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THE POLITICAL LIFE ON THE INTERNET (ANONYMOUS)

Since 2010, digital direct action, including leaks, hacking and mass protest, has become a regular feature of political life on the Internet. Today I will consider the source of this activity through an analysis of Anonymous that is a loosely associated international network of activist and hacktivist entities. A website nominally associated with the group describes it as "an internet gathering" with "a very loose and decentralized command structure that operates on ideas rather than directives". The group became known for a series of well-publicized publicity stunts and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on government, religious, and corporate websites. It has been remarkably effective, despite lacking the human and financial resources to engage in longterm strategic thinking or planning. Anonymous has neither the steady income nor the fiscal sponsorship to support a dedicated team tasked with recruiting individuals, coordinating activities and developing sophisticated software. One feature stands out: Anonymous’unpredictability.

Anonymous originated in 2003 on the [imageboard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imageboard) [4chan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4chan), representing the concept of many online and offline community users simultaneously existing as an [anarchic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchy), digitized [global brain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_brain). The group is also associated with the satirical open wiki [Encyclopedia Dramatica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia_Dramatica). Anonymous members (known as "Anons") can be distinguished in public by the wearing of stylised [Guy Fawkes masks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Fawkes_mask).

In its early form, the concept was adopted by a decentralized online community acting anonymously in a coordinated manner, usually toward a loosely self-agreed goal, and primarily focused on entertainment, or "[lulz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lulz)". Beginning with 2008's [Project Chanology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Chanology)—a series of protests, pranks, and hacks targeting the [Church of Scientology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scientology)—the Anonymous collective became increasingly associated with collaborative, hacktivism on a number of issues internationally[1]. Individuals claiming to align themselves with Anonymous undertook protests and other actions (including direct action) in retaliation against anti-[digital piracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright_infringement)campaigns by motion picture and recording industry trade associations. Later targets of Anonymous hacktivism included government agencies of the US, Israel, Tunisia, Uganda, and others; child pornography sites; copyright protection agencies; the [Westboro Baptist Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westboro_Baptist_Church); and corporations such as [PayPal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PayPal),[MasterCard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MasterCard), [Visa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_Inc.), and [Sony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony).

While certainly unique in its bombast and capriciousness, Anonymous is part of a wellspring of hackers and geeks taking political matters into their own hands to make their voices heard, to orchestrate protests over a range of issues, in particular civil liberties, and to transform policy and law.

Anonymous signals the growing importance of what could be called “weapons of the geek,” in contrast to “weapons of the weak”.

Among geeks and hackers, political activities are rooted in concrete experiences of their craft — administering a server or editing videos — skills channelled toward bolstering civil liberties, such as privacy[12]. Geeks and hackers, even Anonymous, indisputably call attention to themselves via their volatile, usually controversial, legal and transgressive political acts. They are testing new possibilities and legal limits for digital civildisobedience.

Individuals who live at great distances from each other, without hefty financial resources, band together under recognizable names and symbols to direct attention on and thus judge — often quite swiftly — the actions of individuals, corporations and governments. To do so, they often exploit a feature of our collective digital predicament: corporations and governments have collected and stored a vast sea of digital data, often insecurely on unencrypted servers, which can at times be legally accessed, and in other cases illegally procured, but once leaked, is nearly impossible to contain and sequester.

Still, the broader effectiveness and success of Anonymous is contingent on the vibrancy and diversity of its wider political milieu. Anonymous is a niche in a broader ecosystem of geek- and hacker oriented activism, which includes policy reform, participation in Internet governance and whistleblowing. Social change requires a diverse tool kit, including fine-tuned interventions targeting policy to rowdy and subversive tactics. In the fight for digital rights and civil liberties online, Anonymous exists alongside.

Anonymous counters political disengagement and passivity, acting as a gateway for some individuals to engage in direct action. Spectators can join in, follow along and get their daily dose of news. Anonymous, on the other hand, provides individuals with avenues for personal and collective participation[13]. While Anonymous might not appeal to everyone — no political movement ever can or will — it functions as a wide-open platform for discrete microprotests. Participants need not fill out forms, make donations, or in this case, even provide their legal names. By participating, individuals become a part of something larger than themselves. They acquire diverse skills. Some will likely dedicate years of their lives to activism.

Anonymous has awoken and cultivated political sensibilities for some citizens. Dissent of the sort Anonymous specializes in allows citizens to exercise their rights and demonstrate on behalf of the causes they embrace.

As indicated by its name, Anonymous dramatizes the importance of anonymity and privacy in an era when both are rapidly eroding for citizens, and when government secrecy and systematic surveillance are on the rise. Anonymous thus demonstrates the power of symbolic engagement as a subspecies of direct social action.

Due to its lack of transparency, labyrinthine sociology and bountiful secrecy, Anonymous may not be the best model for democracy; in a few instances, operations creep uncomfortably close to vigilantism. It has, however, also revealed current impasses and limits to democracy, the sort of critique offered by Anonymous is an essential feature of the democratic process. While Anonymous has not proposed a programmatic plan to topple institutions or change unjust laws, it has made evading laws and institutions seem desirable. It has enabled action at a time when many feel that existing channels for change are either beyond their reach or too corrupt.

By unpredictably fusing conventional activism with transgression and tricksterism, Anonymous has captured the attention of a diverse cornucopia of admirers and skeptics. Many are watching, recognizing the power of the mask as a potential force to unmask corruption, hypocrisy, and state and corporate secrecy.

**Література**

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