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Submission Date: May 10th 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Janice Denegri-Knott for her encouragement and guidance. I am grateful for having had such an inspirational tutor who motivated me to strive to learn more.

Secondly, I would like to thank new media curator Anne Roquigny for being such an inspirational career woman and friend. I would also like to thank to the amazing participants for their time and for their eye-opening views of the world.

A special mention to my family and to Raphaël, who have been great motivational sources during the past few months.

ART HACKTIVISM AS A FORM OF CONSUMER

RESISTANCE

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, marketing and consumer research texts have accorded significant attention to consumer resistance as scholars recognise the diversity of approaches that can be used in describing this phenomenon (Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Hoy, 2004; Zwick and Dholakia, 2004). This study describes the practice of art hacktivism as a form of resistance within a consumer research context. Drawing on Michel Foucault's model of discursive power, this paper focuses on regimes of practice in order to determine how the circulation of art hacktivism discourse is produced. The regimes of practice are explored through an analysis of practice elements such as knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, projects, rules and teleoaffective dimensions. The preliminary findings highlight an eclectic community whose practices can be defined by using Hardt and Negri's concept of "multitude". As a result, this paper aims to offer a better understanding of the relationship between power and resistance within the art hacktivism discourse.

Key words: art hacktivism, resistance, Foucault, practice, multitude

INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the phenomenon of consumer resistance through the lenses of the discursive power model proposed by Foucault. By using a practice-based approach instead of a focus on subjectivity, this project sheds light on the socio-historical development and the circulation of resistive discourse within the context of art hacktivism.

As consumption plays a central role in contemporary society, consumer movements have “arisen to challenge and transform aspects of it by propagating ideologies of consumption that radicalise mainstream views” (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, p.691). Among the many forms these ideologies of resistance have taken, hacktivism remains a rather controversial topic that has yet to be fully explored.

Hacktivism, a form of tactical media, has developed as a result of people increasingly adopting new media technologies to "resist, talk back to, or otherwise engage with the prevailing culture". In the mainstream culture, it has been associated with a policy of “hacking, phreaking or creating technology to achieve a political or social goal” (Garrett, 2012) with a particular engagement in anti-globalisation, direct action, and resistance” (Von Busch and Palmas, 2006, p.16). In the art scene, hacktivism is a practice combining radical politics, performance art, and technology in order to create "both politically engaged media art projects and aesthetically challenging modes of political mediation" (Dieter, 2011).

Literature on tactical media often describes this type of action through one of the earliest hacktivist projects, the FloodNet project by the Electronic Disturbance Theater, which sprung as a reaction to Mexico's treatment of the Zapatista Movement. The Floodnet website was created so that by accessing it, the website of the Mexican government would be overloaded with thousands of requests, which slowed down or temporary blocked the government server - similar to street protests, but in a virtual space. Moreover, visitors could add in a political message with each page load, to force the government's server to fill their log files with messages like "human rights not

found". Through a creative use of technology, the Electronic Disturbance Theater transformed an error log spamming application into a conceptual Internet art project, which allowed them to express their political concerns directly on the server of the Mexican government.

The FloodNet project highlights the creative use of technology for political purposes, but at the same time, it emphasises its ambiguous nature (Samuel, 2004), as hacking is widely associated with illegal computer intrusion and cyberterrorism, rather than an innovative use of technology (Jordan, 2002). Due to the often illicit tactics accompanying this practice, hacktivism has generally been defined as set of ambiguous activities (Garrett, 2012).

By exploring this ambiguous form of resistance and the practices within the hacktivist community, this paper offers a new way of understanding consumer resistance, through the lenses of the discursive power model proposed by Foucault.

There is an increasing academic attention to consumer resistance (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Wilmott, 1992; Burton, 2001; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Peñaloza and Price, 1993; Holt, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002), which provides examples of various consumer movements.

The existing theoretical frameworks of consumer resistance, are divided, as Denegri-Knott et al. (2006) suggests, into three main approaches to power : the consumer sovereignty model, which describes consumer resistance occurring in collective forms, such as boycotts (Mikkonen et al., 2011) (Friedman, 1996; Friedman, 1991; Garrett, 1987; Miller and Sturdivant, 1977; Smith, 1990, Nelson, 2002; Moynagh and Worsley, 2002; Pitt et al. , 2002). The second power model proposed by Denegri - Knott et al., 2006 is the cultural power model, which draws on Michel de Certeau's *Practices of Everyday Life* (1984). This model describes consumers as creative and playful agents using subterfuges against corporate players (Abercrombie, 1994, Hebdige, 2000; Peñaloza and Price, 1993), and, since it describes resistance as having a tactical character, it has been widely use to theorise hacktivism and tactical media (Galloway, 2004; Lovink, Garcia, 1997; Cloninger, 2009), The third model described by Denegri-Knott et al. is the Foucauldian discursive

power model, offers an account of how power establishes discourses and produces subjectivities. Consumer researchers have been generally engaged with the discursive model of power in order to describe the genesis of consumer subjectivities and different representations (Bauman, 1988; Ewen, 1976; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). However, genealogical Foucauldian studies exploring practices of consumer resistance operating within existing discourses and ways in which existing fields of action are reconstituted are still an exception (Denegri-Knott, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

A Foucauldian practice-based approach allows for a better understanding of the production and reproduction of routine resistive practices, conceptualised as an array of organised constellations of activity in social life which manifest a logic of their own (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Within this framework, art hacktivism provides a compelling case study, as it shows how practices seen by the mainstream culture as dubious and questionable are developed and normalised by its advocates.

Further on, the literature review will define art hacktivism as a discursive form of resistance located within the discursive power model. Then, art hacktivism will be discussed in terms of the Foucauldian regimes of practice, in order to better understand its discursive construction.

HACKTIVISM AS RESISTANCE

Hacktivism, and more broadly, tactical media have emerged as a set of "cheap Do-It-Yourself media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and the expanded forms of distribution (cable, satellite and internet), exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved or excluded by the wider culture" (Garcia, 1997). Garcia argues that what separates the tactical from the mainstream media culture is a refusal of the position of "objectivity", which more than anything separates the tactical from mainstream media culture.

Seen as "politicised interdisciplinary practice" (Critical Art Ensemble, 1996), hacktivism allows for what Critical Art Ensemble call "critical intervention": statements, performances and

actions which can be continually altered in order to meet social demands. Initial hacktivism projects (which mostly took place during the 1990s) implies the intervention, disruption, modifying and repurposing of a dominant semiotic regime, by creating a situation which sets into play signs, messages and narratives so that critical thinking becomes possible (Raley, 2009). Thus, the phenomenon of resistance is rendered "ephemeral and subject to continual morphing" (Raley, 2009), which has lead many scholars to theorise art hacktivism by borrowing from Michel de Certeau's description of consumer action as tactical - more improvisational, playful and adaptable, in comparison with the schematic strategies of producers (Nicotra, 2011).

However, recent criticism suggests that this definition and interpretation of hacktivism as using reverse engineering, open access, collaboration and hacking methods in order to disturb, attack or critique political or corporate power, does not allow for building anything new (Guertin, 2012). Thus, hacktivism cannot sustain itself, and, moreover, it appears as a temporary glitch, which contends itself by merely pointing out a problem and then it disappears (Rossiter, 2006). Using tactics to merely produce criticism is problematic, as Cox (2012) suggests, as "it is partly through its very critique that capital is able to regenerate itself [...] it does not wish to destroy critique, but tame it through subsumption, and in so doing expand its reach to the whole life" (p.107).

Therefore, more recent projects of art hacktivism have been distancing themselves from the tactical element, and have started to envisage "situated software" or "locative media", designed to find alternative approaches, to re-imagine old spaces or problems, invent new viruses or other organisms to do a better job (Guertin, 2012). This evolution of the hacktivism concept can be seen as a result of the fact that "basic traditional models of political activism, class struggle and revolutionary organisation have become outmoded and useless" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.69). Thus, from playful, improvised tactics, hacktivism has been shifting its attention towards creating technology, or hacking into systems in order to create a more sustainable world, with an affect on both digital and physical environments. As Guertin argues, this evolution of hacktivism allows for a resistance against "the biopolitical state of things and new counter-hegemonic devices are

persistently developed in the face of the well-known risk of unpredictable oppressive manipulation" (p.64). An example marking this shift from tactical, critical intervention to more impact-driven activities is the evolution of net art pioneer Heath Bunting's projects. His 2002 *BorderXing Guide* website consisted of re-enacting and documenting walks that traverse national boundaries, without interruption from customs, immigration, or border police. The work represents a commentary on the way in which movement between borders is restricted by governments and associated bureaucracies. More recently though, Heath Bunting's activity has been focused on giving workshops on survival techniques (hunting, making a fire, building a shelter, improvised tools), so that people can out-live the organised crime networks during what he calls "the final crisis".

This change, impact-driven approach is in line with the discursive power model proposed by Denegri-Knott et al. (2006), as it offers a "more integrative and less antagonistic" (p.961) view of resistance, based on Foucault's arguments that domination is inscribed in the power operating in modern discourses, always provoking resistance (Foucault, 1988; Shankar et al., 2006). This suggests that the interactions between consumers and producers co-create and reproduce the market. Thus, the art hacktivist is "never just a passive, docile automaton, subjected and discursively totalised by the practices of disciplinary institutional power" (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006).

The premises of the discursive power model are anchored in the Foucauldian theory that power is not held by anybody and there is no authoritative discourse, but a number of competing discourses which produce different versions of events (Danaher et al., 2000). This approach allows for a legitimization of the art hacktivist as a co-creator of the capitalistic ideology, where capitalism appears as an open structure, subject to rearrangement (Von Busch, Palmas, 2006). This is closely linked to the sociological conception of social interactions, which link power and resistance in a coextensive manner (Roux, 2007; Dahl, 1957; Giddens, 1987), which implies the "insubordination" of a free subject (Foucault, 1982, p. 1056). Here, it is important to note the role Foucault attributes to art in challenging hegemonic ways of seeing and of knowing, and to the "heterodox forms of

practice capable of enunciating the intimate relationship between ethics and aesthetics, individual and social transformation” (Heighton, 2009, p. 620).

Resistance emerges from a set of everyday practices through which the consuming subjects constitute themselves (Foucault, 1988). For the art hacktivists, their projects become the means by which they alter the power relations currently dictated by the establishment. The use of various media enables them to challenge the commonly accepted views of the world (Boyd, 2005). Moreover, an examination of the practices and routines in the art hacktivism community will allow for an analysis of its political impact and the level of involvement with various neoliberal apparatuses.

HACKTIVISM AS A FOUCAULDIAN PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH

Consumer researchers have been generally engaged with the discursive model of power in order to describe the genesis of consumer subjectivities and different representations (Bauman, 1988; Ewen, 1976; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). For Foucault, however, it is not the subject, but the discourse that produces knowledge (Hall, 2001) and therefore, power. Since all social practices have a discursive aspect (Hall, 2001), the subject is constituted through practices that are always “specific to particular social and historical contexts” (O’Leary, 2002, p.111).

An exploration of art hacktivism as a set of discursive practices may produce an insightful account, as for Foucault, practices “possess [...] their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and reason” (Foucault, 1991, p.75). By enquiring their discursive practices, this paper explores the context of art hacktivism as form of consumer resistance and its evolution in time.

He proposes the “regimes of practice”- places of “where what is said and what is done” (Foucault, 1991) - as programmes of conduct, “which have both prescriptive effects regarding what’s to be done and codifying effects - what’s to be known” (Foucault, 1991, p.76). Thus, a study

of regimes of practices in art hacktivism, will allow for an analysis of intended outcomes and the actual impact of these projects.

The regimes of practice are executed through what Foucault (1988) defines as technologies of the self as “techniques which permit individuals to perform [...] a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves [...] and reach a certain type of perfection” (p. 18).

In his studies, Foucault uses two complementary methods of enquiry, archaeology and genealogy in order to study the forms of discourses and their power-related origins (Alvesson and Skölldberg, 2000). However, Foucault’s methods of enquiry are problematic in concretely identifying the institutional means by which the circulation of discourse occurs and the modalities to determine it in particular instances (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005). Also, Foucault’s definition of regimes of practice as “where what is said and what is done” is also a relatively abstract notion in terms of methodology.

In consumption studies, scholars such as Barnett et al. (2005), Clarke et al. (2007) have employed a Foucauldian perspective, “dovetailing at the same time with some more general ideas derived from practice theory” (Halkier et al., 2011). Following the steps of these academicians, a practice-theory approach was adopted, as it allowed for a better understanding of art hacktivism as a form of resistance within a consumer research context.

The definitions of practice offered by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002) as a set of doings and sayings that is “organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules and a teleoaffective structure” (Schatzki, 2001, p.58), namely a “routinized type of behaviour which consists of several interconnected elements: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249–50). The definitions offer concrete areas of exploration, such as knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, rules, projects, and teleoaffective structures.

The exploration of these elements can produce an understanding of how art hacktivism functions within the sphere of consumer resistance, as it analyses the following aspects: their rationale to perform this type of action, the criteria according to which art hacktivism projects are chosen, the level of involvement and the determination to complete a task, potential rules shaping and governing the art hacktivist community and their projects, specific skills necessary to perform this type of resistance, their understanding of the environment they interfere with. Practice theory argues that social structure may constitute a site of resistance and challenge, where certain practices may involve adjustment, interpretation and alteration (Halkier et al., 2011). By using this approach, the research paper investigates the level to which art hacktivists contribute to creation of the dominant system and the political dimension of their activities.

METHODS

The empirical analysis consisted of nine practice-based interviews with a variety of internationally renown artists active in the fields of media art, bio-art, media hacking, net.art, software art, net-based installations and social interface. The interviews, conducted in March 2013, served in documenting and mapping out resistive practices, specifically in terms of knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, rules, projects, and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) within the art hacktivism discourse.

An interpretive practice-based approach was adopted as it offered a more detailed illustration of Foucault's definition of practices as "where what is said and what is done" (Foucault, 1991). The advantage of interpretive practice is that it draws upon the Foucauldian discourse analysis (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005), at the same time offering methodological compatibility with a consumer research investigation. Within the fields of marketing and consumer research, scholars such as Schau et al. (2009), Orlie (2002), Barnett et al. (2005), Magaudda (2011) adhered to an interpretive practice approach to illustrate how individuals embrace and stabilise or change social practices

(Halkier and Jensen, 2011). Thus, by extrapolation, the same method was applied to this particular case, the Foucauldian approach to consumer resistance.

For the purpose of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants, as this form of analysis allows researchers to collect data on the ways in which institutionalised discourses are resisted and contested in everyday discursive practices (Holt, 2002; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). This method has been employed (usually in combination with other methods of data collection) by various advocates of practice theory (Gram-Hanssen, 2010, Magaudda, 2011, Hargreaves, 2011).

Pragmatically, a thematic interview guide was developed according to the areas of explorations as suggested by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002). In addition to this, various materials found online, were studied prior to, during, and after conducting the interviews. These included the participants' personal websites, twenty-seven other websites describing their projects, seven previous interviews, sixteen videos presenting the participants during conferences or performing artistic interventions, three books published by the participants, a book published about the hacktivist duo UBERMORGEN.GOM, as well as the PhD Thesis of Adam Zaretsky. As proposed by Foucault, these materials served as archaeological artefacts, which allowed for a socio-historical exploration of the development of the art hacktivism discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). This was consolidated by an immersive experience in an international community of new media artists, hacktivists and curators, which took place during a year of work experience (2011-2012) in the field of digital art, in Paris, France. This involvement opened access to a varied sample of participants.

Following interpretivist research conventions, the aim was not to attain a statistically representative sample. Instead, with a focus on a diverse sample of participants who are active in different fields of new media art and who are known for hacktivism interventions, four of the participants were contacted after an initial contact in Paris, and six others were selected through a snowball technique. The final sample included artists who are widely appreciated, whose artworks

have been exhibited in prominent art institutions such as Guggenheim, Palais de Tokyo, SFMOMA and Centre Pompidou. Artists such as Steve Kurtz from Critical Art Ensemble, UBERMORGEN.COM, Heath Bunting, Shu Lea Cheang and Paolo Cirio have received prestigious awards, including Ars Electronica, John Lansdown Award for Multimedia, Transmediale. Due to the highly controversial nature of their projects, which in some cases led to the involvement of the FBI (as it was the case with Steve Kurtz), and other juridical polemics (e.g: a 27 minutes CNN “Burden of Proof” debate on the [V]ote Auction project of UBERMORGEN.COM), these artists are regarded as pioneers of the new media art sphere, who have had a substantial influence on the development of the current art movements. Their work has also had a significant contribution to the theorisation of art hacktivism.

INSERT TABLE 1

Overall, nine in-depth interviews were conducted. Due to geographic impediments, the interviews were conducted via Skype, as computer mediated communication is a “practical and cost-efficient way of conducting in-depth interviews” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005). At the request of the participant, one of the interviews was conducted via e-mail. Prompted by the thematic interview guide, the interviews encouraged the participants to describe their practices as art hacktivists, the knowledge around this form of resistance, the rules followed in their artistic processes, as well as the emotional commitment to their projects.

The interviews lasted 30 minutes -1 hour each, and seventeen pages of notes were taken during the interview process. In total the audio recordings produced 6 hours 10 minutes of data, and 67 pages of transcription. One interview was conducted in French, therefore it was summarised instead of producing a full transcript. Seven pictures were provided for the use within the research paper.

The notes and transcripts were analysed through ordinary qualitative coding and categorizing (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), and thus, the key themes were identified. Also, the interpretation of the data was based on a “back and forth” process to relate part of the text (individual spoken) to the whole (the materials available online which relate to a discursive socio-historic development) (de Coverly et al. 2008; Holstein and Gubrium 2005).

Limitations of authorisation, confidentiality, integrity and non-repudiation (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005) were overcome by an initial informative e-mail where the participants agreed to be audio recorded and to be quoted with their full names within the paper. The challenge to transfer the flexibility qualities of face-to-face communication (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005) was reduced by the utilisation of Skype, which permitted an audio-visual form of conversation.

Issues characteristic to an interpretivist approach, such as authenticity, plausibility and criticality (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008) were dealt with on different levels. Thus, bias was reduced by requiring clarifications during the interviews to attain accuracy in the interpretation process. Moreover, the analysis of the data covered all the areas of the thematic interview to ensure that potential emergent themes and findings were not ignored.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Existing literature on consumer resistance drawing on Foucault implies a certain degree of homogeneity regarding the discursive representation, as Foucault’s analysis of power refers to a “disciplinary society [...] of managing, transforming, differentiating, classifying and hierarchizing all deviances” (de Certeau, 1984). However, our data articulated an occurrence challenging the idea of a unitary discourse.

The study of the art hacktivism praxis crystallised an eclectic community of artists whose projects consist of complex, multi-layered forms of creative practices. The analysis of practice elements as proposed by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002) highlighted a high degree of

incongruity. The manifestations of these multiform aspects led to a definition of this eclectic community of artists as what Hardt and Negri (2000) describe as “the multitude”. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of power relations in the modernity, Hardt and Negri (2000) propose the notion of “multitude” as “new figures of resistance are composed through the sequences of the events of struggle” (p.61), who “are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual reconfigurations in the system” (p.60).

The data presented in this study contributes to the existing literature by introducing Hardt and Negri’s concept of multitude in a consumer research context, as the themes presented below continuously reinforce the idea of multitude and lack of unitary discourse.

The data showed that the interviewees had a wide array of activities and an interest in very different fields of action. When describing their practice, most of the participants rejected the denomination of “hacktivist” for their own praxis. In terms of projects, their projects are elaborated as alternatives to the established discourses. Their goals suggest transformation as an act of resistance, whereas their rules of producing and sharing knowledge emphasise the Foucauldian concept of knowledge as a generator of power.

HACKTIVISM IN THE EYES OF THE MULTITUDE

The general understanding of art hacktivism within the community presents no consistence, and thus, the participants resist to being disciplined through the a broad collection of sources of inspiration and by taking an active stand against framing their activities.

When exploring the knowledge revolving around art hacktivism, the participants mentioned a diversity of intellectual influences, as well as a multitude of sources of inspiration ranging from other artistic movements (such as Situationism and détournement), to political manifestos (such as Marxism), to fiction and science fiction, which emphasised a high degree of plurality among the interviewees. This was encapsulated by RYBN.ORG, an extra-disciplinary artistic research platform, which organises conferences in order to share, perpetuate and develop the knowledge and

critique within this sphere. RYBN's goal is to invite individuals from different areas of expertise, such as artists, philosophers, mathematicians and individuals with different political ideologies, in order to produce different articulations of the same discourse. They declare that they enjoy producing tensions between the participants, as they think their arguments are productive. This accentuates Foucault's approach to analysing how knowledge is produced, as he sustains that "discourse [...] is so complex a reality that we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels with different methods" (Foucault, 1973, p.xiv).

Moreover, when asked about how they would define hacktivism related to their practice, all the participants acknowledged hacktivism as being part of their methods, but none of them accepted the denomination of "hactivist".

UBERMORGEN.COM, the controversial artistic duo formed by Lizvix and Hans Bernhard, that Jean Baudrillard described as "hardcore and radical in their actions and [...] extremely strange and highly intelligent people" (2000). They operate within the conceptual art, software art, computer installations, net.art and media hacking. They describe their objection to the term of "hacktivism" to describe their practice:

We like to separate our work from what we see as conventional activist work, which works with certain goals, searching agendas and certain types of objectives. So usually in hacktivism people define what they want to reach or what their goals are, or what their mission is. And in our field, we don't do that.

In the case of UBERMORGEN, we can notice an active rejection of the hacktivist because of the lack of a political goal. This rejection is rather paradoxical, as their projects have had significant political implications, and UBERMORGEN is often described as a classical example of hacktivism. This rejection is also present in the case of RYBN.ORG, who define hacktivism as amplifying a political purpose, whereas in their practice, the political reflection exists across their entire research, but without defining a specific political goal to achieve.

A rejection of the hacktivist denomination also occurs in the case of media artist Paolo Cirio, whose work investigates perception and the creation of cultural, political and economic realities manipulated by modes of control over information's power. Although his work is also considered a classic example of art hacktivism, he argues that he does not necessarily perceives himself as a hacktivist, since he is not an adept of the cyber culture, and he uses the computer strictly as a medium:

I probably don't even see myself as a hacker, I just see myself more as the link between an activist and an artist [...] The reason why I am doing this is because today, it is the right field to work, and engage a wide audience, and put forward effective challenges against the power structures [...] I am concerned about the power of networks and how that influences the contemporary society.

The lack of a coherent philosophy in the case of the participants suggests that hacktivism is a “continually evolving and open process [...] it has no prophet, no gospel and no canonized literature” (metac0m, 2003). Contrary to an initial belief that art hacktivists might reject this denomination because of the fact that hacking is often perceived as an illegal activity, it seems that these artists rather enjoy the ambiguities and the confusion revolving around their practice. Rather, it seems that they refuse to be classified or categorised, which reinforces the Foucauldian idea that resistance emerges as the refusal of discipline, hierarchy and systematization.

These findings contrast other consumer resistance studies, such as the ethnography conducted by Kozinets (2002), which suggests a clear polarisation of the anti-market resistance, with a community adhering to common set of ethics and whose identity is more clearly defined. On the contrary, the art hacktivists taking part in this study appeared as a disparate, difficult to categorise community, reiterating Hardt and Negri's heterogenous multitude.

These differences could also be interpreted as an evolution of the art hacktivism evolution. Usually, hacking is a term connected to the world of computers (Levy, 1984). However, Otto van

Busch and Palmas (2006), argue that more recently, the emphasis has shifted to constructive modification as a central aspect of hacking, making this practice a “modifying culture” (p.29). This is captured by one of the participants, Vesna Manojilovic, an active member of the Incognita Technologia hackerspace in Amsterdam:

There are all kinds of different hackers, who are involved in hardware hacking, in bio-hacking, in the chemistry experiments, in electronics, in doing wood work, in creating art, and it's not just software hacking, just people who write programmes [...] that are going to attack your computer.

This description of hacktivism as a culture of modifying systems is in line with the multitude's characteristics, as they ‘combine and recombine in fluid networks’ (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 202) to exercise “power particularly through symbolic resources, such as by attempting to create new discourses” (Wall, 2007, p. 260-61).

Similar results were obtained in another area of practice suggested by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002), knowledge in the sense of know-how, namely competences and tools. Again, when asked about the competences required in hacktivism, the participants presented different answers, ranging from “being disillusioned” to “being curious” - which suggests that the rationales for their projects also differ, from wanting to improve social aspects imposed by the dominant system and to act as a modern Robin Hood, to fulfil personal desires and curiosities.

When it comes about tools used in their practice, everything can be subject to experimentation, including hacktivism, art, and even life itself (Adam Zaretsky), which can function as different tools or different channels of diffusion. Moreover, these are completely interchangeable, depending on the project. This conceptual abstractionism is captured by RYBN.ORG:

*Art is just a tool that allows us to articulate a discourse at a certain moment. It's a field, where there is a critical discourse [...] we don't really portray ourselves as hacktivists [...]
For us, hacking is simply a tool to produce different revelatory actions or interventions.*

This abstract relativisation in terms of know-how suggests, again, a resistance to categorisation and hierarchisation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000, p.233). Their actions, tools, competences seem to differ from project to project, which suggests that their investment as a revolutionary form corresponds to the shift in the nature of power, which has become nomadic instead of static, constantly modifying its configuration.

Goals

The data showed one fundamental goal for the interviewees, namely to produce transformation, which confirms Otto van Busch and Palmas' theory of hacking as a culture of modification (2006). The interviewees described two potential cases: social change or personal transformation. In Foucault's analysis, social change refers to the production of power through establishing new truths via the production and circulation of knowledge (Danaher et al., 2000). In the second case, personal transformation is what Foucault defines as the ultimate expression of resistance - the ability to change one's own mind (Barker, 1998).

In the case of Paolo Cirio, he defines the adoption of technology as a means of engaging a wide audience, which has as an ultimate goal the production of social change. By criticising certain corporations, his work aims to change existing discourses within the public sphere through information and in some cases, even through social practices:

People often through my artwork, rely on something that they didn't know. So in a way, surely it is informative, definitely, most of my artworks are informative, so people become aware of a problem in a different way. [...] So because of that, they act to change that platform, that technology, the rules. So yeah, sometimes it happens, technically, so there is an artwork, performance [...] that actually changes the reality in a really material way.

In the case of UBERMORGEN personal transformation is a fundamental aspect of their practice:

(Hans Bernard): For me [...] it's about looking at things, developing things that are maybe even unthinkable, or maybe unforeseeable, things that are not obviously to be connected, and

most important, to go where the research leads you [...] That's why I told you we don't like hacktivism, we don't have an objective, we don't have a goal. We don't say "this and this is bad, and now we're gonna do something about it". We say "this and this is happening, there's some merits going into it", and then we go into it, and [...] it leads you to another place [...] And you start to think things that were unthinkable before, and do things that you thought you didn't want to do, or that you couldn't do [...] So for me, it's kind of a religion, it's kind of a faith in science [...] And this is why science and art are completely intertwined.

In this case, we can see that the artistic process attains a revelatory function, which produces a change in the thoughts and the actions of the artist. The goal of his artistic practice is to continuously interrogate established institutions, habits and discourses, rendering possible the connection between art and science. This is also the case of Heath Bunting, who interrogates different aspects of the dominant system through his artworks. Thus, he is able to modify his own beliefs, which, according to Foucault, is the "raison d'être" of the intellectual. Heath asserts that the most radical act of change is changing one's own mind:

[When asked about his mission statement] I remember saying during the past decade that it was to create good questions, but for the next decade it will probably be to skilfully change my mind about the world [...] I think, really, the most radical act is to change your mind.

In analysing Foucault's work, Barker (1998) suggests that "the very possibility of being an intellectual, a revolutionary or a radical is already a consequence of power relations" (p.31), and what intellectuals can do is "focus on the possibility of transforming their own thought and perhaps the thought of others" (p.31). The role of the intellectual is to "re-interrogate the obvious and the assumed, to unsettle habits, ways of thinking and doing, to dissipate accepted familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 30). Thus, the ultimate goal is "not only to arrive at an establishment of truth but also to experience something that permits a change, a transformation of the relationship we have with ourselves and with the world [...] a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge" (Foucault in Faubion, 2000, p. 244).

It is important to note that in other consumer resistance studies adopting either the sovereign consumer model (Nicoulaud, 1987; Swagler, 1994) or the cultural model (Gottdiener, 2000; Ritzer, 1999, Murray and Ozanne, 1991), although resistance is well-defined within an anti-consumption discourse, it does not appear as radical as in this case, and generally, it does not involve acts of self-transformation.

PRODUCING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The concept of knowledge plays an important role in Foucault's work, as it is closely related to the notion of power, "each incites the production of the other" (Barker, 1998, p.25). For Foucault, it is the pursuit and creation of knowledge, which, "by creating norms and standards, helps form a disciplined subject" (Shankar et al., 2006, p. 1017).

Indeed, in the information age, information appears as a vital source which determines the parameters of how life is experienced. Thus, within the collected data, research appears as an empowering apparatus, as it allows the participants to produce knowledge and therefore power, and it also allows them to determine in what areas to perform their interventions. For the multitude, research is necessary in order to determine where to "impose continual reconfigurations in the system" (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Moreover, it is research that renders possible the process of self-transformation.

During the interviews, UBERMORGEN.COM and RYBN.ORG described their artistic practice as "freestyle research", respectively "extra-disciplinary artistic research platform" to emphasise the role of research not only as "technical enquiry, but as cultural creativity and commentary, much like art" (Wilson, 2002, p.3). Candy (2011) argues that this type of creative research "plays a role in documenting the individual creative process and the insights gained from it to [...] influence the ideas and actions of others" (p. 57).

Other artists also described research as an important part of the act of resistance. Steve Kurtz argues:

Hackivism is some sort of enlightenment [...] So it's important, since we're trying to address issues and try to get it right, not to screw up or make the problem worse. We have to actually know about it, and know about it in some detail [...] We can get pretty well informed, in the sense that I think we can insert ourselves in the discourse, or issue, or territory we're working in, and shit right in. [...] So yeah, research is a key part.

Programmer, writer, performer and explorer Martin Howse also describes his projects as emerging from a research-based practice:

Projects tend to be quite open-ended and to flow into and across each other under a certain subject of research, at the same time trying to find wider connections.

Candy (2011) argues that research usually leads "at one end of the spectrum, to better information and, at the other, to new knowledge that challenges existing theories and assumptions" (p. 55). This is closely related to the assertion that "knowledge and power are intimately and productively related" (Barker, 1998, p.25). In a more practical sense, the practices of these artists involve "a process of reflecting on one's actions and learning how to act differently as a result" (Candy, 2011, p.43). Thus, research provides the vehicle for producing knowledge, which further produces social change or self-transformation.

This cycle of research as a site of knowledge, which in turn produces resistive power is well represented by the work of Adam Zaretsky, a bio-artist working as a research affiliate in Arnold Demain's Laboratory for Industrial Microbiology and Fermentation in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Biology. His genetic research is trying to produce knowledge related to the potential existence of "more aesthetic organisms", as "*I want to show how to make transgenic humans by using DIY methods, and [...] if we are able to design perfect babies, I want to be the person who will make them strange, maybe a protest breed of humans*".

The collected data showed that the interviewees also focus on a process of information sharing, by attending a variety of events such as conferences, workshops and lectures. In a Foucauldian terminology, the circulation of knowledge leads to generating truth, and thus, power

(Barker, 1998). Again, in some cases, the participants articulated the process of sharing knowledge with the purpose of producing awareness and societal change, whereas in other instances, these events were related to self-transformation, as it allowed them to exchange information and learn from one another.

Martin Howse describes his practice as a set of individual actions combined with collective encounters where artists and art aficionados can exchange information and knowledge:

So it's more of an ongoing stream of workshops, experiments, meetings, events around certain thematics such as Crystal World, Psychogeophysics, punctuated by periods of more solitary, technical development.

In a Foucauldian interpretation, Martin's statement suggests that for the resistive individual, in order to produce truth and power, knowledge has to circulate and become visible in the public sphere (Barker, 1998, Danaher et al., 2000).

Shu Lea Cheang is one of the pioneers in the new media art scene, who is renown for creatively combining social issues with artistic methods. In her case, one of the fundamental characteristics of her work is creating a sense of sharing and engagement with a wider audience:

My art is trying to build a public interface. I try to use very popular ways to interact with the public, in the sense that maybe I have some work that's more difficult to understand, but a lot of my work is also about presenting it out there,[...] with respect to a majority, I really want to have that interface with the public.

RYBN.ORG comment on the main functional roles fulfilled by the conferences they organise on a regular basis: explaining complex projects which are not easily comprehensible; showing parts of the research process which are not necessarily visible at the surface, but which include relevant details or critiques and being in touch with other members of the new media network of artists, in order to learn about their projects. In describing their activities, emphasises the production and the circulation of knowledge, to create and make public alternative discourses within the system, suggesting a strong connection with the Foucauldian notions of power and resistance.

It is interesting to note that the participants made no specific indications that these encounters might be realised as an effort to create a common ground for these practices or to create a unified theory that would address some of the ambiguities constructed around the hacktivism praxis, which re-articulates the lack of a non-unitary discourse and the preference for an incoherent movement.

PROJECTS

The majority of consumer research projects focus on a view of the resistant consumer either as a sovereign, empowered subject (Moynagh and Worsley, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Pitt et al., 2002), or as culturally opposed (Abercrombie, 1994; Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 2000). But in a Foucauldian analysis, “there is no sovereign, founding subject” (Foucault, 1984, p.50), and moreover, the relationship between power and resistance does not exist as a form of opposition, as there is no one authoritative discourse, institution or group producing events. Indeed, the participants’ various projects seem to serve to the creation of new discourses challenging the existing ones. Rather than trying to obtain control over the system or over certain institutions, their projects appear as dialogical forms, as experiments to create new extensions or different discursive articulations.

An example of such experimental activities is the controversial project [V]ote Auction (2000) realised by UBERMORGEN. During the 2000 presidential election, US voters were given the possibility to auction off their votes to bidders on the Internet by using an online auctioning platform. The cast votes of an entire U.S. state could be sold to the highest bidder, with corresponding portions of the proceeds paid to those selling. Its catchy slogan “Bringing Capitalism and Democracy Closer Together!” suggested the juxtaposition of capital and voting power. Since 13 U.S. states issued restraining orders and injunctions-for alleged illegal vote trading, one may argue that their actions were directly addressed against the U.S. electoral system. However, the artists declared it was an experiment to test the impact of a direct collision between democracy and capitalism.

INSERT PICTURE 1, PICTURE 2, PICTURE 3, PICTURE 4

Thus, by identifying areas of exploration and intervention, the participants are “in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual reconfigurations in the system” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.60). Related to their activity as a multitude, it is important to note that according to the experiment they are conducting, these artists perform their activities either as singularities, or they collaborate with other artists in order to accomplish their project. This phenomenon is captured by bio-artist and tactical media theorist Steve Kurtz: “different nomadic cells [...] [that] would coalesce around a specific problem allowing resistance to originate from many different points; then the team would dissolve” (cited by Galloway, 2004), suggesting that resistance has to adapt to different power forms.

In some of the cases, we can even notice a dialogical form in the power-resistance relationship. For instance, the NAZI~LINE project of UBERMORGEN.COM was a Neo-Nazi re-integration programme funded by companies including Siemens, Bayer, Microsoft and Deutsche Telecom. Something similar occurred in the case of the project Amazon Noir, when the software created to exploit and critique Amazon’s system of providing excerpts of books was eventually bought by the targeted company. This resistive form suggests a Foucauldian attempt for co-creation of the capitalistic system (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006).

The interviews, as well as the analysis of the other materials revealed a great variety of projects, which could be interpreted as a "plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant [...] by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations (Foucault, 1990, p.96).

Although the art hacktivism praxis can be enunciated in various situations and contexts in order to respond to different situations imposed by the dominant system, it fails to address one of the main issues related to the multitude: it cannot describe its actual effects and political dimension, but it idealises the unexploited power of the multitude (Hale and Slaughter, 2005). Since some of

the participants declared that they undertake art hacktivism projects solely with the purpose of personal transformation, it is impossible to determine the revolutionary potential of this form of resistance. Moreover, during the interview, Heath Bunting suggested that "hacktivism could help anti-consumerism through some sort of political action, namely [...] to dignify their end, you know. The best we can hope for is a dignified death of our society. And hacktivists could bring that up".

To summarise, the concept of multitude is continuously reinforced on all the levels of practice throughout the community of art hacktivists, as it is, indeed, "a union which does not in anyway subordinate or erase the radical differences among these singularities" (Fenton, 2008, p.240). This idea is encapsulated by UBERMORGEN.COM:

In this type of art [...] you can just have a description or an idea [...], you can basically collect a whole variety of things under an ethos, you are then free to do whatever the fuck you want, you just have to kind of package it...

As a form of consumer resistance, art hacktivism is a rich, heterogenous practice, but it remains in the impossibility to address the actual political power of the multitude. At best, art hacktivism points towards the possibility of engaging in politics by leading all the elements of life back to a poetic reconstruction (Raley, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the existing consumer research literature by discussing consumer resistance through a Foucauldian discursive practice-based approach. Previous studies concerned with consumer resistance have generally adopted a consumer sovereign (Friedman, 1996,1991; Gueterbock, 2004; John and Klein, 2003; Smith, 1990) or a cultural approach (Goulding and Shankar, 2004; Kozinets et al., 2004; Peñaloza, 2001) as a theoretical framework. Through an analysis of the art hacktivist community in a consumer research context, this study aims to contribute to the discursive tradition on consumer resistance. Moreover, the focus of other discursive model studies has been the construction of subjectivities within the marketplace

(Bauman, 1988; Ewen, 1976; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004); one of the key contribution points of this research paper is the adoption of a practice approach to determine the production and circulation of the art hacktivist discourse. The main findings described an eclectic community presenting complex, multi-layered practices based on the Foucauldian paradigm of knowledge as a generator of power and resistance. The data suggested the absence of a unitary discourse and coherence in terms of practices, which permitted the introduction of Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude (2000) in a consumer research context. However, the analysis of the art hacktivism praxis did not manage to measure the revolutionary potential and the possibilities offered to the multitude.

Further research concerned with postmodern approaches to consumer research could engage with Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude, as this could offer interesting insights on how consumers act as constellations of singularities within modern forms of power. Furthermore, other samples could be used in order to analyse the political power of the multitude. In addition to this, future studies of the community of art hacktivists could produce interesting data in terms of practical implications of consumption practices.

TABLE 1

NAME	OCCUPATION	COUNTRY	WEBSITE
Heath Bunting	net.art, sport-art, contemporary art, activism multi-media art, net-based	UK	http://irational.org/
Shu Lea Cheang	installation, social interface, film production net-art, street- art, video-art,	Taiwan	http://www.mauvaiscontact.info/
Paolo Cirio	software-art, experimental fiction	Italy	http://www.paolocirio.net/
Martin Howse	programmer,	UK	http://www.1010.co.uk/org

Steve Kurtz	writer, explorer performer bio-art, founding member of the performance art group Critical Ensemble, Professor of Art member of Technologia Incognita, Amsterdam installations, performances and interfaces	USA	http://www.critical-art.net/
Vesna Manojilovic		Serbia	http://blogger.xs4all.nl/becha
RYBN.ORG		France	http://rybn.org/
UBERMORGEN.COM	conceptual art, software art, media hacking, net.art and media actionism	Austria	http://www.ubermorgen.com
Adam Zaretsky	bio-art, science	USA	http://www.emutagen.com/

PICTURE 1



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PICTURE 2



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PICTURE 3

DIVISIONS
Archives
Business Programs
Business Filings
Notary Public
Uniform Commercial Code
Elections
Information Technology
Management Services
Political Reform



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State of California

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October 6, 2000

BY E-MAIL TRANSMISSION AND CERTIFIED MAIL

Hans Bernhard
*****gasse ****
Vienna, AU a-10**
AU 43.***.***.***

Re: Criminal Activity by Voteauction.Com

Dear Sir:

This letter is to formally notify you that Voteauction.com is engaged in criminal activity in the State of California.

You are identified by DomainBank.com and media reports as the registrant, administrative, and zone contact as well as the owner of an enterprise known as "Voteauction.com". (see attachments) This enterprise was sold to you by an American citizen, James Baumgartner on August 22, 2000 after he was advised by elections officials in the State of New York that he was engaging in criminal conduct by operating the enterprise to buy and sell votes.

Your website specifically offers to broker the sale and purchase of votes throughout the United States of America and here in the State of California. A "block" of 810 votes is now offered for sale. Such activity is corruption of the voting process in violation of Elections Code sections 18500, 18521, 18522, and 18562 as well as Penal Code section 182, criminal conspiracy. These offenses are felonies that carry a maximum penalty of three years in state prison in California for each violation.

The right to free and fair elections is a cornerstone of American democracy. Any person or entity that tries to sell, does sell, or brokers the sale of votes in California will be pursued with the utmost vigor.

As the Chief Elections Officer of the State of California, I demand that you end this activity immediately. If you continue, you and anyone knowingly working with you may be criminally prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Sincerely,

/s/

BILL JONES
Secretary of State
State of California

"Ensuring the integrity of California's election process"

[Vote-Auction - Letter from the California Secretary of State - Original Document
2000, Ink on Paper US Letter

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PICTURE 4



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