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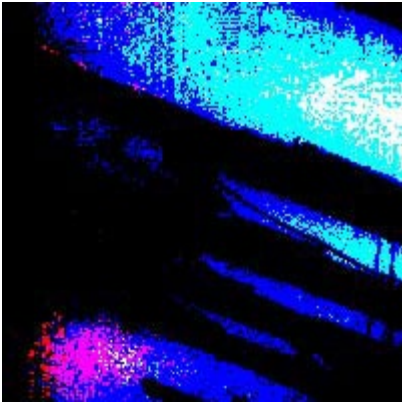
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The phenomenon of ridicule has always played a role in the plight of anti-authoritarian resistance; its creative potential for disruption and its threat to order and stability make it an attractive strategy. The act of ridicule is generally not intended to hasten the collapse of the system; rather it is an attempt to highlight the vulnerability of an absolutist and centralized agency of power. Authoritarianism has an unbridled fetish for brevity, efficiency, and precision, all of which can be successfully, albeit temporarily, dismantled by explosive acts of ridicule.

The phenomenon of ridicule has always played a role in the plight of anti-authoritarian resistance, sometimes minor, sometimes major; its creative potential for disruption and its threat to order and stability make it an attractive strategy. Traditional characteristics of anti-authoritarian resistance have been **tactical** in nature, capitalizing on the moment and countering the typically sedentary apparatus of power with a nomadic, take-to-the-street approach. When ridicule is utilized in this fashion, it injects an element of surprise, disappears before authority can redraw the map, and then takes to the streets and returns to strike as it sees fit. The act of ridicule is generally not intended to hasten the collapse of the system (which isn't possible anyway); rather it is an attempt to highlight the vulnerability of an absolutist and centralized agency of power. Authoritarianism has an unbridled fetish for brevity, efficiency, and precision, all of which can be successfully, albeit temporarily, dismantled by explosive acts of **ridicule**.

While **centralized authority** is by all means still with us, its efficacy has fallen by the wayside and we have seen a gradual shift towards a decentralized power scenario: that of cyberspace, computer surveillance, data warehousing and electronic flows. What used to be a localized, solidified mass that was easily attacked, the apparatus of power is now by its electronic nature nomadic, omnipresent and invisible at the same time. The apparatus of power no longer has a permanent dwelling place and it moves about as it sees fit. In fact, the notion of power is no longer associated with any one particular person or thing that can be easily targeted. For this reason, resistant activity is much more easily controlled and this has drastic implications for the effectiveness of ridicule. Given this new scenario, the act of ridicule as resistance must be completely revamped.

However, all hope is not lost. After a general analysis of the centralized/decentralized metaphor and some of its uses and abuses, including ridicule as resistance, we will suggest a somewhat risky but adventurous foray that takes its cues from the multiplicity and unpredictability of Thuggee in nineteenth century India. The deliberately obscure, ambiguous and confusing tactics of the Thugs, including their unprecedented mastery of multiple identities, can perhaps shed light on some possibilities for the creative use of ridicule in the new decentralized electronic culture. Taking our cues from the Thugs' practice of human sacrifice for the goddess **Kali** as well as their effectiveness at disturbing the taxonomizing attempts of British colonization, we will suggest a polymorphous, marauding electronic anarchist cult that

thrives on character assassination and ridicule. To fight decentralized power requires the use of a decentralized means and Cyberthuggee is the first step.

The most obvious example of the contrast between centralized and decentralized thought comes from the military. When discussing command systems in war, historians have compared a centralized command system with its decentralized counterpart and how the former is inappropriate for managing the amount of uncertainty or 'friction in the machine' [**Van Creveld, 261-275**].

In a centralized command structure absolute control is at the top and soldiers have no individual or local decision-making power. The genius in charge lays out the tactical doctrine, all decisions are at a global level, and command proceeds in a top-down, hierarchical fashion. All individual units must answer to the agency in charge. Plans must be articulated in extreme detail and compliance with these orders must be constantly checked. The goal is to maximize the amount of certainty at all times and prevent unforeseen circumstances. Although centralized command works well in situations of crisis, the problem with this approach is that it usually accomplishes exactly the opposite of its aim: it maximizes uncertainty instead of certainty; it allows for friction to spread instead of decrease. Being anything from a truck breaking down, to bad weather, to the independent will of the enemy, friction in war is defined as any phenomenon that interferes with the implementation of a plan [De Landa, 60]. In communication networks it is 'noisy data.' Friction of this kind cannot be properly accommodated for in a top-down, centralized chain of command because if unforeseen circumstances occur, then it takes too much time for the information to get all the way back to the top of the command chain and it takes too long for new plans to get back down to the bottom. Even with the advent of newer communication media, centralized command cannot keep up with the flow of information. Since local units have no authority and since all the power and command are at the top in these cases, friction, uncertainty, and misinformation spread quite easily.

As a result many armies throughout history have opted for a decentralized approach, dispersing control throughout the system to the individual units. Rather than monopolize the entire decision-making process from the top, control is distributed throughout the system to form a self-organizing network, leaving much responsibility up to localized parts of the war machine. The genius in charge lays out the basic goals, but lower individual regiments deal with friction at their own level as they see fit, as opposed to a strict, top-down command system that deals with it all from above. This keeps the threshold of uncertainty closer to the bottom and serves as a much better model for dissipating the amount of friction in the machine, which if "accumulates, it can generate a feedback loop, like a runaway explosion, in which uncertainty multiplies, flashing through the nervous system and short-circuiting the war machine" [**De Landa, 78**]. Thus, a centralized, absolutist approach to command and control cannot eliminate friction accordingly.

Deliberate sabotage of the enemy's communications network is a classic example of introducing friction. Blocking the flow of information is time-tested, effective tactic. Another is a public attack on the morale of the enemy, which can be easily accomplished by the creative use of ridicule. The nature of centralized power can be effectively changed by ridiculing it in the public sphere. Ridicule is not a proponent for destruction, nor is it effective in wiping out the whole system; rather, it is just a creative way of introducing friction in the machine. When used as an avatar of uncertainty and friction, the act of ridicule simply functions as part of the overall system.

The centralized system and the decentralized system are not entirely polar opposites; Van Creveld postulates that interlocking the two is a prerequisite for a successful command system. The system must maintain some assemblance of stability and control, and at the same time roll with the punches and accept the instability that will always occur. A command system represents a formal communication structure, one which can easily become too formalized and without proper supplementation, become vulnerable:

*In any large organization, the virtues of formal communication systems--standardization, brevity, and precision -- cannot be denied; those very virtues, however, also make such systems more subject to interruption and less flexible as a vehicle for original ideas than their unchanneled, redundant, and imprecise informal counterparts...The danger that formal communication systems reduce command, and indeed thought itself, to trivia is a real one indeed. It must be guarded against by a design that deliberately leaves room for face-to-face, unstructured interaction among people who know each other well enough in order not to limit their exchanges entirely to the line of business [**Van Creveld, 273**].*

Decentralized organization is also starting to make an impact in the research community, especially in the computer sciences. For decades, artificial intelligence (AI) researchers thought that centralizing all the intelligence in the brain or the central processing unit (CPU) of the computer would be an adequate model for replicating human intelligence in a machine. This was called symbolic AI, because symbols and rules were inserted into the controlling environment, and from there on the control was top-down and hierarchical. The idea was to model the human brain as a global entity from which all control flowed. Information was stored in the brain of the machine and the rest of the machine was given sets of rules by the brain on how to behave. This worked for some applications, but not for many others. Somewhere down the line, presumably in the mid-seventies, scientists began to realize that a bottom-up approach provided a much better alternative in many cases.

Rather than have a main source 'teach' intelligence, localized units throughout the system are interconnected in constantly varying ways, and intelligence is learned from the bottom up, rather than 'taught' and controlled from the top down. All intelligence comes from these individual parts and how they interact with each other. Intelligence is thus an 'emergent' phenomenon that grows and synthesizes its way forward as opposed to being controlled by some main repository of information at the top. The behavior of the units is determined locally instead of globally. Rather than learning by a previously defined set of logical rules that comes directly from the CPU, individual components dynamically "engineer themselves from the bottom up." [Plant, 275] This approach has come to be known as 'connectionism' and it is exactly this flavor of decentralized thinking that has fueled a complete paradigm shift in the sciences and the humanities.

That's a ridiculous oversimplification of AI, but it reiterates for us the massive shift that has been happening for the past fifteen years or so. Amongst others, chaos, self-organization, and artificial life are showing that the traditional reductionist method of breaking a problem down into smaller parts is gradually being moved to the back burner. The centralized approach is not being totally thrown out the window; rather, folks from many disciplines are beginning to realize that it explains only a small amount of phenomena in the real world.

In his *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams*, Mitchell Resnick talks about **the centralized mindset**. [Resnick, 4] and gives us even more examples. Foreign viruses in the human body are distinguished by a self-organizing, decentralized army of antibodies who "seek out bacteria in a systematic, coordinated attack," and methodically improvise their way without rigid regulations from any particular commander-in-chief. If the immune system operated by a centralized command structure, then a general would have to lead the forces and each antibody would have to carry explicit instructions, given from the top. We are lucky that the latter case is not how the immune system functions, as a considerable amount of friction (e.g., bacteria) would infiltrate the human body if the case was such.

Flocks of birds are another example. Contrary to what they might resemble in flight, they have no leader. Organizing themselves based on simple rules, i.e., how close the nearest bird is, they function with no centralized control. They need no coordinator [Resnick, 1].

In the corporate world, decentralized thinking is starting to make a big impact on the way that **corporations** do business. Similarly, in the top-down hierarchy of the academy, special degree programs that encourage connectionist-type learning by transversing disciplinary boundaries are starting to pop up on the horizon. They call into question the institutional compartmentalization and separation of disciplines by offering an admittedly difficult counter-approach: forging spaces between disciplines in a heterogeneous patchwork "not to cordon off, but to stitch together patches of students and professors...[and]travel along that inbetween space where boundaries mark off, privilege, or displace one space from another" [Menser & Aronowitz, 17].

In spite of its obvious failures, centralized thinking does however remain at the heart of many scenarios where power and control are forged from the top down. The entire concept of authoritarian power has traditionally depended upon a centralized approach, a sedentary, localized, 'hold the fort' philosophy being the strategy. In these instances, the resistance to power facilitates a plethora of creative possibilities for the insertion of friction. Total annihilation of the apparatus of power is not necessary, nor is it possible; just a temporary short-circuit now and then will suffice and creative uncertainty will henceforth multiply. Ridicule is an act of creative chaos, one that injects uncertainty, surprise, and unforeseen circumstances. As long as an agency of power attempts to hold the fort in a centralized fashion, its vulnerability to ridicule cannot be underestimated. The power of ridicule lies in the fact that centralized authoritarianism has an obsession for instilling habits and routines.

Psychologists have discovered that many people prefer to stick with old habits and routine approaches to solving problems. With a meaty bulk of prior knowledge at one's disposal, this adherence to strict routines can be particularly effective, however, there do exist situations where prior knowledge may in fact inhibit the solution to a problem. In these scenarios, the actual knowledge needed for an easy answer is nowhere to be found and creativity lies in finding new and unforeseen ways of putting things together [Crovitz, 82-84]. The creative impulse lies with discovering new methods for assemblage -- it lies with finding holes in habit [Massumi,104]. One must know the habits first, of course, but many times one must completely do away with all usual habits to come up with something **creative**.

Similarly, Arthur Koestler told us that creativity involves the connecting up of previously separate frames of reference, universes of discourse, or matrices of thought. To be creative, one must not revolve around one point of reference on one plane and stick with habitual thought processes. Many times the creator has to branch out into a completely different context that has nothing to do with the original problem or idea. Creativity, according to Koestler, lies in reaching the point where the contexts intersect: in the constant injection of new ideas that connect up old ideas [Koestler, 34-44].

Along the same lines, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers linked creativity with chaos, uncertainty and spontaneous self-organization. Doing away with the classic thermodynamic rule that heat is always being lost and the universe is continuously running down towards maximum entropy, Prigogine's theory of **dissipative structures** declares them as self-organizing systems where order is spontaneously created out of disorder. Much of the scientific community has consistently ridiculed his *Order Out of Chaos* due to its concentration on the philosophical and holistic side of things rather than dealing with specific scientific problems, however, it is useful for us because he centered on the idea that the uncertain and chaotic aspects of reality are entirely constructive, and how entropic disorder can lead to the spontaneous creation of order. The universe is not constantly running down, rather, entropy is positive and the universe is constantly renewing itself in what Prigogine calls a "dissipative structure". David Porush metaphorized it perfectly: "A dissipative structure is more a raft which floats inexplicably but definitely upstream, against the current, gathering flotsam and organizing it into its flotilla with some sort of autonomous force or direction. Dissipative structures seem to have a mind of their own" [Porush, 57]. The creative, energetic use of ridicule-as-friction can perhaps be the same autonomous force that swims against the tide of a top-down, centralized command system.

Reflecting on that for a moment, we can return to the centralized mind set which for some reason still remains the core of many formal structures and much of Western thought. The accuracy, clarity, and precision associated with a centralized, formal communication system serves its purpose by attempting to minimize the number of ways that unforeseen things can happen and thus by limiting the amount of possible creativity [Van Creveld, 273]. Its function is to breed an insidious rigor of habit. In lieu of this, a fostering of the self-organizing, creative potential of ridicule comes to mind immediately. As a creative strategy for introducing uncertainty, there is nothing a centralized mindset is more vulnerable to than pure, unabashed ridicule. Mockery may not seem like a tool that one would desire to wield in the slightest bit, however, a formal command system, by its very nature, possesses a soul of uncompromising platitude that is easily crushed by an incendiary outburst of ecstatic ridicule. Thus, ridicule can be a creative assemblage that stabs habit in the side and injects uncertainty, friction, and surprise. From his "Chaos" article in Scientific American, Jim Crutchfield, et. al.: "Even the creative process of intellectual progress relies on the injection of new ideas and on new ways of connecting old ideas. Innate creativity may have an underlying chaotic process that selectively amplifies small fluctuations and molds them into macroscopic coherent mental states that are experienced as thoughts. In some cases the thoughts may be decisions, or what are perceived to be the exercise of will" [Crutchfield,57]. Much like Prigogine's order out of chaos, we can envision a system based not on molecules or matter, but on bodies dissipating energy by creatively ridiculing each other. From this, a 'higher' structure emerges and rather than a universe renewing itself, we have a system based on "constant poetic renewal" [Vale and Juno, 4].

Again, since traditional power structures have been centralized in nature, they have been susceptible to the act of ridicule reiterated as friction in the machine. However, this is changing. In a decentralized power scenario, the effectiveness of ridicule as friction is somewhat weakened. The power elite have begun to wise up, and since friction is less effective when inserted into a decentralized system, we have seen a gradual shift from a centralized and sedentary power scenario to a more nomadic and decentralized entity. With the advent of cyberspace, computer mediated communication, electronic surveillance, and cyberpolice forces, the locus of power has now slipped into ambiguity. In cyberspace, the powerful elite can be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Power is now omnipresent and invisible simultaneously -- it

has retreated from physical space into cyberspace -- from a centralized unit to a nomadic, decentralized presence. Just as sedentary armies throughout history were forced to adapt the methods of their rivals, the nomads, we see the powerful elite now doing the same -- retreating into cyberspace and going nomadic. The Critical Art Ensemble point this out in their book, *The Electronic Disturbance*. The dilemma has now become this: how do you subvert power that is omnipresent? How do you ridicule something when you don't know where it is or even *what* it is? Believe it or not, as Jack Palance used to say, it may actually be easier that way.

OK -- now what? Power has been omnipresent for quite some time and any friction inserted in the machine will inevitably get wiped out and buried. Or will it? I suggest that the tactic of ridicule, if executed properly, stands a chance of not being buried by the apparatus of power. Ridicule is effective when utilized as a creative injection of surprise and as a tactic that capitalizes on the moment, hitting unexpectedly and then disappearing before the map can be redrawn. The trick lies not in boasting a new 'order' or an overthrow of power and thus creating an exact same system which presides over its own domain, but in finding those particular holes in the habit of power, those particular zones, those derelict spaces within which one can temporarily disappear from the new omnipresence of power accordingly, and then return as one sees fit. In order to accomplish this, ridicule must be creative and connect ideas from previously separated modes of thought to utilize what **Deleuze and Guattari** called a 'minor' function of language: "Becoming minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness is called autonomy. It is certainly not by using language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming" [Deleuze and Guattari, 106]. The next step is to update this in order to deal with the new nomadic qualities of the power elite.

The Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) are a collective exploring the interrelations between art, technology, radical politics, and critical theory. In the sequel to *The Electronic Disturbance*, *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, they offer temporary solutions for resisting the new decentralized power. They suggest cellular formations of self-organizing, nomadic resistance and this is exactly what concerns us here: cellular "cults" of ridiculing machines that creatively stab power in the side, leaving wounds here and there. These cells are constantly transforming and dismantling themselves in their own space. They have no overall coordinator or genius in charge; rather, they form a self-organizing, decentralized network of resistance with each unit inserting ridicule from whichever coordinate it perceives to be most effective. The ridicule originates from all over the place, not just one easily located point of attack. We can easily envision a 'cult', so to speak, which does exactly this; the only thing remaining is the metaphysical referent and we now turn to that infamous goddess from the "dark side of Hindu mythology": **Kali**.

Although manifestations of Kali are somewhat varied and her incredible popularity is indisputable, more often than not she is portrayed as a 'mistress of death' who demands animal sacrifice, a goddess that caters to the fringes of society:

Her hair is disheveled, her eyes red and fierce, she has fangs and a long lolling tongue, her lips are often smeared with blood, her breasts are long and pendulous, her stomach is sunken, and her figure is generally gaunt. She is naked but for several characteristic ornaments: a necklace of skulls or freshly cut heads, a girdle of severed arms, and infant corpses as earrings. She is usually said to have four arms. The upper left hand holds a bloodied cleaver, the lower left hand, a freshly cut human head; the upper right hand makes the sign "fear not," and the lower right, the sign of conferring boons.... Her two favorite dwelling places are battlefields and cremation grounds. On the battlefield she is usually said to carry a skull-topped staff, to howl ferociously, and to consume her enemies by eating their flesh and drinking their blood. In the cremation ground she is described as sitting on a corpse [Kinsley 1986, 144]

This description of Kali, the Divine Mother, the feminine force, often leads to complete misunderstandings in the West, where one usually perceives this Hindu goddess as dark, terrible, absurd, horrifying, and violent. To some degree this is true, but only when looked at from a Western perspective. Kali is a dangerous deity who hides out in the exterior of 'morality,' threatening the concepts of order and stability. Misconceptions are abundant mostly because Western thought has a propensity for fearing, ignoring and repressing all that is violent, perverse, and disgusting. The West favors the **Christian** designation of opposites: good/evil, holy/unholy, and sacred/profane. For millions of Hindus, however, Kali has been a beloved symbol for more than fifteen hundred years. In the Hindu pantheon her devotees affirm all that is disturbing, violent, and usually 'forbidden' in the world and see Kali as the universal power that transcends beyond all

that is either good and bad [Harding, 39]. Rather than pushing death-and-blood under the table, they accept the world as chaotic and out of control and heartily embrace the particularly unpleasant aspects of reality, acknowledging the good and evil that is in all of us. No division of the world into opposites makes any sense to them and Kali represents neither one nor both; she is benign and malevolent, she creates, maintains, and destroys, and she is completely beyond any division of opposites. **SHE IS ALL.** For those who worship her, the goal in life is to **become her** -- to embrace all good and bad and transcend all binary opposition. To deny and avoid the horrifying aspects of existence would be ridiculous...

Kali's dark reputation is also due to the fact that she gets intoxicated with the blood of her victims and demands animal and sometimes human sacrifice to remain alive. She is one representation of the divine mother, Durga, who gives blood and life to all female animals and humans. Life and blood are her psychic energies and as they dwindle, they must be replaced. This is where sacrifice comes into the picture; an exchange of life for life, blood for blood [Sinha, 20-21]. Before human females give life, they must ceaselessly give blood for Kali. Likewise, in many animal sacrifices for Kali that still continue today, heads are cut off and blood is poured. In some cases, the same scenario of returning the blood to Kali is the ritual. In others, the sacrificing of goats may represent man's chopping off his greed, lust, selfishness and ego [Harding, 119]. In extreme cases, orgiastic rituals involving excessive intoxication were performed, sometimes with human sacrifice as the result. Kali is the **ecstatic life-juice** that drives the universe, constantly giving lives and taking them one after the other. Lives cannot be taken without first getting her permission.

This demand for lives as her sacrifice is exactly what led to Kali becoming the reigning goddess/saint of the notorious Indian murder cult phenomenon: thuggee, or the Thugs. Derived from the Sanskrit word *sthaaga* and the Hindi verb *thagna*, which means, 'deceive', *thuggee* gave the English language the word, 'thug.' Supposedly stamped out sometime in the mid-nineteenth century by the British, the Thugs randomly murdered and robbed from whomever they pleased. Their secret calculated killings were sometimes committed as sacrifices for Kali and they have also been known as the Stranglers or the Cult of the Black Mother [Daraul, 179-190]. Among many other sordid endeavors, they were known for their unprecedented technical ability of strangulation and their uncanny success at creating multiple identities and personas. Most of them were upstanding respectable citizens in the public sphere while reverting to thuggism in secret.

Confusion was a key tool at their disposal. Thuggee was just as much a practice at the art of deception as it was a cult or a secret society, hence their title, 'deceivers.' Their mastery of deception, as well as their unconditional devotion to Kali, was completely misunderstood and vastly underestimated by the gallant, over-optimistic British officers who were tracking them down.

Nearly all of the literature on the Thugs is written from a British perspective, from the results of the codifying apparatus of colonialism and the interventionary authoritarian reform undertaken in the early nineteenth century by the British in India. As part of their attempt at colonial subjectivity, the British tried to develop an all-around taxonomy of the Thugs: their behavior, their identity as a whole, the nature of their crimes, what exactly constituted thuggism and what didn't. All attempts were made to describe the native, place him in a context, categorize him, naturalize him, reform him, and civilize him according to the moral viability of the colonizing apparatus. The idea was to retrieve as much information as possible regarding Thuggee and to construct a body of knowledge that deemed the Thugs as hereditary criminals by birth, 'and thus subject to surveillance, control, and attempted rehabilitation' [Sanjay Nigam quoted in Roy, 129]. This picture was painted solely as a tool for social control by the British.

It turns out that the proliferation of the Thugs had nothing whatsoever to do with degenerate and dysfunctional qualities of Indian civilization as the British claimed, but more to do with reactions against the new centralized state and the reaches of the capitalist world-economy. Before the British arrived, the political system in India was more localized and decentralized. Iftikhar Ahmad calls to our attention that

power and authority in India were diffused and divisible. The political order rested on the accommodation of competing and autonomous centers of power rather than their elimination. This meant that localities retained a large degree of responsibility in matters of administration, defense, dispute settling, and the like. These functions were performed by various groups owing loyalty to, and drew their authority from, the community, not the state. Organized private violence was an integral constituent of such a political order [81].

When this political and economic system came under pressure from the British, the

practices of the Thugs gradually shifted from a localized movement to a widespread, heterogeneous and disorganized political order. The political and economic strife caused by the intervention of the British escalated and more and more young men were recruited into Thuggism as a form of mass resistance. Fluid and widespread in their activities, the Thugs worked with a polymorphous and constantly transforming theater of operations that challenged and effectively confused the ever-growing onslaught of State authority. The British colonizing authorities were thus forced to paint Thuggee as a strange and perverted secret society which badly needed to be reformed. This picture became the basis for all historical scholarship on the subject, most of which is completely unreliable and ridiculous.

Of interest for us are the Thugs' incredible and meticulous tactics of deliberately confusing, rupturing, and fouling up the British information-gathering mission with their multiple identities and their mysterious and obscure ways of operating. Many of the Thugs were respected citizens in their communities by day and homicidal maniacs by night. Most members of Indian society accepted the fact that they would never be able to ascertain who was a thug and who wasn't. Many times the Thugs would infiltrate packs of travelers and pretend they were part of the pack, only to end up slaughtering the whole group. These types of tactics made it extremely difficult for the British colonizers to figure out what was going on. In addition to this, Indian police and landowners would deliberately conceal evidence of thug crimes just to screw over the British. Perhaps Thuggee can provide an excellent model for ridiculing the colonizing and categorizing forces of authoritarian power:

If there is one thing that characterizes the thug,...it is the multiplicity and unpredictability of his manifestations....If native identity can be staged, can be plural, then what are the implications for colonial authority and colonialism's project of information retrieval? Thuggee, I would suggest, introduces a disturbance in the paradigm of information retrieval as well as the notion of native authenticity and ontological purity that is a governing trope of colonial discourse. The thug, through his capacity for disguise and impersonation, and his skill at negotiating multiple and competing identities, usurps the colonizer's privilege of complex subjectivity and of movement between subject positions, and thus can be read to assume some control over both the construction and flow of colonial knowledge [Roy, 131].

This exact modus operandi can perhaps be revamped for our current technological culture in which the omnipresence of power is causing more and more problems. The internet and cyberspace have already brought whole new uses for the manufacturing of identities. Just the chat rooms alone have enabled people of all shapes and sizes to change their shapes and sizes. One's electronic presence has become almost as important as his/her physical presence.

Returning to the theories of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), we can suggest some specific Thugg-ish methods for resisting the new decentralization of power in the electronic milieu. CAE suggest that the use of power through number -- from labor unions to activist organizations -- is bankrupt, because such a strategy requires consensus within the resisting party and the existence of a centralized present enemy. However, in spite of the lack of consensus on what to do, most organizations do share a common goal--resistance to authoritarian power. Yet even in terms of goals there is no consensus about the practical basis of authoritarian power. The perception of authoritarianism shifts depending on the coordinates from which a given sociological group chooses to resist authoritarian discourse and practice. How then can this situation be redefined in constructive terms? To fight decentralized power requires the use of a decentralized means. Let each group resist from the coordinates that it perceives to be the most fruitful. This means that leftist political action must reorganize itself in terms of anarchistic cells, an arrangement that allows resistance to originate from many different points, instead of focusing on one (perhaps biased) point of attack. Within such a micro structure, individuals can reach a meaningful consensus based on trust in the other individuals (real community) in the cell, rather than one based on trust in a bureaucratic process. Each cell can construct its own identity, and can do so without the loss of individual identity; each individual within the cell maintains at all times a multidimensional persona that cannot be reduced to the sign of a particular practice.

This is exactly the manner in which the Thugs operated. Even though they had common hand signs, a secret dialect, and common methods of strangulation, one can say that they did operate in differing communities and utilized multidimensional personas that fit any given social situation. Instead of British colonizers trying to taxonomize the natives, we now see the apparatus of decentralized authority developing information about individuals in order to maintain control and order in the

cyber-world. The physical body in itself no longer exists, having given way to bank records, school records, medical records, tax records, et cetera. Your physical body is slowly becoming a data body. With all this information at its disposal, the apparatus of power has a great advantage and marketers can make you into a target audience for their products. The secret service, once devoted entirely to protecting the president and his family, has now become somewhat of a cyber-police force and almost all corporations have adopted some sort of computer surveillance system. For lack of any other prefix, "techno" culture is becoming a newer world order of sorts, not the free-for-all utopia that many think it is. Electronic communications technology has now become a tool for social organization.

The time is right to put Thuggee methods of disrupting the information-gathering process into practice; an explosive, unstoppable amount of friction in the machine and deliberate confusion of information flow is an effective tactic. When the process of information retrieval is confounded and altered, the organizational properties of the institution that is being confused become unstable -- and should this be maintained for too long -- the institution will eventually collapse. The various segments will have no idea if they are working at cross purposes against each other or if they are working in unison against competing institutions. Confusing, reversing, mimicking, and ridiculing the process of information retrieval is an effective means to disrupt any institution, whether it be military, corporate, or governmental. When such actions are properly carried out, all segments of the institution are damaged. If one can successfully corrupt and modify his own data representation then temporary wrenches can be thrown into the system. The Thugs' methods of multiple personas and confusion of all circumstances can work perfectly in cyberspace.

Along with this, their expert technical ability of human sacrifice for Kali must be appropriated in a means that won't land us all in jail. Instead of human sacrifice for Kali, a similar strategy of ridicule as character assassination (sacrifice) can be envisioned.

Sacrifice is usually defined as giving something without expecting anything in return, and CAE, expanding on the theories of Georges Bataille and others, suggest that there are actually two kinds of sacrifice: One is guided by the principle of excess, the other by the principle of autonomy. The latter case is what we are interested in. Sacrifice guided by the principle of autonomy is an unfortunate but necessary consequence of the liberation of desire (ridicule), a compromise which must be accepted as part of the responsibilities of freedom. For the greater the autonomy, the greater the sacrifice required. Death and autonomy (as an expression of true desire) are inherently linked. Such sacrifices as these revolve around the ability to give, control, and take life at an individual level. Desire can take any emotional form, and it is difficult to accurately predict how it will manifest itself in action. A possibility always exists that the action will be violent in nature, and hence actively connected with mortality, the acceptance of which is a key tenet in Kali worship:

Kali's boon is freedom, the freedom of the child to revel in the moment, and it is won only after confrontation or acceptance of death....To ignore death, to pretend that one is physically immortal, to pretend that one's ego is the center of things, is to provoke Kali's mocking laughter. To confront or accept death, on the contrary, is to realize a mode of being that can delight and revel in the play of the gods. To accept one's mortality is to be able to act superfluously, to let go, to be able to sing, dance, and shout. To win Kali's boon is to become childlike, to be flexible, open, and naive like a child....Kali is mother to her devotees not because she protects them from the way things really are but because she reveals to them their mortality and thus releases them to act fully and freely, releases them from the incredible, binding web of "adult" pretense, practicality, and rationality [Kinsley 1975, 145-46].

The act of ridicule for Kali as a sacrifice guided by **autonomy** can be a feasible substitute for human sacrifice. It goes right along with the "child-like" letting-go just mentioned. The act of ridicule, if one looks beneath the surface, is much akin to sacrifice, especially human sacrifice. Rather than strangulation, beheading, or other means of taking a *physical* life, ridicule makes the particular life the subject of humiliation and assassinates its *character*. When one imagines the act of ridicule as a sacrificial, autonomous becoming, its devotional power becomes readily apparent. While random acts of human sacrifice for Kali may have been effective for the Thugs, this plan of attack probably won't fly in Western cyberculture in 1997. Character assassination can be a reasonable substitute. The Thugs can be resurrected as cults of ridiculers in cyberspace.

Perhaps, as **Annalee Newitz** once told me, we are all Thugs in Cyberspace.

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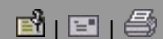
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