

Cyberplaces and the Politics of Disruption


Renée Marlin-Bennett, Professor of Political Science

Kavi Abraham, PhD Candidate

Johns Hopkins University



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The puzzle	The case: 4chan /b/	
<p>Many online practices are purely frivolous until, suddenly, they are political. One moment 4chan and /b/ are nothing but opportunities to waste time with scatological or pornographic images; the next moment Anonymous emerges on the site and begins acting out a progressive politics. How does the political emerge from places within cyberspace? How does Anonymous, with its progressive politics, come out of /b/, an illiberal site?</p>	<p>4chan: Image board, discussion of anime, science, politics, literature, etc.</p> <p>Random /b/ (one of the image boards of 4chan): Intentionally shocking. Contention and anti-social norms constitute community. (Not Safe for Work)</p> <p>Anonymity and ephemerality (context)</p>	
The method	Evidence & interpretive results	
<p>Abduction: <i>Puzzling facts & pragmatic sense-making</i></p> <p>Puzzling facts A B If {C_i}, would A B be less puzzling? If yes, then {C_i} is provisionally true. If not, imagine {D_i}, and begin again.</p> <p>Interpretive technique: <i>"Excavating the rules."</i> Close reading of explicit rules and inferring implicit rules, finding patterns of order and identity.</p>	<p>Rules reveal heterotopic (inverted) social order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rule to be unruly: "ZOMG NONE!!!1" But: "Global rules 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 are enforced." (Example: "1. Do not upload, post, discuss, request, or link to, anything that violates local or United States law. This will be severely punished and strictly enforced.") And: otherwise enforced rules that are not enforced on /b/. (Example: "6. The quality of posts is extremely important to this community. Contributors are encouraged to provide high-quality images and informative comments.") <p>A culture of disruption bleeds out of /b/ and informs how actors engage with other sites of (extended) social reality. Disruption produces a transgressive politics of hacktivism.</p>	
Theoretical insights	Policy implications	For future research
<p>Dewey → sensory shock engenders thinking</p> <p>Panagia → moments of sensory disruption are political in that they provide the opportunity for reconfiguring order</p> <p>Foucault → heterotopias as places mirroring social reality, doing so in "such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert" those sets of relations</p>	<p>Site content does not predict the nature of coordinated political behavior (the <i>kind</i> of politics that emerges).</p> <p>Non-transgressive sites may also provide sensory shock and disruption.</p> <p>Thinking and reconfiguring political orders happens through cross border collaboration among self-identified members of a heterotopic community within a (cyber) place.</p>	<p>Are all three conditions (shock, disruption, heterotopia) necessary? Are all three (or any of the three) sufficient? Is the anonymous, ephemeral context necessary?</p> <p>Selected references</p> <p>Dewey, J. 1910. <i>How We Think</i>. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co. Foucault, M. 1986 [1984]. "Of Other Spaces." <i>Diacritics</i> 16 (1): 22-7. • Panagia, D. 2009. <i>The Political Life of Sensation</i>. Durham: Duke University Press Books. • "4chan - Rules" http://www.4chan.org/rules [accessed 12/13/2013].</p>