

*D.C. Elliott*

## ANONYMOUS RISING

On February 10 2008, over 7,000 individuals from across the globe participated in synchronised protests outside their regional branch headquarters of the Church of Scientology. Disguised in the Guy Fawkes masks made popular through the film *V For Vendetta*, and brandishing placards with baffling, largely indecipherable messages, the protests were considered the first wave of a global protest movement known as Project Chanology, a concept devised by a leaderless, decentralised group calling itself Anonymous. Upon closer inspection by a largely confused, unprepared media, Anonymous turned out to be loosely connected to a group of websites, with their primary base of operations being 4chan.org. The image sharing site Flickr reported 2,000 images uploaded to its servers featuring images taken from the protests, causing mayhem through crashes and software malfunctions, with Flickr completely unprepared to cope with the traffic generated as onlookers scrambled to their browsers to access the images of what was shaping up to be a unique, bizarre experiment in political resistance and global participation.



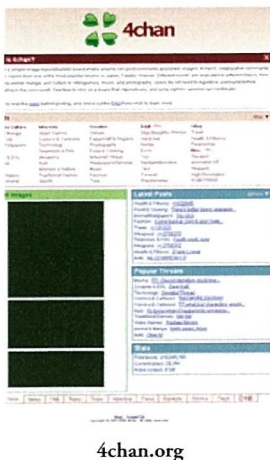
Project Chanology — Sydney, Australia  
February 10, 2008

Subsequent protests were executed throughout 2008, code-named “The Ides Of March” and “Operation Reconnect” — with video sharing site YouTube being drawn into the battle, hosting a number of press releases issued by members

of Anonymous, drawing attention to Scientology's alleged ethical and legal misdeeds. A particularly disturbing release featured a poem narrated over a recording of a child's music box, describing the deaths that have been ascribed to Scientology's policies regarding mental illness and prescription medication, ending with the chilling warning: "Church Of Scientology beware. We are legion. Be afraid."<sup>1</sup>

The campaign waged against Scientology by Anonymous finds its roots in the hypercharged, savage world of the Internet underground. Here is a world without borders and without geography. Personal identities are dissolved in the broth of images and text that spill across the screen with little to contextualise them to outside eyes. This is a classless, communally constructed environment that is uninterested in the real world's standards of morality — moral codes are almost completely self-determined, and standards of behaviour are disconnected from anything that mainstream society considers "appropriate" or "decent." This is 4chan.org — beyond the body, beyond society, a web community that gives voice to a netherworld of Internet geeks, sniggering misanthropes, and over-educated mischief makers.

The site's history runs roughly as follows.<sup>2</sup> In 2004, a 15 year-old boy using the assumed name "moot" built a website, paid for using his mother's credit card. The site's layout was based on a similar Japanese model, and was dedicated primarily to the posting of images relating to Japanese animation. The caveat placed on the site's user-base was that all users were to be anonymous — there were no accounts, no personal identities, and everyone was welcome to contribute as much, or as little, as they deemed appropriate. The site was named "4chan," a reference to the Japanese original, 2chan. Over time, attention became focused on 4chan's "/b" forum — the "/b" denoting a board dedicated to 'random' images. As time went on, 4chan's users started to communicate using pure images, and a strange new language built on the display — and redisplay — of recontextualised, replicated media artifacts started to take shape. Collage, pastiche and parody became integral to this new communication paradigm that 4chan's user-base was unwittingly developing, the immediacy of Internet communications allowing for the almost instantaneous appropriation of new cultural artifacts that could be injected into 4chan's endlessly changing lexicon. This, however, is not to suggest that in the initial stages of 4chan's development, there was anything on the user-base's mind other than insular pranks and



attempts to be amusing. 4chan was not, in any way, created to be a force for anything obviously worthwhile — and in many ways, that credo remains. In its lowest, darkest moments, 4chan is racist, sexist, violent, misanthropic, and obsessed with sexuality on a completely juvenile level. 4chan's user-base is involved in an almost continual game of moral brinkmanship, attempting to outdo one another in terms of nastiness, cruelty, and the rejection of anything that mainstream society would consider sacred. Worldwide news stories such as the deaths of celebrities such as Heath Ledger or Michael Jackson almost immediately form the basis of new images and text combinations, usually intended to slander or mock their target. Nothing is off-limits for 4chan's brand of cruel, dark humour — and for most people, the nihilism and rage of the site's user-base proves completely unacceptable.

For better or worse, and despite the complicated moral questions one must ask oneself when becoming involved in the mind-war of perversion and brutality that is 4chan's subculture, 4chan represents something extremely new in terms of electronic community and globalised culture. It is a borderless, worldwide culture processor, devouring anything that the users feed into it, and converting the material into recontextualised components that are subsequently integrated into 4chan's synthetic language. With users coming from pretty much every country with commercially available Internet access, there is no limit to the possibilities of cultural ephemera that can be sourced for reprocessing and reintegration — from a still shot of a Serbian politician, to Kevin Rudd laughing, to a windmill in Sweden, to the cover of a book, any image is ripe for 4chan's processing. This would suggest, however, an automation in the process; but on the contrary, there is an organic, artistic aesthetic at work. These are, after all, no different to the digital art pieces that are so prominent in modern galleries — they are collages and/or manipulations created with software packages such as Adobe Photoshop.



The by-product of 4chan's culture, whether by accident or design, is the harnessing of the globalisation of community that the Internet facilitates, and using it to promote a new kind of democratised popular art, heavily influenced by postmodernism's obsession with replication, pastiche, and collage.

4chan's brand of popular art, however, is also the fuel for two very interesting and important offshoot activities that the site's userbase indulges in — the aforementioned construction of a language founded on pure semiotics and their manifestation in the real world — in the form of pranks, activism, and culture jamming; and the realisation of the Internet underground's very real, very powerful culture army, in the form of Anonymous. In Anonymous, the



regional and the global become politically fused, and the power of shared ideas is harnessed and directed at otherwise unreachable targets, such as the Church of Scientology.

Project Chanology<sup>3</sup>, the long campaign of attacks intended to discredit and ultimately dismantle the Church of Scientology, was initiated on January 14, 2008. Somewhere, a member of Anonymous acquired and posted a video of Tom Cruise, noted Scientology figurehead, to YouTube. In the video, Cruise engages in a deeply bizarre rant, with the *Mission Impossible* music playing in the background, claiming a number of strange, highly dubious “facts” about Scientology’s teachings. With a wild-eyed mania, and a bellowing, crazed laugh, Cruise tells the camera that Scientologists are the only people who can truly help at the scene of a car accident, that they are the “authorities on the mind,” the “authorities on getting people off drugs,” and that he “will not resist ruthlessly placing [his] ethics in other people.” The Church’s reaction was immediate and brutal, insisting that the video was edited from a three-hour original, intended only for distribution within the Church of Scientology, and that YouTube were to remove the video or face litigation. Gossip site Gawker.com was also instructed to take the video down — but they resisted, insisting that the video was news, and would thus be reported.

Anonymous responded with the announcement of Project Chanology — initiated somewhere in the milieu of 4chan and affiliate site 711chan — in the form of a YouTube video, posted on January 21, 2008.<sup>4</sup> Over sped-up footage of clouds rolling across an urban landscape, a digitised voice announced:

Hello, leaders of Scientology. We are Anonymous. Over the years, we have been watching you. Your campaigns of disinformation. Your suppression of dissent. Your litigious nature. All of these things have caught our eye. Anonymous has, therefore, decided that your organization should be destroyed. For the good of your followers. For the good of mankind. For our own enjoyment. We will proceed to expel you from the Internet, and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form. We recognize you as serious opponents, and do not expect our campaign to be completed in a short time frame. However, you will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic. Your choice of methods, your hypocrisy, and the general artlessness of your organization have sounded its death knell. You have nowhere to hide, because we are everywhere. You will find no recourse in attack, because for each of us that falls, ten more will take his place....

“Message To Scientology” January 21, 2008



Knowledge is free. We are Anonymous. We are legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.<sup>5</sup>

The cryptic, unsettling nature of the short film did not stop it from being viewed over two million times as of February 8, 2008 — writer Warren Ellis describing it as “a manifesto — a declaration of war.”<sup>6</sup> The lessons that Anonymous had learned from its gestation as the clown prince of 4chan’s underworld were finally being put into practice — all of the tools required to mount a full-scale war against a designated target were at the fingertips of the Anonymous userbase: Video editing software. Mashups. Pastiche, parody, and satire. Distribution nodes such as YouTube. In “Message To Scientology,” all of these things finally coalesced into something that the world simply hadn’t seen before — a global announcement on behalf of a global organisation with no leaders, no membership, no borders, and no means of identification. Anonymous didn’t seem to exist — except as a construct in the minds of the audience who saw its films and images.

For the media, the emergence of Anonymous was a baffling, perplexing social phenomenon. Yet, it was one that could not be ignored. Groups such as the Cult Of The Dead Cow, and media pranksters such as Negativland or the Max Headroom Hijacker could easily be dismissed as bored misanthropes attempting to stir up trouble for the sake of it. Here, though, was an artful, elegant declaration of war. There was an intelligence behind the voice, and a sense of overwhelming dread. This was something new — a harnessing of technology in the pursuit of perpetuating a globalised culture offensive. The media, typically, responded by misunderstanding, or misreporting the facts surrounding Project Chanology. On January 25, 2008, Anonymous issued a second video that was highly critical of the media’s coverage of their campaign, and drew attention to the unwillingness of the press to address specific criticisms of Scientology that Anonymous levelled against the organisation:

We find it interesting that you did not mention the other objections in your news reporting. The stifling and punishment of dissent within the totalitarian organization of Scientology. The numerous, alleged human rights violations, such as the treatment and events that led to the deaths of victims of the cult, such as Lisa McPherson. This cult is nothing but a psychotically-driven pyramid scheme. Why are you, the news media, afraid of discussing these matters? It is your duty to report on these matters. You are failing in your duty.<sup>7</sup>

The reference that Anonymous makes to Lisa McPherson is designed to draw attention to the McPherson case, in which a Scientologist and victim of mental illness died in appalling, inhuman conditions — largely attributable to the Church of Scientology’s policies regarding the treatment of mental illness, and

their wanton usurping of the law. The February 10, 2008 global protests against the Church were designed to coincide with what would have been Lisa's 49<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>8</sup> This second video was banned from the YouTube network on January 25, with YouTube's administration team citing a "terms of use violation."<sup>9</sup> The truth is that Anonymous was drawing worldwide attention to itself, and Project Chanology was escalating beyond the boundaries of a simple Internet prank, and was about to go global, spilling out into the courtrooms of the entire world.

Anonymous announced its intentions on January 28, 2008, in a YouTube film called "Call To Action."<sup>10</sup> Again, the synthesised voice and time-lapsed footage of clouds and skies were the centrepiece of the film, yet the message was an attempt to explain exactly what Anonymous was to the uninitiated and confused. Denying their reputation as "super hackers," the voice announced that:

Anonymous is everyone and everywhere. We have no leaders — no single entity directing us. Only the collective outrage of individuals guiding our hand in the current efforts to bring awareness. We are individuals from all walks of life ... united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing. That someone must bring light to the darkness. That someone must open the eyes of a public that has slumbered from far too long. Arm yourself with knowledge. Be very wary of the 10<sup>th</sup> of February. Anonymous invites you to join us in an act of solidarity. Anonymous invites you to take up the banner of free speech. Of human rights. Of family and freedom. Join us in protest outside of Scientology centres worldwide. We are Anonymous. We are legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. We will be heard. Expect us.<sup>11</sup>



**Project Chanology — London  
February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

In a further act of globalised resistance and borderless policy making, Anonymous issued a film entitled "Code Of Conduct"<sup>12</sup> on February 8<sup>th</sup>, two days before the protests, designed to ensure that a semblance of uniformity existed across the global protests. Twenty-two rules — many of them couched in cryptic, baffling in-jokes relating to videogames and the Internet underground — were issued to protesting members of Anonymous. The rules stressed the

peaceful, non-aggressive nature of the protests, insisted on promoting solidarity amongst members of Anonymous, looking after each other's wellbeing and

safety, and maintaining anonymity. The stage was set. The Church of Scientology arrogantly dismissed Anonymous as a group of teenaged crackpots, and did nothing to prepare themselves for the protests. Law enforcement and the media — similarly — were unprepared for the events of February 10<sup>th</sup>, and when Project Chanology's physical manifestation occurred, it would be a shot heard around the world, announcing the birth of a very new kind of art and culture-powered method of political resistance, which united the regional and the global in a united, ruthless offensive.

From Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney, Australia — to Toronto, London, Dublin, Texas, and New York City — a simultaneous, worldwide assault on the Church of Scientology was launched on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Anonymous's tactics had worked better than they'd dared imagine — with little more than a few websites and their love of creating digital art, the group had led a charge that spread over 100 cities worldwide. Sydney, Australia was one of the first, catching the Church off guard, causing the building to be locked down. Seattle, Pittsburgh, and Santa Barbara followed suit, as the legions of Anonymous, clad in their now infamous Guy Fawkes masks, took to the streets in an act of global insurgency. Mirroring *V For Vendetta*, the Guy Fawkes masks are provided to the public by rebels in a dystopian fascist state, in order to enable the public to organise mass protests. The masks made Anonymous's physical manifestation even more eerie — the sea of identical faces providing a striking image for the press, who began to cotton on that this may be a story more deserving of its attention. Major newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Gateway* attempted to capture the flavour of the protests, but this borderless group with no leaders, no administrative or command structure, and no definitive, clearly stated goal proved too elusive to characterise. Across the world, Scientology churches were temporarily shut down, under siege from the hordes of masked protesters, and for a brief, undeniably perfect moment, technology, art, politics, and culture operated in complete communion. Anonymous had arrived.

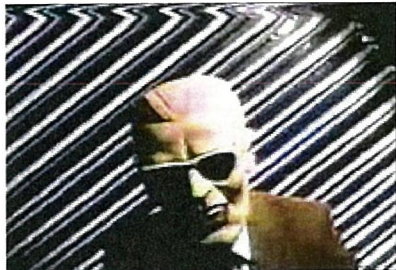
Since the February 10<sup>th</sup> protests, Anonymous have staged a number of global insurgencies, with the Church of Scientology responding with equal parts wrathful venom and litigious paranoia. Attempts to wrangle the legal system as a weapon against Anonymous have proved a mixture of success and failure — arrests have occurred across the globe, and instances of Project Chanology-related gatherings are now understood and prepared for by law enforcement officials, who are mobilized ahead of time by the Church. That's not to say, however, that Anonymous's campaign against Scientology has been terminated. On the contrary, in many ways it has become more intricate and fascinating, retreating into the world that it dominates — the internet — and mobilising the forces of art and communication in a weaponized alloy that is increasingly difficult for Scientology to deflect.



This kind of activism, however, has antecedents stretching back to the mid-1980s. To put it in some kind of historical perspective, it helps to examine the twin cases of the “Max Headroom Incident”<sup>13</sup> and “Captain Midnight,”<sup>14</sup> two early, high-profile cases of technologised political insurgency using re-contextualised cultural artifacts — or, as it has come to be known, “culture jamming.”

“Culture Jamming” is a term coined by experimental art collective Negativland on their *JamCon '84* cassette and — essentially — it refers to a tactic employed by an activist, intended to disrupt mainstream cultural institutions or corporate advertising. In Negativland’s parlance, the term comes from amateur radio, and refers to the process of radio jamming — in which one signal is suppressed and overpowered by another. In modern terms however, culture jamming involves modern technology’s aptitudes for image manipulation, filmmaking, and digital art — the replication of images leading to an endless array of possible recontextualisations and detournements, and an endless array of possibilities for usurpation of cultural institutions.

The event that has become known as the “Max Headroom Incident” is an interesting blip on the cultural radar, not so much for the technological sophistication required to suppress a broadcast television signal but for the status of the event as a high-profile, relatively early instance of what has become



**The Max Headroom Signal Intrusion**  
November 22, 1987 — 11:15 p.m

known as culture jamming — a term that is wholly appropriate when examining the activities of Anonymous. On November 22, 1987, a broadcast signal intrusion occurred in Chicago, Illinois. The first instance of the intrusion took place during WGN-TV’s *News At Nine*, in which the original programme suddenly disappeared from the air and was replaced by an image of a man dressed as cult TV character Max Headroom. The intrusion was silent, except for a buzzing sound and lasted

twenty seconds — at which point WGN switched the modulation of their studio link to another transmitter.

Later that night at around 11:15pm, WTTW 11 was broadcasting the *Doctor Who* serial *The Horror Of Fang Rock*, when the hijacker struck again. This time, he appeared with synchronised audio, speaking in cryptic phrases, parodying Coke’s advertising slogan “Catch The Wave” while holding a Pepsi can, making a number of surreal references to the *Chicago Tribune* before being seen with his buttocks exposed, being spanked with a flyswatter by an unidentified accomplice, while exclaiming “They’re coming to get me!” The



hijack ended after 90 seconds, leaving a city stunned and confused about what they had just witnessed.

The Max Headroom Incident is a clear precursor to the activities of Anonymous and indeed to the processing of cultural material that takes place on 4chan.org. The hijacker's intentions are unclear to this day but it is clear that he was parodying *something* — his ramblings were random, yet not quite random enough for them to be empty, disconnected ravings. Unfortunately, we'll probably never know exactly what the incident was intended to achieve — the Max Headroom pirate was never apprehended, despite a standing reward offered for information leading to his arrest.

An even earlier example of culture jamming in the modern era can be seen in the Captain Midnight HBO Incident. Here, we see a far more pointed and politicised example of culture jamming, and a clear antecedent of Anonymous's digital manipulations and technologised resistance. On April 27, 1986, a satellite TV dealer in Ocala, Florida named John R. MacDougall was working at Central Florida Tele port, a company providing uplink services to satellites. He was supervising the uplink of the movie Pee Wee's *Big Adventure* when, at the end of his shift, he was struck with subversive inspiration. He aimed the dish at Galaxy 1 — the satellite that was carrying the HBO (Home Box Office) channel. In protest against HBO's recent policy of raising fees and introducing scrambling equipment, he jammed HBO's airing of *The Falcon And The Snowman* for four and a half minutes, replacing the image with a text message:



The Captain Midnight Incident April 27, 1986 — 12:32 a.m

GOODEVENING HBO  
FROM CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT  
\$12.95/MONTH ?  
NO WAY!  
[SHOWTIME/MOVIE CHANNEL BEWARE!]

McDougall chose the "Captain Midnight" moniker in reference to a movie he had recently seen — *On The Air With Captain Midnight*. He was eventually caught, and the Federal Communications Commission brought him to trial, resulting in a \$5,000 fine and a year's probation.<sup>15</sup>

From a contemporary perspective these two examples are interesting, as they illuminate the schism that exists between the work of pre-internet culture jammers, who were locked in time and space by the constraints of technology, and the globalised, post-Internet monster that is Anonymous — borderless, timeless, cultureless, and decentralised. They were both incidents that locked directly into issues stemming from the regional, by virtue of their technological limitations — while Anonymous provides nascent culture jammers with a fusion of the regional and the global as a forum for dissent. They both provided their jammers with the ability to give voice to their concerns in a world in which calm, legally-mandated dissent is increasingly impossible. With western culture being so heavily corporately colonised, and the very nature of the image being hijacked for commercial interest, culture jammers fight against this branded, corporatised environment, even if only to raise attention to issues which are marginalised in the face of corporate interests. Whether it is a little guy working in a satellite store who is angry at HBO's rate increases, or Anonymous assuring the world that it is a group of people "united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing,"<sup>16</sup> culture jamming is separated from empty or blank parody — or pure, pointless vandalism — through the altruistic politics at the core of the jammer's activities. The early culture jammers intersect with Anonymous in the form of their reliance on the basic unit of communication in culture jamming — the meme.

Richard Dawkins, writing in *The Selfish Gene*, coined the term *meme* in an attempt to explain the role of evolutionary principles at work in the spread of ideas and cultural phenomenon. His examples include melodies, catchphrases, and fashion as memes that have evolved through the process of natural selection, much like biological evolution. Information is introduced, reproduced, and inherited; it enters into competition with other memes, and if it is unsuccessful in its proliferation, it may become extinct. Other memes may flourish, spread, replicate and ultimately, mutate into other, new memes. They may also, of course, be interbred with other memes to create a third, hybridized meme. In terms of culture jamming, the meme refers to a condensed, refined image that is designed to generate a specific response in the recipient — whether visual, verbal, or behavioural — which can easily be imitated and replicated, and transmitted to others. Classic examples of familiar memes include the Nike swoosh, or the McDonald's arches — images which immediately elicit a response in the viewer and which they can immediately identify as having an intrinsic meaning. Culture jammers then, take familiar memes such as the McDonald's logo and use them — via the process of detournement — to comment, reflect upon, or refute their original meaning. Industrial band Snog's 1999 album cover "Third Mall From The Sun" is a perfect example of this kind of cultural re-contextualisation, in which a meme is used to comment on the source artifact — usually negatively and falling on

the side of anti-capitalism. In this case, McDonalds was decidedly unamused and threatened legal action against Shock Records, unless they dropped Snog from their roster in an alarming act of bullying on behalf of the corporate behemoth.

Anonymous is itself a meme, born from the meme culture embraced by 4chan, and weaponised by the meme's transmitters. It should never be forgotten that Anonymous is an *idea* — it may look like a highly organised, paramilitary pressure-group but in reality, it is none of these things. As Anonymous describes itself in the short film "Who Is Anonymous?"

Anonymous is ideas without origin — may it be a phrase, a fad, a proverb. The concept of Anonymous has *always* existed... Anonymous started as an image-board in Japan, nearly a decade ago. A place where there were no rules. No topic. No identity. Images and text with no authorship. The only control being whether a post was enjoyed, or simply deleted from lack of interest. The individual isn't measured. Slowly, through repetition, and this unique process of natural selection, popular ideas duplicated, and developed into memes. These memes would be incorporated into new ideas. Evolution of thought.<sup>17</sup>



Anonymous –  
Logo & Motivational Poster

Anonymous, then, complies with the basic outline of a meme as posited by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*.<sup>18</sup> Anonymous, and involvement in Anonymous, requires nothing more than participation in the culture of memetics — popular ideas, such as Anonymous, and by extension, *Project Chanology* itself, thrive by a process of cultural and intellectual natural selection, whilst unpopular ideas are discarded through lack of interest. The genius behind *Project Chanology*, whether by design or by serendipity, is that it takes the memetic thrust of Anonymous's activities — the films, the images posted on forums, and the websites dedicated to Anonymous's various targets — and uses them to ensnare a target in the memetic process. The documents, video clips, court reports, and other pieces of information regarding the unscrupulous practices of the Church of Scientology are now a part of the *Project Chanology* meme — ideas that are transmitted from person to person, and that are given life through natural selection. *Project Chanology* has been such a rousing success because of public interest in it, and because of the user-base's desire to be involved in it. Public reception of *Project Chanology* can also be attributable to the effect of memetic transmission, with the criticisms laid against the Church of Scientology being seen as real, credible complaints, worthy of investigation.



Ultimately, *Project Chanology* is the birth of a new kind of culture jamming — a globalised reimagining that takes the form of memetic process, rather than the static, almost auterist image manipulation of the past. Through memesis, all information is democratised and destabilised, with culture jamming becoming a communal effort, easily lending itself to globalised transmission and — as with *Project Chanology* — implantation at the regional level, bridging the space between the regional and the global.

The globalised nature of Internet culture would suggest that there exists an incompatibility between notions of the regional and the global, with the regional being subjugated in the face of a worldwide torrent of ideas, information, and cultural nodal points. 4chan's memetic dialogues prove that this is simply not true. While 4chan — and by extension, Anonymous — operates by decontextualising found cultural artifacts and reconfiguring them as easily transferrable and modifiable packets of information, the democratisation available to regional users through the destabilisation of identity that the process facilitates indicates that regional coding is possible — if that is the direction that the information organically pursues. In this sense, regional identity operates in one of two ways — regional culture that is transformed into global culture, or global culture that is infused with the regional.

The implications here are obvious. All art and culture is, in terms of 4chan's memesis, information. Whether music, art, or film, it is simply transferrable information that has the potential to be reconfigured and reintegrated into new works — and so the process continues. The neutrality of images and sounds indicates that regional codings are irrelevant in the face of a matrix of configurations so massive in scope as to obscure microsocial readings. The contrary, however, is true. The homogeneity of globalised western culture can be broken through the introduction of regional dialects, images, and political movements. In terms of Australia, the very "Australianness" of Australia runs in direct counterpoint to the region-neutral cultural milieu of much Internet culture, and as such, this intersection of the regional and the global — or, a fusion of micro- and macrosocial cultural influences — gives us an opportunity to reflect on what defines an image, or sound, or a piece of film as being "Australian," and to observe, actively, the ways in which "Australia" interacts with foreign cultural material at the point of alchemy.

Interestingly, one of the by-products of *Project Chanology* has been an investigation of the synergy that exists between the regional and the local in terms of electronic cultures. If *Project Chanology* is a meme, and memes are designed to be constantly unstable, modified, and restructured according to the desires of the transmitting audience, then the success of the *Project Chanology* demonstrations suggests that there was a connection with regional

cultures at work. Each protest was different, according to the location and demographics of those in attendance, and in terms of the legal ramifications of the city in question. The protests, then, were united as a global offensive, but the global was very much entwined with the regional in terms of understanding the specific needs — legal and technical — of the protestors, and the language that needed to be employed to inject the memetic transmission of charges against Scientology into the dominant cultural dialogue of the region. The Church of Scientology may be a global organisation, but it thrives by understanding the legal axioms of each host country, and the regional variables at work in the culture and society of the region. Anonymous understands this, and seeks to replicate this process of regional connection — but in the service of passive resistance.



The Church of Scientology has long been at war with the freedom of speech that the Internet provides. Their earliest attempts can be traced back to a 1995 attempt to have Usenet group `alt.religion.scientology`<sup>19</sup> removed from the global Usenet feed. This led to the first War On Scientology, conducted from the embryonic electronic underworld of the mid-1990s. In this case, it was the Cult of the Dead Cow,<sup>20 21</sup> a notorious text file collective and hacker group affiliated with Phrack Magazine,<sup>22</sup> the underground's journal of hacking, electronic crime, and general mischief. The Cult of the Dead Cow can be seen as the spiritual ancestors to Anonymous, despite CDC's influence being far more minimal in scope due to limitations in the technology of the day — they have existed in one form or another since 1984, and are now considered elder statesmen of the underground, often contacted by the mainstream media when an opinion on an electronic crime issue arises. In 1995, the Cult Of The Dead Cow's mission statement was very similar to that outlined by Anonymous in the present day: "Save people from Scientology by reversing the brainwashing. Cause current Scientologists to doubt their 'religion' (CULT). Gain experience of performing operations on a global scale. Alert the public to our presence and recruit active participants." The CDC were limited to text-file releases and other examples of the then-embryonic art of "hacktivism" and culture jamming, although they did from time to time indulge in the kind of manipulation of existing cultural material that has become a key weapon in Anonymous' arsenal. Activism was a largely regional affair, conducted through Bulletin Board Systems and the remote, isolated nature of text file releases. Technology manifested in the real world in far more traditional ways — fliers, zines, and pamphlets designed to transmit information and dissent to the public.

Interestingly, Anonymous has in recent times started to reach back into the bag of tricks that pioneers such as the Cult of the Dead Cow employed — the simplicity of fliers and websites, though infused with a cleverness that indicates all that has been learned since the halcyon days of internet activism.

As a case in point, the “You Found The Card” campaign is as simple as it is ingenious. Anonymous members are given a business card template, and are encouraged to print it out, and to leave the cards in and around real-world locations. The cards feature the Anonymous logo, and a link to a website — <http://youfoundthecard.com> — which hosts an information repository on the criminal activities of the Church of Scientology, links to a site explaining *Project Chanology* and the details of upcoming protests and insurrectionist activities. This grassroots brand of viral marketing is an effective, quirky way of spreading the information that Anonymous deems so precious, and is an innovative fusion of new and old technologies, combining archaic print media and the Internet. Perhaps, more importantly, it allows Anonymous to operate beyond the scope of globalised activism for which it has become infamous, and allows it to return to the regional scale of the original wave of culture jammers and art-terrorists. In that sense, Anonymous has — as a culture jamming body — finally found comfort in its history, and has found a way to truly start integrating the lessons of the past with the cutting edge technologies of the future. Anonymous marches on, with new targets, new enemies, and new ways to fuse art, culture, technology, and politics — and Anonymous itself will change. The essential body of Anonymous is constantly destabilised, with participation requiring nothing more than a willingness to participate, and as the evolutionary forces of the information age continue the process of natural selection, Anonymous will continue to shift and reshape itself — an idea in constant flux: the public face of evolutionary thought. A legion that does not forgive, and does not forget. Expect them.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Why We Fight.” February 22, 2008. Anonymous. Accessed 14 August, 2009. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_78hgi3Hoo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_78hgi3Hoo)

<sup>2</sup> “4chan.” Anonymous. Accessed 14 August, 2009. <http://whatport80.com/4chan>

<sup>3</sup> “Project Chanology.” Anonymous. Accessed 14 August, 2009. <http://whyweprotest.net>

<sup>4</sup> “Message To Scientology.” January 21, 2008. Anonymous. Accessed 14 August, 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



- <sup>6</sup> Ellis, Warren. "We Are Your SP's." January 23, 2008. Accessed 14 August, 2009. <http://www.warrenellis.com/?p=5476>
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