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theme of geographic transformation. While these fictional portrayals of the city might seem to distort and thereby diminish the importance of place, both novels' experimental techniques serve to disclose the real experience of the city's ethnic communities. By superimposing the geography of Los Angeles's segregated past with its multicultural present, *Tropic of Orange* and *People of Paper* explore the effect of these social transformations on the city's African-American, Asian, and Chicano communities. But more importantly, in depicting Los Angeles in all of these contexts—local as well as global, fictional as well as sociological—these novels suggest how new models of identity, community, and literature might emerge from the city's shifting physical, social, and literary geographies.

Chapter Nine

POLYSpatial RESistance for the sAKE
OF THE “REAL” SUBALTERNS:
ELECTRONIC CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE
AS A FORM OF HACKTIVISM

ISKANDAR ZULKARNAIN

The rules of cultural and political resistance have dramatically changed. The revolution in technology brought about by the rapid development of computer and video has created a new geography of power relations in the first world that could only be imagined as little as twenty years ago: people are reduced to data, surveillance occurs on the global scale, minds are melded to screenal reality, an authoritarian power emerges that thrives on absence. The new geography is virtual geography, and the core of political and cultural resistance must assert itself in this electronic space.

— Critical Art Ensemble

Stop the G8+5, Defend Oaxaca!
The borderlands Hacklab, Electronic Disturbance Theater and Rising Tide North America call for a virtual sit-in against the websites of the G8+5 and the Mexican government during the G8+5 meetings on October 3-4th, 2006 in Mexico. To join the action, click here: http://sdhacklab.org/oaxaca

— Electronic Disturbance Theater website

The first paragraph of Critical Art Ensemble's book (hereafter CAE), *The Electronic Disturbance* cited above suggests that the diagram of resistance in the contemporary network society should utilize the infrastructures of new technologies as the media for disruptive expressions against what they call the new emerging authoritarian power. As a collective of tactical media activists CAE perceives that the development

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of new technologies have added more layers to the structure of power relations and in anticipation necessitates new layers of political and cultural struggle. Meanwhile, the second citation is one of the responses to CAE’s call. It is a type of resistive action that goes by the name “electronic civil disobedience,” and is commonly referred to as “hacktivism.” Hacktivism, according to Richard Kahn and Douglas kellner, is one example of a “globalization-from-below” movement that develops and propagates oppositional ideas and movements throughout the planet.2 In this essay, I will explore the dynamic within electronic civil disobedience action as a form of hacktivism that resonates with the issues of subalternity, in a cyberspatial context. In this case, I will focus on the actions of one hacktivist group called the Electronic Disturbance Theater (hereafter EDT).

Within postcolonial scholarship, the concept of subalternity is central in questioning racial and economic divisions and inequalities, (regional and national) identities, and (political) resistances. More significantly, theories of the subaltern center their assertions on the idea of representation, one that becomes more and more problematic in the context of the information age. Ranajit Guha, co-founder of the Subaltern Studies Group, asserts a differential relationship between what he calls the “elite” and the “subaltern,” where the unequal composition is heterogeneous and differs from area to area.3 Grounding on Guha’s assertion, Gayatri C. Spivak insists upon the need to critically represent the “voice” of the subaltern. Claiming that the subaltern cannot speak in its own terms, she contends that “representation has not withered away.”4

However, when the idea of representational space has gradually shifted to information space, the politics of representation becomes in question. As populations defined informatically, the dialectics between the “elite” and the “subaltern” have multiplied into what Tiziana Terranova brings up new layers of contention. It, thus, serves as a preliminary suggestion to think non-linearly about the subalterns and their politics.

Before I begin to discuss EDT in relation to the subaltern concept, it is important to identify certain diverging characteristics in hacking and hacktivism. This move is not an endorsement of a simple binary opposition whatsoever, but rather a practical effort to study the dynamic between the two terms. In his book Hacker Culture, Douglas Thomas suggests that, “the term ‘hacker’ has been stretched and applied to so many different group of people that it has become impossible to say precisely what a hacker is.”5 Part of the reason for this complexity, I will argue, is the role of fictional narratives, such as William Gibson’s seminal work Neuromancer, and media hype that have placed hacking in the realm of popular culture. It is also from these sources that hacking gains its status as a type of digital subculture.

Thomas purposively defines hackers as “a group of computer enthusiasts who operate in a space and manner that can be rightly defined by a sense of boundless curiosity and a desire to know how things work, but with the understanding that such knowledge is further defined by a broader cultural notion: secrecy.”6

If Thomas emphasizes secrecy as the main tenet of the proliferation of hacking as a techno-cultural phenomenon, then in my case, to differentiate hacking from hacktivism, the emphasis will be placed on the two other characteristics, namely curiosity and desire. Hackers’ actions, which many people consider as intrusive if not destructive, highlight the craving for technological excitement and pleasure. This passion becomes the drive for the hacker in circumventing any type of rigid systemic function. Synthesizing Shirley Turkle’s argument on hacking, Tim Jordan and Paul Taylor assert that “the main characteristics of a hack are that it be simple, masterful, and illicit.”7 Many hackers attempt to achieve these in their actions. The desire to comply with this standardization is what creates a thrill or what is often described as “the kick” in creating a hack.”8

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7 Ibid.
Moreover, the emphasis on excitement is revealed by three seminal hacker figures, Steve Wozniac, John Draper a.k.a. Captain Crunch, and Kevin Mitnick. In Ralph Lee’s documentary movie, The Secret History of Hacking (2001), Wozniac claims, “hacking is about invention.” Draper, in a similar vein, states, “hacking is experimentation . . . about how to make [things] do cooler things.” Meanwhile, Mitnick asserts, “hacking is about forbidden knowledge, it’s about pranksterism, it’s about how to outsmart the other.” Here although seemingly presenting diverse definitions, all three hackers embrace the idea of seeking performative delight in hacking, be it in the form of inventing new machines, experimenting with the unexplored nature of machines, or gaining forbidden information.

Additionally, the notion of “the kick” has several implications. First, it relates specifically to Thomas’s argument on masculinity in hacking. He indicates that hacker culture is mainly a male (youth) culture. He argues that “[the] traits most strongly shared by the two generations of hackers are the desire for mastery over technology and the struggle between authority and autonomy that constitutes a significant portion of formative masculinity and youth culture in contemporary society.”

Even though Thomas’s argument cannot be applied universally, it identifies a key element of hacking. Arguably, hacking activities are mostly done by men (although there are some exceptions). This perception, moreover, is confirmed by such figures as Bruce Sterling. He asserts that “hacking is a teenage-male voyeur-thrill-power-trip activity. You don’t find female computer intruders, any more than you find female voyeurs who are obsessed with catching glimpses of men’s underwear.” At this point, one can perceive an overlapped connection between hackers’ technological and libidinal desires. In her analysis about the hacker’s body, Deborah Lupton suggests a gender-based connection in the interface between hackers and computers. She argues that hackers perceive the computer as a female body that is “dark and enigmatic, potentially leaky, harboring danger and contamination, vulnerable to invasion.”

Stressing the hacker’s thirst for the kick also presents another implication, its significant in distinguishing hacking from hacktivism. Because hacking favors the search for the kick more than anything else, it then becomes an anarchistic action without a concrete political motivation. The hacker’s intrusion does not derive from any external reason other than the passion of infiltrating and gaining control of any technological system. By and large, hacker-dom consists of several technological layers that derive from heterogeneous cultures. It originally comprised computer scientists, research assistants, and hobbyists as hackers. These actors were involved in sharing knowledge on how to access various kinds of mainframes. As the information technology evolved in the development of the Internet, the scope of the access-gaining drive multiplied. Gradually, it dealt with access to hardware and software, to network systems, and to the content of information itself. This development, to certain extent, produced a cultural spectrum based on what Steven Levy calls “hacker ethics,” encapsulating the constructive (“white hat”) hackers, who primarily only seek the excitement of infiltrating the system and the destructive (“black hat”) hackers/crackers, whose main interest is on profit-taking and thus falling the hacker ethics. Although this condition suggests the inherent political atmosphere of the movement, this condition

10 Thomas, Hacker Culture, xvi.
11 Alexander R. Galloway in fact suggests the opposite argument. In his chapter about cyberfeminism, he subscribes to Sadie Plant’s argument that “the computers are, and have always been, a technology of the female” in Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization (Cambridge: The MITP, 2004), 185.
14 Ibid., p. 111.
16 For an explanation of the layers of access, see Alexandra Samuel, “Hacktivism and the future of political participation” (PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2004), 41-42.
17 In Chapter 2 of Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution, Levy listed hacker principles as follows: 1) access to computers should be unlimited and total; 2) all information should be free; 3) mistrust authority, promote decentralization; 4) hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, ages, race, or position; 5) you can create art and beauty on a computer; 6) you can change your life for the better; 6) like Aladdin’s lamp, you could get to do your bidding (19-25). The example of the white hackers is one who leaves message about the “holes” in the system without destroying or malfunctioning the system. Meanwhile, the example of cracking is credit card cracking or stealing personal information. Interestingly, sometimes it is hard to create a fine line between the two. The case of Kevin Mitnick is perhaps one of the examples of this blur. As documented by Samuel in her dissertation, when Mitnick was arrested and prosecuted for hacking, thousands of hackers mobilized to support him (42).
does not reflect a concrete political vision and tactical plans for implementation.

The most accepted political slogan in the ethics of the hacker, namely "information wants to be free," is perhaps the best example of the political abstractness of hacker culture. There is no precise quality as to what kind of information "politically" wants to be free. In fact, the debate between hacking and cracking is in itself the logical consequence of the lack of political concreteness and intention that the jargon carries. Biella Coleman might be correct in suggesting that "hacking always tends to evoke political elements due to the nature of knowledge in our society." Yet, as she explains, it only provides tendencies, or perhaps it is better to say potentialities for political actions. Elsewhere, she suggests, "politics tend to be seen by programmers [hackers] as buggy, mediated, and tainted action clouded by ideology that is not productive of much anything while it insidiously works against true forms of free thought." This is the crucial point which differentiates hacking from hacktivism.

Hacktivism can be defined as combining the skills of hacking with the spirit of political activism. Contrary to hacking, hacktivism emphasizes the actualization of hacking's disruptive potentials for broader political agendas, not only restricted to the Internet culture. In her dissertation, Alexandra Samuel defines hacktivism as "the non-violent use of illegal or legally ambiguous digital tools in pursuit of political ends." In fact, Jordan and Taylor claim that this movement "has shown significant potential for re-radicalising hacking and digital cultures generally." From the perspective of hacktivism, hackers' intrusion is seen as being impartial or not politically well-grounded. Their actions only derive from a desire for an orgasmic sensation of penetrating into an authorized system, thus

18 This influential jargon originally comes from Stewart Brand's statement that "[o]n the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other" (cited in Galloway 152n10).
22 Jordan and Taylor, Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?, 172.

becoming susceptible to corporate/capitalist/military cooptation. They are in danger of being turned into efficient labor forces for information-based enterprises or even for government or military purposes. "They [hackers] fail frequently to redirect corporate power to more humane ends and this is perhaps due to the ultimate conflation of the desire of [hackers] and of corporations for technological experimentation."23

What hacktivism does is a political channeling of hackers' disruptive potentials in their thrill-seeking adventures. The hacktivists realize that hacker culture is like a reservoir of untapped potential. It is a culture of what Deleuze would describe as "nothing but the potentiality of an Idea, its determinable virtuality." In this case, the "Idea" that turns hacker culture into a realm of potentialities is the idea of the kick, the desire for circumvention. Therefore, hacking becomes the resource of disruptive or transgressive potentials in cyberspace, while hacktivism is the political harnessing of those potentials. I should also note that, as Deleuze would argue, no movement, not even hacktivism, could exhaust the potentialities of hacking culture itself. There is always potential that escapes the force of actualization, although both (the potential and the actual) "coexist, and enter into a tight circuit which we are continually retracting from one to the other." This is the potency that drives the dynamic of hacker culture. Hacktivism, in this regard, can only be able to actualize some of hacking's disruptive potential to create a singular political trajectory, a trajectory that, in my study, becomes assembled with the idea of subalternity.26

As a hacktivist collective, EDT develops the political routing of hacking potential in their concept of electronic civil disobedience. In exercising their concept of electronic civil disobedience, EDT seeks to merge "off-" and "on-line" sites of resistance, both artistically and technologically. They are, as Stefan Wray, the co-founder of EDT, explains, "a small group of cyber activists and artists engaged in developing theory and practice of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD)."

23 Ibid., 24.
25 Ibid., 150.
26 The notion of assemblage is deliberately used here to connect with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s theoretical conception of assemblage as an emergent structure that will be explained further in this essay.
He also suggests that they “[work] at the intersection of radical politics, recombinant and performance art, and computer software design.” 28 The group grounds their movement on the understanding that “capitalism has become increasingly nomadic, mobile, liquid, dispersed, and electronic.” 29 This political stance, as I noted earlier, derives from the belief of electronic resistance that CAE propagates. This should not be surprising since, Ricardo Dominguez, another co-founder of EDT, was one of the founding members of CAE. 30 Interestingly, as documented by Samuel, the reason Dominguez left CAE was his frustration in seeing the group’s unwillingness to put its theory of electronic civil disobedience into practice. 31 Wray himself elsewhere has made the somewhat prophetic argument that, “[as] hackers become politicized and as activists become computerized, we are going to see an increase in the number of cyber-activists who engage in what will become more widely known as Electronic Civil Disobedience.” 32

Moreover, through what they call “polyspatial democratic movements,” what EDT aims for is to create “disturbances and force multiplication . . . in search of leverage anchors for voices without powers.” 33 This is where the discourse of electronic civil disobedience interconnects with the discourse of subalternity. Based on their aim, therefore, I will argue that EDT is a hacktivist movement that seeks to represent the voice of the subalterns in the context of a new medium. I should also note that, in their case, the group locates the subalterns in the realm of the physical or “off-line.” As Samuel states, the type of hacktivism that EDT enacts usually focuses on “offline issues like globalization and human rights.” 34 For instance, EDT enacts a significant number of “hacktions” in defense of the Zapatista insurgent movement against government repression in Mexico.

28 Ibid.

Contrary to Gayatri Spivak’s acknowledgement that “the subaltern cannot speak,” in this case, EDT instead perceives the subalterns as those having a voice to “speak,” yet without (enough) power to be appropriately heard. 35 This kind of perception also has an implication that there is a need for them to be heard. This is where EDT posits their status as “actors among civil societies,” to aid or to represent those voices to be properly heard. 36

Taking this position is not without risk, especially within the context of information culture where the limits of the politics of representation are revealed. As Terranova suggests, “the analysis of the play of differences in representation within the self-other dialectics, in fact, has always implied the support of a space where the other is observed as from across a space.” 37 The concept of representation itself necessitates the creation of a gap of distancing. It is this gap that restricts the representational force to intricately engage with what it wants to represent.

Here, Terranova’s argument is in contrast to the “classic” subalter politics that Spivak propagates in which she insists that “representation has not withered away.” 38 Rather than focusing on “how cultural struggle is waged within a representational space, marked by the relationship between self and other, or the identical and the different,” Terranova suggests a cultural politics that makes known “a problematic of mutations and movement within immersive and multidimensional information topologies.” 39 This kind of assertion puts the subaltern position into a non-linear trajectory. In the information age, one can say that the subalterns have turned into informational codes. This “mutation” does not necessarily derive from its interactions with technologies such as the computer

35 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 104. One should understand that this synthesis does not overlook Spivak’s complex and rigorous argument about the subaltern. While she states the impossibility of recovering the voice of the subalterns without changing the status of the relation, she also alerts us not to essentialize and romanticize the subaltern subjects. However, her insistence of the subaltern silence and the necessity for politics of representation by what she calls “the intellectuals” are also problematic. In Colonialism/Postcolonialism (New York: Routledge, 2005), Ania Loomba states, “too inflexible a theory of subaltern silence, even if offered in a cautionary spirit, can be detrimental to research on colonial cultures by closing off options even before they have been explored” (196).
36 Dominguez, “Post-Media Impossibilities (Part One) or Mayan Technology for the People.”
37 Tiziana Terranova, Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age, 35.
38 Ibid.
39 Terranova, Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age, 8, 10.
although it does make us aware of the informational dimension of the subalterns. Subaltern positions, here, emerge out of an unstable and affective structure of assemblages.  

EDT must have been aware of the risk in taking their position as representative power in a movement that emphasizes the creation of an information network. That is why they introduce the concept of polyspatial movement through which they try to “recombine” the real and the electronic space in a different way from the common interactions between these spaces. The notion of recombination comes from their understanding of CAE’s proposition about the electronic disturbance where “[the recombinant process] assembles and reassembles fragmented cultural images, letting the meanings they generate wander unbound through the grid of cultural possibility.” However, at this point, I will not yet analyze the stakes and consequence that EDT takes in claiming the position as representational civil actors. Instead, I will first explore EDT’s actualization of their conceptual politics. Here, EDT’s hacktivism correlates with the concept of noise in information theory. This apposition is productive in relation to my discussion about hacktivism and subalternity within the cyberspatial context.

In her work, How We Became Posthuman, N. Katherine Hayles suggests that the interface between human and machine, in this case a computer and its network, consists of an information transaction. Arguing that our relationship with machines has already turned us into posthuman cyborgs, she states, “[C]entral to the construction of the cyborg are informational pathways connecting the organic body to its prosthetic extensions.” In these information pathways, information consists of noise and signal.

Moreover, Terranova explains that “as elaborated by the researchers working for telecommunication companies in the first half of the twentieth century, information theory is fundamentally concerned with the accurate reproduction of an encoded signal.” In this case, one treats signal as the desired information while noise is perceived as distortion or corruption of information. It is this privilege of signal over noise that is subject to critique.

Hayles, critiquing Claude Shannon’s theory of information, argues:

Shannon’s distinction between signal and noise had a conservative bias that privileges stasis over change. Noise interferes with the message’s exact replication, which is presumed to be the desired result. The structure of the theory implied that change was deviation and that deviation should be corrected.

In contrast, Hayles believes that noise is actually a productive force in information creation. Seemingly agreeing with other information theorists such as Donald Mackay, she suggests that “information [is] not opposed to change; it [is] change.”

Furthermore, Hayles’s perception of noise has a close affinity to her argument about randomness in the pattern-randomness dialectic. Signal can be perceived as the patterned element of information while noise is randomness. In line with such information and cybernetics theorists as Stuart Kauffman, Francisco Varela, and Henri Atlan, she argues that randomness is not simply the lack of pattern but the creative ground from which pattern can emerge. It is within this perspective that one can see the characteristic of noise as productive and mutational. The randomness of noise has the capacity to mutate any existing patterned signal thus creating a new kind of pattern indeterminately.

At a metaphorical level the critique of signal in information theory is similar to the critique of EDT, as well as CAE, against the advanced form of power/capitalism. The ways the hacktivists perceive the domination and control of corporate interests and/or the government in various media are identical with the dissection of information to minimize the interference of unwanted noise. Here, the term “signal” could refer to the desired “media effect,” to use Terranova’s term. Dominant interests are controlling the effect of media globally to serve their own agenda. EDT’s hacktivism thus becomes the politics of noise disturbing the information signal relay modulated by advanced capitalism. As Domínguez asserts, polyspatial
resistance should "create situations for mutations that can interrupt and reroute the protocols of acceleration, improvement, and obsolesce that late capital is bound by."\(^48\)

One can perceive this politics of noise in the type of hypertextual resistance that EDT introduces. In realizing their polyspatial movement, EDT launches a hacktion called Floodnet action or virtual sit-in. A virtual sit-in is a type of electronic disturbing action similar to a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack, enacted using software called "Floodnet." According to Alexander R. Galloway, the creation of Floodnet software originated from 404, a net art created by a European net-artist duo called Jodi.\(^49\) Yet, he also claims that EDT is the one that conceptually designs the software as the infrastructure of hacktivism. The creation of Floodnet software itself comes as the technological improvement of a call for NetStriking for Zapata by a group called Anonymous Digital Coalition in January 1998.\(^50\)

A virtual sit-in, according to Wray, is a "cyber-manifestation of a traditional sit-in."\(^51\) It is like bringing your electronic body to participate in an electronic sit-in within the realm of cyberspace. I should note here that contrary to the common practice of hacking which underscores the merit of individual skill of circumvention, virtual a sit-in intruding effect depends on the power of the collective. It suggests that there is no individual superiority between the participants in any virtual sit-in action.\(^52\) Everyone contributes as hacktivists to the production of disturbing noise.

Moreover, it encouragingly involves both the hacker and the non-hacker community. As one announcement of Floodnet action suggests, it is "hacktivism for everybody."\(^53\) As long as people have common interest with the issue that the group raises (and I should add that they must have access to a computer with an internet connection), they can join the action.

\(^{48}\) Dominguez, "Post-Media Impossibilities (Part One) or Mayan Technology for the People."


\(^{50}\) Ibid., 217. See also Dominguez's "Digital Zapatismo" for details on the first virtual sit-in action.


\(^{52}\) Although the suggestion of equality in virtual sit-in is challengeable since there seems to be an underlying hierarchy between the EDT group and the participants that they are trying to invite, the collective network produced in a virtual sit-in is still a collaborative linkage.


To differentiate this type of denial-of-service (DoS) action with individual DoS, therefore, DJNZ and the Electrohippies, another hacktivist group that performs similar actions to EDT, calls a virtual sit-in "[a] client-side distributed DoS action" as opposed to "server-side distributed DoS actions," which only involve one or two people.\(^54\)

Technically, a virtual sit-in works in the activation of the software enabling automatic the reload function on the targeted website(s) several times per minute. The more people join the action (i.e. activate the software), the more reloads (hits) they make on the targeted website. When the hits flood the targeted website, it will consequently stop functioning normally and eventually produce a denial of service message. This happens because of the nature of the Internet as technological architecture. As Wendy Chun claims in her technical observation of EDT's action, "[a] web server can only manage a finite number of simultaneous hits."\(^55\)

Artistically, the action displays conceptual artistic spamming of targeted server logs. As Brett Stalbaum, one of the coders of Floodnet software, explains:

FloodNet is an example of conceptual net.art that empowers people through activist/artistic expression. By the selection of [phrases] for use in building the "ad" urls, for example using "human_rights" to form the url "http://www.xxx.gb.mx/human_rights," the FloodNet is able to upload messages to server error logs by intentionally asking for a non-existent url. This causes the server to return messages like "human_rights not found on this server." This works because of the way many http servers process requests for web pages that do not exist. FloodNet's Java applet asks the targeted server for a directory called, in this example, "human_rights", but since that directory doesn't exist, the server returns the familiar "File not Found" or "Error 404" message, recording the bad request. This is a unique way to leave a message on that server.\(^56\)

It is the combination of this technological savvy and artistic political expression that indicates EDT's virtual sit-in as a mutational politics of noise.


Through the existence of a virtual "crowd" (virtual sit-in participants), EDT's hacktion discloses and creatively makes use of the unsettled yet highly controlled nature of an information network in cyberspace. Alexander Galloway describes this nature as a "protocological system," a management style that maintains the informational milieu of the Internet in the form of an inter-operable distributed network. This system places its foundation on the possibility of information nodes to act as noise.

Since the nodes act as what Galloway calls "a multitude of independent vital agents," the ones that actually never follow any types of pattern yet have the capacities to affect and the potentials to be affected by the network they are appended to at any time, a virtual sit-in action can be perceived as an act to resistively affect the "desired" pattern of the targeted website's distributed network. Acting as website visitors, the virtual sit-in participants form a collection of "noisy" vital agents who exhaust the operation of the targeted website to its limit. In this case, the denial-of-service message functions as a disclosure of the instability of information distribution.

Moreover, EDT's mutational hacktivism does not only touch the politics of anti-capitalism or anti-oppression. It also signifies the mutation of hacking and activism. As I described earlier, hacktivism is a political routing of hacker culture. In fact, at some points it even denies its hacking characteristics. As Carmin Karasic, the co-designer of Floodnet, claims, "Floodnet was Art, not Hacking. Floodnet never accessed or destroyed any data, nor tampered with security, nor changed websites, nor crashed servers." Here, interestingly, Karasic places the mutational characteristic of EDT's hacktivism in the realm of artistic expression. In hacking culture itself, the discourse of artistic expression is not something new. There are more than just a few hackers that consider their acts as artistic productions. As the "classic" principle of hacking elaborated by Steven Levy suggests, "to qualify as a hack, the feat must be imbued with innovation, style, and technical virtuosity." It is from this principle that some hackers see themselves as information artists.

Yet, there is a conceptual difference between EDT's and "conventional" hackers' artistic expression. Hacking, in its commonality, emphasizes individual artistic expression. On the other hand, EDT's hacktivism, as already described, underscores collective artistic expression. EDT's attack is a political action that seeks to disrupt and redirect the flow of information. It is a form of resistance that challenges the established order and seeks to create new possibilities. The denial-of-service message is a means of disclosing the instability of information distribution and highlighting the power dynamics at play in cyberspace.

Figure 1. Reconstruction of virtual sit-in

Since the nodes act as what Galloway calls "a multitude of independent vital agents," the ones that actually never follow any types of pattern yet have the capacities to affect and the potentials to be affected by the network they are appended to at any time, a virtual sit-in action can be perceived as an act to resistively affect the "desired" pattern of the targeted website's distributed network. Acting as website visitors, the virtual sit-in participants form a collection of "noisy" vital agents who exhaust the operation of the targeted website to its limit. In this case, the denial-of-service message functions as a disclosure of the instability of information distribution.

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By characteristic, here, I mean the force of circumventing any machinic nature. The figure of Carmin Karasic is also exceptional in disturbing the preconception about the existence of female characters in hacking culture that I described earlier. Steven Levy, Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (New York: Anchor P/Doubleday, 1984), 10.
performance. As their group's name suggests, EDT is a theater performance of electronic disturbance. It involves a shared experience in its artistic expression. Karasic calls EDT's virtual sit-in a "conceptual internet art of becoming" where "it need[s] the participation of thousands of online participants to become fully actualized." This characteristic encourages Samuel to argue that "virtual sit-ins can also lay claim to being more democratic or representative forms of hacktivism." This premise of mass participation, therefore, mutates the trajectory of artistic expression in hacking culture from individual to participatory action.

At this point, one can also notice that there is an evident feature of Deleuzean ideological belief in EDT's political movement. The concepts of "becoming" and "recombinant theater" follow Deleuze's idea of "rhizome," as a non-linear political structure. This would not be a surprise if we consider EDT's relation to CAE. The philosophical belief that CAE holds itself is proven to be Deleuzean. As Wray states:

Thus, EDT's virtual sit-in can be accepted as the manifestation of Deleuzean ideology that CAE promotes.

Nevertheless, EDT does not seem to just blatantly implement the ideas that CAE disseminate. They are quite critical in assimilating the idea of electronic resistance. From the group's perspective, instead of being the only form of resistive action, CAE's idea of electronic civil disobedience has to be established as "a component of or as a complement to traditional civil disobedience." Although it is not clear whether this suggestion derives from the group's past background in "traditional" activism or not, EDT has introduced a novel characteristic in both hacking and activism in their development of "hybrid civil disobedience actions."

The group shows the hybridity of its action in its insistence on merging its virtual sit-in actions with offline actions "on the streets" at the same moment. EDT arranges any of its virtual sit-in actions to launch at the same time with a street protest or action. For instance, as the call for participation at the beginning of this essay shows, the group arranged to launch their virtual sit-in action in defense of the teachers of Oaxaca and against the G8 2006 meeting in Mexico at the same time as rallies and protests on the streets. This is why they call their movement "polyspatial democratic movements." The group believes that the dominant power (manifested in corporate power and the military entertainment-complex) has been experimenting with "pragmatic hybrid structures that can retain

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control over networks, while allowing network autonomy to expand within a specific types [sic] of command structures. In anticipation to the development of this controlling power, the group, thus, experiments with a form of resistance making use of the characteristic of open and non-linear networks. They want to develop "recombinant strains of disturbance at all levels." In this case, the virtual sit-in cannot be a complete polyspatial disturbance if it only performs in the cyberspatial realm. It has to accompany an off-line action so that the disruption can be felt at all levels. In a sense, EDT's polyspatial resistance relies on a Deleuzean structure of assemblage as "[an] increase in the dimension of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections." This assemblage happens at several levels. Firstly, as I described earlier, it brings together the discourse of hacking, activism, and art. Secondly, it gathers a mass of online participants non-linearly, as the number and the location of the participants cannot be determined until the virtual sit in is enacted. Each node of the participants is an "autonomous agent," that has the affective capacities to influence (and the potentials to be influenced by) the level of disturbance. Each hacktion will ideally be different both quantitatively and qualitatively from every other. It will always be an emerging action. Thirdly, it is a parasitic technological assemblage between the informational message sent by EDT and the remote server's log book that records the targeted website's traffic. This happens, according to Galloway, because "Web servers record all traffic to their website including errors, [and thus] the error acts like a Trojan horse." He calls this relationship between the local users (virtual sit-in participants) and the remote server (the targeted website) "a type of virtual sculpture." Lastly, the hacktion is an assemblage of real space and cyberspace nodes. In each action, there is a rhizomatous sprawl of noisy nodes of the online participants' physical and electronic bodies, the bodies of the participants on the streets, the material codes of Floodnet software, the artistic spamming message, and most significantly the context that drives the action.

73 Ibid., 217.
74 Ibid.
75 Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," 42.
functioning between the nodes participating in the group’s action. The group seems to imagine the interface between each node will always function at all times.

Even though the qualitative and quantitative unpredictability of the hacktivism already suggests a sense of noise feedback loops, it is still a pre-arranged noise, or to use Brian Massumi’s term, a “gridlock” of possibilities. In their imagination, the group has not yet noticed that when they arrange a polyspatial structure of nodes, each node itself consists of multiplicities of other nodes or at least does not necessarily assemble permanently to the polyspatial structure that EDT creates. The group does not realize that at the same time as it has become the element of possible outcomes, each node also molds into a “sculpture” of indeterminate potentials. Thus, EDT has, paraphrasing Massumi, backward the field of potentialities of polyspatial resistance into the field of possibilities.

In actuality, the unprecedented “noises” that escape EDT’s grid of possibilities cover both human and non-human scopes. In the scope of non-human elements, the group seems unconscious that the physical hardware of the participants’ computers differs. Computer hardware has its own various technological evolutions. Take, for instance, the distinction between the hardware of Mac and PC platforms and Intel and AMD processors. Each has its own spectrum of performance-based hardware, thus creating a division of capacities to operate (Intel Pentium I, II, III, Celeron, AMD Athlon, Thunderbird, Turion, etc.) Although by designing Floodnet software EDT somewhat standardizes the technological performance of these various types of hardware, these multiplicities certainly may have the potential to modify and be modified by the group’s polyspatial action.

I should note, however, that EDT is already aware of the digital divide in terms of the hardware facilities of internet connections (dial-up, DSL, or cable) (see figure 2). Perhaps, this is due to the fact that they had noticed this issue when the proto-Floodnet action (the Anonymous Digital Coalition’s NetStrike) occurred. In spite of that, there are still indeterminate layers that can emerge out of the technological evolutions themselves. This can cover, for instance, the unequal dissemination of bandwidth pipeline around the globe or restriction setup by university computer administrators. In fact, in my latest virtual sit-in involvement, my laptop suddenly rebooted in the middle of the sit-in without any clear reason.

Moreover, on the issue of protocol, in their polyspatial actions “for real peace in the real communities,” EDT did not anticipate unpredictable disconnections of the human nodes. In this case, I will again take the Zapatista movement as the example of EDT’s subaltern context. As a part of the subaltern insurgent movements, EDT tries to realize Spivak’s dualistic conception of representation, the act of both “speaking about” and “speaking for” the Zapatista. As I mentioned earlier, the group portrays itself as the continuation of the subaltern’s presence and struggles. The group in fact tries to both “amplify” and “become” the voices of the subalterns in polyspatial information networks. Through their virtual sit-in actions, the group attempts to be, as Jill Lane explains, “digital Zapatistas.”

However, as I noted in the first part of this essay, emphasizing the idea of representation in information culture has its own limit. In the realm of information network, as Terranova argues in her observation of Rodney Brooks’s robotics experiments, representation is unable “to keep up with the complexity and instability of an informational space (representation can only capture the macro-scale, but it misses the abundance of reality and its capacity for dynamic shifts).” In this case, I can argue that EDT’s representation as the digital Zapatistas fails to capture completely or perhaps has to paradoxically ignore the dynamic forces that compose the Zapatista movement as a subaltern uprising. As can be observed in Figure 4, EDT’s polyspatial movement can only represent the context of subalternity, not the subalterns themselves. EDT perhaps represents the “voice” of the Zapatista movement speaking about its condition globally. Yet, the group’s attempt to enact a rhizomatous structure of resistance (the polyspatial hacktivism) as “becoming” the Zapatista, proves to be incompatible re-presentation. When Karasic claims the virtual sit-ins for the Zapatistas as efforts to show that “we are numerous, alert, and watching carefully,” the “we” in this statement is not really the Zapatistas but rather the people in solidarity with the insurgence.

This mode of distancing, then, produces noise in EDT’s hacktivism. One can perceive this feedback noise from the response of Miguel García...
Regardless of the incompatible noises within EDT's politics, the group has shown a deliberate attempt to experiment with a non-linear politics of the subalterns. In attempting to reconcile two conflicting ideas, representation and rhizome, the group has brought up new layers in perceiving the subalterns as informational entities. Perhaps the disconnections occurring in EDT's polyspatial resistance might demonstrate Spivak's insistent statement that the subalterns cannot speak. Yet, in this case, it is not so much that they cannot speak as much as their positions as multiplicious informational nodes that exist together with other informational entities, both human and non-human, in an informational space. This informational space does not necessarily imply a process of "information-retrieval approach" that Spivak claims to be dominantly occurring in subject-object (subaltern-elite) dialectics. This informational space is more like "a field of displacements, mutations, and movements that do not support the actions of a subject, but decompose it, recompose it and carry it along." The subalterns as informational nodes are as unstable and affective as any other nodes. What is required from EDT's hacktivism is perhaps an attempt to keep their movement in motion, to return it to the field of potentials.

In this essay, I have made an effort to situate EDT's form of hacktivism as a resistive movement that necessitates a rethinking of subalternity. By tracing the diverging paths between hacking and hacktivism, I have posited the group's hacktivism as a polyspatial struggle in defense of the offline subalterns. Drawing on the concept of noise in information theory, I have displayed the nonlinear qualities and limitations of the group's subaltern movements to reconcile representational politics with the non-linear conception of the rhizome. I have also argued that EDT's hacktivism is a significant attempt to describe the subaltern's volatile and mutational positions as informational nodes.

In the end, although with the existence of feedback noises, the movement might be visible as a kind of back-formation, it also, in Massumi's phrase, "reduces" new movements since there is a metastable unity of feedback and feed-forward. It opens up the potential to move hacktivism into a new trajectory. As metaom, a hacktivist writer suggests, "Hacketivism is a continually evolving and open process; its tactics and methodology are not static. . . . Hacktivism is a rhizomic [sic],
open-source phenomenon. I believe within this open dynamics, a non-linear subalternity will also be introduced, or perhaps "reintroduced" as mutative and moving linkages.

Chapter Ten

Dwelling in the Mother Tongue: The Status of Language in Displacement

Paola Bohórquez

What in fact, does language name, the so-called mother tongue, the language you carry with you, the one that also carries us from birth to death? Doesn't it figure the home that never leaves us?

—Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality

In an interview aired in West Germany in 1964, Günter Gaus asked Hanna Arendt about her relation to the Germany of the pre-Hitler period: "What, in your impression, remains and what is irretrievably lost?" "What remains?" She answered, "The language remains." Arendt's response not only speaks of her ever-lasting attachment to her first language, but it also confers to the mother tongue the status of indestructible foundation: "There is no substitution for the mother tongue." This statement, repeated innumerable times in the voices of those who live between languages, speaks of the absolute familiarity, the permanence across time and places, and the sense of irreplaceability of the mother tongue.

Yet, the notion of "mother tongue" has lost currency in poststructuralist approaches that emphasize the fictional character of the priority and

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1 This article derives from my doctoral dissertation entitled "Living Between Languages: Linguistic Exile and Self-Translation." Through the reading of various cross-cultural self-narratives that focus on second or further language learning, my thesis addresses the problem of linguistic displacement and its effects on subjectivity in its experiential, theoretical and textual dimensions.


3 Ibid., 13.