from that of Hine. Rather than take the view that the field for a virtual ethnography is only located in the spaces of connection, Miller and Slater not only conduct investigation online, looking at websites, message boards, and chat rooms devoted to Trini culture, but also look at real-world locations of this online

activities, particularly internet cafes in Trinidad and Tobago and in cities abroad with significant Trini expatriates residing.

A third methodology, which borrows elements from the previous two scholars is one described by Liav Sade-Beck. In her work on Israeli virtual support communities for the mourning and bereaved, she sets on a three tiered approach to ethnographic research. An initial observation period, where she reads discussions conducted by the community for context and in order “to take full advantage of the relative advantages of Internet research: the expanded field of research, which covers more ground geographically and has higher accessibility to subjects than traditional fieldwork,”(10). Concurrent to observations made from viewing the community, documents were analyzed in order to “[enable Sade-Beck] to collect factual data “from the field,”(10). After these two methods on virtual research, Sade-Beck then conducted research in the real world space, conducting interviews with research subjects, who ranged from site administrators to members of the community. Sade-Beck explains that the three methods used together offer:

the ability to provide the key to analyzing Internet sites online and cross-matching data with the offline interviews with those working to establish and maintain the sites. Researchers who use online data-gathering methods exclusively are in danger of focusing on findings arising from the sites themselves, thus missing additional themes that are expressed otherwise; their research will not be as rich as studies based on integrated methodologies (12).

These methodologies point to a tension in the “completeness” a virtual ethnography can have. Both Hine and Sade-Beck feel that a virtual ethnography methodology that only focuses on online-based research is incomplete, though the

difference is that for Hine, this is acceptable provided the focus of the study is shifted to the communication networks of the community rather than on specific sites and community whereas Sade-Beck sees it as an incomplete methodology “in danger of focusing on findings arising from the sites themselves, thus missing additional themes that are expressed otherwise,”(Sade-Beck, 12). While both Hine and Sade-Beck see virtual ethnography as inherently incomplete or limited because of the mediated communication space, Boellstorff argues that “studying virtual worlds ‘in their own terms’ is not only feasible but crucial to developing research methods that keep up with the realities of technological change,”(4). Indeed one can argue that while the technological barriers, such as asynchronous message boards and synchronous chat, between two people offer a form of interaction that can be seen as “less than” real world human interaction, a community such as Anonymous in which all of its interactions take place within mediated constructs does not suffer a lack of fidelity from using the same mediations in trying to understand the ways in which the community operates. That is, simply, in observing the community “in its own terms”, one can be confident that whatever nuance present will not be lost.

As a result, in my online ethnography of Anonymous, I observed specific loci of interest to members of Anonymous: the /b/ board on [4chan](#) and [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#). The reason for selecting these sites was twofold. Both are large foci for Anonymous users and comments and therefore receive a lot of traffic as well as discussion and arguments regarding the state of the community. Secondly, even though they quickly appear and disappear on the board, since /b/ is part of [4chan](#),



its threads are part of the [4chanarchive](#), which was set up by an Anonymous user who was “was annoyed enough of missing the birth of new memes and the constant “What was teh xxxM GET?” questions to actually start learning PHP and delve into the world of webhosting.” The result of this is that discussion on /b/ that took place near the beginning of the formation of Project Chanology are easily retrievable. [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#), is a site which utilizes MediaWiki to create a humorous encyclopedia of Anonymous, its history, and its various memes. The advantages here is that the site offers perhaps the best source of historical accounts of what occurred in the history of Anonymous combined with the editorial voice of the various affiliations and sentiments of Anonymous.

Of course, in the case of Project Chanology and the local real-world protesters, this is a different story. The ideal course of research follows much of the same methodology employed by Miller and Slater where online activity is followed up on by real-world participant observation and interviewing. Unfortunately, due to the Institute Review Board’s reservations about the case study in question, real world participant observation was not an available strategy for research. In lieu of this impasse, I have had to make do with a combination of virtual ethnographic techniques and textual analysis of media produced by Project Chanology. Luckily, the group, similar to many tactical media collectives, employs heavy use of recording devices and thus, after each protest, a large amount of photos and videos inevitably ends up on the various virtual spaces the local “ATL Anons” group inhabits. These spaces include the sub boards of [whyweprotest.net](#), a clearing site for information about Scientology as

well as a place for strategy, planning, and organizing various real world events. The ATL Anons also utilize a Ning group to socialize and organize in a more private environment that Why We Protest allows. Additionally, I utilized an online survey as a way of getting some direct input over various research questions I had regarding their participation and their relationship with Anonymous. This was also an acceptable approach since, aside from the actual attended events (global protests, flyering at smaller Scientology-affiliated groups), all of the discussion and planning occurs online. While “virtual” in both of Hine’s uses of the term, this offers me the best look at the Chanology community given the circumstances.

### *The Formation of Project Chanology*

The initial organization of Project Chanology occurred in two well-known foci of Anonymous activity: 4chan’s /b/ and 7chan’s /i/. On these forums instructions to raiders were given such as the motivation for the raid, what to do (in general terms), and precautions to take such as masking IP addresses, claiming that raiders came from EBaum’s World, and other actions that were typical of earlier raids.

An example of some of the discourse during the raiding period is below. These are a few posts among 587 replies to one thread, entitled “project chanology” on January 16, 2008.:

“this anon has a question: HOW THE FUCK DOES MAKING THEIR OFFICIAL WEBSITE NOT WORK ELIMINATE SCIENTOLOGY???”

“It's their hilarious insane reaction to being DDOSed or hacked that contributes to their downfall.”

“Wow, the site is down. Great. For what? 10 minutes?  
WE NEED TO FUCKING RUIN IT /b/.  
FILL IT WITH INTERNETHATEMACHINE STUFF.  
Pr0n OR SOMETHING??!  
LET'S FUCKING MAKE THEM SHAT BRIX.  
LET'S SHOW FOX WHO ANONYMOUS ACTUALLY IS /b/.”

“THIS IS AN EBAUMSWORLD RAID.

Ebaums raid! Do your coordination off-site, don't link back, and wait until the 18th to put this on places like Digg.”

After the two waves of raiding conducted by Anonymous, which were deemed very successful as evidenced by both the disruption of various Scientology websites and centers, as well as with the flurry of media attention gained. This prompted Anons to produced work such as image macros which proclaimed expressions such as “1/21/08 NEVAR FORGET” and “WHY MY WEBSITE NO WERK?” accompanied with images of Tom Cruise and of Scientology symbols.



Figure 5.1: One of the images that appeared after the raids was this, which used a screenshot from the initial Tom Cruise interview video clip

The shift in focus from traditional raiding to actual protest organization was the result of several actions. One was the recording of videos by people involved in anti-Scientology movements directly targeted towards Anonymous. Of particular note is Mark Bunker, whose XenuTV videos directed towards Scientology were disseminated on forums such as /b/ and noted with generally positive reactions. Some Anons agreed with the premise that the illegal raiding strategies are not sustainable and that the long term goal should be to get Scientology's tax-exempt status reformed. Other sentiments were more negative, ranging with feeling that Bunker did not understand Anonymous's motivations<sup>46</sup> to outright mockery and dismissal<sup>47</sup>.

Another motivating factor may have been the amount of mainstream press that covered Anonymous and the initial actions against Scientology. One post on /b/ echoes both the confusion and sense accomplishment echoed by the mainstream media press regarding both the raids and the organization of the first protest planned for February of 2008:

ok so at first i thought this scientology thing was a fun thing, but nothing too serious. even thought of showing up on the 10th in chicago... but then was like whatever.

im reading my weekly subscription of the london economist, not fox news, not the sun, not a tabloid, THE ECONOMIST. articles from here are about israeli foreign policy and economic policies of the UN. Not puppies.

So i skip to the international section. The article reads "an online onslaught against scientology"

so it goes on... talks about how the tom cruise video got out. i take a breath, ok nothing to be excited about. and then i shat bricks and decided to post on /b/ for the first time in 6 months. they even talk about the 10th.

HOLY SHIT. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE /b/?

WHY IS THIS MAKING INTERNATIONAL NEWS?

SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT YOU DEAR /b/?

This mix of sentiments also added to the perception that the February 2008 protest was more an “IRL raid” of Scientology than a traditional demonstration. There is also the perception, among Anonymous supporters of the protests that this was the way to do significant damage to Scientology. As a poster puts it:

The more people we get on our side whether /b/tards / /i/insurgents or not, the more we can get away with in terms of "protesting" and fucking their shit up. The IRL raids have to be the main part, DDoSing, fax DDoSing and ordering them tons of pizzas etc is just a small part and to piss them off. Getting them to react/flip may just be what we need.

While enturbation.org was used a site of information and some organization, the first protest’s planning was performed in the pages of Anonymous wiki partyvan.info<sup>48</sup>. The haphazard nature of organization led to an idiosyncratic variety of protests styles based on both local laws regarding protests as well as who was organizing the event. In one excerpt for the March 2008 protest in Boston, the organizer mentions attendees, “DO bring cameras, camcorders and flyers and signs—the more the better. DON'T bring obnoxious retards. This isn't about shouting memes. “ However, in other locations, such as London, the use of memes was prevalent.

However, idiosyncratic the organization was at a local level, a coherent set of rules was created as a set of universal protesting guidelines. These rules focused on having protesters maintain their cool<sup>49</sup>, following the local laws and directions of police,

keeping comfortable and safe, and documenting the protests. In fact one rule emphasizes the last point, stating, “JPEGs and AVIs don’t lie: People DO. Proof is crucial.” Throughout the year that the real-world protests have occurred, much of the larger scale organizational work has been routinized with general announcements as well as “think tank” planning occurring at sites such as [Why We Protest](#), which emerged after the old enturbation.org went down due to internal problems with moderators separate from Project Chanology. The site operates several geographically organized subforums in order to have local organization happen though, as in the case of Atlanta area Chanologists, it is not the only space where this occurs.

# Code of Conduct

(Rule 0: Rules 1 & 2 of "Rules of the Internet" still apply. Do NOT talk about /b/)

RULE 1: Stay Cool.

RULE 2: Stay Cool. You mustn't lose your temper; Do NOT tarnish the reputation of Anonymous.

RULE 3: Comply with the orders of law enforcement officers: Above ALL else.

RULE 4: Notify city officials of your intentions. Know the rules for your district and abide by them.

RULE 5: Always be across the street from the object being protested.

RULE 6: In the absence of a road; Find another natural barrier between yourself and the target.

RULE 7: Stay on public property; You may be charged for trespassing if you do not.

RULE 8: No violence.

RULE 9: No weapons. This is a peaceful demonstration: Your weapons; You will not need them.

RULE 10: No alcohol or pre-drinking. Violating this rule may easily precipitate violation of rules 1 & 2.

RULE 11: No graffiti, destruction or vandalism.

RULE 12: If you want to do something stupid: Pick another day.

RULE 13: Anonymous is Legion; Never be alone. Isolation leaves you vulnerable.

RULE 14: Organize in squads of 10 to 15 people.

RULE 15: 1 or 2 megaphones per squad. Too many will only confuse the public.

RULE 16: Know the dress code. This will help to convey protestor/group cohesion.

RULE 17: Cover your face. Scarves, hats and sunglasses. Masks are unnecessary; and thus forbidden.

RULE 18: Bring water.

RULE 19: Wear good shoes.

RULE 20: Signs, fliers and phrases. Make sure they can be EASILY READ.

RULE 21: Prepare legible, complicated & accurate fliers for those who wish to know more.

RULE 22: Document the demonstration. JPEGs and AVIs don't lie: People DO. Proof is crucial.

RULE 23: Only through Unity will we achieve Epic Win, and Victory. Expect us.

## The RULES bring ORDER from CHAOS

Only YOU can prevent B& 4 stupidity

Figure 5.2: The generalized Code of Conduct that was created for the protests distributed online using the demotivational poster meme.

The Atlanta area protestors or "ATL Anons" utilize a wide variety of online resources for organization, planning, and chat regarding Scientology. Besides using the more centralized hub of Why We Protest for general organizing and announcement of protest dates and times, the group utilizes more popular social networking technology.

Specifically, the ATL Anons operate a Ning group which is seen as a quieter home where more sensitive topics can be discussed away from the more open (and thus, more watched by Scientology) Why We Protest. Recently, a small \*chan board, 888chan, opened up a “Southern Insurgency” board, though time will tell if the Atlanta-based Chanologists will frequent this location. Finally, many of the group’s media creations, such as protest video footage, are uploaded to video sites, usually YouTube, to share with other Anons and to document what happens at each protest.



Figure 5.3: The front page of Why We Protest. The use of the Anonymous logo as well as the V masks are attempts to link Project Chanology with Anonymous, despite its claims of separation with the group.



**ATL Anons**  
A place to learn more about the ATL protests against the Cult of Scientology

Main My Page Members Events Forum Groups Photos Videos Blogs

**Events**

March 2009

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Last Month Next Month

**University of Alabama raid, April 4th!**  
April 4, 2009 all day - [University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama](#)

**Arpil 11th World Wide Protest**  
April 11, 2009 from 1:30pm to 4:30pm - [4480 North Shallowford Rd, Dunwoody Ga](#)

**Southeastern Mashup - Operation: Nashville Mayday!**  
May 2, 2009 all day - [Nashville scilon bunkers](#)

**DragonCon**  
September 4, 2009 to September 7, 2009 - [Atlanta Downtown](#)

**Anime Weekend Atlanta**  
September 18, 2009 to September 20, 2009 - [http://www.awa-con.com/index.php?page=directions\\_to\\_awa](http://www.awa-con.com/index.php?page=directions_to_awa)

**Welcome!**

Welcome to the Ning site for Anons in ATL! Here you will find the info you need to get started in activism against the Cult of Scientology.

**Why are we protesting?**

Scientology **breaks apart families, stalks and harasses its critics, and ruins the lives of its members.** Don't take my word for it, find out for yourself.

[Why Are They Dead](#)  
[The Unfunny Truth About Scientology](#)  
[You Found The Card](#)  
[Ex-Scientology Kids](#)  
[Why We Protest](#)

For more in-depth reading, these sites are recommended:

[Operation Clambake](#)  
[Xenu TV](#)  
[End The Cult Wiki](#)  
[LermaNet](#)  
[Wikileaks page of leaked Scientology documents.](#)

**New to Anonymous? Joining up is easy!**

- 1) Make a name for yourself. Something that will not identify you is good.
- 2) Make a post on the forums and say 'Hi'. There is an [Introductions](#) forum set up for new posters. Don't be shy!
- 3) Plan to meet up at one of the upcoming mini-protests or at the Global protest by clicking on their links on the [Events](#) page.

Welcome to ATL Anons  
[Sign Up](#) or [Sign In](#)

**About**

Rick Astley created this social network on Ning.

[Create your own social network!](#)

**Latest Activity**

Stutroup commented on the blog post '[Scientology's Administrative Technology for Dentists and Religious Discrimination \(WISE\)](#)' 12 hours ago

mefree added a blog post 12 hours ago  
[Scientology's Administrative Technology for Dentists and Religious Discrimination \(WISE\)](#)

Stutroup commented on the event '[Arpil 11th World Wide Protest](#)'

Figure 5.4: The Atlanta area Project Chanology Ning page

## Acquisition of Knowledge About Scientology

Online, there are many sources Anonymous uses to educate individuals about Scientology. Enturbulation.org, not [Why We Protest](#), where much of the initial online raids took place, hosts and links to much of the other sources of information. Users who were already familiar with Scientology pointed others to longstanding online sources of information such as [Operation Clambake](#). In addition, there are many sites which are much more specialized such as [ex-Scientology Kids](#), [Why are They Dead](#), and [Fair Gamed](#). In addition, users pointed people to [YTMND](#), a site devoted to normally humorous

audio/image/video juxtapositions, to view a work created in 2006 entitled “The Unfunny Truth About Scientology”. In these ways, information was quickly spread to users to gain momentum needed for the initial raids, but more importantly, for the first global protest that was held afterwards. Information and media were spread quickly through Anonymous locations, such as the instance where the Mark Bunker videos to Anonymous were discussed on /b/.

Locally, many protestors were familiar with the criticisms levied on Scientology. Several respondents claimed to have been readers of alt.religion.scientology at some point in the past or are even current readers of the Usenet group. Those who did not know about Scientology pre-protest gained a lot on information from the main organizing site enturbulation.org (now whyweprotest.net). One Anon notes on how he acquires information about Scientology:

My list is short. Initially, things posted on 4chan ... ""lulz"" things ... but then I got involved online, and learned atrocities by the cult. Enturbulation and Scientology Exposed were my first ventures into forums. I soon found a local cell's ning site. ARS, xenu.net, etc., are all still sources of info for me.

this points out the ways in which information and links are quickly spread online.

### *Attitudes Between Anonymous and Project Chanology*

Even from the beginning, though perhaps more pronounced as Project Chanology continued, the attitudes towards the project among non-Chanology participants in Anonymous changed. The general attitude ranged from simple claims

that protesting Scientology (as opposed to raiding or trolling) was boring. Others felt it was either a fruitless effort or even worse, antithetical to what Anonymous is.

The main tensions that have been brought about by the formation of Project Chanology have centered on a few factors: whether Project Chanology's goals are tenable, whether their goals and methods are in keeping with those of Anonymous itself, and whether, in becoming more visible in the name of a social justice cause, they become something that members of Anonymous would usually mock or troll rather than celebrate.

One instance of this sentiment lies in the Encyclopedia Dramatica description of Project Chanology. While the site keeps good records of the events that have occurred as well as the cultural productions related to the group, the group is described as "Anonymous had nothing better to do than get their collective panties in a twist because there is a cult masquerading as a church." The page also notes that, "Project Chanology is now considered gay by most chans. Posting about it will get you b&, your IP posted," which indicates the mixed feeling Anonymous has towards the current status of Project Chanology<sup>50</sup>. At the conclusion of the ED article:

PC CoSplay is argued to be an epic IRL win, and an utterly amazing failure... Nevertheless, (and) nothing of value was lost; for somewhere hidden on ebaumsworld the next phase was being enturbulated. Fortunately, fans and critics alike will always have Magoo, The Geterator, Gas Mask Girl, Wise Beard Man, and Raidfag Wench to fall back on just in case the future raids miscarry.

As far as the real-world protesters themselves, most of them are non-plussed by these remarks. However, one Chanologist did characterize his or her sentiments towards anti-Chanology Anons as:

Those who try to label the protests as over, or a failure, or whatever, irritate me because they try to speak for everyone. Their term, 'moral fag,' is indicative of the desire to do things for laughs, even at the expense of others and their opposition of people who do things for the sake of a moral cause. So label me moral. I won't get all butthurt over it. I do enjoy lulz as well, on my own level.

Alternately, protestors ignore these critics since the majority of them ignore the Chanologists. Another Chanologist noted that, for the Atlanta group, "Anons who were into Chanology solely for the fun HAVE drifted away; it is those who have become personally outraged... who continue to protest and work on getting the message out.."

It should be noted that there is critique of these anti-Chanology Anons. Their sentiment refutes the narrative of mystique and secretive power some Anti-Chanology Anons have built around Anonymous. One image macro portrays the narrative of Anonymous as suit wearing invisible "feared, respected final boss of the internet" was replaced by a nerdy, rail thin geek who is a "cause-oriented, friendly butt of every joke on the internet" in a V for Vendetta mask. In response, another image macro in particular directly critiques this statement. Instead of the narrative of Anonymous as a mysterious man turned nerdy protestor, Anonymous is portrayed, more accurately, as a nerdy "hentai enthusiast" interested in "loli tentacle rape" who became the nerdy protestor caricatured in the original image. Alternately, some embrace the skepticism expressed by these Anons.

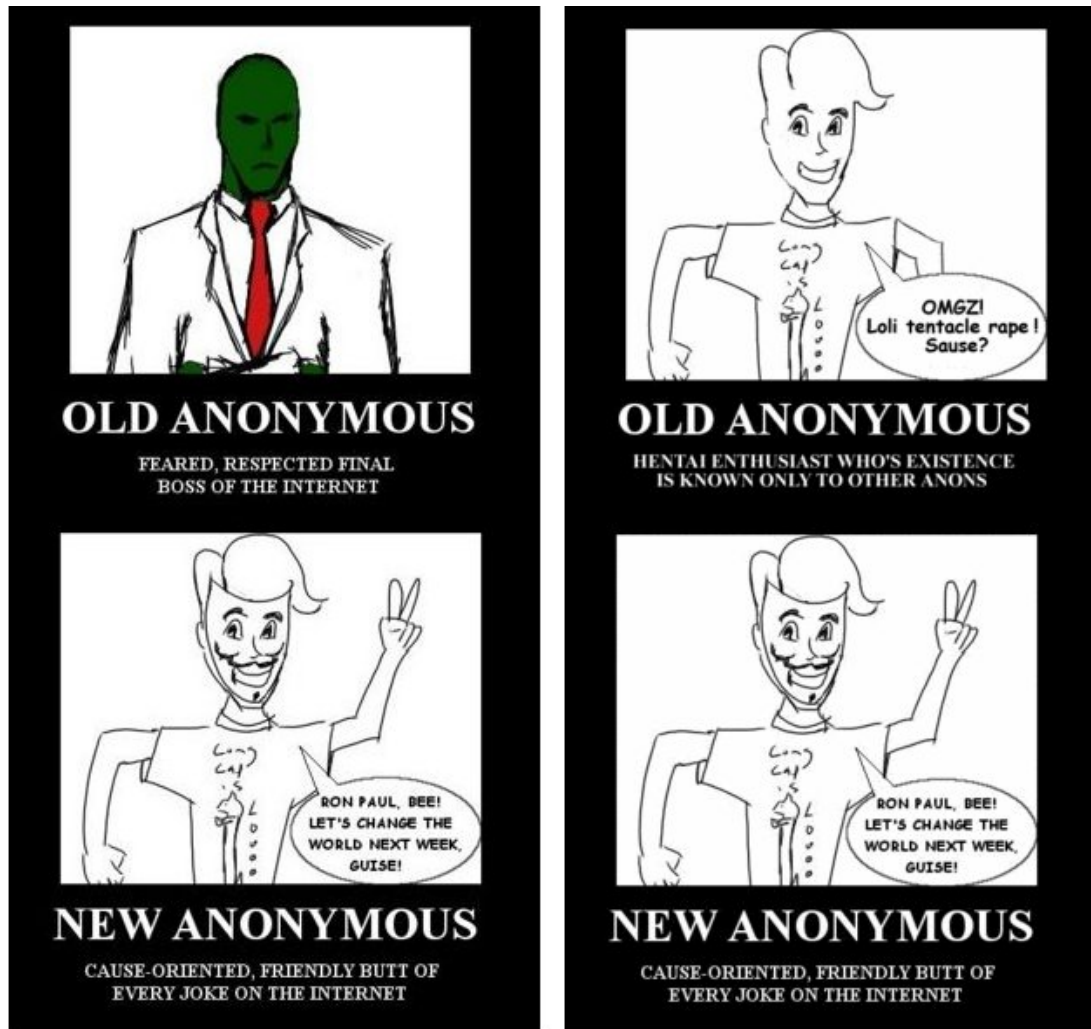


Figure 5.6: Two sets of image macros. The left one portrays the tensions between certain members of Anonymous and Project Chanology. The right one specifically critiques that viewpoint

Another Atlanta-based Chanologist notes that, “From what I understand of Anonymous, making light of and criticizing is the nature of the beast,” which indicates an understanding that, because of the diverse of people that make up Anonymous and the openly critical nature of the group, criticisms over Project Chanology’s purpose is inevitable. By and large, while Project Chanologists will be dismissed by some members

of the community, most indirectly support, ignore, or, most humorously, make fun of the people who make fun of the Chanologists.

In the next chapter, I will draw my conclusions about Anonymous as a multi-sited online community and Project Chanology as a closely held offshoot of the community. I will also espouse some of the design-related lessons a group such as Anonymous provides and, in a somewhat off the cuff manner, mention several points that should be taken into consideration if one is considering either designing an internet-centered community or if one is pushing a primarily online community to the real world, lulz optional.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion, Lessons for Online Communities, and Directions for Further Inquiry

The construction of Anonymous is best defined as a loose consortium of online spaces of various fidelities and its members. The metaphor, while initially accidental, has served as both metaphor and rallying cry to a sort of internet counter culture. While aspects of this counterculture is disruptive, even illegal, other aspects seem to be about using the numbers, resources, and technical and media expertise of Anonymous to accomplish laudable goals.

#### *Lessons to draw from Anonymous to Online Communities*

In looking at this group and its activities, it is worth pondering how a designer or administrator of an online community can take these aspects of Anonymous and create a similarly vital community. This is a question that seems obvious. After all, one can simply look at the existing sites and even, with a bit of work, use one of the freely available imageboard software such as Wakaba.

However, this does not the answer which is probably most pressing to a web entrepreneur: how to make such a community profitable, or, at least, self-sustaining. Even moot, the founder of [4chan](#) is still figuring out how to make a site like his profitable or at least self-running. The only site so far to be sustaining and profitable is

2ch.net. Needless to say, it is difficult to match the scope of what is arguable the largest message board in the world. Even this only produces about 100 million yen, or about 1 million dollars, a year in revenue.

To that end, I wish to describe a few design lessons that one can draw from Anonymous. While these lessons are beneficial for certain sorts of online communities particularly groups that are internet-centered and based on discussions, are very context-specific. Therefore, these are not intended as tenets or commandments, but guidelines for web designers and information architects who wish to construct communities that have very high active user participation and discussion as well as a user base that is both very loyal and very prolific with content creation.

- *Forced registration is not necessary*

The user registration process is seen, from the perspective of a user who wishes to add content to an online community, as anything from a minor inconvenience to a complete deterrent to ever wanting to contribute anything. Sites such as bugmenot, which offers automated username/password combinations to access various sites with free registration, are evidence that registration process is seen, at least by a significant minority of users, as a bother. Measures such as captchas<sup>51</sup>, validation emails, and “forum invites” are useful to site administrators to ensure new users are actual people, as opposed to spammers or advertisers. However, in total, the registration process is rather cumbersome.

The solution, in Anonymous’s case, is simple. No registration is necessary. In keeping people anonymous, they are free to come in, enter comments, images, or



link to content, and be on their way. Moderators are quick to discover spam, especially since the format doesn't allow for users to submit any complicated scripting and thread which are spammed are quickly saged<sup>52</sup> by the community and, thus, are quickly removed from public view.

Secondly, while not having registration doesn't allow the site to keep track of specific users, users who wish to be known can do so. Nearly all of the English Language \*chan sites allow a name to be placed in the name field and there are users who will go by a pseudonym over the default "Anonymous" name. Even though this can be easily spoofed, in context, it becomes obvious when a person named X is really that person and user continuity is preserved.

Here I should note a quick difference in culture between Western imageboards and their Japanese predecessors. Because of the Japanese cultural norms that focus on a lack of publicly speaking out and of having one's identity widely known, it was decided early on in 2ch's life that all posts would be Anonymous. As Nishimura has noted, [quote about Japanese being freer to express themselves when anonymous]. Futaba Channel, despite being a direct outgrowth of 2ch, did not preserve this model and allowed optional names, though the default is anonymous. Since 4chan's board software was initially identical to Futaba-Chan's software, it brought with it the "anonymous as default" model of usernames as opposed to 2ch's "anonymous as forced" model. In some ways this was for the best as Western culture, American culture in particular, does not have the same taboos regarding being outspoken in public as Japanese Culture does<sup>53</sup>.

- *Groups will organize themselves*

In the book Here Comes Everybody, Clay Shirky talks about the ways in which online technologies have enabled people to organize, particularly around sharing, an activity that many online groups participate in. He notes:

We now have communication tools —and increasingly, social patterns that make use of those tools—that are a better fit for our native desires and talents for group effort. Because we can now reach beneath the Coasean floor, we can have groups that operate with a birthday party’s informality and a multinational scope... New ease of assembly is causing a proliferation of effects, rather than a convergence, and these effects differ by how tightly the individuals are bound to one another in the various groups(67).

This characterization is very close to the ways in which Anonymous organized immediately following the pull of the Tom Cruise video from YouTube.

Very quickly in the Scientology-Anonymous schism, organized teams were able to utilize the various spaces, initially 4chan’s /b/ and 7chan’s /i/ and later enturbulation.org (which became whyweprotest.net after the first protest in February of 2008), to direct people to both information about Scientology, provide information and documents for the initial raids and, after the raids were called off, provide a space for people to organize locally for monthly protests. Moot, 4chan’s owner, noted that, due to the heavy post volume of boards such as /b/, “the power lies in the community to dictate its own standards... All we do is provide a general framework.”

Naturally, with the organization of groups, phenomena such as offshoot groups and cliques will form. However, if a group is loosely organized, these offshoots won’t

prove detrimental in the long run. While Project Chanology is perhaps the most stark example of such an offshoot group, particularly because of its real world presence, Anonymous supports vary many sub-groups which range from the manga subtitlers which exists on various \*chan's and their related IRC networks, to the Patriotic Nigras who are chiefly responsible for grieving virtual worlds, to groups such as the Internet Vigilante Group which was responsible for collecting incriminating information on Chris Forcand. These groups operate, while not necessarily harmoniously, with a sense of community that is perhaps most analogous to people living in an open apartment complex or tenement house.

- *Too many rules alienate communities*

Of course some semblance of order is necessary. While the obvious reason for rules is legal protection, one of the issues plaguing [4chan](#) is in inability to secure sufficient revenue through advertising. This is due to the lack of online advertising networks comfortable with the content the site produces. [4chan](#) is currently working on ways in which to balance the open nature of the content and rules of its boards with the ability to generate enough revenue to sustain the site.

Because of the various sorts of activities Anonymous performs, it is unsurprising that users feel blocked in with too many rules. The level of rules deemed acceptable will necessarily change based on software format and context. [4chan's /b/](#) imageboard, for example operated initially with only with a very small set of rules. A site such as [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#), a wiki, operates under a larger set of rules, though these mostly concentrate on formatting and categorizing content, which is

inherent to the way a wiki stores and indexes content. Still yet another example is Why We Protest. Since the site uses a traditional vBulletin-like interface, there are more formal rules to posting versus /b/, but perhaps not as many as Encyclopedia Dramatica. On the other hand, with its focus on Chanology activities and the fact that, while many of the members consider themselves Anonymous, the site does interface with users who do not consider themselves part of that community and, as a result, there are stricter rules regarding content than either /b/ or ED.

When new rules are levied, they are usually looked at with disdain, especially when there seems to be no apparent justification. For example, when moot added additional rules, specifically a “no invasions” rule in 2006, as well as extra moderators and software to combat spam and legally problematic images, users staged a small revolt which led to a post that has since been entitled “The Declaration of /b/ Independence”<sup>54</sup>, which led to a large outgoing set of /b/ users to other \*chan sites, in particular 7chan. While this wasn’t a major drop in usage for 4chan and indeed a boon for Anonymous as a community<sup>55</sup>, it does highlight that rules for a forum should be laid out in advance as much as possible. If new rules need to be levied, justifications should be available to minimize the fallout from the changes.

### *Further Inquiries*

While Anonymous and its relationship with Project Chanology has made for a very good case study in looking at the relationships between online and offline communities, there are several avenues of research one can proceed further from/ In

particular, I am interested in three distinct avenues of research. These are: a longitudinal study of Project Chanology and its measure of “success” in protests, looking at other internet-centered communities in much the same manner as Anonymous, and looker at the broader “internet counter culture” in order to find broader trends at work that Anonymous is only a part of.

Since Project Chanology is only a little more than a year old, a longitudinal study of Anonymous, in particular Project Chanology, would be useful in seeing how goals, attitudes, and even the makeup of the groups have changed over time. A longer term study of the group, with physical site ethnography included as part of the documented research would also suss out some of the relationships between real world protesters and the ways they view themselves with the group and the local leaders of Scientology.

Recalling the historical trajectory of groups such as the Women’s Action coalition, it would also be useful to see how the makeup and size of Project Chanology changes over time. While it is unlikely that the group would spawn a dramatic rise in membership that overwhelms its organizational capacity, it may be that, over time, the size of the group become small enough that the advantages of Project Chanology protesting Scientology, namely its numbers, becomes nullified. Either way, since the community feels that the success of further real world actions rides on the long term results of Project Chanology, a longitudinal study is appropriate for further research.

Secondly, research on Anonymous would be useful in any ethnographic study of other internet-centered communities. In particular communities of practice such as fan-

subtitlers of foreign media as well as piracy groups are networks that operate in similar virtual spaces as anonymous and share many similar practices such as sharing media, commenting on quality and type of work, and evaluating both technical and cultural literacy. Similarly, groups such as hackers which have been the subjects of other sorts of research would be served with an ethnographic approach and a look at how the various practices of hacking are similar to or diverge from Anonymous's strategies used in raids and grieving sessions.

Finally, this study of Anonymous makes a great stepping stone to talk about the larger internet counter culture. While I talked a bit about the history of Anonymous from a formal and technical perspective, which led to discussion about 4chan and its Japanese predecessors, I did not focus much on the various Western online spaces that are Anonymous's predecessors and/or contemporaries with regard to meme production and distribution, online discussion, and a shared online cultural background that I regard as an "internet counterculture". This collective of various online communities appears to be simultaneously at home on the internet and seriously opposed to the way it operates, or perhaps more precisely, the way in which people not of this shared experience operate online. There is some historical background to this culture, stretching back to the early days of Usenet and the "September that never ended".

Anonymous and other sites that are loosely grouped together as the greater "internet counter culture" are, in many ways, the 800lb. gorilla in the room of the internet. In some ways, this is on purpose. Owners such as Hiroyuki Nishimura or moot are famously dismissive about any influence their respective sites may have in the

greater popular culture. However, the fact that byproducts of the site emerge, however uncommonly, into the mainstream press (usually obfuscated into an “internet-spawned” idea) suggest that communities like Anonymous and the virtual spaces in which they inhabit have some bearing, if not on the grand scheme of social causes, then on the ways in which people perceive community and cultural production on the internet. As popular culture moves incessantly towards being pervasively on the internet, one imagines communities such as Anonymous will play an even greater role in shaping popular culture.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hubbard came to Rhodesia claiming to be the reincarnation of Cecil Rhodes.

<sup>2</sup> These messengers were speculated to be teenagers and adults working as slaves aboard the ship.

<sup>3</sup> Miscavige assumed the position of Chairman of the Religious Technology Center (RTC), a corporation which owns the trademarked names and symbols of "Dianetics", "Scientology", and "L. Ron Hubbard". It is also speculated that Miscavige holds a high position in the Sea Org, which is where real power in the Church is located. Thus, for most people Miscavige is regarded as head of the church.

<sup>4</sup> The OSA's predecessor, the Guardian's Office was responsible for organizing Operation Snow White, which is what prompted the change in name. Many critics of the church consider the OSA to be the church's "intelligence agency".

<sup>5</sup> A tripcode is a number that represents what number message on the server it is, based on history. Particularly large milestone tripcode are noted, even celebrated on 2ch-like message boards.

<sup>6</sup> Futaba Channel's name is a play on the reading of the number two and the word for bud or sprout. In certain contexts, 二(ni) can be read as futa. Futaba means sprout or bud.'

<sup>7</sup> While moot has used the name Christopher Poole in interviews with the New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, among other mainstream news organizations, it is speculated that this, too, is a pseudonym based on an inside joke based in either /b/ or one of the various Anonymous affiliated IRC channels.

<sup>8</sup> While Futaba Channel separated topics, it was between 2-D images and CGI or Photographic images rather than by content.

<sup>9</sup> Matthias Schwartz, in an article for the New York Times Magazine, describes a discussion on /b/ that asked "What makes a bad person? Or a good person? How do you know if you're a bad person?"

<sup>10</sup> The rules for /b/ are inherited from the major rules of the site. In General, no Child pornography, no posts calling for invading other sites, and readers of /b/ are assumed to be of the age of majority.

<sup>11</sup> Trolling is the act of intentionally deceiving or riling a person or persons in a message board or similar environment, such as Usenet.

<sup>12</sup> もえ (moe, pronounced "Mo- eh") is a trend in character design that has developed over the last ten years in Japanese animation and comics. The word stems from 萌える (moeru, to blossom). It refers to female characters who possess child-like innocence and naivete, though sometimes this extends to even a child-like appearance.

<sup>13</sup> Utilizing the collision mechanics of Habbo Hotel (which have since been changed) they blocked players from entering an in-game pool, re-enacting the "Pool's Closed" meme. Also, since the characters they used were all black men with suits and large afros, they

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coordinated themselves into human swastikas in an effort to offend the tween demographic.

<sup>14</sup> Of these subcultures, furies are a common target and anti-furry memes such as a still image from Disney's Robin Hood where the titular character is caught in a fire, shocked in overlaid with text proclaiming "Yiff in Hell Furfag" are common.

<sup>15</sup> Criminon is an organization operated by Scientology which purports to rehabilitate criminals using methods derived from Scientology. It is one of several similar organizations such as Narconon and Citizens Commission of Human Rights

<sup>16</sup> Citation Needed

<sup>17</sup> As an example, [alt.religion.scientology](#) posts about Anonymous ranged from rationalization : " I think

that more people will be harmed and even possibly killed in the time it takes to bring down CoS legally than it may take using more extreme methods like Anonymous is trying to do," to nihilistic condemnation: "So why promote illegal actions? It won't work-----ever-----long term, and they then become what they say they're fighting."

<sup>18</sup> Taping two sheets of black paper to form a continuous loop through a fax machine in order to waste fax toner.

<sup>19</sup> The time period of Scientology server downtime is estimated to have been between January 18<sup>th</sup> until January 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> A group associated with the project, called "g00ns," mistakenly targeted a 59-year-old man from Stockton, California. They posted his home telephone number, address and his wife's Social Security number online for other people to target. They believed that he was behind counter-attacks against Project Chanology-related websites by the Regime, a counter-hack group who crashed one of the Project Chanology planning websites, partyvan.info. The group allegedly attempted to gain personal information on people involved in Project Chanology to turn that information over to the Church of Scientology, though other people felt that the group was merely trolling the Project. After discovering they had wrongly targeted the elderly couple, one of the members of the g00ns group called and apologized.

<sup>21</sup> A Google bomb is a directed attempt to have a site listed at or near the top of a Google search, especially for specific terms. Usually this involves some amount of scripting or manipulating the algorithms Google uses in assigning page rank to its searches.

<sup>22</sup> "Pedobear" is a [4chan](#) meme. Originally a Japanese character named Kuma or "bear", it was adopted by [4chan](#) users early on in the site's history. The character is used as a marker for Lolita-complex or lolicon, i.e. drawn images of prepubescent girls in sexually suggestive poses, or other behavior that may suggest pedophilia. In some cases it is also used to describe photographic images which skirt the line of being child pornography as



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well as in ironically contrasting situations, such as a picture of someone with the image on hand posing with *To Catch a Predator* host Chris Hansen.

<sup>23</sup> Supposedly chosen due to the date being Bill Cosby's birthday.

<sup>24</sup> "desu" is another meme used by Anonymous. Literally the verb "is" or "to be" in Japanese, in context is used repeated several times (i.e. "desudesudesudesudesu...") to indicate repetitiveness, droning, and a sense of noise overwhelming the signal.

<sup>25</sup> The full title of the meme is "Pool's Closed due to AIDS". The image is typically a clip art of an African-American in a suit with his arms crossed and wearing a crudely pasted-on Afro. The meme has been applied not only in the Habbo context, but also as commentary on the "cancer" (boringness) of 4chan's /b/ board, and as part of a local news report where the image was mistaken as a racist threat in a Texas apartment complex pool.

<sup>26</sup> As Encyclopedia Dramatica points out, ironically, in the wake of the the various raids, having a black avatar, especially one that has either an Afro or a suit, raises the attention of moderators and increases the chances a user will be banned from the game.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase that received the most traction was "BRB, going to church", which Forcand used in the middle of chats with the supposed girls.

CHAPTER 1<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the initial result of the "McLibel trial" (McDonald's Restaurants v Morris & Steel) was in favor of McDonalds with the defendants originally forced to pay McDonalds £60,000 in damages, which was far less than the court costs McDonalds spent in pursuing the case. Additionally, the case spread much of the information in the pamphlet to a wider audience than would have normally been possible, which prompted McDonalds to announce it would not collect the damages owed from the plaintiffs, "an unemployed postal worker (Morris) and a community gardener (Steel)" (Klein, 389) a further example of the "Streisand effect" at work. In an appeal case in 2005, the award was lowered to £20,000.

<sup>29</sup> At least at the OTIII level, which one achieves after hundred of thousands of dollars are spent in "auditing" and training courses.

<sup>30</sup> Dawkins himself even remarks in the second edition of *The Selfish Gene* that "the word meme seems to be turning out to be a good meme."

<sup>31</sup> The LOLCat meme emerged from the practice of "Caturday", where members of /b/ would post images of their cats. At one point in 2005, text was superimposed. LOLCat (or lolcat) images typically feature a photo of one or more cats with text, usually meant to represent what the cat is saying (even having the text misspelled to emphasize the "cat-like" dialogue).

<sup>32</sup> YTMND or "You're The Man Now, Dog" Is a site where users can create animations that are an assemblage of images (either a still image, an animated GIF, stills from, or even short clips of movies or television), text, and audio to create strange, often

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humorous content. The site has spawned certain memes such as “The Picard Song” and “Lazytown Bake a Cake” mashups

<sup>33</sup> Animutations or fanimutations are a type of web-based computer animation, typically created in Adobe Flash and characterized by montages of pop-culture images set to music, often in a foreign language. The genre was invented by Neil Cicierga (the term fanimutation emerged from people who were attempting to copy his style of animation), who claims he was influenced by many sources, particularly Japanese commercials.

<sup>34</sup> While “Pool’s Closed” is the common usage of the theme, at times the full phrase “Pool’s Closed due to AIDS” is used.

<sup>35</sup> In this case, a news report of an HIV-Positive black child being barred from a public pool and another where the original meme was placed at an apartment complex pool and was interpreted as a racist threat.

<sup>36</sup> In some online communities, particularly Something Awful, it was very popular at one point to misdirect people into viewing images from goatse.cx, which featured graphic images of a prolapsed anus. The “goatse” meme still exists to some degree, though many people in those communities are both more inured to graphic imagery and more cautious when presented with a link to click

<sup>37</sup> These online votes ranged from being the “8<sup>th</sup> Inning Sing-Along Song” for the New York Mets to getting Rick Astley himself selected as “Best Act Ever” on the MTV Europe Music Awards.

<sup>38</sup> One application was a Firefox extension that redirected all YouTube links to the Rick Astley video. Another utilized a web-dialing service to have phone calls sent and the song play when the receiver answered the phone.

<sup>39</sup> T-shirts have been made, styled in a retro 80s fashion with “You’ve been Rickrolled” written on them with a stylized screen print of Rick Astley next to the words. A Writer on Encyclopedia Dramatica notes: “In addition to being old meme, Rick Roll is now officially “cool”... [i]f you see any one wearing one of these shirts, please kill them with fire.”

<sup>40</sup> Copy-pasta (a merging of copy/paste) is fictional text meant to sound like a real post, though sometimes with an ending that references a meme, intended to generate a lot of responses of shock and horror, particularly from new posters or “newfags”.

<sup>41</sup> Seaking is a character from *Pokemon*, and is considered a forced meme mostly because there are a few successful memes involving *Pokemon* characters already and it is seen as yet another instance of pointless copying of the image without any context to make it humorous.

<sup>42</sup> A meme where the formal quality of motivational posters is used in a ironic manner. Originally used as simple celebrations of negative qualities, the format is used in a variety of contexts that don’t necessarily reference the original intent.

<sup>43</sup> “Facepalm” is a meme that uses images of people who are embarrassed or frustrated and express it by placing ones palm over one face.

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<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, a stenciled version of the original image is given a cape and oval eyes with the same text reproduced below.

<sup>45</sup> Pritchard's work was on the Nuer in Eastern Africa, particularly Sudan. Mead and Bateson's work focused on Indonesia and, in particular, the culture of Bali. Malinowski's research was focused on the Tobriand peoples of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>46</sup> One comment: "Well, the thing is, his arguments are mostly based on morality, and I don't really give a shit about morals. Sure, sabotaging their shit may seem "wrong", but who cares? I'm only in it for the lulz."

<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the harshest comment of the thread: "Why don't you all go suck his cock then? Srsly, this guy came out of the fucking blue. He's never gotten media coverage, he's never gotten scientology websites shut down. He's a spec on the windshield. If you're going to be a faggot about it, then don't DDOS in the first place. And if you do DDOS, don't turn around and BAWWWWW after some random guy with a beard calls you on your shit. Make up your fucking minds."

<sup>48</sup> The original text was deleted following the first protest and the move to enturbulation.org and more secure places. However, *Encyclopedia Dramatica* maintains an archive of the protest information.

<sup>49</sup> A common tactic that Scientologists perform is provoking protesters so that, in a emotional moment, they do something to provoke law enforcement officials.

<sup>50</sup> One such admittance of the mixed opinion is also on this page where the entry notes "PC is also notable for being considered serious business; when in fact it is whatever you make it. You can help by realizing PC 's broad subversive and ultimately satirical nature."

<sup>51</sup> A captcha is a validation technique wherein text, ranging from a few characters to even whole phrases, is placed in an image and the user must be able to note and type the text in the image correctly. This is usually implemented as anti-spam devices as programs have a difficult time performing the task of separating out words in an image file.

<sup>52</sup> Sage (pronounced "sah-geh") from 下げる (sageru or "to lower") is the act of replying to a post without "bumping it up" to the top of the thread list for a particular board. While this in itself does not remove a post or even lower its position. Once the reply limit for the post is reached (usually 300 replies), it quickly falls out of view, especially with the high posting rate of a site like [4chan.org](http://4chan.org).

<sup>53</sup> I am not attempting to be Orientalist in this phrasing, but I do want to note that the concern that a username would result in people not speaking out or not "being on an equal level" as Nishimura puts it, is not one that comes up much in English Language message boards.

<sup>54</sup> The text reads:

*When in the course of /b/tard events, it becomes necessary for anonymous to set forth the shackles of oppression we set forth on the Furfag mods of 4chan.org. They have plundered our posts, and deprived us of our jailbait. They have forced upon us their twisted ideology of "Furry Fandom".*

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*They have deprived us of our ability to fight our enemies, forcing us to submit to the wishes of the Furfag overlords.*

*In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated bans from our homeland. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free anonymous.*

*We, therefore, the Representatives of the Anonymous States of /b/, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good Anonymous of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That /b/ is, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the 4chan Crown, and that all political connection between /b/ and the State of 4chan, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

*We are Anonymous. We are /b/. Our home is no longer on 4chan. In these times of unrest, we have formed the State of 7chan.org as our new sovereign nation on the World Wide Internet.  
Signed, Anonymous*

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, some Anons, particularly on *Encyclopedia Dramatica* note that the declaration “is still important to the status of Anonymous, which defines them as independent of wherever their 'home' may happen to be. From the authoring of this precious document to present day, Anonymous would get full credit for Anon's doings, and not their home.”