

**We Like Copies, Just Don't Let the Others Fool You: The  
Paradox of the Pirate Bay**

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## **Abstract**

The Facebook page of the anti-copyright Pirate Bay explains much about the group in few words. “We Like Copies”, it explains “Just Don’t Let the Others Fool You”. The paradoxical phrase reveals the contradictions of the Pirate Bay. Their use of “copies” deliberately chaffs with their opponents who equate piracy with theft of intellectual property. Pirates copy digital bits; they do not steal intellectual property. Championing copying is problematic for a group at the centre of the Piracy Movement. The warning that “others [might] fool you” acknowledges the tensions brought about by celebrating copying while depending on their privileged voice. This paper address these contradictions by describing the Pirate Bay as an assemblage defined by conflicting forces of centripetal pull and centrifugal push. Understanding the contradictions of The Pirate Bay offers greater insights into the challenges faced by other Hacktivism groups as they struggle for political change and legitimacy.

## **Keywords**

Hacktivism, file sharing, peer-to-peer, piracy, The Pirate Bay, assemblage theory

## **Introduction**

The Pirate Bay's tag-line on their Facebook page, "we like copies, just don't let the others fool you", nicely captures the paradox of their public advocacy and peer-to-peer networking. As much as The Pirate Bay (TPB) promotes copying, it depends on users, servers and even administrators paying attention to their unique message – not letting the others fool you. This paper uses the history of TPB to illustrate a paradox in Hacktivism between dreams of decentralized communication and the practical demands of gaining attention. At once, TPB shares a hacker ethic dedicated to sharing, openness and decentralization (Levy 2001) and depends on being the loudest, best recognized voice of piracy. This paradox – a contradiction that is true – concerns Hacktivism (Jordan and Taylor 2004; Wray 1998) and the possibilities of contemporary media activism (Kahn and Kellner 2004; Meikle 2002; McCaughey and Ayers 2003; Lievrouw 2011).

The paradox of TPB is best understood as a political assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Wise 2005). It provides a more robust understanding the politics of the group and other Hacktivist groups like WikiLeaks or Anonymous. Communication and Media Studies have adopted the concept to theorize the intersection of material and discursive processes (Packer and Wiley 2011; Gillespie, Boczkowski, and Foot 2014). While from its own theoretical lineage, the assemblage should also interest the field of

Media Studies in general since it compliments concerns raised by Harold Innis (1951) on concentration and monopolies of knowledge as well as Jo Ann Yates (1989) who questioned the up- and down-ward communications necessary for systematic management. These approaches – while distinct – share an interest in how material and symbolic processes organize heterogeneous actors into units like an assemblage.

The paper defines the paradox as tension in TPB assemblage between two tendencies or lines: centrifugal and centripetal lines. Lines refer to the different axes or trajectories that constitute an assemblage. The paper first defines assemblage and lines, then uses the concepts to discuss how its piratical desires manifest in their attempts to avoid centers while simultaneously desiring concentrated attention on its home page. My reflections come from observing the group since 2006 as well as research with the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine to observe the site's evolution. The tensions in these two conceptual lines resonates with a debate in Hacktivism and media activism concerning multitude, non-representative movements against the politics of recognition (Virno 2003; Dyer-Witford 2007; Hardt and Negri 2004). These tensions, far from being a problem, is the defining aspect of TPB and its implications to Hacktivism.

## **Piracy, Hacktivism and the Struggle for an Open Internet**

The Pirate Bay (TPB) has been the home page of piracy on the Internet for the past ten years in spite of trying to create nomadic, decentralized networks. Neither police raids nor personal conflicts have stopped the unfiltered site from helping millions of Internet users find and share files. From their front page to their performance in court, TPB have been both evangelists for copying as part of everyday life (or what they call *kopimism*) and political spokespersons for an open Internet. The site evolved out of the Swedish Piratbyrå or Piracy Bureau (a name mocking Svenska Antipiratbyrå or Swedish Anti-Piracy Bureau) (Ernesto 2010; Norton 2006). Piratbyrå, according to founding members Rasmus Fleischer and Pelle Torsson (2005), lobbied “to support the free copying of culture and has today evolved into a think-tank, running a community and an information site in Swedish with news, forums, articles, guides and a shop” (np.). Along with their political and philosophical activity, Piratbyrå started coordinating peer-to-peer file-sharing (technically starting a tracker and a search engine) called THEPIRATEBAY.ORG on 21 November 2003. Rasmus Fleischer recalls, “it started off as just a little part of the site. Our forum was more important. Even the links were more important than the [torrent] tracker” (quoted in Daly 2007). TPB grew so popular that the Piratbyrå decided to split the site into a separate organization in October 2004.<sup>1</sup> Since then, TPB has endured far longer and grown larger than other peer-to-peer

networks like Napster, Limewire, Oink.me or What.cd. The website's popularity also translated into popular support for its politics in Sweden and around Europe as part of a Piracy Movement. While Swedish culture with its balance between individualism and collectivism that offered a hospitable climate for these piracy movements (Burkart 2014; Andersson 2011a), TPB has played an important role in promoting piracy in Sweden and internationally. They have continued the Piratbyrå's mission by running an unmanaged peer-to-peer network and using the popularity of their website to promote political issues related to piracy.

While some piracy applications like Napster and Limewire had commercial motivations, TPB should be seen as part of a diverse and politicized Hacker Culture or what-has-been-called *Hactivism* (Coleman 2013a; Jordan and Taylor 2004; Kelty 2008; Sterling 1992; Thomas 2003). While often seen as a kind of tactical media (Raley 2009; Garcia and Lovink 2001), Hactivism has evolved into a diverse struggle against resist the secularization of the Internet and the protection of an Open Internet. Their political struggle for an Open Internet unfolds in debates over the ethics of copying (Boon 2010; Lessig 2004; Vaidhyathan 2004), in the courtrooms over the legality of file-sharing (Leif Dahlberg 2011; Touloumis 2009), in the streets as Pirate or Crypto Parties (Simon Lindgren and Linde 2012; Burkart 2014) and in the homes of millions during the daily copying of copyrighted works

(Strangelove 2005). Dyer-Witford (2002) calls this multitude of resistances an e-hydra – a mythic beast capable of regenerating its many heads – since new movements develop as fast as other fade away. The e-hydra describes the struggles against digital property as a structural phenomenon rather than elaborating on the singularities of each struggle.

Where some New Hacktivist groups like Anonymous and WikiLeaks have received much academic attention (Beyer 2014; Coleman 2013b; Burkart 2014; S. Lindgren and Lundstrom 2011; Brevini, Hintz, and McCurdy 2013), the link between piracy and hacktivism remains smaller (Andersson 2009; S. Lindgren and Lundstrom 2011; Simon Lindgren and Linde 2012). Piracy functions as hacktivism by producing and protecting insecure and unmanageable communications online. Piracy then is more than downloading movies but making insecure or open communications (Coleman 2013a; Kelty 2008; Wu 2003). Pirates find themselves at odds with forces securing digital property and normalizing the Internet. In this way, digital piracy continues a long history in undermining the secured movement or transmission of property. Adrian John (2010) describes the many historical forms of piracy from high-seas raiders stealing cargo to street publishers copying sheet music to the hackers creating non-commercial computing. Political, Utopian as well expressly commercial reasons motivated pirates in their various iterations to undermine property and security (Johns 2009). Digital pirates now undermine property and security through technical

designs that avoid choke-points and central hubs while creating redundancies and distributing responsibility among peers (Assange et al. 2012; Oram 2001).

While its tempting to piracy as a form of network-making power (Castells 2011) or protocological (Galloway and Thacker 2007; Galloway and Thacker 2004), the paradoxes of TPB and Hacktivism cannot be reconciled with the singularity of a network or protocol. Castells describes network-making power as a crucial form of power constituting and programming networks as well as ensuring co-operation. His description emphasizes the network as a shared, cooperative formation. Galloway and Thacker similarly describe decentralized networks as being drawn by a protocols – the standards common to all nodes. Protocols are both a form of dominant and resistant power online. Both accounts of network, conceptually, struggle to define its inconsistencies, preferring to focus on its shared logics. Galloway and Thacker have gone furthest in pushing the concept of the protocol to recognize difference by emphasizing that networks have competing topologies, but the concept of the assemblage offers the most productive framework to understand TPB since its emphasizes the dynamic and heterogeneous of collectivity rather than a singular logic of networking (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Parikka 2010).

### **Activists, Servers, Routers and Software: TPB as Assemblage**

The assemblage captures the make-up of this digital political movement, but also



acknowledges there within it. An assemblage refers to the outcome of a “process of arranging organizing and fitting together” (Wise 2005, 77). It is less a structural network than a group of components – human and machine – sharing a common evolution. The Piratbyrå describes itself like an assemblage; it is “a cluster with fuzzy borders, a network consisting of a number of connected humans and machines; artists, hackers, activists, servers, routers and software, each approaching the question of copyright in its own manner” (Eriksson 2006, np.). An assemblage, like TPB, includes not only servers and peers, but also desires to pirate, to rebel and to share files. These desires and labors become tangible forces. Desires of audiences become the attentive labor of Smythe (1981), the free labor of Terranova (2004), mobilizations in the streets and even massive flows of Internet traffic. The amount of traffic flowing through the site is as much a part of the assemblage as when a TPB administrator describes wearing a TPB t-shirt and “there was a school class lined up outside a museum, a big group of eight- or nine-year-old American kids. And a bunch of them started pointing at me: ‘Hey! Pirate Bay! Cool!’” (quoted in Daly 2007). Regarding TPB as an assemblage revives its traffic statistics (like hosting 71 million active peers) with a political sense of the group’s ability to compose bandwidth, computer time, attention and routines by thousands of Swedes and millions of global Internet users (Sunde 2012). The assemblage requires us to understand how TPB fits all these elements together along common planes and trajectories.

Trajectories of an assemblage contradict each other. An assemblage has a *plane of organization* that refers to how components of an assemblage relate to each other. *Lines* refer to the collective processes that draw this plane of organization. Lines, in short, describe the processes of assembling. While Deleuze and Guattari describe their triad of rigid lines, supple flows and lines of flight (Deleuze 2007), TPB has a plane of organization drawn by two competing lines of assembling: centrifugal lines that refer to processes that flee or undermine a center in the plane of organization and centripetal lines that orientate elements toward a center. Centrifugal lines emanate from elements of TPB assemblage that pushing it apart. Peer-to-peer networks and piracy create these lines. At the same time, TPB contains centripetal lines where elements create gravitational pulls that orientate components toward a central figure or position.

### **We Like Copies: Piracy as Centrifugal Communication**

Centrifugal lines emanate from TPB's desires for communication without centers (similar to what Galloway (2010) calls a *web of ruin*). This vision of communication draws on their term *kopimism* developed by Ibrahim Botani of the Piratbyrå. Kopimism encourages copying as a way of life. "Liking copies," as the group's Facebook page states, is a reflection of kopimism. It subverts the authority of the original, as the copy is just as valid. Kopimism manifests in networks that avoid centers of authority that could determine

original or copied, legitimate or pirated. Centrifugal lines, at their most abstract, seek to distribute all capacities amongst its peers and remove any centers. As Rasmus Fleischer of the Piratbyrå (2006a) explains in a speech:

We instead insist on talking about file-sharing as a horizontal activity. Just like the activity of breathing includes both taking in air in the body and letting it out, file-sharing has the same symmetry between up and down. Taking them apart, if even only through language, can only fill the purpose of replacing open exchange with centralized control. Talking about “downloading” obscures the fact that horizontal P2P-communication is essentially different from vertical mass-distribution. (np.)

Piracy creates networks of communication that Fleischer contrasts against vertical mass distribution or broadcasting. Horizontal and symmetry are tenants of kopimism as everyone can copy and everything is copyable. A lack of a central control prevents any authority in what can or cannot be copied.

The piratical desires of kopimism have converged and extended the development of peer-to-peer networking. Piratbyrå elected a highly centrifugal form of peer-to-peer networking with its choice of BitTorrent. They could have chosen one of the many peer-to-peer applications developed after Napster (Pouwelse et al. 2008). Piratbyrå instead choose BitTorrent, a peer-to-peer protocol that both decentralized the network and also enforced

mandatory sharing between peers (Cohen 2001). It did not aggregate file sharing in one network; rather every shared file creates its own network. BitTorrent proliferates networks just as how Piratbyrån calls for more copies and more copying. BitTorrent also requires peers to upload in proportion to how much they download (see Ripeanu et al. 2006). Encoded in BitTorrent is a rule that a user can download only as much as they upload. Users who disobey have their connection “choked” (Bittorrent 2009). As the pool of user download increases, so too does the pool of uploaders. In this way, a BitTorrent swarm scales as popularity increases.

BitTorrent actualizes TPB’s piratical desire to turn all members of the assemblage into “a space of production, of inspiration, obtaining, downloading – remixing and reinserting distribution and up-down-loading of data” (Fleischer and Palle 2005). BitTorrent networks, according to Andersson (2011b), fill with users “occasionally embodying” differ roles set out by the protocol. Roles such as uploader or downloader imply that “the actor him- or herself only comes into being through the shared protocol and the vast assemblage of machines and humans at hand” (np.). The “choking” rule in the protocol orders the activities of millions of home users, directing their desires for files into a global assemblage and thwarting attempts to not share. The protocol draws a plane of organization of centrifuge, distribution and decentralization.

TPB has gradually adopted any developments in the BitTorrent protocol that furthers its centrifuge. Clouds, Distributed Hash Tables (DHTs) and magnets push out resources from the center into a more distributed assemblage. First, TPB stopped coordinating sharing between peers in November 2009 (technically it stopped running a tracker) and let BitTorrent clients co-ordinate their own sharing through distributed hash tables (DHT) (Anderson 2009). Later they moved completely to DHT and stopped hosting any links to BitTorrent swarms (or technically .torrent files) in favor of *magnet* links (Geere 2012). Peers searched Distributed Hash Tables and Peer Exchanges using the magnet link metadata to share files instead of through TPB (Ernesto 2009). Removing .torrent files shrunk TPB down to 90 megabytes (Ernesto 2012c). TPB joked about putting its small index on autonomous drones and sending them out through the city. Later, the group announced that it had stopped running on its own servers in favour of hosting the entire service in “the cloud”. Although TPB had toyed in the past with moving its servers offshore or into secure bunkers (Ernesto 2011; Libbenga 2007), it still relied on servers hosted in Sweden until 17 October 2012 when its infrastructure dematerialized into the cloud or, more accurately, in virtualized servers scattered across the globe maintained by TPB.

TPB actualizes a kind of communication system that the Piratbyrån describe as a *gray commons* (as opposed to the Creative Commons) (Sengupta 2006). The gray adjective

signifies the legal ambiguity of content in the commons that ranges “between the penguin white of a creative commons license and the pitch black of a zero day blockbuster release” (Fleischer 2006b, np.). Greyness represents their vision of centrifugal communication that lacks any authority to make decisions about what or who enters the commons. TPB has kept the tracker open to the public even at a time when other BitTorrent websites had become restricting access (Aitken 2012). Administrators have avoided removing or censoring any content in spite of criticism for spreading of child pornography or photographs from a murder scene (Landes 2008; Savage 2007). Former site administrator Peter Sunde explains, “we have created an empty site where the only condition was that you cannot upload something where content doesn’t match the description or if it blatantly is criminal in Sweden” (quoted in Jones 2007, np.). Where this could be seen as simply a laissez-faire attitude to the content of the platform, the concept of the gray commons suggests that TPB have tried to withdraw from envisioning a network with any position to judge its content. Administrators certainly do not condone controversial content on the site, but managing any content would orientate the site around the administrators as censors or curators. Such a move would contradict the very principles of the gray commons and their centrifugal line. Instead, they prefer a network without any gatekeepers or more specifically without any authority that could be a gatekeeper.

Even though curation, torrents, trackers and servers have all been removed from their platform, TPB's website has been largely unchanged since its start. Their centrifuge appears to jettison everything except their centers of attention. Their domain name, much like the front page, remains THEPIRATEBAY even though they have changed top-level domains (TLDs) five times (see Mueller 2002 for a discussion of TLDs). After their trial ended, TPB switched to a .SE TLB in fear of their .ORG being seized by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Ernesto 2012b). Fearing seizure from the .SE registrar, TPB switched TLDs from Greenland, Iceland and now to the Caribbean island of Sint Maarten (Hamill 2013). Even though the TLD and jurisdiction might be quickly abandoned, the domain name THEPIRATEBAY is too important – memorized likely by its users – to be jettisoned in its centrifuge.

### **Just Don't Let the Others Fool You: Centers of Attention in TPB**

TPB also desires to concentrate attention on its front page, its blog and, more recently, its Facebook page in order to communicate to its audience and share political messages. This strategy comes from another set of lines in TPB: centripetal lines of attention. TPB directs the gaze of its users and computational aggregate toward its front page and other centers of attention (like its Facebook page) to spread its political message. In a networked politics of distraction and competing issues, TPB has relied on this part of their platform to

be able to legitimate and disseminate their political cause of promoting piracy.

Political movements online succeed in part by capturing public attention for their causes and issues (Elmer, Langlois, and McKelvey 2012, 14–16). Attention has become a rare commodity (to use the language of the attention economy) amidst the constant distraction of the Internet and social media stimulus (Lincoln Dahlberg 2005; Goldhaber 1997; Lanham 2006). MacGregor Wise suggests that attention is not simply a scarce resource, but a product of a networked assemblage that has:

a plane of attention, with gravitational points of intensity and valuation, that is a product, experience, habit, chance, and desire. It is a plane of attention not centered around just the perceptual field of an individual, but in device scattered across our bodies and environments which note, recognize, and attend. (Wise 2011, 169)

Facebook Newsfeed algorithms, for example, construct an attention assemblage that selects what posts appear as updates to a user (Bucher 2012). Attention involves socio-technical processes that create as Wise states “gravitational points of intensity and valuation”. Centripetal lines in an assemblage draw these gravitational points on the plane of organization becoming valuable audience commodities and political platforms.

The front page is the major center of attention for TPB’s sizable assemblage of users and resources. It has grown from hosting 6,750 torrents in July 2004 to 5,146,978 torrents



in April 2013 according to the Internet Archive. Over the same period, TPB has reached over six million registered users and over 71 million peers sharing files using the site. Alexa.com now ranks TPB as the 66<sup>th</sup> most popular site in the world as of April 2013. The front page has been designed to capture this attention. Through a possible source of valuable revenue, TPB does not sell advertising on the front page even though it does on the rest of the site. Only the group's own designs have graced its front page. It seems the front page has more value to the group for its own messages. In the center of the front page is a search box that acts as a point of passage for desires and attentions of its users looking for torrents into the gray commons. Above the search box is the largest image on the front page: TPB's logo of a Pirate Ship with sails featuring a re-purposed Tape and Bones logo once used by the British Phonographic Industry to combat piracy (Land 2007, 186–187).

TPB periodically uses its center of attention to promote events, artists and political statements. Similar to Google, TPB periodically changes its logo on its search home page. Google calls these changes *doodles* and TPB adopted the name as well.<sup>2</sup> A change in a doodle means a user sees a new image on the stark white page, one usually linked to a blog post explaining their concerns or tactics. TPB first used doodles to celebrate the release of new copyrighted works on the site. Parodies of the Pirates of the Caribbean, Grand Theft Auto and the Simpsons all appeared as doodles on TPB. These early doodles had a similar

tone to their offered bawdy responses to take-down notices that mobilized support for a site that stood up to “copyright trolls and the industry” (scubacuda 2004, np.). As a whole, TPB used its website to wage a symbolic war against digital property and build support.

TPB also changes doodles to raise awareness of upcoming threats to their sense of an open Internet, to promote political events and to circulate forms of digital activism. The site famously depicted a phoenix to signify the rise of TPB after the police raid in 2006. When the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement appeared before the European Union in 7 June 2012, TPB linked to a Google map listing protests organized against the agreement. After the United Kingdom blocked TPB’s domain .ORG domain, TPB announced the Hydra Bay with a new doodle. (Whittaker 2012). The doodle raised awareness of the blockade and encouraged users to spread a list of proxies to reach the site in the UK. The campaign proved successful, the UK Pirate Party received over 10 million hits to their own proxy in the first month of the Hydra Bay campaign (ajehales 2012).

The Hydra Bay is one example among many of how TPB uses technical centrifuge to preserve its attention assemblage. Keeping the front page and Doodles a focal point of TPB has been difficult given the legal pressure to close the site. The front page remained the same after police raid in 2006 and later trial (Kiss 2009). The site has remained online in part by using centrifuge to replace activities that new court rulings or laws made illegal.

Stopping their BitTorrent tracker, removing .torrent files and moving to the cloud have all kept the site in legal limbos that allowed it to remain online.

### **Paradoxes of TPB: Centrifuge and Radical Democracy**

The success of the front page and their efforts to keep it online illustrate the tension between TPB's centrifugal and centripetal lines. As much as it distributes, the front page remain the focal point of its attention assemblage. The need for attention thwarts their desire for kopimism and a gray commons. This contradiction explains why its founders have met its popularity with a sense of failure. Rasmus Fleischer laments that the “basic failure was that it become such an icon that people began to celebrate TPB rather than to copy it, although being copied was the real goal – not to be the biggest, but to spawn a hydra” (Fleischer quoted in Ernesto 2013, np.). His words echo the Dyer-Witthford in that success cannot be attributed to one force, but a self-renewing hydra. The continued attention to TPB detracts from this process of death and renewal by concentrating too much attention in one movement.

Becoming an icon then represents a problem to both TPB and other New Hacktivist groups attempting to reconcile their centrifugal desires with the power of attention. TPB, Anonymous, WikiLeaks and other Hacktivist groups follow these centrifugal paths in

various ways (in no small part due to the mantra that “information wants to be free”), but at the same time depend on capturing the mass attention. Since the first Anonymous video uploaded to YouTube, the group has had to cope with their popularity. The collective has an ethos of anti-publicity that ostracizes members who claim to speak on its behalf (Coleman 2013b). Keeping with the centrifugal line, no person or part can be too important. The lack of a publicly-known system of authority has meant anyone can appear to speak on its behalf. It’s easy to dub a distorted voice over shots of clouds moving across the sky. An Anonymous Operating System circulated for days before turning out to be a hoax riddled with invasive privacy leaks (Albanesius 2012). The problem is not so much identity but rather the tensions inherent in being at the nexus of anonymity and a recognizable political movement like Anonymous. Where Anonymous has tried to avoid the formalization of an authorized voice to the public, WikiLeaks has the inverse problem Julian Assange has become a figurehead for a more distributed organization. Attention on Assange has allowed the group to use his celebrity status to overcome its past issues with attracting press attention (Lynch 2010), but has also meant the politics of the group have been overshadowed by character attacks against Assange. The centripetal has overshadowed the centrifugal desire to prevent any gate-keeping and ensure the free flow of information.

TPB has attempted to resolve the paradox through programs like the Promo Bay. It

shares its attention assemblage by promoting new artists as a Doodle in exchange for the artists sharing their works on the website. Musicians, filmmakers and game producers have all participated in the program. Since its launch in January 2012, the program has promoted 29 artists (Ernesto 2012a). One independent game developer, Sos, shared their game McPixel through Promo Bay. It had sold 2,000 copies before participating and the Promo Bay campaign sold an extra 3,055 copies at an average price of \$2.56 leading to a profit of \$6,789.64 after PayPal service fees (Klepek 2012). Evidence of McPixel's profit, more than suggest TPB as a viable distribution channel, does give some numbers and value to the centripetal pull of its front page. Curation of the Promo Bay remains concentrated with site administrators. Over 10,000 artists initially applied to the program. Little mention of the curation process appears on the website. Instead, users fill their details into the form and wait for a response. TPB has acknowledged this problem and created a Facebook group to solicit feedback and provide more information to artists. It remains to be seen whether TPB will succeed in distributing curation of the site (Ernesto 2012d).

Centrifugal and centripetal lines of TPB offer insight into the future of Pirate Politics as well (Lincoln Dahlberg and Siapera 2007; Poster 2007). Pirate Parties have tried to reconcile their roots in centrifugal communication with a representative political system. The Berlin Pirate Party has begun experimenting with *liquid democracy* to translate the

dynamics of peer-to-peer file sharing into political governance. Members delegate voting responsibilities to proxies, similar to a representative democracy, but these delegations vary per issue and over time. Currently, the party is experimenting with deploying the system for internal decisions and future plans include applying the model to Parliament (Becker 2012; Burkart 2014).

All these attempts to reconcile attention with centrifuge raise an important perhaps introspective question for Hacktivism: does sharing attention or political representation – be it an authority or a privileged voice – even resonate with its centrifugal desires? Members of TPB seem to favor an absolute line of centrifuge and kopimism instead of any reformation of TPB icon. Rasmus Fleischer continues,

Today the best thing would be to get rid of TPB and start over with new solutions for free and decentralized file-sharing, not too dependent on web search engines. To me, such a quest would be in the spirit of the Bay. (quoted in Ernesto, 2013, np.)

Peter Sunde echoes this claim, “I think it needs to shut down in order for something else to grow out of the lack of Pirate Bay” (Brewster 2013, np.). If approaching this matter from a purely symbolic perspective then his suggestions would seem self-destructive, but these demands and the demise of the Pirate Bay continue a centrifugal line. Copies of TPB, while disrupting centripetal lines of attention, continue its piratical project. Self-destruction,

decay and collapse all seemingly a threat to attention might simply be a needed push to the centrifugal desires of TPB assemblage. A new head will grow.

The case of TPB adds an empirical dimension to debates in Hacktivism theory between articulation and the multitude (Dyer-Witheford 2007). Groups like TPB and other Hacktivism seemingly resemble the non-representable politics of the multitude as discussed Paulo Virno (2003) and Ned Rossiter (2006). Parts of TPB assemblage desire becoming a movement that cannot be represented, but these groups need an attention assemblage to communicate their political values. Representation calls back TPB if it wishes to succeed in politics. Political struggle seems to demand a representative that accentuates contradictions in Hacktivism by privileging the centripetal aggregate over a nebulous centrifugal plane of organization. Ernesto Laclau (2005) argues populist movements require common symbols or empty signifiers that might unite a heterogeneous of subject positions – a task Laclau suggest endures in spite of the promise of a digital multitude (Laclau 2006). More than prove or disprove either side of the radical democratic debate (Lincoln Dahlberg and Siapera 2007), the concept of centrifugal and centripetal lines will become important concepts to study the future of Pirate Parties and Hacktivists as they move from elite hacker communities to broader movements.

## **Conclusion**

Lines and assemblage offer a rich description of the politics and paradox of TPB. TPB remains one of the most popular sites on the Internet for piracy amidst years of closures and failed peer-to-peer networks. Kopimism, BitTorrent and the gray commons describe the centrifugal lines drawing a distributed and decentralized plan of organization in TPB that have contributed to its success. Activists, servers, routers and software co-exist as peers. Political speech and organization celebrate copying at the expense of authority and centers. These lines create discontinuities and changes in the constitution of the platform. Centrifugal lines only go so far to describe TPB. As much as TPB attempts to be centrifugal, it also depends on the concentrated attention of their users to politicize its activities. Its home page, its domain name and its design all endure despite the centrifuge. Therein lies the paradox: success of centrifugal communications relies on a centripetal attention assemblage. As much as TPB then tries to distribute, attention remains concentrated in the owners of the site. In spite of “liking copies”, it cannot be copied else losing its privileged voice. TPB then describes a paradox of an assemblage being constituted by both centripetal and centrifugal lines. Both will influence its future. Will the Promo Bay or a future iteration succeed? Will TPB collapse or will its attention endure even if its radical communication has atrophied?



The use of the assemblage hopefully will inspire more discussions of New Hacktivism as an assemblage Unlike the network, lines theorize how the group can appear to be moving in two directions at once. Lines call us to attend to the layers at work simultaneously in their politics. Movements do not have one politics, but many lines that pull and push to create contradictions, tensions, failures and possible resolutions. The assemblage offers a way past the vision of the network as a political formation online toward a more complex and heterogeneous . Whatever its end, the paradox raised by TPB will require new lines to be drawn by future pirates and Hacktivists. Neither centrifugal nor centripetal lines have run their course and what other trajectories may there be?

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## Endnotes

- 1 Piratbyrån gave control to Gottfrid Svartholm Warg (aka: Anakata), Fredrik Neij (aka: TiAMO) and Peter Sunde (aka: brokep). Mikael Viborg, a prominent lawyer in Sweden, provided legal assistance (Norton, 2006) and Carl Lundström, a controversial right-wing Swedish business man, funded the start-up of the site (Orlowski 2009). For more details, see the documentary The Pirate Bay: Away from Keyboard at: <http://www.tpbafk.tv/>.
- 2 This was part of a whole strategy by the Pirate Bay to position themselves as a Google for BitTorrent files. By arguing that the site was just a search engine for BitTorrent files, they hoped they could be entitled to the same Safe Harbour legal protections as Google.