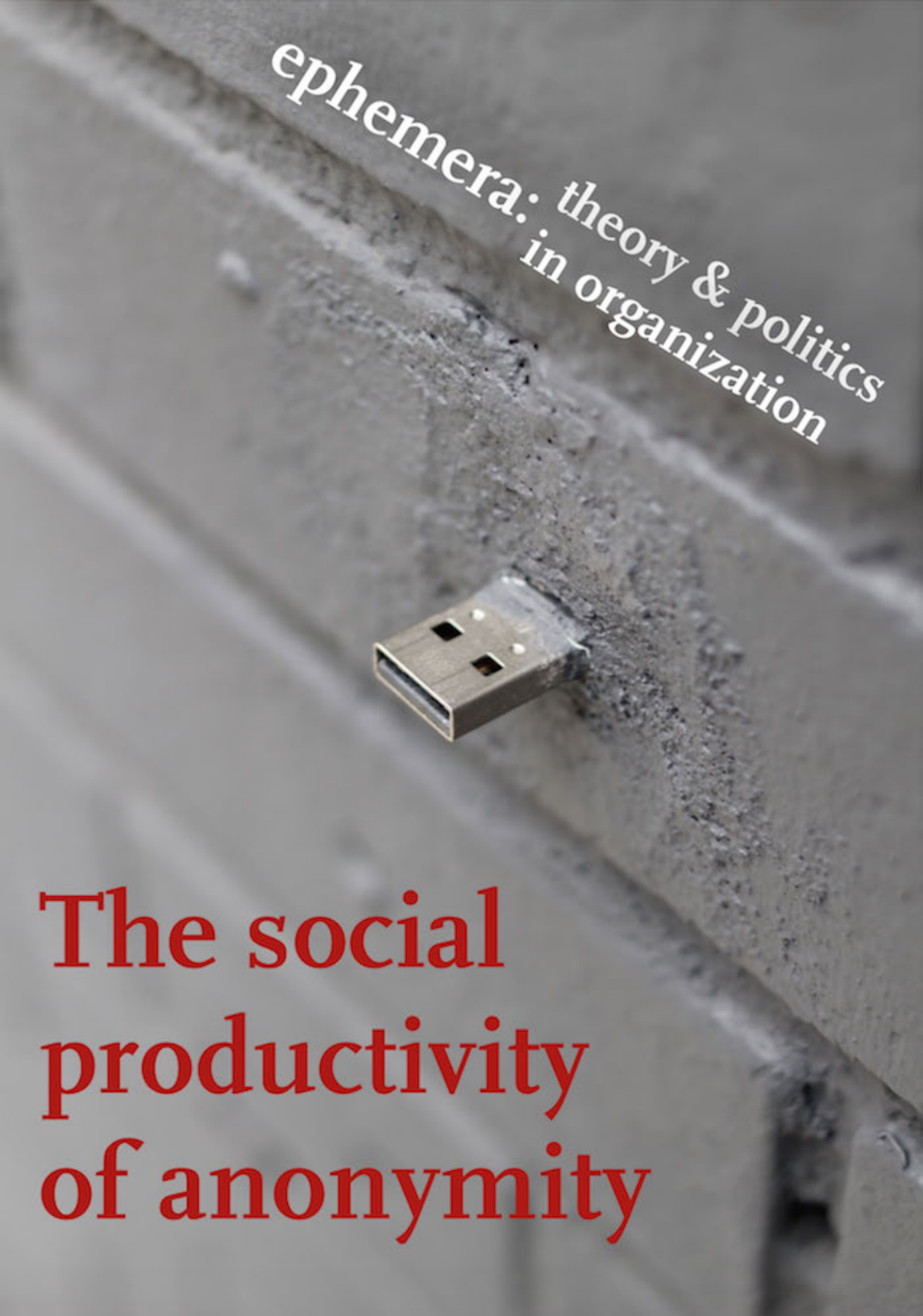
ephemera: theory & politics in organization



The social productivity of anonymity

What is *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*?

ephemera is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

theory
ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. e*phemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics
ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politicized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization
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ephemera
theory & politics in organization

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The social productivity of anonymity

Götz Bachmann, Michi Knecht and Andreas Wittel

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The social productivity of anonymity*

Götz Bachmann, Michi Knecht and Andreas Wittel

Introduction

Anonymity is under attack. In a process that started decades ago, an increasing multiplicity of forces is creating a slow, but steadily rising perfect storm. These forces include communication infrastructures like the IP-address-based Internet, cellular networks and social media platforms. Exponentially increasing storage and processing capabilities are now mounting up to big data, to be analysed with algorithms evolving out of machine learning. An ever increasing number of sensory devices, from surveillance cameras to smartphones, smart cars, smart cities to the rise of drones are matched by low cost ways of analysing DNA and other biological traces. All such technical forces find their equals in the politics of fear; in the extension of the various national security apparatus; in normative dreams of transparency, connectivity and justice-via-measurement; and in digital capitalism's competition for more and more data. As a consequence, the end of anonymity has been declared as near, or already upon us. But even though this special issue is partially motivated by such scenarios, we aim to take a step back. Our initial questions are simple: What is that which might be under threat? And why should we care?

* Some elements of our conception of anonymity were developed in the context of a VolkswagenStiftung funded project 'Reconfiguring anonymity: Reciprocity, identifyability and accountability in transformation'. We thank all our colleagues in this project. Further essential input came from Bernd Jürgen Warneken and Carol Wittel, as well as from the reviewers and members of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.

Conceptualising anonymity

This special issue is based on the premise that anonymity is always socially productive and always produced. With this premise we do not try to establish a normative or ethical principle. Our aim is to highlight conditions for, and potentials of, anonymous forms of social action and interaction to contribute to the making of the social world. Anonymity's contributions are manifold. Surely they include those to radical political action, as anonymity can not only help to evade and fight surveillance, but it can also enable particular forms of equality or certain forms of speaking out and speaking up. Indeed, the ties of radical politics to anonymity are only bound to grow further – an example for this is anonymity's potential to challenge new forms of surplus value extraction in the data economy. However, at the same time we know all too well that hate speech or attacks on the values and practices of doubting and challenging truth claims thrive under anonymous constellations, too. And indeed, all such forms and potentials – be it for politics of the radical left or its opposite – are part of an even larger field of the social productivity and production of anonymity in general: a field that is not only marked by various and often contradictory ethical and political potentials, but also by a plethora of forms, constellations, practices, actors and outcomes.

It is the aim of this issue to explore this wider field. We aim to explore how the productivity and production of anonymity contribute to the making of the social world (which includes, but exceeds radical politics.) Given that anonymity plays a significant role in the constitution of the social world, it received for a long time less theoretical attention than one might expect. But this situation has started to change profoundly. As anonymity is seen as both under threat, and threatening – both claims are often tied to digital media –, the topic of anonymity has generated a small boom of research in a variety of disciplines. Anonymity has thus become a topic in organisation studies (Rossiter and Zehle, 2014; Scott, 2013), media and communications (Brunton and Nissenbaum, 2015; Lovink, 2011,), philosophy (Halpin, 2012, Ponesse, 2013; Vogelmann, 2012), history (Pabst, 2011; Starner et al, 2011), literature studies (Griffin, 2003, Mullan, 2007), sociology (Bauman, 2012; Hirschauer, 2010; Rost, 2003; Wiedemann, 2012), information science (Tsikerdekis, 2013), geography and urban studies (Garber, 2000). Some disciplines can draw on more intensive traditions of engagement: these entail social psychology (Huang and Li, 2016), law and legal studies (Kerr et al., 2009) and cryptography, mathematics and computer science (Danezis and Diaz, 2008) as well as the new, specialised surveillance studies (Lyon, 2007; Marx, 2015). While it is notable that the topic has seen a rise of attention in a multiplicity of disciplines, it is also remarkable how little acknowledgement or discussion there is across them.

We conceptualise anonymity, as many of the aforementioned authors do, as constellations of partial unknowability, invisibility and untrackability. However, such a short definition hides as much as it clarifies. The editorial collective of this special issue consists of scholars based in social anthropology, German european ethnology, cultural and media studies. We assume that the constellations of anonymity emerge in complex intersections, entailing and combining, amongst others, social practices, technologies and infrastructures, ethics and politics. Ethnographies give us a particularly rich access to such intersections: Lock's ethnography of organ transplantation (2001), Konrad's (2005) and Klotz's (2014) work on egg and sperm donation, Copeman's comparative inquiries into blood donation (2009), Frois' exploration of anonymity in self-help groups (2009), Loeber's ethnography of imageboards (2011), Coleman's study of the online collective Anonymous (2014) and the Tactical Tech Collective's research into anonymised online visibility of marginalised communities of activists in Kenya and South Africa (Ganesh et al., 2016) are examples of research that discuss the complexities of situated anonymity.

Ethnography's attention to the complexities of situated anonymity can come at the cost of making systematic claims across different case studies. At the same time, it enables us to map a plethora of forms and appearances: anonymity exists in highly regulated and highly random settings, it appears in intentional and non-intentional forms, it is sometimes a protective shield against the outside of a given social configuration, and sometimes a trait of the relations contained within. It can be welcomed and embraced, but it can also be instituted as a regime upon unwilling participants. It can invite reciprocity or deliberately foreclose reciprocity. It can be both a condition and a process. It is amorphous and transient. It is situational and context-specific. It is therefore a category that defies easy ways of modeling and framing, but also a category that opens up a structured field of potential properties.

The authors of this issue contribute to a mapping of this field with ethnographic, theoretical, experimental and artistic forms of research. The social production and productivity of anonymity gives the issue its overarching theme. In the following passages we will first explore the social productivity of anonymity. Then we will turn to questions that investigate how anonymity is socially produced. We will conclude with introductions to the papers that make up the special issue.

On anonymity's social productivity

Stating that anonymity is socially productive, means more than that is produces desirable outcomes. Anonymity's contributions to the making of the social world

can, but do not have to be desirable. Not only are there different ethics and politics at stake. Some of anonymity's forms might be undesirable from almost every possible ethical stance, but they still contribute to the making of the social world. At the same time, thinking about what is a stake in the social productivity of anonymity cannot evade ethical and political questions. The conflicted social, moral, and legal significance of anonymity is reflected, for example, in controversial domains such as baby drop-off boxes and anonymous births, the anonymous donation of organs, gametes, and blood, or peer reviewing and application procedures. To give a sketch of what is at stake, when anonymity co-produces social worlds, we therefore want to start with exploring how anonymity is tied to a fundamental set of values associated with the European enlightenment: liberté, egalité and fraternité.

This is nowhere as apparent as in liberté. In times of a growing surveillance apparatus, with technologies ranging from networked databases to biometric identification and ever improving recognition algorithms, all matched by moral imperatives that celebrate transparency and openness, anonymity has the potential to protect and enable freedom – partial, fragile and privileged freedom, but freedom nonetheless. Anonymity's liberté is, to evoke Isaiah Berlin's ([1958] 1969) distinction, negative: It is a freedom from being fully visible for the governmental surveillance apparatus, from social and cultural restraints, and, indeed, from accountability. Freedom from accountability can also, in its best moments, produce new possibilities and foster the courage to speak truth to power (see Trytko and Wittel, this issue). The social productivity of anonymity lies here in an increase of social space and subjective possibilities. The same social space for freedom has then, in turn, all the characteristics, including the chances and perils of the liberal ideas around freedom. Without systematically questioning whose freedom it is, at whose expense, and for what purpose it is used, freedom can quickly become a space for the accumulation of unaccountable power.

But anonymity's freedom does not stop here. It also increases freedom with respect to the data we produce. This is not fully new neither. Ethnographers grant anonymity to their interlocutors so that they may speak freely without fears of being reprimanded by others. Journalists promise anonymity to their sources and informants. But with respect to the data we produce being online, and to the value chains of the new data economy, anonymity has recently undergone massive reconfigurations. In the new context of 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2014), 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2015), and 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek, 2016), our social life is being transformed into valuable data. This is a new form of capitalist enclosure. Our connections, social relationships, and friendships have become valuable information, or more precisely, have become information with a significant exchange value. This extraction of data from our social life and its

transformation into a commodity is a capture of what once was a common good. However, online anonymity is a severe obstacle for those who operate in the data extraction, data analysis, and data trade business. While online anonymity, even on a mass scale and in the most radical forms, would not put a stop to the data economy, it would surely devalue the extracted data significantly. In such a constellation anonymity can foster a freedom from the commodification of the social.

Less immediately visible but just as important are the ties of anonymity to the other two values in Robespierre's well-worn triad. But anonymity has a welcoming effect on egalité, too. Equality can be promoted by anonymity, particularly in situations in which social actors are mutually anonymous to each other. Categories in social life often produce hierarchies, such as age, class, gender, ethnicity and education. If information on these categories is not available to those who interact anonymously, hierarchies between them cannot be established easily. Anonymity is then able to create more equality. In the words of British anthropologist Copeman, it can operate as a 'critical site of social change', specifically in the way 'it comes to act as an instrument of re-composition of an array of associations, relationships and institutions' (Copeman, 2009: 2). The work anonymity is doing here is aimed at a momentary or temporarily extended de-institutionalisation of classificatory systems and towards an unmaking of status inequality. Let's look at the example of the academic convention called double-blind peer review. Even though peer reviewing is in many ways a rather problematic convention, the non-disclosure of both the author's name and the reviewer's name can help creating a more equal relationship between these two parties. The same is true for anonymous self-help groups: the deep and intense relationships between attenders of self-help groups are created on the foundations of anonymity (see Frois, 2009; Helm, this issue). We are all equal in front of the demon alcohol, so to speak.

Even fraternité is tied to anonymity. Anonymity's capability of traversing cultural differences can lead to new forms of sharing, communality and collaboration. Sisterhood is difficult to define. We understand fraternité as a specific state of care for each other. A brother or a sister is someone with whom we have strong and lasting bonds, someone who gets our attention without much need for justification. We find anonymous structures of sisterhood in various sizes, from inter-personal relations, to groups, and to large-scale collectives such as commons-based peer production initiatives (Wikipedia, open-source community) or online activism (Anonymous). Anonymous self-help groups (see Helm, this issue) are also a great example for fraternité. These groups embody and represent indeed our understanding of an organisation with a distinctive state of care for each other. Anonymity is the undisputed foundation on which strong and caring relationships can grow between the members. On a larger scale, the scale of the collective,

fraternité is a coming together of individuals and groups from various backgrounds in solidarity for a common political cause (Warneken, 2016). Anonymity also helps to create such structures of collectivity, for example through the performance of being and becoming part of a larger collective, of being-one in a mass.

To discuss the close ties of anonymity with central values of the French Revolution underlines the fact that anonymity is a foundational concept of Western modernity. However, Western modernity is, of course, not to be reduced to this set of rather elevated values. And indeed, anonymity has contributed to modernity's darker sides, too. One example is the anonymisation of weapons at a distance, which reaches its conclusions in modern weapons of mass destruction. Or take another fundamental trait of modernity, as we currently know it: The economy of money and commodities. The buyer does not need to know the producer of the commodity. The same applies to capital owners and investors. Both commodity fetishism and reification can not be reduced to anonymity but neither can they be understood without it. Anonymity is deeply ingrained in capitalist relations of production.

There are multiple ways of being modern in the world today, and by far not all of them are exclusively modern. Pre-modern forms of anonymity, and its successors in the present, have their own forms. Masks and other disguises have long had significant roles, especially in ritualised and spiritual contexts. The notion of multiple modernities is helpful in redirecting dichotomies of traditional versus modern or the West vs. the Rest towards an acknowledgement of multiple forms of being contemporary (Fabian, 1991) in interconnected worlds. Placing the question of anonymity's social productivity centre stage thus entails the necessity to recognise that concepts of anonymity often implicitly build on Western assumptions and categories. To give an example, the symbolic, social and practical act of conferring a name as a marker of individuality and personhood is common to all human societies but it can come in many forms. Not always are state related forms of governmentality involved, nor is name-giving necessarily tied to the cascade of 'isolational effects' (Trouillot, 2001) so typical of Western nation states that model individuals as autonomous within unspecified publics and relate them with each other along pre-given systems of identification. If namelessness as one form of anonymity is seen as the other side of the coin of name-giving, it becomes obvious that its social and symbolic meanings will differ with respect to the social orders and exchanges to which a name grants access.

The implied naturalness of Western ways of conceptualising anonymity needs to be made explicit for two reasons. For one, it is instrumental in opening up analytical sensibilities to the multiple trajectories and historical contexts in which

anonymity stands. Such an acknowledgement entails that we grasp the wide array of possibilities in which anonymity, as a way of 'undoing the person' has to be conceptualised as the other side of getting to know a person or even 'making' a person in very different historical contexts and societies. Secondly, we might be able to rethink anonymity's productivity for the Western context on the basis of alternative ways to create relationality and the person. An anonymous person might be easier to conceptualise with ideas about personhood from the highlands of Papua New Guinea in mind, than on the basis of an imaginative canvas of identity concepts that dominate our life in the West. The examination of (or the immersion into) alternative ways of understanding object-person relations, social forms and orderings of private property/the commons has the capacity to sensitise us for what might be one of the most productive potentials of anonymity: to recompose existing foundational relations, institutions, and social forms.

On anonymity's production

Anonymity can be produced in various ways: socially, discursively, technically or legally. What is produced is an absence of information. Few authors, who write about anonymity, miss the opportunity to mention that the word anonymity is rooted etymologically in ἀνωνυμία, the Greek word for the absence of ὄνομα, the 'name' (Liddell and Scott, 1996) Indeed, the absence of a name gives us an entry into conceptualising anonymity, since the name is a central hub for connecting information to our persona and our bodies (Marx, 1999). However, anonymity can clearly not be reduced to the question of namelessness. Even if we are nameless, we might still not be faceless – a fact that gains new significance in an age of ubiquitous surveillance cameras and face recognition, driven by machine learning algorithms. Indeed, as Nissenbaum (1999) pointed out, it is neither name- nor face- but tracelessness that has become the most endangered trait of anonymity in recent decades, as we are communicating online, while spreading offline our all too easily readable genetic material. After all, who needs a name, when you have an IP address and DNA? Or when you use a specialised sensory device also known as a smart phone? Anonymity is obviously a condition that changes historically, and its production does so, too. Indeed, anonymity is situated in a cluster of concepts, all of which are undergoing historical changes. This cluster includes terms such as privacy as well as crowd, loneliness as well as confidentiality, and multiple opposites ranging from transparency and surveillance to individual and common property.

To produce constellations of anonymity can mean a plethora of practices. Anonymity can, for example, describe the state where a conversation happens in full public, for anyone to perceive, but with no one knowing who is talking. But it

can also refer to a situation, where two or more people who know each other have an intimate conversation, but shield it from others. Both situations can legitimately be described as anonymous, however they lead to almost opposite social and communicative arrangements. There are more of such ambivalent meanings. Take the example of namelessness again. The name is an indexical sign, usually attested by the nation state, connecting events or acts or a piece of information to a person and a body. Namelessness can thus denote both a body without a name (such as a person roaming the streets anonymously) and an act, which we cannot tie to an identifiable subject (such as an anonymous graffiti message). Even something as simple as namelessness describes a variety of forms that cut connections.

Such connections and their cuts have their own temporality. When we try to evade surveillance by the state, for example, it is often essential that we not only produce anonymity in the present, but in the foreseeable future too. In this case anonymity has to entail an inevitably fragile effort to control the future – an effort that is especially tenuous, if the data is out there in principle, but not (yet) connected to our name. We therefore need assurances that these connections won't be made in the future. The German Federal Data Protection Act defines 'rendering anonymous' as a 'modification of personal data so that the information concerning personal or material circumstances can no longer or only with a disproportionate amount of time, expense and labour be attributed to an identified or identifiable individual' (BDSG §3/6[1]). Note the rather careful phrasing that exempts anonymity from the need to be able to withstand 'disproportionate amount of time, expense and labour': without such an exemption, anonymity might hardly ever pass the legal test.

The same formulation of 'time, expense and labour' also points to the different actors that are involved in the present and in the potential future. Complex databases, for example, usually have a maze of domain-specific access authorisations, including the manifold authorisations to provide authorisations to others, as well as the authorisations to authorise authorisations. All this is far from trivial once we take into account that databases do not only contain already existing knowledge, that is information, which is explicitly stated in the database. Rather, once databases reach a certain complexity, they are also full of potential knowledge, ready to be actualised, once new connections are made: a database might not contain a name, but enough information to deduct it, once certain bits of information are linked with each other. Anonymity can often only be protected through the deliberate construction of artificial boundaries. Complex systems of authorisations are one possible way to achieve this. This in turn can further complicate the matter. When those whose information is documented in a

1 BDSG stands for Bundesdatenschutzgesetz, Germany's Federal Data Protection Act.

database wish to protect parts of their anonymity, they often need to demand that the anonymity of those handling their data is unveiled. Anonymity can require transparency.

If we look at anonymity in acts of communication, the situation becomes even more complicated. The anonymous network Tor for example does not only keep the senders and receivers of messages anonymous, but also the hubs, which transfer the messages. One might think that such a method is ideal; however, a relevant critique of Tor is that this arrangement fails to ensure that only trustworthy and known hubs selected by those who communicate through this network, are the ones providing the communicational infrastructure. For all these reasons there is hardly ever total anonymity, neither temporally, nor socially, nor technically: 'Anonymity is never perfectly complete' (Wallace, 1999: 25). No wonder that intentional anonymity can only exist with a certain amount of trust.

In all the above examples, anonymity is produced intentionally. There are, however, forms of anonymity, which are non-intentional. Think for example of the anonymity of urban spaces, which became an important topic for early 20th century sociologists such as Simmel (1971/1903); the anonymity of people passing by each other as strangers in the streets of metropoles; the anonymity of citizens living in the same urban neighbourhood. To solve this confusion it makes sense to distinguish between the state of anonymity on the one hand and the act of anonymisation on the other. Anonymisation is the process of intentionally producing constellations of partial unknowability, invisibility and untrackability. Often intentional anonymity – if successful – consists of a long chain of intentions in which the first step secures the anonymisation whereas the next steps are designed to uphold this state over time. Anonymity can be, but does not have to be, produced by (intentional) anonymisation. It can be its outcome, but also the outcome of other processes such as modernity or urbanisation, or more generally of unintended socio-material processes and constellations, in which identifying information is dis-associated from a person or simply vanishes. Therefore anonymity is always socially produced, albeit only sometimes intentionally.

If we ask how anonymisation in a digital environment can be achieved and maintained, it makes sense to knock on the doors of today's specialists for such an endeavour: computer scientists. Here we can learn that anonymity is attained by blurring either the sender in larger sets of senders, or the receiver in larger sets of receivers, or the message in a larger set of messages, or some, or all of these elements in their respective sets – potentially in combination with blurring the respective sets in even bigger sets (Pfitzmann and Hansen, 2010; see also the interview with Marit Hansen in this issue). Such blurring in 'anonymity sets' prevents an 'attacker' from singling out specific entities in the blur of the set. In

computing, relations of anonymity are never dyadic for two reasons. Firstly, being anonymous means to be part of a larger set of other entities. Secondly, we are, at least in computing, only ever anonymous-for-an-attacker. This 'attacker' is not necessarily malicious, but simply an abstraction, a representation of a given entity that might want to know something we don't want it to know. Cryptography always solves the double problem of encoding messages and/or senders and/or receivers in ways that unintended 'attackers' cannot decode, while intended receivers can. Indeed, the mathematical discussions of cryptographers are inhabited by a whole range of standardised fictional characters: 'Alice' (for receiver) and 'Bob' (for sender) are trying to communicate, but not without 'Eve' (for eavesdropper), 'Carol' (for the third person), 'Chuck' (a malicious participant), 'Mallet' (the active intruder), 'Trent' (the trusted third party) and 'Grace' (the government representative) all having their role to play. Therefore it is impossible to understand anonymity if we make the mistake to conceptualise it simply in one single dyadic relation.[2]

The abstract yet precise models of computing can cater for many of the constellations of anonymity. However, the abstraction, purification and formalisation of code and its mathematical logic is not only a strength, but at the same time a limitation for social and cultural theorists. Anonymity entails a lot of further problems that cannot be explained with such logic. One such example is simply the question, what happens to the 'set'? Remember, for example, that while specific entities hide themselves in an 'anonymity set', the 'anonymity set' itself often becomes more visible. Once an 'anonymity set' becomes visible, it can take on a further social life of its own. The online collective Anonymous, for example, turned such a 'set' of anonymous entities – the many people who post on specific platforms and channels – into a fragile process of collectivisation, joint decision-making and collective action. While all its members are hiding inside the 'anonymity set', this 'set' starts its own life. In such a situation its members do not only hide inside the 'set', but begin to interact and to use the 'anonymity set' as a collective weapon (Coleman, 2014).

Aside from the set and multiple forms of collectivities that can emerge, many other social and socio-technical forms are at stake in anonymity: individual relations, relations between individuals and organisations, or between organisations, as well as socio-technical assemblages. In its most general form, anonymity constitutes a specific form of social relation in which a range of potentially identifying markers

2 This is even the case when two communicating participants are anonymous towards each other. While these two are communicating they are senders and receivers, but also attackers prevented from identifying each other. Within this constellation of two, we thus have three analytical positions: sender, receiver and attacker.

of individuality and difference are dissociated from specific individuals (see Ponesse, 2013). It is neither a form of a-sociality nor the 'ultimate symbol of incoexistence' (Konrad, 2005: 5), but rather in itself a social form and a form of sociality. Such a perspective opens up a new set of questions: How many identifying markers can be dissociated in a social relationship for it to still exist? What kind of 'relations of non-relationality' (Konrad, 2005) emerge here? How can fundamental traits of social relationships such as reciprocity, trust or accountability be ensured? Which webs of relationships emerge around the anonymous relationship itself? Who are the gatekeepers of anonymity, who become the guarantors of trust, and who are its beneficiaries and victims? How can anonymity trigger 'congregational thoughts' (Copeman, 2009: 7), new forms of solidarity and different rationalities of identity not necessarily connected to property assumptions? What forms of intimacy and confidentiality arise, and what happens to parrhesia, the speaking of truth, when the speaker is hidden?

Adding to the complexities of anonymity is a further grey area: the subtleties of open secrets (Curtis/Weir 2016) and non-knowledge in general. We might, for example, stabilise social situations by ignoring what we could know – including identifying information. These are Goffman-esque forms of anonymity. Take for example the moment in a double-blind peer review process, when the author recognises the person who produced the peer review, or more commonly, when the peer-reviewer recognised the author(s). To keep the conventions of the peer review's 'ongoing panoptic organization of communication' (Hirschauer, 2010: 72) intact, it often makes sense to separate between a front stage, where anonymity is formally acknowledged by all sides, and a backstage, where this is not the case. The convention of the double-blind peer-review is only one of the many examples, where non-knowledge of identifying information can greatly matter. Such dissonances between front and backstage only point us to a much larger issue, to the performative dimensions of anonymity.

While anonymity therefore has to be analysed in specific situations, it nevertheless has to take into account larger contexts. Context refers to a heterogeneity of interacting factors such as technologies, infrastructures, values and laws. What standards, protocols, codes, technologies and aesthetics are shaping anonymity? How are they designed, decided upon, regulated and changed? What are the laws, regulations, and social conventions that structure, shape, or undermine anonymous forms of interaction? Which role play moral and ethical discourses? How do they contribute toward a legitimisation or delegitimisation of anonymity? Last but not least: how do hierarchical settings and relations of power and domination shape anonymity? Is it imposed, as an act of violence, against the will of those who are being anonymised (Natanson, 1986)? Or is it used, as a strategic move, to circumvent, undermine, abolish, or even reverse relationships of power?

To summarise: We started with a broad diagnosis that anonymity is under attack. We then unpacked our two basic assumptions: anonymity is socially productive, as well as produced. In both its productivity and production, anonymity is a category that defies easy ways of modelling and framing, yet sets up a structured field of properties. The tensions and connections within this highly complex, yet structured field of properties might never be ordered in a satisfactory way, but they nevertheless present social theorists with a persistent and insistent requirement for precision. Any attempt to theorise anonymity has to deal with a conceptual messiness on the one hand, and a call and opportunity for precise analysis on the other hand.

We will now introduce the contributions in this special issue.

The contributions

Daniel de Zeeuw's article 'Immunity from the image: The right to privacy as an antidote to anonymous modernity' opens our issue with an exploration of two different forms of anonymity. On the one hand, anonymity can be seen as a means-to-an-end to achieve a specific form of privacy. On the other hand, anonymity can describe a specific form of sociality. In a genealogical enquiry into legal and philosophical debates in the 18th, 19th and early 20th century in the US and Europe, de Zeeuw shows that these two meanings of anonymity are both distinct and connected: the merger of anonymity and privacy arose out of class-specific anxieties over mass modernity and mass culture, which were perceived as alienating and impersonal. To re-establish an analytically sound idea of anonymous sociality requires its dissociation from ideas around anonymity as a means for privacy, as well as from the latter's origins in bourgeois fear.

A similar demand to contextualise anonymity, as well as the debates and discourse around it, in specific historical, social, political and geographical conditions drives the analysis of Kornelia Trytko and Andreas Wittel in their article 'The exposure of Kataryna: How Polish journalists and bloggers debate online anonymity'. Analysing a case study of a Polish blogger who became an influential voice in the Polish public sphere, only to be doxed, Trytko and Wittel show two things. Firstly, they explore the issues that are negotiated in and through the debates around this case of de-anonymisation, including the nature of the public sphere, the status of journalists and bloggers, and the state of democracy as well as citizens' autonomy in Poland. Secondly, they provide a passionate defence of anonymity, showing how the debates and the conflicts have ultimately enriched the Polish public sphere.

'On anonymity in disasters', an article by Katrina Petersen, Monika Büscher, and Catherine Easton puts equally much emphasis on the context in which anonymous data and anonymous relationships are produced and maintained. Analysing disaster and emergency management, the authors start from the premise that anonymity is neither a state nor something that happens in isolation. All individuals and organisations involved in disaster management have to balance the requirement for data protection with the urgency of the situation and the need to share data across various socio-technical systems. Here anonymity and anonymisation can sometimes get in the way and obstruct the most efficient responses to emergencies. In particular the authors explore disaster information and anonymity with respect to two moments, (1) how anonymous sources of information are dealt with, and (2) how protected data is shared between different agencies.

'What can self-organised group therapy teach us about anonymity?' – asks Paula Helm in a case study that explores anonymity in mutual support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, groups that fundamentally rely on anonymity to prevent possible stigmatisation and discrimination. Her contribution focuses in particular on various functions of anonymity. Some of these functions structure the social dynamics and the social distances within anonymous therapeutic groups, others organise the political communication and the public relation between the group and the outside world, and some functions are about the formation of a specific subjectivity as well as a sense of belonging to a specific collective. Helm suggests a typology of forms of anonymity to facilitate future research and more differentiated discussions on the merits and dangers of anonymity in a digital age.

In his contribution 'Archaeology of no names? The social productivity of anonymity in archaeological information process', Isto Huvila investigates the 'labour of faceless individuals of the past and present'. He analyses the relations and overlaps between named and anonymous individuals and institutions as a control regime of information and draws specific attention to the role of writing in mediating between anonymous and non-anonymous work. While the productivity of anonymity – as a glue or enabler, for example – is in parts quite evident, other effects and outcomes of anonymity within archaeology remain hard to judge, meander between openness and vulnerability and remain ultimately dependent on specific situations and contexts.

'Images of anonymity' by Andreas Broeckmann offers a special gift: a curated visual essay. The essay does not intend to present an exhaustive overview of visual representations of anonymity. Rather, it explores a diverse field of entitlements, agencies and power relations within anonymous constellations and social forms. Playful and terrified at the same time, we follow the visual representation of

identity markers and their opposites through the picture-text arrangement and encounter violence and suppression as well as nonchalance and new modes of identification and existence.

Renee Ridgway's note 'Against a personalisation of the self' presents tentative results of an on-going research project on personalisation. In a series of experiments, Ridgway compares online search results that she either achieves while allowing herself to be personalised by Google, or by using the anonymity network Tor. In a paradoxical twist, so the analysis of Ridgway shows, personalisation forces her into uncontrollable associations with anonymous clusters, whereas anonymous research allows membership, and, indeed, agency as part of a collective of anonymous users. Standing at the core of the Internet's power structures, personalisation thus contributes to the 'tragedy of the web', whereas evading personalisation through anonymisation is a chance to continue to explore its potentials.

Paula Bialski and Götz Bachmann have conducted an interview with Marit Hansen, a computer scientist, and the head of the Independent Centre for Data Protection in Kiel, Germany. Together with her colleague, the late Andreas Pfitzmann, Hansen co-authored an article, which provided an influential contribution to synthesise and stabilise the terminology around anonymity in computer science. The terminology developed by Hansen and Pfitzmann aims to cater both for the mathematical precision needed to build systems, as well as for a terminological common ground to think about anonymity together with members of other disciplines. As such, it is a theory of anonymity in itself, albeit a rather abstract one, and firmly rooted in computing. The interview revisits the article, and explores how concepts from computer science can enrich the thinking of disciplines that are more familiar with qualitative approaches than with the logic of computing.

Final remarks

One thing that all papers of this issue demonstrate is that diagnoses claiming the nearing end of anonymity are oversimplified. While anonymity clearly is under attack, while processes of de-anonymisation are undeniably taking place, anonymity is not dying a slow death, not yet. Instead regimes of anonymity are getting reconfigured and we need to be able to better understand how exactly such transformations of anonymity are affecting the multiplicity of our social practices and what kind of new dimensions of the social they entail.

Both academic and non-academic discourses on anonymity are often oriented to explain the workings of anonymity through reference to normative questions and terms. The diagnosis of merits and dangers, of allegedly good and bad aspects of anonymity is part of such a predominantly moral evaluation. In contrast our purpose is to analyse anonymity on the basis of qualitative empirical case studies and to portray it as a social form. We hope to contribute to an analysis of anonymity as a practice of doing the social that aligns technical, infrastructural, political, and regulative dimensions. We draw attention to its production and productivity, and with it to its temporalities, its transformative powers and its entanglements with practices of person making, property relations, public spheres and social forms. However, we are not completely disinterested bystanders in this debate – without anonymity the social world would be poorer. It would be reduced in quantitative and qualitative terms.

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Immunity from the image: The right to privacy as an antidote to anonymous modernity

Daniël de Zeeuw

abstract

Being unidentifiable and untraceable to state or corporate apparatuses of surveillance and control today has become almost synonymous with being anonymous. It is in this capacity that anonymity is often understood as instrumental and conducive to citizens' personal privacy vis-à-vis said apparatuses. Yet there is another sense to anonymity less immediately aligned with or intelligible within these privacy-centric narratives. In the motto that epitomizes the liberatory role attributed to online anonymity in early net culture ('On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'), anonymity designates a particular mode of sociality and culture that is impersonal or even anti-personal, ephemeral, collective, authorless and in that sense 'nameless' and 'faceless'. Today, imageboards like 4chan continue to cultivate and embrace anonymity in this sense, as a mediatic *condition post-humaine*. The article aims to show that these forms of anti- and impersonal media prosumption have their roots in a more encompassing tradition of popular mass media culture, *against* which the right to privacy was originally asserted. As a value, privacy is linked to class-specific anxieties over the increasingly anonymous and impersonal forces of mass modernity and its new media publics, whose profane curiosity desired to 'bring things closer' by means of their technological reproduction. The emergent mass culture threatened dominant bourgeois values of personal autonomy and selfhood historically and culturally implied in the idea of a right to privacy. The resulting understanding of anonymity and its relation to privacy suggests an alternative perspective on what is at stake in the politics of online anonymity today.

Introduction

'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'. This caption to a famous cartoon by Peter Steiner published in *The New Yorker* in 1993 epitomizes the positive role attributed to anonymity in early net culture. But since then much has changed.

With the rise of mass surveillance, big data analytics and a booming platform economy, the Internet, rather than fostering anonymity, is said to contribute to its demise (Froomkin, 2015). Moving toward an Internet of things as the backbone of a society of control, where every interaction is instantly identified, tracked, mined and so rendered exploitable and manipulable by corporate and state actors that themselves remain in the dark, Steiner's cartoon no longer rings true. Confronted with the growing precarity of online anonymity and its negative effects on privacy, Steiner's dogs may in retrospect come to nostalgically mark a relic from a blissful past in which online anonymity – and thereby privacy – was still possible.

The last decades have shown that online anonymity is indeed no longer (or perhaps never was) given, but instead something that needs to be constantly created and updated, and with uncertain returns, if any at all. In line with this dominant narrative, societal actors concerned with the withering of online anonymity generally situate it in a liberal-democratic rights problematic which revolves around questions of personal privacy and free speech. A recent UN report claims that 'Encryption and anonymity, today's leading vehicles for online security, provide individuals with a means to protect their privacy' as well as 'exercise the rights to freedom of opinion and expression' (UN General Assembly, 2015: 3). Various apps (Signal) or services (Tor) claim to improve their users' privacy by providing *anonymous* means of communication. Finally, following the post-Snowden and WikiLeaks rise in consumer awareness, tech and social media giants like Apple and Facebook have also become more attuned to new privacy needs, by offering encryption for their devices (iPhone) and apps (WhatsApp), or by allowing Tor-access to its platform (Facebook, since 2014).

These examples serve to sketch in very broad strokes the context in which the language of online anonymity is presently spoken, and in which the terms 'anonymous' and 'anonymity' acquire their particular meaning and political legibility, as an instrument and stake in citizens' battle for privacy and free speech against governments and big tech. Yet the kind of online anonymity Steiner's cartoon suggests can also be read in a different key, namely as referring to the various modes of impersonal sociality and anonymous media prosumption that early net culture harboured. Rather than exclusively or even primarily geared towards individual and personal privacy concerns, the way the cartoon mockingly celebrates online anonymity refers to the joy and thrill of engaging in ephemeral encounters with unknown others, of momentarily suspending one's 'real' life in dissimulative role-playing, and of losing oneself in a proliferation of digital masks on forums and chatrooms, or in virtual environments and multiplayer games. Despite the general trend towards social media platforms like Facebook, where most content is organised around personalised timelines and friend-communities, imageboard repositories like 4chan (www.4chan.org) continue to affirmatively

cultivate anonymity in Steiner's sense (Bernstein et al., 2011). On these imageboards, masquerade forms 'an integral part of social interaction' in which 'suspicion, pranking, and unreality are pervasive', issuing in the specific understanding of 'anonymity as culture' (for this concept see Auerbach, 2012: online). These practices of online anonymity explore the ephemeral and multiple, pseudonymous, and collaborative forms of media prosumption that the Internet uniquely enables. It is to this sensibility that 4chan's founder refers when he claimed – in mocking defiance of social media platforms like Facebook – that 'anonymity is authenticity' (Christoper 'moot' Poole, quoted in Bodle, 2013: online).[1]

What these preliminary observations on two rather different ways to situate and interpret the meaning and value of online anonymity reveal, is simply that there *are* indeed these different dimensions to the question of online anonymity. The larger discourse or problematic by means of which we try and make sense of a cartoon such as Steiner's will largely determine what aspects of online anonymity stand out as meaningful or politically significant. This raises the question: where do these different aspects and interpretations of online anonymity overlap, and where do they come apart?

It seems to me that when anonymity is spoken of as instrumental or conducive to ensuring citizens' privacy, it is typically framed as an informatic condition or statistical measure of non-identifiability and non-traceability of digital communications or personal data. It is in this capacity that anonymity is thought to safeguard communication of a *personal* and *private* nature against intrusion by external parties operating 'off-stage' (e.g. the NSA or even your local Wi-Fi fraudster). Instead, in the case of Steiner's cartoon and imageboards like 4chan, anonymity refers to a social and cultural modality of mediatic interaction. Here anonymity is attributed to *impersonal* and *public* forms of online spectatorship and

1 4chan represents a particularly interesting case to think about different aspects and dimensions to online anonymity. For around 2006, contributors to its '/b/ Random' board came to understand and refer to themselves individually as 'anons' and collectively as 'Anonymous'. At this point, anonymity was no longer only implicitly lived as an infrastructural condition but explicitly recognised and cultivated as a collective mode of online existence, whose 'networked individuals' may at any moment morph into mischievous swarms. With the ludic appropriation of this collective pseudonym, these self-styled 'anons' emphasised not so much the ability to exercise control over one's own image or to restrict the circulation and use of images but the freedom to engage the modes of anonymous sociality and media prosumption 4chan enables – an aspect that will be come highly relevant in the following sections, which discuss this type of anonymity's problematic relation to the idea of privacy.

media prosumption, whose participants are anonymous and unknown *to each other*.

The following example clarifies this distinction: you can access Facebook via Tor and be relatively anonymous in the first 'informatic' sense, but not in the second, 'socio-cultural' sense, given the nature of Facebook as a platform, which is designed to facilitate personal interactions between known others in a sheltered community environment built around personalised time lines and verified 'real names'. Instead, whereas 4chan does little to protect its users' anonymity in the first sense (it is not using HTTPS and it logs its users' IP-addresses) it *does* enable anonymity in the second sense, by allowing users to post and share images under any pseudonymous banner without registration, and by organising content in comprehensive public threads to which anyone can contribute, but which are quickly deleted once contribution to them fades. So although it is true that anonymity in the first sense typically helps to establish or maintain anonymity in the second sense, just as, conversely, a culture of anonymity tends to foster values sympathetic to 'actual' informatic anonymity, the above example shows they can come apart in significant ways.

How are these different dimensions to online anonymity aligned with the notion of privacy? Whereas it is only natural to link privacy and the first, informatic sense of anonymity, in this article I argue that anonymity in the second sense – as an impersonal mode of sociality and culture cultivated on imageboards like 4chan – is more problematic from the perspective of privacy as itself representative of an historically and class specific, socio-cultural ideal. Returning to the moment where a right to privacy was first explicitly formulated in the context of *mass media* related issues, more specifically the rise of so-called 'yellow journalism' and its use of new reproductive technologies like photography, the first section reconstructs how privacy as a value arose from anxieties over the increasingly anonymous and impersonal forces of modern life and its new mass media, whose new mass publics transgressed established cultural codes and social privileges.

The second section expands on this reconstruction through the eyes of the generation of 'Weimar' critical theorists and artists like Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Bertolt Brecht, who were among the first to perceive and critically contemplate the growing influence and pressure of 'the masses' and new media technologies on prevailing social divisions and cultural paradigms. The mass-cultural logic that manifested itself through the new publics' profane curiosity to bring things closer by way of their technological reproduction, Benjamin claimed, harboured an enormous culturally destructive potential, and suggested new, potentially emancipatory forms of collectivity and practice, anticipating what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993 [1972]) later theorised as the 'blocked' elements

of a 'proletarian public sphere'. Using these writers' critical insights on the profane, plebeian thrust of mass culture, it becomes clear that from the end of the 19th century onward, the former slowly eroded and forced into crisis the *auratic* root of the person and its immunity. It is this crisis in the context of which anxieties over personal privacy were first voiced, and which still resonate in current understandings of privacy as control and ownership over one's personal information. Despite many important differences between Warren and Brandeis' historical conjuncture and the way they argue for a right to privacy, and ours, the *longue durée* problematic of mass culture and the resulting crisis of autonomous personhood nevertheless connects their present to our own.

Immunising the person against an epidemic of 'ruthless publicity': Reconstructing the societal problematic at the core of Warren and Brandeis' 'The right to privacy'

There are not many concepts that have been subjected to so much critical scrutiny as privacy, even *within* the liberal-bourgeois legal traditions whence it came. Communitarian and socialist critiques typically reject privacy's possessive-individualist premises; whereas feminist critiques focus on its historical function in reproducing and sanctioning a patriarchal organisation of the domestic sphere.[2] These critiques have led some to abandon it in search of less tainted concepts. More frequently however, a transformed idea of privacy that salvages the criticised aspects is proposed, implying that the relation between these aspects and the concept itself is ultimately contingent. Consequently, privacy is spoken of in many ways today. Brunton and Nissenbaum note that 'the house of privacy has many rooms' and that within different uses of the term 'are divergent concepts' (2015: 45). Static notions of privacy construe it as the state of being private and the right to privacy as each person's right to be *let* or even *left* alone, to live undisturbed and in absolute independence from others. Instead, more dynamic, control-oriented or social accounts take privacy to refer to the ability to manage access to one's personal sphere across different public/private registers (Altman in Kerr and Steeves, 2009: 206). The fact that there is such a plurality of different privacy concepts seems to preclude any one criticism of 'privacy in general'. Yet despite

2 In response, many privacy scholars argue that privacy is not primarily concerned with keeping one's personal, social or professional life private or hidden from others *per se*, but rather with the ability to know, negotiate, control and consent to the terms and conditions under which social and communicative interaction takes place, even in places that are ostensibly public or 'social'. Despite persistent associations with privacy and the private sphere, which often take an individual's autonomy to be *a priori* given, there is such a thing as 'privacy in public' (Nissenbaum, 2010) as well as an understanding of privacy as anchored in social and communicative interaction, rather than in the *absence* thereof.

crucial differences and historical shifts in emphasis on different aspects of privacy, in *Laws of image: Privacy and publicity in America* Samantha Barbas locates as one of the fundamental *continuities* at the core of most privacy concepts the importance of 'the exercise of autonomy and control over the self' (2015: 33). Taking this continuity as its premise, my approach differs from the above-mentioned critiques of privacy in its specific angle namely that of the rise of a popular, mass media culture, and the alternative understanding of anonymity as a social and mediatic condition implied therein.

Regarding the relation between privacy and anonymity, Alan Westin – former professor of public law at Columbia and author of the influential book *Privacy and freedom* – listed urban anonymity and anonymity of publication as one of four distinct types of privacy, the other three being solitude, intimacy, and reserve. Solitude, which refers to the state of each individual 'freed from the observations of others', is 'the most complete state of privacy that individuals can achieve' (Westin, 2006 [1967]: 36-37). Intimacy refers to forms of 'corporate seclusion', small social units of personally related people like family, friends or colleagues. Finally, the term 'reserve' seems inspired by Georg Simmel's sociological observations on the transformations of mental life in the city, where reserve and indifference designate the behavioural attitudes of discretion and mental distance that respects the personal demands and psychic requirements of interactional partners under metropolitan conditions.

Subsuming such a broad range of different phenomena under the single rubric of privacy, raises the question: what allows these four phenomena to be categorised in this way? What do they have in common such that they can be understood as four separate instances of privacy? The answer to this question must be sought, I think, in a certain expansion or naturalisation of privacy that transcends the class-specific character of its original historical context of enunciation. As such it implies both a *dehistoricisation* and a *depoliticisation* of the socio-cultural conditions by which privacy as a value, ideal and specific right came to be, as a moral stake and legal instrument in deciding the direction and resolution of various societal transformations and frictions present at the time. By contrast, the following sections situate the right to privacy in the context that gave rise to it, namely the emergence of a mass society and its new forms of mass publicness, which allowed new publics to bring into the formerly privileged spheres of cultural representation new experiences, tastes, styles, affinities, and interests not necessarily aligned with the ruling cultural and moral paradigms.

Westin's categorisation provides a clear example of a more general tendency to understand the value of 'anonymity in public space and of publication' in terms of privacy. Expanding the scope of application and relevance of privacy even further,

Westin claims that while many people believe that '[Man's] desire for privacy is distinctively human', it can in fact already be found as a primal need in less developed animal species (1984 [1967]: 56). This innate animal and human desire for privacy manifests itself in evolutionary terms as a 'tendency toward territoriality, in which an organism lays private claim to an area of land, water, or air and defends it against intrusion by members of its own species' (56). Such a founding of privacy in our 'animal natures' is the most extreme but – from its own perspective – logical end point of its understanding of privacy, which draws and collapses all possible, highly diverse and often incommensurable states of privateness and publicness into its concept.

Historicising Westin's categorisation, we can concede that personal and corporate seclusion clearly fit the label 'privacy' insofar as both originate in the private/public sphere divisions underlying liberal-bourgeois traditions of imagining and legally codifying social space. Through a series of internal spatial codifications, the private dwelling provides to each family member a measure of personal solitude vis-à-vis the relatively more public living quarters. This kind of individual solitude is deemed essential to the development of certain capacities of psychic interiority conducive to personal autonomy, understood as a kind of 'mental privacy'. Together with familial seclusion, solitude is constitutively related to what it excludes: the public sphere as well as the world of private property and the market, as reconstructed by Habermas (1991), Rorty (2009) and others: 'the public sphere emerges in private, and it emerges via a particular mode of subjectivization. Indeed, that there was a domain of privacy anchored the possibility of a public precisely insofar as it guaranteed this subjectivization' (Dean, 2002: 145). The rights of the person are thus relatively defined to each domain. Instead, the uncontrolled, unsanctioned mixture or passage between realms is understood as a permanent danger to social order. Yet it is not that their separation should be made absolute: what is at stake is a social pragmatics of boundary management in a way properly attuned to the particular forms of life it thereby sanctions.

It is with regard to 'urban anonymity and anonymity of publication' that Westin's expansive and naturalising conception of privacy proves to be more problematic. Tracing this naturalisation in reverse, the present article always links back the idea of a right to privacy to the specific societal problematic in which it originates. The point here is not that anonymity cannot be legitimately understood in the way Westin suggests, but precisely that it *can* be so understood, that applying *this* rather than *that* hermeneutic frame or ideological template *determines what is at stake in a particular situation*, implying that any given situation is fundamentally open to contingent and competing determinations. This conception of how discourse works and influences how and what we perceive as objective and significant in a situation, is informed by the observation that discourse is always 'penetrated by a

system of values inseparable from living practice and class struggle' (Bakhtin, 1984: 471), which is to say simply that 'our utterances necessarily reflect systemic social contradictions, the social location of particular speakers, and the forms of material and rhetorical power that regulate the relevant speech genres' (Gardiner, 2004: 36). Westin's categorisation displaces and obscures the historical problematic of mass society in which the idea of a right to privacy is rooted, replacing it with abstract relations between individual persons possessing an *a priori*, innate need for privacy. Doing so he transcends the multilayered, conflictual, class-cultural realities to which privacy as an ideal responded, and in which it intervened. At the end point of this displacement, it becomes possible to construct true statements about privacy as an undeniable human condition relevant to almost all aspects of life, including urban anonymity, as Westin indeed proceeds to do.

In order to understand why this is problematic, we need to return to the original formulation of the right to privacy at the end of the nineteenth century, by Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis. In what is now recognised as one of the most influential law articles ever published, they propose to ground the right to privacy in the 'immunity of the person' (Warren and Brandeis, 1984 [1890]: 83). The *rationale* behind this particular approach is that they hope to establish such a right independent of already existing (intellectual) property and copyright laws (*ibid*.: 79-81) as well as available slander and libel laws (*ibid*.: 77-78; Post, 1991; Barbas, 2015; The Harvard Law Review Association, 1981). The right to privacy ideally encompasses the whole of a person's bodily integrity, feelings, thoughts and peace of mind, his or her dignity as a *person*. Doing so, Warren and Brandeis rely on the concept of 'immunity' as the legal and political halo that surrounds the person and protects it from outside intrusions that may impede upon its autonomy (Blackstone, 1899: 223). In his treatise on torts to which Warren and Brandeis refer, justice Thomas M. Cooley defines the right to one's person in terms of privacy as 'a right of complete immunity: to be let alone' (Cooley, 1880: 29). For the American sociologist Edward Shils as well, 'Intrusions on privacy are baneful because they interfere with an individual in his disposition of what belongs to him. The "social space" around an individual, the recollection of his past, his conversation, his body and its image, all belong to him' (1966: 306).

For Warren and Brandeis, however, a right to privacy deals with the somewhat narrower issue of control over one's reputation, 'the legal right to control one's public image' (Barbas, 2015: 26). This problem of control over one's image first becomes urgent when that image can be splintered and circulated in various new media networks, reaching new publics in a way that is beyond that person's control or consent. Theirs was an attempt to find a 'remedy for the unauthorized circulation of portraits of private persons' (Warren and Brandeis, 1984 [1890]: 193,

195). So rather than geared to the already established and more encompassing right to a private or personal sphere, the specific and novel societal problematic that propelled Warren and Brandeis' proposal was the emergence of new forms of mass publicity and popular media consumption: the proliferation of illustrated magazines filled with gossip and 'fake news' that catered to the ever greater and relentless curiosity of an expanded group of readers from all – but increasingly also the lower – classes (Schoeman, 1984: 203). Added to this was the growing availability of cameras and the means of reproducing and disseminating images in ever wider and less controllable circuits of private and public circulation, multiplying the possibilities for unwarranted exchange of personal information beyond the grasp of any one person (Whyte, 2009: 102).

Warren and Brandeis speak of an epidemic of 'ruthless publicity' (1984 [1890]: 214) caused by 'a media environment in which otherwise proper portraits [...] circulate in ways that countermand the cultural ideal of individual self-ownership' (Osucha, 2009: 76). Such publicity represents the increasing mixture and confusion of different class forms of life that before remained separate, and that by the end of the nineteenth century come together in the new mass public spheres: 'For Warren and Brandeis, the institution of the press symbolized the impersonal mass culture that threatened preexisting social institutions that, in turn, enforced cultural values' so that 'privacy represented the person's freedom from the undistilled attention of the masses through the media' (Bezanson, 1992: 1138). As such, the endangered 'sacred privacy of domestic life' entails much more than questions of ownership: it concerns a way of life and the world view implied therein, as well as a mode of subjectivation and its institutions. In this the right to privacy 'looks back to a period before mass society and its information technologies that threatened to burst the bubble of the sheltered life of the upper classes' (Gaines, 1991) and represents 'a record of legitimation of a bourgeois view of life: the ultimate generalized privilege, however abstract in practice, or seclusion and protection from others (the public)' (Williams, 1976: 243).

The following example serves to show how, even before Warren and Brandeis, 19th century criticasters of mass society employed the language of anonymity and impersonality to describe and motivate their distaste for the popular press and its new publics. In *The present age* (1962 [1846]) Kierkegaard bemoans what he calls the *Phantom Public* as a 'monstrous abstraction' driven by what he deems the two main 'powers of impersonality': the press and anonymity (Dreyfus, 2004). The modern-day author, he argues, 'is often only an x, even when his name is signed, something quite impersonal, which addresses itself abstractly, by the aid of printing, to thousands and thousands, while remaining itself unseen and unknown, living a life as hidden, as anonymous, as it is possible for a life to be' (Kierkegaard, 1967: entry #3219). Insofar as the publics Kierkegaard criticises

because of their impersonal, inauthentic and irresponsible character, resemble those against which Warren and Brandeis aim to formulate their right to privacy, these observations capture precisely in what respects the relation between privacy and these kinds of anonymity is more problematic than intuitively apparent.

The anxieties of and over the person swallowed up and stumped upon in the relentless massification of life and its reproductive technologies sketched by the above authors becomes even more pertinent when we reflect on the specific problem of *images of persons* circulated in the press. On the opening pages of *Crowds and power*, Elias Canetti claimed that 'There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown', and that in fact 'All the distances which men create round themselves are dictated by this fear': the repulsion, panic and fear of being touched, which 'never leaves a man when he has once established the boundaries of his personality' (1981 [1960]: 15). The fear of being touched by strangers and the formulation of a right to privacy are connected, if only by the terminology used. The gendered metaphor often used to highlight the importance of privacy is that of an innocent and vulnerable woman's body or face violated by a stranger's gaze or touch. A few months after the publication of 'The Right to Privacy', the U.S. supreme court proclaimed, in a case involving the physical examination of a woman (Clara Botsford) for insurance purposes, that 'to compel any one, and especially a woman, to lay bare the body, or to submit it to the touch of a stranger, without lawful authority, is an indignity, an assault, and a trespass' (in Smith, 2000: 133). Warren and Brandeis make use of similarly gendered examples to make their case.

It is in the image of a violation of intimate female parts by a stranger that an important tension between the concept of anonymity and privacy is brought to light. Whereas in the late 19th and early 20th century privacy refers to the enclosed private space of both a community of letters, familial intimacy and individual seclusion, anonymity in the sociological literature of the same period refers to the indifferent and contingent co-presence of strangers in urban-industrial environments. To their benefit, Warren and Brandeis did *not* understand privacy to include anonymity in the sociological sense at all. In a state of privacy, family and friends are the very opposite of anonymous to each other. Neither is the secluded individual anonymous to himself, nor for that matter are they anonymous to others outside of the domestic sphere. These relationships are persistent and personal, rather than ephemeral and impersonal, based on mutual trust and shared social codes, rather than suspicion and indifference. In this context, it makes no sense to speak of anonymity as conducive to privacy, as these two concepts belong to mutually exclusive socio-cultural registers.

On the contrary, it is precisely the kinds of anonymous, mass publicness with which Warren and Brandeis take issue, fearing an inversion of 'the relative importance of things' by the commercial exploitation of gossip by and to the vicious and the idle (1984 [1890]: 77). In this the curse of 'ruthless publicity' signals not merely a spatial but a social and political crossing of boundaries, making for a kind of general societal pollution whose violence lies in its contagious character. As the emergence of privacy as the right to be let alone is thus rooted in an experience of intrusion by anonymous strangers (the curious gaze of the mass public enabled by new visual technologies of reproduction), to confuse the personal privacy of the home with the impersonal anonymity of the street by subsuming them under one overarching concept of privacy, as Westin and other privacy theorists do, erases this important tension between them. On the basis of this insight, the next section takes a closer look at the specific, mass-cultural media logic of 'curiosity' that triggered the idea of a right to privacy by Warren and Brandeis.

'To detonate a prison world': The class-cultural dialectic between mass curiosity and privacy

Contributing to public debates on the nefarious effects of the popular 'yellow press', Warren and Brandeis sided with the journalist E.L. Godkin's claim that 'the chief enemy of privacy in modern life is *that interest in other people and their affairs known as curiosity'* (Godkin, 1890: 66, emphasis added). According to Warren and Brandeis, privacy legislation is needed because 'the press [and by implication the mass publics it caters to] is overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and decency. Gossip is no longer the resource of the idle and the vicious, but has become a trade which is pursued with industry as well as effrontery' (Warren and Brandeis, 1984 [1890]: 76). In the very last sentence of the article, hinting at the *fait accompli* that is the legal protection against unwarranted government intrusion, they comment: 'Shall the courts thus close the front entrance to constituted authority, and open wide the back door to idle or prurient curiosity?' (*ibid.*: 90).[3]

The popular press brought previously excluded subjects into the public sphere and its means of representation, as a result of which the public sphere was expanded, diversified, and structurally transformed (even when this apparent democratisation was bought at the price of the further commercialisation and

3 Gajda (2008) argues that what Samuel Warren perceived as hurtful 'gossip-mongering' about his family's private life in the press was in fact the central motif for writing 'The right to privacy'.

commodification of culture). But as Shils in the aforementioned article also suggests, rather than a nuisance *per se*, for some of the lower classes 'awareness about the doings of one's neighbors, the gratification of impulses of curiosity about and malice toward them, were perhaps among the main pleasures available' (1966: 290). Likewise, the following commentator observes that 'Curiosity, fascination, repugnance, fear, sympathy, greed, hostility, love, hate and the thousand-and-one other conflicting emotions which affect people living in close association with one another – especially people of different races, creeds, nationalities, and economic levels – created a desire to know more and more about the intimate details of the lives, the actions, the habits, the customs, the thoughts, and the activities of those about them' (O'Connor quoted in Pember, 1972: 8).

These observations are important not only because they testify to the larger conjuncture from which privacy concerns arose, but also because they imply that such concerns were not equally or homogeneously shared by everyone, revealing their class-specificity. Once acknowledged, curiosity appears in a different light, namely in that of a class-politics of anonymous spectatorship and the social pleasures of gossip that created a common world, in a way that temporarily suspended the desocialised, atomised and reified relations that prevailed under industrial labour and urban living conditions. In this the gratification of the masses' curiosity perhaps constituted a kind of symbolic revenge, a returning of the gaze that was cast upon them daily by the disciplinary apparatuses that controlled the streets and the factories. The pleasure of peeping into the private lives of the better-off must have conferred a sense of power, a power of looking accorded to those who were normally at the other end of the gaze. Doing so, they exploited and enjoyed the anonymity that new forms of spectatorship provided to attain the asymmetrical position of the voyeur, which sees but itself remains unseen.[4]

The critique of 'idle or prurient' curiosity that motivates Warren and Brandeis's proposal for a right to privacy has a longstanding moral-philosophical and theological tradition. After Plutarch, Augustine chastises curiosity as the pathological mark of an 'inordinate desire for knowledge derived from sense experience' that signals the unregulated intellectual appetite for things other than

4 The mass publics to which these 'invasive' and 'immoral' forms of curiosity were attributed are probably under-represented in the literature through which we view the era: we only come to know about their existence through the writings of those that cry out against them. In this they resemble the lowly, insignificant lives of Foucault's 'infamous men': those nobodies, those opaque anonymous masses who are incited to speak by being incessantly spoken of, and whose disparate traces, meticulously recorded, fill the administrative, psychiatric and police cabinets of the preceding centuries.

God (Fitzgerald, 1999: 259-261). Curiosity – the 'lust of the eyes', or *concupiscentia oculorem* – is a disease of the mind that affects both plebs and scientist, under whose spell men desire nothing but to know (Augustine, 2006 [AD 397-400]: 10.V). Among the most influential critiques of curiosity in 20th century philosophy is Heidegger's *Being and time,* where it designates one of the main modalities of *Das Man* (the impersonal 'They' or anonymous 'Anyone-self') – the collective pseudo-subject that inhabits the diffuse, inauthentic being-in-the-world of everyday life. Together with idle talk or 'chatter', for Heidegger curiosity promotes 'an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer' (2010 [1927]: 163) and through which 'every mystery loses its power' (*ibid.*: 123).[5]

In his discussion of Heidegger's critique of the curiosity of *Das Man*, Paolo Virno shows that curiosity and mechanical reproduction together indeed 'strive to abolish distances, to place everything within hand's reach (or better, within viewing distance)' (2004: 92). Contrary to Heidegger, however, Virno sees in curiosity and idle talk an 'authentic' mode of sociality and communication of the the masses (or 'multitude' as he calls it). Doing so he links Heidegger's notion of curiosity to Benjamin's observation in his famous *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, that 'Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range in an image [*Bild*], or, better, in a facsimile [*Abbild*], a reproduction' (Benjamin, 2008 [1939]: 23). Rather than designating the 'fallen' and inauthentic life of the impersonal Anyone-self, for both Virno and Benjamin mass media and new media technologies like photography and film bear witness to a positive 'desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction' (23).[6]

These observations are at the heart of Benjamin's theory of mass modernity as entailing the 'withering' of the aura, where the aura refers to 'a strange tissue of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be'

5 On the relation between St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Heidegger's *Being and time*, see Coyne, 2015.

6 The ambivalence and lack of 'normative clarity' of Benjamin's remarks on these anti-auratic tendencies of mass society has always divided commentators. Some quote the above passage to argue for Benjamin's ultimately affirmative stance to this process, while others find passages seemingly incompatible with such a stance, e.g. those in which Benjamin adopts a more conventional Marxist critique of the culture industry. The reasons for this ambivalence must, I think, be sought in the historical circumstances that, first, the masses' desire to bring things closer is always already mediated by capital and appears in the inherently exploitative form of the commodity and its 'fetishism'; and second, this process is structurally open to its regressive, fascist appropriation and channeling, as Benjamin himself witnessed up close and suffered the consequences from.

(2008 [1939]: 23). The concepts of uniqueness and distance that an emerging mass consumer culture – in tandem with new reproductive technologies – are in the process of eliminating, are also central to understand the person as an historical configuration of legal and subjective selfhood. The dignity and respect accorded persons is premised on an auratic separation and distancing from the profane world of things that surrounds it, including animal and human non-persons. Precisely this immunity of the person is compromised when it is made into a mass-circulated image.[7]

By projecting the human body in its ephemeral anonymity as merely one interchangeable *thing* or *image* among others, the auratic 'ritual value' that secures the distinction between person and thing collapses into the aesthetic 'exhibition value' that both immanently possess. Benjamin's ironic commentary on a short opinion piece by literary critic Friedrich Burschell in *Die literarische Welt* (No 7, 1925) may help in understanding his position. In the piece, Burschell bemoans a recent magazine cover of the then highly popular *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* for showing a miniature photographic portrait in remembrance of esteemed German writer Jean Paul right alongside a series of images depicting, among other things, 'the children of Thomas Mann, the petty bourgeois hero of a dubious trial, two tarts all done up in feathers and furs, and two cats and a monkey' (Benjamin, 1972 [1925]: 449). It is this leveling juxtaposition of disparate things normally perceived to be categorically distinct, which induces and motivates Burschell's sentiment (which, Benjamin taunts, reflects an attitude that is 'kleinbürgerlich'). Instead, Benjamin positively recommends the cover's 'higgledy-piggledy' construction as among the best modern journalism has to offer. It is this reduction of the individual portrait and singular 'authentic' face of the person (especially a highly esteemed artist-personality like Jean Paul) to a mere part of a larger visual ensemble of printed matter whose proponents are judged by their exhibition rather than their cult value, that for Benjamin signals the illustrated magazine's progressive, even emancipatory tendency. What would be more boring, he asks, referring to Burschell's own cultural paradigm and aesthetic ideal, than a full-blown portrait of the artist on the cover? (Benjamin, 1972 [1925]: 449).

As to the photographic portrait, whose public mass circulation is at stake in Warren and Brandeis' article on privacy, Benjamin observes that 'for the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face [...] But as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value' (2008 [1939]: 27; Costello, 2005). Rather than the melancholic and conservative attempt

7 For a genealogy of the 'dispositif of the person' and its relation to the logic of immunity, see Esposito, 2011; 2012.

to save the aura of the human face from its eclipse in the reproducible image, for Benjamin Eugène Atget's photographs of deserted city streets from which all human personality and community has been erased, offer a more realistic picture of the inhuman present. In this he seems to follow Bertolt Brecht's advice not to 'start from the good old things but the bad new ones'. The personal, honorary portrait plays an important role here as it is the singular *face* that, together with the name, functions as the central symbol of personhood that becomes grotesquely 'defaced' by its mechanical reproduction and circulation. This defence of the 'face' and the 'name' as harbouring the person's reputation, as in the expressions 'saving one's face' or 'defending one's good name', clearly ties into Warren and Brandeis' attempt to protect one's 'image' against the curious masses.

Along similar lines as Benjamin, Kracauer (1997 [1960]) approached photography and film in terms of a 'redemption of physical reality' that inherently challenges previous value and object hierarchies, including the categorical distinction between persons and things, exposing all equally to a collective curiosity geared towards their public exhibition and common use-value. Early film 'treated the human figure as only one among a variety of objects or sights, a jumble of animals, children and adults, of things, crowds, and streets' (Hansen, 1993: 448). Like the magazine cover Benjamin discusses, the cinematic medium is radically egalitarian and inclusive: the filmic gaze is indifferent to the status of the object insofar as this status transcends the object's materiality, (re)presenting any one object in the dimension shared by animals, marionettes and persons alike.

Only a few years earlier, in a short article called 'Anon is Dead' the American critic Henry Seidel Canby analyses what he considers the 'almost hysterical attempt to escape from the deadly anonymity of modern life [by] the general man who feels his personality sinking lower and lower into a whirl of indistinguishable atoms to be lost in a mass civilization' (1926: 80). For Benjamin, Kracauer and others, however, this loss is not an oppressive, reifying or alienating process per se. Rather than 'saving' the person from the mass that engulfs it, in the very precise and beautiful statement by Brecht, 'man does not become man again by stepping forth from the masses but by sinking deeper into them' (1977: 69). Elsewhere, Brecht links this idea of individuation *through* rather than *despite* the mass (on which liberal-bourgeois notions of individuality are instead premised) to the '*Zertrümmerung der Person'* [the destruction or 'shattering' of the person]. In modern society '[The person] falls apart, he loses his breath. He turns into something else, he is nameless, he no longer has any face [...]' (Brecht, 1967: 60, see Jonsson, 2013).

Whereas in liberal-bourgeois ideas of personal autonomy this name- and facelessness can only appear negatively, for Brecht the destruction of the person

opens up to an inherently collective, 'transpersonal' realm pregnant of ever new modes of social, cultural and political individuation. Similarly, in his famous essay on the mass ornament Kracauer frames the Tiller girls as exemplary of the new, emancipatory forms of sociality and culture potentialised in mass modernity as a whole (1995 [1927]). A then popular form of entertainment, these girls move as one in a serial, repetitive and synchronous manner, locked arm in arm. In said essay, Kracauer finds that these girls form a kind of 'anonymous figure' in which the individual person (*das Vollindividuum*) dissolves into prepersonal bodily elements of a larger ensemble that never add up to anything remotely resembling an organic community. This figure's very 'mass' character resides in this dissolution of both the unity of the individual person and the organic community, in a new social choreography of impersonal and (con)dividual elements that mirror modern labor and urban living conditions. What is left of the individual is ultimately only a 'partial self' (*das Teil-Ich*).

'Wasted upon the many': Mass media culture beyond the person?

This becoming anonymous – in the sense of being unrooted by the deterritorialising powers of modernity in which slowly but steadily, in Marx and Engels' famous wording, 'all that is solid melts into air' and 'all that is holy is profaned' (1969 [1848]) – points to a liberation from premodern social formations and traditions, in a process Agamben calls 'profanation' (2007). The latter designates the emancipation of all bodies and values from previously established stratifications as they enter the sphere of incessant circulation and exchange. Taking up Kracauer's theory of the mass ornament, Agamben states that 'the commodification of the human body, while subjecting it to the iron laws of massification and exchange value, seemed at the same time to redeem the body from the stigma of ineffability that had marked it for millennia' (1993: 48). Lyotard goes even further when he suggests that

> the industrialized masses actually enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolutions of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous anonymity of the suburbs. (1993: 214)

Whereas in the modern political-philosophical tradition, persons are constituted in a relation of mutual recognition to a virtual centre of the one, capital-letter Person (e.g. State or God), the *carnivalesque* and materialist 'chain of being' of the urban and labouring masses is marked by a relation of bodily immanence to a temporality of anonymous becoming. Whereas 'to exist as a person is to maintain all one's parts and their properties under one's own control' (Lingis, 2001: 61), it

instead suggests a release of self in an endless proliferation of masks. Doing so it moves in a direction diametrically opposed to that of Augustine, when he attempts to gather and 'collect' himself out of 'that dispersed state in which my very being was torn asunder because I was turned away from You, the One, and wasted myself upon the many' (quoted in Coyne, 2015: 98).

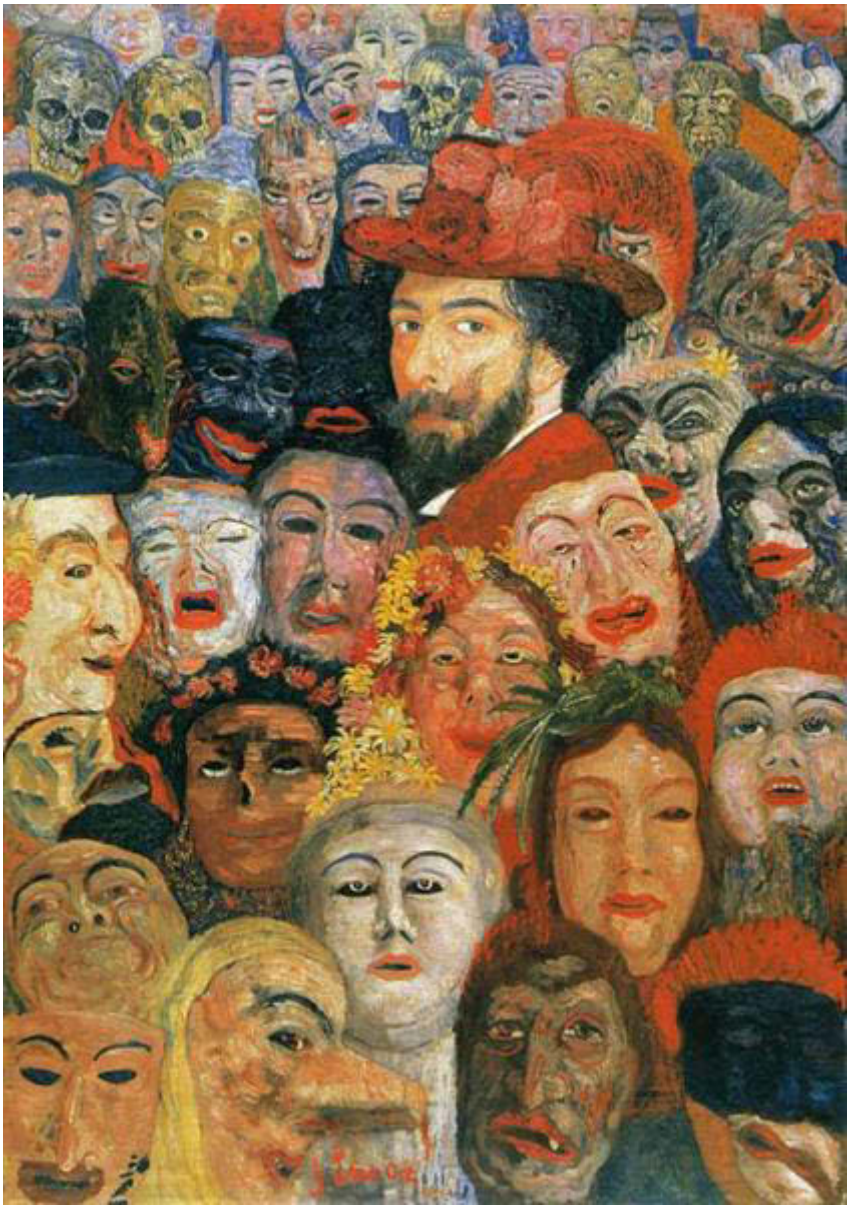

Figure 1: James Ensor's Self-portrait with masks (https://www.wikiart.org/en/james-ensor/self-portrait-with-masks-1899).

James Ensor's Self-portrait with masks (Fig. 1) may serve as an illustration of this dialectic between the masked mass and the authorial, personal self. In this self-portrait, a swarming crowd of grotesquely deformed and grimacing faces and carnival masks flood the pictorial frame from all sides, encroaching on the portrait of the artist classically positioned in the centre. In contrast to conventional bourgeois portraiture, in which the masked crowd is always already exorcised from the frame and its field of visibility, Ensor paradoxically includes this exclusion constitutive of individuality on the very pictorial stage where it is classically performed. The suggestion of a non-immunitary relation to the carnivalesque crowd is reinforced by the fact that, rather than threatened by it, Ensor seems quite at ease within it, as if temporarily overcoming what for Canetti marked any person's 'fear of being touched'. Yet by gazing directly and somewhat conspiratorially at the viewer, Ensor does in the end seem to want to shock us into a belated recognition of the artist's heroic ability to endure, defy and transcend the violently usurping crowd.

In the urban crowds Ensor often depicts as a grotesque masquerade, anonymity is rendered in its modern sociological sense as 'a defining attribute of urbanity' (Garber, 2000: 19) inherent to 'the being together of strangers' (Young, 1990: 237). Likewise, in *A World of strangers,* urban sociologist Lyn Lofland notes that 'To experience the city is, among many other things, to experience anonymity' (1973, ix).[8] This understanding of anonymity as a structural aspect of urban forms of mass sociality can be transposed to the realm of popular media culture and new media technologies, as Benjamin and others suggest. From this perspective, contemporary practices of online anonymity on imageboards like 4chan and in Anonymous partake in the profane and post-auratic thrust of curiosity and its concomitant 'destruction of the person', in response to which Warren and Brandeis formulated their idea of a right to privacy. It is a more adequate grasp of this problematic and conflictual relation between privacy and such practices of collective anonymous media prosumption that the current article aimed to establish, in a way that suggests a rethinking of the politics and aesthetics of online anonymity better attuned to its profane, mass-cultural media logic.

8 For an overview of how the terms 'anonymous' and 'anonymity' are used and transformed over time, see Ferry, 2002.

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The exposure of Kataryna: How Polish journalists and bloggers debate online anonymity

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abstract

This article starts with the premise that anonymity is under attack and that we are experiencing the consequences of a slow but steady process of deanonymisation. While we are aware of the ambiguity of anonymity, we want to make an argument in defence of anonymous speech. The social productivity of anonymity will be demonstrated through an analysis of the doxing of Polish blogger Kataryna, whose real life identity was revealed by journalists. Her exposure in 2009 sparked one of the most heated debates in the history of the Polish internet. It triggered a controversy across several newspapers and blogging platforms. Using critical discourse analysis this study investigates how the Kataryna case was constructed, evaluated and interpreted by three traditional daily newspapers and by bloggers on two blogging platforms. The analysis reveals that the debate on online anonymity reflects three underlying conflicts: (1) conflict over the vision of the public sphere, (2) conflict over the professional identities of journalists and bloggers, and (3) conflict over the process of democratisation in Poland.

Kataryna

The events which led to the most heated debate about online anonymity in Poland begun in 2002, when a blogger using the nickname Kataryna started commenting on sport events on one of the online forums, which belonged to Gazeta Wyborcza, a leading daily quality Polish newspaper. Soon she became active on political forums, especially those related to one of the biggest corruption scandals in post-communist Poland, the so-called 'Rywin Affair'[1]. When Gazeta Wyborcza created

1 'The Rywin Affair' (also known as 'Rywingate') in 2002 was a major corruption scandal in Poland, in which the editor of Poland's major daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*,

its first blogging platform, blox.pl, one of the administrators invited Kataryna to join and she agreed.

The 'Rywin Affair' made Kataryna highly sceptical of the political order that had been established in Poland after 1989. She became critical of both, Polish mainstream media and the political elite. She also joined another blogging platform, salon24.pl, established in 2006 by a group of mostly conservative publicists. On both of her blogs she published in-depth analysis of various political events, revealing inconsistencies in statements made by Polish politicians and mainstream journalist.

Kataryna's observations were widely discussed on new and traditional media platforms, rising questions and speculations about her 'real' identity. However, until May 2009 she managed to keep her legal name a secret. Things changed after she published a blog post on salon24.pl, in which she commented on media reports stating that the then Polish Minister of Justice, Andrzej Czuma, went to United States and met with a high rank official to discuss his personal debts (Stankiewicz, 2009). Although the minister denied the reports, Kataryna stated: 'I'm quoting this, because I'm strangely convinced that the Newsweek's information will soon be confirmed and we will see that the minister departed from the truth again' (Kataryna, 2009a).

This short and seemingly innocent statement provoked one of the most heated debates in the history of the Polish internet. After Kataryna's publication, Igor Janke, the owner of the blogging platform was contacted by the son of the Minister of Justice, who demanded that the entry must be removed (Janke, 2009). He also asked Janke to reveal the real name of Kataryna in order to file a law suit. Otherwise, he threatened to sue salon24.pl's administrators. Janke refused to obey and the conflict was publicised across all major media in Poland.

Initially, Kataryna was not willing to disclose herself, as she thought she was not confident that she would receive a fair trial:

> Unfortunately, I'm afraid that in Poland everything is possible and that I will quickly find out that as a citizen of the state of love I don't have the right to express my opinion about the minister's credibility and trust media reports that are critical of him. Unfortunately, I'm not as rich as the state treasury. I cannot afford paying minister thousands in compensation for the huge damage that I caused with my blog post... (Kataryna, 2009b)

was offered favourable amendments to a draft of the new Broadcasting Act in exchange for 17.5 million dollars. The scandal involved prominent Polish politicians and media personas.

Eventually she declared that she is willing to reveal her real name and make a lawsuit possible, however, only after receiving official evidence that the minister is really willing to sue her.

Then the case took an unexpected turn. Despite the initial, almost unambiguous refusal of traditional media outlets to reveal Kataryna's name, Dziennik, a conservative daily newspaper, published a story entitled 'We know who Kataryna is', in which the authors revealed the blogger's real-life identity. This article was published on 21st of May in 2009. While the authors did not explicitly mention Kataryna's name, they provided enough details for readers to figure it out. Among other things they mentioned her age, her place of birth, and the fact that she is the head of a Warsaw-based foundation promoting democracy and civil society. The journalists also quoted parts of the foundation's charter, which provided a direct link to the web-site and thus to the legal identity of Kataryna. She was identified as Katarzyna Sadł o, the president of the Foundation for Civic Society Development.

The already controversial case turned even more contentious when Kataryna publicised a personal text message which she had received from a journalist of Dziennik before the public revealing of her identity:

> Ms Kataryna, please consider our proposal seriously. We don't want to ruthlessly reveal your identity and help Czumas. We would prefer that you agree to this 'coming-out' on your terms, which would include us hiring you as our columnist. But please, understand that it is "frustrating to know but not be able to write about it". I know that your identity is known by Fakt [a Polish tabloid newspaper, KT, AW] and they won't treat you so well – please, do not think of this as blackmail. We really don't want to hurt you. (tan, 2009)

However, Kataryna and many other bloggers and commentators did perceive it as blackmail. After all, Fakt belongs to the same publishing company as Dziennik, Axel Springer.

In response to Kataryna's decision to make the text message public, Dziennik published a series of articles defending its decision to reveal Kataryna's identity and condemning online anonymity. In one of its commentaries Dziennik's editor-in-chief described anonymous Internet users as losers and cowards and asked them to "kiss his ass" (Krasowski, 2009). The series of Dziennik's articles provoked a number of responses from other mainstream media, as well as bloggers, politicians and various public figures. The debate escalated into a serious conflict around different visions of the public sphere, the role of bloggers and journalists, and the place of anonymity in a democratic society.

The minister has never filed any lawsuit against Kataryna. Instead, Kataryna decided to bring Dziennik to court for the infringement of her personal interests.

The first hearing took place in January 2010 and attracted much media attention. There was a widely shared expectation that the court's decision would clarify the status of anonymous online speech in the Polish public sphere. However, in October 2010 the case ended in an out-of-court settlement between Kataryna and Dziennik, the terms of which remained undisclosed.

While these events took place eight years ago, the issues discussed in the context of the 'Kataryna case' are equally relevant today. Perhaps they are even more relevant, as it becomes increasingly obvious that online anonymity is being pushed to the margins by a culture of openness, transparency, self-disclosure and self-promotion (Bollmer, 2012; Lovink, 2012). It is in this context that the debate deserves a more in-depth analysis.

Deanonymisation

The outing of Kataryna by Dziennik took place in a very specific cultural, political and social context. However, this is not an isolated case. There are numerous examples of what might be called 'media doxing' – instances in which mainstream media outlets published identifying data of previously anonymous internet users. These examples include the disclosure of a British blogger, Girl with a One-Track Mind, who was writing about her sex life in London. Her real identify was lifted by the Sunday Times. They also include the disclosure of NightJack, a blogging policeman from Lancashire, by The Times. In all these cases, journalists made their decisions on the premise that disclosure serves the public interest more than the internet users' anonymity.

To understand the real relevance of this case we need to look at the wider context within which anonymity has been attacked. The Kataryna case is part of a much broader trend towards the elimination of anonymity from online spaces and the promotion of the legal identity. Only recently, in the context of increasing internet surveillance and an exponential rise in micro-drones, Bauman (2011) importantly posed the question if this marks the 'end of anonymity'. While such a prediction might be slightly exaggerated, there can be no doubt that we are in the midst of a severe process of deanonymisation.

As van Zoonen (2013) observes, people's online identities are increasingly expected to be harmonised with their offline, 'real' ones. The culture of identity play and exploration, typical for the early years of the internet, has been substituted with the culture of self-promotion and transparency (Lovink, 2012). Similar tendencies are also described by Bollmer (2012: 2):

> The freedom to speak the 'true' self while remaining hidden is replaced with the belief that liberation comes from the 'complete' revelation of self, fully connecting to the totality of the network, defined by the limits of social technologies. The ability to speak truth and have that truth recognized politically depends on one's willingness to fully reveal one's fixed and totalized identity.

Commentators attribute the marginalization of online anonymity to various factors. Drawing on Lessig's (2006) framework we argue that anonymity on the internet is challenged by four forces, by (1) legal regulations (see Froomkin, 2015; 2003; Mansell and Steinmueller, 2013), by (2) commercial interests (see Campbell and Carlson, 2002; Edwards and Howells, 2003; Fuchs, 2013; Wallace, 2008; van Dijck, 2013), by (3) technological developments (see Bodle, 2013; Grosser, 2014), and finally by (4) social norms (see Baym, 2010; boyd, 2012).

The ability of internet users to remain anonymous on the internet is heavily influenced by the law. One of the most extreme examples comes from South Korea, where in years 2007-2011 the law forced every website with over 100,000 visitors per day to verify the identity of its users (Lee, 2011). More often, however, online anonymity is legally restricted in more indirect ways, such as via chokepoint regulations or data retention (Froomkin, 2015). Market opportunities and constraints are another force which limits anonymity. What some authors call 'radical transparency' (Bollmer, 2012; boyd, 2012; Dibbell, 2010) is a raison d'etre of most social networking sites, which achieve financial profit by 'tailoring advertisements to the consumption interests of the users' (Fuchs, 2013). The third force mentioned by Lessig is technology. This is about the design and code of web sites. Some of them safeguard anonymity (4chan and T.com), others limit it. The architecture of Facebook, for example, very much fosters a real name policy (Grosser, 2014). Finally, the fourth force with an impact on anonymity, are changing social norms. Two decades ago anonymity – often in the form of pseudonymity – was the norm. As Turkle observes, thinking about one's identity was dominated by the images of 'multiplicity, heterogeneity, flexibility and fragmentation' (1995: 178). With the rise of social media platforms social norms shifted to favour transparency, or what Lovink (2012: 38) calls a 'culture of self-disclosure'.

Although there is enough evidence to conclude that a process of deanonymisation is indeed on its way, it must also be noted that the future of anonymity is not yet determined. The internet is still a rather young technology and the result of a mix of 'competing layers of meaning and functions that combine different affordances of the medium for different purposes' (Feenberg, 2014: 117). The way online identities are constructed is not yet fixed. As Stryker suggests, we will continue to see a warfare, in which a 'primary battleground will be the identity space' (2012: 16).

One of the areas of this battleground, which has so far received little academic interest, is discourse. Studying the discourses around anonymity is crucial, since anonymity is characterised by what Feenberg (2014) calls 'interpretative flexibility'; it is filled with different meanings by various social, political, and commercial players. Taking the Kataryna case as an example we will now explore and identify some central discursive struggles which dominated the debate on the meaning of anonymity, its ethics and politics.

The social productivity of anonymity

Before we examine the outing of Kataryna more carefully, we need to explain our own position. We consider the process of deanonymisation to be problematic and indeed dangerous for the social fabric in digital capitalism. As academics we want to participate in the debate on anonymity and initiate a defence. In close alignment with the overall concern of this special issue we want to argue that anonymity is strongly needed for a healthy public sphere. Indeed, anonymity is socially productive. Let's be clear what this means. If something is socially productive it produces the social. We want to make a case that anonymity is a specific condition within the realm of the social that can create and does create communication and social interaction.

The first and most obvious point to make is that anonymity, as Ponesse (2013) insists, is not a subjective but a relational category. This is what distinguishes privacy from anonymity. Privacy refers to identity and subjectivity, while anonymity is always relational. Therefore, it needs to be considered in a broader social context. Ponesse develops a concept of anonymity which rests on the claim that anonymity is the result of a specific exercise of control, in which some information about a person is concealed from others.

> Understood in this way, anonymity is interpersonal and relative to particular networks or contexts of knowing (i.e., there is no anonymity simpliciter), and therefore should be understood derivatively in relation to the ways we standardly come to know other persons. (Ponesse, 2013: 343)

We want to go one step further however and demonstrate that anonymity is not just a social category, but a category that has the potential to create the social. We want to make three arguments why anonymity is socially productive. Firstly, it is a category that produces communication and interaction which otherwise might never have occurred. Anonymity as a condition opens up possibilities which otherwise might not be explored. Without the possibility for an anonymous blog there would not have been a 'Kataryna case', there would not have been a conflict between various parties, there would not have been debates between journalists

and bloggers about their respective roles or debates on the legitimacy of online anonymity. Anonymity is socially productive in that it increases communication and social interaction.

Secondly, it is socially productive on a deeper and more qualitative level. Online anonymity eliminates the context of conversations. In other words, it cuts out any information beyond that what is being said. It eliminates social categories such as age, gender, ethnicity or class. It flattens hierarchies and relationships of power and therefore enables conversations across race, age, gender, and class. This needs to be applauded as it enriches the public sphere. It can function as a social glue, as a bridge enabling dialogue between different parts of society. However, there is more to this. It is also about power and agency. Anonymity empowers. Those who criticise anonymously people in powerful positions do not have to fear repercussions such as being taken to court (Hogan, 2012). It is for this reason that boyd (2012) argues that real names' policies are an abuse of power. Anonymity is socially productive in that it flattens hierarchies and relationships of power.

Thirdly, anonymity works on an affective level. Dean (2010) develops a theory of social media that is significantly shaped by the notion of affect. For Dean blogs are affective networks and circuits of drive. It is this affective dimension of blogs, the anxieties as well as the enjoyments which blogs and their feedback loops produce that are so crucial for their understanding. We agree with this perspective but would add that anonymity can create a condition that makes these affective networks even more intensive. This affective intensity can be observed on both sides, on the side of the reader and on the side of the anonymous blogger. It produces an additional stimulation to the relationship between writer and reader. Anonymity is socially productive in that it intensifies the circuits of drive.

To summarise this, we want to argue that anonymity is socially productive in three ways. It enhances the social, in that it increases interaction and communication. Furthermore, it creates a platform that brings people together from all segments of a society, facilitates connections across class, age, gender, and ethnicity, and eliminates formal hierarchies. Last, but not least, it accelerates the debate and adds intensity to conflict in affective networks. As we will see all these points play a significant role in the following analysis of the debate on the outing of Kataryna.

Aims and method

The main aim in the empirical part of our article is to investigate the conflicts and power struggles that were activated in the debates on online anonymity in the

context of the 'Kataryna case'. As the issue of anonymity is in fact one of control and power (boyd, 2012), we want to show how this struggle is being articulated.

The sample of texts was compiled according to their relevance to the discussion of online anonymity and their engagement with the 'Kataryna case' in a way that balances the voices of traditional media and bloggers. Using purposive sampling (Krippendorff, 2004), we selected 25 stories which were published by three traditional newspapers with online editions: Gazeta Wyborcza (gazeta.pl, wyborcza.pl), Rzeczpospolita (rp.pl) and Dziennik (dziennik.pl) and two blogging platforms (salon24.pl and blox.pl). These 25 articles were published within 5 days, between 22nd and 26th May 2009, which was the most crucial period in the development of the 'Kataryna case'. We selected only those texts which explicitly discussed the issue of online anonymity. Due to the large number of blog posts in this period we have used an additional criterion for the posts we have selected. The 10 blog post we have chosen have attracted the highest number of comments.

We employ Fairclough's (1993; 2003) model to analyse this debate at the level of text, discursive practice and socio-cultural practice. Our analysis focuses mainly on the representations of social actors, events and relations. We have identified three conflicts that dominate the debate:

1. the conflict over the role of anonymity for a democratic public sphere;
2. the conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers;
3. the conflict over the democratisation process in Poland.

All of these conflicts make a strong case for the social productivity of online anonymity as outlined above.

The role of anonymity for a democratic public sphere

The outing of Kataryna by Dziennik triggered a heated dispute across Polish media, which went far beyond the issue of online anonymity itself. Our analysis of this dispute helps to identify dominant conflicts involved, some of which set journalists and bloggers up against each other, while others ran along different lines. It also shows that discourse surrounding online anonymity is influenced both by global changes of the media related to the popularisation of the internet, as well as the local social, cultural and political context.

In the Kataryna case the discourse on online anonymity can be regarded as part of a struggle for control over the production of discourse in society. Journalists and

bloggers expressed competing visions of the public sphere, which referred to distinctive rules of access, terms of participation, and conditions for being heard and respected.

For many traditional journalists who covered the Kataryna story one of the most important rules of participation in the public sphere is transparency. The articles in Dziennik and Gazeta Wyborcza in particular indicate that anonymous statements cannot be considered respected contributions to the public sphere, since it is impossible to argue with authors who refuse to disclose their real names. Moreover, anonymity is perceived as creating asymmetric power relations, putting an anonymous person in a privileged position and limiting her accountability.

> Kataryna is always hidden behind a pseudonym, which doesn't allow any serious polemic by the authors she attacks. Her entries shape internet users' opinions about journalism and particularly journalists, and she doesn't take any responsibility for it. (Czubkowska and Zieliński in dziennik.pl, 21.05.2009)

The argument that anonymity is at odds with accountability and responsibility is repeatedly brought up by journalists. Accountability, often presented as an indication of civil courage and freedom, is portrayed as a fundamental element of democratic deliberation. Only accountable individuals deserve to be heard:

> Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition of credibility and respect (...). (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Similar claims are made by American journalists (Reader, 2005; 2012) who also assigned a considerable value to authorship, claiming that it makes texts more credible. Accountability is therefore a key justification for authorship being a defining criterion of legitimate participation in the public sphere.

At the same time, Polish bloggers and some journalists, particularly those from Rzeczpospolita, contest the necessity of a by-line. Repeatedly they argue that content matters, not authorship:

> Dziennik authors assume that one argues with a surname. I thought you argue with an argument. That's why I don't mind that someone wants to remain anonymous as long as he behaves in a decent way. (Wildstein in rp.pl, 23.05.2009)

The calls for transparency and real names are seen as an attempt of powerful groups to retain their influential status built on the polarisation of Polish society, and the ease with which one can dismiss any critique by discrediting its authors, presenting them as agents of the oppositional group. Anonymity, however, distorts this picture. Kataryna's identity was disclosed because her anonymity had disrupted the traditional order of the public sphere, and as a result, the traditional

relations of power. In challenging the value of transparency of the author, bloggers and some journalists advocate for a debate that involves less dogmatism and more critical thinking.

The debate about characteristics of the public sphere has hierarchy and quality pitted against equality and inclusion. The analysis shows that journalists prefer a hierarchical public sphere, in which hierarchy guarantees quality of news and comments. In an interview published by the online edition of Gazeta Wyborcza, a journalist makes a telling statement: 'If everyone can write everything on the blog, then gossips and slander become equal to facts' (Jędrysik in wyborcza.pl, 26.05.2009).

The quote above reveals the journalist's concern that if everyone was allowed to contribute to the discussion, without pre-selection and established ways of verifying information (for example by professional journalists), the quality of the public discussion would drop and it will be difficult to identify valuable content. Such rhetoric, implicitly suggesting that public expression, or at least blogging, should be restricted, resonates well with Keen's appraisal of expertise in 'The cult of the amateur' (2008). In the dystopian reality depicted in the book, the lines between 'traditional audience and author, creator and consumer, expert and amateur' are blurring (2008: 2).

The importance of discourse quality was also visible in the way journalists described internet users' contribution to the public debate:

> Many times I read insults (because it is not possible to call it polemic) that anonymous internet users wrote under my own and my colleagues' texts. [...] This is a form of direct democracy, but because of anonymity it inevitably takes the shape of denunciations and insults. (Michalski in dziennik.pl, 22.05.2009)

The lack of quality in the argument is often supplemented by accusations of a so-called lack of civility or rationality. Since all these notions are highly subjective, these claims serve as a powerful tool for delegitimising and undermining the importance of diverse voices. In the Kataryna case journalists use this argument to challenge critical assessments of their work voiced by bloggers.

For bloggers, however, the hierarchical structure of the public sphere, with journalists serving as the only gate-keepers to controlling news and information is a relic of the past. Bloggers on salon24.pl for example perceive the public sphere as a pluralistic space where different views and opinions should be promoted and no voices should have a monopoly on the truth.

> The blogosphere is necessary to assure the pluralism of opinions in the public space. Only pluralism, and not a monopoly of one of the sides, allows getting closer to the

> truth and expressing the interests of various parties involved in a debate. (Kataryna in salon24.pl, 25.05.2009)

For bloggers, anonymity can be a guarantor of inclusion, which is depicted as more important than discourse quality. Three groups of authors are often mentioned as those who are in particular need of anonymity online: LGBTQ bloggers, watchdog bloggers, and women. In all these cases anonymity is perceived as a condition that makes the public sphere more inclusive and accessible to those who would otherwise not participate. Some bloggers are concerned that by disclosing Kataryna's identity, Dziennik sent out the message that everyone else can also be 'outed', consequently prompting self-censorship in the blogging community.

Journalists and bloggers also differ in their perceptions of the link between anonymity and freedom of speech. The dominant view among journalists is that the two have nothing in common. According to a Gazeta Wyborcza journalist anonymity constitutes an antithesis of democratic free speech, which requires transparency and courage:

> In a democracy, the anonymity of a participant in a public debate is not a value and has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It is a caricature of this freedom. Implying otherwise means brainwashing and spoiling the idea of democracy. (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Such a statement seems to support Reader's (2005) observation that professional journalists have a 'blind spot' preventing them from recognising the important role of anonymity in enhancing freedom of speech. While Reader does not offer an explanation of this phenomenon, describing it as 'knee-jerk biases against anonymous opinions' (2005:64), it seems reasonable to assume that for the majority of Polish journalists, anonymity is not part of their vision of a good public sphere. Their vision favours professional journalists, since in most cases they are protected by the media institutions that employ them.

In stark contrast many bloggers see a close link between anonymity and free speech, reflecting what Trytko (2012) describes as an 'instrumentalist' and 'essentialist' approach. Firstly, they view anonymity as a tool to ensure freedom of speech because it helps to limit political and societal pressure on the speaker and protects alternative voices from retaliation or from being exposed to social stigma. Secondly, an author's decision to withhold their identifying information is seen as an inherent part of protected speech. Kataryna for example insists that people should have a right to choose their form of participation in the online public sphere:

> Free people decide for themselves in what form they want to participate in the public debate. Some do it for the MP's allowance, some do it for the salary in the

> newspaper, and some do it for free wherever they want. (Kł opotowski in salon24.pl, 26.05.2009)

Overall, the debate surrounding the Kataryna case and online anonymity is in fact a struggle over the rules of access and participation in the public sphere. In this conflict journalists attempt to assume the role of the gatekeepers and 'symbolic elites' (van Dijk, 1989), who try to retain their traditional power over public discourse.

In situations when access to the public sphere has been democratised by the internet, journalists engage in what Foucault (1970) calls 'discursive policing' – they construct rules which need to be obeyed if one is to become a rightful member of the public sphere. Giving up on anonymity is clearly one of these rules.

Bloggers position themselves as representatives of the public and defend online anonymity as a means to create a more inclusive, equal and less hierarchical public sphere. By stressing the importance of content rather than authorship they effectively challenge the established authorities and divisions in Polish society.

Conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers

While arguing over the rules of legitimate participation in the public sphere both journalists and bloggers were in fact negotiating their own status within it. The debate about Kataryna's anonymity became a pretext for both sides to construct their identities and define their role in public debate. Our analysis of (self)representations of journalists and bloggers demonstrates that online anonymity is an important element in a struggle over rights, responsibilities and the status of both groups.

However, this struggle took place in a very specific context. During the last quarter of the 20th century, Polish journalists had to come to terms with two important and profound changes, one of them political and the other technological. Both of these transitions had a significant influence on their profession. When Poland's communist regime fell, journalists stood at the forefront of the democratic transition, setting the standards for public deliberation. They exerted pedagogical roles, leadership, and guardianship in their dealings with audiences, seeing the audience mostly as passive pupils.

For Polish journalists the political changes and the technological changes are not harmonious. The status of journalists as guardians of a new democratic Poland sits awkwardly with technological changes that enable many people to produce and disseminate news. Bloggers, citizen journalists and other internet users could

now, at least theoretically, get their voices heard without traditional media as intermediaries. Clashes were unavoidable when some bloggers and journalists started producing similar content and competing for similar audiences.

As Lowrey (2006: 478) observes, both groups started to 'claim some jurisdiction over the tasks of selecting events and issues for audience attention, commenting on these issues, and, to a lesser degree, gathering information for reports'. We focus our investigation on the (self)representations of journalists and bloggers by examining those expressions in the texts which define and describe the roles, qualities, values and resources of both groups (van Dijk, 1995).

Our analysis shows that journalists use the issue of anonymity to question the value of bloggers' participation in the public discourse and to clearly distinguish them from the traditional press corps. On the other hand, bloggers describe anonymity as a tool that gives them independence and protection. The conflict, which in its essence concerns the professional status of journalists and bloggers, has four main aspects.

Firstly, journalists claim that bloggers have the same rights and responsibilities as journalists, and they should therefore act in a similar way and give up on anonymity. According to some authors, publishing content without disclosing its author's identity is only acceptable in non-democratic countries. While some acknowledge that journalists are better protected from lawsuits (e.g., they have access to lawyers and media companies' financial resources, they have some protection guaranteed by the press law), the general message toward bloggers is this: If you want to be considered as journalists, if you want credibility and respect, you need to abandon anonymity and take full responsibility for your words.

Yet, most bloggers reject such an approach. They do not seek to have the status of journalists. As Kataryna states in one of her posts, they do not expect respect. Neither do they expect that blogs should be seen as credible. Instead they want to be left alone and to be able to separate their blogging activity from other areas of their lives. Anonymity is necessary for them to avoid what Marwick and boyd (2011) describe as 'collapse of context' – the situation in which internet users lose control over social contexts in which they act online.

A second way in which journalists use anonymity to discredit bloggers is by claiming that transparency and courage gives journalists a privileged position in the public sphere. They construct their self-image by frequently using words such as 'watchdogs' and 'heroes' in order to establish the differences between themselves and bloggers and to justify their dominant role in shaping public debate. They repeatedly point to anonymity in order to delegitimise bloggers'

contribution to the public sphere and to highlight the importance of traditional tenets of journalism, such as accountability, credibility, and authority. In one of the most controversial commentaries, written by Dziennik's editor-in-chief, Robert Krasowski, the author describes the status of journalists as follows:

> You say that we don't have the right to out Kataryna. Well, we do; we didn't do it[2] only because we didn't want to act like allies of the government. But if we want to, we can out anyone. We are journalists, and not teddy bears like you. We have the right to enter every corner of the public sphere. (Krasowski in dziennik.pl, 24.05.2009)

For Krasowski, the power to decide who can or cannot be anonymous ultimately lies in the hands of journalists. They are portrayed as powerful members of the public sphere, with the right to control other participants. While social media widen the number of news producers, those who make use of the new possibilities to be part of public discussions have become an object of journalistic scrutiny. The quoted extract also shows strategies of identification and exclusion which are frequently used by journalists to construct boundaries around their professional practices. By creating strong polarisations between journalists (us) and bloggers (them) journalists claim superiority and explicitly degrade the value of bloggers. The most extreme example of such superiority can be observed in the opening sentence of the Dziennik's editor-in-chief commentary mentioned above. He opens his piece with the following rather vulgar words: 'Kiss my ass.' This statement is not only a clear demonstration of power but also serves as a perfect example to highlight the affective intensity with respect to blogging.

As Lisowska-Magdziarz (2006) points out, the freedom to communicate directly and sometimes impolitely often depends on the social status. The use of offensive, rude language is strongly related to power struggles and might indicate that the speaker is aware of his privileged position. For bloggers, the attempts of journalists to emphasise their privileged status in the public sphere demonstrates that journalists are not willing to be criticised. In the blog post 'A tiny letter to Krasowski' the author hits back at the editor-in-chief and ridicules the small readership of Dziennik's blogging platform redakcja.pl.

> Because we few people on Janke's platform [Igor Janke, the founder of salon24.pl, KT, AW], have a few million visits per week. And we don't do it professionally. How many visits do blogs on redakcja.pl have? (galopujący major in salon24.pl, 24.05.2009)

2 Dziennik's staff consistently refuted accusations of doxing Kataryna, stating that her 'real name' was not published by the newspaper. However, by publishing the extract from the statute of the foundation she led provided a direct link to Kataryna's offline identity.

Bloggers believe they are part of a technological and social transformation which journalists refuse to acknowledge. This transformation challenges what Lowrey (2006: 478) calls the 'journalists' reign of sovereignty'. As a consequence, journalists turn to values such as transparency and accountability in order to distinguish themselves from the new participants in the public deliberation.

This leads to a third argument brought up by journalists, namely that the anonymity of bloggers leaves room for abuse. They argue that bloggers might represent interests that are contradictory to what they state in their texts.

Bloggers counter this argument by stating that it is important for them to separate their blogging activity from other areas of life. This does not mean, however, that they see anonymity as a tool to avoid responsibility. In fact, they consider themselves to be more accountable than journalists. As one of the bloggers explains:

> Unlike journalists in all those weeklies and dailies, we are being constantly assessed. Non-stop and in many places. Everyone can comment on our post, show its weaknesses and simply compromise it. (...) Journalists are not subjected to this kind of quality control. (anie in rp.pl, 26.05.2009)

Accountability as understood by bloggers stems from the inherently social and interactive nature of blogs. Since the validity of posted content can be easily verified by others, the identity of the author becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, they argue that anonymity might be even more dangerous if abused by journalists. In one of her posts Kataryna suggested that journalists have double standards when it comes to anonymity.

> Maybe then, in the name of total transparency of the public debate, we should prohibit using anonymous sources in journalistic articles, where the potential impact and possibilities of manipulation are much bigger compared to even the most popular blog. Criticising someone's anonymity, while at the same time using anonymous sources in every article, is slightly inconsistent. (Kataryna in salon24.pl, 24.05.2009)

Like other bloggers Kataryna argues that journalists use anonymity in a highly instrumental way. They would criticise it only when it serves their interests or threatens their privileged position.

Finally, some journalists make a fourth claim on anonymous bloggers. As the following quote of a Gazeta Wyborcza journalist shows, they acknowledge that anonymous bloggers do have a certain level of influence:

> [Kataryna, KT, AW] went far beyond the role of an anonymous commentator and got lost on the way between blogging and influencing politics (Węglarczyk in gazeta.pl, 22.05.2009).

While this journalist does not clearly explain the boundary between comments and influence, there is obviously some envy shining through. There is an acknowledgement that bloggers are a threat to journalists, that they are competitors.

All four arguments described above demonstrate that journalists are determined to keep their privileged position as opinion leaders. They use anonymity as an argument to fight their cause.

Conflicting visions of the democratisation process in Poland

The two conflicts described so far – one on the perception of the public sphere, and another on the status of journalists and bloggers – demonstrate significant differences in the way bloggers and journalists perceived the value of online anonymity. Although some journalists showed support for anonymity, and some bloggers opposed anonymous communication, the lines of conflict were mostly rather sharp.

Finally, our sampled texts refer to a third topic, to different opinions about the state of democracy in Poland and to conflicting assessments of the process of democratisation in Poland – something that Nijakowski (2008: 113-114) describes as 'the collective memory and debate about the past'. The analysis of the Kataryna case shows that in order to justify their respective positions on anonymity, both journalists and bloggers often refer to Polish history, in particular to the post-war period of communism.

In order to explain these influences, it is useful to draw on Polish sociologist Kowalski (2010), who identifies two dominant groups in the Polish public discourse. The transition optimists believe that democratisation in Poland was successful and that Polish citizens enjoy all important democratic rights, including unrestricted freedom of speech. In contrast, the transition pessimists, he argues, assume that the process of democratisation has mostly benefited the liberal elite and that Polish democracy is built on a murky cooperation between old communist elites, current political elites, and the mainstream media. The optimistic version of this transition process is often associated with Gazeta Wyborcza, while the pessimistic one is associated with more conservative media such as Rzeczpospolita and Dziennik.

A similar division exists with respect to the two blogging platforms. While bloggers on blox.pl, the blogging platform owned by Agora (the publisher of Gazeta Wyborcza), reflect a mostly positive attitude towards the state of Polish democracy, bloggers on salon24.pl are often quite sceptical.

It is interesting to note that attitudes towards the condition of Polish democracy strongly correlate with perspectives on online anonymity. The optimistic view is visible mostly in texts published in Gazeta Wyborcza and the related website gazeta.pl, as well as, occasionally, in blog posts on blox.pl. It is important to recall that Gazeta Wyborcza was founded in 1989 as an outcome of the Polish Round Table Agreement between the workers' Solidarity Movement and the communist government. The newspaper's founders took an active part in influencing the state of Polish democracy. Therefore, it has been promoting the optimistic view on the transition. Moreover, in May 2009 when the Kataryna case took place, the government was led by Platforma Obywatelska, the party which Gazeta Wyborcza had endorsed.

The optimistic discourse perceives Poland as a successful, prosperous country, characterised by a consolidated form of democracy and a satisfactory level of freedom for its citizens. This view leads some Gazeta Wyborcza journalists to conclude that in the Polish public sphere there is no place for anonymity, because democracy and freedom of speech requires accountability:

> Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition for credibility and respect (...). Civil society is a society of free individuals, therefore people who are not afraid to take responsibility for their words. (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Here journalists of the mainstream newspaper exclude those from the democratic discourse who choose to stay anonymous. The implied message here is that if someone is afraid of the consequences of speech, then he or she should not speak at all.

Another tendency in the optimistic discourse in relation to online anonymity is to compare the current situation in Poland to the times of the oppressive communist regime.

> Hiding behind pseudonyms brings to mind communist times, when slandering the government using guerrilla methods was in itself a courageous act. But today we have a free country, freedom of speech. This kind of activity is therefore an expression of plain cowardice. (Kurtnovotny in blox.pl, 23.05.2009)

The author implies that – in contrast to the communist period – citizens now have nothing to fear, so that there is no more an 'us' versus 'them' situation. Now the

state is us and there is no reason to be afraid of it anymore. People can openly express their views without fear of prosecution. As a Gazeta Wyborcza author stated, anonymity is only needed in non-democratic regimes, where freedom of speech is restricted. Moreover, some authors argue that the right to openly state one's views was one of the objectives in the fight against the communist regime. In the context of the optimistic discourse about online anonymity, concealing one's name is expressed as at odds with the achievements of the democratisation process in Poland.

The remaining two platforms, Rzeczpospolita and salon24.pl, represent significantly different positions on the condition of Polish democracy, and thus on online anonymity. The pessimistic discourse also appears sometimes in texts published by Dziennik, where journalists occasionally try to attenuate their harsh criticism of anonymous online users. The critical position towards the Polish political system is closely connected to the fact that all these media outlets were sympathetic to the conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), which at the time of the Kataryna case was in the opposition.

For conservative journalists and bloggers the 'us' versus 'them' division did not disappear in the post-communist era. Most of them believe that the country is ruled by the elite (dominating the political institutions, mainstream media and judiciary) that emerged at the early stages of the transformation. According to Kataryna, anonymity should be preserved in order to protect citizens from the media and politicians. She stated that the disclosure of her identity by Dziennik was clear evidence that Polish citizens do not enjoy freedom of speech.

> There is one thing I envy them – this undisturbed belief that we live in a normal country. A country where there is no problem with expressing unpopular opinions, because our politicians and media are so painfully ethical that nobody would even think of prosecuting others for their views. As if Dziennik hasn't just proved how much beating one can get only for their views. (Kłopotowski in salon24.pl, 26.05.2009)

However, in Kataryna's view, the need for anonymity is not limited to situations when expressing certain views might be problematic to the author. For her, one of the main benefits of Poland's democratic transformation is citizens' autonomy. Unlike supporters of the optimistic perspective, she argues that the freedom won by the communist opposition manifests itself in the right of citizens to decide about their form of participation in the public debate.

Overall, the disagreement between the optimists and the pessimists boils down to power relations in Polish society. In the context of the Kataryna case, anonymity is

seen as a weapon of the weak and powerless, while those in positions of power argue that anonymity is not needed since there is nothing to be afraid of.

Conclusion

The exposure of Kataryna has started a very intense debate on the legitimacy of online anonymity. It is perhaps not surprising that this debate has created sharp divisions between journalists and bloggers, with bloggers defending it and journalists mostly developing a more ambiguous position toward online anonymity. While most journalists agree that anonymous publishing should be protected in a democratic society, they are keen to point out the dangers that come with it and even defend the doxing of Kataryna.

Furthermore, our discourse analysis has produced more results. Firstly, it confirms that anonymity is usually not debated in an abstract zone. It is likely to be debated in very specific conditions, historic conditions, national conditions, and other context-dependent conditions. We have highlighted three themes of these debates. One referred to visions of a healthy public sphere and to the conditions for meaningful participation. The other debate concerned the role and status of both, journalists and bloggers. The third debate was about competing visions of Polish history, Polish identity and the democratic process in Poland since the fall of the Berlin wall.

Another important result refers to the concept of anonymity as a condition of communication and interaction that is socially productive. Much of the conflicts we have analysed are struggles for power and struggles for a legitimate position within the public sphere. Anonymity empowers those who chose to take part in public debates. It empowers them as they cannot personally be held accountable for their claims and opinions. Anonymous speech liberates those who take advantage of it. Those who are in positions of weakness can use anonymity with great effect. Those who are in positions of strength have different objectives. They will try to tame those who threaten their position. They will try to make anonymous speech illegitimate. While non-accountability comes with great dangers and has the potential to produce severe negative outcomes it does open up the social. It creates new possibilities. In a world where economic and political inequality is on the rise such an opening up of possibilities needs to be welcomed.

The conflicts we have analysed were heated and therefore meaningful for all participants. As such they have enriched the Polish public sphere and forced all sides involved to reflect on their respective identities and their place and role in

the public sphere. The Kataryna case exposes the power mechanisms behind anonymous and non-anonymous interactions.

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On anonymity in disasters: Socio-technical practices in emergency management

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abstract

Disasters are often thought of as exceptions to the norm, where it is ethical to break rules in order to maintain social order and security. Indeed, such exceptions are recognised in high-level international legal provisions such as the European Union's (EU) Data Protection Regulation, building the expectation that during disasters systems of data sharing and protecting, including anonymity, will have to balance the urgency of the situation, the effort to manage those regulations, and the risks being faced in order to provide the security these protections intend. This paper explores what this means for the practice of anonymity as it examines the tensions between the social and technical practices behind information sharing for disaster management. By examining anonymity as a practice both in relation to how information is sourced from a community being protected and to how information is shared between organisations doing the protecting, this paper opens up the black box of information sharing during disasters to begin to unpack how trust, community, liability, and protection are entangled. As disaster management exposes and juxtaposes social and organisational elements that make it work, we find that what anonymity means, and the security and protection anonymity offers, creates a mélange of hope of unprejudiced reception, protection from liabilities, opportunities for shared meaning, limitations to solidarity, reinforcement of power struggles and norms, and the ability to mask difference.

Introduction

During an interview about how he manages data quality when disaster information comes from a range of sources in a variety of formats, an experienced police chief from the UK offered up this statement:

> I'll be very reluctant on an anonymous call from someone who didn't want to tell you anything to jump straight to that action point. It comes back to developing your intelligence first. (Police Chief, UK in May 2015)

Expressed almost as an aside within the comments, he points to an important issue in the social productivity of anonymity: disaster intelligence is built around knowing who your information comes from; it is built around being able to link information to a person. Yet, in today's environment of digital information sharing for disaster response, anonymity is not just a privilege, it is a regulated right. Sharing disaster information through digital infrastructures puts into tension these social and regulatory practices and makes visible the complex ways in which anonymity produces power in society. As these information practices engender new interactions between groups sharing data, new ways of seeing informational needs, and new methods by which to get involved, the role of anonymity in these socio-technical relations becomes less straightforward and clear. Considering the increasing move toward solutions based in information technology for building new formal collaborations and forms of responder interactions during disasters, this power needs to be examined in greater depth.

Anonymity grants specific forms of power both to those providing the information and to those acting upon it. This is because the ability to be anonymous instigates specific social and technical ways of organising around and within a given emergency situation. Anonymity is often practised when there is fear of discrimination, namely when there is a fear that information from one source might get privileged over another (Nissenbaum, 1999). But the equity it provides is only as good as the consistency in practices and the consistency of the contexts in which it is made available and engaged with. Without such consistency, having no identifier at all can inspire more questions rather than fewer and lead to greater distrust (Fast, 2014). This can be a challenge when quality assurance comes primarily from socialisation practices, affecting not just how information is understood by a responder, but also affecting how information is classified and made accessible or notable as it moves onto digital sharing platforms.

In this paper, we explore practices of digital disaster information sharing to better understand the work done, both socially and ethically, by acts of anonymity. We start from a single premise: anonymity is neither a state nor something that can happen in isolation, but emerges along with specific forms of social interaction and organisation. Taking a perspective that spans the disciplines of mobilities studies, science and technology studies, and legal studies, we argue that these practices of anonymity in relation to socio-technically shared information are more than just key components in inter-organisational practices and approaches to disaster management. Practices of anonymity are also intimately intertwined in civil community building and maintaining practices, such as the ability to produce

shared meaning, to produce states of privilege or equality, and to produce spaces for negotiating difference.

In order to best examine the tensions that emerge around the social productivity of anonymity in disaster information sharing, we examine the design and uptake of new information sharing technologies and practices for disaster management, processes that directly influence how those engaging in disasters are organised. Our research has been carried out in a European Union (EU)-funded research project (SecInCoRe.eu) concerned with the collaborative design of technology to enable inter-organisational information sharing for disaster management. In this project we work with engineers and practitioners to experiment with the design of new forms of disaster information sharing that can support more ethically and socially reflexive organisational practices. Our research, conducted from 2014-2016, includes data from interviews with emergency practitioners from across Europe, ethnographic observations of disaster training exercises, and multi-day collaborative design workshops. The practitioners with whom we have worked come from a range of backgrounds, including fire and police officers, community resilience planners, information technology managers, departmental liaisons, and national security experts. The slices of disaster explored are equally as varied: discussions of lessons learnt around past disasters, observations of training and planning practices based on expectations, experimentations with technological prototypes exploring what might happen next. There is no single disaster, single agency, or single country that drives this work. Our aim with this work is to think through the issues that are often contested and situated in order to find ways to best support engineers and disaster practitioners as they design and use new technology to collaborate around disaster management. To do so requires building our empirical evidence in ways that reflect disaster information sharing practices, by engaging with amorphous and ever modifying communities.

We first explain the move in disaster management toward digital information sharing that requires new approaches to anonymity. We then expand upon key definitions of anonymity and disaster in order to set the stage on which we are working. We follow this with an exploration of disaster information and anonymity in two ways. First, we examine how information that is anonymously sourced gets dealt with by those in disaster management and how that affects not only the relationship with the information but with the communities at risk. Second, we examine information sharing between disaster agencies and how anonymity both binds and excludes these organisations as communities of response emerge. Each discussion opens up different elements within the black box of information gathering and sharing during disasters. Through them we explore how the socio-technical production of anonymity produces a mélange of hope of unprejudiced reception, protection from liabilities, opportunities for shared meaning,

limitations to solidarity, reinforcement of power struggles and norms, and the ability to mask difference. We end with a discussion on the implications of these intersections on the social productivity of anonymity.

The social and data practices of disaster management

Disaster management involves a complex, non-linear cycle of planning, mitigation, response, and recovery. Cross-border disaster management and information exchange requires a certain level of interoperability between different organisations, their practices, and their technologies as they work through these phases. However, within this framework, there are a large number of crisis management models, with specific models created to cover a range of hazards, including natural disaster, terrorism, chemical spill, and medical epidemic. Moreover, these models evolve on an almost daily basis. This constant change is in part because of the situated nature of disasters: every disaster is grounded in a specific history of social order and socio-technical cultures of practice. Moreover, because of their innately disruptive character, disasters bring into question previously accepted analytical categories and systems of classification (Klinenberg, 2002; Oliver-Smith, 2002). But this is also because there are wide variations in response agencies' service delivery, both between agencies and within a given agency. For example, when discussing the police's role in disasters throughout the UK, one practitioner put it, 'so whilst we provide the same service, we do it in so many different ways that actually there is a commonality but it makes a very, very vague commonality' (Police Officer, UK in March 2015).

While there are certain common criteria between agencies and different situations, it is often difficult to be sure of consistency in interpretive practices and the consistency of the contexts in which information is provided. There is no routine to rely upon fully, there is no standard process or procedure that fits all circumstances, and (perhaps most importantly of all) the situation at the commencement of any incident, no matter how big or small, is rarely clear and complete. In some cases, as explained by a Fire Chief involved with the Federation of the European Union Fire Officers Associations, reliability and usefulness of information is defined in advance by Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). In others, as explained by a senior Hazardous Area Response Team Liaison, UK, it is defined by the number of people who use a source. Or, as explained in interviews with officers in the Greek K9 bomb squads, while it is mandatory to check all information regardless of the reliability of the source, they often do so based on how the information is provided (e.g. speech pattern and tone of voice of the threatening phone call), the bombing target, and how long until the explosion. Interoperability between these practices cannot be assumed.

The one trend that appears in our interviews is that reliability and usefulness are based on trust, which is based on social networks: if you already know the person and they have been reliable in the past, then you trust the information that comes from them. Not knowing sources often leads to withholding initial trust. How these relationships are leveraged creates 'knowledge gaps'; gaps, as Frickel (2008) argues, that often lead to uneven spreads of risk and resources. This not only brings into question what it means to know a disaster, but it also reveals that how shared information is turned into knowledge and granted power is tightly bound to personal relations.

To try to address these variations in information sharing practices as they work across organisations and borders, disaster responders are increasingly engaging with sophisticated information systems to share information and enable inter-organisational collaboration (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2011). One range of these technologies includes cloud-based warehouses that compile data from a variety of globally scattered emergency response agencies that can be searched as needed for information regarding a type of disaster. They store everything from community phone calls providing specific, local details to general disaster plans and lessons learnt that enable one response agency to learn from the activities of another. As they gather and make data shareable, these technologies are intended to encourage among their users shared understandings, respect, and greater ability to work together. In other words, the idea is that by using these disaster information technologies, not only will disaster planners and responders be better prepared because they have a wider breadth of information available, they will also build stronger communities, both among disaster responders and the publics that they serve.

Because these technologies have the ability to track sources and users, they are increasingly developed with an on-going focus on privacy and anonymity preserving techniques; techniques that are partly mandated by EU law. What is required of these techniques stands at the intersection of law, ethics, and organisational practices; an intersection that offers no clear directions or delimitations.

Anonymity, disasters, and exceptions to the rules

At its most basic level, anonymity is achieved when those seeking information cannot link specific data back to any identifying features of an individual. Colloquially, anonymity is treated as a Boolean status: personal details are either linkable to you or they are not. For example, Pfitzmann and Kohntopp (2001) describe anonymity as the state of an individual to be identified within a set of

subjects. Legally, anonymity as a practice is intended to protect privacy. Privacy is similar to anonymity in that it keeps identifying features from being shared. But whereas for privacy those features exist somewhere in an information system but are just not made shareable, for anonymity they do not exist anywhere. Nevertheless, the main purpose of both concepts is to act as forms of personal protection. They both offer individuals safety when there is the potential that threats to the person could occur if they can be identified. Doing so provides a strong basis for a secure public civic society where individuals do not feel at risk and thus can participate as needed in public life. However, in practice, such definitions are neither easy to evaluate nor easy to codify. Claims to anonymity are always relational, as they are defined in relation to national security and the protection of the common good (Nelson, 2011).

Moreover, as more information is linked together, EU law has had to define a new category: pseudonymity. Pseudonymity, as a legal concept, acknowledges that though data might be anonymous in isolation (e.g personal identifiable features not linked to stored data), once this data is integrated and analysed with other data sets, patterns could emerge that make it possible to link back to the person in new ways. Recent EU Data Protection Regulation (EU Regulation 2016/679) has had to include this legal concept of pseudonymity, now defining anonymity as 'the processing of personal data in such a manner that the personal data can no longer be attributed to a specific data subject without the use of additional information' (Article 4 (5)). Anonymity can be lost if anonymous data is combined together and it is up to the responsible party controlling that data to determine when such risks might be necessary and accountable (EU Directive 95/46/EC). And combining data together is exactly what happens during disaster information sharing.

By engaging with practices of anonymity, individuals are implicitly articulating relationships between identity, personal responsibility, political community, vulnerability and social authority (Hansen and Nissembaum, 2009). Anonymity can relieve fear of persecution. The un-linkability of information to a person has the potential to provide a form of authority where socio-political power is otherwise lacking (North, 2003). For example, if a person providing information during a crisis could be identified by a hostile organisation, not only would the source be put at risk for prejudice and recrimination, but it would also likely mean they withhold information that could strengthen their community's safety and recovery (Burns and Shanley, 2013). How that work is done matters not only to individual safety but also to how communities interact and find value in each other's actions.

These complex interrelations between aim, definition, relativity, and value of anonymity as a practice are very visible in the difficulty the EU has in defining regulations around anonymity and related privacy issues. To determine what is a

reasonable attempt at providing anonymity, the law states, 'account should be taken of all objective factors, such as the costs of and the amount of time required for identification, taking into consideration the available technology at the time of the processing and technological developments' (EU Regulation 2016/679: Recital 26). What counts as these objective factors is situationally dependent: the amount of money and time needed to create and use algorithms to run a specific data set using a specific technology. Moreover, according to the EU Data Protection Regulation, it is lawful to process personal data – without consent – if it is necessary 'to protect the vital interests of the data subject or of another natural person' or 'for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller' (EU Regulation 2016/679: Article 6 (d and e)). If it would help someone else or for a greater good, then a person's anonymity can be legally compromised. In other words, whether something is considered legally acceptably anonymous is not about a specific, clearly defined de-linked state. It is about whether the practice of linking or delinking is worth the effort to the parties involved or of value to society.

Part of the difficulty of a clear and clean definition in this area is that legal mechanisms to protect humanitarians within international law, both customary and codified, derive from regulations concerning armed conflict, war, and criminal acts (Fast, 2014). This derivation builds into it an 'exceptional' approach to disaster management. One reason for this need is built into the causal nature of disasters: if disasters could be pre-defined in their entirety such that rules could be established, they would mostly be preventable. But, of course, they are not. While disasters emerge within the structures of society, they also occur because of what is made invisible within the norms of society (Davis, 1995; Hilgartner, 2007). Disasters are not exceptions to the norm; they are exceptions to expectations and understandings enabled by the norms.

As such, disasters justify making exceptions to the rules. They carry with them belief that efficiently achieving response goals, following the spirit of the regulations, and meeting social expectations are of greater value than the letter of the law (Zack, 2009). Similarly, legal exceptions include processing personal data without consent for 'humanitarian purposes, including for monitoring epidemics and their spread or in situations of humanitarian emergencies, in particular in situations of natural and man-made disasters' (EU Regulation 2016/679: Recital 46). Consequently, when faced with disaster, having the necessary information and technology that can temporarily allow exceptional data processing to make decisions about the situation can be more acceptable, and even more legally permissible, than the regulatory 'status' of the data used (Jasmontaite, 2016). The transgressions are not just excusable but necessary for social cohesion and resilience. But these decisions have the ability to shift the normative rules that

structure power relations, inclusion, and exclusion (Ignatieff, 2005; Sandin and Wester, 2009).

The complexity of what it means to practice anonymity demonstrates the tension between notions of security and considerations of human rights, especially when different countries adopt different stances, even within the EU (Scheppele, 2006), or when trying to synthesize emergency power and liberal democracy (Scheuerman, 2006). Ultimately, anonymity is bound to the situation of information searching; to the who, when, what, and medium of information sharing. Anonymity is grounded not just in the capacity for physical links but also practical and political concerns like resource expenditures necessary to make those links. As highlighted by Nissenbaum (1999), these tensions are inherent in the interaction between new technologies and anonymity: it is all a matter of degree and layering.

In the uncertainty and unpredictability brought by disasters, this situational value judgement is a point of contention for emergency responders, as they try to manage their responsibility towards their communities and determine what kind of personal data practices can best produce community resilience (Li and Goodchild, 2010). Is this produced through privacy or non-discrimination? How much needs to be known, or not known, about an individual to ensure non-discrimination? Disaster information managers have to address individual needs while also considering the larger social context. They have to support community building but also build figurative firewalls that provide security to those within their bounds. As the solutions to these problems change from one situation to the next, so, too, does the understanding of what anonymity is, what it provides, and what it protects. Exploring how anonymity is practised in engagements with disaster IT systems can help deepen the understanding of the intricate relationships between vulnerability, community, protection, and authority.

Building disaster management around anonymous sources

These many interoperable uncertainties faced by disaster responders in the EU have led to an EU-wide commonplace practice of providing a grade to information. This grade represents both the accuracy and the importance of the information coming in. Grading can help responders determine how urgent the situation is, what kind of corroboration is needed, how quickly an issue will disrupt the basic functions of a given society, and what kinds of actions to take. Even more, this type of determination can help responders know when they can and should make exceptions in how they engage with the data. If information is graded as highly urgent and as potentially impacting a large part of a society, then it is easier for

disaster responders to justify the need to work in the legally flexible framework of exceptions. How the practitioners define these grades is directly tied to the ability to identify their sources. However, if data is valued more when the source is known, what happens to urgent anonymous data?

Knowing who provided the information matters in relation to how quickly the information becomes valued. Such knowledge can increase the level of importance and urgency of the information provided (Bannon and Bødker, 1997). This is true for a Senior Liaison Officer for a UK Hazardous Area Response Team, who has undergone special training to gather and share information between agencies engaging in search and rescue or tactical medical operations during hazardous situations like toxic chemical leaks, collapsed buildings, or explosions, who stated: 'the more information you have from the key decision makers, the quicker you can resolve the incident and return to the new normality' (Hazardous Area Response Team Liaison, UK in April 2015). This is also true for a member of the UK ambulance service that responds by sending out paramedics to emergency medical calls throughout a region, who in answer to a question stated:

> Q: How do you know your data is reliable?
>
> A: Quality assure it? Generally where the data has come from. Have to get to know the people - because what may be a cardiac arrest for one person is a minor scratch to another.

If there is no history with or of the author of the information, then the information is likely to remain low on a list of things to deal with. While providing data anonymously can protect against a range of surveillance issues and support necessary risk-taking, it can also limit the production of shared-meaning. The integration of personal information with civil interactions is necessary in order to participate in a community (Nelson, 2011). This is partly because identity carries with it a history of engagements that form the foundation of social dealings (Fine, 2012).

But the problem is that not all information comes from these identifiable key persons. Sometimes it just comes from a local citizen or from a member of another agency who has never had any interaction with these services before. This data is very difficult to grade. A UK Police Chief, who during disasters deals with protection of life and property and preserving peace, stated that it is very difficult to provide grades because:

> People want to ring in anonymously, write in anonymously or e-mail anonymously as much as you can do. But this information comes in and if it's anonymous it is very difficult to follow up on, but you've got to keep it on file to think well it might be part of a bigger picture and then it does take time. I don't know what the answer

> is to that. People will either trust us or not, or trust other people or not. (Police Chief, UK in May 2015)

The police chief continued: 'You can keep people safe and anonymous, or you could feed the information in and that's how it's graded appropriately'. Anonymity could provide protection and security to vulnerable individuals by limiting who can access their identity or the situations in which it can be revealed (Puzar et al., 2008). But the assumption behind the latter is that it keeps the source and the disaster responder at low risk and low liability for their actions, as it follows proper protocol and supports formal decision-making. But this takes time, which could lead to larger community-based risks due to inaction on the information as it works its way through the grading protocols.

Information provided by anonymous sources goes into a data warehouse and waits, often unused, until there is more information to back up the concern or more information to provide context to help balance the lack of details about the source. The grade will change when multiple reports start to be connected together, such as when more than one anonymous persons report the same issue of concern or more than one information system is connected together that each contain a similar report. But this solution relies on some assumptions: all the information reaches the same place in a timely manner, such as the same warehouse; all the information is comparable with little effort in terms of time and money since otherwise the links that produce value will not be made; and that these acts of combining data will not produce situations of pseudonymity, in which anonymous individuals can be identified as a result of the interconnection of the various data points.

Even if personal data about the source is connected to the information within different agency databases, each agency has strict privacy rules that do not allow personal data sharing for the safety of the people they serve. If an issue is reported four different times, by four different anonymous reporters, to four different systems – taking full advantage of the different social organisations intended to support best social practices around risks and disasters – then the information will likely remain as invisible as if it had been provided anonymously unless there is a system put in place in advance. However this is difficult to fully map out in advance considering the unexpected nature of disasters. The situation gets even more complicated when the data has to cross borders, since as crisis and related personal data flows across national borders, it faces different data protection regulations as well as limitations on what and how that data can move across a new boundary, creating barriers in the sharing of critical information (Burns and Shanley, 2013). Anonymity here is less about de-linking data from person and is more relative to privilege for accessing data and resources for managing legal protocol.

The invisibility provided by acts of anonymity produces a social security when participating in political life (Nelson, 2011; Secor, 2004). The need for security is unavoidable when dealing with the management of cultural differences, especially contentious ones, like in cases where religion is involved. Being unidentifiable or untraceable provides safety for individuals and their related communities at times of political opposition or transgression. This can be important when claims of favouritism are floating about, as often is the case in disaster aid, or when one group is facing persecution because they have some connecting characteristic with those more directly involved in a disaster. Or in the case when there is a lack of trust in formal response, anonymity can enable sharing of information that does not follow the traditional and more formal lines of disaster management (Rizza et al., 2013; Starbird et al, 2015).

The answer to how the information is sourced, however, is vital to a responder's ability to do their job and mitigate risks. For instance, police in the UK have to manage their interactions with the public carefully, including data provided by members of the public, as their powers are only as strong as public consent. If the public does not trust or think that data is being handled properly or transparently, then that consent could be limited or even withdrawn. Anonymity becomes a tool directly related to trust: trust, or lack thereof, of the source in the safety being provided by the disaster responder; and trust, or lack thereof, of the responders in the validity of the source.

But, while anonymity can protect an individual from the feared harm that might come from identifying oneself and can make data interoperable between systems, it can also erase a category of need or the nuanced socio-cultural differences that could suggest a different pattern of disaster planning and response. As information is shared via IT systems, the necessary socio-technical practices of making information interoperable and comparable ends up abstracting individuals (as sources and within information) to match the bureaucratic needs in order to support interoperability in disaster management (Paganoni, 2012). Within such generalities that make interoperability possible, differences in definitions of need, aid, recovery, and support are often missed by the governmental disaster responses that have to manage many diverse communities at once (Henderson, 2011). Doing so walks a fine line between protection and obscurity, and masks differences that are integral to to the work of disaster responders who have to address diverse community needs, even as these practices and tools support a kind of sharing information that makes it possible for different responders to work together.

Being anonymous can lead to the invisibility of unique needs and differences becoming the norm. This norm, as expressed in our interviews, can be an

expectation that as a source an individual can, and thus should, be anonymous. It was also expressed as an expectation that anonymity anticipates discrimination, thus reinforcing that discrimination as the norm. As a result, without critical, situational engagement, anonymity can reproduce the difference and exclusion that required anonymity in the first place (Carlson, 2011). These practices have the potential to act as an exclusionary, instead of a protective, force for diversity.

In such cases, despite lowering the local risk to an individual, anonymity can put communities at risk because of how the action derives from the gaps left in place by the anonymity. In other words, anonymity erases the social relations that build trust, and thus more work has to happen before there is enough trust to know how to engage with the anonymously provided information, and, vice versa, more work has to happen before the sources providing the information have enough trust to not request anonymity. If the gap is too large, then the procedure is to hold, wait, and risk inaction.

Building communities of action around anonymised social and organisational relationships

Emergency responders use their daily contacts at work to develop relationships, internal and external to their organisations, that help them accomplish their goals. The people encountered on-the-job become confidants, fellow experts, trusted sources for off-the-record discussions to support the necessary information analysis:

> It's about trust, I suppose. By getting to know the people so you know what you need to do automatically, so they don't have to ask, so you just share for their benefit. (Senior Fire Officer, Ireland in April 2015)

These interactions make it possible for one practitioner who has information they know should not be shared to find creative ways to share what is vital about it without directly breaking the rules. For example, when a medical professional refers to a victim injured during the chaos of a disaster who is known to have a contagious blood disease – personal medical information that cannot be shared with other responders – the medical professional can say to their colleagues: 'I would use gloves with this individual' without directly breaking the privacy laws. Or, when speed matters, these people are already contacts that exist in one's personal mobile phone, making a call a quick and easily identifiable tap away instead of relying only on the more formal practice of putting the information into the digital information systems to be found though a slower formal procedure. When discussing why such blurry, semi-exceptional interactions were needed, many of those interviewed expressed similar statements as the one below:

> It might take a bit of time to get through the process in which time that individual who is drink driving may have had an accident and injured someone else. So you have to make a personal call sometimes and say that needs dealing with right now. (Police Chief, UK in May 2005)

But these information channels are not just about sharing data under-the-table for the sake of simplicity. These personal connections that make up these communication pathways support the responders as they find themselves in positions of making individual decisions about the data they encounter. In such situations, the authority to determine what data they should and should not see – and as importantly why – is not in the hands of the state or even their agencies, but in their individual hands because of the urgency of the situation.

The informal and personal connections provide not only a level of trust, but also a level of leeway because knowing with whom you are working removes much of the fear of liability of an error in information sharing. For example, when asked if this tendency to share with greater value on speed than procedure during disaster situations ever led to getting personal data he did not think he should have, one responder replied:

> Maybe at times, but you don't dwell on it, use the bit you want and keep going. It's not like you go 'oh I found something juicy here that I shouldn't know about'. (Senior Fire Officer, Ireland in April 2015)

Despite getting his hands on information that should have been anonymised, because he knew who he got it from and understood the context in which it was being shared – particularly the urgency of the sharing – the responder did his best to rebuild the anonymity in his informational gaze and was not concerned about liability.

The same flexibility and trust does not appear when dealing with information from a generic role in disaster management instead of the individual in that role; a colleague in another agency with whom one actor has a history will be trusted faster than just any police chief that does not have a face but is defined by their role. Typically, judgements about the legal leeway in data protection and protocol are grounded in situational details and urgency that do not make it into final incident reports. However, as data sharing is carried out in a technological environment that does not have the same situational grounding, fear of technological surveillance and related liabilities will often impede any sharing that is not cleanly on the side of data protection.

Designers are struggling to design disaster IT in a way that can collect data about a source that supports the most efficient and trusted information sharing practices, but in a way that does not turn organisational decisions into situations of

individual liability. A UK Senior Civil Contingencies Officer described it like this: if there are records of a specific firefighter making the ethically and legally challenging decision of letting one house burn in order to save ten others then suddenly that individual becomes liable for his actions. Instead, if the report goes into a data system as belonging to an agency or a role, anonymising the individual making the decision means that the liability goes back to the organisational level. However, doing so limits the ability to work in the framework of personal relations that form such a strong basis for disaster response work and weakens the community built as responders share and act upon information jointly.

Trust in the source of information is vital for full participation within a community (Allen, 2007). If a responder does not trust who they are receiving their data from, they will neither engage with the data nor act in solidarity with that actor's organisation. Consequently, setting the framework for trust is the basis for how requests are often made for information, especially information that might fall on blurred legal lines. As explained by an emergency legal expert from Germany who helps manage the laws around anonymity and data protection:

> We try to give reasons for all the data we want to have. We want to explain why we need this data. And we hope if we explain why we need this data we will get it...We have to discuss often the willingness of the persons to whom these data belong. (Legal Expert BBK, Germany in June 2015)

These engagements are based around providing the answers before the questions arise, to encourage the type of inclusion needed to build not just trust, but also a community of active, equal, participants. For instance, the emergency legal expert above hopes that the explanations can provide an equivalent to this personal history, both of the responders' own needs, but also of the individuals or situations about whom they are seeking data. Without such history, it is much harder to legitimise future interactions, or to act in solidarity. This need also signals a lack of openness; a fear and a sense of a need for protection, reinforcing those power structures that require anonymity (Secor, 2004).

Anonymity, here, acts to protect a specific form of participation in a specific set of power structures. As part of digitally shared information, anonymity formally limits liability, but still makes space for the face-to-face social connections that allow for information to be shared directly from person to person in ways that are not easily classified or categorised but still legally permissible. In doing so, practices of anonymity can create situations where not everyone has equal access to such practices (Garber, 2000), such as when new forms of response emerge, like crisis-mapping. Such cases require the inclusion of new actors in the response that do not have the same cultural or political histories with data sharing. This unequal access to practices of anonymity affects not just how individuals are

protected through data de-linking, but affect how a disaster becomes known and acted upon.

As a result, anonymity often becomes a tool of unintentional power, playing a role in determining who has the right to define what a disaster is and how a disaster is responded to. But doing so can close off opportunities for new forms of cooperation (Garber, 2000). Anonymity keeps relations between individuals and organisations as they were, reinforcing current power structures, emphasising divisions, and raising questions about who should be trusted.

Conclusion

Here is one of the fundamental challenges being faced in information sharing for disaster management. On the one hand, information is being digitally collated across systems in a way that is safe and secure and protects the data and the individuals represented by the data (as source or subject). This collation is being done via classification schemes to help make the data more visible and interoperable in order to continue to provide the authors of that data the right to be anonymous while also giving them a place in society. On the other hand, information is often dealt with through personal experience and informal pathways, from one person to another, in order to make sure a concern gets addressed. While this might mean less exception on a small scale (e.g. one responder picking up the phone for an off-the-record talk to help with sharing and risk analysis), it can also mean more exception on a wider scale in order to get past the limitations of the protocol, legal language, and technological codified information. As a result, anonymity produces community and connects to organisational power structures in two different, competing, ways that stand at the intersection of protection and discipline.

Anonymity is enacted to help support equal protection among those being served by the disaster responders. It is enacted as part of civil community practices that support shared meaning and equality, and opens up possibilities for negotiating difference and protection without prejudice or discrimination. It can level the playing field providing opportunities for all actors involved – responders and the affected individuals and communities – to find value in each other's actions. In the case of the former, anonymity can protect those who fear liability for decisions they make in the urgency of the moment, where being visible can keep actors from making risky, but potentially life-saving, decisions. In the case of the latter, both individual actors or entire communities that, prior to the disaster, were marginalised by socio-political relations, can use disasters as an opportunity to

work to gain a new voice in both the larger organisation of disaster response, and potentially society as a whole (Palen and Liu, 2007).

But, relying on anonymity as a solution can also hinder solidarity and limit openness to changes in disaster management practices. Disaster organisations are built upon networks that require history of engagements for best practices and a level of organisational trust. Speed of decisions and actions are connected to identity, while working around systems grounded in anonymity becomes a necessary means to bring the different organisations together. The added work that is necessary to balance the anonymously sourced information with information that comes from key, and trusted sources, can put the same communities seeking protection at risk. Making data interoperable between systems often requires generalisations that discipline actors and problems into specific understandings, masking cultural and political differences that are vital to disaster response. Anonymity becomes a tool of unintentional power, shaping who has the right to define not only how a disaster – and response - unfolds but how the disaster is understood to put people at risk in the first place.

These two layers of anonymity practices – simultaneously producing and hindering solidarity, community, and organisational change – intertwine in the information exchanges around disasters. They emerge from the socio-technical acts intended to support participation in the type of civil interactions and community building required by disaster. What should be codified in law and technology is not just the state of the data as personal data or de-linked data. The focus needs to be on the work anonymity does and its connection to the protection both of the rights of individuals *and* that of civil society. The focus should be on the role of anonymity in relation to the possibility of a shared meaning necessary for sensitivity to the multicultural and often tense political situations made visible by disasters. To understand how anonymity fits within these structures of disaster response, we need a better understanding of how anonymity can benefit and disadvantage individuals, communities, and publics in general. It needs to focus on how the official government response has to interface with ad-hoc community reactions, and how standard procedures have to relate to locally improvised solutions. There is also a need to evaluate how anonymity can support the maintenance of a cultural authority without costing another group its voice in order to encourage the development of a more nuanced understanding and acceptance of different community needs and more interoperable disaster IT.

Anonymity, as a concept, does not automatically engender inclusion or exclusion. Instead, data and privacy structures need to acknowledge the disaster specific social and technical forms of organising to see how new norms around protection and discipline might emerge. How anonymity works within social organisation

and technological structures needs to be considered in the design and use of IT for disasters so that communities in need of aid do not experience exclusion or fear. The ability to provide data anonymously can provide an opportunity for communities that have not had a strong voice to speak more freely and equally, and allow those in ethically challenging positions to make necessary and hard decisions for their community without facing personal liability. But doing so also lessens the value of the information provided and the ability to understand the nuanced differences that make up a given society. Without such considerations, instead of having their needs supported and protected by the possibility of anonymity, already marginalised communities can have those political relations further reinforced by these systems. In the end, the value and role of anonymity in the community of disaster response depends on the questions being asked and the situation of asking.

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What can self-organised group therapy teach us about anonymity?

Paula Helm

abstract

The article suggests a shift from an individualistic understanding of anonymity as a mechanism protecting singular data-subjects towards a broader understanding of anonymity as a mode of communication that is characterised by revealing information on the basis of withholding others. Such understanding allows studying anonymity as social practice. This not only means dealing with the question of what anonymity might do for individuals but also for groups and societies. I have developed this perspective in an ethnographic case study on the functions of anonymity in self-organised group therapy (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous in the US and Germany). In this case study I have shown how people apply anonymity not only as a tool serving to protect individuals from discrimination but also as a technique to create social equality among group members and to distribute ideas as common good with the intention of breaking through patterns of greed, possession and big-shotism. As a result of empirically studying functions of anonymity in the context of self-organised group therapy, a multi-dimensional anonymity-concept has been developed, differentiating three forms: Personal anonymity, social anonymity and collective anonymity. The concept is meant to suggest ideas for future research and to facilitate more differentiated discussions on the merits and dangers of anonymity in a digital age.

Introduction

In this paper, I focus on the particular context of self-organised addiction-therapy where anonymity plays more than just one important role and thus serves various functions – functions which are not only vital for therapy to work but sometimes even convey a culture-critical message against social distinction, hyper-individualism and big-shotism. These functions of anonymity are considered

valuable in the name of recovery and equality by members of self-organised support-groups against addiction. They also refer to the long-term objective of what in such groups is called 'sustainable recovery', leading from a 'self-centred attitude' which addicts have identified as the roots of their disease (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1935: 62) towards a 'social attitude' that is not only supposed to prevent individuals from relapsing but also to foster fruitful social action. Subsequently, I deal with a number of questions: What moves people in therapy to act anonymously? What would people in therapy lose, if what they once did under the condition of anonymity is no longer safe? What forms of anonymity can we differentiate and what functions do they perform? Lastly: when might practices of anonymity justify calling for political intervention and how could such interventions be legitimated?

In answering these questions, I begin with a general conceptualisation of anonymity: I propose a shift from a dominating individualistic perspective, focusing on anonymity as a device mainly serving the protection of the singular data-subject towards understanding it as a mode of communication enabling certain ways of social interaction. Understanding anonymity as an empowering mode of communication helps in broadening the perspective on how it can serve in socially sensitive contexts such as addiction therapy. This facilitates the empirical analysis of anonymity's potential in terms of the various functions it is said to serve. Accordingly, I studied mutual support groups [1] following the approach of Alcoholics Anonymous.[2] Here, sufferers of addiction and similar diseases meet to support each other in recovery. For their groups to exist, anonymity is vital in a variety of ways, which I will analyse in this article. To do so I will start with an introductory overview on my field of study, providing an insight into my methodology and briefly introduce the alleged functions to be discussed. This is followed by an extensive analysis of the different functions of anonymity observed in the course of my investigations. I proceed by reflecting on transformations of anonymity that have been described in light of the digitalisation of our communication practices. Having identified and described anonymity's various functions and transformations, I follow up by developing a concept of anonymity consisting of three different forms[3]. I conclude by discussing the need for protection for each of the three forms according to the different functions they serve in addiction-therapy.

1 For a more extensive discussion on the differences between the concept of 'self-help' and the concept of 'mutual support', see Helm (2016a: 17-20).

2 The most prominent of such groups are Narcotics, Gamblers, Overeaters, Families, Sex Addicts, Work Addicts and Debtors Anonymous.

3 For a more extensive description of this three-dimensional concept of anonymity see Helm (2016a).

Concepts of anonymity

Compared to privacy, conceptual approaches to anonymity are quite rare. It is still useful, therefore, to consider the word's etymological roots when undertaking a systematic assessment. The original Ancient Greek word ἀνώνυμος, an amalgamation of the two words *ano* and *nymos*, meaning 'not' and 'name', describes the condition of 'being nameless'. This was a state which people sought because it granted them the freedom to remain unreachable as committers of their actions. Yet today, in a world ruled by digital linkage and tracking, namelessness no longer achieves the objective of 'unreachability' (Nissenbaum, 1999: 142). Nowadays, it seems to make much more sense, therefore, not to define anonymity as namelessness but to open it up instead to a general translation as the condition of unreachability in order to describe what is at stake in the *digital age*.

In direct social interaction, unreachability can be achieved through masking, hiding, covering or concealing. However, digital contexts call for the introduction of more sophisticated techniques, an example which Latania Sweeny (2002) presents as *k-anonymity*, meaning that an individual becomes 'lost in the crowd'. As a means of establishing anonymity this can be operationalised digitally through programmes such as TOR, an open source software that defends users against surveillance (for instance, Kubieziel, 2010).

When thinking about anonymity as the condition of unreachability, this usually refers to the protection of single individuals as it links with identification, being defined as the act of 'connecting information to individuals' (Solove, 2006: 510) or as 'the association of data with a particular human being' (Clarke, 1994: 3). Consequently, anonymity as the condition of preventing identification is considered valuable. It protects 'people from bias based on their identities and enables people to vote, speak, and associate more freely by shielding them from danger of reprisal' (Solove, 2006: 513). This conception of anonymity as a protection mode encouraging people to speak out is strongly connected to sociological concepts of stigmatisation and discrimination which suggest that anonymity appeals mainly to socially marginalised or politically contested groups of people (Goffman, 1967).

The connection between anonymity and stigma associates the former with a certain social connotation that has implications for anonymity-politics. For instance, from a security point of view this connection can be said to work against protecting anonymity, tending to suggest that a person who chooses it most probably has something to hide. Anonymity is, therefore, notoriously linked with suspicion. From a personal rights perspective, the connection can also be laid out in favour of anonymity by presenting a metaphorical conceptualisation as an

important tool for the socially deprived. Solove, for instance, conceptualised anonymity as the opposite of identification. Understood as such, anonymity can serve to 'enhance the persuasiveness of one's ideas, for identification can shade reception of ideas with readers' biases and prejudices' (Solove, 2006: 514).

While certainly helpful and important, such definitions of anonymity can be understood as individualistic as they concern a form of anonymity that only refers to the identities of individuals, omitting important and valuable functions referring to group dimensions which I am going to elaborate upon on the basis of my empirical investigations in the main part of this article. Regarding the conceptualisation of anonymity, one finds few approaches pointing to its social embeddedness. Gary Marx (1999) notices in his overview on anonymity that, as a phenomenon, it needs to be conceptualised as fundamentally social. But while acknowledging the social embeddedness of anonymity, Marx still focuses on individuals who seek anonymity within social structures (*ibid.*). Katherine Wallace has further developed the concept of anonymity by taking its social embeddedness into consideration. She provides the following definition: 'Anonymity is a kind of relation between an anonymous person and others where the former is known only through a trait or traits which are not coordinatable with other traits such as to enable identification of a person as a whole' (Wallace, 1999: 23). In this constellation, at least one party is known to the other only for certain aspects of herself and her interlocutors are prevented from gaining access to others. This grants the anonymous person a form of control, which she can use for different purposes. While Wallace's thoughts on anonymity are very instructive in that they overcome reducing anonymity to namelessness, Wallace focus in the main part still lies on the anonymity of single persons.

Investigating anonymity not just in terms of single persons' identities, in an even more abstract manner one could state that it denotes a special mode of communication regarded as useful in granting privacy, which is widely understood as access control (Allan, 1988; Gavison, 1980; Moore, 1998). Framed as a specific, distinguishable mode of privacy, anonymity is further characterised by never being total but always being relational (Dumsday, 2009: 71) thereby distinguishing it from other forms of privacy such as isolation or intimacy. To give an example: an addict who is locking himself up in his apartment, drinking until delirious without talking about his condition to anyone could be described as private and isolated but not as anonymous. Yet, as soon as this addict goes online, starting to communicate about his drinking-problem in a chat room under a pseudonym, one would stop talking about the person's privacy in terms of isolation but would now speak of anonymity. From this we can see that anonymity is not only related to the act of withholding something but that it also refers to the act of revealing something and therefore needs to be understood as a certain mode of

communication, quite different from other forms of privacy that refer to shutting off, forgetting, or withdrawing.

In light of anonymity's communicative dimension, it is instructive not only to apply a negative approach from the perspective of what it hinders but also to frame it positively from the perspective of what it enables. This means conceptualising anonymity as a mode of communication that is characterised by revealing certain pieces of information on the basis of withholding others. When analysing practices and functions of anonymity from the perspective of such a positive conception, anonymity is seen to meet wider objectives than just protecting individuals from being reached. To show this, I will analyse its various applications within the context of support groups, within which anonymity has been cultivated, preserved and valued for over eighty years, and where it is thought to perform many functions beyond protecting the individual from being reached.

Entering the field: Anonymity in self-organised group therapy

To illustrate the multidimensional scope of anonymity, I turn to the different functions for which it can be applied and valued in actual social practice, taking the context of support groups for people suffering from addiction. As the most assertive approach to group therapy one can consider the approach developed by Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) during the 1930s and 40s in the US (Kurtz, 1991). Here, the idea was developed that processes of mutual identification could be based on and triggered by anonymous communication taking place within the anonymous support group setting.

Although the A.A. account of addiction therapy is non-professional and self-organised, it can be considered as semi-institutionalised, working across a decentralised structure that operates on collectively developed and anonymously published principles rather than by following the directives of a single leader. Today all mutual support groups carrying the family name *Anonymous* can be considered as offspring of A.A. While all offspring carry the same family name indicating their adherence with identical principles, different first names create plurality, recognising the complexity of addiction's various symptoms. When browsing the internet one can find up to 20 groups carrying names such as *Underearners Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous* or *Families Anonymous*, to name just a few. All those groups have received a copyright license from A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1962: 75-77), which allows them to print, use and become identified officially with what A.A.

calls the 'Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions', small texts coding the essentials of the support programme and its corresponding principles for group work.[4]

To receive the A.A. copyright licence a group must comply with certain communication rules, in line with different forms of anonymity, whose implications and conceptualisation I aim to clarify in the course of this article. Furthermore, support groups are of particular interest in terms of questions dealing with the scope of anonymity here being used as a therapeutic vehicle, supporting people who suffer from a disease characterised by inner dependency, isolation and self-denial. Given this characterisation, recovery implies development of a new attitude to life that brings about valued conditions such as autonomy, friendship and self-acceptance (Helm, 2016b). The correlation between anonymity and addiction-therapy even points to some further-reaching conceptual considerations regarding the interrelation between anonymity and the social environment, in which the therapeutic process is embedded. Bearing this consideration in mind, I proceed by analysing five different functions anonymity is said to serve in non-professional addiction therapy:

Anonymity as withdrawing option:

This function is supposed to grant group participants the chance to reconcile their otherwise momentous revelations as addicts by shielding them from future contact with group participants.

Anonymity as social leveller:

The second function, which can be observed in the context of self-organised addiction-therapy, refers to a certain kind of group dynamic that is held to be vital in and for support groups to function efficiently because it fosters mutual solidarity. This dynamic is created by collectively withholding distinctive information about status, age, education, employment, etc., thereby channelling people's focus on communicating about shared dimensions of emotional distress, suffering, recovery and hope.

Anonymity as public relations manager:

This function concerns protection of the groups' reputation. It is supposed to shield the groups from becoming spoilt and corrupted by attention and fame-seeking individuals as well as bad press stemming from these individuals going

4 See Catarina Frois (2009), who has conducted an ethnographic study not only on A.A. but on several groups following the so-called 'Twelve-step-approach' such as Narcotics Anonymous and Families Anonymous.

public in the name of the groups. In a sense, this is management of the groups' public relations sector. It is born out of the insight that even though confidentiality is vital for the groups to be attractive for their target community their enterprise still calls for some kind of publicity. Here anonymity provides a solution because it can serve as a communication-mode, enabling transmission of the groups' message to public media without acting against their internal interests.

Anonymity as attitude:

A fourth function of anonymity can be understood as resulting from the third. It refers to the social attitude of group participants practising and praising anonymity for the sake of preserving certain principles that teach participants the importance of self-sacrifice in the name of a greater whole. This 'lesson' often is connected to a more general change of lifestyle, resulting from exchanging what is held to be a self-centred attitude on life with an attitude considered to be more 'social'. It demands abstention from direct personal gratification for the sake of sustainability.

Anonymity as culture-critical message:

This function points to the cultural aspects of anonymity. When analysing anonymity as embedded in a certain culture dominated by individualistic norms and ideals, it can also be understood as a practised social alternative to communication modes following patterns of hero-worship, thereby carrying a political message.

To illustrate how these five functions of anonymity work within support groups, what they entail, how they are preserved, for what kind of sacrifices they ask and how they are culturally embedded, I will analyse the concepts and practices of support groups taking on an actor-centred perspective.[5]

5 By explicitly referring to my perspective as actor-centred (Thiersch, 2002), I am acknowledging that the same function of anonymity, which for addicts can be considered as vital, for instance from the perspective of law enforcement agencies, might rather appear as a bar to justice than as a key to freedom. Such cases apply when group participants use the secure context of anonymity and trust among their fellow sufferers as an opportunity to confess a capital crime, which they once committed in the throes of disease. From an actor's point of view anonymity here can be understood as an important tool of therapy, granting formerly afflicted people the possibility to seek redemption and leave behind a troubling past without having to fear legal consequences, this way granting them the possibility of starting new lives. From a law enforcement point of view, anonymity can be understood here as a barrier to crime solving and doing justice to the victim.

This I will do by drawing on four kinds of sources. Firstly, there is a wide range of information material on the groups and their participants, which the groups publish through their own publishing companies. This material provides an extensive insight into their programme and their structure, including descriptions of the therapeutic program as well as personal stories written by participants. Secondly, I draw on unpublished archive material, important in providing insight into discourses on the significance of anonymity that the groups purposely withhold. Although the political and culture-critical views expressed in certain papers represent a commonly supported understanding, groups are reticent to publish in order to preserve political neutrality. They consider this as vitally important in order to maintain focus on what they call their 'Primary Purpose', which is 'to carry their message (recovery through mutual support, A/N) to the addict who still suffers' (Archive Folder: The Principle of Primary Purpose, 1950-1970). The 'Principle of Primary Purpose' forbids the publishing of anything political under the group name. To take the culture-critical reflections of (recovering) addicts into account when doing research on the scope of anonymity, it was therefore necessary to include unpublished archive material in my sample as otherwise the analysis would be biased.[6]

A third source refers to the groups' actual practices, which I analysed by participant observation in various meetings organised by support groups in New York, Woodstock, Berlin and Passau. Finally, while the phenomenon of support groups forms a deeply fascinating subject for discussing not only the personal but also social and political functions of anonymity, there are of course other areas where those functions can be observed, to which I will also refer, pointing to the general scope of anonymity.

Functions of anonymity: The perspective of addicts in recovery

Anonymity as withdrawing option

As widely understood, anonymity plays a central role in sensitive therapy contexts to prevent discrimination against people who suffer from stigmatised diseases. Moreover, there is an emotional dimension to anonymity, which has to do with shame, guilt, fear and sometimes also denial, especially striking in the context of addiction. Anonymity is thought to ease those emotions by facilitating the

6 To gain access to the unpublished papers documenting A.A.-history and internal correspondences one needs to write an official request to the General Service Offices of A.A. in New York, stating one's motive and intention. If being allowed access, one further has to appear in person at the Offices, being handed out the respective archive folders to be looked at in situ.

expression of secret problems while keeping control of possible social consequences. This possibility of control granted by anonymity provides the option to never return but also to not be found. In order to better illustrate the function of anonymity as a withdrawing option I suggest comparing anonymity here with a crutch helping people to take the critical step towards asking for help by revealing their problem in front of others without needing to confront otherwise expected (negative) consequences.

By choosing the metaphor of the crutch as an illustration of this function of anonymity I aim to point not only at the helpfulness of this function but also towards its limitations as this first function of anonymity in self-organised addiction therapy is seen by group members only as a temporarily limited solution. This is because needing a crutch is still a form of dependency. It is not *yet* recovery. The same holds true for anonymity as a withdrawing option. As long as an addicted person needs a backup even when speaking in front of fellow addicts, she is considered still a long way from disengaging herself from her disease. This is because self-organised addiction therapy qua mutual support is based on the idea that the compulsive behaviour is just a symptom while the disease itself actually implies a deeply rooted (psychological) distress. This distress roots in running away from one's feelings and desires (especially those connected with intimacy). Therefore, mutual-support-based therapy starts with radical self-confrontation, through which participants seek to develop self-acceptance. A member of Narcotics Anonymous explains this as such:

> I have learned that the disease of addiction goes deeper than drug use. Some days, my head tells me to use, especially if I am hurting emotionally. Feelings like shame, guilt, loneliness, inadequacy, or fear are enough to start the whole mad cycle all over again. But today I have my own keys to my life, and one of the keys is the program and Fellowship of NA. My friends here are the main key, because they mirror my feelings and thoughts and through them I am learning how to live, to feel, and to accept me for being me. (Narcotics Anonymous, 1990: 3)

Given this understanding of addiction and its therapy, it becomes clear that depending on anonymity as an option to run away again, undoing the act of revelation, is seen as something that people should – at least on the long run – overcome for the sake of confrontation, commitment and self-acceptance.

Even though it should be considered only as a temporary aid, the withdrawing-option inherent in anonymity encourages people to try out the groups as they retrospectively report in their personal stories. The idea is that once a person has found her way inside, the atmosphere of mutual solidarity and acknowledgement will automatically initiate the therapeutic process. A participant describes this effect vividly:

> I saw and heard those beautiful words of self-acceptance that night. I had feelings come over me in my first meeting that I've never experienced before in my life. Someone had written a book about me without me even knowing it. Other people had the same problems as me, but I was too self-centred to see it. The mirror of other recovering addicts told me that night that I had a chance to be free. My friends at NA taught me that I could learn to love myself by supporting others stay clean. (Narcotics Anonymous, 1990: 6)

This sense of having found a community of like-minded individuals is considered as just the entering condition into a long-term therapeutic process that support groups are aiming at. The scenario of a community where people really help each other on the basis of nothing other than shared experience is meant to persuade especially newcomers to return and start engaging in mutual support. However, truly engaging in mutual support includes further measures such as undertaking committed relationships of mutual support with other participants (called sponsoring) and committing oneself to a particular meeting by helping to organise it.[7] Such actions usually require reachability at least to some extent since entertaining a committed sponsor-relationship with another participant or helping out in organisational affairs implies being accountable to others. In 1955 this understanding was clearly expressed at a conference dedicated to defining the role of anonymity in support groups:

> We do not hide our alcoholism in guilty secrecy out of fear and shame. That would actually strengthen even further the cruel stigma that unfortunately surrounds the victims of our illness. Passing on our experience, strength and hope to other alcoholics is too important to let any fear of discovery or stigma stand in our way. (...) Within A.A. itself we stop being ashamed of our illness and freely exchange our full names. We keep address books. Also in personal, private, face-to-face relationships with non-alcoholics we are not ashamed to say we are recovered or recovering alcoholics. This in no way violates our anonymity. When you tell facts about yourself, privately, it's not an anonymity break. (Archive Folder: Anonymity Breaches, Conference Minutes, 1955)

Surprisingly, despite such clear statements, even today the idea that anonymity is primarily granting a withdrawing-option is held by many newcomers to anonymous groups as well as in the wider public.

Anonymity as social leveller

In anonymous self-organised group therapies, the therapeutic process towards sobriety and recovery is commonly understood to be facilitated by the effects of mutual identification, support and self-reflection; it is in this regard that

7 The circulation of a call list for mutual support outside the meeting can be interpreted as such an expression, since it encourages support calls at any time instead of disappearing out of reach right after the meeting.

anonymity is held to really serve addiction therapy. Catharina Frois indicated this function in her ethnographic study on Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Families Anonymous in Lisbon. She described anonymity as not only being important in protecting individuals when starting therapy but also in serving as a 'social leveller among members' more generally (Frois, 2009: 158). Drawing on Erving Goffman's *The presentation of self in everyday life* (1996), she observed that anonymity is able to facilitate the elimination of exactly those 'symbols of social status' that in everyday life create distinctions preventing people from identifying with each other.

By doing so, anonymity is being applied by participants as a tool to foster a group dynamic that renders possible effective mutual support, creating the feeling of being amongst peers. Accordingly, anonymity is enacted in order to ensure non-discrimination not only outside the groups but also within, where equality is derived from a shared illness. This particular equality can be interpreted as making participants willing to accept the experiences of others as mirroring their own emotional condition. Thinking of my own related ethnographic findings, I fully agree with Frois' interpretation. For further examination of the actual practices needed for the social levelling function of anonymity to take effect, I will now describe one exemplary meeting routine, understanding it as a certain kind of ritual process called 'rite of passage' (van Gennep, 1904).

When interpreting what is happening in support groups against the background of postmodern ritual and performance theory (Fischer-Lichte, 2012; Fischer-Lichte and Wulf, 2001; Wulf et al., 2001) as a 'rite of passage', I imply that what is said and done is embedded in a broader (sub-) cultural context. Hence certain actions can be interpreted as symbols referring to important meanings and principles at stake in this context. Through the physical enactment of symbolical movements, performance theory further suggests that such meanings and principles can become incorporated.

Bearing this in mind, I observed different speech-acts and movements being performed in the context of non-professional support groups when studying their meetings. To do so, I usually declared my identity as a researcher before the beginning of each meeting, asking for permission to attend. Always being welcomed very warmly, I participated in the entrance and closing rituals, which involve the whole group, while remaining silent for the middle part of the meeting, which is dedicated to what participants call 'sharing'. This means that single members recount their disease experiences, the solutions they found while struggling with recovery and the emotions involved. They do this in turn for about five minutes each. Nobody ever interrupts or passes judgement.

The meetings are chaired by any participant who volunteers to do so. The chair's task is to guide the group through a written routine, starting with a short explanation of sharing-rules and a statement on anonymity. After that, the so-called Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions are featured with each person reading out loud one step and one tradition. The readings are followed by the so-called 'go-around', during which each member in turn gives a personal introduction. In broad terms, one can differentiate three types: newcomers usually offer first names only; others disclose their symptoms and more familiar participants actually identify strongly with their symptoms, stating self-consciously and proudly that they are, for instance, gamblers, sex addicts or narcotic users.

During the sharing in the middle of the meeting, it is usually the third type who dominates. These are the so-called 'Oldtimers' (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952: 133-145), who have been sober for some time, who have already passed the process of accepting their status as recovering addicts and who are aware of what that means for their life-style in general. The newcomers mostly listen and at best identify with what the 'Oldtimers' openly reveal about their often destructive past, their no longer repressed feelings and desires, their former tendency to escape from their feelings and their new ways of dealing with them by connecting with other people. While exposing sensitive details of their inner lives, there is no mention of social status, employment, education, etc. After the sharing section, which is more or less free-flowing, the meeting is brought to a close by another strict routine. Unlike the opening routine, when individuals speak in turn, now participants grab each other's hands, whilst reciting a statement of hope in unison, demonstrating the idea of defeating the disease together, to which alone they had found themselves exposed powerlessly.

Viewed as a whole, the meeting features all three stages typical for a rite of passage: an entrance stage, in which people leave behind their everyday identity, preparing them for entering the central stage of the ritual, called the 'liminal space'. This space can be described as a space which is set apart from ordinary daily structure, dedicated to granting participants the creative freedom to try out new ways of relating to each other (Turner, 1967). The closing stage serves to integrate the new experiences, thereby leading back to everyday life. In the communities that they studied, ethnologists such as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner observed ritual-processes following this structure (Turner 1969, 2000; van Gennep, 1904). Both researchers generally explain the existence of the phenomenon through its community-building effect. The same could be reasoned for the ritual action, taking place in support group meetings. Whilst the beginning of the meetings features anonymous individuals' introductions, the end sees a community having been formed that conveys a feeling of mutual solidarity, support and trust.

While one can observe striking parallels between the social levelling function of anonymity at stake in the rites of passage observed by van Gennep and Turner and those of support groups, there are also considerable differences. In the case studies by van Gennep and Turner, people have performed anonymity as a symbolic action, but were in fact at no time unreachable to each other since they actually lived together. An example is a form of initiation rite observed by Turner (1957) during his stay at a Ndembu Village. Here, before a person enters a new position that might grant him or her more power within the community and thus distinguishes him or her from other members, a ritual is performed, where everybody wears the same mask, making all look the same. In such cases, anonymity is meant to develop a symbolic power, creating a moment of social equality between ritual participants as it is meant to do within support groups' ritual process, too. However, in the latter case the option to withdraw after the meeting is still valid as well. Thus, it is possible to treat both functions of anonymity entirely separately and present vitally important insights from the therapeutic context, where both functions are valued very differently. While there is a continuous necessity for anonymity as a communicative regulator in the ritualised meeting-structure in order to develop its therapeutic effect, anonymity in the sense of providing an option to withdraw is of temporary value. Although it encourages intimidated people in particular to break through isolation, it should be overcome in the course of a therapeutic process working through mutual support, identification and commitment.

Anonymity as public relation manager

Understanding anonymity as a way of regulating and thereby enabling certain communication processes not only applies for the communication of people within support groups, but also for communication between such groups and the outside world. To illustrate this function of anonymity in more detail, I will now turn to letters, protocols, minutes and other documents, that chronicle the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. They can be inspected in the Central Archives of Alcoholics Anonymous in New York. Seen as a whole, those documents reflect a history of many trials and errors that eventually led to the establishment of public anonymity as the binding rule for all participants of support groups following the A.A. approach world-wide.

One particular case of failure is illustrative in this regard. It involves Addicts Anonymous, a group that was founded in New York City, 1950, at a time when A.A. had already established itself as a place to which helpless drinkers could turn. Addicts Anonymous was founded by Danny C., a man who fulfilled all the attributes associated with the personality of a 'charismatic leader' (Weber, 1972: 124, 140-142). His idea was to operationalise the compulsive pattern concept as

symptomatic of an underlying disease by founding a group open to all addicts, regardless of their particular symptom. The idea was ultimately successful. Addicts Anonymous grew to a number of hundred followers within just a few weeks. However, Addicts Anonymous had a weak spot in that it was associated with one single person. When that person, Danny C., relapsed, not only his personal preaching about sobriety became inconceivable but also his ideas as such (Boyd and Budnick, 2011).

The founders of A.A. followed the rise and fall of Addicts Anonymous with alarm, exchanging letters about how to deal with this issue themselves. They soon realised that they had to think about anonymity not only as a personal matter, but also as one concerning their continuing existence as a group. They came to the conclusion that they needed to set up a protection, generally preventing individual exposure from jeopardising the entire movement's reputation. The following letter exemplifies the tenor of correspondence at that time:

> Dear Earl, (...) I think that our principle of Anonymity refers to the general public. It can, if we take it seriously enough, guarantee the Alcoholics Anonymous movement sterling attributes forever. Great modesty and humility are needed by every A.A. for his own permanent recovery. If these virtues are such vital needs to the individual, so must they be for A.A. as a whole. I would say the Concept of Anonymity is most responsible for our growth as a fellowship and most vital to our continuity. (...) if you ask me, for the good of A.A. as a whole, we need to keep thinking about anonymity for a long time to come. (Archive Folder: Anonymity Breaches, Bill's letter to Earl, July 6, 1951)

To put this kind of thinking about A.A.'s future into practice, the A.A.-founders started differentiating between anonymity on the private and public levels, finally publishing the following statement, explaining this differentiation in one of their books, published under the group pseudonym 'Alcoholics Anonymous':

> Of course no A. A. need be anonymous to family, friends or neighbours. Disclosure on the private level is right and good and should be part of the recovery process. But 100% personal anonymity on the public level is just as vital to the life of A. A. as 100% sobriety is to the life of each personal member. Our collective anonymity is not a council of fear. It is a prudence of experience. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1957: 293)

Here the variety of anonymity in terms of scope and function becomes very clear. Anonymity on the private level affects only the identity of the individual wherefore its handling is up to each person. Anonymity on the public level (collective anonymity) refers to the identity of the groups in general and needs to be considered as a binding rule for each participant as it helps in realising the preservation of mutual support long term. From a practical perspective, collective anonymity can be preserved by prohibiting individual members from publishing

anything concerning their affiliation with the groups under their full name and instead using only the group pseudonym:

> The word ›anonymous‹ for us has an immense significance. It reminds us that we have renounced personal glorification in public. That our movement not only preaches but practices a true humility. [...] Our book is the product of thousands of hours of discussion. It truly represents a collective voice, heart and conscience and is therefore published anonymously. (Archive Folder: Correspondences 1939-1947, Grapevine 1946, S. 12-16)

Anonymous publication for such idealist reasons today is being practised by very few other enterprises such as *The Economist* (an English-language weekly newspaper edited in London). In 'about us' the newspaper explains its decision to remain nameless, using similar wording to A.A.:

> Many hands write The Economist, but it speaks with a collective voice. (...) anonymity keeps the editor not the master but the servant of something far greater than himself (...) it gives to the paper an astonishing momentum of thought and principle. (The Economist, 2016)

In terms of the so called 'copy-left license', a strategy that has been developed for preserving the non-proprietary beginnings of the internet, one can also observe striking parallels with how A.A. handles its collective achievements' distribution. The idea of the copy left license is that everybody may use and further develop what predecessors have achieved under one condition: they may never raise tenure on any of the further developments (Stallman, 2002). Similarly, anything developed by support groups will never be assigned to any individual but is understood as the result of collective work.

Anonymity as 'attitude'

Looking more closely at the implications of complying with anonymity on the public level for individual group participants, the decision on whether or not identities are to be revealed when communicating about support groups on the public level needs to be considered in terms of taking responsibility not only for one's own but also for a collective's future. This is because individual members are urged to respect anonymity, regardless of personal desires. Anonymity, therefore, sometimes calls for a sense of responsibility that goes beyond self-interest. Being interviewed about recovery through mutual support could possibly help recovering addicts to gain public respect, redemption or fame, helping participants to learn about abstention from temptation. Otherwise they will not be able to continue benefiting from a more sustainable help, a help that the solidarity of support groups claims to offer.

Taken to be necessary for certain group dynamics to work and for the respective communication principles to persist, anonymity in A.A. is being understood as a function not only serving people but also teaching them to adopt a new attitude, which the founders of A.A. have called the 'attitude of anonymity'. The idea of understanding anonymity as an 'attitude' has been born out of the personal insights of certain founding-members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Those insights are till today being adopted and replicated by their followers. In an interview, Stephen S.[8], who is a recovering alcoholic himself and who works at the General Service Offices of A.A. in New York, explains the idea of understanding anonymity as attitude in the following words, which in my view very well express in how far A.A.'s understanding of anonymity has over the years turned into an idealistically charged one, exercising a disciplinary and moral power on group participants:

> Can anonymity be compared with altruism? Yes, I think that comparison works. Anonymity serves as an antidote to a culture of self-centeredness because it forces people to develop an attitude that keeps them from thinking of their personal benefit in the first place. Recovery from addiction has to come along with developing an altruistic attitude to life. (Helm, 2016b: 338)

Anonymity as culture-critical message

The idea of staying anonymous as a collective responsibility is in tension with the ways through which public discourse is usually being managed and shaped in individualistic cultures, where personal prestige and personal achievements often play important roles. Another example from the history of Alcoholics Anonymous illustrates how collective anonymity and individualism can run into conflict. This example refers to Bill W. an A.A. co-founder. Against his own will, he had been heroified as the leader of the A.A.-movement. Being also publicly known as the man who had invented Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill was offered several honours, e.g. a doctorate of honour by Yale University, which he, as one of the most dedicated advocates of collective anonymity, steadfastly refused. The letters he exchanged express his difficulty to explain how serious he was with the idea of collective anonymity. This is what he wrote to the board of 'Who is Who America', refusing the honouring proposal to add him on the list:

> By virtue of my singular position in the A.A.-movement, I am actually a man of two personalities, a public and a private one. One belongs to me most of the time. But not all the time. Sometimes I am circumstanced so I must act as a symbol of our whole society regardless of my private desires or inclinations. As the public symbol of Alcoholics Anonymous, which our people have insisted in making me, I am strictly bound in my personal behavior by the traditions of our society.

8 For reasons, which are obvious, the name has been changed.

> Now as I guess you are aware one of our traditional cornerstones is this: A.A. does not publicize its leadership by name, picture or extensive personal description. This tradition strictly binding on me, enjoins us to place principles before personalities. Such is the scope and reach of our anonymity. To us it has immense significance; it is probably the greatest protection device against exploitation and big-shotism – things that made us sick in the first place. Now here am I, the special symbol and guardian of that tradition which I have done so much to uphold. Were you in my place, of course you would have to reply thanks deeply but I must decline. For me there is no other way. (Archive Folder: Anonymity Breaches, Feb 23, New York, 1951)

The response can be interpreted as displaying a total lack of understanding for what Bill had described as 'the scope and reach of our anonymity':

> The editors recognize the duality of your position and ask why the man, William Wilson, should not be sketched in Who is Who so that those who know this "other self", so to speak, and want to know more about him, can turn to Who is Who for the information they desire, while Bill, the symbol, remains anonymous? In other words, would you object to supplying the data – vital statistics – from which a sketch about Bill Wilson, investment bank, born in New York, ... etc. could be written, which sketch would contain no mention whatsoever of A.A.? (*ibid.*)

Following up on this, Bill smugly asked whether they really felt certain about including that man William Wilson in 'Who is who', since his achievements can be considered as less than limited:

> Before including me, please note that pre A.A. my career was anything but distinguished. War saved me from not graduating, following war I was a clerk, later a criminal investigator for a security company, studied at nights but never practiced, finally I became an investigator for a large speculative clique in the Wall Street boom of the 20s. Made money for a while, but drinking cut me down to right rise. Lost all my capital and plenty of other people's. Being a lone wolf by nature I never joined anything. I doubt who is who would publish such an ordinary and melancholy tale like this. (*ibid.*)

This and other incidents of a similar nature seem to illustrate the counter-cultural scope of anonymity to the A.A. founders. They gradually reached the understanding that collective anonymity might not only be important for their own preservation but that sticking to it can encompass also a political dimension as it carries an anti-individualistic message. For reasons of political neutrality this view on anonymity has never officially been published under the A.A.-name, but it has been expressed in dozens of unpublished letters stored in their archives. Here are just a few examples:

> A.A. is not just another form of Group-Therapy for Addiction, it is a practiced social alternative to the self-centered circular ethic that is addiction and which results from a lack of sense in a culture based on a concept of life which ideals are limited to striving just for the individuals benefit. (Archive Folder: Correspondences 1939-1947, Dick S., 1942)

> Our national custom of hero-worship, the transaction of great affairs by force of published personalities; these beloved characteristics of the United States cannot be for us A.A. (Archive Folder: Anonymity Breaches, March, 1951)

> With Anonymity, we renounce personal prestige for our recovery and work, and place the emphasis on our principles – the power that really heals us – not on our personal selves. (Archive Folder: Anonymity Breaches: September, 1954)

Today the culture-critical message inherent in practising anonymity is still valid within anonymous support groups and has extended into other realms. With ever more public discourse being framed through social networking sites and shaped by individuals themselves, a culture of fame and prestige seeking self-exposure is increasing. Yet it also provokes counter cultures. The hacker network Anonymous, can be seen as the most prominent example. Following Gabriella Coleman's extensive ethnography on this network, anonymity can be observed as serving various ends. Coleman convincingly argues that Anonymous not only practises anonymity for the sake of protecting the individual activist, but can also be understood as the enactment of an 'anti-celebrity ethic' which is supported by the bulk of people who are considered part of the network (Coleman, 2014: 17, 47-49).

Functions of anonymity in the digital context

As part of the most recent developments regarding anonymous support groups in the US and Europe, one can observe changes regarding the ways in which the regulation of anonymity is being approached. Those changes can be understood as a reaction to a general decrease of information privacy or even a 'privacy crisis' (Solove, 2008: 104) provoked by a constant increase of communication via digital technology. Such technology usually implies using commercial software that is based on a business model treating personal data as currency and where – consequently – treating personal data as confidential is no matter of concern (Rössler, 2015). Accordingly, everything said or done through digital media needs to be considered as being said on the public level, regardless of whether it has been posted on a blog, written in a direct chat, or communicated via mail. However, this is often not obvious to the ordinary user as many platforms provide the option of using a pseudonym, seemingly providing a withdrawing option that encourages people to discuss aspects of their life normally kept private. Many social websites use this encouraging function of anonymity, without ensuring long-term preservation. As such they present a threat to enterprises such as support groups, which depend on long-term preservation of anonymity.

Support groups are, therefore, developing information-sheets, making new participants aware that in regard to talking about support groups, the rule of anonymity also applies in the digital context:

> Anonymity is important to us not only off- but especially on-line, because it keeps us humble and right-sized. Therefore, nothing matters more to the future welfare of A.A. than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication (the Internet). (Archive Folder: Alcoholics Anonymous and the Invention of the Internet)

Those words appeal to a sense of responsibility that goes beyond personal protection. They refer to the long-term preservation of the groups. However, at the beginning of the therapeutic-process, participants might be overburdened with such an appeal. Drawing on a sense of responsibility that calls for a future-perspective might simply be too much for a person struggling to overcome fears and resistances about therapy in general.

This is why, apart from their appeals for collective anonymity, A.A. has also developed an 'Internet Guidelines Sheet' that can be considered as generally teaching what privacy scholars have called 'privacy literacy' (Trepte et al., 2015). They do this by warning all support group participants about the fact that apart from special, secured chat rooms and e-mails, everything they communicate digitally should not be considered as private:

> Social Web Sites are not private, as it is often believed by the general public. Policies vary about confidentiality, control over your profile, posting and much more. It is the responsibility of users to know what the websites allow others to do with their information. We often find that websites state that they are maintaining your anonymity, yet frequently perform the opposite. They will also explain how they may use information put on the site to profile each person for commercial, legal, or employment purposes, either by the site itself or by access to it from outside sources. Therefore one can consider Social Web Sites akin to walking through a large crowd of unknown people. This crowd seems to provide some sort of anonymity but that sort does not serve its purpose as it does not serve privacy. Walking through that crowd is like speaking privately to a friend who is earning his money by selling records of his conversations. In such a context, would you want to share your worst drunkalogues so that the whole world and not only those who can identify may be witness? (Archive Folder: Alcoholics Anonymous and the Invention of the Internet)

Whilst these warnings might be effective from an individual's perspective, they omit to say that anonymity remains important even if the individual loses interest; for the groups in general anonymity functions as a social lever and public relations manager.

Protecting and preserving anonymity for such far-reaching functions against the economic interests present in collecting and selling data, therefore, cannot be placed as a burden on the individual only, not least because it would place the burden on group participants to use secure technical systems only when communicating with each other. However, such systems are often relatively complex to use, acting as a barrier to communication (Gürses, 2010). Requiring

use of only secure systems would, therefore, soon run into conflict with the idea of providing a low threshold, for people to become easily engaged in mutual support-relationships.

In light of these considerations the preservation of anonymity's therapeutic and regulating functions seems to be threatened. The ways in which this problem is being addressed at so-called A.A. General Service Conferences (GSC) devoted to taking general decisions affecting anonymous support groups worldwide show that this has also become obvious for many support group-participants (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2013). However, despite having long observed the political dimensions at stake with collective anonymity, support groups, bound by their principle of primary purpose, so far have chosen to stay publically silent in this regard.

Three forms of anonymity

What studying support groups can teach us about anonymity is that anonymity exists in different forms. They evolve from different contexts and can be deployed to achieve different ends ranging from protection over equality up to distributing culture-critical messages. When looking at the context of addiction therapy alone, already five different functions have been identified. As a result of studying these five functions, I now suggest differentiating between three forms of anonymity, not only to establish an order for future research, but also to provide a framework for discussing the question when and in how far certain social practices of anonymity might merit political protection in the name of democratic values (freedom and equality).

Personal Anonymity: Serves to protect individuals. It enables the act of sharing sensitive information and/or undertaking risky endeavors as it provides the actor with control over the consequences that might follow.

Social Anonymity: Serves to create social equality among members of a group/participants of a program. It enables developing a common attitude of mutual identification, solidarity and/or support albeit social differences between group members.

Collective Anonymity: Serves to establish and distribute an idea/program as common good. It enables breaking through patterns of individual possession, greed and big-shotism, conceptualising ideas, practices and programs as common rather than as personalised achievements.

Conclusion

Support groups make us aware of the fact that there is an important and basic value in personal anonymity for many people – it grants people who feel anxious about discrimination the freedom to ask for help without being paralysed by fear.

Social anonymity is not only important for individual participants to find the courage to enter support groups but is considered as vital for self-organised group therapy to work at all. This is because it is understood to be functioning as a social leveller, thus facilitating identification and confrontation, two most basic mechanisms of therapy. When discussing possible forms of protecting anonymity in digital times it is this form of anonymity that we should not lose sight of. I would consider it very valuable and worth protecting as it enables people to create spaces of social equality.

Collective anonymity is considered most important for the continuous persistence of the concept of anonymous support groups and their global network within the A.A.-community itself. This is because collective anonymity is seen as shielding the intentionally very loosely organised network from becoming internally corrupted by hierarchies and power-structures. When reflecting collective anonymity in light of other phenomena such as the hacker-collective 'Anonymous', who – following Coleman (2014) – practice collective anonymity as an 'anti-celebrity ethic', parallel stances in other cultural fields become apparent. Collective anonymity can be considered not only as valuable in that it facilitates the survival of support groups but moreover in that it transports a wider message, reminding people of the value of being part of a greater whole instead of circling just around one's own benefits.

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Archaeology of no names? The social productivity of anonymity in the archaeological information process

Isto Huvila

abstract

The portrait gallery of archaeology presents a conspicuous mix of discoveries of the great characters of the past and an everyday labour of faceless individuals of the past and present in the service of 'archaeology' and 'archaeological knowledge'. The aim of this text is to discuss the premises and conditions of why and how the anonymisation happens in the archaeological information process and the forms of social productivity (or consequences) of the anonymous moves. Anonymity becomes a boundary object that is authored in the course of the switchings from netdom to another to emerge as a particular type of social relation and a constituent of a social imaginary of *being archaeological*.

Introduction

The portrait gallery of archaeology presents a conspicuous mix of the discoveries of the great characters of the past and an everyday labour of faceless individuals of the past and present. As Fagan notes in an article published in *History Today*, most archaeologists are working 'in quiet anonymity, far from the blaring headlines' (Fagan, 2007: 14) even if public relations officers would make valiant efforts to promote their work and even though the popular image of archaeology is that of the long gone romantic figures discovering the magnificent remains of lost civilisations. Even if archaeology shifted from being the domain of solitary luminaries to being an effort of a college of experts (Bahn, 1996) and later on, increasingly a mixture of expert and community effort (Marshall, 2002), the

question of having or not having a name and an identity still has implications for how archaeological information is used and produced (Huvila, 2006, 2014a).

The aim of this text is to present some tentative ruminations on the premises and conditions of why and how this anonymisation happens in the archaeological information process and the forms of social productivity (or consequences) of the anonymous moves. Anonymity, in this particular context, means that archaeological information is archaeological, being of archaeology rather than interpretations presented by specific individuals. The context of this discussion is to be found in (North) European and Anglo-American 'archaeology', archaeological information processes and archaeological knowledge production that refer to an assemblage of archaeological practices in society, how archaeological information comes into being and how archaeological knowledge is produced by a wide variety of actors in society. The current framing of the global issue of naming is obviously a simplification that simultaneously covers only a part and fails to embrace the entire spectrum of archaeologies from commercial to academic and community contexts and the international nuances that influence its ramifications (cf. e.g. Demoule, 2012; Schlanger and Aitchison, 2010; Shepherd, 2015). The theoretical underpinnings of this study borrow from contemporary theorising on anonymity, the notion of boundary objects of Susan Star and James Griesemer (1989), systems thinking of Harrison White (2008) and the theory of writing of Jack Goody (1986). It argues that the 'archaeologicality' and in the essence, the existence of archaeology as a social practice is constituted by anonymity and its (social) productivity.

Anonymity and its consequences

Even if many actors remain unattributed in archaeological information process as a whole, the type of anonymity practices related to the scope of this article are characterisable through a social rather than an onomastic lens of understanding anonymity. In this perspective, rather than referring to a binary state of namelessness (e.g. Highmore, 2007), anonymity is a social (cf. Nissenbaum, 1999), or as Scott and Orlikowski (2014) underline, a sociomaterial relation. Leaning on Barad's (2007) sociomateriality they see anonymity as 'an ongoing accomplishment that is enacted in different ways in specific material-discursive practices at particular times and places' (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014: 880). Anonymity can be a norm (e.g. Griffin, 1999) or it can be engaged in the forming of a dissident form of engagement (Drake, 2011).

As the editors of this special issue note, there is conspicuously little empirical research on anonymity and its consequences. Perhaps, in some contexts,

anonymity is taken by its face value to the extent that it is left unproblematised. In others, like in job printing, public administration (Gitelman, 2014), or archaeology, it has become institutionalised and thereby an ubiquitous part of the infrastructure (Star and Ruhleder, 1996) so that it becomes difficult to recognise as anonymity. It becomes an inherent part of the practices and things as in case of the relative anonymity of documentary art (cf. Highmore, 2007). At the same time, because virtually everything including 'raw data' (as Carusi (2008) notes) is a representation, even the most apparent forms of anonymity are not absolute. Therefore, it is not necessarily surprising that anonymity is often debated when there is too much anonymity or that it is compromised or there is such a risk, for instance, because of technological and/or societal changes (Nissenbaum, 1999). For instance, Hays et al. (1997) note that the *lack* of anonymity makes it difficult for rural medical doctors not to be at work. In scholarship, the discussion on anonymity has often heated when itself, its significance or utility has been put under debate. This has happened also in the context of archaeology (e.g. Hammond, 1984; Ramundo, 2012) when anonymity has been perceived as a hindrance for a constructive dialogue or a guise for providing negative feedback on the basis of individuals, not their proposals.

As in the discussion of anonymity itself as a binary relation (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014), the characterisations of its consequences have tended to be rather categorical. Marx (1999) has compiled diverse benefits of full and partial anonymity and identifiability and notes that there are likely costs and gains in both. He names fifteen different factors including the possibilities to facilitate information flow, to encourage attention to the content of the message (rather than the messenger), to encourage reporting, information seeking, and obtaining self-help, to encourage action that might involve illegality, to individuals engaging in socially useful activities (e.g. donors), to protect major economic interests, to protect individuals and their persons, to facilitate judgments based on specific criteria (rather than a person), to protect reputation and possessions, to avoid persecution, and to encourage experimentation and risk-taking.

In spite of the general lack of empirical research on anonymity, there are examples of how anonymity and its implications have been discussed in different contexts. Many of the observations are parallel to the examples discussed by Marx (1999). For instance, both Garvey (2006) and Highmore (2007) exemplify how both anonymous and pseudonymous publications can be used to draw attention from their authors to their contents (either the message, or in case of Highmore, what lies behind the expressive purposes of the message) and contextualisation from the author to the genre. In Anglo-American newspaper publishing, impersonal voice and anonymity of journalists have been the norm as it was considered to give the stories a more authoritative voice (Reich, 2010). Today, when almost all authors

are identifiable (major exception being The Economist), anonymity may have an opposite impact (*ibid*.).

Lidsky and Cotter (2006) investigated the balance between the benefits and disadvantages of anonymous speech in the US legal setting. The perspective of the social productivity of anonymity has been earlier discussed briefly by Baumeister-Frenzel and collegaues (2010). They note that it is common to see anonymity as dangerous and anomalous whereas the productive potential of anonymity as a social form has been discussed very little. Instead of merely hindering reciprocity, anonymity enacts a new constellation of social imagination and practices related to the thinkable anonymous encounters of the anonymous egg (in the study of Konrad, 2005) and sperm donors (Baumeister-Frenzel et al., 2010) and their equally anonymous biological siblings. Terrall's (2003) discussion of anonymous scholarly publishing in 18th century France is another example of how anonymity allows authors to 'be absolutely nobody and to live absolutely nowhere; [..] [to be] everything and nothing; every sex and no sex' and gives readers a possibility for multiple readings of the texts (Terrall 2003: 108 citing Robert Chambers). Compared with anonymity of donations, the (in practice often relative and temporary) anonymity of authors gives them and their works a new life in the minds of the readers.

Even if the interest in anonymity and its consequences has been rather sporadic, the research undertaken so far demonstrates the plurality of social relations anonymity can enact. The plurality of its implications and premises makes the study of anonymity a truly interdisciplinary challenge (Brazier et al., 2004) whether anonymity is perceived as a norm or a topic of empirical interest. In this text, like in the studies relating to knowledge and information processes in general, anonymity forms a useful lens because, as Scott and Orlikowski note, 'it is a deeply relational concept that is constitutive of the production and use of knowledge in organizational phenomena' (2014: 877). Here the specific interest in anonymity stems from a strive to make sense of how 'archaeological' information comes into being and the anonymity practices embedded in the process.

Anonymity and archaeological knowledge production

Before engaging in an in-depth discussion of the anonymity practices embedded in archaeological information processes, it is fair to point out that the predominant form of anonymity in the continuum of archaeological information relates to the namelessness of the subjects of archaeological research. Only in rare cases, even when archaeologists are working on very recent remains of human activity, is it possible to connect a material object to a named individual. These cases tend to be

highly exceptional and related to recent past or extraordinary discoveries and well-known individuals like Richard III of England (e.g. Kennedy and Foxhall, 2015) or pharaoh Tutankhamen (Carter and Mace, 1923). As Fagan (2007) notes, the strength of archaeology is to trace the life of the members of past societies like slaves, artisans and labourers, who remain anonymous to us and who seldom have found their way into the written or visual accounts of the past. This form of anonymity does not mean that archaeology would not be interested in agency, personhood and individuality. Quite the contrary, the notions can be useful in understanding the dynamics of past societies (e.g. Fowler, 2004; Knapp and Van Dommelen, 2008) even if, in practice, archaeology would only rarely able to study individual human beings known by their name.

While anonymity of past human beings may be considered as evident and unavoidable (even if in some cases it has been escalated by e.g. social inequalities, Wilkie, 2004), it is perhaps less obvious to non-archaeologists that investigators of our ancestors have a tendency to remain faceless and nameless, too. In the course of the archaeological information process, independent of the type or context of archaeological work (commercial, academic, public) and even more so in the societal contexts within which archaeology is practised, they mostly remain unidentified. Television documentaries, tourism and popular culture have contributed to the emergence of a public awareness and an image of 'archaeology' (Holtorf, 2007; Kehoe, 2007). The crux of this image is that it is not a very accurate representation of the actual work of archaeologists and it does not necessarily mean that archaeologists will be named or taken into account in the context of the societal processes that underpin the major part of archaeological work. In contrast, the (non-)anonymity of archaeologists is determined to a larger extent by policy and regulations. For instance, in the UK, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Flatman and Perring, 2013) positioned archaeology as a part of 'sustainable development' that together with local administration cuts has prompted urges to advocate for the visibility of professional archaeologists (e.g. Hinton, 2013). Instead of steering a 'heritage ship', archaeologists have 'boarded a much bigger vessel, occupying a single cabin somewhere below the deck' (Lennox, 2013: 31).

It is therefore possible to discern two faces of anonymity. One has already been documented and debated in the archaeological literature (e.g. Bradley, 2003; Hodder, 2000; Lucas, 2001; Tilley, 1989) and relates to the *primacy of field directors* (or in the case of large projects, the overall project directors, and in commercial archaeology, increasingly the operator or even land developer) as authors of their projects and their results. At least on an implicit level, the field directors and in some cases their superiors or employers are still not only seen as the owners of *their* data, but at the same time they are the principal, if not only, person associated

with *their* project. The personal attribution functions not only as a label, but also as a token of general trust concerning the reliability of observations and conclusions. It further serves as an indication of the use of certain methods and approaches, and as a pointer to a person to use as a source of further information. This articulation of a single authority does, however, at the same time anonymise all or most of the others in the excavation team that have been responsible for not only moving earth but for identifying finds, structures and features and their respective documentation. Everill (2012) has discussed this sense of anonymity in the context of British commercial archaeology in terms of the invisibility of the majority of the site staff from the post-excavation analysis and reporting of the findings. It is reinforced by the second sense of invisibility discussed by Everill (2012), that of the interchangeability of the ordinary site staff. As Lucas writes, 'there is a very large group of anonymous and silent archaeologists engaging in fieldwork in Britain and elsewhere today, who have no voice' Lucas (2001: 12). In some cases it can be obvious that the authorship rights of individual team members to a particular piece of data, specific interpretation or a part of the work have been violated either deliberately or because of the carelessness of their supervisors (Seidemann, 2003) but in most cases the often criticised anonymity (e.g. Bradley, 2003; Hodder, 2000; Lucas, 2001; Tilley, 1989) can be traced back to the conventions of archaeological work and how the distribution of the intellectual labour of interpreting and drawing conclusions functions in a field project.

There are examples of how certain archaeologists are attempting to fight back these tendencies on individual and collective levels in different branches of archaeology, including commercial (e.g. Everill, 2012), community (e.g. Holtorf, 2015) and academic contexts. The reflexive archaeology of Hodder (e.g. 2000; 2003) is perhaps the most cited approach, even if its principal aim is not to counter anonymity *per se* but to foreground reflection and interpretation on the field and engage all participants of an investigation project to do so. Besides Hodder, also others including, for instance, Tilley (1989), Lucas (2001) and Bradley (2003) have expressed similar views. As an example of a less conventional critique, David Webb's photo archive of archaeologists, the *Diggers alternative archive* is another attempt to counter the imbalance of how archaeology, a discipline of recording and documentation has neglected the documentation of itself (Witmore, 2007). However, as Witmore (2007) notes, Webb's visual approach of documenting archaeologists perpetuates the anonymity of photographed subjects. They are given a face but not necessarily a name. When the group effort is explicitly opened, it becomes obvious that a large number of people have contributed to an interpretation (e.g. Bradley, 2003).

However, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the debate on facelessness may not have affected the attribution as much as considerations of its kind. Even if expectations of objectivity and neutrality, and in a sense, anonymity, of individual archaeologists in the process have shifted when the predominant paradigms of archaeological scholarship have fluctuated between positivist and subjectivist theorising (Trigger, 1989), field practices have shown considerable resilience to change. Earlier culture-historical archaeology was centred on the person of the field director and his [sic!] subjective interpretations whereas the expansion and colloquialisation of archaeological fieldwork and the emergence of processual and scientific archaeology especially from the 1960s onwards shifted the focus away from subjects. Post-processualism and reflexivity from the late 1970s onwards lead to resurgence of subjects (Binford, 1964; Jensen, 2012; Trigger, 1989, 1992). As Baines and Brophy (2006) note, at present, there is a gap between the dominant, often rather positivist, documentation (versus interpretation) oriented and subsequently anonymising field practices, and the more theoretically oriented, often academic archaeology with a clearer interest in interpretation and its subjectivity. This does not mean that the authorship of field directors or the anonymity of their team would have changed.

The emergence of professional development-led archaeology as the predominant form of archaeological fieldwork in many European countries and, for instance, in the US and Canada has formalised the role of field directors and subordinated them to new, often more stringent guidelines, legislation and personal needs of securing continuing employment in an increasingly precarious labour market (e.g. Everill, 2012; Huvila, 2006, 2011; Zorzin, 2010). Field directors have also become more closely subordinated to their employers even if (with some precaution) it seems that the formal role of the field director as an author has remained relatively constant. Field directors might not be authors as *auteurs* of an *oeuvre* anymore but rather named professionals with certain liabilities and responsibilities regarding the project and its outcomes (cf. Huvila, 2012). There are indications that field directors might be losing their primacy and become a part of the invisible mass when the contractor becomes the entity with a name (e.g. Zorzin, 2010). When larger developers and infrastructure projects, for instance, Hydro-Québec (Zorzin, 2010) and the Crossrail project (Jackson, 2013), recruit archaeologists directly for their staff, it is legitimate to interrogate the role of these corporate archaeologists as new faces of the projects and ask whether the developers themselves might be turning into *auteurs* of archaeological knowledge. In the sense that developers have an opportunity to put pressure on archaeologists to work faster and cheaper (e.g. Goudswaard et al., 2012; Özdoğan, 2013; Vinton, 2013), they have a major influence on the produced knowledge. They also have an opportunity to use archaeological findings for polishing their image even if they would not directly claim authorship of archaeological knowledge.

Interesting exceptions to the colloquialisation of the role of field directors are popular culture and television documentaries (e.g. Holtorf, 2007; Thomas, 2013) that are still dominated by 'celebrity archaeologists'. For other team members, the changes in how projects and information are attributed have been similarly subtle. There is still 'a very large group of anonymous and silent archaeologists engaging in fieldwork' (Lucas, 2001: 12) namelessly participating in the making of archaeological information and knowledge.

In addition to the social evolution of archaeological work, also the tools and techniques of archaeology have influenced the authorship of individual archaeologists. As Hodder (1989) noted already a quarter of a century ago, before the digitisation of everyday archaeological practices, the shift towards more schematic, coded and technical drawings have replaced dated and signed personal illustrations. Schematisation together with mechanical and digital production and reproduction of drawings made them comparable to faceless job printing and 'photocopy-lore' in their anonymity (cf. Gitelman, 2014). This type of anonymisation has been accelerated by the emergence of digital data capture as a standard method of documentation in archaeology. Even if data is always a representation as Carusi (2008) reminds us, of both its subject – and as may be added – of its producer, the representations can be very different depending on whether data are captured by using a pen, a total station or a laser scanner. The data, how it is captured, if it is attached with information on its creator and how this information is made available affect the degree and type of the eventual anonymity of their author. At the same time, however, the data may reveal very little of what Hodder (1989) demands, of the decisions, rationales and premisory assumptions related to the processes of documentation and interpretation. Fluctuating discussions on engagement and documentation across the field of archaeology from the documentation of archaeological representations (e.g. Greengrass and Hughes, 2008; Huggett, 2012) to engagement with social media (e.g. Huvila, 2013; Richardson, 2014) are symptomatic of the intricacies of naming and not naming in digital contexts.

Even if the underlining of the authorship of the field directors and, to a limited extent, of a small number of specialists participating in the analysis of the findings and the anonymity of the contributions of the rest of the team is a common form of namelessness in archaeology, it is not the only one. The second, and in a sense, an even more comprehensive form of not naming the origins of archaeological information and knowledge relates to *labelling things as being archaeological*, archaeologically significant and interesting. This type of anonymisation of the information and its stakeholders starts already in the field and is institutionalised in the later stages of the information process when the excavation data and the conclusions of individual projects are archived and used as a basis for making

claims of the archaeological and cultural value of sites and monuments. This anonymity is similar to the anonymity of a large and structurally complicated society where individuals act as representatives of corporations and societal entities. Participants rely on the system rather than on a named individual (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). This process is especially visible in archaeological heritage management and in the decisions of whether a particular 'archaeological' site needs to be protected, if an archaeological site that needs to be investigated exists in a particular area, how the investigation should be conducted and how much it may cost. Huvila (2006) cites one of his informants who underlines that an administrator needs a clear statement from an expert (archaeologist) that a particular site either is archaeologically significant or not. He (*ibid*.) describes the frustration of that particular administrator of the hesitance of field archaeologists to make explicit judgments of the archaeological significance of sites. Apparently it is an important part of the process that it is an *archaeologist* who makes the decision and *turns* a location into an archaeological or non-archaeological site. At the same time, however, the required expertise appears binary by its nature and whenever a decision has been made, a site is archaeological by definition. Something being of or belonging to 'archaeology' and 'cultural heritage' are anonymous, non-attributable relations without a named author even if it is obvious that there is someone that performed the act of making it archaeological. In contrast to the act of labeling itself that comes from a specific archaeologist who is the one who has been there, upon administrative decision, the 'archaeologicality' of a site and the premises of the decision becomes nameless and largely independent of its author.

In an attempt to understand the patterns of how anonymity is practiced in archaeology, it seems that both when anonymity is attributable to the primacy of field directors and when the labelling as archaeological has been performed, much of archaeological information remains anonymous because it is never explicitly attributed to its authors or the attribution is lost during an information process that has often been described (e.g. Huvila, 2014b; Thomas, 2006) as being long and disconnected. Unlike some other forms of anonymous transactions indicated in the literature (e.g. egg (Konrad, 2005) and blood donation (Copeman, 2009) and organ transplantation (Lock, 2002)), the predominant forms of anonymity in archaeological knowledge production and information process are of a more indirect nature. It is doubtful whether any archaeologist would explain that she or he would deliberately attempt to act anonymously. Rather when explicit anonymity might be desirable, for instance, in interview research of archaeologists work (e.g. Huvila, 2006; Zorzin, 2010), online contexts (e.g. Morgan and Eve, 2012) and in countries with small professional communities (Smith and Burke, 2007), it has become apparent in many cases that ensuring anonymity is difficult or even

impossible because most of the archaeologists acting in a given context know or are knowledgeable of each other.

As a conclusion, anonymity of archaeologicality can be seen as a result of a process of the institutionalisation and infrastructuralisation of archaeological knowledge production. The information process has become legitimate *per se* as a part of a process that has produced an authoritative frame of discussing archaeology, a part of the authoritative heritage discourse discussed by Smith (2006) and turned archaeology into a particular type of common good. Archaeological significance and its implications are not generally contested and in general they do not require elaborate argumentation and personal authority to be accepted. Simultaneously, when archaeology has been objectified as public property, the management of archaeological heritage has turned to task-based public administrative work with an ethos of reducing personal involvement and promoting anonymity (cf. Bonwitt, 1989) even in administrative cultures based on transparency, accountability and freedom of information. Similarly to how, for instance, Gray and Jenkins (1993) criticise the mythical anonymity of civil service (in contrast to the accountability of politicians) in archaeology and heritage management, anonymity is a construct that is assumed and acted upon rather than an irrevocable technical state. Even if the identity of the actors can often be difficult to determine: who was digging, who documented what, and who came to which specific conclusion, there are ways to at least partially withdraw the anonymity of archaeologists by consulting the available documentation and making inquiries. The same applies for many other forms of anonymities. The anonymity of organ transplantations, donated blood and eggs can be technically revoked by DNA testing but this is generally resisted because of the preference to maintain the mutually advantageous exchange of assets, whether bodily or informational. As Nissenbaum (1999) notes, the value of anonymity does not necessarily relate to the capacity to be unnamed, but to the possibility of acting or participating while remaining unreachable. This condition can be fulfilled both when an individual remains technically unreachable or the likelihood of being reached is considered negligible.

Social productivity and anonymity of archaeological information

A closer look at the various forms of anonymities in archaeology suggests that like anonymity itself, the eventual social productivity (and counter-productiveness) of being and remaining anonymous stems from how anonymity is practised within and in relation to archaeology in different situations. Archaeology reminds us of other contexts of anonymous relations in that the (relative) namelessness of individuals, to paraphrase Terrall (2003), gives them a new life of their own as archaeologists and representatives of 'archaeology'. In comparison to the life (as a

context) of a named individual, it is a parallel milieu with different possibilities to act. The extent and kind of possibilities and for whom they apply depend on how, when and in conjunction to what anonymity is being practised.

Anonymous past

Even if the *anonymity of past human-beings* may seem an obvious form of namelessness, that does not mean that it could not be socially useful. In contrast, it plays a very specific role in the context of contemporary post-colonial and community-oriented archaeo-politics. In spite of the recent advances in palaeogenetics and the new possibilities to study the evolution of populations, only rarely is it possible to name an individual or a group in the archaeological record. It is more likely when it comes to recent remains, remains that are associated with explicit written evidence or when very specific conditions are met. Similarly, it is extremely difficult to find definite links between past and present populations and communities. From a strictly scientific point of view, it is obvious that archaeological evidence is not very useful in supporting claims of lineage and ownership set forth by individuals and communities today (Gathercole, 2001). However, even if the demands would lack validity beyond any reasonable doubt in a scholarly and scientific sense, they can be useful as political arguments outside of the professional and scholarly archaeological discourse. The anonymity of ancient remains can be used as an argument for claiming that the remains are not unique and as such of limited significance. On the other hand, many local communities take pride in archaeological sites (Huvila, 2006) and make claims of lineage to the ancient inhabitants of their site and in some cases assert ownership or influence on how a specific site should be managed (Chirikure et al., 2010). In both cases, the rather hypothetical possibility of lifting the anonymity of the past occupiers of a site and uncontroversially determining a specific contemporary community as their 'true heirs' would be unlikely to lead to a useful outcome. The prioritisation of (genetic) lineage would exclude later historical and contemporary occupants and communities engaged in the site and its heritage and could bestow the named community with responsibilities beyond their contemporary interests and capabilities.

Invisible archaeologists

In addition to the namelessness of the past, social productivity can also be found in other forms of archaeology related to anonymity practices. Even if the *primacy of field directors* has been a subject of vehement criticism, the facelessness of individual fieldworkers can also be an advantage. From the perspective of anonymity, it coalesces with the labeling of things as being archaeological. Even if the silencing of individual voices can be questionable from the point of view of

collecting and appreciating diverse interpretations and perspectives to the object of study, the anonymisation functions also as a mechanism of standardising the archaeological information process – for good and bad.

From the perspective of an individual fieldworker, anonymity furthermore has a certain equalising potential when the results and interpretations of the entire group are presented under the authorship of the field director or a collective body. Whether being a part of the mass is detrimental or not, depends on how the information process is working, to what extent contributions of individual participants are erased and whether the field director is claiming a total ownership or merely assuming the liabilities relating to the project and its outcomes. The relative anonymity of an individual does not necessarily mean that interpretations or reflections are not encouraged (even if it would be the case in many situations) but it is rather a question of how they are used in drawing conclusions and how they are recorded and preserved as a part of the field documentation.

The equalising potential of anonymity does not only pertain to the professional and academic archaeological communities but as Deeley et al. (2014) suppose, they can balance uneven power relations between archaeologists and members of local communities. Anonymity on the Internet (as Deeley et al. (2014) suggest) but also in general as a technology-non-specific social relation can allow and encourage spectators to ask questions, make comments and provide information without exposing themselves to the institutionalised hierarchies.

Anonymous archaeology

Even if the practices of *labelling things as being archaeological* are distinct from the primacy of field director, the forms in which they are potentially productive have similarities. *Labelling things as being archaeological* obviously is a relative form of namelessness but in practice it can be sufficient to create a new life and to 'unname' an individual for the practical purposes of one's work.

From the perspective of individual archaeologists working in precarious labour market conditions, a relative anonymity can function as a safeguard against direct critique. Even if it can be useful to stand out in a positive sense, in practice, it can be less risky to try to focus on avoiding to stand out as being wrong. This type of strategy of trying to stay in relative anonymity has influenced archaeological report writing and the tendency to write formally faultless but conservative and unambitious reports in order to secure future employment (Huvila, 2006).

In a broader context, Finnigan (1989: 238) notes that in Canada, with many of the members of the professional archaeological society, the Saskatchewan Association

of Professional Archaeologists 'linked directly or indirectly to the government, it is impossible to influence public policy without the anonymity granted through a professional society'. The collective body anonymises an individual opinion by granting it a collective identity. As in the case of the Saskatchewan Association of Professional Archaeologists, the identity that bestows anonymity can be a specific named body but it can also be a more obscure collective label like archaeology or archaeologist. Zorzin (2010) refers to an opinion piece published in an Irish newspaper by an anonymous archaeologist who could identify herself as a member of the collective body of archaeologists but stayed anonymous as an individual. Morgan and Eve (2012) make similar remarks on how anonymity can help junior (or female, as Scott (1998) notes) archaeologists in fighting back the lack of transparency of employment processes by anonymously publishing information on the progress of their applications, or when government-employed archaeologists are releasing information about negative policies of the current regimes in their home countries. Under this anonymous but professionally anchored identity the writer of the opinion piece, underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, and archaeologists under threat can express their critique of the situation in the commercial archaeology in Ireland, unveil the possibly unjust employment processes and report on the current developments in their home countries for both their own and their colleagues' benefit. Similarly to how Griffin describes the usefulness of anonymity for literary authors, anonymity can be 'commercially useful' (Griffin, 1999) for archaeologists by providing protection not only for an individual archaeologist but also for the entire profession. An anonymous archaeologist as a writer of an opinion piece or a report is simultaneously an archaeologist without being a named individual. A relative namelessness can help secure one's personal integrity, support and increase the impact of the claims made by an *archaeologist* versus those presented by a named archaeologist, and facilitate spreading the information as a part of a particular genre and discourse.

Drawing on examples from the Midwest USA, Baake (2003) discusses how the (economic) context of conducting archaeological fieldwork influences the writing of the reports. He argues that the professional archaeologists (working with more explicit temporal and financial constraints and with an awareness of that the site they are investigating will cease to exist due to an incoming land development project) tend to be more focused on limitations of their work and interpretations and the negative consequences of losing the site. In research excavations when there is no imminent risk for losing the site, he notes that the style of writing tends to be more optimistic, focused on observations and less prone to emphasise the limitations of the work. Baake (2003) argues that both groups draw from a narrative of the destruction of the unspoiled past shared with some

environmentalists expressing similar feelings of sadness of the loss of a mythical pristine nature.

Even if Baake's (2003) reading of his empirical work might be somewhat limited in explaining the entire spectrum of complexities of the narratives of archaeological reporting, his observations of the origins of archaeological authorship are helpful in understanding how 'archaeology' (instead of individual professional opinions) is produced as a part of the archaeological documentation and reporting practice. His work is illustrative of how archaeology is written to be representative of archaeology rather than of the individual report writers. As Baake (2003) notes, the context is an active agent in the rhetorical situation of writing a report. A report emerges in the context of the social setting of archaeology and Baake (2003) underlines that the social setting is clearly influenced by the economic constraints of the field project. Assuming Baake's perspective, it is apparent that besides reports (i.e. information objects) the anonymity of archaeological reporting itself stems from the interplay of different types of contextual agencies ranging from the economic onsets of archaeology to theoretical paradigms (Trigger, 1989), information policies governing archaeological knowledge-making (Börjesson et al., 2015), practices of doing archaeological work, and for instance, the different work-roles of individual archaeologists (Huvila, 2006).

Between productivity and detrimentality

In spite of the examples of its social productivity, it is not self-evident that anonymity is always socially useful or that usefulness applies to everyone. The anonymity of individual fieldworkers and archaeology professionals in general is a social issue and a problem for the preservation and advancement of archaeological knowledge. It contributes to the lack of appreciation of the archaeological work, lower wages, degrading of the profession, shortage of competent professionals and decline of archaeology as a branch of scholarship (Everill, 2012; Hinton, 2013; Lennox, 2013). In commercial archaeology, the detrimental potential of anonymity is especially apparent. The precarious situation of both fieldworkers and archaeology contractors described by, for instance, Zorzin (2010) and Everill (2012) combined with the facelessness of individual archaeologists makes it easy to play down the significance of archaeological work in contrast to land development. An example from the field of biblical scholarship illustrates the possibility to use anonymity to generalise critique beyond its specific target also in archaeology. Thompson (2009), a biblical scholar, criticises a biblical archaeology conference 'for the use of caricature and anonymity in referring to their critics as "minimalists"'. The example is illustrative of the potential problems

that collective anonymity of a discipline than the 'archaeologicality' can represent. If a strong enough opinion exists against (anonymous) 'archaeologists' or 'archaeology', it is possible to question the legitimacy of an entire discipline without a need to argue against specific lines of reasoning. It is conceivable that similar issues might arise when an 'archaeological' actor, whether a private or public organisation, produces substandard work causing shame and bad reputation for the entire discipline. Within the archaeological profession, relative anonymity gives room for omissions of reflection and interpretation, conducting and submission of substandard work and lower quality of documentation without directly risking one's own name.

Its detrimental potential shows that anonymity, like other social relations, presents an amalgam of productive and counterproductive potentials. So far in archaeology, the explicit discussions of the intermingling of the productivity and detrimentality of anonymity have focused on the online discussions and their role in archaeology. Emanuel (2014) criticises the possibility to use anonymity for spreading misinformation and misinterpretation, intentionally circulating information that is implausible or plainly wrong. Morgan and Eve (2012) emphasise the benefits of transparency and non-anonymity in making archaeology more 'ubiquitous, reflexive, open and participatory' and acknowledge the benefits of anonymity when it can abolish existing barriers of publishing information.

From the perspective of how Morgan and Eve (2012) conceptualise anonymity as an essentially binary state (even if they acknowledge that in contemporary society, achieving full anonymity is close to impossible), it is easy to agree with their conclusion. However, if anonymity seen as a complex socio-material relation with different shades of grey rather than as an antagonistic state of namelessness, the question of benefits and disadvantages become more convoluted. In addition to physically or economically risky contexts, various degrees of anonymity can help decrease the opacity while increasing ubiquity, reflexivity, openness and participatory potential in other areas of archaeology as well. As Garvey (2006) notes in the context of anonymous publishing during the US Civil War, anonymity opens the possibility to participate in the making of the authorship for readers and distributors. Similarly to the imaginary relations between egg donors and their biological siblings, an anonymous authorship of archaeological interpretations and reflections can be suggested to have a potential to nurture the social usefulness of the texts. As Morgan and Eve (2012) suggest, online anonymity can be useful in scholarly contexts, so that it seems plausible to assume that there is even more potential in exploiting this type of a social imagination in the interface between scholarly archaeology and society.

On an individual level, the consequences of revoking anonymity in the archaeological information process differs from that of many other anonymous relations. From the perspective of an individual unnamed contributor, it may be considered as a positive acknowledgement of one's contribution. From a systemic perspective, the differences are smaller. The assumption that each individual would be personally accountable for every small detail and transaction in the information process would quickly become a liability for both the authors and users of the information. Similarly to how blood donations function because of a trust on the nameless relation, the anonymisation of the relation between individuals and archaeology keeps the information process manageable. At the same time, it is apparent that similarly to many other anonymous contexts, anonymity applies to a part of the (information) process. The identity of a blood donor is known by the time of donation even if the blood itself is made anonymous for its recipients. Similarly, in archaeology, information is named in specific communities: within an investigation team most of the members are likely to have a rather good knowledge about the author of individual pieces of information. In the scholarly archaeological community, the scientific and scholarly arguments are authored by named individuals but like in other anonymous communities, the names remain within certain boundaries.

Discussion

Even if it would be an exaggeration to claim anonymity as a norm in contemporary archaeological information processes like it has been at times in literary and scholarly authorship (Griffin, 1999) as well as in journalism (Reich, 2010), it is apparently no anomaly. Anonymity that reflects back to the context of its operation can function as a dissident practice in an established economic-juridical order by forcing us to engage with defining what is an author (Drake, 2011), or in more general terms, an actor who is not named. However, as the scrutiny of archaeological anonymity practices shows, this non-conformist potential of anonymity does not imply that anonymity would be dissident *per se*, and thus cannot be deeply embedded in the hegemonic regimes of practices.

It is fair to admit that most of the mentioned anonymity practices embedded in the archaeological information process are not dissentient. Only the suggestions of the emancipatory potential of anonymity in the work of Morgan and Eve (2012) and the (critical) references to the invisibility of archaeological fieldworkers represent non-conformist views (e.g. Everill, 2012; Lucas, 2001). In most cases anonymity has been institutionalised and infrastructuralised to such an extent that it is not explicitly claimed or assumed. The assertion of Latour (1996) that granting of anonymity takes the same semiotic price as the granting of humanity,

collectivity or materiality may seem counter-intuitive due to the invisibility of anonymity. This invisibility does not mean however, that assuming and maintaining anonymity would not be gratis in terms of the effort of attributing a thing to a named author, ascribing it as archaeological or anonymous. Considering the categories of Marx (1999), it is apparent that anonymity can facilitate information flows to the extent that it is tempting to claim that anonymity is a significant enabler of archaeological information processes. The literature contains also evidence of how anonymity can enable or is assumed to be capable of enabling socially useful (but also detrimental, cf. Emanuel, 2014; Huvila, 2006) activities and protect individuals (Huvila, 2006; Morgan and Eve, 2012). The relative anonymity of the authorship of archaeological information (as with data, cf. Carusi, 2008) and the anonymisation of its expressions by the standardisation of documentation encourages attention to the content of the message rather than the messenger and facilitates judgments based on specific criteria rather than a person (cf. Marx, 1999). Beyond that the archaeological information and documentation practices can be argued to incorporate a similar desire as with the artistic documents discussed by Highmore (2007), to go beyond the message to the phenomenon the document is documenting. To a certain degree, archaeological information is not authored by a named individual or an anonymous 'archaeologist'. It is anonymous, it *is* a substitute for its referents.

In contrast to the relatively straightforward task of identifying different types of anonymities and how they are perceived to be a part of the archaeological work, the question of how anonymity is produced as a part of archaeological practices is complicated. Following the theorising of White (2008), the entire network of individuals and institutions participating in the archaeological information – from the field to the archaeological heritage management agencies and beyond (for a detailed discussion on the layout of the process, e.g. De Roo et al., 2016; Huvila, 2006; Zorzin, 2010) – can be seen as a network of named and anonymous identities and partly overlapping, sometimes antagonistic but mostly identity-related control regimes (White, 2008) that utilise information and documentation to advance their goals. The regimes and their represented identities are authors of the archaeological anonymity and its constituents similarly to how relations and relational artefacts can be intentionally and unintentionally authored (cf. Huvila, 2012). In terms of White and Godart (2007), the information process and its paper-trail in archaeology can be argued to form a story. Archaeological information itself is an amassment of meanings that surface in the process of how archaeology is practiced through switchings in surroundings within which direct identities seek to take control over one another. It traverses chronologically from the field to the post-excavation work, report writing, archiving and archaeological heritage management to research, public dissemination and beyond. In parallel to that, it switches between unattainable ideals and the often severely restricted working

conditions, precarious labour market, and expectations of framing the work according to the principles of archaeological education, contemporary guidelines of archaeological work and current legislation. Individual stories from specific projects, their syntheses and accretions, not only their individual constituencies, can be and are constantly called into action and they are used to frame archaeological practices. Anonymity is an outcome but besides it functions as a glue and an enabler in the meaning making and the assemblage of the stories as socially useful and individually practicable in the diverse *netdoms* (network, domain) (White et al., 2007) to which archaeological practices pertain. Similarly to the socio-material theorisation of anonymous relations by Scott and Orlikowski, the Whitean reading of the archaeological information process conceptualises it as a process of becoming in which the practices of anonymity intertwine with a series of material artefacts (cf. Barad, 2007: 439; Scott and Orlikowski, 2014) from artefacts to tools and reports. Both the anonymity and archaeological knowledge are matters of practices, doings and actions instead of being something essential.

Even if the stories of archaeological information processes are constituted and negotiated in a labyrinthine continuum of switchings, the anonymity of the past human-beings, the primacy of field directors and the *labelling of things as being archaeological* have one thing in common. In all of them a major propeller of anonymity relates to an act of *writing* (or not writing) as a constituent form of making and cementing the relative anonymity of things. Even if the anonymity of the past human-beings and invisible fieldworkers differ from each other, both groups are excluded in their specific contexts from a hegemonic written culture. In contrast, the field directors and archaeology are explicitly mentioned as significant actors in the narratives produced as a part of the archaeological information process. However, instead of merely focusing on writing versus not writing, it becomes apparent that the relative and quasi-absolute forms of anonymity are a part of the infrastructure in how archaeological information comes into being. Building on the theorising of Goody (1986) on the contrast of oral and written cultures, the naming and non-naming of subjects can be seen as a breach between actors operating according to the conditions an 'oral' and a 'written' culture and perhaps more importantly, the act of writing specific individuals and archaeology as named identities and granting them relative forms of anonymity in the archaeological information process gives them a possibility to traverse netdoms and interact with other identities – to make them productive in particular social constellations. Others are divested of this possibility.

The practical significance of this observation for understanding the archaeological information process as a chain of sociomaterial practices and switchings of identities from a netdom to another is that writing itself draws attention to the moment when anonymity and having a name become social relations (and to the

process of that happening). As Scott and Orlikowski (2014) point out, anonymity is not binary or separate from the material aspects of reality. From the perspective of writing and Whitean stories, it is a part of how things are constituted as a part of the system of our lived reality. Even if anonymity can be abused, in contrast to the generally negative considerations of anonymity in public sector (e.g. Paul, 1991), relative forms of anonymity are a central element of the making of common infrastructuralised social relations like the *archaeological* relation to the human past and a constituent of their social productivity. Similarly to how anonymity ties donors to their siblings or people to their anonymous donors (e.g. Konrad, 2005), anonymity in archaeological practices creates a related social imaginary of archaeology and being a part of archaeology. It becomes a social relation in its own right but also, as in terms of Star and Griesemer (1989), a boundary object that helps to traverse perceptual and practical differences among communities including archaeologists and other stakeholders of archaeological information from land developers, museum professionals and politicians, and facilitate cooperation by emanating mutual understanding (Karsten et al., 2001). The problem might not necessarily be the facelessness of fieldworkers or the hegemony of field directors alone but the negligence of the role the names and the nameless play in how archaeological information comes into being.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it may be argued that the anonymisation of subjectivities of the data is a process of objectification and/or institutionalisation that makes archaeological information potentially productive for other archaeologists, museum professionals, community planners and stakeholders of cultural heritage, cultural politics and societal debates as a part of the institutionalised system of archaeology and that system or lived reality, socially productive for those who engage in it. The archaeological anonymity becomes a boundary object that is authored in the course of the switchings from one netdom to another to emerge as a particular type of social relation and a constituent of a social imaginary of *being archaeological*. The downside of its socially productive potential is that it is not self-evident that the outcomes of anonymity are necessarily positive for archaeology itself. The anonymity of being archaeological makes it also exposed for external influences and gives possibilities for other stakeholders to make claims of its significance and ownership. Whether it is a question of positive openness as in public archaeology or vulnerability as in the case of archaeological pseudo-science or the critique of the precarity of contract archaeology depends on the context of discussion. For archaeology and the society as a whole, it is undoubtedly a question of both, a double-edged sword *par excellence* so to say.

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Against a personalisation of the self

Renée Ridgway

abstract

With presently more than 3 billion search queries a day, Google is the most used search engine in the world. Since December 4, 2009 Google uses 'personalisation' where it captures users' data, logs users' histories and adapts previous search queries into real-time search results, even if one is not signed into a Google account. In exchange for data, users acquire 'tailored' advertising, turning themselves into commodities for advertisers and receiving free services. In order to gain a greater understanding of the complexities involved with data retention of online searching habits, I designed my own 'empirical' study in an attempt to circumvent personalisation and to determine whether one could be anonymous when searching online, and if so, how. In a critical and experimental (auto) ethnography of the self using specific keywords, I investigated if the 'anonymous' browser Tor (The Onion Browser) offered divergent search results from those of 'personalised' Google. The experiment proposes that Tor delivered divergent search results from Google's personalisation in two ways: the ranking of the results and the returned 'unique' URLs. Tor enables a degree of anonymity without exposing the identity of the user (IP address) and delivers 'relevant' search results, thereby offering an alternative to Google's personalisation.

Introduction

> He handed Mae a piece of paper, on which he had written, in crude capitals, a list of assertions under the headline *The rights of humans in a digital age*. Mae scanned it, catching passages: We all must have the right to anonymity. Not every human activity can be measured. The ceaseless pursuit of data to quantify the value of any endeavour is catastrophic to true understanding. The barrier between public and private must remain *unbreachable*. At the end she found one line, written in red ink: *We must all have the right to disappear*. (Eggers, 2013: 491)

Although personal data has been captured by governments and private entities for centuries, nowadays it has become a daily activity for citizens to give away their data to corporations in exchange for 'free services' in online activities, such as search queries. In the past couple of years I have been exploring the notion of personalisation. This process, where corporations deliver customised search results to users, stands at the core of the internet's power structures. In order to explore personalisation, I conducted a series of search experiments using chosen keywords in two different scenarios. On one computer (Apple), I allowed myself to be fully personalised by Google. On the other computer (PC), I searched with the same keywords using the anonymity network, Tor (The Onion Router). In other words, I became either a Google 'personalised subject' or a Tor 'anonymous user'. These experiments have led me to re-think how personalisation, anonymity and collectivity organise and control aspects of our quotidian lives.

Data collecting

On October 6, 2015 Max Schrems, a Viennese masters student of law, won a landmark decision at the European Court of Justice with his lawsuit *Schrem vs. Data Protection Authority*. The decision invalidated the much-used Safe Harbour agreement whereby Silicon Valley companies were able to receive transfers of personal data from European citizens for data processing, such as data produced by online searches and social media usage. This decision stood at the end of a series of judicial procedures, which had started in 2008, when Schrems had requested to see the data Facebook had collated about him, including the posts he had deleted (eventually he obtained his data – all 1200 pages of information). It continued in 2013, when Schrems lodged the compliant about Facebook concerning EU data privacy restrictions, which eventually led to the aforementioned 2015 decision. Schrems felt that the responsibility should not be completely placed on the consumer (or user), as so many are not able to read the copious *Terms of Service* agreement, nor fathom exactly what it means. He also pointed out that in contrast to the U.S., data privacy in Europe is considered a fundamental right, and the ruling now renders data transfers illegal that only rely on the Safe Harbour self-certification. Edward Snowden's revelations regarding data surveillance by governments and corporations that were not in compliance with EU laws further motivated Schrems.

The 'Schrem suit' might indeed slow down the data transfer of European consumers to corporations located in the U.S. Ways of circumventing the law to enable certain types of data transfer will likely be implemented, but it reflects the consciousness of Europeans to have their data in their own hands in lieu of Silicon Valley. With the additional EU Commission's ruling in 2014 concerning the 'right

to be forgotten', EU citizens now have the option to go through the legal red tape, requesting Google delete information that the user deems embarrassing, even if this information is true (Thylstrup, 2014: 35). Both the 'EU's new directive confirming the right to be forgotten in the face of leaking machines that seem to remember forever', (*ibid.*: 36) and the invalidation of the Safe Harbour agreement function as temporary deterrents to Silicon Valley's international corporate governance of Europe.

However, in a situation where 'international data transfers are the lifeblood of the digital economy' (Levine, 2015), as stated by Thomas Feehan, chief executive of IAB Europe, which represents start-ups and Google, all of this does not even begin to scratch the surface concerning the ability of having access or control over one's data, let alone whether one can be anonymous online, so that one's data cannot be captured and assigned to a particular user: 'As more of our data, and the programs to manipulate and communicate this data, move online, there is a growing tension between the dynamics on the front (where users interact) and on the back (to which the owners have access)' (Stalder, 2012: 242). The user on the backend is a 'data shadow', (Thylstrup, 2014: 30) comprised of the bits and pieces of 'dividual' selves, dispersed as 'masses, samples, data, markets or banks' (Deleuze, 1992: 5-7). Without robust safeguards, multinational companies and governments organise our online experiences around advertising, data tracking and surveillance. 'There stands the nightmare of a "transparency society" in which the exposed life of individuals becomes "big data" in the hands of Internet companies and government intelligence agencies that, while remaining non-transparent themselves, collect and evaluate the traces that have been left behind by digital users' (Beyes and Pias, 2014: 111).

In previous centuries, analogue querying accounted for the collation of citizens' data and could be considered as the 'pre-history of search engines'. Census bureaus relegated government control through constructed statistics, such as King Philip II's 'elaciones topográficas', Louie XIV's administrator Jean-Baptiste Colbert's enquêtes and the harvesting of information by the Hapsburg dynasty (Tantner, 2014: 123). Human informants, such as maids, servants and journeymen, added to this, they had functions not too dissimilar to the present-day 'crawlers' of search engines (*ibid.*) that index information and then pass it on to interested parties. The 'office of address' in the 16th and 17th centuries in many cities of Europe (Paris, London, Amsterdam), collated information (and addresses) from advertisers as well as seekers in 'register books' – and here you can trace similarities to today's IP addresses.

The IP address is the numeric label assigned to any type of device that is connected to a network and that uses IP (Internet Protocol) for communication. The IP

address (as well as GPS) helps determine where you can be locally pinpointed and located. IP addresses are captured when users type in keywords with Google Search and serve as a tracking device. Google fills the word in for us, thereby offering suggestions with their 'autocomplete', which extends to their system of AdWords. Google would indeed 'do no evil', if this would simply speed up search and not direct us to 'favoured' search results. However, with the danger of pointing out the obvious, advertising is still Google's primary revenue model, providing 91% of their revenue.[1] Thus, autocomplete's main intention is to redirect our thoughts and to rather choose popular words that advertisers have paid for in AdWords: 'Google managed to transform this "linguistic capital" into actual money by organizing an algorithmic auction model for selling keywords' (Kaplan, 2014: 57). And it is for this reason that circumventing an IP address identification system is becoming increasingly difficult.

Google's personalisation

Since December 4, 2009 Google uses 'personalisation' where it captures users' data and logs users' histories and adapts previous search queries into real-time search results, even if one is not signed into a Google account. This search engine bias retains user data as algorithms, which gather, extract, filter and monitor our online behaviour, offering suggestions for subsequent search requests. In exchange for our data we receive 'tailored' advertising, making things fit, turning ourselves into commodities for advertisers and receiving free internet usage. Many users are generally aware of these data collating activities yet do not exercise their rights to opt out, or access and delete 'their' data if they can. Ostensibly most users agree to the hidden control of search algorithms and how they affect obtained results, whether for the production of knowledge, information retrieval or just surfing. This personalisation is the currency in the online marketing of our data, correlated through algorithmic technologies as our information (data) is acquired by marketers, or third parties (Ridgway, 2014).

In an attempt to understand how Google is personalising search results, Martin Feuz, Matthew Fuller and Felix Stalder designed the empirical study, 'Personal web searching in the age of semantic capitalism: Diagnosing the mechanisms of personalisation'. Published on the *First Monday* blog in February 2011, the research was carried out with great difficulty in the preceding years. Google interfered with the testing while it was being conducted by blocking IP addresses and adding personalisation: 'a query is now evaluated in the context of a user's search history and other data compiled into a personal profile and associated with

1 https://investor.google.com/earnings/2015/Q2_google_earnings.html.

statistical groups' (Feuz et al, 2011). Based on buying habits, search histories and so on, the user is first classified and assigned according to demographics, not as an individual, but rather with what one might call mass personalisation. The authors conclude that 'Google is actively matching people to groups, which are produced statistically, thus giving people not only the results they want (based on what Google knows about them for a fact), but also generating results that Google thinks might be relevant for users (or advertisers) thus more or less subtly pushing users to see the world according to criteria pre-defined by Google' (Feuz et al., 2011).

This business model has serious side effects. One such side effect is the now notorious *Filter Bubble*, that is the 'distortion effects' of personalised filters:

> Like a lens, the filter bubble invisibly transforms the world we experience by controlling what we see and don't see. It interferes with the interplay between our mental processes and our external environment. In some ways it can act as a magnifying glass, helpfully expanding our view of a niche area of knowledge. (Pariser, 2012: 82-83)

At the same time, these filters limit what we are exposed to and therefore affect our ability to think and learn. In this way, personalisation has legitimised an online public sphere that is manipulated by algorithms. Through the lens of this 'filter bubble' we do not get information that diverges from our own, instead we receive recommendations from our social network and search histories (Pariser, 2012: 82). 'We are led – by algorithms and our own preference for the like-minded – into "filter bubbles", where we find only the news we expect and the political perspectives we already hold dear' (Gillespie, 2014: 88).

Tor's anonymisation

The ability to have control over personal information, deemed 'informational self-determinism', has been at the forefront of many research enquiries, which investigate whether this could even be possible because of the manifold ways in which information is constantly captured in an era of 'big data' (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier, 2013). One way to escape such forms of commodified statistics and its side effects are tools that provide partial anonymity online. Much like the corporate search algorithms of Google, which are proprietary and their evaluative criteria and code obfuscated from the user, the user in turn, can find ways to obfuscate their online presence, hidden from the very algorithms that are designed by humans to be obscured *and* that obscure. The user could become much more like the algorithms, stealth and arcane, shrouded in (onion) layers of Tor instead of remaining inside the filter bubble of Google.

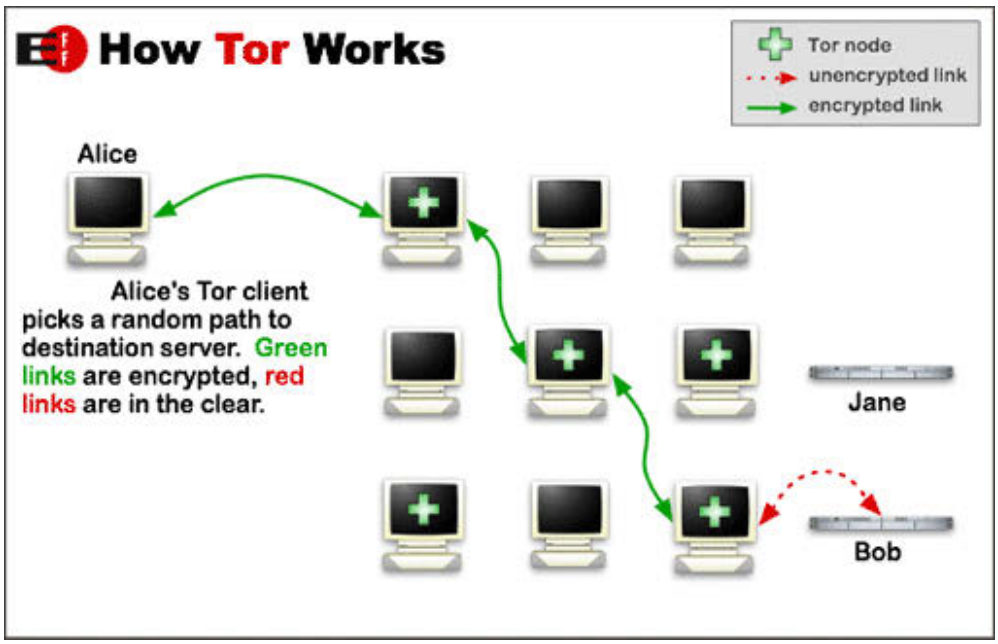

Image 1: Infographic about how Tor works from EFF (Electronic Frontier Foundation).

'Tor is a low-latency anonymity-preserving network that enables its users to protect their privacy online' (AlSabah et al., 2012: 1) and enables anonymous communication. The Tor p2p network is a mesh of proxy servers where the data is bounced through relays, or nodes. Presently more than 7,000 relays[2] enable the transferral of data, applying 'onion routing' as a tactic for anonymity (Spitters et al., 2014: 1). Onion routing was first developed and designed by the US Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) in order to secure online intelligence activities. It is structured by 3 relays (entry, middle, exit) that through a system of circuits transmit the communication, thereby not divulging the IP address of the user.[3]

2 https://torstatus.blutmagie.de.

3 'Tor is a low-latency anonymity network which is based on a client-server architecture model. Clients, known as Onion Proxies (OPs), periodically connect to directory servers to download information about the currently available Onion Routers (ORs), and information on how to contact them such as the OR IP and public keys. Then, clients use ORs to form paths, known as circuits, through the network to Internet destinations. By default, circuits are composed of three ORs, usually nicknamed the entry guard, middle and exit OR, depending on their position on the circuit. Of the three ORs, only the entry guard knows and communicates directly with the client, and only the exit knows the Internet destination that the client is communicating with, but no OR can link a client to a destination; this is how a client's privacy is maintained in Tor' (AlSabah et al., 2012: 74-75).

Data is sent using Tor through a proxy configuration adding a layer of encryption at every node whilst decrypting the data at every 'hop' and forwarding it to the next onion router.[4] 'In a nutshell this means that the data which is sent over the network is first packed in multiple layers of encryption, which are peeled off one by one by each relay on the randomly selected route the package travels' (Spitters et al., 2014: 1). In this way the 'clear text' does not appear at the same time and thereby 'hides' the identity of the user and provides anonymity. At the end of a browsing session the user history is deleted along with the HTTP cookie. Although Tor is easy to download and install, the largest critique of Tor by users the past years is its latency, though the last two years it has become much quicker. Moreover, the more people use Tor, the higher the anonymity level becomes for users who are connected to the p2p network, where volunteers around the world provide servers and enable the Tor traffic to flow.

There is controversy surrounding the Tor network. Most of these controversies connect Tor to the so-called 'Dark Net' and its 'hidden services' that range from the selling of illegal drugs, weapons and child pornography to sites of anarchism, hacktivism and politics (Spitters et al., 2014: 1). In 2014, members of the UK government suggested banning Tor or anonymity systems online and the Chinese government attempted to block and forbid it. Russia even offered a significant monetary award to challenge the anonymity of the Tor network (Çalışkan et al. 2015: 18). Therefore the risk involved in using Tor has become more pronounced. On the other hand, Tor today is an influential anti-censorship technology that allows people in oppressive regimes to access information without the fear of being blocked, tracked or monitored. Tor has often been accredited the past few years in protecting the anonymity of the user in areas of protest and freedom of speech: 'The importance and success of Tor is evident from recent global uprisings where the usage of Tor spiked as people used it as a revolutionary force to help them fight their social and political realities' (AlSabah et al., 2012: 1). All this has increased the risks involved in using Tor.

As shown in numerous studies (AlSabah et al., 2012: 1; Biryukov et al., 2013; Çalışkan et al., 2015: 18; Spitters et al., 2014: 1, and Winter et al., 2014: 1), different actors have compromised the Tor network, cracking its anonymity. These actors potentially include the NSA, authoritarian governments worldwide and

4 'A SOCKS proxy interfaces between user applications and the OP. When the application sends data through Tor, the OP divides the data to 512-byte fixed-sized cells, and adds a layer of encryption for every node on the forward path. Then, cells are source-routed through the established circuits. Every hop, on receiving a relay cell, looks up the corresponding circuit, decrypts the relay header and payload with the session key for that circuit, replaces the circuit ID of the header, and forwards the decrypted cell to the next OR' (AlSabah et al., 2012: 75).

multinational corporations – organisations that would like to discover the identity of users and their personal information. Specifically, it should not be disregarded that the Tor exit node operators have access to the traffic going through their exit nodes, whoever they are (Çalışkan et al., 2015: 29). In other words, Tor does not offer 100% anonymity since the exit node is in a position to capture any traffic passing through it, including IP addresses.[5] Other breaches of security include personal computers that might already be infected with malware or spyware and cybercafés that have keyloggers installed on their computers, which make anonymity for users more difficult and even dangerous. Applying a VPN (Virtual Privacy Network) all the way through the three relays could help to boost anonymity, along with using Tails (The Amnesic Incognito Live System). Although Tor's design and programming (along with various patches, etc.) have been added to enhance its security, everything must be perfectly configured. In conclusion, Tor anonymises the origin of the traffic, and ensures encryption inside the Tor network, but it 'does not magically encrypt all traffic throughout the Internet' (Çalışkan et al., 2015: 30).

Besides governmental actors in the security industries, activists, dissidents, journalists and whistleblowers using Tor, there are those who wish to search regions of the internet that have not yet been indexed by Google to form the 'surface web'. This user group includes myself, as I desire to experience the serendipity of finding alternative results. This 'freedom to surf collections without the constraints of disciplinary institutions and freedom to contribute to the construction and curation of one's own past' is my goal in establishing a method to be anonymous online (Thylstrup, 2014: 36). Self-determination, self-governance of one's own data and being free of corporate search strategies are key issues that need to be addressed for such an endeavour. However, 'more research is urgently needed to develop a wider understanding of the social and cultural implications of personalisation of web search in people's everyday life' (Feuz et al., 2011). In order to gain a greater understanding of the complexities involved with data retention of online searching habits, I designed my own empirical experiment in an attempt to circumvent personalisation and to determine whether one could be anonymous when searching online, and if so, how. In a critical and experimental (auto) ethnography of the self I investigate if the 'anonymous' browser Tor offers divergent search results from those of 'personalised' Google.

5 Tails warning: [https://tails.boum.org/doc/about/warning/index.en.html].

The personalised subject versus the anonymised user

The study compares searching keywords on a 'hacker approved' PC that runs Debian using the Tor browser[6] with a completely personalised Apple with an OS Yosemite operating system using Google Search,[7] where Google applies its algorithms to offer relevance and recommendations. Whilst conducting the research online, the search results affect, in turn, the research through the URLs (Uniform Resource Locator) obtained, but also offline behaviour through being personalised. Recursive in spirit regarding the research of search, this study will concomitantly attempt to answer the call for 'a poetics as such for this mysterious new machinic space' (Galloway, 2011: 11).

In order to carry out the study in a secure and parallel manner, I received permission from the technical service department at CBS (Copenhagen Business School) to have a router installed inside my office with multiple ports. Each computer was connected to the router by a cable with the router coupled to the CBS internet, allowing almost simultaneous querying, or at least within the same time frame.[8] While my hypothesis was simple – that I would obtain divergent search results on the two computers – I also wanted to find a way to show *how* they differed. In order to do so, I decided to search with the same keywords, same router, same internet connection with cable, same time stamp (same hour), on two different computers and two different browsers. I gathered data on each computer by capturing the entire web page of the 1st page of results, along with the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th and 50th pages for the data set. I saved these web pages and

6 Obtaining a so-called 'clean' computer was a concerted effort, even convincing trusted hackers to allow me to purchase one of their computers. The PC (a Lenovo Think Pad from about 7 years ago) has only the Tor Browser installed and according to the hackers who set it up for me, is clean. In other words there is no chance of a 'backdoor' when made in China as it has been taken apart, checked and now recycled for this experiment.

7 Given to me to use during my 3-year PhD at Leuphana University, this 13-inch Powerbook is from the end of 2013 with a Retina display, 2,6 GHz Intel Core i5, 16 GB 1600 MHz DDR3 of Memory and an Intel Iris 1536 MB Graphics card. I use Firefox as my browser to search. I have installed no plug-ins (Ghostery, AdBlocker, etc.) for higher privacy and instead, the preferences are set to allow Google 'to have its way with me'.

8 As with most technical setups, this was not without unexpected obstacles en route. Denmark is a trust society, which means everyone in my department has the same master's key to all offices and can let outsiders access offices during business hours. One day, a telephone installer changed all the plugs around, knocking my router off the internet so the technical service had to reconfigure the router, which meant bureaucracy and loss of time. This happened twice up until now. With security updates, the technical service at CBS has reconfigured my router, three times so far, unbeknownst to me, until I discover I have no connection.

clicked through the page numbers at the bottom, and continued to the next page of results. I then engaged the services of a graphic designer, and the data visualisations included here are speculative results. These visualisations of the keyword 'post digital' show the imagined difference in ranking of the search results using Google Search and the Tor browser, along with 'unique' results represented by red and green.

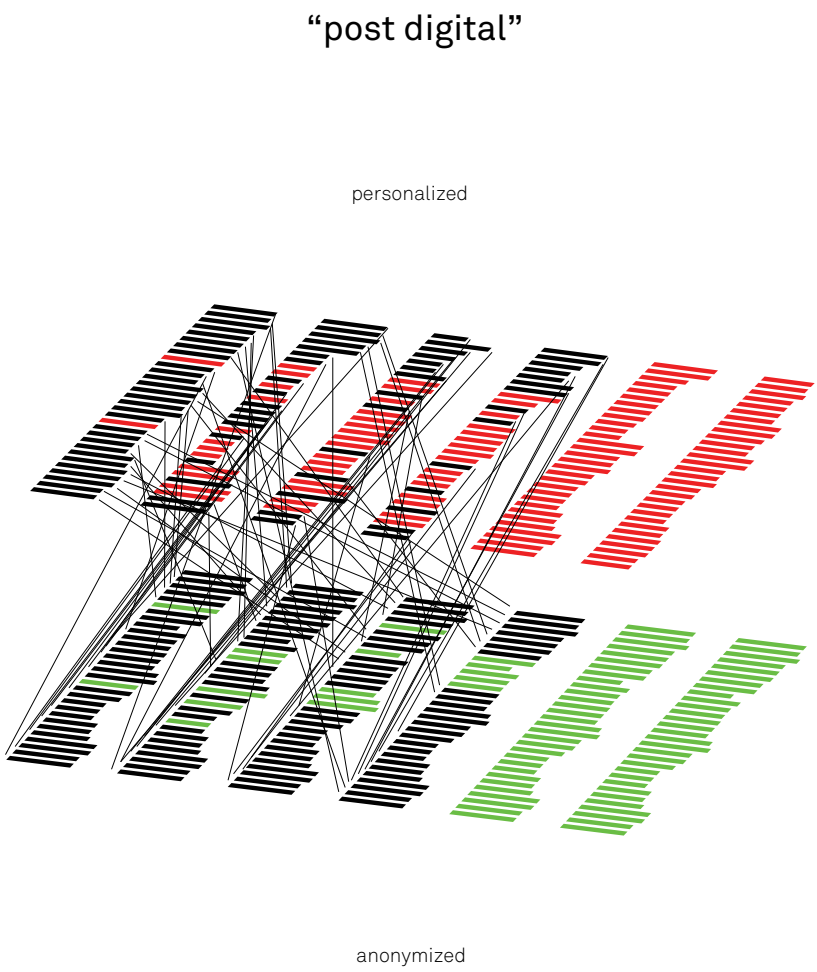

Image 2 and 3: Comparison of imagined ‘personalized’ and ‘anonymized’ search results with keyword ‘postdigital’. Concept: Renée Ridgway. Data visualisation: Richard Vijgen.

Actually the keyword ‘post-digital’ in my findings show that Google does not go beyond the 87th page and Tor not past the 60th page. Whilst searching on the personalised Apple after so many results (35th page), Google asked me if I wanted to search again without having the redundancies eliminated, so I did, with the result of receiving more results, which I used instead. The images emphasise the

links that are unique for a specific configuration – those which only appear with 'personalisation' or those which only appear when 'anonymised'. This 'small data' test shows that the more results obtained, the larger the amount of difference between the two browsers. Numerous speculations exist why there are divergent results; the most obvious is that locative data is included in personalisation, which affects the results based on country and language.

As a next step, I decided to build a larger data set, with more 'keywords' that reflect the vocabularies I came across in my research that were not just 'trending' on Google or had a high currency for AdWords. I used specific keywords, terminology in contemporary art, new media and digital aesthetics, in order to find potential undiscovered texts or projects about these very notions. *Re:search – Terms of art* reflects the 'epistemological gain' measured by their URLs (Uniform Resource Locator) and consists of the following keywords: Accelerationism, Aesthetic Turn, Anthropocene, Artistic Research, Contemporaneity, Creative Industries, Cultural Entrepreneurship, New Aesthetic, Object Oriented Ontology, Performativity, Post Digital, Post Humanism, Post Internet, Post Media, Transmedia.[9] Over the course of a couple of months (October-November in 2015) I searched more and more keywords, in other words carrying out more 'qualitative interviews' with algorithms that gave me 'answers' or results, in an environment that was in constant flux. In regard to labour, I manually conducted the search queries, conducting Mechanical Turking of sorts. The labour was repetitive, incredibly time-consuming and required full-concentration in order to save every web page and gather the data. At a certain moment Google sent me a message to the effect of 'looks like you are a machine' and I had to start over again (earlier, I had also received CAPTCHAs from Tor to test whether I was a machine.).

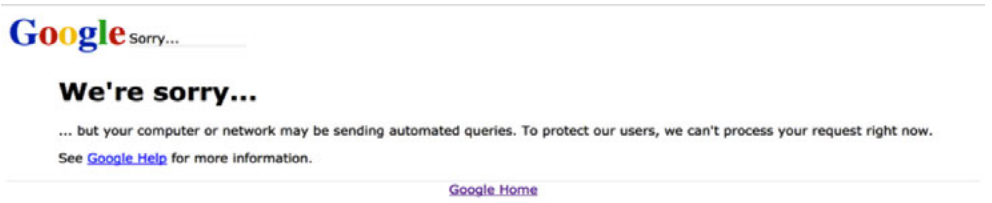

Image 4: Screenshot of 'Googlesorry'

9 I should mention that the term prefix 'post' is problematic. Not only is it now the 'term of the year' (2016) with 'post-truth' society, but with it's double meaning. On the one hand it means 'mail delivery services' and I received many URLs that referred to the various Danish postal systems. On the other hand, many art terms use the term 'post' to make a distinction between various eras or movements. Even a 'post post' whatever is commonplace nowadays.

My data collection so far only involved saving webpages and making screenshots. Initially, I was manually extracting the URLs I obtained. In order to save time, I then started to apply a Python script (provided by an 'anonymous' colleague at Leuphana University and written specifically for this experiment) in order to extract the URLs, which I then extrapolated and placed in an Excel file. My graphic designer used these Excel files to visualise my results – helping me to see another 'view' to understand the results and to compare these two types of online querying. This method, which I am calling 'data visualisation as transcription', allowed me to interpret and analyse my results more efficiently and in a completely new way.[10]

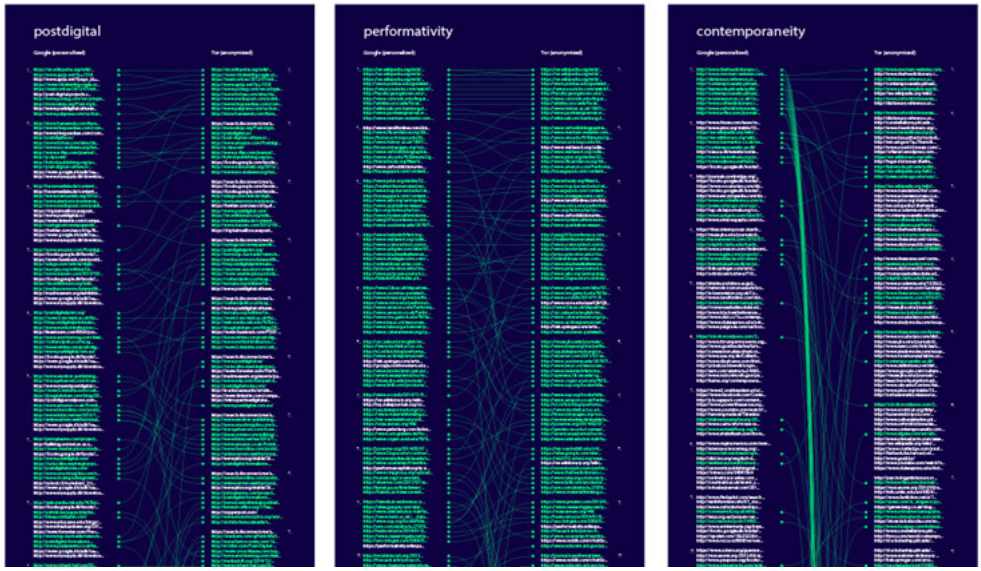

Image 5: Comparison of Goodle Search 'personalized' and Tor Browser 'anonymized' search results with keywords 'postdigital', 'performativity' and 'contemporaneity' Green represents 'identical' URLs. White represents 'unique' URLs

There were constant incidents en route that 'messed' with my searching methods. Google started returning less SERPS (Search Engine Result Page), which means I received less search results. Eventually Tor started to do the same, though Google always delivered more SERPS than Tor, at least with my chosen keywords. As someone who went through all of the webpages of the given results, I was able to see exactly how many pages (and therefore number of results) were actually returned. Moreover, once more I would receive a message from Google around the 35-39th page stating that they had eliminated redundancies and asking if I wished to search again. I kept this data set to the first returns, with the consciousness that I was personalising myself if I were to repeat the keyword during the data capture,

10 'While the URLs are shortened in the print version for legibility reasons, it is the full URL that is being tested for matches'. Richard Vijgen, graphic designer.

stacking the deck as it were.[11] Tor followed suit and seemed to be mimicking Google results with the amount of pages they delivered, however it was consistently less than Google.

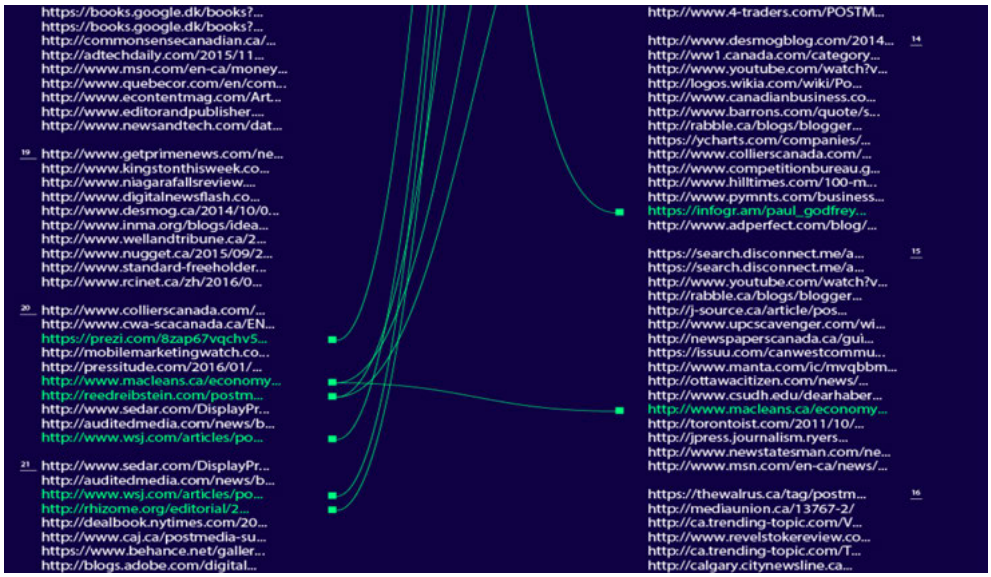

Image 6: Detail: Comparison of Google Search 'personalized' and Tor Browser 'anonymized' search results with keyword 'postmedia'. Green represents 'identical' URLs. White represents 'unique' URLs.

The results were never exactly the same. The major difference between the search results is that even though the URL is the same, the ranking of Google is not the same as Tor. If we compare various keywords, the same URLs are represented by green yet there are also unique results as shown by the white URLs: both Tor and Google delivered unique results. It wasn't until I started digging deeper (searching for answers with Google Search) that I discovered Tor had changed its default browser. 'Startpage.com' used to be Tor's default search engine, yet since March 2015 Tor incorporated 'Disconnect Search' in its browser bundle as its default search engine. Tor stated on their website that 'Disconnect provides private Google search results to Tor users without CAPTCHAs or bans'.[12] I also started to obtain 'ads' from Disconnect Search in my results, which skewed the data as they changed the order of how many results were delivered per page (even though I had set them both at 10 returns per page). Disconnect declared that it does 'detect non-personally identifiable geo-location information to optimize our services, but

11 I did not click on the URL during any time when I was capturing data, as this would have affected the results for personalisation and even added to it. Many of the words were 'first time' search terms.

12 https://blog.torproject.org/blog/tor-browser-45-released.

[unlike Google] we definitely don't collect your precise geo-location or associate geo-location information with a particular user' (*ibid*.). After my experiment, the situation changed once more, as Disconnect was delivering results from Bing and no longer delivering Google search results and as of June 2016, DuckDuckGo is the default search engine for Tor.[13]

Looking back on my 'small data search experiment,' which executed many search requests in a given time frame, I carried out 'qualitative interviews' with algorithms that gave me 'answers' or results. The process itself necessitated negotiating the technical anxieties of attempting to carry out 'empirical' research in an environment where the infrastructure is invisible and the algorithms are in constant flux. As much as Tor is changing its browser bundle and choice of the default search engine, Google is constantly changing its search algorithm. With Tor my IP address was hidden – there is no pinpointing locative data – and for these moments I felt I was able to gather data online 'anonymously'. The ability to be anonymous online, on the 'clear net' without Google's personalisation gives one a sense of freedom and control over one's autonomy. I witnessed a completely different user experience using Tor (and a PC) than searching with Google Search, as Google has a seamless interface that makes searching effortless, and suggests past searches with autocomplete.

The key result – that Tor offered 'relevant' (ostensibly Google) search results – without exposing the identity of the user because of hidden IP address, offers an alternative to Google's personalisation. The experiment also confirms that Tor delivered divergent search results from Google's personalisation in two ways: first, the ranking of the results and the fact that 'unique' URLs were returned. Moreover,

13 https://disconnect.me/privacy. DuckDuckGo also does not share data [https://duckduckgo.com/]. During the past two years Tor has become much faster, which has to do with more relay and exit node operators, the increasing amount of bandwidth available to users, and the fact that file sharing over Tor is less common now that many other services exist for transfer of larger files or storage in the cloud. I can only infer that Tor would like to have quality search results 'as good as Google' yet it does not allow IP addresses to be collated nor sell user data to third parties. Tor states on their blog: 'For a while now Disconnect has no access to Google search results anymore, which we used in Tor Browser. Disconnect being more a meta search engine which allows users to choose between different search providers fell back to delivering Bing search results which were basically unacceptable quality-wise. While Disconnect is still trying to fix the situation we asked them to change the fall back to DuckDuckGo as their search results are strictly better than the ones Bing delivers.' [https://blog.torproject.org/blog/tor-browser-60-released] It is still possible for Tor users to specify they wish to search via Bing (or Yahoo) via Disconnect. But Google is not currently an option, although many users would like Disconnect Search to restore access to Google Search.' [https://techcrunch.com/2016/05/31/tor-switches-to-duckduckgo-search-results-by-default/].

it proposes that Google delivers customised (personalised) search but cannot show the criteria of how Google Search ranks the results, nor how it 'personalises' users and to what degree. I postulate that Google assigns users to 'people like them' as shown in the previous experiment I reference in this text (Feuz et al., 2011). On the other hand, it now seems to me as if I am, when searching via Tor, collaboratively filtered (assigned) on my computer as a 'Tor user' by every web server who sees my IP address.[14]

Preliminary conclusions

If we assume for now that both is the case – on the one hand, I am assigned as a Tor user and on the other that Google assigns me to groups, or people like me (an assumption that I cannot fully prove with my experiment) but is the most likely scenario to explain its outcomes – the original framing of my experiment has to be specified. Instead of a simple personalised versus anonymised search, I would have had, in fact, conducted, on the one hand, search that is collective-via-users-like-me, versus, on the other hand, search that is collective-via-all-Tor-users. At stake are two collectives. These two collectives take different *forms*. In the collective-via-users-like-me-search it is Google's algorithms, which construct the collective I am part of, and assign me into this or that collective. I have no access, no knowledge and no agency in regards to the collectives, which I am made part of via Google. Both the forces that sort me into a collective and the collectives that I am sorted into, i.e. the clusters or groups that Google sets up, are not transparent to me. Meanwhile, Google still collects my individual search activities, and in future scenarios Google will probably individualise search even further based on this data collated in the past and present. Tor's collective, on the other hand, is at least partially known to me. Of course I do not know who is in it (after all it is an anonymised network) all the time but I can look at the 'exit address' list, which is constantly updated that shows who is using it and their IP address).[15] The key difference perhaps is that we decide to be in the 'anonymous Tor' collective,

14 'Any web server will get which public IP address a user is coming from. It's kind of like watching people on public square: it is easy to see what's the street they came from with extra difference that internet users, if they would be on public square, would also wear the big sign saying what's their public IP address…one could easily imagine that the same way a user gets annotated by their country of origin (via geo-IP-database) they also get annotated as "Tor country" (matching IP address of Tor exit nodes). That's something any web server can do (unlike internet service providers who would need to (arguably) put in a lot of effort in order to "capture" Tor traffic from that (beginning) to end)'. Email correspondence with anonymous hacker (12.02.2017).

15 [https://check.torproject.org/exit-addresses].

whereas Google assigns us to particular groups through their non-transparent process of collaborative filtering.

Both search collectives, e.g. the one determined by Google algorithms as well the one created by the decision to use Tor, add to specific filter bubbles. But once more, the filter bubbles are structurally different: in the case of the bubble produced by Google's algorithms, Google uses the data of its users, tweaks its algorithms and feeds this back in the loop. When I search different things, I would just be merged into different clusters with *other* people like me. I would then add to the feedback loop by continuously adding to my own personalisation by clicking on the links that are fed to me. I do not have access to the Google cluster itself – I would be switched into a different cluster by an algorithmically organised process that I have no control over.[16] The filter bubble of the Tor users, on the other hand, is one where I stay in the same group that shares the same filter, no matter how much I change my search behaviours (what I click on or not).

What changes is what Tor uses as their default search engine (Startpage, Disconnect Search or presently DuckDuckGo) and if this default uses Google. When I use Tor I am part of an anonymity p2p network, which increases in strength the more users use it. Exactly and only because I am anonymous and unknown, I have a small voice in a choir of the manifold decisions that make up the p2p-*collective* of Tor users, whereas I would lose this voice if I were to join in the constant flux of algorithmic clustering of personalisation. To partake anonymously in a p2p-collective individuates me more than personalisation does. At stake is an *individuation* in the sense of Bernard Stiegler's reading of Simondon – an individuation that is marked by being collective and psychic alike, which forms the opposite to the *individualisation* of the pseudo-autonomous objects of Google's personalisation.

When Introna and Nissenbaum wrote their seminal text, *Shaping the web: Why the politics of search engines matters* in 2000, the World Wide Web was a growing space of websites that were not necessarily interconnected. For some it 'was a new medium, a democratizing force that will give voice to diverse social, economic, and cultural groups, [and] to members of society not frequently heard in the public sphere. It will empower the traditionally disempowered, giving them access both to typically unreachable nodes of power and to previously inaccessible troves of information' (Introna and Nissenbaum, 2000: 177). There was also the belief that the web and searching wasn't only about information retrieval but knowledge exploration. Written at the dawn of the development of 'gateway platforms' for the

16 I have tried to obtain answers from various Google employees but they all sign 'non-disclosure' agreements when hired.

internet, one of their concerns regards access, for 'those with something to say and offer, as well as those wishing to hear and find' (Introna and Nissenbaum, 2000: 169). The concept of serendipity, or the discovery of websites and connecting linkages one didn't know occurred through surfing the net, by just clicking on hyperlinks and not knowing where these would lead, was the modus operandi for users. This utopian vision of the World Wide Web was that we would search and find information, which we could then share, and hence the world would become comprehensible in all its diversity. This was, of course, an illusion.

What we can now see is that one of the reasons for the end of this illusion lies in the way this 'democratic information space' was conceptualised. The web was thought of as emerging out of myriads of individualised website creators and surfers, whose joint activities would then add up miraculously to a new structured, yet democratic and open space. What was absent was a systematic approach to the need of organising *collectives* to systematise the processes that enables us to navigate this space. This absence, and with it the inherent ideology of individualism at the heart of the World Wide Web, was the opportunity search engines seized. They answered the question of how to navigate and organise such a space by creating algorithmically determined collectives, calling these processes of clustering, in a rather interesting twist: 'personalisation'. In doing so, they became a force that not only enabled accessibility, but also commodified and monopolised access to information, stifled psychic and collective co-individuation and pushed instead the individualisation of the web even further. Whereas early net programmers and users with their 'bulletin board' postings, chat rooms or networks in the 1990s envisioned a 'digital democracy', instead a new form of censorship within political discourse emerged, creating what Matthew Hindman (2009) describes as 'Googlearchy'.[17] The tragedy of the web is that 'deliberative democracy' has been prohibited by a flaw in the World Wide Web's very own structure, recently elucidated by the UK referendum and the US election in 2016.

The experience of setting up these experiments has opened up a *view* on what search could look like, offering 'relevant' search results with Tor, without the user being a 'personalised subject'. After I conducted my research, the Tor browser switched its bundle to DuckDuckGo as its default search engine option and it is not clear whether it uses Google search results by default. However it offers privacy browsing and doesn't track users because data (user IP) is not collected nor do they collect precise geo-location and assign it to a particular user. Tor then provides online protection in the form of anonymity, even though there are still risks to using Tor as it has been and could potentially be compromised by malicious actors in the future. Aside from its other merits in terms of challenging surveillance by

17 Those most heavily linked 'rule', in other words.

state actors, using Tor is also one, albeit not the only, strategy to challenge the internet's very own malevolent power structures. As one of the few alternatives to personalised search it offers to the 'anonymous user' a chance to actually *explore* the internet in an on-going and almost impossible experiment in anonymity.

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Appendix: Interview with an Anonymous hacker (AH)

Renée Ridgway (RR): What makes Tor unsafe?

AH: When you use Tor you are just a client. But the exit nodes are a real problem. We do not know who is running the servers of these exit nodes. They could be anyone in the world, also governmental officials, FBI, CIA, SIS, M16, etc.

RR: Can I be anonymous on the internet?

AH: There is no way to be anonymous on the internet actually. Or, if you would be anonymous, it would be temporary and it would cost much effort and money. If you wish to be anonymous you would need to hack a wireless network somewhere, anonymously, by sitting in a car in the street for example. The computer or device you are using needs to not be registered to you, or that you have purchased it because its MAC (media access control) address is traceable. (Every device has a MAC address, but there are ways to remove it.) After using the internet for whatever you want to do you would then need to destroy the computer or get rid of it in some way, pass it on, knowing full well that you have been able to be tracked. Nowadays the way you type, how long it takes, rhythm, keystrokes, (e-biometrics) are also personally identifiable.

RR: What is the best way you know of to be anonymous on the internet at this moment if I cannot carry out what you describe above?

AH: Tails is an operating system that is installed on a USB stick that you boot with your computer. Using Tails in combination with Tor complicates things a bit so you are harder to track but the good news is that everything is deleted afterwards. Tails is designed to leave no traces on your computer. If you do want to save something you should either back it up on another device, like a USB stick, or a DVD or send it through the internet (always tricky, depending on whether you wish to have the information compromised). Saving webpages, taking screenshots, etc. for your research would only work if you set yourself up with admin account and deliberately save them on the computer you are using, but then you compromise the whole purpose of using Tails for deletion and anonymity.

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Images of anonymity

Andreas Broeckmann

Introduction

The term 'anonymity' characterises a particular type of social relationship in which identifying information about a person is unavailable, perhaps actively withheld. Anonymity manifests in social interactions and transactions, or in the ways in which certain types of information are detached from these interactions. Images that deal with anonymity therefore often refer to the visual sources of identification (like the face, fingerprints, DNA visualisations), to communication techniques through which such information is conveyed, and to the transformation of these sources by means of masks or codes. Such images generally remain metaphorical of anonymity which can only be indicated, while this relation itself it is a cognitive state that is not visually given.

This essay deals with some of the contemporary visual representations in which anonymity comes into play. It includes examples of press images as well as images taken in artistic and scientific contexts, which it loosely collates into four sections, relating to anonymity in public space, involuntary and voluntary masks, forensic techniques of identification, and the desire to overcome enforced anonymity. The selection presented here is not intended as a definitive classification, but as an attempt at circumscribing the visual field of anonymity. Neither are all the possible variants of contemporary anonymity arrangements covered by the following examples – aspects like the anonymity of money, anonymous sperm and egg donations, or anonymous online browsing environments like 4chan or the Tor network are not addressed here, nor are related artistic practices (like for instance the complex *Status project* flow-charts with which British artist Heath Bunting maps the administrative construction of legal personas, or the bitcoin-based shopping spree by Mediengruppe Bitnik's *Random online shopper*), many of which are conceptual rather than visual in nature.

The human face plays a particularly prominent role in images of anonymity. Homing in on what Dutch critic Daniël de Zeeuw has referred to as 'mask culture', the opening image of this essay points to the multiplicity of meanings associated with anonymity: this mask, originally a stylised portrait of the English Catholic revolutionary Guy Fawkes and adopted a.o. by the Anonymous hacker collective, appears here in a transparent version crafted by the artist Aram Bartholl. Like the questionable protection offered by this mask, anonymity is never absolute, but relative to the context and the particular circumstances under which it is constructed and performed. In many cases, it is merely imagined, though no less empowering and affective.

Aram Bartholl: *How to Vacuum Form,* multiple, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Catalogued. Crowded urban spaces are the epitome of anonymous social environments. Many people moving around, doing their own thing, not knowing each other – and in many cases not wanting to know each other. Social theorists of modernity have described the city as a site of both alienation and of freedom from obligations that come with communitarian and intimate sociality. The short video *Catalogue* by Chris Oakley (produced in 2004, several years before people started carrying smartphones as their personal tracking and data transparency devices) develops the vision of a shopping mall in which the visitors are identified by a surveillance system that correlates their customer type and previous consumption to their behaviour in the situation observed *in situ* as they look at shop windows, pay attention to advertising posters or not, and examine garments and other products, try them on, etc. While these people remain anonymous to each other, they appear as fully identified and made transparent as subjects of the technological system that controls and informs this site of consumption.

Chris Oakley: *Catalogue*, video still, 2004. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Camouflage. Social relationships, whether unequal or equal, are based on reciprocity. The figure of *MacGhillie,* proposed by the artist group Knowbotic Research, subverts such reciprocity. Neither the face of the wearer nor his or her body can be seen. The figure oscillates between the hyperpresence of a mask and visual redundancy. It traverses the modern urban environment in which conspicuity holds ambivalent currency, wavering between cumbersome affirmation and visual arbitrariness. *MacGhillie* is a vague presence, an anonymous figure without identity, a void in the social system. Donning the camouflage suit offers the chance to temporarily withdraw from the normal subject position and 'become *MacGhillie*'. The participative action implies a fundamental questioning of interpersonal relationships based on mutual recognition and trust. *MacGhillie* is not necessarily a tragic, solipsistic figure, unable to enter social relations; instead, camouflage is a cunning instrument of self-empowerment and control over one's social identity through its negation.

Knowbotic Research: *MacGhillie,* urban intervention, 2009. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Commons. Because of its current technical protocols, any data transaction on the Internet leaves digital traces in log-files, on servers and routers, many of which are subject to the control not only of the respective system operators, but also to the online surveillance by state and private, so-called security services. The documents made public by Edward Snowden testify to the comprehensiveness of global online surveillance by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and their international partners. They highlight the technical challenge for any attempt to establish in online communication and transactions the levels of anonymity which were, in the past, customarily expected in private conversations or cash acquisitions. Will there be a growing differentiation in social protocols and practices around anonymity, while on the technical level, substantial anonymity will increasingly be eroded? Will the technical implementation of anonymity require clandestine tools like the *Dead Drops* which are non-private USB devices available for data storage and sharing, cemented into the cracks of the built urban infrastructure?

Aram Bartholl: *Dead Drops,* public interventions, 2010-2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Inconspicuous. Over a period of two months, in the summer of 2009, Serbian artist Milica Tomic visited sites of the armed struggle of Yugoslav partisans against German occupation during the Second World War. During these walks, Tomic was carrying a gun – as casually as possible, she says, as though she was carrying a plastic bag. The photos and videos taken during these repeated walks document the marking and mapping of the sites where the clandestine acts of resistance took place. An unintended outcome of these performances was the realisation that people in the city streets barely took any notice of this anonymous woman-in-the-crowd carrying a gun, and nobody ever called the police, or tried to stop her. One could speculate that the militarisation of the Serbian society was, just over ten years after the wars in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, still so intense that seeing a weapon in public seemed normal. Or that the level of social disengagement was so high, that nobody really cared.

Milica Tomic: *One day, instead of one night, a burst of machine-gun fire will flash, if light cannot come otherwise*, photo / video action, 2009. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Bagged. This photo of a detainee whose identity is being concealed by means of a black bag won the World Press Photo Award in 2004. It is reminiscent of the infamous images of acts of abuse against prisoners in Abu Ghraib and of those from the US camp in Guantánamo Bay where prisoners have been regularly kept in obtrusive orange overalls and with similar black bags over their heads. The concealment of the face is an act of power that articulates the conditions and regimes of identity and anonymity. The dehumanising gesture of hiding the head in a bag – a bag that might just as well function as a container for the head after it has been severed from the body – is here contrasted and amplified by the caring gesture towards the child whom the detainee is holding in his arm, protecting it as well as possible from the sun. The child is perfectly calm, exhausted perhaps, fully accepting the protection as though coming from a parent. What the photograph does not show, and what the bag also conceals, is whether the lips of the detainee are moving, and whether he might be whispering to the child words of love and comfort or words of hate and insurrection.

Jean-Marc Bouju: *Iraqi War Prisoner*, photograph, 2003. Photo copyright AP / Picture Alliance.

Codes. One technique of anonymisation implies the replacement of names by impersonal numbers and other codes and the inscription of bodies with these codes – in this case with a waterproof pen, in others by means of tattooing, like in the Nazi concentration camps where identification numbers were tattooed on the inmates' forearms. In a database, such more or less unchangeable physical features like birthmarks, tattoos, or missing or deformed limbs, would be documented and permanently connect the number to a name, the durability of the mark inscribing identifiability on the body. But why are the eyes of the arrested man bandaged? What is it that he is not supposed to see? The face of the soldier who so readily allows the photographer to shoot a picture, over his shoulder? Or the face of the photographer? In this scene, whose identity is being concealed from whom? Which information is withheld, and which information is added? Who can read the codes of identification?

Jacob Silberberg: *Haditha, Iraq*, photograph, 2005. Photo copyright AP / Picture Alliance.

Blur. In a digital portrait image, pixelation signifies that the facial features and identity of the person are known, and that this knowledge is deliberately withheld from the public eye. It is a visual code applied in the mass media, a media effect. The computer on which these image files are stored and through which the pixelation has been applied, holds the undistorted portraits. They are not shown themselves, but their digital masking testifies to the authenticity of the portraits and the existence of the accused.

Photo clipping, Rheinische Post, 27 September 2007.

Dangerous reward. The protection offered by a mask can have many reasons. Here an informant to the police in the Philippines is publically rewarded for having provided crucial information that led to the capture of an Islamist terrorist leader. Any particular physical markers are hidden behind a black mask, white gloves, generic clothes. Most striking in the photograph is perhaps the smile of the plain clothes officer who hands over the suitcase with the money and who appears certain that he knows the person hiding under the mask – an anonymisation that is meant only for some of those present, while others feel a gratitude towards the person whose identity they help obfuscate. The danger from which the mask protects the informant comes from two sides: from the accomplices of the captured terrorist who might seek revenge from a traitor, and from those observers who are envious and would like to obtain a part of the reward money. The moment of removing the mask, the moment of revelation and transformation, is always highly precarious.

Laurenz Castillo: *US embassy officials and informants, Philippines*, photograph, 2007. Photo copyright dpa - Report / Picture Alliance.

Prize. In this image the relationship of masked and openly visible faces is reversed: the guys with the guns hide their faces behind what looks like traditional cloth, while the kidnappee is clearly identifiable. Showing his face is the main purpose of the image, the promise of the prize that is his safe return if the ransom is paid, or other conditions set by the kidnappers are met. The second most important aspect are the guns, which testify to the possibility to kill the captive and, as marked by the bazooka leaning in the background, launch attacks against larger targets. This is a gamble in which the faces of the kidnappers are unimportant. What Roland Barthes called the *punctum*, the point of attraction that appears to form the emotional hinge of the photograph, are the eyes of the squatting kidnapper who observes the victim with puzzling care.

Stringer, *Hostage, Afghanistan*, photograph, 2007. Photo copyright Reuters.

Equals. In the summer of 2007, German special police forces arrested members of a supposed Islamist terrorist group which, in correspondence to the region where they were based, became known as the *Sauerland Gruppe*. All four men in the photograph are wearing balaclavas which make them appear very similar – unidentified members of the tribe that does not want to be recognised in press photographs like this one. The detainee is hand-cuffed and wears a blue overall which the police may have brought to the early-morning arrest. His anonymisation protects his civil rights that prevent public exposure. A carefully choreographed scene, down to the handsome automatic weapon camouflaged in front of the grey jacket.

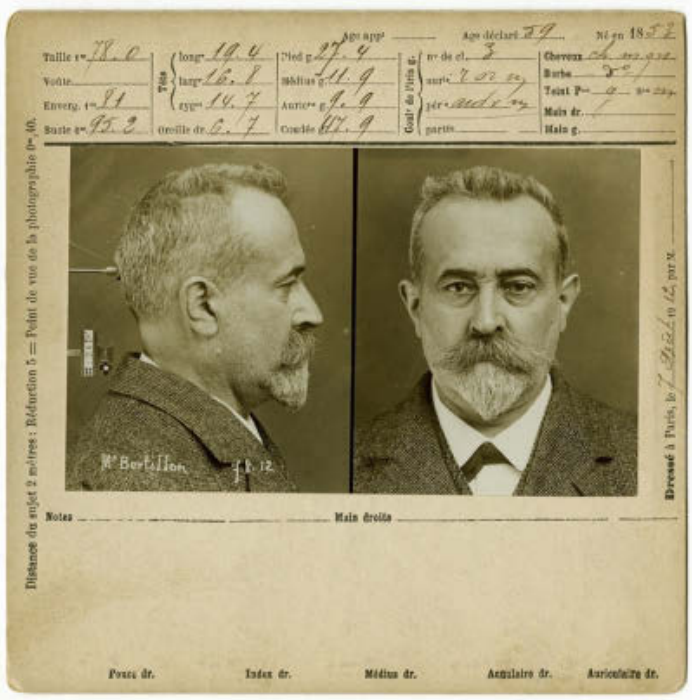
Ronald Wittek: *German Federal Police officers and suspect*, photograph, 2007. Photo copyright DPA / Picture Alliance.

Green veil. The woman's face is covered by green cloth, darkened glasses shield her eyes from the sun and from unwanted gazes. The hair which a veil is normally supposed to hide, proudly towers her forehead. There is a man standing beside her, his face clearly recognisable, his mouth pasted shut with an x-shaped green tape. The gesture he makes with his right hand – a Victory-sign composed of forefinger and middle finger, both tightly wrapped in shiny green tape – seems to embrace the woman, even though, on second sight, we understand that she is standing in front of him, and only the medial effect of spatial compression due to the optics of the tele-lense pushes their images together, closer than the two people actually are. As it appears in this press image, the woman's form of public protest is one of passive resistance, of hiding her face and turning the religious demand of covering her head into an act of anonymisation and defiance. Under which circumstances will she reveal her face?

Photo Ghalam News, Iran, 2009.

Being Leo Selvaggio. How to avoid being identified by public surveillance cameras and facial recognition systems, including those in people's smartphones? If you wear a balaclava, or show up as *MacGhillie*, you're likely to draw unnecessary attention. The American artist Leo Selvaggio is offering his own face as a basis for masks that people can buy or produce themselves, and wear in public. Similar to the multiple copies of the same *Payback* customer card issued by the Foebud media activist association a few years ago, Selvaggio's *URME Mask* multiplies and diffuses his own facial identity and, at the same time, offers it as an anonymising shield for others. While they walk around as though they were Leo Selvaggio, he himself is henceforth only one possible wearer of the face and his identification would require immediate physical examination, rather than visual surveillance at a distance.

Leonardo Selvaggio: *URME Personal Surveillance Identity Prosthetic*, 3D-printed mask, 2014. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Portrait parlé. The concept of a personal identity which is disrupted by anonymity, is itself an invention of the modern era of Western civilisation. According to Michel Foucault, the emergent forms of governmentality of the 18th century required – first in Europe, then also in its colonies – an unambiguous relation between bodies, names, and social personas. The inscription into administrative, labour and juridical relationships created the modern subjectivities of individuals who would – reluctantly or proudly – say 'I'. The French police administrator Alphonse Bertillon, one of the engineers of such modern identity regimes, conceived the *portrait parlé* to enable 'signaletic identification': measurements taken of different body parts, combined with a standard frontal and profile portrait photograph. The latter was, notably, not regarded as the primary source for identification, but only as subsidiary, since the usefulness of such a picture depended on intuitive recognition, rather than on the objective reliability of skull circumference, ear shape, or finger prints (which are missing on this *fiche* which Bertillon made of himself).

Alphonse Bertillon: *Portrait parlé, Alphonse Bertillon,* identification card, 1912.

Inversion. The trial against OJ Simpson in a US court made extensive use of DNA traces that were found at different sites and presented as proof of the identity of the supposed murderer. The court case was embedded in a media environment in which the forensic methods employed by the police were popularised by the 'CSI' TV series that inflated trust in the reliability of such methods. At the same time, the case became the site of their intense public critique. Against the popular belief that the visualisation of a DNA sequence is a fixed and recognisable 'portrait' of a specific person, the Bio-Art activist Paul Vanouse staged a performance in which his collaborators instructed the audience in creating such visualisations. The aim was to inform them about the degree to which the visual outcome of the procedure varies and is predicated on specific technical methods, materials and choices taken. The Simpson trial, as Vanouse affirms, was then also the first such case in which the defence team was technically informed enough to successfully challenge the supposed DNA-related evidence put before the jury.

Paul Vanouse: *Suspect Inversion Center, SIC, Clipboard from installation at Schering Foundation, Berlin,* 2011. Photograph by Axel Heise. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Constructions. In a series of artificial human faces, the artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg speculates about the presumed possibility of gleaning physiognomic information from DNA traces found, for instance, in the street in the form of human hair, or saliva on cigarette butts. The presence or absence of certain genes in these DNA samples suggest the likelihood of specifications regarding race, gender, eye-colour, nose size and shape, or obesity. In order to arrive at a fully shaped face – rather than at a loose assemblage of abstract features – the results have to be extrapolated to an extent that what are really random or highly generic choices appear, in plastic representations like these, as unique features. The recognisability is disconcerting, especially because there is no way to confirm or disclaim any real similarity that may exist between the person who threw away the cigarette butt, and these artificial, phantom features. Since the procedure is in use and requires critical public engagement, Dewey-Hagborg has decided to make the code publically available that she continues to develop for her project.

Heather Dewey-Hagborg: *Stranger Visions (East Hampton 7)*, 3D-printed portrait, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Archaeology. The murder of political opponents and prisoners and their anonymous burial in individual or mass graves is one of the methods of annihilation that have been used in recent decades by dictatorial regimes all over the world – in Argentina, in El Salvador, in Iraq, in Iran. The practice of 'counter-forensics' as described by the artist and critic Allan Sekula, is employed to recover the identity of those carelessly buried bodies. The archaeological work to be done includes many steps and requires the observation and documentation of the henchmen and the grave-diggers, the identification of burial sites, the digging and careful removal of covering earth and materials, the recovery of significant bodily remains and their coupling with identifying markers, culled from the memories of surviving family members and acquaintances. These efforts involved in reconnecting information, reversing the cuts of anonymisation, give an indication of the work that is involved in any countering of anonymity, in the marking and creating of identities, sources, origins.

Susan Meiselas: *An international forensic team organized by Middle East Watch and Physicians for Human Rights work at a mass grave site in Koreme, Northern Iraq (Kurdistan)*, photograph, June 1992. Photo copyright Susan Meiselas / Magnum Photos.

Operational images. The form of display in this widely publicised aerial image suggests that the portrait it shows has a target audience of only one: the drone pilot who, perhaps, considers launching a deadly attack on the house next to the field where the oversized picture of a child has been placed; the implicit claim being that the depicted child lives in the house and would be killed if the house was bombed. However, for over a hundred years the history of aerial military reconnaissance has been a history of camouflage and counter-camouflage, hiding military installations under seemingly natural covers on one side, and employing specially trained people who recognise the camouflage and identify the relevant target hidden beneath it on the other. The anonymity of the dangerous or innocent homestead is given a face which it can only wear like a mask, since there is no way that the truth about the inhabitants can be directly communicated to the remote viewer on a computer console in Nevada, or Arizona. Like for the wearer of Selvaggio's *URME Mask*, identification would require an immediate encounter.

#NotABugSplat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, Pakistan, hand-out, 2014. Photo copyright AFP/Getty Images.

Insertion. While somebody has requested for the facade of Borsigstraße 4 in Berlin to be concealed from Google Streetview, which is why in this image the area to the left appears as a translucent blur, the artist Aram Bartholl decided to run after the camera car and seek its attention, and the attention of uncounted Google Streetview users who examine that part of the Earth by means of the online service. Somewhat frustratingly, his face – like any other face or number plate that Google's visual recognition software detects in these photographic images – is also blurred and recognisable only to people who are familiar with Bartholl's characteristic physique. On the image files stored on servers of the company itself, faces, number plates and facades are of course properly visible, waiting for examination and further usage.

Aram Bartholl: *15 seconds of fame,* performance, 2010. Photo courtesy of the artist.

further reading on 'Images of anonymity'

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The terms of anonymity: An interview with Marit Hansen, German data protection expert

Götz Bachmann, Paula Bialski and Marit Hansen

abstract

As data gathering technologies are permeating various corners of our lives, a number of stakeholders are attempting to map, track, analyse and define what is happening to our identity, our privacy, or our ways of being social. As notions like privacy, anonymity, data, unlinkability, or pseudonymity are being defined, many of these definitions, while sounding almost the same, shift meaning from discipline to discipline, from context to context, and from one political agenda to the other. In this interview with Marit Hansen, one of the most influential activists for data protection regulation in Germany, and the head of the Independent Centre for Data Protection (ULD) and the Data Protection Commissioner of Schleswig-Holstein, Hansen highlights the way in which her computer science discipline defines its terms and working categories, in a rapidly changing landscape of data gathering technologies. The interview draws heavily from her (co-authored with Andreas Pfitzmann) seminal paper in the computer science field around privacy, anonymity and 'identity management,' titled 'A terminology for talking about privacy by data minimization: Anonymity, unlinkability, undetectability, unobservability, pseudonymity, and identity management'.

Introduction

The profound changes in technologies of personal data collection have shifted our terms for understanding anonymity. As data gathering technologies are permeating various corners of our lives, a number of stakeholders are attempting to map, track, analyse and define what is happening to our identity, our privacy, or our ways of being social. These stakeholders include lawmakers and politicians, think tank members and lobbyists, entrepreneurs and marketeers, journalists and activists, legal scholars and lawyers, social scientists and computer scientists. Part

of these processes of defining the unfolding reality of our mass-scale data collection includes outlining the terms and definitions at stake. As notions like privacy, anonymity, data, unlinkability, or pseudonymity are being defined, many of these definitions, while sounding almost the same, shift meaning from discipline to discipline, from context to context, and from one political agenda to the other.

Computer science has very technical definitions for the terms of anonymity – terms that are used to build technical systems – simulating how anonymity in practice works, searching for failures and loopholes in various communication networks being built, and tweaking these networks in order to improve them. Perhaps the most seminal paper in the computer science field around the terminology used for a range of phenomena related to privacy, anonymity and 'identity management' online is 'A terminology for talking about privacy by data minimization: Anonymity, unlinkability, undetectability, unobservability, pseudonymity, and identity management'. The paper was written by the late-computer scientist Andreas Pfitzmann, and Marit Hansen. To put the authors' main argument quite simply: times are changing in the world of anonymity, data privacy and identity management, and nobody knows how to define what's happening. Let's attempt to do so anyhow.

We reached out to Marit Hansen in order to gain insight into the way in which a discipline defines its terms and working categories in a rapidly changing social landscape. Written in 1999, first published in 2000, and rewritten in multiple iterations until 2010, the paper was created during a period, when the way in which anonymity was 'done' online – meaning how communication happened and who could partake in intercepting such communication – was in rapid flux. Throughout our interview with Hansen it became apparent how data protection knowledge is shaped by a nexus of legal and technical knowledge alike, within historical, political and economic contexts, and with various decisions becoming politicised, often explicitly building on the history that came before it. All these elements become enmeshed. Pfitzmann and Hansen's paper tried to 'clean up this mess', while being fully aware that such a task is challenging, if not impossible.

At the moment, Hansen is one of the most influential activists for data protection regulation in Germany, and the head of the Independent Centre for Data Protection (ULD) and the Data Protection Commissioner of Schleswig-Holstein (one of the Federal States of Germany). She is a computer scientist by trade, and her work sits at the interface of law and technology. In her years as a researcher and data protection commissioner, she has pioneered the concept of data protection by means of technology and privacy-by-design, through which the ULD has gained its respected status. In 2007, she was furthermore appointed by the

European Commission as an expert in the 'Privacy & Technology' working group. The interview is based on an evening with Hansen in her office in Kiel. In two hours, we revisited the aforementioned seminal paper (for a short summary see also the appendix), and explored the paper's context as well as ways how the paper terms can be translated to scholars in the social sciences and humanities who are interested in working with these terms.

Paula Bialski (PB): I'd like to start by backing up about 20 years, to the moment before you wrote your paper with Andreas Pfitzmann. What inspired you both to write it?

Marit Hansen (MH): I normally don't get asked this question! I have to really think back ... Well, in the year 2000, we had the first workshop on privacy enhancing technologies, called PETs. In fact this was the founding conference of the PET symposia [currently one of the most influential gatherings of researchers working on privacy technologies.]

PB: Can I stop you right here, and ask you to explain a little bit more about where the idea of privacy enhancing technologies comes from?

MH: You have to see that in the 1980s and 1990s it had become increasingly apparent that if you want to protect privacy, regulating information and communication technologies is not enough. You have to build such concerns and values directly into the technology, for example by developing technologies that minimise the collection of personal data.

PB: Interesting! This reminds me of Lawrence Lessig, who famously declared that 'code is law' – privacy becomes a job of technology, so to say!

MH: Yes, very much so! And at that time I had been working at the data protection authority for a few years. I started in 1995, and by the year 2000 we knew already how much misunderstanding there could be between lawyers and computer scientists. At that time, even the 'anonymity' or 'anonymisation' definition in the different data protection acts was different. Schleswig-Holstein [the state of Germany where Hansen is based] had a different data protection policy from the federal one, not to even mention the differences between the definitions of the different EU member states.

PB: Can you give me an example of what was at stake?

MH: At that time, pseudonyms and pseudonymity entered the legal debate and was turned into laws, but often with completely different definitions. That kicked off the identities management debate in computing and legal regulation. Several

people thought: 'isn't identity management – on the basis of different pseudonyms – the solution? Isn't this the future of data protection perhaps? If you can protect your identity yourself?' At least it was necessary to understand better how technical solutions could support the societal challenges of data protection.

PB: So what were the aims of the PET workshop in 2000?

MH: The workshop on all flavours of privacy enhancing technologies was organised by a colleague named Hannes Federrath, who, at that time, was a visiting scholar at Berkeley University. So I flew to California with several others from the team of Andreas Pfitzmann from Dresden University. There were Europeans and Americans – and both groups even had different ways of understanding how an infrastructure should work. We were talking about 'mixes' – and there were at that time different ways that mixes worked.

Götz Bachmann (GB): Before we talk about these differences between US-American and European approaches – and we surely should! – can you please first explain, what, 'mixes' are?

MH: Mix technologies were invented by David Chaum, who is often called the grandmaster of privacy technologies. If you want to achieve anonymity in a computer science context, you have several possibilities. In theory, you could have 'no identifiers' at all, which is, of course, not very realistic in a computer science world. Because, as we all know, there are always identifiers. But there are different types. One type is generated by using random data. This identifier doesn't contain information on the subject it is attached to. And then there are non-random identifiers, like a nickname based on my street name. An e-mail address or a phone number are of the latter kind, too, as they contain information on how to reach the user. To attempt to achieve anonymity, you try to use the former. But what's more important is an 'anonymity set', where people cannot single out specific individuals within this set, because the behaviour of this 'set' is the same. The 'mixes' I mentioned then work as a chain to achieve 'anonymity sets'. They take in messages from multiple senders, mix them, and send them back out in random order to the next destination.

GB: I think we might do well with another example ...

MH: Okay, let's say I wanted to send a letter to Goetz, and if I send it, you can intercept that. The idea of David Chaum was that we should assume within any communication network, that there is a big mighty observer. At that time, nobody could imagine that this observer was real. But Chaum said, that it doesn't matter if this observer is real or not – if you solve the problem (in computer science terms)

for a mighty and powerful observer, then all other observers are also solved as well. So you make the problem bigger. Even larger than you think is realistic. And if you solve that, the rest is solved as well. Now in the meantime we have found out that the mighty observer, or the powerful observer does exist! But this we did not know at that time.

GB: If I understand you right, in your paper the 'mighty big observer' is called the 'attacker', correct?

MH: Yes, that's correct. And it is true computer scientist always think about 'attackers', or 'adversaries'. But we shouldn't take the term 'attack' as negative, or aggressive. It can also be a passive observation. And therefore we have something called a 'passive attack' and the 'active attack'. So you always have to consider that this is strictly computer science terminology. It's often not well understood in other disciplines like the legal sciences for example. For legal experts, there usually seems to be motivation behind an action. The attacker is trying to destroy something. That's not the same understanding in computer science. Of course, the third party might be trying to gain access, but this could also be for a legitimate, lawful reason, such as when law enforcement needs to accesses something. Attack does not mean that it's forbidden or not, or morally good or bad. It's only about the power of the 'attacker' – and that's called in our language the 'attacker model'. We also discuss the level of power that this attacker has: are they very bright or intelligent? Or do they have very quick computers? Can they draw on their computer forces? Can they also input their own messages? Or can they only observe? These are all part of the 'power of the attacker'. So you can imagine that at that time, nobody thought that what we discussed was in fact a real attacker model. We thought it was too mighty, too powerful.

PB: I am starting to get the picture. And I think this is a good moment to return to your point about different US and European approaches to anonymity.

MH: Okay – although it's not really US versus Europe. With the TOR network, for example, there is a free possibility to find your route through a network. Let's call this the US American approach. Our approach, the one we were and are employing in the AN.ON network and its successors, was different. It was much more about knowing exactly the 'nodes', i.e. the 'mixes', the message will pass. We called this mix mechanism a 'fixed mix cascade'. In it, it is fully clear where the 'mixes' are, what the order of the 'mixes' are, and what 'the last mix' is. The Americans said: 'Forget about cascades. Cascades have to be coordinated, and this helps the attacker. If somebody decides how to put together the cascades, you become vulnerable'. But the German team at the workshop argued: 'Our method is reliable because there are guarantees of the service, and you also know' – and here is where

the first legal idea came in – 'where the mixes are situated. What is the local law at that specific "mix" location? Should the "mixes" be in the same country? Should they be in different countries? What are the pros and cons?'

You know from the routing protocol on the Internet that it's not necessarily by accident, where each item of information goes. Whoever says 'oh my route is very good, come to me!' may get most of the traffic. Which means that an attacker can also try to be one of those seemingly 'nice' mixes, and by that getting everything. So with TOR, for example, you send something, and it finds its way. 'Its magic! It's good! You don't think about it!' But almost every hop could be accessed or owned by the NSA. You don't know for sure, but it could. With the cascades of AN.ON this could, in theory, happen, too. But with the fixed mix cascade, you know, who is providing each mix. The mix provider has signed a contract – at least in our setting they did. So if you know beforehand, who owns the specific mix, you may visit them, you may think about their reputation, you follow up with them. You would think, that if one link in the chain of the mix is weak, it breaks. But within a mix cascade, the opposite is the case. If only one link is strong, that would be sufficient for anonymity. The attacker does not have the full information and thus cannot decrypt the data, and anonymity is not broken. So we think it is really something where we can do some lobbying for.

With the American perspective, on the other hand, the individual is responsible, and everybody who discloses information is responsible. And it's the 'once-it-is-out-we-can-not-help-you' approach. But this does not work well in a networked world. Who can really defend himself against so many data controllers? So the legal European model, the data protection model, means, we want to *trust* the data controller, but the data controller has to give guarantees and to prove its trustworthiness. And if they are doing something wrong, then we can sue them, or they can be fined, or something like that. So these are two different approaches.

PB: And all this comes to the foreground in this workshop in 2000! What happened next?

MH: At the workshop we found out that we need the right terms to find out what are the different pros and cons in this matter. At that time, Andreas Pfitzmann was lecturing on this topic, and he had some ideas of how to define these terms, because it was his need to have these categories organised in his head. But these terms were not really what we needed at that time. So we sat around and got into a lot of discussions. Andreas changed almost everything. That workshop in Berkeley wasn't about PowerPoint slides, but really about getting together with colourful paper and pens and transparent projector foils. And I remember that Andreas put the foils on top of each other to make different levels – to see 'now we

are discussing this level, now that level'. And this I thought was very impressive. It was such a nice atmosphere there. The weather was warm. We were sitting on the flat roof of this building and thinking about what he had presented. And through this process, we found out, 'yes, it makes sense, not only to have this debate, or one little facet of the debate, but it's great to really have some basics. To really have the same terminology'.

PB: In the following 10 years, the paper was constantly being updated. It almost became a public document, a sort of wiki written by some of the leading experts...

MH: Yes, and that is not typical, by the way! It is not typical to have an open paper, which is ready for discussion and amendments from the public. Andreas was a very open guy and said, 'This is so important, we need to get feedback from everybody who wants to give feedback'. These updates made sense for our times and for our discipline. You can look back to older versions and see the progress. We decided it doesn't matter where we publish it. We didn't want to publish it for the sake of publishing. We wanted to publish for the sake of the academic discourse. And at that time you could see several references from different fields, and different translations into all sorts of languages, but it was progressing slowly. If you count what is happening in the field of anonymity in different disciplines, it is very hard to, well, cover everything. Our paper worked, because we said it was not fixed. We wanted to get input from others in our field, because otherwise this term-building would not work. After my co-author Andreas Pfitzmann died, at first I didn't feel like continuing on my own – we always had so many discussions and argued about each word until we were satisfied. This process cannot be done by one person only. Several people asked me to continue and update our work. But one of the things I understood only recently is that I am now in a different position. I am the head of ULD, and this is the supervisory authority in charge of laid down data protection law. But the legal definitions are different from the computer science perspective. Even if we could achieve a connect, changes in the terminology paper could become political. That makes it too complicated.

PB: What would you change now? Where does the paper need updating?

MH: We only wrote this paper to define communication technology, but we never really addressed database terminology – which is, as it turned out, something different. At some point in time we noticed that and added a definition of the setting. But the discussions on big data and potential anonymity wouldn't fit well in the current structure of the paper.

GB: Could you elaborate on this difference?

MH: With a communication network, there is always a sender and a message and one or more recipients. Then there are always items of interest. This can be, for example, the message itself, or the relation between a message and sender. With database terminology, it is important to remember that a database contains many entries, many items of interest. This is important. When just analysing a communication system, we assumed that, for example, a third party doesn't look into the content of the message. So if the message contains 'I am Marit', I can encrypt it and do as much anonymisation to this message as I want, and nobody can read into what the content of the message is. So with communication systems, we assumed, that the message is not readable, and that it is encrypted in a way that it cannot be hacked.

But it does not make sense to discuss settings of databases with encrypted data. Why not? Because you cannot work well with encrypted data. So we always have to take into account the accessible information. And as you can imagine, a database often includes personal data. So then what do you do with this personal data? That becomes mostly a legal discussion: When do you anonymise, or throw the item of information away, etc. etc.? But this issue goes beyond singular databases: if there is a large amount of people in a medical database, and this database can be linked to other data sets in another database, then it may be very easy to get to the personal relation by linkage, by linking these two databases together. Databases contain much more information than merely the obvious. This was the case before in the 90s, but in our times of 'big data', this has reached a new dimension.

PB: This sounds like an even more pessimistic stance than the starting point of your paper, where you state that full anonymity is not achievable.

MH: A perfect world is not achievable, but still, we talk about it, right? Again, I think it is about the attacker-model. If some observers can observe so many things, or so much is digitised, or available in some way, then you can put in as much effort as you want to anonymise something, but it's still not achievable. I guess a person could be anonymous only by not being part of society. Since the last version of the paper in 2010, which came out still before the full impact of the hype of social networks, there are new things we have to consider. So many people have already left so many data traces and discussed so much online. From a computer science perspective, if information is out, it is out. But the legal world has introduced the right to forgetting, and the technical tools for protection are improving. I am optimistic that the level of data protection will increase if we design products and services with fundamental rights in mind.

Appendix

Pfitzmann and Hansen's text starts with a 'setting', which contains 'senders' sending 'messages' to 'recipients' via a 'communication network', as well as an 'attacker', who aims to infer 'items of interests' (IOIs). Senders and receivers are both 'subjects', which can take the form of a 'human being (...), a legal person, or a computer'. Anonymity can be achieved, if 'the attacker cannot sufficiently identify the subject within a set of subjects'. The latter is called 'the anonymity set'. A system normally aims to provide more than 'individual anonymity' for one specific subject. But as 'global anonymity' for all its subjects is never achievable, the latter is a question of 'strength'. Pfitzmann and Hansen then introduce three further terms: 'unlinkability' refers to a state, where IOIs cannot be linked to each other, whereas 'undetectability' and 'unobservability' describe states where IOIs are hidden. Based on this groundwork, Pfitzmann and Hansen analyse sender-, receiver-, relationship-anonymity. 'Pseudonymity', on the other hand, is a state, where an 'identifier of a subject other than one of the subject's real names' is employed. It enables, for example, the accumulation of reputation. If one holder has different pseudonyms (for example for different contexts), establishing 'sameness' can be a goal, but also an open door to an attacker. Pseudonymity furthermore throws up questions of various forms of links between the pseudonym and its holder. 'Public keys' are one specific and particularly important form of pseudonyms, which enable its holder, and only the holder, to prove his or her holdership by the 'corresponding private key'. The last of the terms introduced is 'identity management'. It describes the 'administration of identity attributes', is thus more a practice than a state, and includes an invitation to increase user agency in a given setting.

Link from 'Pfitzmann and Hansen's text': https://dud.inf.tu-dresden.de/literatur/Anon_Terminology_v0.34.pdf.

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The dark riders of the internet?

Nils Zurawski

review of

Coleman, G. (2014) *Hacker, hoaxer, whistleblower, spy: The many faces of Anonymous*. New York, London: Verso (PB, pp. 476, £9.99, ISBN: 9781781689837).

This is by far not the first review of Gabriella Coleman's book to begin with. But it is one that is written in the context of a concentrated effort to explore the various dimensions of anonymity within anthropology and further afield. Although Coleman's book is not exactly about anonymity as a concept, it is a worthwhile addition to the overall discussion in its very own way. In its mixture of social history and ethnography it provides a political anthropology of a social movement, whose ideology is intrinsically linked to the history of the Internet, its promises and a particular culture of anonymity that once used to be among the drivers behind many digital developments, but has ceased in importance since the corporate world took over and commodified every bit of information that we have.

Anonymity, which used to be part of the many narratives which where circling around the Internet in the 1980s and early 1990s, has been transformed from a possibility towards an almost futile necessity in the face of big data, doubtful data protection policies and the overall commodification of information and data. So with this back story in mind, Coleman's book can be read as a strong case for why anonymity as a social concept is an essential for a democratic society, and one that has been neglected lately. But the book itself is not about the concept itself.

So what is it about? Ultimately *Hacker, hoaxer, whistleblower, spy (HHWS)* is about a social movement, maybe the most important social movement that has its roots

in Internet culture. Coleman is telling the history of this movement, of the many individuals that shaped it, its culture and the impact it has made with its quite peculiar forms of activism. An activism that is not manifested in demonstrations, but recognisable in terms of the consequences Internet attacks have on our digital world. In this regard Coleman is providing an in-depth account of one of the most intriguing social movements in recent years, as its mode of action, its forms of protests and its identity are at the same time a product of the arising digital society, but also constantly questioning such a society's very integrity. Anonymous is a child of the digital age and conscious about its shortcomings and weak spots.

The book is built around 11 chapters that are more or less chronologically arranged. Each chapter focuses on a particular action and point in time in the development of Anonymous. It starts with the year 2007, when Anonymous appeared on the scene with their attack on the Church of Scientology who where really the first who fell prey to a collaborative effort of what is called a *distributed denial of service* attack (DDoS). From thereon Coleman recounts the origins of the group and most importantly the culture it emerges from, i.e. a hacker culture that was involved in trolling, pranks and hacks since the early 1980s, but which turned political in the sense Anonymous did only in the early 2000s. Coleman's task is described on [51], when she explains what her research is actually looking at, i.e. to find out whether 'the cesspool of 4chan (an online bulletin board serving as a communication channel, my addition), really [did] crystallize into one of the most politically active, morally fascinating, and subversively salient activist groups operating today?'

Coleman uses a different action of protest of Anonymous to explore its struggles and successes, while simultaneously explaining more about her own research methods and the ethnographic approach. So we learn about Anonymous' involvement in the Arab Spring, the so-called Green Revolution in Iran, the protest against the Anti-counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), and some of the more spectacular cases connected to Wikileaks and the US government, especially relating to the intelligence services. Most of the accounts are descriptive, however they provide a very thick description it their very own way. One could take issue with the fact that Coleman often puts herself at the centre of those accounts, which seems however necessary to understand her approach and the complicated entrance to the group. Hence the reader learns a lot about the movement and the hacker culture in general, but also about a wonderful piece of fieldwork in the digital age, which she reflects upon constantly. It is important to note that Coleman became involved with the group at a different level than just an observer. She was rather fully accepted as someone that could speak about (and sometimes it almost seems for) the group. Her research was largely viewed as important and trustworthy by those identifying as Anonymous.

In his review for his own blog ('media/anthropology') John Postill (2015) finds that Coleman has actually written two books, one in which the coming of age of the Internet is portrayed through the actions of Anonymous and a second in which what he calls 'an account of the continuity-in-diversity that makes Anonymous what it is' is being told. All is held together by an outstanding ethnography, which Haidy Geismar (2015) concentrates on in her review for HAU. And, indeed, the ethnography is rich, outstanding, inspiring. It has so many layers and dimensions that make it a prime example of what ethnography and anthropological analyses is able to achieve in a world that is spreading from the 'real' to the 'virtual' world and back so many times, it finally becomes clear that such distinction is of no further use. The shine of *HHWS* lies in the ethnography and especially the tone and Coleman's ability to tell a story right. It is as much an anthropological account as it is a crime story, a thriller, a journey into a world that lies hidden as the dark antipode of all our online lives, ready to threaten us just by way of a computer keyboard and the will to act from behind the scenes. Reviews in the mass media focus on this fascination with the movement, the clandestine, the secret, but also the resistance and the hints at conspiracies that lurk behind in the dark (e.g. Bartlett, 2014). Much of what we knew of Anonymous before *HHWS* was hearsay and borne in our imagination – *HHWS* gives it a form, even names, faces and an identity behind quirky nicknames and the prank the movement originates in. With the cases of Wikileaks, Assange and Snowden now being household issues, cyber resistance originating in the pranks and practical jokes, has grown from something to be regarded as childish and irrational to something many citizens around the world may feel to be utterly necessary to protect citizens' rights and democratic values. *HHWS* is providing the background for why this transformation has taken place, as it can show how this has also taken place within Anonymous itself.

However, with that said, there are a few issues the book does not explore further, although Coleman touches upon them. One is concerning a theory about hacktivism. Coleman does not provide the reader with a more analytical view stemming from the insights of her research, she remains on the level of description for most of the book. Thus, she does not situate her research in the existing forms of hacker research made by others such as Tim Jordan, who wrote extensively on hacking and digital forms of social protest (cf. 2002, 2004, 2008).

And then there are some issues Colman's account instigates and which could be worth following. Beyond the ethnography itself, this to me is a real strength of her account, i.e. to provoke further thinking with a lot of ideas that are more or less implicitly stated within her text. From the perspective of a social anthropologist these ideas include questions of identification, deviant behaviour, norms and not least questions of egality in societies or social groups. One particular question I

became interested in when reading the book was circling around the issue of power in relation to anonymity and whether Anonymous had the possibility to become totalitarian precisely because of its anonymous structures – an issue also raised by Lovink (2012) and still one worth bearing in mind. Although this presupposition of mine has vanished with the progress of the book, I still feel it should be addressed as this is an important point, especially to avoid a mystification of the movement.

Concerning Anonymous' nature of communication and the social relations between members of Anonymous on the various IRC channels, it was one quote by Coleman that struck me instantly when reading it. On [180] Coleman, or *Biella* as she has nicknamed herself on IRC[1], recounts the following conversation, after she has been kicked out of a channel, but let back in straight after that:

> <Topirary>: Hi biella, apologies for the kick.
>
> <biella>: no it is ok
>
> <biella>: you gave a fair warning :-) and I have been too too idle
>
> <biella>: more than i would like
>
> <Topirary>: We're just usually very strict and sometimes a little paranoid of *unidentified* users here. *[my accentuation, nz.]*

Although she remarks on the issue of how reputations are being made and what is deemed acceptable behaviour in mutual conversations between members of an IRC channel, she does not take up this lead here. In this case, her interest lies in how trust is built up and how she experienced it in a real situation as part of her fieldwork. The incident leads her to discuss the often difficult and tricky relations between outsiders and the members of Anonymous. I was struck by the apparent contradiction that surfaced, i.e. the wish to remain anonymous and identify users on the IRC channel at the same time. Thinking about anonymity as a general concept and as a mode that classifies and hence regulates social interaction, this brief chat indeed raises a major question: how is identification possible under modes of anonymity? And, are these two categories mutually exclusive, or rather, as I would argue, different possibilities of social interaction that may overlap and even share a few aspects? It certainly needs further research to answer this

1 IRC = Internet Relay Chat is a text-only based communication platform that was developed in the 1980s. It is organised along channels and allows for group chats as well as 1-to-1-communication. It is an important technology for the communication of Anonymous.

question, but *HHWS* provides some examples as to why the connection is important and more complicated than one would think.

The inherent connection between anonymity and identity (which is an almost subterranean motive in *HHWS*, but not explicitly theorised by Coleman herself) also brought me to change my mind concerning the assumption that Anonymous as a group, although having the vital potential for becoming totalitarian, it in practice does not. Coleman points out pretty much at the outset of the book that 'it (is) almost impossible to know when or why Anonymous will strike, when a new node will appear …' [17]. This seems to vest them with ultimate powers, almost totalitarian. Their anonymity paired with the technological knowledge gives them such powers without accountability. However, it becomes clear in the book that this is not the case at all, i.e. it is not what Anonymous is after. Although Anonymous is about power relations – and the group very much questions existing modes and flows of power – they also have to deal with power structures and struggles within the group that make them vulnerable. Hence, they have to develop procedures of establishing trust, identifying mistrust and hence engage in identity formation, as their mode of organisation is rather loose, without much official regulation, mostly self-organised following informal codes of the hacker culture. From this point of view, *HHWS* is even more important than the geeky story of resistance against big business and the corporate world. *HHWS* is telling the story of how trust is possible among people and within a group that have a rather adverse attitude towards clear identification. The culture rather lives on the ideology of obscure nicknames and on the obfuscation of one's links to any form of 'real' life. Coleman does not use this, nor does she address these issues, but she gives enough accounts in her ethnography for others to follow up on this issue. And hence, on yet another issue that is connected to the question of identity, i.e. egality, social norms and the sanctioning of deviance.

The issue of deviance and norms is a constant issue in her book, albeit not explicitly brought to the fore by her. Whom to trust, what is acceptable behaviour, how to punish? These are core questions – sociologically and anthropologically – of how society actually works and what keeps a collective together, despite the infringement of norms. In the case of Anonymous this brings us back to discussions from the early 1990s and whether the Internet could foster new utopian ideas about egality based on anarchistic concepts rather than on hierarchical ones. Coleman uses the !Kung of the Kalahari desert to make her points of how alternative ways of resisting domination may be played out [189]. In this case it is by use of ridiculing a person to keep her or him in line. Such procedures are well known in research on social control, i.e. the use of laughter, shame, gossip, naming and so forth (cf. Gluckman, 1963). The lack of hierarchy in a society or social group is not a sign of weakness or a deficit, but in many cases

a conscious decision to resist domination and centralised powers as e.g. Pierre Clastres has shown in 's*ociété contre l'etat'* or Christian Sigrist in '*Regulierte Anarchie'*. In Coleman's own words: '*The teasing helps keep egos in check'* [189].

HHWS provides a rich resource on how social control does work in which trolling, harsh language, deviant behaviour and the resistance of domination are endemic, but that is also able to generate collective actions and form social bonds despite the unlikely surroundings. The forms of communication the members of Anonymous choose to organise for themselves are built in such a way that they may remain anonymous to each other – and to outsiders in particular. Coleman shows that this is only one way of looking at it, as they do put a lot effort in regulating their social interaction, establishing trusts and knowledge about each other, while trying to remain anonymous to their outside world, especially the media or law enforcement agencies. The Internet makes it easy to fake identities, to pretend you are someone else, but for Anonymous to work as a social movement and to stage collaborative actions, they need to get together as a group and act accordingly. This means to trust each other. Coleman shows how the sensitivity of these processes, and that to be anonymous does not necessarily mean to be unknown to one another or to mistrust each other. And while they always remain anonymous to the outside world, they have developed forms of communication and ways of knowing and passing that open up new ways to think about this issue.

In this regard Coleman could have taken up discourses about the emancipatory potential of the Internet and the digital that were more common 20 to 25 years ago and seem forgotten today. Maybe HHWS is a possibility to bring back these discussions, as it clearly shows that anonymity and the threat that Anonymous may pose for some does have a bigger social potential than just it being a movement of protest and covert action against the rulers of the world. Its socially relevant potential should not be dismissed and it is Coleman who provides new material, new perspectives and new questions to again engage in this discussion, despite the fact that she does not address it herself.

Gabriella Coleman has made an important and convincing contribution to understand what goes on in the underbelly of the digital. If I should have to choose one point to criticise, it would be that the descriptive site of the whole narrative has way too much room, while the analyses does not go too much beyond the material, does not address those issues that concern the very nature of what Anonymous maybe is all about as a movement, a social group, especially with reference to the concept the group borrowed its name from. While Coleman wrote a book about Anonymous as a social movement performing its actions on the threshold between the clandestine and the limelight, the concept of anonymity remains untouched. But even so, HHWS provides food for thought on a variety of questions, e.g. on

the relationship between anonymity and power or how trust can be manufactured beyond the usual regimes of identification and so-called transparency. If we take trust to be a central element to engage in collective action or to establish social relations, HHWS is giving examples of how this is possible despite the personal knowledge of a person. New forms of accountability could be explored, social formation may be theoretically explored based upon different, if not new and largely changed conditions. With Coleman, we can discuss the possibilities and limits of egalitarianism, but also find arguments as to why anonymity has to remain possible in a world that is eager to have everything identifiable, surveilled and controlled. The research project Reconfiguring anonymity, which is also responsible for this special issue here, will hopefully help to engage in these discussions.

Regardless of this point the book is a goldmine when it comes to understanding how Anonymous as a group work, how its very existence is bound to global politics and how its dynamic is shaped by the ongoing struggle of resistance against domination, ignorance of and misconduct against human rights. Anonymous are neither the White Knights of the digital age, nor are they the new Robin Hoods. They are somewhere in between and yet entirely different.

If Eric Hobsbawm would have written his book Bandits today, he would have certainly included Anonymous and rightly so in all its ambivalence and importance in an age of big data, unfettered spying on citizens and an apparent powerlessness against the powers that be. And Gabriella Coleman's account would have been a prime source.

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Transilient relations: Exploring the social in anonymity

Amelie Baumann

review of

Konrad, M. (2005) *Nameless relations: Anonymity, Melanesia and reproductive gift exchange between British ova donors and recipients*. New York: Berghahn Books. (PB, pp. 306, £ 22.00, ISBN 978-1-84545-040-3).

In her intriguing study of anonymous ova donors and their recipients in England, anthropologist Monica Konrad examines how it is possible that new social relations emerge from such donations although those involved in egg donation practices have no possibility of getting to know each other. *Nameless relations* (Konrad, 2005) is a detailed ethnographic analysis of a situation marked by non-knowledge, and of the relations that those involved in it form under the conditions of anonymity and non-reciprocity. Konrad carves out the 'creativity of non-linkage' [6] and shows how her research partners establish 'relations of non-relations' [49] despite there being no chance of donor-recipient pairs ever meeting up in person. Her study of ova donation practices is an illustrative example for how anonymity can be explored as a form of sociality instead of as a barrier to social relations. The impossibility of establishing reciprocal relations in a situation where persons cannot trace each other is a defining feature in this particular form of anonymity. Konrad's analysis of what happens to sociality when reciprocal returns are made impossible could therefore give direction to research that looks at how the social can be thought through the anonymous in a context that is far removed from reproductive technologies.

Her own field of research has changed considerably since *Nameless relations* was first published in 2005: anonymous gamete donation is now prohibited in the UK and in several other countries, and those conceived with the help of anonymised gametes have the right to obtain information about their donor at a certain age. However, those conceived before the laws were changed still have no legal right to obtain identifying information.[1] Likewise, countries such as Spain and the Czech Republic, that are popular destinations for those seeking fertility treatment, still hold on to the principle of anonymity in gamete donation. Besides, the right to obtain identifying information does not usually apply to the recipient or the donor, but only to the offspring. Hence there still is a high number of people that live under the conditions of non-knowledge, even though there currently is a general tendency towards legally and temporarily restricting anonymity in many countries. Overall, anonymity in gamete donation continues to be a contested issue, manifested especially in the political activities and the attempt to enforce their 'right to know' by groups of adults conceived with the help of gametes from anonymised sources. Non-knowledge still exists and is reproduced, leading to attempts of concerned groups to find genetic relatives, but also, and at the same time to the 'creativity of non-linkage' [6] described by Monica Konrad.

Konrad's key arguments are set out in the first part (Chapter 1-2) of the book, which explores the relationship between anonymity and gifting. The argumentation is further developed in the second part (Chapter 3-8) which evolves from her ethnographic data. Konrad conducts her fieldwork in the mid-1990s at three privately-run assisted conception units in England, where she follows daily life at the clinic and gets to know donors and recipients. Donor-recipient pairs undergo their treatment around the same time, but do neither meet each other nor receive any identifying information. According to British law (both at the time of Konrad's fieldwork in the mid-1990s as well as today), egg and sperm donors cannot be paid for their donations; they may only receive a small allowance for their efforts. Although they are linked to commercialised services offered in fertility clinics and a 'global multi-million-dollar human-egg industry' [17], donations are thus at least partly shielded from the dynamics of commodification. The data presented in Chapter 3-8 stems mostly from in-depth ethnographic interviews with donors who donate their ova out of 'complex and contradictory' [20] reasons and with recipients who undergo fertility treatment with donated ova. Especially in the final third part of her ethnography (Chapter 9-11), Konrad addresses the interdisciplinary audience that she hopes to reach with her book and presents possible applications

1 With the exception of the Australian state of Victoria, where the law was changed retrospectively in 2016. The change came into effect in March 2017. Anonymity was retrospectively removed for all donors and donor-conceived persons were given access to identifying information. [http://www.bionews.org.uk/page_621487.asp]

of her research to bioethics and policy work in the realm of reproductive technologies.

Konrad notes that 'the notion of "gifts of life" enjoys wide appeal' [19] in both clinical and popular discourses, and that it also appears in donors' accounts of wanting to help others by giving them the chance to have a family [67]. The female donors in Konrad's ethnography describe their donated eggs as a 'gift of life' [70] that could profoundly enrich the recipient's life. When looking at anonymous ova donation with an 'anthropologically trained' mind, it seems however not quite apt to describe anonymous gamete donations as 'gifts': in his seminal essay *The gift* that first appeared in 1925, Marcel Mauss (2002) identifies reciprocal returns as the third obligation that marks gift exchange systems (following the obligations to give and receive). Fulfilling this responsibility does not necessarily entail the return of a gift that is exactly the same as the one that was received. However, in the case of anonymous ova donations, reciprocity cannot be fulfilled for two reasons: by virtue of being infertile, ova recipients cannot make return gifts in the form of ova; besides, no interaction between the different parties involved in the donation process can take place since they will remain mutually non-identifiable. Therefore, return gifts in the form of something else cannot be exchanged either. The 'principle of balance' [41] is blocked as reciprocity cannot be fulfilled.

Konrad asks what exactly happens to the gift in a situation where the 'convention of return' [41] is broken by anonymity: 'Where does it go? How is it presented? Who in fact can lay claim to it?' (*ibid.*). Her choice of approach is innovative and almost provocative as reciprocity has been assigned great value and importance in terms of creating and preserving social relations by anthropologists. Against the background of reciprocity's idealisation in anthropology, Konrad sets out 'to challenge the essentially negative connotations accorded to the concept of anonymity in mainstream social science literature' [5] and to show that 'anonymity, as a form of non-reciprocity, [does] *not* equate with the severance of social relations' [42], emphasis in original]. Instead of arguing for or against anonymity in donor conception, her aim is to show that 'the discourse of anonymity is multiple, complex, challenging, elusive' [xiii]. Konrad's work shows that the particular form of anonymity at stake, as radical as its cut is, is nevertheless not inherently a-social and does not equate with the destruction or breakdown of social relations. *Nameless relations* demonstrates that 'anonymity may yield its own productivity through its strange, paradoxical surprises' [xiii]. Konrad's endeavor to show how the social can be thought through a radical anonymous cut is relevant not only to her own case study, but also gives direction to further research on situations in which reciprocal relations are made impossible by the conditions of anonymity. Konrad herself expresses the wish that her book 'may facilitate an appreciation of some of the more unspoken aspects of the anonymisation of persons' [xiii].

In situations that are marked by anonymity, sociality and social ties cannot be established and sustained through reciprocity, and a different mechanism of the gift unfolds itself: 'Where once the central mechanism of the gift was held to be reciprocity – the movements of return – in anonymous sociality relations of non-relations are mediated by the (non) knowledge of transilience' [242]. Konrad introduces the concept of 'transilience' to explain what exactly is happening between mutually anonymous donors and recipients who cannot make direct reciprocal counter-returns. Transilience is a polysemic concept that can be used to describe a leap from one thing to another. The knowledge of transilience and the expectation of sudden shifts become the basis upon which anonymous sociality is mediated in her cases. For Konrad, 'the substance of transilient relations is made from the anticipation of a future, as yet unknown, kinship whose processual activation sometimes may span several years' [49]. Transilient relations are imaginary anonymous relations that are 'killed off' by physical encounters in the 'real world' [214]. Not knowing for example the outcome of one's ova donation is 'compensated for by the continuous work of transilience that keeps ties alive as imagined relations' [115]. Relations between mutually anonymous donors and recipients are 'relations of non-relations' [98] that can be marked by 'a sense of intimacy at a distance' (*ibid.*). A childless donor may enact imagined relations when she opts for donating her eggs as an alternative route to maternity should her own wish to start a family stay unfulfilled. Konrad concludes that '[t]hough her biological productivity is finite, she nevertheless transforms herself into her own "bio-engineer" who productive agency circulates "through" others as the spatio-temporal effects of transilience' [117]. The donor is in this context not a bounded sphere of thought and action and hence does not conform to a Western conception of the person. Instead, she acts as 'a medium whereby the past and the future, as the actions of others, continue to pass through her' [115]. Within such anonymous sociality, different notions of personhood without clear and distinctive boundaries are possible: anonymity becomes 'a symbol for a collectivity founded in and through the agency of a "someone" whose identity is neither necessarily traceable nor self-bounded as a known categorical order' [48].

Konrad's analysis employs different notions of the kinds of sociality and personhoods at stake to think through situations in which persons do not try to 'secure' their individuality by setting themselves apart, but instead try to disappear in the crowd. In order to approach the subject of anonymous sociality, Konrad – a social anthropologist by trade – juxtaposes her own ethnographic research conducted in England with findings from Bronislaw Malinowski and other anthropologists that have worked in Melanesia. Konrad finds traces of seemingly exotic practices and modes of thought observed in Melanesia in the processes that she witnesses when interviewing woman involved in fertility treatment as either egg donors or recipients, notably with regards to personhood and sociality. Britain

and Melanesia are not 'directly' linked in the book, and the women that Konrad talk to do not travel between the two regions, as the book's title might suggest. Instead, Konrad carves out similarities of their ways of relating to others and the self with similar phenomena in Melanesia, where a person is thought of as constituting a 'locus of relationships' [45] instead of a closed unit. Within this Melanesian conception, which is radically different to Western notions of personhood, persons are partible and body parts have 'the ability to activate social relations' [46]. Konrad shows that similar dynamics can be observed in the case of egg donation where donated ova have the potential to activate social relations and establish an 'anticipated kinship' [49]. In an 'economy of transilience' [50], bodily parts such as gametes are not thought of as constituting personal property, but instead circulate 'as the collective extensions of "someone"' (*ibid.*). Konrad observes that donors are 'trying to create an alternative non-biological context as the originary basis' [69] for the donated ova that doesn't 'tie' them to the donors as a form of personal property. The idiom of 'chance' instead of 'ownership/property' becomes the dominant rhetoric. This contradicts the way reproductive substance is thought of in law, which interprets it as personal property. Within anonymous sociality, 'ownership' is re-conceptualised 'as a relationship of non-relations between persons' [48]. Konrad's work on ova donation carves out that 'anonymisation stands also for the time of non-ownership and idioms of non-possession' (*ibid.*).

Reproductive technologies and laws regulating donor conception have changed considerably since 2005, and new 'modes of transilience' [49] that require detailed ethnographic analysis are already emerging. But Konrad's thoughts on donor-conceived persons and their search endeavors are even more relevant today than they were at the time of her fieldwork as donor-conceived persons conceived with donated gametes or embryos (as well as their parents and donors) are increasingly trying to find genetic relatives and to enforce the 'right to know' their genetic heritage. Konrad, whose own research is mostly focused on the mothers, and not the children, sees the searches of the children as 'the enactment of prospective transilience' [216]. Recipient couples who undergo IVF with donated eggs may decide to anonymously re-donate embryos that are left over and have been cryopreserved after their own treatment is finished to those still awaiting treatment. The decision to re-donate 'spares' to infertile recipients instead of donating them to research or having them destroyed can be 'marked by a non-possessive modelling of biosubstance' [197]. Embryos are passed onto others not as personal property, but as 'chances'. Those conceived through the continuation of the donation process may be successful in their attempt to locate notably siblings to some extent, but there will always be 'thwarted non reunions' [216] and 'the relational space of the "non-link"' (*ibid.*).

Today, new online-based registers help to connect those that have been conceived with gametes from the same anonymised donor. Such 'donor-siblings' could not have emerged as a kin category without 'the intimacies of social media where propinquity is not necessarily synonymous with proximity' (Edwards, 2003: 291). Little is known so far about the novel search strategies of the donor conceived. One important recent contribution is the work of anthropologist Maren Heibges (née Klotz) (2016) who looks at how donor-conceived persons employ subversive practices of knowledge management and establish relations that are unprecedented and officially unintended. Through circumvention of official regulation and usage of complex digital infrastructures, donor-conceived persons can achieve agency over both their past and those who officially manage the genetic knowledge they seek to find out about (Klotz, 2016). More research that looks at how search strategies vary depending on the legal and infrastructural context and that examines how on- and offline search attempts are related is needed. Within my Ph.D. project that builds upon the work of Konrad, I focus on persons in the UK and Germany that were conceived with the help of gametes from anonymised sources and on how infrastructures, regulations, and social practices relate to the formation of new social relations among them. Commercial genetic testing sites figure prominently into most stories that I have been told so far and were even described to me by one woman as 'the holy grail' of the donor-conceived community. These sites which were originally intended for those wishing to learn more about their health and ancestry are an interesting case study that can be used to examine how 'active not-knowing sets up "unfinished" relations whose unconcealing makes persons "transilient"' (Konrad, 2005: 180). Even those who manage to make a 'match' will probably not stop their search endeavors once they've been successful as there is always more to be discovered; after all, there might always be more donor offspring who have not yet been told about the details of their conception. The search endeavors of the donor-conceived are an example for how transilience is 'activated by known "half-knowns" or by what is simply imagined and not yet known. Its cultural space is the occupancy between concealment and revelation' [181]. Genetic testing services are likely to change how anonymous sociality 'works', as new players appear on the scene. For example, on a recent field trip to England I met a donor-conceived woman in her mid-30s who had discovered a cousin on one of these sites. The cousin agreed to give her non-identifying information about the donor who was her uncle, but disclosed neither her own nor the donor's identity. New players like the cousin with whom my research partner was still in regular contact, but whose identity remained hidden from her as well as the way the various databases work are decisive for how and what relations are set up, and how 'finished' or 'un-finished' they are. As anonymous sociality changes and new players and concerns emerge, new

regulations and infrastructures might evolve as well. Different kinds of relations that should be the subject of future research are likely to be imagined.

More than a decade after its publication, *Nameless relations* remains a fascinating and stimulating book not only for anthropologists studying donor conception. Instead, it is an insightful read for everyone who wants to challenge anonymity's devaluation as an object of research and contribute to its reconceptualisation as a social form. Konrad shows that anonymity can indeed 'yield its own productivity' [xiii] and that new 'relations of non-relations' can be established between persons that remain mutually anonymous. Konrad's complex theoretical ideas only became intelligible after reading the theoretical and empirical parts alternatingly and repeatedly. Presenting more of her own fascinating ethnographic data before delving into complex theoretical ideas would have made the book more accessible for a wider audience. Given the central position that the concept of transilience takes up in Konrad's attempt to explain the dynamics of anonymous sociality, a longer and more concrete definition of this concept would have been beneficial. Similar to Konrad's other theoretical ideas, transilience gets only accessible to the reader after reading the ethnographic chapters and then returning to the beginning of the book. Whereas notably the first part of *Nameless relations* can be difficult to follow, the middle part in which she presents the findings of her empirical work is fascinating and more accessible. One of her main concerns is 'to put back into the picture the subjective experiences and voices of actual women' [19] that are involved in ova donation practices. Their accounts are marked by a 'narrated ambivalence' [19] that makes the second part the most fascinating and arguably the strongest section of the book. Notably her account of donors' voices which are 'deeply imbibed with paradox' [60] is intriguing, given how little is known about their motivations and thoughts.

Although *Nameless relations* is not an easy read, the hard work of going back and forth between ethnography and theory does pays off. By drawing upon scholars that have worked in Melanesia and on Melanesian concepts of property, person and relation Konrad makes the stories that she is told by British donors and recipients more understandable and familiar. At the same time, *Nameless relations* demonstrates that work on seemingly exotic, distant places is far from irrelevant when one attempts to understand sociality in general and anonymous sociality in particular. Konrad shows that such accounts can be highly instructive when trying to understand more current phenomena that occur closer to the part of the world in which the researcher her- or himself was socialised. This seemingly exotic and largely forgotten book on ova donation practices presents an especially radical form of anonymity. Monica Konrad carves out precisely, how this particular form of anonymity challenges not only the way we think about anonymity, but also how we conceptualise social relations as well as reciprocity and personhood.

Furthermore, Monica Konrad gives us insights into the highly productive relations of transilience that can emerge out of anonymity. As such, this ethnography should become part of the essential reading for anyone who tries to approach anonymity as a form of a social relation, and especially as one that is socially productive instead of destructive.

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Crisis, critique and alternatives: Revolutionary politics as the lost substance of the left?

Christian Huber and Vitor Hugo Klein Jr.,

review of

Memos, C. (2014) *Castoriadis and critical theory: Crisis, critique and radical alternatives*. Palgrave Macmillan. (HB, pp 183, $105, ISBN: 978-1-137-03445-8).

As the radical left had won the 2015 elections in Greece, the hopes of many Europeans were ignited. Commentators discussed the chances of the left expanding its influence on the political agenda and the potential it could have in counter-weighting the allegedly unavoidable austerity programs. Few months elapsed and Syriza found it difficult to live up to its promise, as new austerity measures were approved in parliament under the protests of people on streets. The turnarounds and dead ends in the Greek case call for a reflection on why it has been so difficult for political alternatives to thrive in contemporary society.

In this respect, Memos' book, *Castoriadis and critical theory: Crisis, critique and radical alternatives*, proves to be important and timely. It provides significant lessons as to why it has been so difficult to break the cycle of ever-recurring capitalist crises and how the left has stagnated intellectually for a long time. The book addresses these issues by critically examining the intellectual oeuvre of Cornelius Castoriadis, a philosopher and social critic who has tackled both Marxism and liberalism with extreme rigor, but whose ideas, Memos argues, scholars have stripped of critical and radical meaning. The book urges then for a 'reradicalization of Castoriadis' thought' [5].

Cornelius Castoriadis was one of the great intellectuals of the post-war period, but his contributions to social and organizational theory have been less explored than those of some of his contemporaries such as Foucault, Derrida and Habermas. His opus magnum, The imaginary institution of society (1987), roughly consists of two parts: an elaborate critique of contemporary Marxism; and the development of a social theory based on the idea of the social imaginary. While organizational theory has tentatively engaged with the latter (Wright et al., 2013; Klein Jr., 2013; De Cock, 2013; Shukaitis, 2008; e.g. Hasselbladh and Theodoridis, 1998), the former has been largely absent from recent research, according to Memos. Thus, Memos' book sets out to provide an in-depth discussion of the political thought of Cornelius Castoriadis, its historical context, his relation to contemporary Marxism, Marx's work itself and the implications of Castoriadis' writings for political action. Memos builds his argument based on a rich amount of minutely researched historical context, and an intimate knowledge of Castoriadis' life and writings. Through this detailed engagement, his well-written book provides impulses for both a renewed appreciation of Cornelius Castoriadis' lesser-known writings and the debate about modern Marxism.

The book follows an accessible and rigorous dramaturgy. After a brief introduction, the first chapter provides a detailed account of the early life and biography of Castoriadis. Memos pays special attention to the Greek communist movement, its downfall and its understandings of Marx's theory. By contextualizing Marxism in Greece during Castoriadis' youth, and the limited access to Marx's writings at that time, Castoriadis' arguments are historically grounded. Memos skillfully introduces the reader into those formative experiences of Castoriadis in Greece, the circumstances of his migration to France and the political and intellectual context he faced in post-war France. Such experiences profoundly shaped Castoriadis' intellectual progress and political engagement. One of these influences was Stinas, a leading member of the Greek Communist Party who later formed a Trotskyist group and raised questions that would shape Castoriadis' intellectual interests. Among them, one was pivotal: did Marx's theory include the elements that rendered possible Stalinism and allowed bureaucrats to misuse it? It was therefore by experiencing the 'vulgar-codified and mechanistic Marxism of the Greek Communist movement' [11] that Castoriadis set out to develop his own perspectives on the Russian question and, subsequently, on society.

The second chapter delves deeper into Castoriadis' writings on totalitarianism. It examines Castoriadis' immanent critique of Marxism, his confrontation with Trotsky's interpretations of Marx that led to orthodoxism, his confrontation with Lenin's ideas, his view on the class nature of the USSR and his original analysis of totalitarianism. This is a suitable progression, since Castoriadis' oppressive

experiences in Greece were pivotal for his political thought. It also allows Memos to connect to other literature, especially Hannah Arendt's The origins of totalitarianism (1951). For Memos, Castoriadis engages with a concept of totalitarianism which is less elaborate than Arendt's, yet offers a link to Marxism that is absent from Arendt's work. This theme is further developed in the third chapter, which deals with Castoriadis' writings on the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

In his analysis of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, Castoriadis explored the contradictions of the Soviet regime and the potential for alternatives that emerged from these contradictions. Thus, in chapter three Memos presents us with Castoriadis' accounts of the Hungarian crisis, which, for Castoriadis, 'had been the only total revolution against total bureaucratic capitalism' [48]. At the same time, this episode revealed how deep the crisis of Marxism was, and marked Castoriadis' shift from 'historically specific analysis of economics and political relations' to abstract theory [48]. Memos argues that the distinctiveness of Castoriadis' analysis of the Hungarian Uprising resides in the focus on social contradictions and the self-organizing initiatives of the insurgents. This inspired Castoriadis to advance his conceptualization of revolution. Instead of an apocalyptic event, Castoriadis worked on a concept of revolution as the 'self-organization of the people' [53].

Still in chapter three, Memo's explores the debate about the crisis of Marxism. According to Memos, 1898 marked the first crisis of Marxism, when, at the theoretical level, Masaryk contested the philosophical and scientific underpinnings of Marxian theory. Participants in this debate included Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch and, later on, the Frankfurt School of critical theory. All of them raised concerns about the lack of advancements in Marxism, the atrophy of Marxian theory and the close and fossilized ideology that Marxism had become. In this regard, the chapter explores Althusser's attempts to identify the causes of the crisis of Marxism and remedies to it. However, for Castoriadis, Althusser was only 'reproducing the "Stalinist and neo-Stalinist industry of mystification"' [63], since he could not detach himself from the bureaucratic capitalism that cast aside the revolutionary element of Marx's original thought. For Castoriadis, Althusser and European communism have both 'been identified with the dominant methods used in capitalist countries' [63]. The chapter ends by exploring why European communism failed to renew Marxism and became part of the contemporary systemic neoliberal crisis.

The structure of the book loosely follows Castoriadis' intellectual life. Consequently, the fourth chapter deals more closely with Marxian theory in relation to Castoriadis' writings. Here, Memos explains how Castoriadis tried to

overcome the problem of political Marxism by engaging with Marx's original writings. This is probably the central disagreement between Memos and Castoriadis: Memos proposes a different reading of Marx's original work than that of Castoriadis. Essentially, the argument boils down to Castoriadis' shift from a traditional Marxist focus on class struggle and the production process to power relations. While Memos sticks more closely to the tenets of Marxist critique, Castoriadis had parted from this tradition. This departure is important, as it is mirrored in Castoriadis' most-received work The imaginary institution of society (1987), developed as a response to the shortcomings he perceived in Marx and Marxism – i.e. technological determinism and doctrinal economics. For Castoriadis class struggle and revolutionary praxis are incompatible with the deterministic core of Marx's theory. Memos argues, however, that while preoccupied with the coherence of Marxian theory, Castoriadis remained oblivious to the material aspects of capitalism and, therefore, made the same mistakes as the orthodox Marxism he so sharply criticized. Memos' criticizes Castoriadis for questioning orthodox Marxism and thereby defends traditional Marxist thought – here, Memos' and Castoriadis' agendas are conflicting. We shall return to this point later.

Chapter five tackles the concepts of crisis and critique in Castoriadis, and presents the revolutionary element of Castoriadis' thought. Memos explores two facets of crisis in Castoriadis writings: 1) crisis as the general trait of modern society, and its respective tendency towards conformism; and 2) crisis as the opportunity for constructing radical alternatives. Concerning the former, Memos offers a reading of Castoriadis' accounts of the movements of 1968. Memos argues that these writings are important since there were many intellectual and political tendencies that dismissed the events of that time as a lifeless historical event without lasting consequences. For Castoriadis, however, the uprisings of 1968 must be valued for their creative and emancipatory potential. According to Castoriadis, the revolt is important as it emerged out of the collective action of ordinary people, who protested against the 'key elements of consumerist functionalities of capitalism, its instrumental rationalization and mechanization of life' [103]. The event represents, accordingly, a 'radical revolutionary affirmation', which reveals the creative potential of society. Yet, by underscoring the creative component of the events of May 1968, Castoriadis hardly painted a rosy picture of revolution. One key lesson he draws from that event is that, when radical alternatives lack a positive element upon which changes can rely, revolutions can be rapidly absorbed by the dominant ideology.

This observation led Castoriadis to conceptualize crisis as general trait of capitalism, a crisis that manifests itself in many aspects of life. As a way of overcoming the crisis of modernity and the ever-deepening decay of society,

Castoriadis suggested that society should not deny its contradictions but explore them instead. Such a project should be pursued, according to Castoriadis, through the continual quest for autonomy in which subjects consciously question and decide which type of society they want to live in. Revolutionary politics are then the main contribution of Castoriadis to renewing socialism. The aim of such revolutionary politics is 'to trace the "seeds of something new" that comes out of the crisis and assists with its entire emergence and further development' [125]. Crises are, from this perspective, moments of opportunity and action. However, to bring society back to its self-determining power, says Castoriadis, amounts to a reorganization of values so that economic ones cease to be followed blindly and are therefore dominant. Under the project of autonomy, societies must cope with questions such as:

> Why produce and why work? What kind of production and what kind of work? What kinds of relations between people should there be, and what kind of orientation for society as a whole? [126].

Searching for answers to these questions would imply a transformation of labour relations and the creation of new forms of direct democracy. Socialism, a term Castoriadis avoided using, means, in this way, an autonomous society. And autonomy implies continuously questioning everything.

Memos' book offers a historical grounded and minutely researched assessment of Cornelius Castoriadis' work in relation to Marxism and Marxian theory. One of the aspects that can make the book challenging is that it assumes a readership familiar with Castoriadis' conceptual thought (and Marx's thought for that matter). This problem is tolerable though, especially, if one takes into account that Castoriadis himself is a difficult read. In this view, Memos' book serves as a helpful guide to Castoriadis' work and thinking. More frustrating, however, is the book's title, which seems somewhat misleading. The reference point of Memos is not critical theory and its developments, but Marxism and the unexplored potential of Marxian theory. Critical theory is, in this regard, only addressed by Memos en passent, since he does not position Castoriadis' thought within well-established traditions of critical theory or current debates (e.g. Stavrakakis, 2007; Tovar-Restrepo, 2012). Despite Marx's undeniable contributions to critical theory, modern critical theory and critical thinking should not be reduced to Marxian theory. This was, indeed, the position Castoriadis defended and which Memos explores in detail.

The clear focus on Marxism is the book's main strength. However, by trying to situate Castoriadis within Marxian thought, Memos' occasionally harsh assessments of Castoriadis writings and readings needs to be moderated. The main disagreement between Memos and Castoriadis seems to be one of two issues, namely: 1) who is reading Marx correctly; and 2) how far can Marxism

deviate from Marx and still remain relevant? To some extent, these two issues are antithetical. The former is about exegesis, the latter about creation. At the political level, however, both are about relevancy. From our reading, a general question is acute: Can there be a correct exegesis of Marx? The central reason why Marx's writings are still important today is their revolutionary and emancipatory potential, which Castoriadis tried to preserve [131]. Maybe the worker's struggle has taken, at least in industrial countries, different forms than during the time of Marx's writings, as contemporary capitalism has become obsessed with financial markets (e.g. Davis, 2009). Yet, the lack of viable alternatives still leads thinkers to draw on Marx in face of capitalism and its excesses, which we have come to face on a regular basis, usually in the form of financial and ecological crises. As Memos reminds us, Marxism has taken great liberty from Marx's writings and the second half of the 20th century has brought little in terms of theoretical advancement. In the Castoriadian vocabulary, the relevance of Marx lies in his potential to open avenues for accessing our society's instituting imaginary.

Memos avoids entering the debate about the concept of the social imaginary, which, for him, 'led Castoriadis' critical theory to become domesticated, bloodless and apolitical' [130]. Castoriadis, however, worked hard on his theory of society as an imaginary institution; this is evident in the title of his main work. Yet, it must be said, that Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary is important not only as a way of advancing a more dynamic view of society, but also as a warning against the dangers of theoretical orthodoxism. For Castoriadis, those who transformed Marxism into an ideology of domination, which suffocated its revolutionary potential, as had happened in Communist totalitarianism, fell for the instituted imaginary. Reading Marx would be, however, an instituting experience, if it serves as an inspiration for change. However, this does not fully reflect the complexity of Castoriadis' argument. Castoriadis' contributions extend beyond the political component that Memos elegantly brings to light in his book. Such texts drawing on Castoriadis' non-political works have contributed to critical stances towards, for example, psychoanalysis (Urribarri, 2002), epistemology of organization studies (Hasselbladh and Theodoridis, 1998), neo-institutionalism (Hasselbladh and Kallinikos, 2000) and institutional logics (Klein Jr., 2013). The point is, if we assume that critical theory should be restricted to Marxian theory, and that critical examinations of theories are not part of our struggle for autonomy, then we would risk becoming entrapped, again, in orthodoxy.

Another issue Memos raises is that Castoriadis downplayed the importance of class struggle in favour of a more abstract concept of power. This, Memos argues, has tempted scholars to lose sight of the material aspects of capitalism and subsequently of the material aspects of neoliberalism. Defending Castoriadis, we would point out that the play between instituted and instituting imaginary is

central to Castoriadis' reading of Marx. Concepts such as class struggle are open to scrutiny and debate because they are social imaginary significations that depend on the material and technical context in which they are used. Contradictions are, therefore, not only inherent in capitalism but in all forms of social action; and this includes theory building. In Castoriadis' understanding of praxis, we can say that normativity, something any theory of political action must deal with, derives from the new eidos that emerges from society's struggles. To put it more plainly, action is creation, an aspect already described by Marx in his accounts of the ability of humans to produce new objects and social forms; a thought he abandoned when enclosing economy into theoretical determinism (Joas, 1993). Hence, interpretations of Marxian theory – or any other theory for that matter – should be judged by their fecundity, that is, by 'the possibilities of succession it opens up' (Bernstein, 1989: 121), rather than by their correctness of conceptual use.

To our minds, the way forward for both Castoriadis' and Marx's writings is not asking for the correct exegesis but for what offers revolutionary potential and relevancy for contemporary society. This seems to be what Castoriadis suggested with his revolutionary politics; that is, unbounded questioning of society. That implies not only Marx-inspired critique but also questioning both detached and engaged investigations of society and organizations. Memos makes, in many ways, an important case for critical scholars interested in Castoriadis. His point is that without understanding Castoriadis' political thought, his theories might be in danger of becoming depoliticized and devoid of their revolutionary potential. Memos has made sure that the political relevance of Cornelius Castoriadis will not be forgotten quite so easily. For this alone, one should applaud him.

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Information, cybernetics and the second industrial revolution

Thomas Swann

review of

Kline, R.R. (2015) *The cybernetics moment. Or why we call our age the information age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (HB, pp. 336, $54.95, ISBN 9781421416719).

The aim that motivates Ronald R. Kline's *The cybernetics moment* is an attempt to answer the question of 'why we came to believe that we live in an information age' [6]. Kline works towards this by tracing the history of the concept of information from the early days of cybernetics and information theory in the 1940s and during the Second World War, through the 'cybernetics craze' of the 1950s, the decline of cybernetics in the 1960s, the counter-culture hype around information in the 1970s and, ultimately, the advent of the 'information age' in the 1980s. The book presents a compelling historical narrative that illustrates how the highly technical accounts of information in the work of Norbert Wiener and Claude Shannon extended into the popular imagination. Kline's book is important because of the historical detail it brings to the development of cybernetics and information theory. Kline, professor in History and Ethics of Engineering at Cornell University, weaves together an in-depth study of the technical aspects of cybernetics and information theory while at the same time taking care to situate these in the political context of the day. The story he tells is animated by the personal relationships, hang-ups, feuds and challenges that the originators of these ideas were involved in and faced.

Information as quantity and information as data

Central to Kline's account is the history of how information was transformed as a concept. In the hands of Wiener and Shannon, information referred to the amount of randomness or potential uncertainty that the source of a transmission has in selecting a message to transmit. Wiener worked on radar tracking systems during the Second World War but came out after the war as an anti-militarist and focussed on automated feedback processes in mechanics and early robotics. Shannon, who had studied under Wiener briefly, was an electrical engineer and his work dealt with information channels and how to make them more efficient in transmitting signals. After the concept of information was defined by Wiener and Shannon, it came to refer popularly to the content of transmissions, the data that is sent between a transmitter and a receiver or, importantly, stored on a drive.

'In adopting the language and concepts of cybernetics and information theory', Kline writes, 'scientists turned the metaphor of information into the matter-of-fact description of what is processed, stored, and retrieved' [6]. While in 1972 there were at least thirty-nine meanings of information in play, over time it 'was reduced in popular discourse to a transmission of commodified, equally probable bits in computer networks' [*ibid.*]. It is, of course, in this sense that we use information today. Paul Mason, in his recent book *Postcapitalism* (2015), understands information as a resource akin to matter, but with the important difference that information is not subject to scarcity and can be copied ad infinitum (Mason, 2015). Wiener was scathing of this approach to information, stating that

> Information is information, not matter or energy. No materialism which does not admit that can survive at the present day. [14]

The point for Wiener is that information is not something that is produced either by the human brain or by an electrical or mechanical system when communicating. So what is it?

While there were differences between the theories of Wiener and Shannon, what they agreed on was that information should be understood as a measure of 'what was communicated in the messages flowing through feedback control loops that enabled all organisms, living and nonliving, to adapt to their environments' [12-13]. Rather than measuring the content of these messages (what the message says), the agreement between Wiener and Shannon came down to what can be described as the non-semantic element of the message. Information, they argued, was the measure of uncertainty in the message as it is transmitted or, in other words, the amount of choice the transmitter has in constructing the message. As Kline writes [16]:

> Shannon defined information as the amount of uncertainty involved in the selection of messages by the information source, not as the amount of data selected to be transmitted. The greater the uncertainty of what the information source will select from an ensemble of messages, the more information it produces. The maximum amount of information is generated when the choice of message is random (i.e., when there is an equal probability of choosing any message). No information is generated when the selection of messages is known.

This may seem an odd way of characterising information, but from an engineer's perspective it is vitally important. In designing or evaluating the suitability of the channel that will carry a signal, the potential uncertainty or randomness in the message will determine the maximum capacity of the channel. If the transmitter has low information (i.e. it is highly certain what the message will be) then the channel can be designed accordingly. If the transmitter has higher information (i.e. it is less certain what the message will be) the channel will require a higher capacity.

While critics often reject this way of thinking about information, it should be noted that for both Shannon and Wiener, other more encompassing definitions did have broad relevance, just not specific relevance to the engineering problem about which they were concerned. Shannon, on the one hand, acknowledged different concept of information, even arguing that the word should not be used for his quantitative concept but failing to find a suitable replacement [60]. Wiener, on the other, was clear that signals had semantic content as well as information content [80]. Kline's book helps highlight the fact that critiques of Wiener and Shannon must take into account the precise nature of their work: they were not aiming at an overall theory of what was important in communication; rather, they sought to define the quantity of uncertainty in signals and did so as electrical engineers. This account of information is often credited to Shannon (and Warren Weaver who helped popularise it (e.g. Weaver, [1949] 1973)) [112] but at the time both Wiener and Shannon agreed that it was developed independently but by both more or less simultaneously and, as Kline notes, many refer to this as the 'Shannon-Wiener' or 'Wiener-Shannon' model of information and communication [16].

Throughout the book, Kline argues that this definition of information was at some point replaced in both scientific and popular imaginations with the idea of information as data, as that which computers, brains and other systems process. Sociologist Daniel Bell, for example, picked up on the hype around information and the information society in the 1970s, and while he discussed Shannon's work, he redefined information as 'data processing in the broadest sense' [224]. However, there is much in Kline's book to suggest that this was less of a shift in the definition of information and more a symbiotic relationship in which the technical and scientific importance of Wiener's and Shannon's work on

cybernetics and information theory, and the subsequent development of electronic computers, allowed the concept of information as data to become the rhetorical reference point of the late-20th Century. Kline notes, for instance, that the idea of information as data or content was prevalent around the time Wiener and Shannon were working on their respective quantitative information theories [73]. Indeed, as early as the late 1940s, just after the publication of Wiener's *Cybernetics*, computer scientist Edmund Berkeley 'spoke extensively about "storing information" and the "handling of information"' [121]. What we have then is not a shift from information as quantity to a notion of information as data that had more traction but, as Kline puts it, a popularisation of writers like Wiener and Shannon (Wiener's *Cybernetics* was a surprise hit [68-69]) who were associated with 'an information discourse that arose to explain the newly invented electronic computers to the public' [121].

This is not to say that those working on cybernetics and information theory brought nothing to wider debates about information and the idea of the information society. Wiener, for example, is credited in the book with introducing the connection between information and the idea of a second industrial revolution. Kline describes this as 'creating the rhetorical basis for what would later be called the "information age"' [73]. While Shannon was much more humble and reluctant to talk about applications of his work outside of his own field, Wiener was a keen publicist and populariser of both cybernetics and information theory. For him, while the industrial revolution of the 19th Century was based on the transmission of energy, the industrial revolution of the 20th Century was based on the transmission of information [14].

The rise, decline and rise again of cybernetics

A core focus of Kline's narrative about how we have come to live in what is commonly referred to as the information age is the story of how cybernetics rose with the hype associated with information but ultimately lost out and was left behind. So while the concept of information, in one form or another, has gone on to inform many of the understandings of contemporary society, cybernetics was discredited in the 1950s and 1960s. How cybernetics became initially popularised and then later rejected is one of the ways in which Kline situates the narrative around cybernetics and information theory in broader changes in society and, importantly, in the political climate of the Cold War. Introduced by Wiener, the term cybernetics refers to the study of the control and communication processes at work in organisms, machines and social groupings. It grew out of Wiener's work on automated radar tracking during the Second World War and quickly became involved in work on robotics and even, in the Soviet Union, economic planning.

Ultimately, the value of cybernetics lies in how it aims to shed light on processes of self-organisation that eschew the need for centralised controllers, be they brains, planning committees or governments.

As well as a general uptick in the discourse around information and electronic computing having a hand in cybernetics' penetration in the 1940s and early 50s, Kline highlights how both the military funding structures of US science research and the popularity of science fiction helped cybernetics along. On the latter, Kline writes of the work of authors such as Isaac Asimov and Kurt Vonnegut being advertised alongside books like Wiener's *Cybernetics*. Asimov's *I, Robot* and Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, furthermore, are singled out (along with Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*) as drawing on cybernetics in their storylines [88-89]. While Kline doesn't mention it, the work of Frank Herbert, although writing later in the late-1950s and 60s, could also be counted here. Wiener himself (not very successfully) wrote sci-fi but despaired over the trivialisation of cybernetics as a science fad. Kline quotes him as saying, '[I] watched carefully through a period where what I intended as a serious contribution to science was interpreted by a considerable public as science fiction and as sensationalism' [88]. Wiener was similarly sceptical when cybernetics was taken up by scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, demanding through his lawyer that the Dianetics Foundation stop using his name and remove him from a list of its associate members [91-92]. As Kline notes, Shannon was of a different opinion and 'thought highly' of Hubbard. Shannon cited Hubbard as a friend and facilitated connections between him and Warren McCulloch, one of the grandees of cybernetics in the US [92-93].

This was not the only difference of opinion between Wiener and McCulloch. While cybernetics is linked to military funding for research, particularly during the Second World War, Wiener considered himself an anti-militarist, penning an article in *Atlantic Monthly* (1947) denouncing the use of science in war. He met with trade union leaders in the US to discuss applications of cybernetics [73] and was monitored by the FBI over his anti-militarist statements and friendship with communists [87]. When writing of the potential for factory automation that cybernetics brought, Wiener was clear to focus on the social side of this and devoted his second book, *The human use of human beings*, to 'a protest against [the] inhuman use of human beings' on assembly lines [quoted at 80]. In this book, as Kline puts it, 'Wiener criticized the dehumanizing effects of fascism, big business [and] big government' [*ibid.*]. Perhaps Wiener was closer to the radical politics that later strands of cybernetics have been linked to (e.g. Duda, 2013; Swann, 2014) than one might at first sight assume. On these points Wiener saw himself as distinct from others in the cybernetics community, notably the anti-communist McCulloch but also Shannon, whom he described as a cold warrior [86]. While there also seems to be personal reasons behind the clash between Wiener and

McCulloch [66-67], McCulloch's dominance in the US academic cybernetics circle due to his links with government and the military certainly didn't sit easily with Wiener and the feud was maintained until the latter's death in 1964.

The connections Kline maps between government/military and cybernetics, on the one hand, and sci-fi and cybernetics, on the other, go further. Cybernetics faced decline in the late 1950s and 1960s. Kline highlights the irony of the role of sci-fi in this, as cybernetics came to be linked to the fear of top-down, automated control and, more importantly, in the scientific community it was regarded as a science fad [183], something Wiener had shown concern about. More generally, cybernetians such as Grey Walter and those close to the movement such as Margaret Mead, reflecting wider academic opinion, saw cybernetics loosing face as a quantitative science [180-182]. Kline quotes Walter as saying that 'so rarely has a cybernetic theorem predicted a novel effect or explained a mysterious one' [quoted at 181]. In an odd turn, it was in government and military support that again bolstered cybernetics. Cybernetics, in the US, was revived, as Kline discusses, in response to its adoption in the Soviet Union and a lot of the financial backing came from the CIA [185]. Both the American Society for Cybernetics and the journal *Information Society* (launched much later in 1981 as part of the more general hype around information) are linked to the CIA in the book, as is Wiener's rival McCulloch [185, 222]. On the other hand, however, cybernetics and information theory also enjoyed some popularity among the New Left of the 1960s [216] and counter culture figures such as Stewart Brand picked up on the theories, often through the work of Gregory Bateson.

Overall, cybernetics' partial rehabilitation was not enough to fix it into popular consciousness and the discourse around information and the information society swamped cybernetics in the 1980s and later. As Kline writes, '[t]he alternative discourse of cybernetics had many fewer proponents, despite the role of cybernetics in creating the information discourse' [227]. Cybernetics is now commonly reduced to the prefix 'cyber' (in 'cyberspace' and 'cyberpunk'). '*Cyber'*, Kline points out, 'became a favourite adjective to describe the world of information flowing in a vast computer network'. He goes on to note that this is 'a truncated residue of what remained of the rich discourse of cybernetics in the information age' [228]. A combination of these factors – the negative image in sci-fi and public consciousness, the rise of the narrative of the information society, Wiener's position as an outsider and its failure in cementing its position as a quantitative science – led to the ultimate decline of cybernetics in the US.

Cybernetics and organisation

Kline focusses the book on developments in the US, and one possible criticism is that this misses much of what is most interesting about how cybernetics developed outside of its initial field of electrical engineering and mechanics. On the one hand, cyberneticians like Wiener and Shannon were adamant that their accounts of information and feedback could not be applied to other disciplines, namely social sciences. While anthropologists Mead and Bateson were present at the Macey Conferences that launched cybernetics, the leaders in the field were opposed to including social scientists. Wiener, for example, declared that, in Kline's words, 'social science did not have long enough runs of consistent data to which to apply his mathematical theory of prediction' [37]. Wiener was keen to extend cybernetics to deal with social issues [81], but for him this should not mean extending it to social science. Wiener's opposition, it should be noted, was not to social sciences using cybernetic principles. It was, rather, an opposition to social sciences using the mathematics of cybernetics [153]. Nevertheless, there is a rich seam running through the history of cybernetics of applications to the fields of social sciences and, more importantly given the focus of this journal, to questions of organisation.

Kline mentions the work of Karl Deutsch on cybernetics and government, and notes that Deutsch appealed directly to a letter he received from Wiener in which he had stated that, as Kline puts it, 'even though social systems had more complex communication process than did machines, both cases abided by the "same grammar"' [144]. This signalled a way in which the principles of cybernetics could be applied to social science questions such as organisation. More than this, however, Kline does not delve into these applications. Management and participatory self-organisation are discussed briefly, as are information management systems [206-208], but Stafford Beer, for example, who in Europe stands out as one of the most important figures in cybernetics and developed it as a theory of organisation (e.g. Beer, 1972), is mentioned only once, and only in relation to 'the intractable problem of modelling [...] complex, nonlinear feedback systems' such as populations and resources [193]. Of course, it is unfair to raise this as a criticism as Kline is quite clear about focussing on the discourse of information and the information society and his account of cybernetics is rightly limited to this context. Where the book will be of use to organisation scholars, I would suggest, is in providing a rich picture of the development of cybernetics and information theory in the US and filling in much of the background to how cybernetics has been applied elsewhere and in other fields. So while Kline might focus predominantly on public discourse and electronic computing in so far as they relate to cybernetics, his book will be of interest and genuine use to those examining the potential in cybernetics for a theory of organisation. Central to such

a project, of course, are the developments in second-order cybernetics that, again, feature only briefly in Kline's book [196-101].

While *The cybernetic moment* has neither the narrative spine of a single historical situation to focus the discussion (as Eden Medina's *Cybernetics revolutionaries* (2011) does) nor the theoretical examination that might make clear the importance of talking about cybernetics and information theory (as in the cases of Katherine Hayles' *How we became posthuman* (1999) or Andrew Pickering's *The cybernetic brain* (2010)) it nonetheless manages to tell a story that highlights the development and change of the concept of information and its use in cybernetics and information theory through to the everyday usage in the context of the so-called information age.

Much of what is fascinating in the book, however, are not the technical detail or the grander historical narrative but the personal stories and the primary sources Kline draws on in illustrating these. These present the context that is not only the background to cybernetics and information theory but also the scaffolding within which they were constructed. Some of the most interesting elements of the book are those that are fleeting in the story. I mentioned above the role of sci-fi in the rise and fall of cybernetics, but more important are the social and political constraints that, during the Cold War, were applied to those working in cybernetics. In one telling case, Kline writes of how Margaret Mead, who had been involved in cybernetics from the very beginning (and indeed is the first historical character we encounter in the book), was denied funding to attend a key conference on information theory. Transport would have been provided by the Office of Naval Research and regulations excluded women from being passengers. In the end Mead had to fund her own travel. It is these personal (yet also political) stories that run through Kline's larger narrative and that give the book much of its depth and richness and that force us to read cybernetics and information theory not as abstract academic theories but as thoroughly situated in their specific context.

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