

## From the Deep Web to the City Streets: Hacking, Politics and Visual Culture

### Des de la *Deep Web* als carrers: *hacking*, polítiques i cultura visual

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#### Abstract

The political protests that have taken over urban space on multiple occasions since 2011 have been connected to parallel actions within virtual space, actions that involve hacking, *hacktivism* and piracy. This article explores the role of the Internet in the development of the protest movement and the idea of hacking as a subversive ideological and cultural practice. Starting with global protests, we will see how they are both linked to each other, and form part of the culture and politics of the information age. Subsequently, the analysis turns to hacking as a political and cultural act. Finally, we will see how these protest movements and hacking practices are expressed in participatory artworks that further foment the revolutionary spirit.

**Keywords:** cultural hacking, information age ideologies, computer-based art, street art, urban protests.

#### Resum

Les protestes polítiques que, moltes vegades, s'han apoderat de l'espai urbà des de 2011 s'han vinculat amb accions paral·leles en l'espai virtual, accions que van implicar el *hacking*, el *hacktivisme* i la *pirateria*. Aquest article explora el paper d'Internet en el desenvolupament del moviment de protesta i la idea de la pirateria com una pràctica subversiva ideològica i cultural. Partint de les protestes globals, es desenvoluparà com es relacionen entre si i com s'emmarquen dins de la cultura i la política de l'era de la informació. A continuació, l'anàlisi se centrarà en el *hacking* com un acte polític i cultural. Finalment, s'explicarà com els moviments de protesta i les pràctiques de *hacking* analitzades s'expressen en obres d'art participatives que fomenten encara més l'esperit revolucionari.

**Paraules clau:** pirateria cultural, ideologia de l'era de la informació, art computeritzada, art de carrer, protestes urbanes.

*"The hacker emerges as the new leading figure of the intellectuals"*

(Claus Pias 2002: 270)

## ***Introduction***

"The revolution will not be televised", but will it be streamed online? It is a legitimate question to be asked as a series of events -the leaking of a massive amount of classified documents by Wikileaks, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement and the anti-crisis protests in Greece and Spain- were seen reflected and magnified in online media.

Truly, the protests, revolts and revolutions that took place since 2011 came as a reaction to the imposition of the neoliberal ideals and the adding up of existing problems. At the same time, these movements were supported not only through traditional, but also through digital means. Thus, the aforementioned events accentuated polemic discussions regarding freedom within the urban and virtual space, discussions that constantly define and challenge the ideas of hacking, hacktivism and piracy as acts of political and cultural significance. These ideas are not just limited to the realm of politics, but they also shape cultural actions -and often become shaped by them.

This paper focuses on the issue of *hacking* as a subversive approach to information and ideas, not only within the virtual space, but also in political and artistic actions in the urban matrix. More analytically, it explores how the existing political, social and cultural tensions are expressed in the virtual space and how, in turn, online groups and hacker ideals support parallel cultural and social developments in the urban space.

Starting with the protest movements that took place worldwide since 2011, we will see how they are linked to each other and how they are prescribed within the digital culture and politics of the information age. Subsequently, the analysis will turn towards hacking, as a political and cultural act. Finally, we will see how the protest movements and the hacking practices analysed are expressed within participatory artworks, which further foment the revolutionary spirit.

## ***Revolutionary movements and information age ideologies***

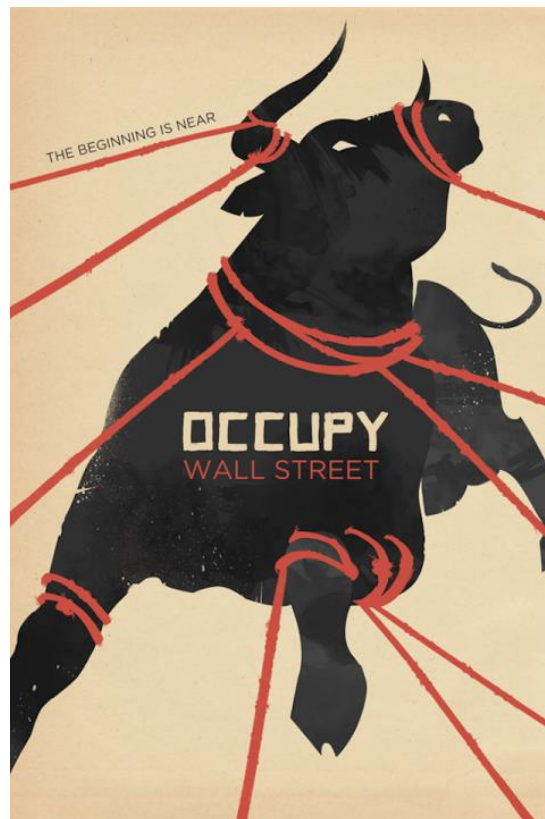
The past four decades –since the 1970s- have been defined politically by an incessant strengthening of the neoliberal policies worldwide, resulting in a series of financial crises (Bolt 2013). The crises and the constant shrinking of workers' rights fuelled diverse reactions, which soon began to look like a multifaceted but vaguely unified movement against economic globalization, expressed in the massive demonstrations – first in Seattle, then Genoa and at a world scale. This "strange tendency to standardization and homogenization" of the protest movement (Raunig 2007: 238) owes a lot to the projection of the images of the mass demonstrations on the media, which highlighted the similarities, giving the impression of one movement, regardless of the different ideals and objectives.

This unified projection of the protest movement will be taken into account when measuring the impact of the protest movement on visual culture, as the general frame of the cultural acts mentioned here. So, referring to events in a vast geographical and political spectrum should not be viewed as an effort to overlook their particularities, but as a way to approach their cultural influence. On the other

hand, there are undoubtedly strong links between the mentioned events: first, they all took place –almost in succession- from late 2010 until today. Second, and most importantly, they all came as a reaction –to a larger or smaller extent- to the growing social problems caused by global capitalism and extreme neoliberalism.

Within this context, the revolts in North Africa, from Tunisia to Egypt and Syria are ideologically related to the anti-crisis protests and the *SOS Halkidiki* resistance in Greece, the *Indignados* in Spain and the Occupy movement in USA and elsewhere. As a whole, these protests went against neoliberal capitalism as the dominant financial, political and social system (Bolt *op. cit.*). In this process they often used similar means to express their discontent against inequality and exploitation: by reclaiming the public space, sharing slogans with the other protesters, hiding behind the same “Anonymous” masks. The homogenization of the visual and verbal expression of the revolts is intrinsically linked to the reflection of these movements on the digital media and the social networks.

Often enough, the Internet has played a central role in the propagation of the revolutionary ideas and the creation of communities, which subsequently strengthened the protests in the urban space. One could even say that in certain instances the clashes between the authorities and the revolutionaries took place online: when the Egyptian authorities tried to cut access to the Internet during the 2011 Tahrir protests, for example, internet users throughout the world replied by sharing with the protesters numbers of international Internet Service Providers, which let the revolutionaries connect to the Internet; in the case of Wikileaks, the blocking of funds sustaining the whistleblowers caused a ‘counterattack’ of Denial of Service organized by hackers and supported by a large part of the internet community.



Alexandra Clotfelter, “The Beginning is Near”, Poster for the Occupy Movement

Occupy Wall Street, as well as the *Indignados*, organized their actions through blogs and social networks, where the announcements for material and moral support were made public. More recently, the protesters in Taksim Square used the social media and online news networks to make their voice heard, leading to arrests for 'tweeting', which was seen as a "menace to society" by the Turkish government (Letsch 2013). Lastly, the *SOS Halkidiki* movement in Greece gained wide support through social media and blogs, because all information regarding the protests was largely banned from the Greek mainstream media (newspapers and television).

Therefore, these movements were based on conflicts of the pre-Internet age; however, they were atypical, in the sense that the protesters were granted with a powerful media tool that could help them make their voice heard throughout the world. As Athina Karatzogianni (2012: 60) notes, "the groups engaging in cyberconflicts are still fighting for power, participation, democracy": an old battle, but with new, downloadable weapons, which are "empowering the previously marginalised or repressed", as they stimulate political awareness and create a sense of community between disparate individuals or groups worldwide.

Truly, such developments had caused disproportionate optimism about the possibility to bring about political change through collective activism online and offline. Viewed under the prism of cause and result, these events might look insignificant, since they failed to shake the ruling elite off power. However, they are still important because they shed light on the existing antagonisms within a society that strives to find justice and democracy. In this regard, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's ideas regarding the concept become highly relevant:

a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate (Bishop 2004: 65-66).

On the other hand, the global scale of these events showcases the emergence of new ideological paradigms, which might eventually cause fissures in the edifice of the current *status quo*. According to Slavoj Žižek (2012: 128), these events could be seen as manifests of a possible future, lying hidden within the present:

We should turn around the usual historicist perspective of understanding an event through its context and genesis. Radical emancipatory outbursts cannot be understood in this way: instead of analysing them as part of the continuum of past and present, we should bring in the perspective of the future, taking them as limited, distorted (sometimes even perverted) fragments of a utopian future that lies dormant in the present as its hidden potential.

One could view these fragments of a utopian future as a virtuality in the Deleuzian sense. For Gilles Deleuze (1991: 96-98) the virtual is something fully real, where the production of actual experience is based. Therefore, the virtual contains all the possible forms that the real can acquire, all the possible meanings it can represent. From this point of view, the aforementioned events and antagonisms could be considered as the potential expression of a yet unrealized future of equality, justice and freedom. The potential is still there, going through fomentations in political groups, artistic actions and online networks.

Within the virtual space, diverse theoretical edifices, from libertarianism, to cybercommunism, anarchist thought and the free culture movement, converge into what has been described as "information age ideologies". This broad ideological

spectrum is based on elements of traditional political thought, which are applied to information society (Karatzogianni *op. cit.*: 59). In fact, we are dealing with diverse political currents, some of them already formed through the social and political movements of the past and some of them that have only recently began to take shape, as a consequence of the new nodes of thought introduced by information technologies (which will be further analysed in the following section):

The free culture movement and hacker culture encompass different types of ideology: some political, others apolitical, some truly revolutionary in both philosophy and practice and others less so. [...] On the one hand, there are ideologues who deliberately seek to realise the revolutionary potential of technology and enhance the effects in the political economic, social and cultural process to change the system as a whole (Ibid: 60-61).

As we focus on this revolutionary potential of technology to change the system, through social and cultural fomentations, our approach to the art inspired by the new ideologies will not follow the obvious path of analysis of the artworks that were created within the movement (posters, paintings, urban interventions). Despite the unquestionable significance of these artworks within the protest movements, what mainly drives our quest here is to discover *the subtler connections between the ideas behind these movements and parallel cultural expressions*, through artworks that incite the public to act artistically and politically.

### ***Piracy, hacking and the active production of culture***

Regarding the nodes of thought that relate to the spreading of information technologies, there has been a strong focus on the ideal of freedom online. The catchphrase “Information wants to be free!” (Brand 1989: 202) is constantly repeated in the discourse regarding human rights on the internet: It refers to the freedom to download, to transform and to share, promoting open culture and transparent governing –thus going against corporate interests and shady political activities.

The broad acceptance of this ideal by progressive political groups and online activists is largely due to the new role undertaken by the public, in regard to the creation of culture and ideology. Within the realm of the internet, digital files can be multiplied and transformed through anybody. Thus the traditional distinction between the consumer and producer, the public and the artist has changed; within the digital sphere the producers of content (entertainment companies, publishing houses) and the artists often use the material they find online, whereas internet users often take part in the creative process, either by offering the ‘prime material’ to the former, or by creating new tendencies with their online activity (Grammatikopoulou 2010: 367-372).

So, as the division between active and passive becomes redundant, we move away from Guy Debord’s idea (1967) of spectatorship as a passive immersion in the spectacle towards Jacques Rancière’s critique (2007) of the division between active creator and passive spectators. Rancière (Ibid: 277) perceives the division between active and passive as a metaphor for inequality –between those who act against those who contemplate, or, from the opposite standpoint, between those who do something against those who do nothing:



All these oppositions –looking/ knowing, looking/ acting, appearance/ reality, activity/ passivity- are much more than logical oppositions. They are what I call a partition of the sensible [...], allegories of inequality.

For Rancière, dismissing the opposition between looking and acting is an act of emancipation that represents equality. Even though his analysis is focused on theatre and performance, one could apply it to the Internet world, where the aforementioned distinctions have been rendered meaningless. Through transformation and dissemination the public can participate actively in the creation of an ideological edifice or a cultural object: by browsing, selecting, downloading and sharing files, they help ideas and cultural objects circulate. At the same time, as the public helps ideas and cultural object circulate, it participates actively in the creation of culture and ideology. For this reason, downloading and information sharing is currently the ‘spearhead’ in the battle for free information flow against the existing copyright laws and the corporate interests that seek to limit this freedom.

The act of downloading has become a threat to the edifice of the current financial political and cultural system, which is based on strict hierarchies and control over knowledge. Diverse manifestos have sprung through the internet, expressing the increasingly political nature of online activity: for example, the Piracy Manifesto (Manetas 2010), the Hacker Manifesto (Wark 2004) or the Cyber.com/munist Manifesto (Barbrook 2012). Within those texts, hacking is presented as a social act, rather than a simple intervention on software. Approaching Carl Marx’s ideas on class from a new perspective (Lewandowska Cummings 2012), McKenzie Wark (2004: 32-36) presents hackers as a social class, who

create and handle information, dispossessed of their production through various forms of private property, copyrights, trademarks and patents” [...], [and has] “the capacity to create not only new kinds of object and subject in the world, not only new kinds of property form in which they may be represented, but new kinds of relations beyond the property form.

The ideas presented in these manifestos, often in a polemic tone, defend the right to receive and to disseminate information freely:

Today, every man with a computer is a Producer and a Pirate. We all live in the Internet, this is our new country, the only territory that makes sense to defend and protect. The land of the Internet is one of information. Men should be able to use this land freely, corporations should pay for use – a company is definitely not a person [...] This is the time for the foundation of an global Movement of Piracy. The freedom of infringing copyright, the freedom of sharing information and drugs: these are [...] Global Rights and as such, Authorities will not allow them without a battle (Manetas 2010).

These manifestos imply that the defence of freedom online is being considered as a key battle in the pursuit of justice and equality. Within this mindset, hacking, which endorses the dissemination and alteration of data as a way of producing cultural content and new ideas, is viewed as an opposition tactic. The idea of hacking as a subversive action within a pre-established system is a predominantly new frame of thought, which expands from informatics to politics and artistic practice; there were certainly “predecessors” in the use of subversive

political or artistic tools (mentioned in the next section) but hacking belongs to a different intellectual and socio-political context.

The term '*hack*', which was originally used for journalism based on unorthodox methods, was adopted by the early programmers to describe a creative solution reached through detours and reworking of existing systems (Düllo, Kiel & Liebl 2005: 13). In this sense, the act of hacking is a *sine qua non* in the evolution of information technologies, since each development is based on the hacking of previous ones. A hacker is someone who enters a system, explores and manipulates its tools, so as to learn how it works and to alter it.

*Hactivism* (a neologism created from the words 'hack' and 'activism') implies that this act has political motives, most commonly to increase political transparency and to raise political awareness; often it is linked to subversive actions against the authorities, with an aim to defend human rights. Although *piracy* simply refers to the act of leaking and sharing content illegally, it also constitutes a political stance, as it disregards the existing copyright laws, in order to spread cultural goods. Despite the differences between the terms, they often imply one another (Grammatikopoulou 2013b: 123).

The terms examined here are not to be viewed only within the context of information technologies; they should be seen within the frame of cultural creation. Manuel De Landa (2006: 73) says that it is important to:

adopt a hacker attitude toward all forms of knowledge: not only to learn UNIX or Windows NT to hack this or that computer system, but to learn economics, sociology, physics, biology to hack reality itself. It is precisely the can-do mentality of the hacker, naïve as it may sometimes be, that we need to nurture everywhere.

So hacking –and also hactivism and piracy– permeate all facets of contemporary action, from science to politics and art. Thus one can talk about 'Cultural Hacking', which, in parallel to the generalized use of the term, implies entering a system, understanding how it works and creating something new out of it:

Hackers create the possibility of new things entering the world. [...] In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world are produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. (Wark *op. cit.*: 4)

Thomas Düllo, Martin Kiel and Franz Liebl (2005: 28-30) consider cultural hacking as a process of orientation and de-orientation, seriousness and playfulness, bricolage and experimentation, radicalization of the original idea, intervention onto a system and dissemination. In this aspect, cultural hacking forms part of the artistic tradition that started with Modernism and continued its development throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until now.

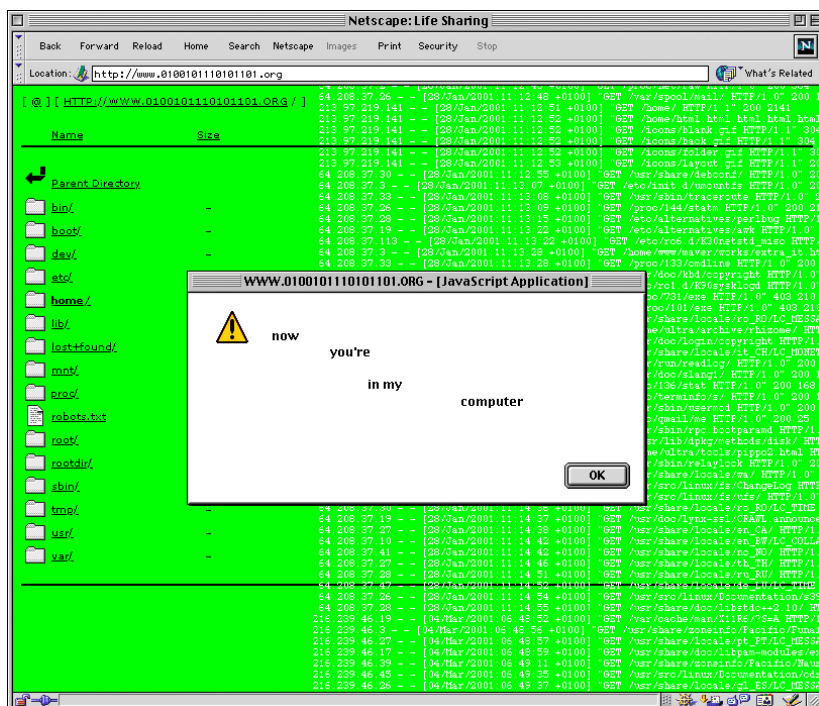
### ***Hacking, information sharing and artistic practice***

In a certain way, art has always followed political movements closely from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until today –sometimes siding with the revolutionaries and other times with their opponents. Artists of the Russian Avant-Garde, like Kasimir Malevich, Tatlin, Aleksandra Ekster, Liubov Popova and others, sought to

transform the message of the October Revolution into constructivist artworks. The futurists followed the opposite direction, expressing support to the emerging Italian fascism. The Situationist movement became closely linked to May 1968. Apart from this direct support, artists have also questioned standing political and cultural processes through subversive actions that bear a strong resemblance to cultural hacking.

In this regard, Dadaist actions like drawing a moustache over Mona Lisa or installing a urinal in an art space –as well as most of Duchamp’s creations- could be viewed as a hacking of known forms in order to create something different. Similarly, the Situationist concept of ‘détournement’, which encouraged a subversive attitude towards the capitalist system, by reinterpreting and decontextualizing its logos and images (Bourriaud 2002: 35-37), could be considered as an early form of ‘hacking’. The appropriation and alteration of marketing strategies by the culture jammers of the 1980s (Ullrich 2006: 44-48) belongs in the same context; the objective of these movements was to ‘jam’ the machine of capitalism, by subverting its messages, and to create “noise” in the channels of propagation of the capitalist ideology. In these works the political message is a process rather than an explicit statement.

Following the same logic, here we will present artists who have embraced hacking, hacktivism and piracy as examples of the ideological links between the protest movement and contemporary artistic practice –rather than focusing in the art that was more directly linked to the movements, as mentioned above. In these works, hacking is just a medium of expression “as concrete is for architects or paint for painters” (Graham 2004: 18). Previous familiarization with hacking and piracy helps the audience engage actively to the artworks in question. On the other hand, the integration of such actions in artistic projects can initiate the public in hacker ethics and practices, as we shall see below.



Eva and Franco Mattes, “Life Sharing” (2000)



Eva and Franco Mattes of the art collective 0100101110101101.org constantly question the established ideas regarding piracy, copyrights and privacy. In January 2001 the two artists started to share their private computer with internet users worldwide through their website. The resulting project *Life Sharing* (2000-2003) left the digital reflection of their lives open and accessible to everyone; for three years, every file on their computer was visible and downloadable, from private mails and photos to software. Long before social networks raised the issue of exhibitionism and voyeurism online, this project showcased the growing threat against privacy brought about by digital technologies. On the other hand, the artists were actually enabling the visitors to break into their personal computer, thus initiating them into hacking practices.



Eva and Franco Mattes, “The Others” (2011)

In *The Others* (2011), the artists decided to switch sides and to become the ones who ‘attacked’ by appropriating images and home-made cover songs from personal computers, which they managed to access because of a flaw in an online file sharing program. Some of the images that constitute the project are familiar poses for social network profile pictures, some others were evidently not meant to be shared; intimate life moments of strangers become remixed into one slideshow that is shown in public. The work produces a certain feeling of embarrassment to the viewers, partly out of fear that their own privacy is at risk and partly because they are obliged to assume the role of the voyeur in public –and not at the privacy of their own computer, as is usually the case.

Within the decade that separates the two works, the changes regarding privacy protection and spying of individuals have been dramatic; Internet users have succumbed to the unauthorized monitoring of their online activity, either used for marketing tactics or for government surveillance (see, for example the PRISM surveillance program). In this regard, these artworks invite the public to reflect on the issue of control of free expression and the violation of the right to privacy that has been largely facilitated through information technologies. This “flip-side” to information sharing was also made evident in the persecution of people who sought to inform the public about said control, Egyptian bloggers or the key figures in information leaking cases (such as Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward

Snowden). In short, these artworks question the fragile balance between the right to free information flow and the right to privacy.

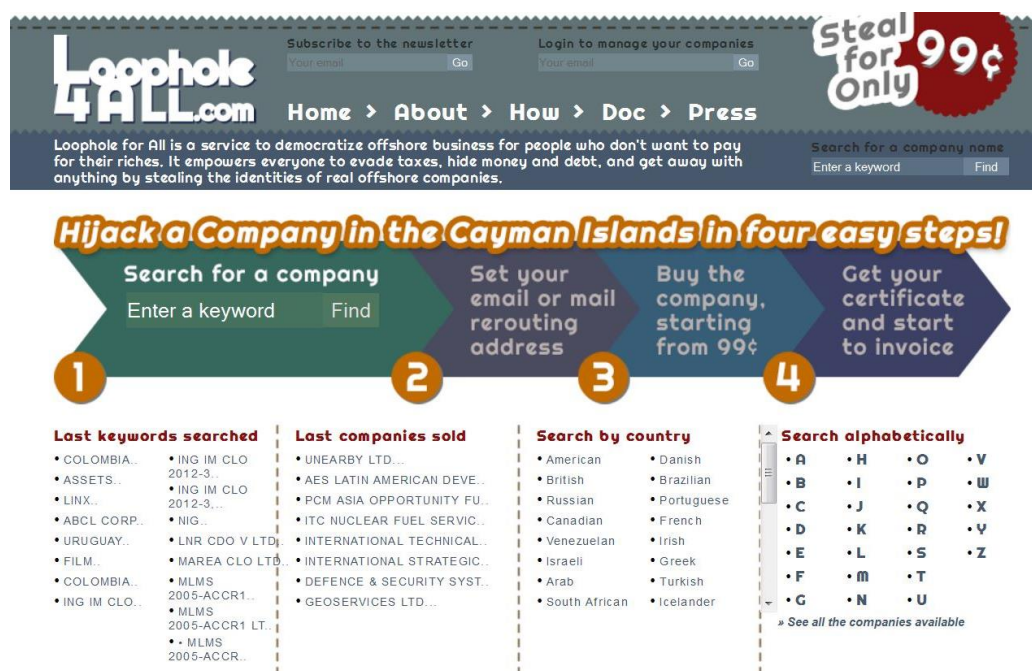


**Paolo Cirio, "Street Ghosts" (2012)**

The artist Paolo Cirio is also concerned with the free flow of information and the right to privacy; with his work *Street Ghosts* (2012) he focuses on the commodification of our image and our preferences online and the hierarchies within public space, which is ruled by financial elites and political authorities. The artist searches for images of people in the Google Maps Street View program; then he prints the figures he finds in natural size and pastes them in the exact spot where he found them in Google maps. His paste ups are a street art intervention and a strong protest against the trampling of privacy on the internet. Google constantly stores private data, like preferences, or images of people without their permission. Google maps constitute an attack to privacy rights, as they involve the uploading of pictures of individuals online without their consent. Oddly enough, these pictures are copyrighted by Google: our image becomes someone else's property, a product with a high marketing value. Thus Google gains profit by appropriating the image of the people and the cityscape.

Cirio (2012) aims at exposing this abuse of power by taking these copyrighted images and returning them to where they originally came from: the streets. For the artist, these ghostly human bodies are "casualties of the info-war in the city, a transitory record of collateral damage from the battle between corporations, governments, civilians and algorithms". It is the same battle between corporations, governments, civilians and algorithms that fuels his work *Loophole4All* (2013). After a thorough research, Paolo Cirio created a list of all the companies registered in tax haven Cayman Islands. He then made the list public in the website *Loophole4All.com*, selling to the users the real identities of the companies on the list and sending them certificates of incorporation to the company for 99 cents. After getting the certificate, the users could start to invoice in the

name of the company they selected, with a tax identification number and an offshore address.



Paolo Cirio, "Loophole4All" (2013)

Thus, the artist exposes the undergoing processes within the capitalist economy, where corporations set the rules against the state and the individual. By inviting the public to follow the tax evading practices of the ruling class, Cirio encourages illegal activity as a means of social equalization. In regard to the artwork, Lafranco Aceti (2014: 240) asks:

In a world of corporations is there any role left for the individual? What are the future implications of the current processes of exploitation, commodification and enslavement of the individual to supranational economic entities? Are there processes that would allow extended forms of community and citizenship to unveil and alter the power relationships between the post-citizens, the post-state and the omnivorous corporations?

Instead of representing the extreme inequalities inborn within the free market economy, Cirio prefers to incite people to act by fighting the system with its own tools. The people who participate in the work understand the mechanism of the system from within. It is a type of action that steers away from the spirit of togetherness and solidarity that often characterizes works of participatory art, works that invite the viewers to enter into "discursive exchange without immediately succumbing to the snares of negation and self-interest" (Kester 2004:112). In contrast, this work highlights the spirit of individualism that drives the system, the antagonisms that lay within it. About the elements of harmony and conflict in participatory art, Claire Bishop (2012: 26) notes:

[...] idiosyncratic or controversial ideas are subdued and normalized in favour of a consensual behaviour upon whose irreproachable sensitivity we can all rationally agree. By contrast, I would argue that unease, discomfort or frustration –along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity can be crucial to any work's artistic impact.





**Ubermorgen.com “The Agency”, (2004)**

Following the same polemic tone, the artistic duo Ubermorgen.com (Lizvlx and Hans Bernhard) with the collaboration of 0100101110101101.org- created *\*The\*Agency\** (2004). This work challenged the existing laws about elections, the keystone of democracy, with a series of performances where one could buy and cast votes in the American Presidential Elections. The beginning of the project in 2000 ironically coincided with the miscounting of votes in the presidential elections of that year.

For 2004, the artists of Ubermorgen.com ordered authentic Florida absentee ballots with stolen social security numbers and created a performance where the visitors could buy, fill out and cast these votes. The visitors were tricked into believing that these ballots were not genuine, but in fact they were. Thus, the artwork could be seen as a criminal act carried out by the artists, who performed the original theft, and the participants, who unknowingly broke the law.

This artistic action poses important questions about the validity of the elections –that can be easily tampered- but also about the right to vote, which is often ignored by the people who have it, and is being denied to a number of people who reside in the U.S.A. Ubermorgen.com connected this action to the “acts of war, cultural and political terrorism” (Bernhard, Lizvlx, Ludovico 2006: 80) performed by the American government in a global scale, even though it was voted only by a minority of people in the U.S. territory. In a way, the artists tried to hack the political system, so as to uncover its frailties.



Ubermorgen.com, “Amazon Noir, The big book crime”, (2006)

*Amazon Noir – The Big Book Crime* (2006), which was carried out in collaboration with Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico, involved the appropriation of over 3000 titles of books and their online sharing. Like Robin Hoods of the digital era, the artists hacked the database of Amazon.com and gave the copyrighted titles to the public, who, in turn, downloaded and redistributed the books through peer to peer networks.

Thus the artists put the initial spark to an endless chain of sharing and downloading; even though they eventually sold their hack-enabling software to Amazon, the files they had managed to obtain still circulate online. Therefore, the work is somehow still active, questioning the existing limitations in information sharing, which are imposed by copyright laws, and advocating for free culture. Through it, the artists defend piracy as a legitimate act and highlight the importance of accessibility to cultural products.

On the other hand, the artwork goes against the giant corporations of the online space that have grown to become almost monopolies, contributing further to the accumulation of capital to a small minority. Selling the software developed against Amazon to the corporation itself is a cynical act that further highlights the individualism and opportunism inherent in the system; the artists visualize a utopia of free information flow and then bring us back to a capitalist reality where everything can be sold, even hacker tools.

## Conclusions

The artists and art collectives mentioned here, 0100101110101101.org, Paolo Cirio, Ubermorgen.com, do not seek to create a representation of the existing conflicts, but rather to accentuate and re-produce them by encouraging acts that generate further tensions. The issues that have emerged from the advancement of information technologies within a neoliberal economy -such as surveillance and



control, lack of privacy, the need to free information flow of ideas, corporate capital accumulation and tax evasion, electoral fraud- are enacted within an artistic context, increasing conflict, rather than subduing it. This way, the artworks mentioned here constitute a subversive reaction against the system, an opposition that is part of the protest movements mentioned in the first part of this paper.

Like hackers, these artists intervene in a system with the aim to create something new out of it. As their works rely on the participation of the public, their work could be seen as an invitation to change the way we think and act within a political frame. In this sense, their hacking actions bear a strong relevance with the protesters that occupied the streets from Tahrir to Omonoia, la Puerta del Sol and Wall Street, hoping to create something new out of an outdated system.

The diplomatic cables leak by Wikileaks has accentuated further the demand of the people to control the government through transparency in information sharing. Further ahead, the Arab Uprising, the Spanish *Indignados*, the Greek *SOS Halkidiki* and the Occupy Movement have shown how information sharing can override established media networks in favour of the protesters. Undoubtedly, these movements are based on existing conflicts related to neoliberal policies, the growing financialisation of economy, capital accumulation and socio-political inequalities; within this frame, the internet constituted a medium that contributed to the stimulation of political awareness and created a sense of community between the people who took part in the protests.

As hacker practices, hacktivism and piracy become everyday tools in the hands of a large part of the population, they are fermenting a multitude of changes in the social tissue, by allowing the distribution of information beyond conventional networks, thus enabling the formation of new communities and groups of action. It is a process that brings new ideologies to the fore, the “information age ideologies” that challenge the current political and financial *status quo*. Within this frame, “the hacker emerges as the new leading figure of the intellectuals” (Pias 2002: 270), who contributes to technological, political and cultural developments; it is a figure that represents a new class of individuals defined not just by what they have, but mostly by how they act.

The participatory artworks based on hacker ethics and practices showcase that not only “every person is an artist”, as Beuys affirmed, but also that *anyone can become a hacker* (Grammatikopoulou 2013a: 62-74). Protest and hacking, reaction and intervention in a system, are actions that highlight and sustain antagonisms within the urban sphere and therefore bring new ideas into debate. These ideas withhold the potential of a different future –of justice, freedom and equality- latent within the present.

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