Examining Hacktivism as Performance Through the Electronic Disturbance Theater and Anonymous

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EXAMINING HACKTIVISM AS PERFORMANCE THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC DISTURBANCE THEATER AND ANONYMOUS

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine how two activist groups--the Electronic Disturbance Theater and Anonymous--have transposed Thoreauvian Civil Disobedience for the virtual realm to explore how this shift of performance space also shifts traditional notions of performance. I further consider how these hacktivists, or hacker-activists, use the dynamic dimensions of cyberspace in a way that allows for interesting intersections of actors and spectators while calling attention to the ethical implications and sociopolitical impacts of their actions. The thesis begins by situating technology in a brief timeline of non-violent activism, establishing the internet as a necessary and useful site of political resistance able to provoke and incite change. Before turning to my objects of study, I take time to distinguish malicious hacking acts from sociopolitical hacktivism acts to highlight the moral and legal ambiguity between the two. To then provide an example of early hacktivist methods, I discuss how the Electronic Disturbance Theater has used technology and the internet in their performances of resistance, the ramifications of their actions, and how hacktivism might evolve alongside the increasing sophistication and complexity of the internet. Finally, I introduce the hacktivist collective known as Anonymous to explore how they have propelled and redefined online activism by incorporating simultaneous physical activism in their performances.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

My exposure to and fascination with online communities began around the mid-1990s as soon as my family registered for internet service—the kind that used a phone line, the kind that made interesting noises as it connected the computer with some unseen series of tubes, the kind that would take what seemed like an hour to load a website. The first virtual spaces I remember encountering were archives of varying information, from encyclopedias to telephone directories, seemingly dominated by the technologically savvy. Since that time, I have experienced the palpable transfiguration of the internet from an interface used to store and search for data to a powerful tool that is frequently employed by its users to alter both virtual and physical spaces. A substantial increase in its users and their ability to communicate instantaneously has shifted what was once a predominantly textual interface to become a spatialized site with interconnection and interaction previously found only in the physical realm. The internet has become a space that allows not only for text and audience, but for actors as well—and the collaboration of all three.

While some may still use the internet only as an archive to store and retrieve data, many artists and activists have increasingly embraced its capabilities for interactivity, utilizing the internet as another site of performance. Some of these artists and activists have since expanded their virtual performance spaces to once again include physical performance spaces and actions, allowing for the inclusion of all the fundamental elements of performance: actors, spectators, text, space, and liveness. Using the internet in this way has permitted it to become a site of performance capable of producing significant real world effects, each holding distinct ethical and
political consequences. With the proliferation of virtual and physical communities now using the web as an apparatus to collectively and actively engage in democracy through performances aimed at raising awareness for numerous social justice issues, it is crucial that we shift our understanding of the internet as an archive to include how it is also used as a dynamic performance space capable of both affecting and effecting the physical world.

I began visiting one such interactive online community in late 2007. It was not necessarily a place for artists, for activists, or for anyone in particular. Designed and launched in 2003 by fifteen-year-old Christopher Poole, 4chan.org is an image board-type forum where users can visit any of the 59\(^1\) themed boards—ranging in topic from Papercraft & Origami to Weapons to High Resolution Images—and post their own topic or image for discussion, participate in an active thread (the discussion of a topic in progress), or browse through threads without interacting. All of the activity occurring on 4chan remains anonymous: there is no registration to the site, and its contents and visitor information are not archived or stored.\(^2\) Providing a place for visitors with varying interests to engage with each other anonymously is perhaps one of the site’s most attractive attributes, as they have over seven million monthly users who provide 700,000 posts per day.\(^3\) 4chan remains in a constant state of flux as threads in each board are simultaneously being introduced, discussed, and forgotten; one study found that the median life of a thread\(^4\) on its most popular board, “Random,”\(^5\) lasted only 3.9 minutes.\(^6\) Any discussion

\(^1\) As of November 2012.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) The life of a thread is thus described by the authors of this study: “Threads begin on page one and are pushed down as new threads are added. If a user replies to a thread, it is bumped back to the top of the first page. If the thread reaches the bottom of the fifteenth page, the thread is removed permanently and its URL returns a ‘Page Not Found’ error” (3).
\(^5\) http://boards.4chan.org/b/
topic remaining visible for a longer time has succeeded in capturing the mass attention of otherwise unassociated users.

I experienced one of these topics for the first time in February 2009 while browsing the Random board. I happened into a discussion of a particularly upsetting video another user had found which depicted a person in a ski mask torturing his cat, uploaded earlier that day to YouTube by the boastful teenager in the video. The discussion shifted quickly from reactions of abhorrence to expressions of vengeance. Naming the operation “Dusty the Cat” after its victim, users taking part in the thread began scouring the internet in attempts to identify the person in the video, intent on making the local authorities in that person’s area aware of the abuse. Within 24 hours, 4chan vigilantes had not only uncovered the abuser’s name but had also identified his location through cross-referencing his YouTube account with online accounts of the same name, carefully examining the details in the video with details found on these other accounts. They notified the local authorities in his area who arrested the boy after reviewing the evidence for themselves.7 As an article detailing the event explained, “the internet does not only produce megabyte upon megabyte of chatter, but can also be a useful tool in administering justice. Dusty, a cat from Oklahoma U.S., is living proof of this.”8 The expediency and accuracy with which the individuals found and identified the masked user in this video astounded me while their thirst for justice and particularly dramatic displays of contempt intrigued me:

Through this action, this community—associated only through the simultaneous encounter of a single thread of a single board of a heavily-trafficked website—rapidly shifted its use of the internet as an interface in discovering an interesting thread to an interactive performance space used as a tool for action to occur both virtually and physically in the name of justice.

**H/ac(k)tivism**

The Internet, in its seemingly boundless scope of interconnectivity, currently exists not only in conjunction with but also largely as an extension of Western democracy. It pervades almost every space of communication and information exchange, influencing even those technologies which exist outside of cyberspace—televisions, telephones, and the like—and does so globally. Cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar believes “white man’s burden [has shifted] from its moral obligation to civilize, democratize, urbanize and colonize non-Western cultures, to the colonization of cyberspace.” Governments in many countries have attempted to and occasionally succeeded in partly and/or fully censoring the internet; similar attempts have been

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9 In his book *@ is for Activism*, Joss Hands explains that “the internet is the physical architecture resulting from the interlinking of a number of global networks,” while “the web works on top of that network (or nested within it, depending on the metaphor one chooses)...in a manner resembling the relationship between a software programme and the computer that runs it” (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 192. Throughout this project I will use the “Internet,” the “virtual realm,” and “cyberspace” interchangeably only as it refers to the space where interaction between users occurs.


11 Reporters Without Borders, a research institute with correspondents in over 150 countries who advocate for freedom of information, list twelve countries as “Enemies of the Internet” as of March 2012 for “their capacity to censor news and information online” as well as for their “systematic repression of Internet users.” They mark
made to allow governments access to an individual’s personal information if they deem the individual a threat to their security. Similarly, as internet activists Electrohippies Collective explain, “the invasion of corporate interests into this space has changed the perceptions of what the purpose of the Internet is...it has become a domain for the large corporations to peddle their particular brand of unsustainable consumerism.”

Online shopping websites, video-hosting websites, search engines, and social media sites, many of which are now integrated within one another, use geo-tagging and the browsing information of their users in order to uniquely customize a user’s interaction with that site. Several artists and activists sought to bring attention to these pervasive surveillance practices using vastly different techniques, each with their own benefits and consequences. As the internet’s capacity as a site of action and performance was further realized, later artists and activists would transfigure these early techniques, some of which are the focus of my project, to use for their own acts of sociopolitical protest.

The Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), an artist/activist collective founded in the late 1980s who sought to “diminish the rising intensity of authoritarian culture” through the use of media, noted that protest solely in the streets was no longer an effective form of resistance as commerce, governmental institutions, and their influence on one another now substantially inhabited online spaces. Advocating for a new form of Civil Disobedience (CD) which took this locational
shift in power into consideration, the CAE proposed the theory of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) to counter attempts to restrict or monopolize virtual spaces, noting that “it was economic disruption and symbolic disturbance that made the overall strategy [of civil disobedience] effective.” ECD’s primary tactics are trespass and blockage:

Exits, entrances, conduits, and other key spaces must be occupied by the contestational force in order to bring pressure on legitimized institutions engaged in unethical or criminal actions. Blocking information conduits is analogous to blocking physical locations; however, electronic blockage can cause financial stress that physical blockage cannot, and it can be used beyond the local level.

These actions are meant to cause disruptions with the intention of raising awareness for a cause rather than to destroy or remove the object being blocked—in most cases, a website—from all functionality. But because these strategies are similar to those used by hackers, or those who employ these techniques with the intent to destroy or exploit a website for personal gain, the application of ECD is frequently associated with hacking though the two practices have fundamentally opposed ideologies. The Critical Art Ensemble explain that because ECD performers seek to invert “the value system of the state (to which information is of higher value than the individual)...placing information back in the service of people rather than using it to benefit institutions,” they are clearly distinguished from hackers, who profit from damaging actions. Because they make use of some of the tactics in hacking but with activist intentions, a

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17 According to Lawrence Rosenwald’s article “The Theory, Practice, and Influence of Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience” in A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Thoreau’s civil disobedience was not associated with a secular or religious perspective, should align itself with both individual consciousness as well as the broad consensus on an issue, and is not specifically nonviolent.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 18.
20 Ibid, 17.
more suitable term for this hacking-activism is *hacktivism*. This thesis will further explore these terminological distinctions, as they reflect ethical concerns that guide and authorize the use of hacking tactics while also providing limitations.

In his essay “Terror and Play, or What Was Hacktivism?” Peter Krapp\(^2^{1}\) suggests that hacktivism aims to capture attention; it is calculated for maximum media effect, trying to raise the awareness of citizens regarding certain rights and liberties: free speech, privacy, access. An act of hacktivism can involve many people or only one; it can forge links and coalitions between people whose politics may otherwise run the gamut. Essentially, hacktivism translates into the digital realm what disruptive or expressive politics have been using for centuries: demonstrations, sit-ins, labor strikes, and pamphlets.\(^2^{2}\)

Hacktivism began receiving widespread attention among international media outlets in 1998 when ECD was utilized as art by the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a group I will explore further in the third chapter of this thesis, to promote awareness for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a rebel army of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico. Founded in 1997 by Ricardo Dominguez, a former member of the Critical Art Ensemble and current Associate Professor in Visual Arts at the University of California in San Diego, the EDT seeks to put ECD as a theory into practice. Defining hacktivism as “the use of digital cracking, hacking, phreaking or creating a technology to achieve a political or social goals,”\(^2^{3}\) Dominguez and his group utilize the internet as both the central tool of ECD as well as the site of their performances. The variety

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\(^{2^{1}}\) Professor and Chair of Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Irvine.
of techniques they employ under the name of Electronic Civil Disobedience which have earned them recognition as both artists and activists by theatre and performance scholars make them a fruitful object of study for this project.

The Electronic Disturbance Theater’s first ECD performance followed their development of FloodNet, an application which would send reload requests to a targeted website every three seconds—a prevalent ECD action known as a Denial of Service, or DoS, attack. These attacks put undue stress on the server where the website under attack is stored, making it difficult for others to access the same site, inhibiting—but not completely denying—access to the site. Like physical blockades, those performed online achieve similar results in access restriction. However, those who may wish to engage with ECD performances but do not have the means or resources to do so are simply unable to participate as the actors, audience, and text exist solely on the internet. This unintentional exclusion of potential hacktivists limits its effects considerably.

Stefan Wray, a founding member of the EDT, challenged the notion of purely electronic civil disobedience citing the role that “street protest played in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.” He envisioned actions which could occur simultaneously in the streets and online, which might prove more effective than physical or electronic resistance alone. The second focus of this thesis project, a hacktivist group formed in the early 2000s named Anonymous, utilizes the hybrid action that Wray envisioned, performing dissent concurrently in both spaces. A decentralized and leaderless group which 4chan spawned, these were the vigilantes retroactively credited with finding justice for Dusty the Cat. Though their roots are seated in localized injustices, this collective has quickly grown into an

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international and internationally recognized activist force that emphasizes free and open
distribution of information primarily focused on the unobstructed use of the internet. They have
successfully taken government websites offline across the world, assisted in significant protest
movements such as Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, and continue aiding and advocating for
citizens that have had their access to the internet restricted by the governments in their countries.

Anonymous is equally interested in social justice issues, taking action against targets
ranging from rapists and pedophiles to the Westboro Baptist Church. Whether they are
bringing attention to political or social injustices, Anonymous has expanded hacktivism by
merging it with simultaneous physical protest. Their tactics, both on- and off-line, still retain
traces of their impish roots; some wear masks to hide their identity and to show solidarity with
other Anonymous operations, some sing songs outside Churches of Scientology offices located
across the world and heckle those who are leaving its buildings, and some assist each other in
manipulating online polls so that Kim Jon Un is named TIME’s Person of the Year. Their
extensive technological capabilities allow them to perform ECD on an immense scale while their
physical mobilization to perform civil disobedience concurrently with online action permits the
participation of an array of dissenters, providing Anonymous exposure and support that is critical
in raising awareness for their causes. At the same time, their decentralized nature allows anyone

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25 Most recently, Anonymous got involved with an unsolved rape case in Steubenville, Ohio when they “released
what its members called a ‘partial dox’—a list of names and addresses, mostly—along with a threat of more leaks if
the alleged perpetrators (and what Anonymous alleges are the officials protecting them) didn’t apologize to the
victim by January 1st [2013]. When no apology was forthcoming, they posted the twelve-minute video.” Michelle

26 Anonymous has been fighting child pornography on the internet since 2011, continuing to dismantle pedophilia-
sharing websites and release the private information of the users of those sites, aiming to, in their words, “diminish
if not eradicate this plague from the Internet.” Emil Protalinkski, “Anonymous Has a New Target: Pedophiles.”

27 Upon the Westboro Baptist Church’s threat to protest the funerals and vigils for the children murdered in
Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012, Anonymous posted the personal contact information of many of the
WBC’s members online.

28 Horn, Leslie. “How 4Chan Made Kim Jong Un Time Readers’ Person of the Year.” Gizmodo, December 13,
to perform under their guise, complicating the identification of their ethics and goals and possibly deterring potential supporters. Because they are the most prevalent group to succeed in the implementation of paralleled physical and virtual activist performances, examining Anonymous allows us to explore how they use both spaces to achieve their goals as well as a range of effects their actions have.

In this project, I seek to examine how both the Electronic Disturbance Theater and Anonymous use the internet as a performance space for hacktivism, calling attention to the ethical implications and political ramifications embedded in these actions. Following Wray’s suggestion that civil disobedience performed only online inhibits its potential to incite change, I argue that merging physical and virtual civil disobedience allows for almost unrestricted participation which both benefits and hinders its goals. Naming this merger Hybridized Civil Disobedience (HCD), I explore how it is utilized by Anonymous as well as the effects of their actions considering their infrastructure. While HCD may produce more desirable outcomes than either physical or electronic civil disobedience alone, I contend that its practitioners should strive to remain politically and ethically minded to allow for wider coalition building and to legitimate their efforts as activists.

I suggest that there is utility in analyzing both ECD and HCD performers, as analysis of their practices and effects are markedly absent from performance scholarship. I believe several factors contribute to this omission. Until recently, media outlets have misrepresented hacktivists as hobbyists and/or nerdy teenagers— notions which even the CAE ascribed to: “Right now the finest political activists are children. Teen hackers work out of their parents’ homes and college dormitories to breach corporate and governmental security systems.” 29 Further, as “terror” became a particularly useful political buzzword in post-9/11 America, “state agencies such as the

FBI and the Secret Service [and] spectacular institutions such as Hollywood\textsuperscript{30} have continued to equate hacktivism with criminality, leading digital media scholar Peter Krapp to suggest that “public opinion [has been] formed by characterizing any disruptive event on the Internet as "terrorism."\textsuperscript{31} This view of hacktivism together with its varying definitions and absence of physicality may be underlying factors in its lack of critical examination. And though Anonymous has a corporeal component, their dispersed and leaderless structure complicates analysis as there is no official source for their information or official spokesperson. Still, language with which to analyze Anonymous and the Electronic Disturbance Theater is readily available as both utilize and expand known artist/activist techniques and traditions.

\textbf{Literature Review and Methodologies}

In gathering material for this project, I found that scholars in a variety of academic disciplines were interested in the intersections of art and activism through the medium of the internet, including sociology, law, information technologies, media studies, theatre studies, and performance studies. In his article “The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements” published by the \textit{Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science}\textsuperscript{32}, anthropologist Jeffrey Juris examines collective activist social movements which specifically use the internet to call for governmental policy changes. He provides valuable histories of anti-corporate globalization movements and their shift to using the internet as a tool in their protests. Seth Kreimer, Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania, provides a similar background of social movements which have used the internet for protest though through the lens of their legality and how it has become increasingly complex.

\textsuperscript{30} Critical Art Ensemble, “The Mythology of Terrorism on the Internet,” 34.
\textsuperscript{31} Krapp, “Terror and Play, or What Was Hacktivism?” 87.
as technologies available to activists continue to develop. While these and several other articles in fields outside of performance were useful to understanding the contexts surrounding the internet and its use in artist-activism, I discovered the most useful conversations for my project within theatre and performance studies scholarship.

Several complex performance-related issues arose throughout this project, such as liveness, presence, agency, subjectivity, and embodiment. While my project is much too short to discuss any of these important topics at length, they are nevertheless integral to the questions at the center of this work. Peggy Phelan’s discussion of the ontology of performance in her 1993 book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* served as the basis of my understanding the term “performance:” because it cannot be saved, recorded, or documented, it becomes itself through disappearance. She further explains that performance “implicates the real through the presence of living bodies,” a notion regarding liveness that virtual performance arguably complicates, as Philip Auslander suggests that the existence of a “chatterbot forces the discussion of liveness to be reframed as a discussion of the ontology of the performer rather than that of the performance.” Because some hacktivist techniques make use of programmed actions, this, in turn, led me to an examination of the interactivity between actors and spectators in physical versus virtual spaces among the differing techniques of hacktivism, since some of its tactics do not require direct interaction while others rely on it. David Z. Saltz’ article “The Art of

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36 Auslander explains that “chatterbots are based in research in natural language processing and are generally programmed to recognize words and word patterns and to respond with statements that make sense in the context of what is said to them” and that “some are also capable of initiating conversations” (PAJ, Vol. 24, No. 1), 18.
Interaction: Interactivity, Performativity, and Computers” was especially helpful in considering these varied relationships, as the actor/spectator relationship is significantly altered depending on the role of the computer and of the spectator in a hacktivist performance. I am particularly interested in Saltz’ distinction between works in which “performers interact with the system while the audience looks on from those in which the audience interacts with the system directly,” as hacktivist groups employ both with understandably differing effects—the computer can be programmed to do the work for the actor, leaving the spectator to passively view its actions, or the actor can use the computer as a medium in a direct interaction with his spectators, in which case the spectators’ input transforms the performance. I explore these multifaceted issues in chapters three and four as I examine how the Electronic Disturbance Theater and Anonymous make use of their actors, spectators, and computers.

As the benefits and risks involved with merging physical and virtual spaces for performances of civil disobedience are key to the goals of my project, much of my research explored Electronic Civil Disobedience as a viable tactic equivalent to civil disobedience in empowering individuals to organize and promote their causes. And as the theories of ECD were proposed by the Critical Art Ensemble originally in their publication Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas and explored again later in Digital Resistance, these works were inevitably fundamental in framing this concept as a goal-oriented performance. This first book addresses the necessity for a new kind of civil disobedience and situates ECD in relation to CD in a chapter aptly titled “Electronic Civil Disobedience.” Published in 1996, this essay describes both the ideology and the application of this theory though in a time when the

internet—and computers—were still luxury items of the most well-off citizens. Five years later, the CAE expounded on these ideas in *Digital Resistance* as digital technologies were becoming increasingly available and affordable. They observe in “The Mythology of Terrorism on the Net” that in the wake of the rapidly escalating prevalence of the internet and its use for ECD, “the inherent civility of electronic disobedience is being deliberately and officially misconstrued under the signs of that which it is clearly not—terrorism, or more modestly, criminality.” They reaffirm ECD’s necessity but reposition it as essential to resisting the domination of knowledge and culture production, specifically naming theater as their object of interest in a chapter titled “Recombinant Theater and Digital Resistance.”

Wishing to apply Electronic Civil Disobedience, Ricardo Dominguez departed from the Critical Art Ensemble to form the Electronic Disturbance Theater. Several theatre and performance scholars have written about this group and their relation to activist performance including Amy Carroll, who describes the influence of the Critical Art Ensemble and the Zapatista movement to the EDT, and Coco Fusco, who, through interviewing Dominguez, explores how the EDT was viewed as a possible bridge between the on- and off-line worlds. These articles help to frame how the EDT utilizes ECD, while their discussions elucidate the group’s ethics. In her article detailing the history and tactics of EDT, performance theorist Jill Lane describes how the principles of the group are distinguished from other types of electronic dissent, as they rely on simulation to create a disruptive ("disturbing") presence in the material, social, and discursive contexts in which they operate.

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41 Ibid, 33.
Resistance, says Dominguez...can take one of three forms: physical, which would engage and possibly harm the hardware itself; syntactical (a favorite of hackers), which would involve changing the codes by which the machine functions—programming, software, design; and finally, semantic, which involves engaging and undermining the discursive norms and realities of the system as a whole.  

Dominguez contends that his group’s actions are semantic, as he views their disruptions as symbolic gestures and is unconcerned with their technological accuracy or impressiveness. While these delineations might clarify Dominguez’s justifications for the EDT’s actions, they are both unnecessary and impractical. The group employs all three forms of resistance in pursuit of their goals, as physicality and syntax are intrinsic in achieving semantic resistance. Dominguez’s own writings about the application of ECD are similarly vague and occasionally contradictory, though still useful in considering how he navigates the artist-activist territory.

Stefan Wray, co-founder and theorist of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, provides an important link between Electronic Civil Disobedience and Hybridized Civil Disobedience in his essay “Electronic Civil Disobedience and the World Wide Web of Hacktivism: A Mapping of Extraparliamentarian Direct Action Net Politics” as well as in a paper he delivered at the Socialist Scholars Conference in March of 1998. In both of these pieces, Wray identifies the limitations of ECD and speculates rightly that

we will see electronic civil disobedience continue to be phased in as a component of or as a complement to traditional civil disobedience. In the near future, we can expect to see hybrid civil disobedience actions that will involve people taking part in

electronic civil disobedience from behind their computer screens while simultaneously people are engaging in more traditional forms of civil disobedience out in the streets.\textsuperscript{45}

Though Wray might consider Anonymous “politicized hackers” rather than ECD practitioners—his distinction is between those who wish to remain anonymous and those who do not—I contend that Anonymous is a rightful successor to these earlier artist-activist groups. They satisfy the propositions set forth by the Critical Art Ensemble in utilizing ECD to incite political change while recognizing the essentialness of performing synchronous physical disobedience.

Because of the scarcity in scholarship involving Anonymous, the sources I discovered which covered them in any particular depth consisted for the most part of news articles describing their actions and technology and security magazine articles attempting to describe their actions, make sense of their goals, and provide rough timelines of their various achievements. However, the majority of information I found for them came from Anonymous itself—writings and media publications including videos, weblogs, social media accounts, forums, and their own Wiki site, which contains the earliest documentation for Anonymous. This site contains an assemblage of links to other sources as well as a vast collection of archival information—screen captures of early conversations about their actions, screen captures of early web attacks, facsimiles legal documentation, etc.—which has proven immensely useful. A significant challenge for this project has been sorting through the available materials to reach some sort of consensus in their philosophies, as the absence of leadership or one central informational hub allows anyone claiming the Anonymous name to publish information under it.

What is provided here as reference to Anonymous’ collective values and decisions is only that

which I have extrapolated from cross-examining information between their highest-trafficking websites.

Assembling research for this project has proven to be a daunting task, if only for the breadth of information that has become available in the past year alone. Anonymous’s high-profile attacks against United States governmental department websites, involvement in LGBTQ issues, exposure of rapists and pedophile rings, and continued thwarting of hate groups have only increased, and various media sources have begun to report on their actions much more frequently and with more substance, rather than dismissing its members as children and its goals as frivolous. This has been at the same time a tremendous benefit and an enormous challenge as the news media—most specifically, online newspapers and journals—have been the biggest source of data for Anonymous outside of Anonymous’ self-published information. In efforts to remain focused in this project while still taking advantage of this continuous spring of new and very relevant material, I primarily use sources for Anonymous that are pertinent to the case studies herein but insert new information where necessary.

Throughout research for this project, I have endeavored to remain conscious of my own positionality as a white, middle-class female who has had the privilege of access to both the technologies of ECD and to the education necessary to make use of them. While the EDT has included multi-racial members and a fair balance of men and women, its situation in an American institution of higher education is an important factor in considering their current activist work. While it is more difficult to distinguish the demographics of Anonymous, many of its more outspoken and visible members are white males—so too is the mask of Guy Fawkes they chose to adopt for their image, which has become almost synonymous with the group.

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46 The EDT is currently based out of the University of California San Diego.
Issues regarding agency and the display of power and privilege for both of these groups are more fully explored in their individual chapters.

**Chapter Outlines**

After an initial introduction to the thesis, the second chapter of this project aims to situate the internet as a useful site of performance, focusing on Electronic Civil Disobedience as a way this space has been utilized by artist/activists to bring attention to their causes. I begin by describing Thoreau’s vision of civil disobedience—the foundation upon which the Critical Art Ensemble developed ECD—focusing on the ideals the CAE embraced and relaying the reasons they suggested which prompted them to theorize a new form of civil disobedience. To understand how using the internet as a performance space may be useful in political resistance, I parse several aspects of ECD which empower individuals to use technology to participate in democratic processes and incite change. I then address specific limitations of ECD, including its relationship to hacking, and the adaptations its practitioners ought to consider to overcome these restrictions. I conclude this chapter by turning to several scholars and thinkers who understood that civil disobedience, in order to be most efficacious in its myriad goals, must be performed both on- and off-line simultaneously.

The next chapter focuses on the Electronic Disturbance Theater, as they perform Electronic Civil Disobedience in distinct ways with the specific purpose of raising awareness of their cause. Providing brief histories of both the group and their founder, Ricardo Dominguez, I then narrow the chapter’s focus to two specific EDT ventures: their 1998 Stop the War in Mexico project (SWARM) and their 2010 Transborder Immigrant Tool (the TBT). SWARM, presented and performed at the Ars Electronic Festival on Information Warfare, included the simultaneous attacks on the websites of the Mexican president, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange,
and the Pentagon in support of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a Mexican rebel army. This undertaking was ECD realized, allowing me to first discuss how their actions remain distinct from hacking and second to consider the political and ethical risks and repercussions of the application of ECD. The TBT, exhibited in 2010 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, is a cell phone application which directs migrants traveling from Mexico into the United States towards water sources—and is loaded with audio clips of poetry. According to Dominguez, “immigrants should not only be able to move safely, find water, and hear poetry but they should also be able encounter the landscape in a way that American painters have approached the landscape: as a sublime object.” This iteration of ECD complicates actor/spectator roles in a way that necessitates further examination of the goals of the project as well as the ethics involved in its conception, production, and distribution. The absence of the physical presence of the activists in both cases is palpable. The stakes of attacking three massive institutions across three countries in the name of an indigenous movement and providing poetry to dehydrated travellers both with the intention of showcasing artistic prowess are grave.

Acknowledging the problematic ethics of ECD and its inattention to the importance of physical resistance, I look at Anonymous in the final chapter to discover how they have adapted hacktivism for their goals by merging virtual and physical sites of performance. I begin this chapter by providing a background to the culture that cultivated the group, including a brief history and explanation of their unique lexicon. Because of the group’s amorphous nature and their absence from scholarship, I provide an introductory case study—their first simultaneous physical and virtual act of protest—to introduce their wide array of techniques, to describe how they function as a collective, and to pose certain political and ethical questions that arise from

their actions. These questions become more focused and concrete as I relate them to the second case study regarding their assistance in support of Occupy Wall Street.

The implementation of Operation Chanology, the protest of the Church of Scientology by Anonymous beginning in January of 2008, involved many firsts for the group. It was the first time they referred to themselves as Anonymous, the first time they published their grievances and goals for their protest, but perhaps most importantly for their progress as an activist collective, it was the first time they announced a call to physical action to coincide with their ECD actions. The street protests, held outside of various churches of Scientology, “drew about 7,000 protestors in more than 90 cities in four continents”\(^48\) on a single day. I look to some of their earliest behavioral guidelines for both virtual and physical protest in order to discuss how these positions were developed and put to use in the fall of 2011 for their involvement with Occupy Wall Street.

As columnist Ayesha Kazmi for The Guardian writes, “the new dynamics of combined street and online activism have significantly underpinned Occupy Wall Street as a distinctive new movement,”\(^49\) referring to the support Anonymous brought to the movement. During the protests, members of the collective would disseminate video footage of officers using pepper spray on peaceful protestors and similarly aggressive behaviors while members online would identify and distribute the accused officers’ personal information,\(^50\) asking those who saw the information to call precincts or the officers directly to complain. Additionally, Anonymous developed and released a program called Universal Rapid Gamma Emitter (URGE) which would

\(^50\) A practice known as “d0xing.”
allow its users to publish posts on the social media site, Twitter, so quickly that the “trending topics” which appear on the site’s home page would be those Anonymous chose to raise awareness for—which sometimes included the personal details of those they believed had abused their power.

Regarding Anonymous’ performances of hybridized civil disobedience, I explore the kinds of discussions that take place (and perhaps what kinds of discussions should take place) before their plans are implemented, how they feel they are contributing to their cause and to the democratic process, how they circulate information among themselves, and how several of their tactics might be hindering their legitimacy as a movement. Addressing these issues allows me to further discuss the potentials, limitations, and implications of simultaneously using the internet and the physical world as sites of activist performance.
CHAPTER TWO
PERFORMING H/AC(K)TIVISM

Virtual Activism and Protest

In the late 1970s, Heidegger observed that “everywhere we remain unfree and chained to
technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it.”\footnote{Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology.” The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 4.} The veracity and relevancy of this statement in especially in our media-saturated present day is difficult to question. But as Hardt and Negri suggest in Empire, “machines and technologies are not neutral and independent entities. They are biopolitical tools deployed in specific regimes of production, which facilitate certain practices and prohibit others.”\footnote{Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. Empire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 405.} Those wielding the power to control these technologies—the Internet in particular—have not hesitated in attempting to heavily regulate capital and production as it exists virtually while fostering the illusion that the virtual realm is a free, open, and democratic space. As internet use has become increasingly prevalent among citizens in developed countries, many artists and activists concerned with such governmental attempts to heavily regulate the internet have used its rapid and expansive communications capabilities to combat these and related issues. Able to connect with individuals and organizations with similar interests across the globe, these artists and activists have the ability to perform for and reach a previously unprecedented expanse of spectators. The ways in which virtual artists and activists connect with their audiences and how audiences are expected to participate are key components of my thesis project, as each method of action has vastly differing social and political outcomes. I suggest that the use of the internet in protest is a rich area for critical examination as it raises important performance-related questions regarding
virtual/physical spaces and audience/spectator interactivity while producing significant real-world effects.

In this chapter, I endeavor to first explain the ideology of using the internet as an activist performance space in order to then examine concrete actions. In the following section, I provide a brief history of one of the earliest forms of technological protest, Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD). I begin with its foundation in Civil Disobedience as influenced by author Henry David Thoreau in the mid-nineteenth century, describing his goals for its usage and what actions he argued should be involved as distinguished from other types of protest, as well as how later activists would use Civil Disobedience for their own causes. From there, I explain why some artists and activists found it necessary to transpose the techniques of Civil Disobedience for the virtual realm, including a brief discussion on the nature of technology to situate it within the timeline of tools used for protest. I then relay dialogue regarding early predictions of what persons capable of using technology to some degree of social and/or political effect might look like, as those who meet such criteria have proceeded to use similar techniques for a wide range of goals.

Establishing a history of virtual protest, why it exists, and who makes use of it, in the next section I move the conversation into parsing certain forms it has taken—Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) and hacktivism in particular—to discuss how each employs actors and spectators differently, and the questions which arise from these differences. While the terms for these types of virtual protest might be used interchangeably, the implications and outcomes of their varying techniques make it necessary to distinguish them. Hacktivism encompasses ECD tactics for using technology to make political and social messages but also includes several other techniques that have developed alongside the internet’s capabilities in aiding virtual protest since
the advent of its widespread usage. In the last section of this chapter I discuss hacktivism’s origins as well as its intersections with ECD and with hacking, as both have shaped the actors’ and the spectators’ role in hacktivist performance. I then explain how hacktivist techniques can differ from those of hacking and of ECD because it is in these differences that a unique and highly interactive actor/spectator relationship can occur which is fruitful for critical examination.

[Electronic] Civil Disobedience

Written in opposition to the “work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool” during the Mexican-American War, Thoreau’s provocative and influential essay “Civil Disobedience” called on American citizens to stand firm against governmental policies if they, as individuals, felt they were unjust. He leads this cause by example stating “What I have to do is to see...that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.” The “civil” component of Thoreau’s argument provides the essential basis to the type of dissent for which Civil Disobedience is known: he “quietly declare[d] war with the State” urging others to let their lives “be a counter friction to stop the machine.” Instead of allowing themselves to be governed en masse, Thoreau advocated for the individual’s ability to effect change in government, warning that “there will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.” It is important to note, however, that Thoreau’s essay was originally a lecture he gave in 1848 titled “The Rights and Duties of the Individual in Relation to the Government,” which was revised the next

54 Ibid, 396.
55 Ibid, 405.
56 Ibid, 396.
57 Ibid, 410.
year and published with the title “Resistance to Civil Government.” The adjective “civil” originally referred to matters of the state rather than to peaceful protest though the essay’s influence on activism is largely due to the latter definition.58

Revolutionary activists Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously referred to Thoreau’s influence in their work, both emphasizing nonviolence in their actions. Gandhi had been practicing nonviolent resistance before coming across Thoreau’s essay, finding enough similarity in it to his own philosophies that he adopted the term. He explained that civil Disobedience is civil breach of unmoral statutory enactments. The expression was, so far as I am aware, coined by Thoreau to signify his own resistance to the laws of a slave state. ... But Thoreau was not perhaps an out and out champion of non-violence. Whereas the term Civil Disobedience as practised in 1919 covered a breach of any statutory and unmoral law. It signified the resister's outlawry in a civil, i.e., non-violent manner . . . Until I read that essay I never found a suitable English translation for my Indian word, Satyagraha.59

Gandhi urged his followers to respond to unreasonable laws with passive resistance and noncooperation, using methods such as boycotts, strikes, and marches. Martin Luther King, Jr. similarly highlighted Thoreau’s belief that a citizen had the right and responsibility to resist laws which they perceived as unjust or unmoral, using sit-ins and boycotts, among other nonviolent tactics, to demonstrate their disapproval. As the interventionist media activists Critical Art Ensemble observed, “it was economic disruption and symbolic disturbance that made the overall

strategy [of civil disobedience] effective.”\(^{60}\) However, they note that “even though the monuments of power still stand...the agency that maintains power is neither visible nor stable”\(^{61}\) adding that “as far as power is concerned, the streets are dead capital!”\(^{62}\) They argue that “capital rarely takes a hard form; like power, it exists as an abstraction. An abstract form will probably be found in an abstract place, or to be more specific, in cyberspace.”\(^{63}\) While civil disobedience and its employers demonstrated their oppositions with their physical bodies, artists and activists have recognized that the current economic and political architecture necessitates new forms of opposition both on- and off-line. They have chosen to apply the philosophy of Thoreauvian civil disobedience to take action against perceived injustices with some of the techniques of its more famous followers who were successful in inciting change to accomplish their goals.

For Hardt and Negri, the central terrain of struggle is “over the different alternatives of the passage between the virtual and the real.”\(^{64}\) They refer to this space as Empire, which is the “complete commingling of the political, the social, and the economic in the constitution of the present”\(^{65}\) where we all exist without subjectivities.\(^{66}\) It comes into existence when language and communication, or really when immaterial labor and cooperation, become the dominant productive force. The superstructure is put to work, and the universe we live in is a universe of productive linguistic networks. The lines of production and those of representation cross and mix in the same linguistic and productive realm. In this context the distinctions that define

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\(^{61}\) Ibid, 9.

\(^{62}\) Ibid, 11.

\(^{63}\) Ibid, 12.

\(^{64}\) Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 367.

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 387.

\(^{66}\) Ibid, 353.
the central categories of political economy tend to blur. Production becomes indistinguishable from reproduction; productive forces merge with relations of production; constant capital tends to be constituted and represented within variable capital, in the brains, bodies, and cooperation of productive subjects. Social subjects are at the same time producers and products of this unitary machine. In this new historical formation it is thus no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is ‘‘outside.”

Empire, then, requires the labor of its unwitting subjects to perpetuate reproductions of communication, as now both subjects and information production exist simultaneously in physical and virtual realms. Co-founder of the Net-Wise Global Business Network Lawrence Wilkinson’s description of “the marketplace” incidentally offers a simple explanation of Empire, explaining that

just as during the Enlightenment ‘the nation-state’ took over from ‘the church’ to become the dominant seat of action, so the nation-state is now receding, yielding center stage to ‘the marketplace’; the action in the marketplace is interestingly everywhere: local, global, wherever—where ‘wherever’ is increasingly dictated by ‘pure’ economics and interests, not by national borders.

Because of Empire’s total incorporation into physical and virtual spaces both locally and globally, opposition to such a force must cohabit these vast spaces as well in order to be effective. Hardt and Negri postulate that this is possible, explaining that “the revolutions of the twentieth century have each pushed forward and transformed the terms of class conflict, posing the conditions of a new political subjectivity, an insurgent multitude against imperial power.”

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67 Ibid, 385.
69 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 394.
Additionally, Empire “creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them.”\(^{70}\) This suggests that the combat of Empire is possible due to and in spite of itself—its attempt to govern global communication and information has allowed its like-minded subjects to make equally global coalitions for opposition.

Advocating for active resistance to a government which one finds unjust, Thoreau asked of others to endeavor to amend and transgress unreasonable laws. Moving this cause into the virtual realm, digital media theorist and professor Mark Poster posits that “the Internet in part at least provides interactive spaces where critical reason might flourish. Usenet, chat rooms, listservs, instant messaging and other functions of cyberspace arguably promote interactive dialogue that might contribute to a new civil society, a new public sphere.”\(^{71}\) Critical reason and interactive dialogue are certainly necessary tools with which to combat the looming authoritarian presences online, but this struggle must have directed actions with specific goals in order to combat the scope of the governmental and political manifestations in cyberspace. Baudrillard understands productive forces and technology as the “promise of human fulfillment, but capitalism freezes or confiscates them. They are liberatory, but it is necessary to liberate them.”\(^{72}\) To actively and effectually stand in resistance to Empire, one might once again make use of the tools of Empire against itself—in this case, its technologies—to act in resistance.

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\(^{70}\) Ibid, 393.


In order to better determine how technology factors into effective resistance, it is useful to explore some existing conversations regarding its definition and function. In his essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger describes technology as an ambiguous extension of human capability, and explains that “the manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is,” while suggesting that “everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner.” Further, technology as its own contrivance is also an instrument—its “fundamental characterization.” Heidegger, it seems, believes technology is at once the process to create technology, the technological object itself, and the function of that object. Because each of these derives from the thoughts and capabilities of man, Heidegger extends his definitions of technology, positioning it as essence capable of revealing the world in its light. This potential of technology “consists neither in unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws.” Its “whatness,” or essence, exists outside of any constructed boundaries but because of this ambiguity, Heidegger suggests it has both a saving power which “lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence” and an extreme danger which “threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the supposed single way of revealing, and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence.” Heidegger is arguing that though technology is a pinnacle of human achievement, it is possible that man could become indeterminately bound to a cycle of technological production. “If the virtual functions and is perceived as a superior form of being,” warns the Critical Art Ensemble, “it

73 Ibid, 4—5.
75 Ibid, 12.
76 Hands, @ is for Activism, 24.
78 Ibid, 29.
80 Ibid, 32.
becomes a monstrous mechanism of control for the class that regulates access to it and mobility within it.”

Technology should then remain as an extension of human capability instead of entering into a cycle of technological production that humans cannot escape from, though Heidegger does not provide a way to intervene in this process.

Hardt and Negri explain that “machines and technologies are not neutral and independent entities. They are biopolitical tools deployed in specific regimes of production, which facilitate certain practices and prohibit others.”

Suggesting though that Hardt and Negri overlook the media as another technology used to dominate, Mark Poster adds television, print, and the Internet to this list of technologies.

Decades before, Herbert Marcuse similarly stated that while technology “certainly has a character that proceeds any specific technology” he cannot conceive of a “neutral technology.”

For Marcuse, the presence in technology “of the masters who determine their number, their life span, their power, their place in life, and the need for them” are the engines of repression, not technology itself as it is malleable and conditional.

According to the Critical Art Ensemble in regard to one such technology, “the Net is culturally and politically bordered, and its meaning is constructed under the authority of capital’s variables of separation.”

While it may prove difficult to find entries for resistance in the Heideggerian sense of technology, Marcuse’s impression places the “possibility of agency, of reflective consciousness, back within the framework of change. Indeed, it renders consciousness and agency vital elements of social change.”

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82 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 405.
84 Hands, @ *is for Activism*, 34.
85 Ibid, 35.
87 Hands, @ *is for Activism*, 37.
opposition to Empire’s control, it is first useful to explore predictions of who these revolutionaries might be.

Though speaking to a very different world than the one we are now in, Marcuse’s 1968 essay “The Re-Examination of the Concept of Revolution,” written following the ultimate failure of the May 1968 protests and strikes in France to incite permanent change, supposes that the foundation of successful resistance will be comprised of the heterogeneous ghetto population and the middle-class intelligentsia (especially students) supported by the working classes. Their commonalities must include

1) Insistence on a break with the continuity of domination and exploitation—no matter in what name, insistence not only on new institutions, but on self-determination.
2) Distrust of all ideologies, including socialism made into an ideology.
3) Rejection of the pseudo-democratic process sustaining the dominion of corporate capitalism.

These persons will have “developed a biological revulsion against capitalism’s excesses of unfreedom,” harboring a new sensibility—perhaps similar to what Heidegger called human reflection. These sentiments continue to be echoed in recent decades by those concerned with the same issues which continue to exist currently: publisher and editor-in-chief of GNOSIS: A Journal of Western Inner Traditions Jay Kinney explains that “the feelings of claustrophobia and manipulation...may indeed trigger a new politics in the midst of digital culture” while social scientist Jerome Ravetz suggests “new generations, some experiencing ever more intoxicating

89 Ibid, 21.
90 Ibid.
91 Hands, @ is for Activism, 36.
powers and others experiencing ever deeper hopelessness”93 might be those who initiate the revolution Marcuse described but in the post-nation-state era of Empire. Kinney, in 1996, anticipated digital culture to be an arena for discontent, describing it as a space for “the resurfacing of a doughty American anarchism—a pioneer/settler philosophy of self-reliance, direct action, and small-scale decentralism.”94 The Critical Art Ensemble expected that the “strategies and tactics for unifying divisions among cultural practices [would] not come from the university or cultural industry centers; rather, they [would] emerge from the minor sectors and nomadic vectors that place themselves in the anarchistic and liminal zones of digital culture.”95 Further, describing the Internet as “an amorphous, myriad constellation of ever-changing locations and facilities,”96 Poster believed it was “subject to fundamental alteration by anonymous, undesignated, unsalaried and unauthorized users.”97 These users, suggests Kinney, would perhaps be “honing devices for the waves of MBAs and lawyers coming to settle cyberspace” in the same way that “artists and bohemians serve[d] as unwitting advance scouts for urban neighborhood gentrification.”98 The revolutionaries capable of finding success in actively opposing the colonization of the virtual realm, following the notions set forth so far, will have developed out of similar circumstances both locally and globally leading them to share many of the same grievances while possessing the strong desire to firmly express dissent; they will necessarily be intimately familiar with the technologies of Empire and, having discovered

97 Ibid.
the need to liberate these tools from their use in controlling Empire’s subjects, will become
capable of commanding the same technologies to use in their resistance—and then take action.

While these conditions collectively seem almost too specific, such insurrectionists do
indeed exist and have discovered a multitude of techniques for using technology in protest, each
amassing varying degrees of praise and criticism. *Hacktivism*, as “not only a predictable
response to technocracy but also a logical extension of the same structure,”99 is both a
multifaceted and loosely defined label for this type of resistance which satisfies its necessary
conditions. It finds its roots in sociopolitical protest, and more specifically in Thoreauvian Civil
Disobedience. As technology has advanced, however, some newer hacktivist techniques have
begun to incorporate physical civil disobedience practices to be performed concurrently with
actions taken online. This merger of virtual and physical actions is important to analyze in a
performance context as the ways in which actors and spectators interact with each other through
a technological medium complicates their traditional relationships.

**ECD, Hacktivism, and Performance**

The Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc), founded in 1984 and known as one of the earliest
hacktivist groups, is credited with coining “hacktivism,” a portmanteau term describing several
characteristics of both hacking and activism. Member and “former chief evangelist for
hacktivism” for the cDc Oxblood Ruffin recalls the initial reaction to the term in a paper he
presented at the CyberCrime and Digital Law Enforcement Conference held at the Yale Law
School in 2004:

Almost immediately "hacktivism" spread like wildfire. The word
sounded so cool everyone wanted to use it—the trendier-than-thou
digerati, on-line news editors, and especially washed-up activists

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who had just discovered email. Suddenly, everyone became a "hacktivist." No one had a clue what it meant, but it sounded cool.100

Seeing the need to more clearly define what this term encapsulated, Ruffin issued a mission statement of sorts titled “The Hacktivismo Declaration” after consulting with members of the earliest hacktivist group, the Chaos Computer Club.101 The declaration suggests that hacktivism will be employed when human rights, as outlined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and fundamental freedoms including “the liberty of fair and reasonable access to information”102 are breached by governments. This firmly situated hacktivism within social justice and human rights activism; it was distinguished from hacking for those familiar with the inner-workings of the internet at the end of the twentieth century. However, its link to hacking further delayed the public’s understanding of its distinction from it for another decade. It is important to consider hacktivism’s link to hacking—where they both intersect and diverge—in order to more fully discuss the ethical questions some hacktivist tactics raise as well as to examine how hacktivism can be discussed from a performance perspective.

Cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar, writing in 1996, believed that “the lawmen of cyberspace and the new heroes of the West [were] hackers, whiz-kids who break into computers, punish those who break the code of ‘Netiquette’ and terrorize other users,”103 positing that hackers were

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101 Formed in Berlin, Germany in 1981.
103 Sardar, “alt.civilizations.faq,” 22.
the early proponents of online terrorism.\textsuperscript{104} Perhaps fitting into Marcuse’s desire for a “new sensibility,” hackers were (and continue to be) described as young people even by their supporters: the Critical Art Ensemble believed that “the finest political activists are children. Teen hackers work out of their parents’ homes and college dormitories to breach corporate and governmental security systems.”\textsuperscript{105} Though as access to the internet became more mainstream across the globe in the twenty-first century, hackers became a varied population and hacking took on a variety of definitions. The Electrohippies Collective defines the hacker as “someone who has a deep understanding of computers to the point where they undertake experimentation with their own systems themselves,”\textsuperscript{106} while Peter Krapp, Chair of the Film and Media Studies program at UC Irvine, explains the hacker attitude as “exploring, testing, and creating solutions to technical limitations.”\textsuperscript{107} Rather than exploring and testing computer systems with activist intentions, a growing technologically savvy population found hacking to be an attractive way for some form of personal or financial gain. There are generally considered three major types of hackers: White Hats,\textsuperscript{108} Black Hats,\textsuperscript{109} and Grey Hats.\textsuperscript{110} Though each type uses hacking for varying purposes, they all share the fundamental attribute of finding and exposing vulnerabilities in computer systems. Herein lies a distinction of the hacker and the hacktivist: those who disrupt for the sake of disruption and those who disrupt to bring attention to a particular cause. As Krapp advises, “it is irresponsible not to distinguish between a Net sit-in and the failure of an ATM network, between conceptual Net art and attacks on a hospital generator, between a cable TV outage and the potential damage by electromagnetic bombs, or between dragging down DNS

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{106} DJNZ, “Client-Side Distributed Denial-of-Service,” 270.
\textsuperscript{107} Krapp, “Terror and Play, or What Was Hacktivism?” 73.
\textsuperscript{108} Those who find vulnerabilities in computer systems to fix and further ensure security.
\textsuperscript{109} Those who hack for personal gain or other malicious intent.
\textsuperscript{110} Those whose actions may be considered illegal but are done without malicious intent or for personal gain.
servers and hijacking airliners.”111 A hacker’s interest lies in his discovery of a weakness in a computer system, while a hacktivist’s interest lies in his ability to promote his cause to others.

Hacktivism has had ongoing difficulty being perceived as separate from hacking and has not been treated favorably by most governments; even “public opinion was formed by characterizing any disruptive event on the Internet as ‘terrorism,’”112 Krapp explains. As with hacking, the inability to concretely define hacktivism combined with its predominant lack of physicality—as it mostly exists in the virtual realm—makes it easy for some witnesses of these actions to “inscrib[e] it with its own paranoid projections,”113 notes the Critical Art Ensemble. Its “high-tech arsenal may comprise [of] writing a computer virus, defacing a Web site, constructing false mirror sites and diverting Web traffic, or flooding servers in denial-of-service attacks,” reaffirms that “the ends for such actions are almost never reducible to a common cause.”114 The connotations of the words used to describe some of hacktivism’s tactics—defacing, diverting, flooding—are indeed off-putting, though the goals behind each action must be carefully considered. In his essay “Terror and Play, or What Was Hacktivism?,” Krapp attempts to describe the multifaceted nature of hacktivism as at once a “politically constructive form of civil disobedience or an anarchic gesture” which can “signal anti-capitalist protest or commercial protectionism.”115 The CAE adds that because hacktivism seeks to invert “the value system of the state (to which information is of higher value than the individual)...placing information back in the service of people rather than using it to benefit institutions,” it is clearly separated from cybercrime where the goal is to seek “profit from actions that damage an

111 Krapp, “Terror and Play, or What Was Hacktivism?” 88.
112 Ibid, 87.
114 Ibid, 73.
115 Ibid, 74.
individual,” though “the authoritarian goal is to prevent this distinction of being perceived.”

They argue that dominant power structures will only view hacktivism as a criminal activity, even as acts of nonviolent protest. To better assess why and how hacktivism remains separate from hacking, it is important to begin to evaluate the techniques, goals, and outcomes of certain hacktivist tactics.

One of the earliest methods of hacktivism was Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD), which made use of any type of technological product—phones, fax machines, computers, and the like—as a tool for active dissent. Krapp explains that it “translates into the digital realm what disruptive or expressive politics have been using for centuries: demonstrations, sit-ins, labor strikes, and pamphlets.”

Wishing to fully incorporate civil disobedience within cyberspace, as they believed the most effective space for resistance to be where capital could be found, the Critical Art Ensemble first proposed the theory of Electronic Civil Disobedience: “ECD is civil disobedience reinvigorated. What civil disobedience once was, ECD is now.”

ECD’s primary tactics, as in civil disobedience, are trespass and blockage; the CAE contends that any type of technology can be trespassed upon or blockaded and they have discovered ways to disrupt multiple types of technological objects used in commerce and governance. Like physical protest, these virtual actions are done for the sake of delivering a message to those who are able to see them executed in order to incite some kind of social or political change. Examining the ways virtual protest makes use of its actors and spectators is useful in considering the ethical and political implications of protest performances.

The performance of ECD disruptions are most similar to a traditional proscenium theatre play experience, as the actors and actions involved are predetermined. To successfully impart a

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116 Ibid, 17.
message, the action must take place for an audience who has no further obligation as spectators than to witness the event. For example, if one performs ECD using telephones, one might continuously call a targeted company or organization constantly for a duration of time. An actor performing ECD in this way has the text of his performance (continuous calling), a space for his performance (the telephone connection), and a specified date and duration. The audience in this case, the receiver(s) of the phone calls need only hear the continual incoming calls (even better if they answer) in order for the actor to communicate his message. Likewise, a fax machine can be similarly used in ECD performance; an actor or group of actors can send faxes incessantly to a company or organization. Much like a play text, the action of sending a fax is the scripted component and how the action is completed is up to the performer. As with the first example, the faxes need only be seen (perhaps the machine’s toner or paper cache is noticeably low) for the message to be delivered. Both of these examples exploit technological objects, using their capabilities in unwelcome ways (or, trespassing) and making their legitimate use perhaps by customers or patrons more difficult (blockading). They also are targeted at a specific audience who must be aware of the event’s occurrence for the meaning of the performance to be effectively communicated. These tactics were eventually transferred to online spaces following the widespread use of the internet, most prevalently in the practice of DoS,\footnote{DoS attacks performed by a multitude are considered distributed denial-of-service, or DDoS, attacks.} or denial-of-service, performances.

To perform a DoS attack, one visits a targeted website and continually reloads a specific page for however long one wishes. This action puts undue stress on the server where the website is stored, making it difficult for others to access the same site, inhibiting—but not completely denying—access to the site. The smaller the storage size of the server being attacked, the quicker this action is effective in blockading it. But because most ECD participants are targeting
servers with high storage capacities, such as those owned by governments and corporations, an individual DoS attack would hardly have an impact since these servers are designed to withstand large amounts of access requests. As the Electrohippies Collective explains, “these type of actions are directly analogous to the type of demonstrations that take place across the world. One or two people do not make a valid demonstration—100,000 people do.” It becomes necessary then, both symbolically and technically, for many to participate in this action simultaneously. But because of significant advances in technology, it is possible to automate these reload requests. ECD on the internet uses the same trespass and blockade methods as its earlier counterparts, but unlike phone and fax ECD actions has the capability to alter actor/spectator interaction as the ECD actor online can program an application to do the action for him. I explain in Chapter Three what implications this may have for performance in discussing the effects this method of hacktivism made in the physical world following its implementation by the Electronic Disturbance Theater, an early hacktivist group.

Electronic Civil Disobedience as a form of hacktivism may not be the final stage of virtual protest, however. Stefan Wray, a founding member of EDT, suggested protest actions which occur solely online are of limited value to a hacktivist’s cause, believing more sophisticated tactics might become available as technology advanced. He challenged the notion of purely electronic civil disobedience citing the role that “street protest played in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.” Even the Critical Art Ensemble in suggesting that “capitalism has become increasingly nomadic, mobile, liquid, dispersed, and electronic” inadvertently points towards the idea that civil disobedience solely enacted online may not be the most efficacious form of resistance. Armin Medosch believed that “by attributing

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120 DJNZ, “Client-Side Distributed Denial-of-Service,” 271.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
the power to bring about social change to media communication as an isolated factor, one is...following the techno-determinist idea of utopia and fetishizing technological communications media.”

Subscribing to these opinions, it is necessary to consider that simultaneous virtual and physical protest, which Wray suspected might occur, may prove more effective than physical or electronic resistance alone. Opposition enacted in both physical and virtual spaces may provide the last, but perhaps most crucial, element in effective resistance to the entities which control capital.

Hybridized Civil Disobedience at once incorporates active dissent as described by Thoreau; has the ability to confront local and global domination, defined by Hardt and Negri as Empire; is predicated by the acknowledgement of the danger of autonomous technologies and the will to ensure they remain submissive to humans, as Heidegger suggests; could be employed by the working classes, making use of those with access to and the ability to manipulate technology as well as those who may not, which Marcuse proposed; and would make this resistance more difficult to be arbitrarily labeled as acts of terrorism. The corporeal element of this resistance is the hallmark of Anonymous, another hacktivist group which realized the necessity of permeating any and all possible performance spaces to ensure maximum visibility for their causes, which I explore more in depth in Chapter Four. As might be expected, however, the group’s tactics are ambiguous as they were one of the first to attempt to utilize both physical and virtual spaces in their protests. Evaluating how Anonymous uses its actors and what they expect of their spectators is important in considering the ethics of performing Hybridized Civil Disobedience.

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123 Medosch, “Society in ad-hoc Mode,” 144.
CHAPTER THREE

THE ELECTRONIC DISTURBANCE THEATER

Electronic Civil Disobedience in Action

On December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group funded by the Mexican government\(^{124}\) brutally massacred 45 members\(^{125}\) of Las Abejas,\(^{126}\) a Christian pacifist group comprised of indigenous people in a small village in Chiapas, Mexico who were convened in a church. The Las Abejas were targeted because of their support for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a rebel army also from the Chiapas region who had declared war against the Mexican government following the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)\(^{127}\). Prior to this tragic event known as the Acteal Massacre, the EZLN had been using various communication tools made possible by the internet (email, websites, etc.) to gather support for and promote their mission, later earning them the title of “the first postmodern revolution.”\(^{128}\) However, the massacre prompted both the EZLN as well as other activists interested in utilizing the internet for their causes to “explore the use of the digital space beyond communication and

\(^{124}\) The Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, a dominant Mexican political party.
\(^{126}\) “The Bees.”
\(^{127}\) According to Joss Hands, a researcher of digital activism, NAFTA “was widely understood to enshrine principles of neoliberalism into Mexican law, and in effect to place the rights and needs of corporations above those of democracy, citizens, and in particular indigenous peoples. This agreement came on top of long history of oppression of indigenous groups and theft of their lands,” and changes to the Mexican Constitution allowing for “the privatization of communal land” was the final straw. @ is for Activism (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 143.
\(^{128}\) Though the source of this notion is widely tied to a New York Times article, I have not been able to find it even after extensive searches. Still, in a 1995 article for the Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, journalist and Latin American human rights advocate Ana Carrigan suggests that the use of resources and technologies available to the “grassroots activists in the Mexican civil society” to help the indigenous people is one postmodern aspect of this revolution. “Chiapas: The First Post-Modern Revolution,” (Winter/Spring 1995), 74.
documentation“ and investigate the potential of the internet as a useful site of action that could achieve real world effects. The focus of this chapter is on the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), an artist/activist group who openly supported the EZLN and were first driven to action following the Acteal Massacre. The EDT has experimented with using technology as a tool for direct action, merging aesthetics and protest in a variety of ways, at first almost exclusively in the name of the Zapatista but later to explore the function of educational institutions in such actions. As the group consists mostly of people associated with institutions of higher education, frequently exhibits their performances at conferences and art museums, and has effects on actual suffering bodies, their ECD actions necessitate discussion of several ethical and political considerations while each of the forms of their ECD actions challenge predominant notions of actor/spectator relationships in differing ways.

In this chapter, I begin with the history of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, exploring how they are situated within the timeline of other hacktivist groups, why it was founded, and what the founders hoped to achieve. I then narrow the chapter’s focus to two specific and widely varying ECD ventures: a singular performance of their 1998 Stop the War in Mexico (SWARM) project and their 2010 Transborder Immigrant Tool (the TBT). As discussed in Chapter One, ECD exploits a technology, using it in ways it was perhaps not meant to be used for the purpose of using it in protest. The first EDT project I discuss, the SWARM project, used the internet as the primary tool for its performance. It encompassed simultaneous Distributed Denial-of-

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130 The Electronic Disturbance Theatre became EDT 2.0 in 2004 upon founder Ricardo Dominguez’s acceptance of an assistant professorship at the University of California in San Diego. EDT 1.0 and 2.0 both explore the uses and potential techniques of Electronic Civil Disobedience, but for different purposes which will be explored later in the chapter.

131 I will be discussing the September 9th performance of the SWARM project which was presented and performed at the Ars Electronic Festival on Information Warfare in Linz, Austria in 1998.
Service (DDoS) disruptions on the websites of the Mexican presidency, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the Pentagon in support of the EZLN. This ECD tactic allows me to consider the political and ethical risks and repercussions of putting the theories of ECD into practice by using the internet as a performance space because of the function of its actors and spectators. The second EDT project I examine uses mobile phone technologies to make a stark political statement. The Transborder Immigrant Tool is a cell phone application developed by the EDT which possesses both aesthetic and practical components; it directs migrants traveling from Mexico into the United States towards water sources and comes equipped with audio clips of poetry, for example. According to EDT founder Ricardo Dominguez, “immigrants should not only be able to move safely, find water, and hear poetry but they should also be able encounter the landscape in a way that American painters have approached the landscape: as a sublime object.”

This participatory method of applying ECD puts turns some of its spectators—those who use the tool—into actors capable of changing the course of its performance, who are then at risk of being found and seized. This calls for serious discussion regarding not only the goals of the TBT itself but the ethics of conceiving and distributing the tool to real, suffering people as the artists maintain that it is as much an art piece as a functional tool. Considering the outcomes, criticisms, and the groups’ reflections on both the SWARM project and the TBT, I look to see if there are perhaps other ways Electronic Civil Disobedience can be practiced to maximize its potential as a form of protest without implicating those who are not expressly involved.

As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, performances of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) are one way digital activists like the Electronic Disturbance Theater have

132 Subtitled “a Global Poetic System,” the Transborder Immigrant Tool has been exhibited at the California Biennial 2010 (OCMA), Here Not There (MOCA, La Jolla), HOPE (Hackers On Planet Earth) in New York, Toronto Free Gallery in Canada, and in San Salvador, El Salvador.

made use of virtual space and its expansive interconnectivity to incite change in real spaces. The theory of ECD shared its strategies and tactics with what the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), who proposed the theory, understood as those of Civil Disobedience: trespass and blockade in pursuit of “economic disruption and symbolic disturbance.” As ECD shifted from a conceptual idea to action, governments and media outlets likened the interruptions it created to those of hacking, though hackers often work individually and not for any one goal in particular. The ethical distinctions between the two groups, explored in the previous chapter, clearly separate them. Still, because of their early association, politically and/or socially motivated digital activism—an article for the San Francisco Chronicle in November of 2000 referred to it as “hacking with a conscience”—became known as hacktivism.

The Electronic Disturbance Theater is similarly concerned with social justice and human rights, acting for “communities suffering under armed aggression who normally have no means and are without voice.” In efforts to achieve this goal, its founder Ricardo Dominguez explains that the EDT was

seeking a type of interactive performance that would collapse the space of difference between the real body and the electronic body, between everyday life and everyday life online, between the activist and the hacker, the performer and the audience, individual agency and mass swarming.

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135 As described in the second chapter, hackers are generally those who exploit vulnerabilities in systems they come across online whether for personal gain (such as identify theft and fraud) or to cause trouble for the sake of causing trouble.


These binaries provide useful parameters in exploring how the EDT envisioned Electronic Civil Disobedience as a way for individuals using technology to act for a shared goal while showing that the group viewed the application of ECD specifically as performance. As I discussed in the first chapter of my thesis, ECD actors make use of any sort of communications technology in their performances, though how their actions constitute performance—not merely “action”—should be considered as well.

Considering the ephemerality and non-reproducibility of Electronic Civil Disobedience actions provides one way to consider them as performances, as Peggy Phelan suggests that performance’s “only life is in the present” and that it “occurs over a time which will not be repeated.”\(^\text{139}\) Additionally, performances must have performers and an audience; David Saltz explains that an actor must “make movements within an articulated region of real space” which projects “some sort of stimulus” that is perceptible to an audience.\(^\text{140}\) In ECD performances targeting specific websites for example, participants physically interact with their computers\(^\text{141}\) for the express purpose of being noticed by the website’s visitors and administrators. The text of these performances—which includes the date, time span, and specific method of action—has been predetermined by the artist. And, like plays or musical compositions, as Saltz observes, interactive online performances will vary between each interaction of the performer, the text, and the audience.\(^\text{142}\) ECD performances, then, encompass a series of actions completed by those who perform those actions (actors) for observers (the audience) which are unable to be exactly reproduced because of the physical interaction between the performers and their performance.

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\(^\text{141}\) Dominguez equates a “click,” as in the click of a mouse button, with action (Fusco, 156).

\(^\text{142}\) Saltz, “The Art of Interaction,” 117.
space. But who can participate in these actions, how can they participate, and what is required of them? Whom do these performances most directly affect? Who is adversely affected, why, and to what extent? Where are the protesting bodies located in relation to one another and/or in relation to those they are speaking for? How does the EDT justify the exhibition of these performances? In order to apply these questions to specific performances, I explore the Stop the War in Mexico Project (SWARM) and the Transborder Immigrant Tool (TBT) in this chapter as they vary from each other in form, techniques, and goals.

A History of the Electronic Disturbance Theater

Ricardo Dominguez, founder of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, became interested in theatre for social change while studying the writings of Brecht and groups such as Judith Malina and Julian Beck’s Living Theater, Luis Valdez’s El Teatro Campesino, and Peter Schumann’s Bread and Puppet Theater. He attended Florida State University in 1981 in pursuit of an M.A. degree in Dramaturgy, which he did not complete. While in Tallahassee, he befriended several artists and activists who studied thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Theodor Adorno. They sought to apply the theories they read by merging art and activism, but were keenly aware of the rising prominence of communication technologies and sought to incorporate this into their work as well. Dominguez joined their newly-formed group, the Critical Art Ensemble, in 1984. They experimented with using electronic equipment like fax machines and telephones as central components in their protests of “the hyper-conservative politics of the 80’s and the space of market driven art”—the first instances of what they would later term Electronic Civil Disobedience. After moving to New York City in the 1990s,

144 Ibid.
145 Bond and Frank, “Ricardo Dominguez,” 3.
Dominguez sought to develop ECD by putting the theory into practice, forming the Electronic Disturbance Theater\(^\text{146}\) to do so.

The goals of the Electronic Disturbance Theater include renegotiating “embodiment” as it applies to virtual space, seeking “to understand the specific possibilities for constituting presence in digital space that is both collective and politicized”\(^\text{147}\) while using the internet as a site of “invention and political action for peace.”\(^\text{148}\) In efforts to reach these goals, Dominguez and the members of EDT adhere to several multifaceted guiding principles which serve as the basis of their performances: transparency, aesthetics, and symbolic disruption. In all of their work, “Dominguez and his collaborators insist on revealing their off-line identities, and make no recourse to secrecy in planning actions against targeted sites...precisely because the online context is dominated by a rhetoric of disembodiment, masking, and anonymity.”\(^\text{149}\) Performance studies scholar Jill Lane explains that, in virtual protesting, masking would create no meaningful disturbance in the discursive protocols of on-line interaction; transparency, in turn, enables a significant form of presence—one that is collective without anonymity, and virtual without being emptied of material concerns and realities.\(^\text{150}\)

The group’s insistence on transparency, though only for themselves as the curators of their performances, allows for the ensemble to be held individually accountable for their actions. Certain types of their performances, however, encourage the participation of interested individuals outside of the EDT. This kind of participatory performance allows communities to

\(^{146}\) Other founding members included Brett Staulbaum, a graduate student at San Jose State University, Stefan Wray, a graduate student at New York University, and artist Carmin Karasic.


\(^{149}\) Lane, “Digital Zapatistas,” 139.

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 139.
be created for the duration of the performance. Scholar/practitioner Coco Fusco suggests that the attraction to participating in online protest actions is both because of the “game-like feel of the interaction” in achieving a collective victory as well as the “intervention in the social produced by dispersed collective engagement with computers.”\textsuperscript{151} As is the case for certain ECD actions, participation from a multitude of actors is essential to its performances to ensure its message is relayed. Though founding member Carmin Karasic recalls Dominguez reminding them that everything they did was “in front of a curtain,”\textsuperscript{152} the identity of participants outside of the group is not always known nor mandatory to participate.

Dominguez and the group’s other members have staunchly maintained that the artistic merit of their performances takes precedence over their technical or political efficacy, explaining that he and his group “are artists first, artists who work with technology, and who also seek to amplify activist work.”\textsuperscript{153} He describes their work as “digitally incorrect,” or deliberately inefficient, clarifying that it is “unexpected, resonant, and offers what [he] thinks art should: a new space to imagine.”\textsuperscript{154} These new spaces are meant to disturb laws rather than explicitly break them.

Similarly, the Electronic Disturbance Theater applies Electronic Civil Disobedience not intending to destroy, but to cause disturbances or disruptions in existing technological systems in order to raise awareness of specific social injustices. Their performances “rely on simulation to create a disruptive (‘disturbing’) presence in the material, social, and discursive contexts in which they operate.”\textsuperscript{155} Simulation, according to Dominguez, operates as semantic disturbance

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{textsuperscript{152}} Goldstein, “Digitally Incorrect,” 8.
\footnoteref{textsuperscript{154}} Ibid, 9.
\footnoteref{textsuperscript{155}} Lane, “Digital Zapatistas,” 136.
\end{footnotes}
“which involves engaging and undermining the discursive norms and realities of the system as a whole.”

He suggests that they utilize this form of resistance rather than the physical form, which is possibly damaging to actual computer components (e.g., programming a malicious code which, once activated, may destroy a targeted computer’s functionality), or the syntactical form, which involves the manipulation of already-functioning programming codes (like redirecting a website’s address to another website). The semantic form works on a purely symbolic level, simply making use of available resources to cause interruptions in their normal functionality such as causing a website to load slowly.

Following the Acteal Massacre, the Electronic Disturbance Theater decided to apply Electronic Civil Disobedience for the first time to protest against the Mexican government’s involvement in the killings, staging the first “virtual sit-in at the Web site of then-Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo” on April 10, 1998. To do this, the group created a Java program that they called FloodNet to automatically reload requests for pages that did not exist (such as “justice” or “human rights”) to the website’s host server, “compelling the server to produce a steady, flashing stream of ‗404 error-reply‘ messages stating: ‘justice not found on this site’ and ‘human rights not found on this site.’”. Technically, this program put excessive stress on the server it targeted, delaying the site’s reaction time. Symbolically, FloodNet made “visible what was invisible or without presence in government and corporate servers through the Dadaist force of the response ‘404_file not found.’” This FloodNet performance became the first of nine Acts of the Stop the War in Mexico, or SWARM, Project. In the next section, I examine the

156 Ibid.
158 Lane, “Digital Zapatistas,” 139.
159 A 404 error message is a standard web-browser response confirming the existence of the server information is requested from but that the specific information requested is currently unavailable.
eighth Act of the SWARM Project, a three-site action directed towards the websites of the Mexican Presidency, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the Pentagon (against the Mexican government, a symbol of international capital, and the U.S. military, respectively) which occurred simultaneously on September 9, 1998, as an exhibit for the Ars Electronica Festival on Information Warfare in Linz, Austria. Because of its geographic scope and the coverage it received, this performance is useful in examining the ethical questions embedded within an action performed “in solidarity with the Zapatistas, indigenous peoples in Chiapas, others resisting the Mexican government, the global pro-Zapatista movement, and people everywhere struggling against neoliberalism and the global economy.”

It reportedly had 20,000 actors across 46 countries, caused a counter-attack by the United States Department of Defense, and received both widespread European (and later, American) media attention as well as harsh criticisms from other hacktivists which I address later in the section.

**The SWARM Project**

In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, social justice scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that the “activist struggle is to defend, protect, enable and facilitate the self-determination of indigenous peoples over themselves in states and in the global arena where they have little power.”

The Electronic Disturbance Theater’s SWARM project, created in response to the Acteal Massacre, sought to bring attention to and support the Zapatista’s mission to give a voice to the indigenous people of Mexico who were being oppressed by their government. The EDT described FloodNet, the application built by the group and used throughout the SWARM project,

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as “an Internet Art Performance” which is “no longer used” because “the performance is over.” As Jill Lane posits, “FloodNet's success is measured by symbolic (semantic) efficacy, not technological (syntactical or physical) efficiency. . .[it] was the semantic structure through which thousands of global participants assembled to stage nonviolent protest in cyberspace.”

The medium used for the project as well as its fusion of actor/audience roles together led to inquiries about the responsibilities of the artist/activist when acting in the name of those who, wielding little power, are unable to act themselves.

Following seven FloodNet actions between April and August of 1998, the EDT announced that they would hold yet another as an exhibit and performance at the Ars Electronica Festival on Informational Warfare, inviting the participation of festival goers and anyone interested. Their announcement, sent via email, included the start time, duration, and targeted websites of the performance. Beginning at 11:00 a.m. CET, the performance was meant to last a full 24 hours. However, four hours into the presentation, the Pentagon counteracted the disruptions by using their own automated application which compromised FloodNet, severely limiting the number of actors able to connect and participate. Though EDT member Brett Stalbaum was later able to effectively stop the counterattack against FloodNet, the EDT announced to the festival at 7:00 p.m. that the performance would conclude prematurely due in part to the Pentagon’s response which greatly inhibited further participation. Another reason was because Dominguez had received a threatening phone call from an anonymous person the morning of the event:

I picked up and in very clear Spanish, Mexican Spanish, they said “We know who you are. We know where you are at. We know where your family is. We are watching you. Do not go downstairs.”

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166 Lane, “Digital Zapatistas,” 139.
Do not make your presentation. Because you know what the situation is. This is not a game.” And they hung up.\textsuperscript{167}

Lastly, they explained that EDT member Stefan Wray was informed by the administrator of the server of his website, hosted by New York University where Wray was a student, that he had received a complaint from the Defense Information Systems Agency of the United States Department of Defense about the EDT’s actions. These reactions to the group’s performance seem to challenge Dominguez’s idea that it was a purely symbolic gesture and that their actions had no destructive effects. The quick intervention from the different targets suggests that they believed it to be a political action with potentially damaging effects that extended well beyond aesthetics.

The interconnectivity made possible by the structure of the internet allowed for actors in 26 countries to participate in the September 9\textsuperscript{th} SWARM performance.\textsuperscript{168} Its wide array of participants may have pointed to a temporary global coalition, art historian Catherine Bernard notes:

digital communications...promote an ideology of transcendence in regard to the plurality and diversity of cultures, politics, and histories that overcome space and time, offering the promise of an open space of equal exchange based upon a nonhierarchical structure. On the one hand, the creation of a global network and space without physical boundaries subverts unilateral systems of information by de facto opening transnational and transcultural connections, while on the other hand, it allows the restructuring of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{167} EDT. “Chronology of SWARM.” \textsuperscript{168} Ibid.}
geo-political boundaries into an ever-expanding market of limitless access.  

The locations of the participants in this project provide an example of Bernard’s observation that the flow of digital communication crosses political and geographic borders but allows for these borders to be redefined in virtual space. While the majority of the connections to FloodNet were made through individual internet service providers, some connections were made via institutions rather than countries; in the United States alone, connections were made through Commercial, Educational, Military, and Government servers. Because the EDT made their actions known to their targets—websites for the Mexican president, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the Pentagon—in advance of the performance, representatives of these websites were able to counter the attacks on their sites using the same FloodNet application as well as their own applications. The reaction by the United States military brought the project to a standstill—the voice for the indigenous people was silenced now, too—nullifying the idea that the project existed on a purely symbolic level.

Identifying the Electronic Disturbance Theater as a new kind of agitprop theatre, Dominguez believed that these actions were a social netwar, “a new social formation that did not fit the paradigms ‘cyberwar’ and ‘cyberterrorism’” but rather instituted a kind of activism that “drew on the power of networks and strengthened global civil society in order to counter balance state and market actors.” They explain that their actions are meant to bring exposure to the negative effects of globalization, a project which might fall into Jacqueline Lo and Helen

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170 EDT, “Chronology of SWARM,” 5.
171 Dominguez suggest that EDT actors are “agitators” while their transparency and preemptive announcements with detailed information about their cause mirrors the propaganda of agitprop theatre such as living newspapers.
Gilbert’s definition of postcolonial theatre, as it is primarily “driven by a political imperative to interrogate the cultural hegemony that underlies imperial systems of governance, education, social and economic organization, and representation” whether it is treated critically or ambivalently, and “usually involves cross-cultural negotiation at the dramaturgical and aesthetic levels because of the historical contact between cultures.”¹⁷³ In solidarity with the Zapatista, their performances of resistance were “grounded in multiple and sometimes contradictory structures” as they were “complicit in the apparatus [they sought] to transgress.”¹⁷⁴ However, in claiming the right to speak with and for the indigenous people of Mexico, a group already under violent oppression from their government, EDT’s actions had the potential to incite further retaliation from the Mexican government onto these people. This possibility already displays the power and privilege the EDT had over those they acted for—the SWARM project itself being possible because of their privileges as well. While the EDT made the FloodNet application relatively simple to operate, access to it through a computer with an internet connection was required—a luxury for most in 1998. Additionally, Lo and Gilbert suggest that considerations for the language used in postcolonial performances should be made, as we should remember that the wide-scale imposition of imperial languages on non-Western peoples has constituted an insidious form of epistemic violence, since the system of values inherent in a language becomes the “system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995:283). To ask whose values are heard and whose are silenced by the use of specific languages therefore seems essential.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 46.
The written English language as well as a newer technological language were both embedded within FloodNet, adding a further communicative barrier between potential actors (those who wished to participate but may have found the technological aspects daunting or confusing), actual participants, and the population on whose behalf they presumed to act.

For the Electronic Disturbance Theater, FloodNet “empowered and mobilized netizens through Internet activist art.” This is reminiscent of the dialogic relationship between spectators and actors as proposed by Augusto Boal in his Theater of the Oppressed. The transformation of passive spectators into active participants, or “spect-actors,” in performance was crucial for FloodNet to function. Not only did the action require spect-actors, it required the participation of as many as possible in order to be most effective. The collective interaction (which was appealing to Coco Fusco, as mentioned previously) is also known as swarming—the double entendre of the project’s name. As Joss Hands explains in his book @ is for Activism, swarming invokes “the absence of centralized control...the autonomous nature of subunits...the high connectivity between subunits...[and] the nonlinear causality of peers influencing peers.” But because swarms “do not think, and certainly do not allow for negation or reflexivity,” Hands warns, “a point will be reached at which many [will act] in response to the disciplinary momentum of the cascading trust system pushing them forward. What results is homogeneity—a distinctly non-pluralist outcome, eliminating the possibility of nuanced or bold political decision-making.” The homogenization of the participants in the swarm extinguishes their empowerment as individual actors, as each is compelled to act according to guidelines set forth by the EDT. The inability of participants to intervene or envision alternatives in the performance

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176 Internet citizens.
177 EDT, “FloodNet Scrapbook.”
178 Hands, Joss. @ is for Activism: Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture. (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 126.
179 Ibid, 130.
potentially inhibited useful suggestions that may have addressed some of the project’s issues described thus far, a further detraction from its potential. At the same time, the insistence on transparency for the EDT combined with the anonymity of other SWARM actors ensured that the EDT must hold themselves accountable for anything one did in the name of the project.

Reactions to FloodNet varied. Members of other hacktivist groups, including Hackers Electronic Art (HEART) and Cult of the Dead Cow, criticized the project as “ineffective” and “unacceptable network abuse” suggesting that it denied free speech to the agencies whom the EDT attacked.  However, on the same day of the performance, activists in Australia contacted the EDT asking to use FloodNet “directed at the developers of the Jabiluka Uranium mine in Kakadu National Park in Australia’s Northern Territory.” The global reaction to their performance indicated that the action reached audiences across geo-political borders. However, EDT’s own reflection on the event states that it “raised questions about the current definitions of cyberterrorism, information warfare, civil disobedience, and legal use of the Internet”—highlighting the performance’s innovation while omitting questions which should have been raised about its impact as a protest of the Mexican government’s violent actions against its indigenous people. Stefan Wray would later address some of the issues the performance raised, which I discuss in the last section of this chapter, though Dominguez and the other members have remained vocal about its aesthetic goals and noticeably silent about its transgressions.

As an Electronic Civil Disobedience tactic, the use of the internet as the performance site for the SWARM project functions largely as any kind of performance space where actors perform for an audience who is able to view the actions in the same space. Though interested and able spectators could take part in the action, they were only able to perform specific,

181 Ibid.
182 EDT, “FloodNet Scrapbook.”
predefined actions in a predetermined time. The roles of the actor and active spectator in this instance remain essentially unchanged from any other mediatized participatory performance, defined by David Saltz as one in which audiences view the event from within it rather than outside of it, uninvolved with its actions. The function of other spectators of this action—visitors and administrators of the targeted websites—similarly remained the same, as they were witnesses to the performance. While this method of ECD does not significantly affect the fundamental definitions of performance, the following EDT action complicates both the idea of a performance space as well as actor/spectator interaction.

**The Transborder Immigrant Tool**

A decade after the SWARM project, Dominguez received tenure as an associate professor in the visual arts department of the University of California in San Diego for research which would lead to the application of Electronic Civil Disobedience in a different form. The goals of his new research team, a extant partnership between the newly established Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 and b.a.n.g. lab, include “the disturbance of borders: national, gender, disciplinary, fiction/non, through the exploitation and re/performance of technology, poetry and the imaginaries of each.” As the original Electronic Disturbance Theater worked to promote the Zapatista, EDT 2.0 endeavors to investigate the role of the educational institution in art research. Member Micha Cardenas explains that their work accomplishes what “much good performance art does, to reveal the unseen dimensions of power.” They ask how the university intersects with performance and resistance:

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184 Dominguez’s research lab at the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology, standing for “Bits, Atoms, Neurons, and Genes.”


186 Ibid, 2.
Will it be a site for the development of technologies for corporations, the military and law enforcement, or will it be a site for the development of new forms of resistance and of humanitarian efforts. Will it be the latest stage in the unfolding of neoliberalism and privatization, or will it be a site for contesting and rejecting neoliberalism?\textsuperscript{187}

To address these issues through a re/performance of technology, EDT 2.0 drafted a research proposal in the 2007/2008 academic school year for a new performance of Electronic Civil Disobedience, an instrument called the Transborder Immigrant Tool (TBT).

Simply put, the Transborder Immigrant Tool is a cell phone that the EDT repurposed, equipping it with both practical and aesthetic elements in order to provide sustenance to immigrants attempting to cross the Mexican/US border. According to Dominguez’s description of the tool, he and his team use inexpensive Motorola i455 cell phones that come equipped with a global positioning system (GPS) application, and install “a simple compass-like navigation system” on it as well as other information like “where to find water left by the Border Angels, where to find Quaker help centers that will wrap [the user’s] feet, how far [they were] from the highway—things to make the application really benefit individuals who are crossing the border.”\textsuperscript{188} What it further entails is explained in a 2010 interview for The Chronicle of Higher Education:

Dominguez and his collaborators do not see the tool in strictly utilitarian or humanitarian terms. Rather, they insist—as they do for all of the lab’s productions—that the cellphone application is art. Loaded with audio recordings of original poetry, the app provides migrants, in the words of Brett Stalbaum, a lecturer in the

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
visual-arts program at San Diego, “emotional and informational sustenance.”189

Dominguez further describes the TBT as a performance which “connects un/expectedly to borders, nature, desert and global positioning via a geo-poetic disturbance.”190 As an art object that “intercedes in contemporary discourses about immigration, about undocumented entrance, [and] about shifting demographics of the United States and the continent,”191 it becomes an active performance rather than a static object during the time it is utilized. While they wish for the tool to assist immigrants in finding water and major roads, it only works within a one-mile radius of the San Diego/Tijuana border.

According to the project’s grant proposal to the UCSD Center for Humanities, the project would develop in five stages; after initial research, the group would test the tool along with “invited artists” for one week and then distribute the devices to “communities of immigrants on both sides of the border.”192 In 2007, EDT/b.a.n.g. lab received three grants for the project: the UCSD Center for Humanities’ Transborder Interventions Transcontinental Archives Award for the 07/08 year totaling just under $5,000, a Calit2 Summer Undergraduate Research Scholarship,193 and the Transnational Communities Award presented by the US Embassy in Mexico which was funded by Cultural Contact, Endowment for Culture Mexico-US, in the amount of $3500.194

\[193\] The team included undergraduate Jason Navarro, who was awarded the grant (of an undisclosed amount) for the research.
\[194\] Presented at the International Electronic Art Festival—TRANSITIO—MX02 in Mexico City held in October 2007. www.newmediafix.net/daily/?p=1677.
The project’s intentions and goals were multifaceted. Practically, according to their UCSD Humanities department grant proposal, the TBT would:

1. Allow a virtual geography to mark new trails and potentially safer routes across the desert;
2. Add a new layer of agency to this emerging virtual geography that would allow segments of global society that are usually outside of this emerging grid of hyper-geo-mapping-power to gain quick and simple access to the GPS system;
3. Offer access to this emerging total map economy;
4. Add an intelligent agent algorithm that would parse out the best routes and trails on that day and hour for immigrants to cross the vertiginous landscape as safely as possible.  

At the same time, the tool also contained an important aesthetic component. Dominguez explains that EDT “believed that poetry should be deeply involved in the core manifestation of the gesture” and that they wished to investigate the idea of the “border” (both between resistance/art and the US/Mexico) as an art space and as a space for performance. In a play titled *Sustenance: A Play for All Trans [ ] Borders*, which EDT wrote as a companion piece to the tool, they state that the tool asks, “‘What constitutes sustenance?’” EDT member Amy Carroll reasoned that if she were in the desert, [she] would want water and...would choose water over a poem. But what if we also made it a point to resist the dehumanization of human beings and to suggest the aesthetic also sustains, and that the assumptions that go along with certain

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195 Dominguez and Stalbaum, “Transborder Immigrant Tool.”
197 Ibid.
198 It is described as “a chapbook/pamphlet set within a play that both describes and defines the Transborder Immigrant Tool and at the same time provides the story/stories that it falls within and is making.” Enríquez-Loya, “Sustenance.”
kinds of representations of the undocumented is always that they wouldn’t have any interest in poetry?  

The play offers that the intent of the group in creating the TBT was “to create a poetic gesture and safety device equipped to identify water caches on the US side of the border,” further explaining that it “represents both a ‘conversation piece,’ a reminder that people are dying, and an ethical intervention, a hand extended to those who are lost and dehydrated.” Given the project’s multiple goals as both a tool which would bring agency and sustenance to immigrants able to use it and as an aesthetic object for the group to exhibit, the TBT consciously raised complex issues regarding the intersections of art and activism to a diverse range of audiences. However, research for the project was abruptly halted in January of 2010 due to investigations by the FBI Office of Cybercrime and by the University of California, San Diego, instigated by three Republican Congressmen. According to Dominguez, “the TBT was targeted by right-wing media, specifically Fox News,” because it sought to aid in illegal immigration. The Congressmen insisted that UCSD investigate the project to see how the group made use of the university’s grant money they had received and to see if EDT had strayed from the intention of the TBT as indicated in their grant proposal for the project. UCSD threatened to de-tenure Dominguez if he was found guilty of these charges. The investigations were dropped in July of the same year when the UCSD Audit and Management Advisory Services concluded that “neither University funds nor effort were used inappropriately during the

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200 Electronic Disturbance Theater/b.a.n.g. lab. Sustenance: A Play for All Trans [ ] Borders (New York: Printed Matter, Inc, 2010), 3.
202 “The congressmen—Brian P. Bilbray, Duncan D. Hunter, and Darrell Issa—suggested that the lab might be in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which makes it a felony to encourage foreigners to enter the United States illegally” (Goldstein, “Digitally Incorrect,” 3).
203 Ibid.
development of the TBT.” Even so, the university asked him to sign an agreement stating that he would “never speak or write about what had happened,” “never create any art work that might disturb anyone,” and “refrain from artistist performances”—none of which Dominguez agreed to. As he explained in a 2012 interview for Vandal Journal, he was able to keep his job by arguing that he believed part of what he was hired to research was “what manifestations of antagonisms or support a university has toward this type of work”—research which led to receiving tenure at the university. The EDT resumed researching and testing the tool in 2011. Though the project has yet to reach its final stage, they continue to develop and exhibit the tool in the hopes of reaching the stage of distribution to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and community groups interested in the tool. As a fitting development in Electronic Civil Disobedience, the group’s framing of the TBT raises certain ethical and political questions regarding the goals and potential effects of the project.

The goals of EDT for this project led to exposure of the TBT to a wide range of audiences: their University (to investigate how they would respond to such an endeavor), governmental employees and politicians (to a spotlight on illegal immigration), artists and activists (to examine the intersections of art, technology, performance, and activism), and the immigrant population (to provide them with sustenance). However, a performance of the tool requires its intended users to make use of it; the immigrant spectators become the actors. This iteration of Electronic Civil Disobedience, like the SWARM project, invites its spectators to participate in the action of the performance which could link them to any of its unfavorable

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204 Nadir, “Poetry, Immigration and the FBI,” 5.
205 Ibid, 3.
207 The TBT was most recently exhibited at the Queens Museum of Art in New York in March, 2013.
209 The time from when its intended users receive it to when they return it, as opposed to the group’s demonstration of the device.
outcomes. However, a key difference between the two is that while SWARM participants might have been rewarded by feelings of community and praise for their activism, the TBT entices its intended users with claims of providing sustenance. SWARM actors could gain perhaps a personal sense of accomplishment; TBT actors might gain water and safety.

Additionally, SWARM actors worked from behind computer screens across the globe while TBT actors are centralized around the San Diego/Tijuana border and are physically present, making their possible apprehension much easier. The stakes of a performance which requires suffering immigrants to take part in its action are high.

Though the device has yet to reach its final stage of distribution, the group has released its programming code so that anyone can recreate the TBT with the proper resources. This leads to a number of new and troubling speculative questions. What might happen if it malfunctions during use or if the information it provides is incorrect? What if the code is taken and modified maliciously so that its users can be traced and captured? Even if it is created correctly, what if it is explained to immigrants incorrectly? Dominguez states that the tool disallows triangulation, or the ability to geographically pinpoint the device and its user’s location, because it is a “single bounce GPS device.” It is meant to be turned on only at the beginning of the journey, during which time the device locates water caches, and then turned off once the user reaches their destination. If the device is accidentally turned back on again, it runs the risk of being tracked via satellite—and government officials—after its initial use. While the EDT is ultimately responsible for the tool, possible negative reactions from their audiences might include defunding by the University, further calls for investigation by politicians, or harsh criticisms.

210 In the SWARM project, perhaps prosecution, incarceration, or paying a fine. In the TBT project, perhaps being spotted, arrested, or deported.
from artists and activists. Negative reactions to TBT actors, however, might include being spotted or located, arrested, and/or deported. Both groups might be at risk for backlash, but it seems as though the use of unwitting immigrants puts them further and unnecessarily into harm’s way.

**Post-ECD**

I have used the SWARM project and Transborder Immigrant Tool as examples of Electronic Civil Disobedience as practiced by the Electronic Disturbance Theater to investigate the different forms such action can take and some of the questions those actions may entail. In both instances, there has been an insistence on the artistic merit of the actions as well as the absence of the artist/activist’s body in physical space during their performances. This has possibly afforded them exception from certain kinds of governmental retaliation such as harsh fines or sentencing, but also in severe backlash from the governments in the countries they targeted—an opportunity which the repressed people the EDT acts in the name of do not have. At the same time, both projects rely heavily on active spectators for a performance to take place. It is perhaps imperative that the actions of the artists and activists using ECD tactics in their resistance be united with their active spectators to ensure that both actor and spectator are exposed to the same risks. In addition, it seems important to uncover and assess the roles that ethics and aesthetics play in performances of Electronic Civil Disobedience.

As one method of hacktivism, Electronic Civil Disobedience practitioners took certain principles and techniques of Civil Disobedience and applied them to technology. Its actors were confined to repurposing technological apparatuses for their resistance while many protesters were still finding use in physical demonstrations. Following the SWARM project performances, Stefan Wray, co-founder and theorist for the EDT, suggested that “hacktivism appears to be a
means to augment or supplement existing organizing efforts, a way to make some noise and focus attention.”

He envisioned that “we [should] expect to see hybrid civil disobedience actions that will involve people taking part in electronic civil disobedience from behind their computer screens while simultaneously people are engaging in more traditional forms of civil disobedience out in the streets.” In the following chapter, I argue that another hacktivist group known as Anonymous has fulfilled Wray’s prophetic description of a hybridized civil disobedience through reciprocally protesting both on and offline.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANONYMOUS

Merging the Virtual and the Physical in Protest

In December 2012, the small town of Steubenville, Ohio was thrust into national attention when a 12-minute video depicting several of the town’s high school football players gleefully defiling a seemingly unconscious young woman was released and posted around the internet. The persons responsible for the release of this video were members of a hacktivist collective known as Anonymous, a group who routinely uses their technological prowess as a protest technique to collect, reveal, and disseminate information which is not readily available to the public. Upon discovering that the video was created in August of the same year and that no one had yet been charged for the crimes, Anonymous began gathering and releasing any information and media that they found relevant to the case to its online audiences across multiple websites. They created a website specifically for this event where this information was also posted, which included some personal information of anyone they believed to be involved in covering up the attack, and distributed the link to the site to several social media platforms. The story and accompanying information spread rapidly across the internet, promptly reaching the news media who then began a debate regarding the ethics of the video and other information being made public. Back in Steubenville, some of its citizens believed the negative exposure brought to the town because of these alleged actions was unnecessarily tarnishing their town’s reputation. Others, however, assembled in the streets and protested the authorities’ handling of the situation outside of the county courthouse. Among the protestors at the rally were dozens of Anonymous members, as the group has found their physical presence at protests concurrent with
their online hacktivist efforts to be beneficial in providing as much exposure as possible to their cause.

As Stefan Wray of the Electronic Disturbance Theater suspected following his group’s early hacktivist actions, protests are being held in the spaces of market and capital which are now in both the physical and virtual realms. Anonymous, wishing to bring as much publicity as possible to their causes about events which they believe impose on human rights, practice a hybridized Civil Disobedience where their protest actions are performed on the internet and in the streets simultaneously. The types of cases they are drawn to have ranged from localized cases such as Steubenville, to national legislative attempts to censor parts of the internet, to global protests such as Arab Spring. Whatever the mission, the group’s actions are inherently yet intentionally theatrical, as they are not only a product of the culture that produced them but a vital part in garnering exposure for their causes.

Now an internationally-recognized force, Anonymous developed out of a popular online image board community in the mid-2000s. Their first collective actions were largely prankish, not seeded in desire to bring attention to anything but their technological capabilities. In only a few years’ time, the group found they could use the “technological tools of social coordination so quickly and well that [they] could collectively attack targets for any perceived slight, or just for fun, without those targets ever having a chance to see it coming or defend themselves.”

Like the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), Anonymous’s earliest hacktivist actions were those of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD), such as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. The group has since expanded the definition of hacktivism by utilizing ECD tactics among other virtual protest techniques and by incorporating traditional Civil Disobedience

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214 The community Anonymous began from, 4chan.org, was founded in 2003.
actions in physical protest which occur at the same time as the online actions. With the added media exposure physical protest brings to Anonymous, it has become important to investigate how the merge of virtual and physical performance spaces has enhanced, disrupted, and otherwise transformed definitions of hacktivism and how it relates to performance.

Though Anonymous comfortably fits within Oxblood Ruffin’s\textsuperscript{216} definition of hacktivism: “using technology to improve human rights across electronic media,”\textsuperscript{217} some of their adaptations of its techniques and tactics have garnered them criticism from within the hacktivist community. Ruffin’s expanded hacktivism definition includes certain ground rules, such as “no DDoS attack and no website defacements,”\textsuperscript{218} both which are key components in Anonymous’s virtual protesting tactics. Ruffin believes that these types of actions inhibit the free speech of the targeted websites, a contradictory action for a group vehemently opposed to censorship. However, the Electronic Disturbance Theater’s Ricardo Dominguez has supported Anonymous’s actions as valid forms of Electronic Civil Disobedience. He disagrees with Ruffin’s criticisms, explaining that “the history of civil disobedience, with Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Henry David Thoreau, is one of blockage or trespass...that disrupts the everyday flow of power,” as he believes “Anonymous has been very effective, both as a network and as the emergence of a type of civil society and one that is extremely intimate with Net culture.”\textsuperscript{219} The discordant views of Anonymous as a hacktivist group from these established

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item A member of one of the earliest hacktivist groups, the Cult of the Dead Cow, who first coined the term “hacktivism.”
\item Mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, Ruffin was a member of one of the earliest hacktivist groups, Cult of the Dead Cow, and sought to more concretely define “hacktivism” in a paper presented to the CyberCrime and Digital Law Enforcement Conference at Yale Law School in March 2004.
\end{itemize}
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hacktivists adds to the necessity of examining Anonymous’ approaches to issues and the tactics they use to raise awareness to these causes.

Perhaps to their credit, Anonymous has issued their own press releases justifying their use of tactics like DDoS attacks, even petitioning the White House in early 2013 to have DDoS attacks recognized as free speech and considered a legal form of protest. One such release describes the group as a “non-violent resistance movement consisting of a global collective of autonomous individuals,” and outlines their most basic guidelines:

1. Do not attack the media (this includes main stream, independent, and social media).
2. Do not attack critical infrastructure (such as communications networks, power grids–or hospitals).
3. Work for Justice and Freedom (especially with regards to freedom of information and the internet).

These principles once again align Anonymous within hacktivism even considering Ruffin’s criticisms. And as David Saltz suggests that “computer artists conflate the roles of the playwright, the director, the designer, and even the performer,” the group has expanded the boundaries of using the internet as a site of performance in pursuit of promoting justice and human rights.

Anonymous’ actions fit comfortably within the definitions of both hacktivism and Electronic Civil Disobedience, though the sometimes simultaneous presence of corporeal bodies to their virtual actions challenges the boundaries of each and of performance as well. The inclusion of physical protest with its online counterpart allows for questions regarding perhaps one of the most fundamental aspects of performance: liveness, defined by Herbert Blau as “the

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look of being looked at,” where two bodies share the same space. Even in virtual interaction, Blau explains that

the sensation may be that of a body virtually there, but that’s it, virtual, maybe quickening apprehension in its shimmering subjunctivity, with a certain charm or enchantment, perhaps, like an alibi of the spectral wishing it could be more, maybe even mortal, but with evacuated gravity, never meant to be.

Whether a person interacts virtually with another individual or with a computer bot, the interaction is still mediated by a computer machine; live participants have only the machine to touch, see, and hear in their physical location. While some artists, such as the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, find the decentralized nature of virtual action useful to their projects, others find such reliance on technology a cause for concern in attempts to perform resistance.

Digital actors, like those who perform Electronic Civil Disobedience, can interact both with computers (automated DDoS programs, for example) and with live individuals which complicates the matter of the actors’ agency in their performances. A digital actor can either be in full control of their actions, or program an application to act in their place. Jane Goodall suggests in her article “Transferred Agencies” that “by playing across the borderline between the agentic and the automatic, the performer can explore” the ambiguous nature of agency in their performances while “the spectator can be witness to processes of energy transmission and conversion.” To the spectator, the virtual actor’s agency may not be explicit: is there a live body on the other end? Is it a bot that has been programmed to act in place of the actor? Has the actor allowed another actor to act in his place without disclosing this information?

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223 Ibid, 535.
The importance of agency in virtual performance is amplified in actions which seek to effect social and/or political change, where those affected might understandably desire some degree of accountability. By incorporating physical protest in their various digital campaigns, Anonymous provides more tangibility to their actions by bringing a physical presence to their performances. They can be seen, located, arrested, identified, prosecuted, or left alone depending on what circumstances necessitate. This visibility has been essential to the global expansion of Anonymous and to their efforts to be seen by various media outlets. They have also gained allies by physically joining other causes (such as Occupy Wall Street) and offering their abilities to rapidly disseminate information.

Considering their direct relationship with hacktivism, their differences in infrastructure and philosophy from the Electronic Disturbance Theater, and their simultaneous actions on and offline which expand globally, I investigate Anonymous in this chapter in order to examine the ethics and potential consequences of their tactics as well as to explore how they may be further pushing the boundaries of performing Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) by physically engaging in the democratic process. Beginning with their development out of an internet message board community, I describe the nature of this community and how it was able to foster a group of like-minded and technologically talented individuals who sought justice. I use several early examples of their actions meant to bring attention to human rights issues to provide a starting point for their ECD tactics and techniques and to examine how they have developed. With these early examples, I am also able to explore the shift of portrayals and understandings of the group by various media sources, first as only a group of mischievous children to the more current recognition of Anonymous as an activist group worth discussing. The shifts in

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225 Described in earlier chapters as the use of hacking techniques in order to call attention to a particular social justice or human rights cause.
Anonymous’ representations and coverage seem to coincide with both the scale of the event they react to as well as with the scale of their actions.

The first example I use to spark initial questions regarding the goals and tactics of Anonymous occurs shortly after the inception of Anonymous as a collective; their decision in early 2008 to hold real world protests against the Church of Scientology while other members of the group concurrently performed Electronic Civil Disobedience actions online marks a significant shift in Anonymous’s existence as they shifted from random users of a website to a distinct assemblage of people with a designated purpose. These protests, held on one day in over ninety cities across the world, marked the first time the group recognized the necessity of utilizing both the virtual and the physical worlds in order to have the greatest amount of exposure to their cause. Their actions against the Church of Scientology, both online and off, were relatively traditional examples of ECD and physical street protest. This example allows me to explore the ethical implications and impact of combining the two.

By 2011, Anonymous had become accustomed to protesting in the streets while they communicated with other members online in real time. My second case study examines their involvement in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests, to lay out additional ethical questions about the use of hacktivism as a mode of performing resistance. Though OWS was not started by Anonymous, the group was attracted to many of the movement’s causes, including putting a spotlight on the heavily imbalanced American wealth distribution as well as on the companies and institutions which they believed had a part in creating this problem. Additionally, Anonymous shared similarities with many of the OWS protestors, or Occupiers, as “both collectives were bound together by being the kinds of people who never found a comfortable
place in society.”226 I use this case study to explain how Anonymous had adapted and used their own existing ECD techniques to support OWS, and to address certain ethical concerns that arise out of these tactics.

**A History of Anonymous**

Described in the first chapter of my thesis, the culture from which Anonymous sprang might be best described in the same way as the name of its origin: Random. The Random board on 4chan.org, sometimes referred to by its hyperlink shortcut /b/, is the site’s most active message board, and has an “anything goes” policy towards its content. As prominent Anonymous researcher Quinn Norton explains, “/b/ is the id of the internet” as the “id is the seat of creative energy.”227 Because there is no registration to 4chan, each post made to the board is submitted under the default user name, “Anonymous.” The anonymity the site granted its users coupled with a space where no topic was off-limits created a culture with “its own aesthetics and values, art and literature, social norms and ways of production, and even its own dialectic language.”228 To better understand their later actions both on and offline, it is important to establish the group’s first and perhaps most fundamental modus operandi, “the lulz.”

An alteration of the internet shorthand for “laugh out loud,” or “LOL,” Anonymous first used the term “the lulz” to describe the sole motive of their actions. Norton explains:

the lulz is laughing instead of screaming. It’s a laughter of embarrassment and separation. It’s schadenfreude. It’s not the anesthetic humor that makes days go by easier, it’s humor that heightens contradictions. The lulz is laughter with pain in it. It

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228 Ibid.
forces you to consider injustice and hypocrisy, whichever side of it you are on in that moment.”

Acting within this framework, Anonymous’s earliest collective actions were spontaneous and short-lived. The group would discover a relatively small perceived injustice, as with Dusty the Cat, and become nuisances to their targets until they felt they had received some form of justice. In the case of Dusty the Cat, this meant identifying the individual in the video who was inflicting harm onto the cat, notifying his local authorities, and sending them and his local media the evidence they had discovered in their mission to discover who this person was. Their abilities to rapidly spread information and desire to do so in a sophomoric way serves as the foundation for future Anonymous work.

Because of their unique roots in both pranks and hacking, most media covering an event inspired by Anonymous in their early years were not sure which aspect of the group to focus on: the group’s vigilantism, how the events were carried out, or who carried the actions out. Their tactics and lack of structure led Fox News to nickname the group the “internet hate machine” in 2007. However, Norton proposes that “Anonymous fundamentally produces two things: spectacle and infrastructure hacking. They create scenes the media often can’t resist, but they also tend to be ones that the media isn’t very good at understanding.” One of the group’s earliest setbacks in attracting favorable attention from the media was the form they chose to take, an extension of the “Anonymous” name assigned to each post on 4chan.

As a decentralized, leaderless collective, anyone can act under the Anonymous name, propose ideas for future actions, create press releases, or maintain websites for the group. One

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229 Ibid, 3.
230 Detailed in Chapter One, Anonymous discovered a video of a teenager abusing a cat and sought to positively identify him quickly so that local authorities could bring him to justice.
such of these websites states, “ANYONE anywhere can initiate an Anonymous operation, action, or group—and so long as they adhere to these basic principles they are as much Anonymous as anyone. EVERYONE is Anonymous.” Norton suggests they are “a ‘do-oocracy’—a banner defined by actions done under it more than who is flying it, named or unnamed.” Though this is and has been Anonymous’s structure, McAfee Security Expert François Paget warns that if hacktivists remain unfocused and continue to accept anyone who signs on to act on their behalf, we may be on the verge of a digital civil war. The entire hacktivist movement may fall victim to an increase in criminalization, as well as to governments fearing that their economic activities and critical infrastructures will be undermined as they become increasingly more dependent on information technology.

At the same time, writer Andrew Leonard suggests that “Anonymous prides itself on its inchoate lack of definition,” adding that they are “the conscience of the Internet, doughty defenders of free speech and privacy in an era when the surveillance state has never been more powerful.” Helpfully, Gabriella Coleman, a digital culture and hacker researcher, proposes that “one of the most fruitful ways to think about Anonymous is simply as a vehicle for getting the word out.” Guardian columnist Fruzsina Eordogh believes the group’s “core strength lies in its PR tactics” as they are “now primarily concerned with mobilizing activists through the spread of information,” while they are similarly praised for helping to promote Occupy Wall Street by

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232 “What is Anonymous?”
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 Public Relations
generating publicity about the event. Indeed, their abilities to draw attention to their causes and propel media coverage of their events is an integral part of their hybridized activism. The more members of Anonymous, known as Anons, that are attracted to a particular cause, the more sources are pooled to create a spectacle that will attract its spectators to support and/or act in alliance with them. This aligns with Saltz’s notion that the spectator’s role from within an event—rather than outside of it, as in a proscenium theatre, for example—is a key component in participatory performance as “the artist cedes control over the sequence of events that any given spectator will encounter” which allows the event to produce outcomes that its originators may not have foreseen. As Anonymous saw an influx of interest and support in their causes, they found the need for a more organized communication apparatus to aid in discussing both existing and future performances.

The group now convenes in multiple Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels; channels exist for individual countries as well as specific proposed actions, and anyone can be connected simultaneously to as few or as many channels as they desire. Each channel has at least one overseer, called an Operator, who has either created that channel or been appointed to the position by the user who created it. Their tasks include maintaining the established order within the channel and collecting the information and ideas proposed in their channel to distribute to other Anonymous channels to gauge support. Paget explains that during high levels of activity such as during Arab Spring, these channels have attracted over 3,000 users connected in one channel. One of their first instances of large-scale rallying centered around a video of Tom

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240 While each channel may have its own set of “rules,” most adhere to the rules of the “Main” Anonymous IRC channel, “AnonOps,” which include prohibiting continually connecting and disconnecting (as it spams the chat room with notifications of a user’s connections and disconnections, interrupting discussions), targeting the media, and glorifying violence, according to Anonymous researcher François Paget.
Cruise which had been being circulated on the internet where he wildly professes his admiration for the Church of Scientology and claims, for example, that Scientologists are the only people who are able to help at accident scenes.\textsuperscript{242} The Church attempted to remove the video, as they believed it was damaging to their credibility and reputation as an institution. In protest of the Church’s efforts to censor this video, and upon discovering more of the Church’s secrecy regarding their members and their finances, Anonymous began discussing how they could launch an effective protest campaign against such a massive institution.

**Project Chanology**

Naming their interactions with the Church of Scientology “Project Chanology,”\textsuperscript{243} interested members of Anonymous chatted in their IRC channels about what kinds of actions might be best suited for bringing attention to their cause. In January of 2008, they decided to use tactics most of those involved were familiar with and agreed upon predominantly using Distributed Denial of Service, or DDoS, attacks against various Church of Scientology websites. While they also engaged in other typical Electronic Civil Disobedience fare like spamming the email addresses of Church officials, faxing them black pages to waste their toner and paper, and making thousands of prank phone calls, the DDoS attacks were initially the most used actions by Anonymous members. To expedite the DDoS actions, members of the group created an application to automatically send page reload requests to the designated site, similar to the Electronic Disturbance Theater’s FloodNet program. However, the outcomes of their early actions show that Anonymous was fairly unorganized and disunited as a collective; one targeted website, thought to be a secret Church of Scientology website, turned out to be an elementary school in the Netherlands. One frustrated Anon suggested in their IRC channel that they could


\textsuperscript{243} A portmanteau of 4Chan and Scientology.
perhaps accomplish more if they “weren’t just a bunch of unorganized brats,” while another
stated that they could “never take down a massive multimillion-dollar corporation like
Scientology.”\textsuperscript{244} Several members of the group who “wanted to be the good guys and
Scientology to play the bad guys,” reasoning that the Church “hurt people, took their money, and
lied to them under the guise of being caretakers and teachers,”\textsuperscript{245} took this advice seriously.
They decided that adding physical protests to their online actions might make more of an impact
by bringing more exposure to their efforts than remaining unseen behind their computers.

Anonymous’s plans to physically protest the Church of Scientology caused friction
within the group. Some members wished to annoy and harass the Church for purposes similar to
their previous actions against other targets: for “the lulz.” This created a divide between Anons
who were only interested in continuing to act out pranks and those who saw themselves as useful
participants in a concerted effort to expose the various issues Anonymous members had with the
Church.\textsuperscript{246} Still, there was enough interest expressed from Anons across the world to both
virtually and physically protest the institution that they proceeded with discussions about how
they would navigate this more sociopolitical issue.

In efforts to become more organized as a protesting group and wishing to disseminate
their grievances and intentions to the Church, the media, and the public, Anonymous officially
adopted the name “Anonymous.” Wired.com writer Julian Dibbell explains that

\begin{quote}
none of them knew one another, even by pseudonyms, since as a
rule there was only one username throughout the community. In
fact, it was a standing in-joke on 4chan and related sites that their
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{244} Dibbell, “The Assclown Offensive.”
\textsuperscript{246} Anonymous itself identifies these two factions as “lulz” members and “moral” members.
collective output was the product of a single hive-mind entity, known by that same username: Anonymous. They needed a name so the Church knew who was behind the protests and so other members of Anonymous could use the name in their discussions and actions. To circulate their intentions, members of the group created a video titled “Message to Scientology” which outlined their issues with the Church and released it on January 21, 2008 on the popular video website, YouTube. This two-minute video, first released in English, has no human figures—live or computer-generated—and only shows clouds passing through the sky as a speech synthesizer “reads” the text of the video. Within two weeks, the video was released in seven other languages (French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Polish, Russian, and Swedish), each displaying either the same or similar videos of clouds passing through the sky as a computer-generated voice reads the translated English message. Three of the eight videos use a female computer-generated voice; as none show human figures, the release of the video in multiple languages as well as the inclusion of female voices seems to add to Anonymous’s attempt at self-identification as “anyone.”

A brief excerpt of the text in the video, which is addressed to the Church of Scientology, shows a deliberate attempt to combine “the lulz” with a distinct political and social agenda:

Your campaigns of misinformation, your suppression of dissent, your litigious nature: all of these things have caught our eye. With the leakage of your latest propaganda video into mainstream circulation, the extent of your malign influence over those who have come to trust you as leaders has been made clear to us. Anonymous has therefore decided that your organization should be

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247 Dibbell, “The Assclown Offensive.”
248 Five members are reported to have created the videos, including 31-year-old technology consultant, Greg Housh (Dibbell, “The Assclown Offensive”).
249 A computer program which converts written text into computer-generated speech.
250 “What is Anonymous?”
destroyed. For the good of your followers, for the good of mankind, and for our own enjoyment, we shall proceed to expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form.251

Once this video began being circulated online, the media took note. They began to disparage the group as nothing more than hackers, as the video includes no course of action other than vague threats. To clarify their intentions, Anonymous released another video one week later, this time addressed to the public at large, which also explained the demographics of the group and further reasons for targeting Scientology:

We want you to be aware of the very real dangers of Scientology. We want you to know about the gross human rights violations committed by this cult. We want you to know about Lisa McPhearson. We want you to know about former members of Scientology's private navy, SeaOrg, who were forced to have abortions so that they could continue in service to the church. We want you to know about Scientology's use of child labor and their gulags. We want you to know about Operation Freakout and Paulette Cooper. We want you to know about Operation Snow White and Scientology's efforts to infiltrate the government of the United States of America. We want you to know about all of these things that have been swept under the rug for far too long.252

The video then set February 10th as the date for their first attempt at merging virtual and physical protest, the birthday of Lisa McPhearson who died under suspicious circumstances in 1995 under the care of the organization.²⁵³

Ten days before the protests would take place, Anonymous released one last video for this event, a Code of Conduct with 22 rules they advised their members to follow in hopes that they would be viewed as a sincere protest group. The rules included complying with orders from law enforcement officials, notifying city officials of their intent to protest, staying on public property to avoid trespassing, organizing in squads rather than acting individually, and making sure to cover one’s face, in addition to prohibiting violence, weapons, alcohol, and vandalism. The video stresses that “the success of the demonstration as a whole hinges on the good behavior of all those who participate.”²⁵⁴ Many of these rules are in alignment with the First Amendment in the United States Bill of Rights, which includes the freedom of speech and assembly, and comply with the American Civil Liberties Union’s general guidelines for demonstrations and protests.²⁵⁵ They are further in alignment with previous Civil Disobedience and peaceful protest tactics such as those utilized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Rather than acting solely for their own pleasure and enjoyment, Anonymous’s video messages and insistence on protesting in accordance with the law seems to indicate a maturation of the hive-mind.

Anonymous’s call to action against the Church of Scientology spread globally: on February 10, protests were held by Anons in more than ninety cities on four continents.²⁵⁶ Though it is estimated that seven thousand protestors were involved, protests in each city

²⁵⁶ Suncoast News.
proceeded largely without incident perhaps due in part to the code of conduct members were instructed to abide by. However, as rules for engaging in online protest have never been outlined or codified, the concurrent virtual protest did not follow such strict behavioral guidelines. This may have been due in part to not physically sharing space with its spectators; there was no crowd of bystanders nor law enforcement in their immediate surroundings. In accordance with their usual prank techniques, members protesting the Church online that day made ominous phone calls to various offices of the Church, sent fake pizza deliveries, and spammed their fax machines and email addresses. Online, they again used their automated reload request application, the Low Orbit Ion Cannon (LOIC),\textsuperscript{257} to take several Scientology websites temporarily offline. According to one security engineer whose company compiles data on internet attacks such as this and was interviewed about this Anonymous’s DDoS attack, their “campaign show[ed] some level of organization...about in the middle of attack sizes...[it was] not just one or two guys hanging out in the university dorms doing this.”\textsuperscript{258} The attacks caused the Church to relocate their website to another server until the actions ceased.

Following the February 10\textsuperscript{th} demonstrations, the Church released a statement filled with unsubstantiated claims which indicated Anonymous had allegedly made 8,139 harassing or threatening phone calls to the church, sent 3.6-million “malicious” e-mails to Scientologists, committed ten acts of vandalism at various churches, made 22 bomb threats, and eight death threats.\textsuperscript{259} One Church based in Clearwater, Florida filed two lawsuits against Anonymous, one for an “injunction of protection against repeat violence” and the other for a restraining order against the group, both of which were denied as the Church was unable to prove a direct

\textsuperscript{257} An arbitrary name, though the “cannon” aspect likens the DDoS attacks to firing cannons.
correlation between Anonymous and the attacks and because they were unable to provide the names of those they believed were involved. Members of Anonymous released a statement following the event stating that “Anonymous would like to condemn any acts of violence, and all threats of violence that may have occurred. They are not the work of Anonymous and Anonymous does not support them in any form,” adding that the “character, demeanor and behavior of the demonstrators themselves” were equally key to the success of the protests as the number of those who participated. Their insistence on good behavior in their earliest physical protests provided the group a foundation of positive reputation so that they would be able to take action again without much complication or pushback from authorities.

Though Anonymous’s request in their Code of Conduct video to keep their faces covered while protesting had at least succeeded in preventing them from being rightfully or wrongfully accused of criminal behavior, their views about concealing their identity online were less defined which has led to very different consequences. The Low Orbit Ion Cannon (LOIC) application did not mask its users’ individual internet protocol (IP) addresses—users “were logged by servers they attacked, and could be found and prosecuted if the attacked site handed the server logs to authorities.” Anonymous researcher Quinn Norton explains that many Anons who used the LOIC application were unaware that they were able to be traced, while some who were aware did not warn the others. This led to the first arrest directly related to Anonymous’ actions, New Jersey teenager Dmitriy Guzner who pled guilty to his involvement in the DDoS attacks. Though he faced incarceration for 12-18 months, Guzner was sentenced to 366 days in prison and two years of probation. Though Guzner’s impairment of a single Church of Scientology

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260 Farley, “Judge Denies Petition by Scientologists to Limit Protest.”
computer\textsuperscript{262} was no more than a minor inconvenience to the Church, his arrest may have perhaps been a warning and certainly a reminder to other Anonymous members that they are traceable and identifiable, even without willingly offering one’s personal information.

Many other members of Anonymous have committed to continue their protests against the institution, with some wishing to remain within accepted legal boundaries of protest. This desire is a significant idea in the development of Anonymous; by using more traditional tactics and forms of protest in conjunction with their digital forms, they have grown from a group likened to hackers and terrorists to a group that could be considered sincere by law enforcement and the media, which could gain them further support in their efforts. Some members spoke with their local law enforcement about receiving permits for demonstrations, while others began an online forum\textsuperscript{263} to discuss news about the Church of Scientology and to discuss and coordinate future protests. The group’s goals have evolved from wishing to completely quash the Church to hoping to expose their fraudulency, their abusive actions against their members, and to have their tax-exempt status revoked. Members of Anonymous across the globe still hold protests against the Church of Scientology;\textsuperscript{264} a group in Montreal gathers every month, regardless of the weather, “to denounce peacefully, the financial and psychological abuses of Scientology.”\textsuperscript{265} An Anonymous group in New York City does the same. While protesting online could conceivably fail to be seen by anyone, protesting in physical, public spaces almost guarantees that they will be seen by other individuals.

Through their actions against the Church of Scientology, Anonymous transformed from an aimless group of hackers to a more defined group of hacktivists with clear goals. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{263} www.whyweprotest.net.
  \item \textsuperscript{264} As of April 2013.
\end{itemize}
merging of Civil and Electronic Civil Disobedience offered the group spectators in both spaces while their insistence on remaining within the boundaries of stated laws of protest gained them supporters, and ultimately a larger membership. This merging also brought their actions firmly within recognized definitions of performance by incorporating physical bodies. Rather than the members only interacting with machines (such as in DDoS attacks), they could interact with each other and with their spectators, giving the actors more identifiable agency in their actions. However, with agency comes responsibility; the discord between actions Anonymous endorsed in the streets and those they permitted online continues to invite confusion and misinterpretation of their goals.

This issue has only been exacerbated by the group’s expansion and inclusion of other hacktivist techniques outside of ECD, as it has become increasingly difficult to ensure each of its members adheres to its principles. McAfee security expert François Paget warns that if the group “continues to accept anyone who signs on to act on their behalf...the entire hacktivist movement may fall victim to an increase in criminalization, as well as to governments fearing that their economic activities and critical infrastructures will be undermined.”

The actions of a few individuals using the Anonymous name could compromise the positive effects Anonymous’ contributions have already made through their performances, as spectators—news outlets, law enforcement, even other Anonymous members—might reasonably associate these actions with the collective even though the majority of its membership is no longer represented in these moments.

Anonymous Occupies Occupy

In response to his 2010 book *The Economic Elite vs. The People of the United States*, journalist David DeGraw established a website to encourage discussion about a platform of

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266 Paget, “Hacktivism,” 32.
economic and legal reform which he called the 99 Percent Movement. Members of Anonymous were drawn to this idea, and attempted to hold physical protests in early 2011 in support of the mission. Perhaps from lack of exposure or preparation time, the protests had exceedingly low attendance. However, Adbusters, an activist magazine not associated with Anonymous, proposed a call to action for the summer of that year for which Anonymous began to spread the word. Their ability to generate exposure to the ensuing Occupy Wall Street movement was Anonymous’s biggest contribution to the protests.

In their IRC channels, Anon members constantly reminded each other to spread the word of the protests. In its first few days, “the established media paid scant attention to the protesters. By contrast, Anonymous ensured that news of the scene in Zuccotti Park went viral.” Using the same methods of information dissemination as they always had, Anons posted “links all over the news comments, YouTube, FaceBook, etc.,” which both spread news of the protests and invited others to join. They encouraged protests to spread across the country, releasing a video which stated that “everyone, everywhere, will be occupying their towns, their capitols, and other public spaces...this is now bigger than you or me. It is about us, a collective 99 percent.”

More videos released under the Anonymous name alerted people of their involvement with and support of the protests, and “garnered media attention from NPR to the Huffington Post to CNNMoney,” even spawning “Department of Homeland Security alerts.”

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268 Huffington Post writer Saki Knafo suggests that Anonymous’s expertise in spreading information virally helped turned OWS into a national movement, while Fast Company journalist Sean Captain similarly suggests that the “real role” of Anonymous in OWS was generating hype.
270 Ibid.
Project Chanology Electronic Civil Disobedience actions, they planned to send black faxes\textsuperscript{273} to the New York Stock Exchange, the Federal Reserve, Goldman Sachs, and the NASDAQ Stock Market.\textsuperscript{274} They announced that they would begin a DDoS attack against the New York Stock Exchange’s website on October 10, though the result was meager in comparison to previous DDoS actions.\textsuperscript{275} These ECD actions were not intended to disrupt the actual infrastructure of these companies, only to bring attention to their mission through interrupting their “inconsequential” websites. According to one Anon, other members he had discussed these actions with did not want to do anything that would bring bad publicity to the movement, like unhinging the NYSE infrastructure which “affects everybody—people’s pensions and savings,” etc.\textsuperscript{276} These recognitions marked a further collective sophistication in the thought processes of Anonymous, who seemed to become more aware of their own place in democratic action. To continue their virtual involvement in the OWS demonstrations, Anonymous yet again created another application to manipulate web data, this time with the intent to bring attention to the protests.

Anonymous had already been using popular social networking websites to call attention to the protests and its grievances. But they found Twitter, a social networking site which only allows users to post 140 characters at a time, to be one of the most helpful sites to disseminate information to masses of people immediately and simultaneously. As a user posts to Twitter, they can include a hashtag next to a topic they are addressing, which Twitter uses to calculate and post what topics are trending, or most popular at any given time. Anonymous, “to help raise

\textsuperscript{273} A document sent through a fax machine which was covered in black, so that the recipient’s fax machine would waste an excessive amount of ink in receiving the document.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid, 5.
\textsuperscript{275} The NYSE noted that their website experienced delays for approximately thirty minutes and was taken offline for only a couple (Captain, “The Real Role of Anonymous,” 8).
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid, 9.
awareness of problems going on in this world and show people that real problems exist outside of ‘Jersey Shore’ and ‘sex,’” created the Universal Rapid Gamma Emitter (URGE) to hijack the trending topics and change them to what they decided to call attention to. They insist that URGE is not a hacking tool, but rather allows them to create and post topics much more quickly. During the OWS protests, they used the program to spread information about keeping the demonstrations peaceful to quell any potential violence.

Throughout the course of the protests, Anons watched, either online or in person, the multiple evictions, arrests, and physical abuse enacted upon Occupiers and sought out ways to combat what they believed were unfair reactions and an injustice to otherwise peaceful protests. In retaliation, Anons reverted back to some of their earliest skills: identifying individuals and collecting as much personal information as possible, a process known as “d0xing.” In perhaps the most exposed occurrence of this action, members of Anonymous released the “phone numbers, addresses, names of relatives, and other personal data of Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna” to PasteBin, an online text storage site accessible to anyone, following his identification by a group of Anonymous members as the officer who sprayed pepper spray in the face of several nonviolent protestors. D0xing was controversial to both Occupiers and other Anons; one Occupier interviewed about the technique explained that their father was a law enforcement officer and that he had received “a lot of death threats” in regards to his actions,

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279 A reference to the documents acquired.
adding that they didn’t “know if his family details should be out there.” Others suggested that protestors call his precinct to complain about his actions—or even him directly.

Anons also d0xed the CEO of Goldman Sachs, Lloyd Blankfein, as they accused the company of “practices that contributed to the economic crisis” which OWS was protesting. In this instance, they released Blankfein’s age, recent addresses, details of past litigations, and registration information for businesses again onto PasteBin. However, the group did not release more sensitive information such as his or the company’s financial data, and did not explain why Blankfein was targeted personally, other than for his affiliation with Goldman Sachs. Following the development of Anonymous from a group largely unconcerned (and perhaps unaware) of the consequences of their actions into a group keenly aware of protest laws and their expressed desire for their grievances to be considered seriously, this action led to questions about Anonymous’s form, since anyone can act under their name.

Since Occupy Wall Street, Anonymous have used their abilities to rapidly spread information as well as their skills in identifying individuals and collecting their personal information in increasingly concentrated—and celebrated—ways, as The Guardian journalist Fruzsina Eordogh explains that “the spooky criminal portrayal of Anonymous has melted from the public consciousness, to be replaced with an image of strangers in pale masks passionate about improving society, one cause at a time.” After Nova Scotian teenager Rehtaeh Parsons

282 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
285 D0xing encompasses releasing any and/or all information members of the group find in their searches. As many Anonymous members are capable of performing this action, the specific pieces of information which are released are not codified; some may release everything they find, while others may only disclose what they feel is relevant.
killed herself in early April 2013 following being allegedly gang raped and bullied, Anonymous once again used Twitter to bring attention to the case, as none of the four teen abusers had been convicted though they had spread “photographic evidence of their alleged crime at Parsons’ school.” Anonymous identified and released the names of the four assailants in mere hours, while their Twitter efforts brought over 100,000 signatures to an online petition to the justice minister of Nova Scotia to reexamine the case. Anonymous then organized a physical protest outside of the Parsons family local police department to bring attention to their cause and gain supporters; all of these actions provoked law enforcement to reinvestigate Parsons’ case.

Eordogh posits that Anonymous’s current strengths lie in their Public Relations tactics and in their ability to swiftly spread information to mobilize activists. I suggest that Anonymous has succeeded in fulfilling Electronic Disturbance Theater member and ECD theorizer Stefan Wray’s vision of a hybridized civil disobedience movement capable of protesting on and offline simultaneously in a mutually beneficial way, garnering more exposure to their causes than virtual or physical protest alone, which has led to swifter justice actions in many cases. However, their refusal of a clearly defined form of organization stands in the way of greater success as a hacktivist group, as the actions of a few individuals acting under their name has the same amount of influence as the actions of its majority. Still, their concurrent use of virtual and physical protest has brought hacktivism and Electronic Civil Disobedience securely within the performance realm as they have placed a sense of importance and urgency onto the liveness of their actions in adding a corporeal presence. While this kind of hybridized performance might relate to other types of digital interactive performance, its unique use of

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287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
bodies, machines, actors, and spectators elicits further investigation within the performance studies field.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Each time I explored a new topic or idea while compiling research for this project, I found that there were still a vast number of areas related to hacktivism which could and should be further investigated. While writing, I developed an interest in several of these areas and had many more questions I would have liked to pursue that did not fit within the range of my primary research question. These questions fall under two broad categories: hacktivism and performance, and the effects of the [non-]structure of Anonymous. Under hacktivism and performance, I am most interested in questions concerning liveness, agency, and identity, particularly regarding the use of automated programs and bots in hacktivist actions. For Anonymous, I would further explore how distinct ways to describe their collective form compare to each other and with how Anonymous actually functions.

In his essay “Virtually Yours,” Herbert Blau asks a simple, yet fundamental question regarding the nature of the internet: what is virtual reality? He explains that “we know very little about its cultural substance and prospects, its possibilities for performance, nor its eventual effect on what we take to be human.”289 The internet is already a space that harbors anxiety regarding agency and identity with issues like identity theft and phishing, but questions concerning these issues will differ if the acts are performed in real time by a person than if they are enacted by a computer application or program which has been designed to perform the specific action without the presence of its creator. The same is true for hacktivist actions. What if a hacktivist develops a faulty program that is destructive beyond his intent? How can we

know his intent? What if the program is launched by someone who has perhaps logged into the developer’s account? Ultimately, how does an internet user’s physical presence or absence affect the liveness of their virtual actions? These are tangled and complex questions which require and deserve careful consideration in order to more fully understand human interaction as it intersects with technology and virtual reality.

The human interaction present in Anonymous can be found both physically and virtually. Because this group has chosen to make use of both spaces to enhance their visibility, I have found that their collective form could at least be described as nomadic, rhizomatic, and as a Temporary Autonomous Zone, though I find the nomadic structure most useful in understanding how the group operates. Deleuze and Guattari posit that “the nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another,” but only “as a consequence and as a factual necessity” as the points are “relays along a trajectory.” Anonymous’s territory, the internet, allows them direct and expedient communication and access to information, enabling them to discover their points: the operations they choose to start. As the Critical Art Ensemble explains, “the voice of the nomadic cultural worker insinuates itself into a given situation at a given moment, only to dissipate in the next.” Finally, their operations/points are chosen because of their trajectory, or their ultimate goal to fight for sociopolitical justice. While this form could surely be used to constitute the “multitude” that Hardt and Negri believe can combat Empire, its implementation through Anonymous should receive further attention both to better comprehend how it is employed, its effects on group members and their targets, and to perhaps predict the efficacy and tenacity of groups employing it.

291 Critical Art Ensemble. Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1996), 49.
APPENDIX A

ANONYMOUS: PROJECT CHANOLOGY VIDEO TRANSCRIPTS

Message to Scientology⁹²

Hello, leaders of Scientology. We are Anonymous.

Over the years, we have been watching you. Your campaigns of misinformation, your suppression of dissent, your litigious nature: all of these things have caught our eye. With the leakage of your latest propaganda video into mainstream circulation, the extent of your malign influence over those who have come to trust you as leaders has been made clear to us. Anonymous has therefore decided that your organization should be destroyed. For the good of your followers, for the good of mankind, and for our own enjoyment, we shall proceed to expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form. We recognize you as serious opponents and do not expect our campaign to be completed in a short time frame. However, you will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic. Your choice of methods, your hypocrisy, and the general artlessness of your organization have sounded its death knell.

You have nowhere to hide because we are everywhere. You will find no recourse in attack because for each of us that falls, ten more will take this place.

We are cognizant of the many who may decry our methods as parallel to those of the Church of Scientology, those who dispose the obvious truth that your organization will use the actions of Anonymous as an example of the persecution of what you have for so long warned your followers. This is acceptable to Anonymous. In fact, it is encouraged. We are your SPs⁹³.

Over time, as we begin to merge our pulse with that of your “Church”, the suppression of your followers will become increasingly difficult to maintain. Believers will become aware that salvation needn’t come at the expense of their livelihood. They will become aware that the stress and the frustration that they feel is not due to us, but a source much closer to them. Yes, we are SPs, but the sum of suppression we could ever muster is eclipsed by that of your own RTC⁹⁴.

Knowledge is free. We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.

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⁹³ Suppressive Person
⁹⁴ Religious Technology Center
Call to Action

It has come to the attention of Anonymous that there are a number of you out there who do not clearly understand what we are or why we have undertaken our present course of action. Contrary to the assumptions of the media, Anonymous is not simply “a group of super hackers.” Anonymous is a collective of individuals united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing, that someone must bring light to the darkness, that someone must open the eyes of a public that has slumbered for far too long.

Among our numbers you will find individuals from all walks of life: lawyers, parents, IT professionals, members of law enforcement, college students, veterinary technicians and more. Anonymous is everyone and everywhere. We have no leaders, no single entity directing us - only the collective outrage of individuals, guiding our hand in the current efforts to bring awareness.

We want you to be aware of the very real dangers of Scientology. We want you to know about the gross human rights violations committed by this cult. We want you to know about Lisa McPhearson. We want you to know about former members of Scientology's private navy, SeaOrg, who were forced to have abortions so that they could continue in service to the church. We want you to know about Scientology's use of child labor and their gulags. We want you to know about Operation Freakout and Paulette Cooper. We want you to know about Operation Snow White and Scientology's efforts to infiltrate the government of the United States of America. We want you to know about all of these things that have been swept under the rug for far too long.

The information is out there. It is yours for the taking. Arm yourself with knowledge.

Be very wary of the 10th of February. Anonymous invites you to join us in an act of solidarity. Anonymous invites you to take up the banner of free speech, of human rights, of family and freedom. Join us in protest outside of Scientology centers worldwide.

We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. We will be heard. Expect us.

Code of Conduct

The following video is intended as a guide for Anonymous preparing to engage in their first real-life public demonstration. It will also provide a refresher for those of you who have experience with this modality of petition. The purpose of the demonstration in a modern, Western society is to convey a message to the public. In keeping with this objective, Anonymous has drafted 22 rules that Anonymous can follow in order to assure Epic Win and no loss of hit points on your part.

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Rule #0:
Rules #1\textsuperscript{297} and #2\textsuperscript{298} of the internet still apply. Your memes are not, at this juncture, something that the real world can appreciate. Although meme speak between fellow Anonymous is acceptable, focus on the target and keep it to a minimum.

Rule #1:
Stay cool.

Rule #2:
Stay cool, especially when harassed. You are an ambassador of Anonymous. Although individuals trying to disrupt your demonstration will get on your nerves, you must not lose your temper. Doing so will harm the protest and tarnish the reputation of Anonymous.

Rule #3:
Comply with the orders of law enforcement officers above all else. Doing otherwise is harmful to the demonstration as a whole and may compromise your performance as a human being. Do not request badge numbers unless you are being treated in a very abusive manner, as doing so will anger officers.

Rule #4:
Notify city officials. Most jurisdictions either have rules about public protests, or would prefer to be notified that they are taking place. Know the rules for your jurisdiction and abide by them.

Rule #5:
Always be across the street from the object being protested.

Rule #6:
In the absence of a road, find another natural barrier between yourself and the target of protest. Doing so will make it more difficult for individuals hostile to your cause to come and harass you.

Rule #7:
Stay on public property. You may be charged for trespassing if you do not.

Rule #8:
No violence.

Rule #9:
No weapons. The demonstration is a peaceful event. Your weapons: you will not need them.

\textsuperscript{297} Rule #1 of the Internet: You do not talk about /b/.
\textsuperscript{298} Rule #2 of the Internet: You do NOT talk about /b/.
Rule #10:
No alcohol or pre-drinking. Violating this rule may easily precipitate a violation of rules 1 and 2.

Rule #11:
No graffiti, destruction, or vandalism.

Rule #12:
If you want to do something stupid, pick another day. These should be self-explanatory. Violation of these rules during a demonstration will tarnish the reputation of Anonymous, harm the demonstration itself and leave you vulnerable to attention from law enforcement.

Rule #13:
Anonymous is legion. Never be alone. Isolation during a protest marks you as a target for handlers who wish to provoke an angry reaction from you and other hostiles. In keeping with this principle...

Rule #14:
Organize in squads of 10 to 15 people.

Rule #15:
One or two megaphones per squad. A megaphone is helpful for maintaining the overall cohesion of a demonstration and spreading your message. However, too many will confuse the public and render your hearing impaired.

Rule #16:
Know the dress code. Forming a loose yet reasonable dress code for protest members will help to maintain cohesion and get the public to take you seriously.

Rule #17:
Cover your face. This will prevent your identification from videos taken by hostiles, other protesters or security. Use scarves, hats and sunglasses. Masks are not necessary, and donning them in the context of a public demonstration is forbidden in some jurisdictions.

Rule #18:
Bring water.

Rule #19:
Wear good shoes. Following these rules will assure your comfort during the demonstration. Keep in mind that demonstrations may often be quite lengthy.
Rule #20:
Signs, fliers, and phrases. Have yours ready. Make sure that signs are large enough to read. Also ensure that the text on your signs and your phrases are pertinent to the target of the protest.

Rule #21:
Prepare legible, uncomplicated and accurate flyers to hand out to those who wish to know more regarding the motivations behind your actions.

Rule #22:
Document the demonstration. Videos and pictures of the event may be used to corroborate your side of the story if law enforcement get involved. Furthermore, posting images and videos of your heroic actions all over the internet is bound to generate Win, exhorting other Anonymous to follow your glorious example.

If you follow these simple rules, the success of your action is virtually assured. However, keep in mind that the success of the demonstration as a whole hinges on the good behavior of all those who participate. Ignore these rules at your own peril. Follow them, and victory will be yours. We are Anonymous. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Shannon Hurst received a BA degree in both English Literature and Music from Florida State University in 2009. She is working towards receiving her MA degree in Theatre Studies from Florida State University in the fall of 2013. Upon graduating, she plans to review possibilities for further education in Theatre or a related field.