

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Geoffroy de Lagasnerie.** *The Art of Revolt: Snowden, Assange, and Manning.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017, p 128, \$18.95 paper, (9781503600010).

**T**he *Art of Revolt: Snowden, Assange, and Manning* by Geoffroy de Lagasnerie raises the question of whether Edward Snowden, Julian Assange, and Chelsea Manning represent a new kind of political actor. Lagasnerie argues that the Internet-produced conflicts around state surveillance, transparency, privacy, and civil liberties have surfaced activists engaged in a new form of “political art” serving as models for what it means to be a “political subject” (p3). Lagasnerie asserts that the potency of this new type of political actor is evident in the severity of the state’s response to them. Lagasnerie’s argument has three major components—context, law breaking, and the new political subjects that Snowden, Assange, and Manning exemplify.

Within his discussion of context, Lagasnerie first tackles the conditions that have given rise to this new form of political actor. He points to the massive increase in state surveillance post 9/11, the wars that followed 9/11, and Snowden’s, Assange’s (whose name is sometimes used interchangeably with WikiLeaks and sometimes not), and Manning’s roles in revealing what was happening to the public. Lagasnerie asserts that a new “economy of power” (26) has emerged as states create extralegal spheres where state actions are exempt from the law. He asserts that the state uses these spaces to “weaken the frameworks that protect our lives from arbitrary exercises of power” (24). He then turns to the ways in which individuals conceive of their relationships to the state, adopting Butler’s argument that the project of constructing the nation-state always involves placing certain groups outside the state and the nation-state identity (34).

After framing the context, Lagasnerie unpacks the subject of defying the law. Here he argues that Snowden, Assange, and Manning are a direct critique to the “order of legality and the architecture of liberal democracies” (40). Lagasnerie asserts that to understand their critique we must focus on their “modes of protest,” and to understand these modes he engages deeply with the question of civil disobedience. Lagasnerie points out that Manning’s actions did not fit the definition of civil disobedience because she remained anonymous. Similarly,

Snowden and Assange have fled the punishment the state might exact against them. Thus, the actions of these individuals did not fit traditional frameworks of politically motivated defiance of the law.

Lagasnerie then turns to the heart of his argument, articulating what makes these individuals new political subjects. He first tackles the question of anonymity and points to the hacktivist collective Anonymous as an example of the way people may now take action anonymously. He argues that this new form of political actor uses anonymity, allowing such actors to be disconnected from the public sphere. Not only does anonymity disconnect actors from the public sphere as it has been traditionally conceived Lagasnerie argues, but for him, anonymity also lessens the cost of politics, thus democratizing participation. The greater accessibility then destabilizes institutions because it offers access to a wider array of people and changes the nature of protest. He argues that this is pure politics because it is non-relational and freed from the gaze of others (75).

Lagasnerie argues that flight from consequence is another distinguishing element of actors such as Assange and Snowden, in particular. For example, he points out that Snowden did not want anonymity – but, he did flee the US and seek asylum in other countries. Similarly, Assange has moved between countries. Lagasnerie argues that this means that they have engaged in a very different relationship to the state, calling into question the legal categories of belonging and foreshadowing of a time when politics will not be imagined as geographically bounded. Further, Lagasnerie looks to the way in which we are socialized – and asks whether the Internet is able to break these frameworks, creating a totally new space for people to understand themselves. He argues the internet gives people an opportunity to have a “chosen” socialization (110), hinting that this possibly allows us to reshape our imagined communities.

Although there is much to admire in this book, it is hard to read this book separate from the post-2016 world, when concerns about state surveillance have been replaced by worries about the use of the Internet to empower white supremacy and elect populist leaders. Particularly, the claims of wide scale transformation of the entire political landscape weaken Lagasnerie’s argument as we have seen very incremental political change and few actors rising to join the holy trinity he focuses on here. Assange’s legacy has been tainted. Snowden is still in exile. Although Manning has been released from prison and has entered politics, the work to combat state surveillance has largely been carried on by hard working civil society groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Pirate Parties.

Further, Lagasnerie's claims of wide scale transformation lack engagement with the broader literature about the ways in which the Internet has pushed forth political changes. Some scholars have written about some of the same actors he discusses, such as Coleman's 2014 work on Anonymous, which Lagasnerie cites but does not discuss. Others, such as Sauter, have written about civil disobedience and hacktivists (2014) and scholars such as Earl and Kimport (2011) have written about the ways in which the Internet has changed political engagement and social movements. In a similar manner, Lagasnerie does not mention whole bodies of theory that speak to the ideas he is putting forth, such as the discussion of boundaries and belonging and the exclusion of groups from the nation (e.g., Migdal 2004, Basson 2008). Lagasnerie is, understandably, concerned with grand political theory, but the lack of engagement with any of these streams of scholarship weakens the argument.

In spite of these issues, Lasagnerie's book provides a clear breakdown of the change he sees in political actors, and he convincingly highlights major affordances the Internet offers to allow this new category of actor to emerge and affect political processes. Lagasnerie's articulation of what new technological realities afforded to political action in the early 2000s, allowing new tropes of protest and types of political actors to emerge and influence politics, is a cogent contribution.

*University of Washington*

Jessica L. Beyer

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**Jessica L. Beyer** is a lecturer and research scientist in the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. She is the author of *Expect Us: Online Communities and Political Mobilization*.

**Email:** [jlbeyer@uw.edu](mailto:jlbeyer@uw.edu)