Networked Media Actions as *Hacktions*: Rethinking Resistance(s) in Media Ecologies

Alberto Micali
School of Film and Media, University of Lincoln
amicali@lincoln.ac.uk
Department of Communications, John Cabot University Rome
amicali@johncabot.edu

Abstract
This article attempts to rethink a notion of resistance for contemporary forms of dissent and opposition that are increasingly organised through digital media and networks. Applying a post-human compass on hacking, a processual reading of the hack is implied to propose a movement towards the idea of *hacktions*. Hacktions are networked media actions that involve an aesthetic register of de-subjective creativity, aiming towards systematic disruptions: the active resistances of a media ecological dysfunctionality.

> We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present.
>
> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari[1]

0. Introduction, or the necessary movements

In contemporary societies, digital networks have increasingly become a 'battlefield' where, following the emergence of novel power relations, new forms of resistance have come to the fore. Domination, discipline and power-over have not disappeared, but are aligned by new patterns of anticipatory control, governmentality and machinic enslavement.[2] These are power mechanisms that take advantage of the pervasiveness of media technologies: what might be called, following Nigel Thrift and/or Katherine Hayles, a distributed technological

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[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, transl. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1991]), 108.
[2] On pre-emption see Greg Elemer and Andy Opel, "Surviving the Inevitable Future," *Cultural Studies*, 20 (2006) 4-5: 477-492; and Richard Grusin, *Premediation. Affect and mediality after 9/11* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). On algorithmic governmentality see Antoniette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns, "Gouvernementalité Algorithmique et Perspectives d'Émancipation," *Réseaux*, 177 (2013) 1: 163-196; and "Le Nouveau Pouvoir Statistique," *Multitudes*, 40 (2010) 1: 88-103. On machinic enslavement see Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014).

'unconsciousness' or 'nonconsciousness'.[3] In parallel, political dissent and opposition have been rethought and re-arranged in several ways. Many a time, this rearrangement does not follow the simple use of media as communicational tools, instead deploying them as 'weapons', moving beyond representation and exploiting the performativity of media objects and processes.[4] An example is the forms of dissent that are organised under the 'Anonymous' moniker, which take advantage of the mass distribution and central position, in contemporary societies, of digital media and networks, to carry out a multiplicity of politically-oriented media actions.[5] These media forms do not have communicative aims; they are processes of mediation that act on the distributed materiality of digital networks, disrupting and challenging the hyper-connectivity which contemporary forms of power, many a time, rely on.

It is not within the scope of this paper to shed light on and empirically examine such forms of political dissent that are actualised through digital media and networks. Rather, I am going to focus on some of the theoretical premises that I argue are needed to conceptualise resistance in contemporary network ecologies. The objective is to speculatively push towards the idea of *hacktions*, which I suggest is a key conceptual tool to think about resistance through digital media and networks, within the broader aim of advancing the study of the politics of media dissent. The starting point will be the world of hacking, and in particular 'the hack': the cornerstone of hacker culture. However, I will contend that an approach to the cultures of hacking needs to take seriously in consideration the developments of the field of post-humanities, which imply an anti-anthropocentric conception of culture. On such a line of argument, I will concentrate the understanding of hacking beyond the field of computing, addressing the hack as a material intervention capable of reaching disruptive points of abstraction. The hack possesses a creational attitude that must be acknowledged in motion: in the processes it is capable of actualising. The conceptualisation of media actions of resistance as *hacktions* precisely seeks to comprehend how hacking media practices can, or cannot, originate resistant disruptions by processually and relationally involving human practitioners, media objects and possible material dysfunctions amongst many – which means always implying nonlinear interactions and processes of co-emergence. Within hacktions – I propose – resistance to domination implies active forces that ethologically entangle the materiality of various bodies, having an affective aesthetics that is capable of triggering certain tendencies of media disruptiveness.

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[3] See Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (London: Sage, 2005) and Katherine N. Hayles "Traumas of Code," *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2006): 136-157.

[4] See Alberto Micali, "Hacktivism and the Heterogeneity of Resistance in Digital Cultures" (PhD diss., University of Lincoln, 2016).

[5] See Gabriella E. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy. The Many Faces of Anonymous* (London & New York: Verso, 2014).

1. Moving from the hack: a view on post-humanities

> Mythologized in an elaborate oral and written tradition, the ideal of the hack suffuses the hacker culture. It embodies shared values and passions. And, of course, it is the centerpiece of hacker rituals.
>
> Sherry Turkle[6]

> To hack is to abstract. To abstract is to produce the plane upon which different things may enter into relation. It is to produce the names and numbers, the locations and trajectories of those things. It is to produce kinds of relations, and relations of relations, into which things may enter.
>
> McKenzie Wark[7]

Hacker culture has been at the centre of intellectual and militant reflections during the phase of mass expansion of the internet.[8] Particularly, between the millennium turn and the emergence of commercial, social networking platforms, several scholarly publications focused on hacking as an ethical, practical and theoretical opportunity to reimagine societal relationships and reorganise the social conflict within the networking paradigm.[9] Many critical accounts addressed their reflections to the political promises of digital networks, emphasising the political potential of hacking. Without entering into the details of all these various positions, their main concerns with regard to the "idea of hacker culture" have been summarised by Patrice Riemens.[10] According to Riemens, hackers were often "[t]ransformed into role-models as effective resistance fighters against 'the system'": a leading oppositional force within so-called 'digital resistance'.[11] Nevertheless, the politics of hacking are far from homogeneous. As Gabriella Coleman points out, a wide diversity characterises

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[6] Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2005 [1984]), 211.

[7] McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge: MA – London: Harvard University Press, 2004), [083].

[8] About the history of the internet, within longer historical lineages, I follow a commonly adopted division in three main periods: a first phase inaugurated by the military complex (from Arpanet, 1969-1980/90), a second comprising research centres and telematics hobbyists (1980/90-2000), and a third of global diffusion and mass commercialisation (from 2000). See Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[9] See for instance Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* (New York: Random House, 2001), Johan Söderberg, *Hacking Capitalism: The Free and Open Source Software Movement* (London: Routledge, 2008), and McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*.

[10] Patrice Riemens, "Some Thoughts On the Idea of 'Hacker Culture'," *Anarchitexts: Voices from the Global Digital Resistance*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 327.

[11] *Ibid.*, 328.

the multiple aspects, richness and oftentimes controversial politics of hacking.[12] Furthermore, once the almost complete commercialisation of the internet has been reached, the influences of hacker cultures on the politics of media dissent have not extinguished their course. Nowadays, countless phenomena of resistance through digital media and networks still retain their connection to hacker culture, differentiating their forms of actualisation in a multiplicity of arrangements. An instance that I have studied thoroughly elsewhere is the digital actions such as those that are deployed under the 'Anonymous' moniker, which embrace hacking media practices and attitudes, bringing novel resistances to the fore.[13] Despite the widespread diffusion of similar forms of media opposition, the conceptualisation of a possible notion of resistance – an analytical tool that would be constructive for studying and grasping the capability of phenomenon such as Anonymous to be politically effective – is far from being mature.

The first question that needs to be advanced revolves around the idea of hacker culture, and follows the development of post-human thought.[14] 'Post-humanities', in fact, calls into question the same conception of 'hacker culture' as a standard set of social practices, community-based rituals and human habits. As maintained by post-human propositions, cultures are not strictly a human affair and, thus, it is misleading to study them as a complex of social variables that can be extracted or subtracted to reduce their complexity. Cultural expressions are not constituted via an anthropopoietic process that closes on itself and, as such, hacker culture cannot be foreclosed in specific instrumental relations that define human-technological practices, or modes of practising with computing technologies.

In his seminal study on hacker culture, Tim Jordan concludes that hacking poses a "conceptual difficulty", which directly involves the determinisms that for long time influenced the study of culture.[15] According to Jordan, hacking implies at its hart a "dynamic and mutual determination between society and technology".[16] Moving from Jordan's suggestion towards the field of post-humanities, it is key to recognise that determinisms are well rooted in humanist conceptions and, particularly, support dichotomic readings (such as the one that separates non-human animals from human ones, the latter from technologies, or nature from culture, as antinomic poles) – interpretations that intensely characterise

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[12] Gabriella E. Coleman, *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[13] See Micali, *op. cit.*
[14] See Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1999); Roberto Marchesini, *Post-Human. Verso nuovi modelli di esistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
[15] Tim Jordan, *Hacking* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 134.
[16] *Ibid.*, 140.

anthropocentred epistemologies.[17] The two determinisms that signed the progression of media and cultural studies during the 1960s and '70s carried on a perspective grounded on dichotomies – even though they fostered diametrically opposite positions.[18] Whether society is conceptualised as shaping technology or – conversely – the latter as influencing and modifying the social tissue, technologies are invariably characterised as being dualistically something else: 'separated' technical objects, whose content can be analysed to assess their cultural impact – or, contrariwise, which instrumental prosthetic involvement can be studied as part of the progression of the human-animal. Similarly, hacker cultures have for long time been delimited to distinct social groups, which could be examined by reflecting upon instrumental relationships to computing technologies.[19]

Proceeding with a post-human compass on hacking, I suggest that attention must first be given to the *hack* in order to rethink the concept of resistance for contemporary forms of digital media dissent. The hack, in fact, is a material gesture used by many scholars to approach hacking and thus stands at the core of the relations between knowledge and technics.[20] Hence, the hack seems to express the potential of relationality of human-technological assemblages:[21] a

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[17] The term 'humanism' delineates a long and not isolated line of thought that proceeds across the long course of Western metaphysics. This line moves from the ancient Greeks (the Sophist and Socratics in the Fifth Century BC) through the current that is more often associated with Italian Renaissance (Fourteenth Century AC) and reaches modernity, when the contrasts between applied sciences and religion arose, strengthening the tendency of considering human rational faculties as the leading source of agency. According to Roberto Marchesini, it is thus key to approach the humanist paradigm as not being merely a form of thought which emerged in the Fourteenth Century, but a "disjunctive philosophical coordinate" – which still permeates contemporary reflections. See Roberto Marchesini, *Epifania Animale* (Milan & Udine: Mimesis, 2014), 37.

[18] The writings of two leading figures in the field of media and cultural studies can typify the two positions in question: Raymond Williams being representative of the so called 'Society Shaping Technology' (SST) framework, and Marshall McLuhan of the so called 'technological determinist' position. The former, being chronologically a theoretical response to the latter, characterises the leading trend in the discipline. Without entering into the detail of the many facets that characterise these perspectives, it is possible to distinguish that, for the SST framework, media and culture principally inheres in the social field; while, on the opposite, for the perspectives leaded by McLuhan, technology has its own capability to act on human society, conducing its progression via technical innovations. See Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant and Kieran Kelly (eds.), *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 77-82; Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London & New York: Routledge, 1974); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The extensions of man* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1994 [1964]).

[19] Anthropic self-referentiality is a common trait that traverses all the literature focusing on hacker culture.

[20] Many scholars uses the hack as an analytical entryway into the world of hacking; see for instance Jordan, *op. cit.*; Turkle, *op. cit*; Wark, *op. cit.*

[21] I use the word 'assemblage' here as this is conceptualised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Assemblages are always 'machinic', and are conceived to emphasise the set of connections that exist between heterogeneous elements (bodies, expressions, objects etc.), which momentarily come together, originating novel functions in ensemble. The use of this concept is hardly possible without referencing to the whole theoretical work of Deleuze and Guattari; however, since the

'machinic' relationality that, being crucial to avoid anthropocentred comprehensions of culture, posits – conversely – emphasis on conjunction and reciprocal co-constitutionality and co-emergence.

According to Sherry Turkle, *the hack* is the "Holy Grail" of hacker culture: a "concept that exists independently of the computer".[22] The 'hack' still retains a sort of 'primordial' sense in the computer underground: a creative and original attempt to approach the technological object, 'bending' it towards new objectives, and pushing it towards unforeseen, personal and specific-to-the-situation orientations.[23] The 'hack' is characterised by the ingenuity of the exploration, aimed at shaping the use of the technological artefact, pushing it beyond its limits for novel, not-yet-thought-of applications, and for a use outside the limitations posited by existing rules.[24] Thus, it is a material re-appropriation aimed at unconventional, 'heretical' uses of technological apparatuses, via an abstraction of the actual possibilities pertaining to that specific technology.

Turkle has identified the most essential features of the hack. In particular, she underlines its aesthetic qualities, which are related to a 'magic' allure surrounding it.[25] This is an "aesthetics of technological transparency", which focuses on knowledge and mastery to render what, at first glance, may be considered very complicated into a simple trick.[26] Thus, the *hack* can be summarised by various, distinctive traits. It is an action that seems very simple, yet creates astonishment. Using means that are often considered ordinary in everyday life, it can be sensational, almost spectacular. It is a sophisticated act, a material gesture that requires a deep knowledge, not only of a single technological device, but also of the system in which it is actualised. This mastery originates in the application of the knowledge acquired by an accurate and devoted study of the system in all its parts. Finally, it involves unorthodox uses of

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ontological movement I am following conforms to processual and relational axes, I permit myself to not specify its development. Similarly, the thematic, conceptualisation and development of the 'machine' is a philosophical task that moves throughout the entire work of Deleuze and Guattari. There is not here the space to fully deal with it, but it might be said that the 'machine' breaks with the prosthetic assumption of the subject-object relation between the human-animal and his/her tool; and it does this rupture through the recognition of the processes involving the 'territory' (see footnote 65 below). Within machines, materials are deterritorialised to form novel 'matters', but these do not enter into prosthetic relations (as tools) with a supposed subject. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. B. Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980]); for critical accounts see John Phillips, "Agencement/Assemblage," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006) 2–3: 108–109.

[22] Turkle, *op. cit.*, 207.

[23] In one of the most influential and referenced texts on hacker culture, Steven Levy narrates many anecdotes that reveal the attitude towards curiosity and material application characterising the hack. See Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1984]).

[24] Rules that are technical but, in capitalist society, obviously also legal.

[25] Turkle, *op. cit.*, 208.

[26] *Ibid.*

the apparatuses – pointing towards unpredictable possibilities: virtual points of abstraction.

It is precisely along these lines that the hack, as a material potency of abstraction, is at the centre of the Marxian media theory of McKenzie Wark, who links it to a particular conceptualisation of nature.[27] "The hack expresses the nature of nature as its difference from itself – or at least its difference from its representation. The hack expresses the virtuality of nature and nature as the virtuality of expression".[28] Wark builds his understanding of contemporary culture on the hierarchical overlapping of three different natures, as well as on the continual historical realisation of their virtual abstracting capabilities. With regard to a second nature, one based on labour as a form of emancipation for survival (the material life as already posited by Marx), Wark overlaps the idea of a "third nature". This is a space of information and communication, which creates new necessities, instead of freeing human life from the needs already created by working under the capitalist relation, in the representations created by a second 'natural' class society.[29]

Hacking, then, is central to what Wark characterises as the struggles of third nature. Hackers have, in fact, an interest "in a nature expressing the limitless multiplicity of things".[30] It is upon this multiple potential that the abstracting potency of the hack is based. The key political point for Wark is that the hack is limited via the extension of new rules imposed by a burgeoning dominant class. This is the vectoral class, which follows the capitalist and the pastoralist classes before it, originating novel exploiting conditions which lead (or can virtually lead) to class conflicts. These innovative forms of exploitation are settled by the continual expansion of the institution of property to involve information. Hence, vectoral conflicts still move around the question of property, which consolidates the monopolising class rules over new forces of production – and in particular over the hack.[31]

I suggest it is relevant to maintain the central position of the hack, as an applied material act that is capable of abstracting potentials. However, I put forward, the hack has to be posited less hierarchically and more ecologically within the 'natural' relations originated by forms of power such as those that emerge with the mass distribution of digital networks.[32] For this reason, I keep to one side the

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[27] Wark, *op. cit.*; McKenzie Wark, *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture and Class*, (Cambridge – Malden: MA: Polity Press, 2012).
[28] Wark, *op. cit.*, 2004, 140.
[29] Wark, *op. cit.*, 2004; 2012.
[30] Wark, *op. cit.*, 2004, 152.
[31] Wark, *op. cit.*, 2004; 2012.
[32] With 'ecological', I mean a perspective that implies scalar relationality beyond any form of anthropocentrism, along the line that connects the ideas of Félix Guattari to more recent

dialectic of class opposition (which still resonates in the proposal of Wark) in favour of a more immanent reading of political frontlines, where resistance can become an active force of media intervention. The hack is, here, pushed towards the differentiating multiplicity of *hacktions*, as networked media actions of resistance.[33]

The hack, as discussed, presents features of originality, creative invention and a certain refusal of constraint. Nevertheless, it still maintains a certain position of humanist 'externality' into practically approaching the technological apparatus. Its abstractive potency is surely a matter of invention, and this potency is contingent, since it emerges from the specific situation faced by its practitioner – hence, immanently, involving human and non-human bodies. However, this kind of invention frequently becomes what might be called a 'beloved detachment' from the technological system itself, without being entangled in planes of co-relationality. More crucially, under the material abstractions of the hack, the technical machine is often bent by following a certain 'personal' taste. This means that the hack reaches points of *high efficiency*, even if these points were not assumed to be in the system itself. In this way, the potency of creation (the active origination of new material relations, or its possibility), as well as the emergent, re-actualised instabilities, can easily give life to new stable power formations, as the reorganisation of capitalist exploitation on global networks has historically demonstrated.

My proposal is to qualify 'hacktions' as media actions of resistance by driving this sort of ontology, or better 'onto-epistem-ology' of the hack towards points of *deficiency*; which means avoiding the shifts that also historically allowed its reorganisation within 'transparent', efficient, machinic networks of cooptation. In an attempt to dispute the separation of ontology and epistemology, Karen Barad calls 'onto-epistem-ology' the possibility of "knowing" as "a material practice of engagement" occurring "as part of the world in its differential becoming".[34] To avoid falling back into humanist paradigms it is, in fact, necessary to overcome the binarisms that assume the object of knowledge as

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developments of 'media ecologies'. See Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, transl. I. Pindar & P. Sutton (London & New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 2000 [1989]); Mattew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2005).

[33] The term 'hacktion' comes from Alexandra Samuel, who first introduced it, albeit without conceptualising it. In her study, a hacktion is just another word for politically oriented hacking, or hacktivist media actions. Samuel's work has the value of moving the emphasis from human subjects to the media actions of resistance. However, this emphasis vanishes by following the attempt of foreclosing, reducing and selecting 'hacktions', rather than letting them to express a potential multiplicity of media technological relations. See. Alexandra W. Samuel, "Hacktivism and the Future of Political Participation" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004).

[34] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 89.

separated from the process of knowing – or, similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, theory form practice – equally acknowledging the heterogeneous plurality of becoming.[35] Within her diffractive method of approaching culture beyond the limits of humanist 'reflexivity', the entangled materiality of producing knowledge is for Barad inseparable from its relational performativity.[36] This means, correspondingly, that by pushing forward the hack, I am not presuming to be detached from such a movement. Rather, I attempt to generate a difference, attempting to avoid a hierarchisation between what the hack is and how it can be comprehended, since theorising is always an embodied and material practice; an entangled particle of differential becomings.

Going back to the hack and its prominence within contemporary forms of digital media and network politics, it does not need to be detached from its creative imagination, from the relational aesthetics that imply it. Rather, the hack needs to be appraised within a broader processual philosophical perspective; an outlook accounting for what the hack might become, that is, by reconsidering its capacity of acting as a primer: a triggering, material gesture that can be virtually capable of activating a certain set of resistant tendencies. Media actions of resistance, as hacktions, imply the hack, but differentiate by having the capability of becoming something else: a virtual set of emergent and disruptive relations. For instance, when a database is forced to gain access the hack might originate a data leak, which is not an unconditional consequence, having as well a political potential that is not acknowledgeable in advance. In certain cases – as it happened for hacktions such as the leaks that were 'deployed' under the Anonymous moniker against Italian police in 2012 – the hack became something different, leading to dysfunctional concatenations: novel weapons in the arsenal of digital media resistances, a throttle in always-emergent hacktivist machines that intervene in ongoing political struggles.[37] The hack, as such, has to point towards a certain disruptive criticality, towards a thought of resistance that does not oppose power face-to-face, but that proliferates in continual contingencies, beyond dualist, or dualist-plus-one, dialectical positions.

2. Acts of creation | acts of resistance

> Creating has always been something different from
> communicating. What is important will be perhaps to create

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[35] See Alberto Micali, "How to become war machine, or… a low hacktivist (un)methodology in pieces," *Networking Knowledge* 9 (2015) 1: 1-17.

[36] Barad, *op. cit.*

[37] Here, I am referring to a leak that occurred the 22nd of October 2012 that exposed the modalities, and the controlling mechanisms, through which Italian police (Polizia di Stato) used to destabilise local struggles such as those of the NoTav movement. A more thorough engagement with this and other examples, which can clarify the conceptualisation and application of the concept of hacktions, can be found in Micali, *op. cit.*, 2016.

> some vacuoles of non-communication, some switches, to escape
> from control.
>
> Gilles Deleuze[38]

The concept of resistance does not seem to have a good reputation in contemporary cultural theory. It is a concept that is frequently over-used and abused, typically as the alter ego of power. In a dualistic account, where there is power, resistance – which opposes it – can always be found. Such a conceptual trend is oriented towards analysing and describing resistance as a reactionary disposition. In such a perspective, resistance is a tendency that, by closing on its own defence, keeps its position rather than affirming itself. Additionally, in dialectical reasoning, when resistance does assert itself, launching its decisive attack against power, it will finally fail by taking power's place, becoming its own 'bogeyman': the same 'state' form it was challenging.

Franco Berardi provides a 'theoretical narration' of his encounter with the (Deleuzo) Guattarian conceptual machine, which is more than a classic 'handbook' about the thought of Félix Guattari.[39] His 'tale' begins by dealing with depression. This is a depression brought on by an increasing impossibility for concepts to grasp the dispersive flow of a shared reality, which is in turn increasingly dissolving under the attacks of schizophrenic capital. Having experienced first-hand the movement of 1977 in Bologna as the climax of the explosion of a communitarian and subversive, proliferant desire, the 1980s and what followed would reveal for 'Bifo' the impossibility of political 'journeys' with an equal intensity. This is the depression of an inconceivable political resistance:

> resistance is hopeless, because when you resist you are actually
> defending conceptual configurations that have already lost their grip
> on the world. When you resist, you replace desire with duty, and this
> cannot work if we believe in a kind of creationist process. Resistance
> is the opposite of creationism.[40]

Berardi posits resistance as a gesture of defensive reaction. He regards this form of resistance as the opposite of creation, the latter being engaged with an always-active desire for new 'encounters'. Hence, the matter here involves the possibility of thinking a concept of resistance by being aware of a historical and philosophical perspective that implies and/or frequently suggests the end of this concept, endowing it only with static and retrograde (im)possibilities, negating

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[38] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, transl. by M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 [1972-1990]), 175; translation modified.
[39] Franco Berardi, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography* (Basingstoke – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[40] *Ibid.*, 13.

for it any ascription of creative inventiveness. This is a resistance that is always crushed; on the one hand by a continual capture and recapture by apparatuses of power and, on the other hand, by a (hyper) critical thought which underlines – by amplifying – the reactionary nature of resistant attitudes.

With the objective of reactivating a concept of resistance with a view to employing this for digital media actions, I suggest it is necessary to outline *the active character of the forces moving within hacktions*. For this reason, I will proceed via a discussion of the 'continental' reading of Nietzsche. Moreover, it is on the notion of 'creativity' that I propose the revitalisation of the concept of resistance has to be based. Even though creativity nowadays is the buzzword *par excellence* of capitalist culture, it must be detached from the subjective, individual state chosen for it by politicians, cultural managers and entrepreneurs, who regularly inaugurate new forms of capitalist exploitation around this concept.

First of all, the conceptualisation of hacktions must consider how such emerging processes of mediation are capable of being – or better – 'becoming' *resistant* to, and not supportive of, contemporary forms of power. From such a viewpoint, the question of resistance has been central for a group of French theorists working in the second half of the last century on crucial questions about subjectivation and power. The concept of resistance needs, then, to be questioned, involving what has been already introduced: that is, how to practically think about it in order to revitalise this notion. In particular, the re-reading of Friedrich Nietzsche has played a central role in this branch of continental philosophy.[41]

Following the so-called 'post-structuralist' reading of Nietzsche, the concept of resistance can be read from two opposite directions.[42] On the one hand, there is the notion of resistance to domination. This is an emancipatory resistance, one that directly concerns freedom, and the possibilities of liberation from a power over. On the other hand, resistance can also be the expression of this same

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[41] A summary of the various positions of the many post-structuralist theorists who re-approached Nietzschean thought is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will deal here with various points of this French reading, with the aim of developing a conceptualisation of resistance that can allow the outlining of networked media actions as hacktions. In particular, I will focus on the work of Gilles Deleuze, which temporarily 'opened' the French reading of Nietzsche, and on various texts and interviews present in two collections of his (alone and with other interlocutors) writings. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, transl. by H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 [1962]); *Desert Island and Other Texts 1953-1974*, eds. D. Lapoujade, transl. by M. Taormina (Los Angeles & New York: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]); *Two Regimes of Madness: Text and Interviews 1975-1995*, eds. D. Lapoujade, transl. by A. Hodges and M. Taormina (Los Angeles & New York: Semiotext(e), 2006 [2003]).

[42] David C. Hoy, *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2004).

domination. This is the resistant attempt to stop and limit any liberating efforts: this is the resistance of repression.

In the preface of the American edition of his translated book on Nietzsche, Deleuze identifies the key conceptual concern with the centrality of forces, something he links to the affective thought of Spinoza.[43] Deleuze emphasises that Nietzsche "invented a typology of forces which distinguishes active forces from reactive forces (those which are acted on) and analyzes their various combinations".[44] For Deleuze, Nietzschean thought is a step forward into the affective (and unknown) capacities of bodies as introduced by Spinoza.[45] Nietzsche's thought recognises the presence of equally strong, but this time reacting, reactionary forces.

In these terms, the central question for resistance regards the 'quality', the direction of the forces living and enacting its deployment and its embodied disposition. This, using Nietzschean terminology, involves the 'will to power', 'potency' or power to, that is the differential between the forces in action. Following Deleuze, since "any given thing refers to a state of forces", 'potency' is the element that qualifies this as affirmative or negative: "affirmation" or "negation".[46]

It is worth noting that 'affirmation', in Deleuze's own take on Nietzsche, is not the opposite of negation. Implying the two as being extremes on the same spectrum would mean falling once again into dialectical thinking. Conversely, Deleuze does not define affirmation through negation or opposition, but through multiplication, the joyful playing of differences, that is heterogeneity as the potency of releasing and freeing forces. In summary, crucially for the characterisation of hacktions as media forms of resistance, affirmation does not imply acceptance but *creation*. It is this creative element, as an infra-subjective one, which accompanies the deployment of media actions of resistance. However, before going on to discuss this creative aspect, it is vital to stay focused on resistance in order to highlight what allows Nietzsche – according to the Deleuzian reading – to distinguish between active and reactive forces.

This distinction is decisive, since it specifically involves a possible characterisation, *a posteriori*, of resistance – avoiding, then, its normative presupposition. The difference between the two introduced forms of resistance resides precisely in the quality of the forces that populate them. For Deleuze, this

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[43] Deleuze, *op. cit.*, 2004.
[44] *Ibid.*, 204.
[45] See Gilles Deleuze, *Cosa può un corpo? Lezioni su Spinoza*, 3rd ed., transl. by A. Pardi (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2013).
[46] Deleuze, *op. cit.*, 2004, 205.

'ethological' issue does not mean that the character of the form of resistance has to be questioned with regard to its essence.[47] Questioning the essence of resistance would be enunciated as follow: 'what' is the form of resistance in question? This is a question that does not deal with the disposition of the forces at stake. On the contrary, the value of the Nietzschean 'image' of thought is its capacity to do "away with all 'personalist' references".[48] This permits to avoid any essentialist questioning of the forms of resistance focusing on a 'de-individualised' question of "who".[49] This means that "'[w]ho' does not refer to an individual or person, but to an event, to relational forces in a proposition or a phenomenon, as well as to a genetic relation that determines those forces".[50] Therefore, to distinguish between a resistance to, and a resistance of domination, it will be relevant considering the forces that populate resistant media actions, recognising when the de-individual character of such forces is an active or reactive disposition.

David Hoy proposes a definition of resistance as being 'critical' – critical resistance – to characterise a form of resistance that directly deals with critique.[51] Critique is, in fact, the central element recognised by Deleuze in commenting on Nietzsche's genealogical method.[52] Nietzschean critique is not a reactive, negative mode of inquiry: conversely it is an action, a positive, active gesture, which is counterposed (by differentiation, and not dualistically) to reactive forms such as resentment or revenge.

> Critique is not a re-action of *re-sentiment* but the active expression of an active mode of existence; attack and not revenge, the natural aggression of a way of being, the divine wickedness without which perfection could not be imagined. This way of being is that of the philosopher precisely because he intends to wield the differential element as critic and creator and therefore as a hammer.[53]

'Critique' is the crucial element for an active conceptualisation of resistance. However, I do not agree with Hoy's shift into considering interpretation as an equally relevant matter for critique. Hoy draws together his theory of critical resistance with recourse to Derridean deconstruction, identifying a non-universal notion of interpretation in Nietzsche. Although this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, I nevertheless suggest that critique, according to Deleuze, is already far from being a rational, 'interpretative' matter. As regards a 'mode of

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[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*, 206.
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] Hoy, *op. cit.*
[52] Deleuze, *op. cit.*, 1983.
[53] *Ibid.*, 3; *emphasis in the original*.

existence', critique directly involves an active state of forces, which needs to be understood in affective more than rational terms – but never as an opposition. In this sense, I consider *resistances* (in plural) as being critical in proposing, or better 'disposing', a set of immanent relations that can be qualified as being active *in the potency of the affective qualities* that are, and can be, activated.

Hacktions need to be studied through their processuality, where the being materially situated of hacking practices has to be considered as parts of media resistances, which means without rigidly separating the hack from the possible disruption of hacktions: the hack has the capacity to become hacktion(s). This directly implies an 'ethological' field of study, where resistances can be approached through a de-individualised questioning of the forces at stake in media interventions. Indeed, the distinction, between active and reactive forces, permits to avoid the presumption to outlining media actions *a priori*, through a universalist objectivity. For this reason, the revitalisation of the concept of resistance that I suggest has to implicate critique, as an active recognition of the disposition of the forces populating hacktions. Such a critical resistance does not deal with issues of representation or interpretation, being interested in the relations that might be activated by forms of opposition and dissent on an affective register.

∞ Ethical (and aesthetical) questions: becoming-cosmic, a conclusion

> It might also be better here to speak of a proto-aesthetic paradigm, to emphasise that we are not referring to institutionalised art, to its works manifested in the social field, but to a dimension of creation in a nascent state, perpetually in advance of itself, its power of emergence subsuming the contingency and hazards of activities that bring immaterial Universes into being. A residual horizon of discursive time (time marked by social clocks), a perpetual duration, escapes the alternative of remembering-forgetting and lives with a stupefying intensity, the affect of territorialised subjectivity.
>
> Félix Guattari[54]

The active disposition of forces populating resistance, as it emerged from the last section, involves a field of creation. I have introduced this issue without detailing it by recognising the differentiating nature of affirmation in a context of heterogenesis. This point needs to be specified here, permitting a clearer outlining of hacktions as media actions of resistance in relation to creativity.

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[54] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, transl. by P. Bains and J. Pefanis (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995 [1992]); 101-102.

Indeed, a crucial consideration regarding resistance in its critical and active definition involves ethical questions. According to both David Hoy and Todd May, the ethicality of resistance is a key element for a post-structuralist positing of this concept.[55] Resistance in fact involves, and is in consonance with, a wider framework that fosters ideas such as emancipation or freedom. This problematises the fact that these notions – as empty constructs – can be critically questioned. For this reason, a discussion of the Guattarian ethico-aesthetic paradigm is vital here. In addition, Félix Guattari's paradigmatic positing of ethical and aesthetical questions allows to move the argument in the direction of creativity, due to the emphasis he places on aesthetic ambits in their experimental and non-individual features: territories that are open to plural processes of semiotisation, having the capacity to involve 'cosmic' forces.

According to a rationalist critique, it is possible to question the normative validity of a notion of resistance in accordance with other concepts, such as freedom or emancipation. From a rationalist perspective, for resistance to be valid it has to follow ideals of justice or freedom which can be recognised as universally accepted – think, for instance, about the idea of perpetual peace as suggested by Kant.[56] Even though I have suggested a concept of resistance(s), this can be rationally attacked because of the fragile base of the normative content it may miss. We might call this critique as the 'rule' of the majority, the normative guiding principle that a minoritarian thought attempts to smooth.[57] The fact is that – following Nietzsche and his readers – resistance does not invoke any universalism here. This is why it is important to regard resistance through what Guattari calls an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, one which can dismantle any fascist, humanist and universalist reasoning, inclining instead towards the idea of a sort of cosmic, post-human and 'affecting' creativity.

Guattarian 'ecosophy' is characterised by its emphasis on the necessity of paradigms oriented towards ethical and aesthetical dimensions, which can 'care' about singularities in their exclusive, plural, continual and processual 'differentiation'.[58] Such paradigms can in fact limit the becoming rigid of subjectivities, favouring conversely heterogeneous processes of subjectivation. An analogous paradigm is not ethical in accordance with a superior rationality; it points, on the contrary, to the necessity of virtually setting ethical coordinates,

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[55] Hoy, *op. cit.*; Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

[56] Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003 [1795]).

[57] About the 'minor' see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, transl. by D. Polan (Minneapolis & London: University Of Minnesota Press, 1986 [1975]), esp. ch. 3; Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, transl. by H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987 [1977]).

[58] See Guattari, *op. cit.*, 2000; and Félix Guattari, "Qu'est-ce que l'écosophie?" *Terminal* 56 (1991), 22-23.

frameworks that have yet to come and cannot be universally arranged. This constitutes a sort of 'moving' ethic of the virtual, of the potency of essence in what, following Spinoza and his readers, is an ethological framework.[59] For Guattari, ethics is a question of ecological responsibility for the cosmos, with its vital affective species of corporal and incorporeal constituents. This involves aesthetic dimensions of creation, as a capacity to prompt active forces of resistance.[60]

The dimension of artistic creation possesses, in fact, for Guattari, residuals that are distinctive of societies in which the processes of subjectivation were polysemous, animist and trans-individual.[61] These "societies without writing or state" were in fact characterised by what might be called 'territorialised', or 'not discerning' assemblages of various activities, such as economic, artistic, ritual, magic, religious or other activities.[62] Within such social contexts, the aesthetic dimension was not a separate sphere of individual psychic formation. Art was not a specific activity, 'separated from the context', while forming part of the immanent acting of the socius – a constituent part of social relationships. Thus, the creative dimension of art is capable of recalling the dimensions that Guattari calls of non-structuralised, open and affective semiotisation.[63] The aesthetic ambit therefore, being a field of affects, is an ambit in which *foyers*, nuclei or fires, of resistance endure. These are processual nuclei which can allow re-singularisations and heterogeneses, which are processes of opening towards 'possibles', and not of what might be called 'calcification', standardisation or 'fascistisation' as occurs under the enslavement of aesthesis to the capitalist Signifier – which for Guattari is a universal value that works as a semiotic operator over life flows.[64] It is crucial that these resistant fires are traversed by what Guattari defines as an "aesthetic puissance of feeling".[65] This is, again, the creative potency as a 'power to' that has a privileged – in the sense of active and of possible – position, precisely due to its capability regarding virtual, open and transversal processualities.

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[59] Readers such as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Negri or Braidotti. See for instance Antonio Negri, *L'Anomalia Selvaggia: saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981); Braidotti, *op. cit.*

[60] Guattari, *op. cit.*, 1995; and Guattari, *op. cit.*, 2000.

[61] I am using the past tense here, but it is key to note that Guattari is always careful to underline nonlinear readings of history, since such processes re-emerge within different societies and never characterise a definite historical stage.

[62] Guattari, *op. cit.*, 1995, 101.

[63] It must be highlighted that, by following Guattari, I am always implying a context of semiotic pluralism. See, *Ibid.*; and Lazzarato, *op. cit.*

[64] Guattari, *op. cit.*, 1995; Félix Guattari, *Capitale Mondiale Integrato* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997).

[65] Guattari, *op. cit.*, 1995, 101.

This is how the ambit of creation needs to be thought within the processuality of media actions of resistance, when the hack might become a hacktion, via – what following Deleuze and Guattari might be called – its 'deterritorialisation' and 'reterritorialisation' in disruptive contingencies.[66] The territories that relationally compose and border the material, applied gesture of the hack processually move to originate novel sets of relations, new territories, which will be disorderly and turbulent, rather than highly functional. I suggest the hack needs to be 'reoriented' and pointed towards 'machinic' disruptions, moving to hacktions. If this is not done (both in theory and practice, beyond any dualism), the abstractions capable of being originated by media hacking practices will comfortably terminate in the welcoming hands of apparatuses of capture. Hence, creation cannot be assumed to be an individual state. Creation does in fact constantly re-emerge in processes that are trans-individual, plural and open. *Creativity is not human: it is cosmological.*

To conclude, then, networked media actions as hacktions are resistant since they express the creative capability of 'machinising' certain affections, words, practices and/or involvements, transversally populated by active, and not reactive forces. Hacktions heretically resist the rationality of the state, which would label them as being irrational, criminal and immoral because of their distance from the liberal majoritarian way of doing politics via digital media and networks (post your profile badge, sign the petition, receive your weekly newsletter). These networked media actions are emergent and dysfunctional, they are blossoming events, and their field of intervention is what, with Deleuze and Guattari, can be called a micropolitics 'in-becoming': a plane of action that implies subjectivation as a non-anthropocentred relational process. Creation traverses hacktions, from media hacking as a material practice, to its abstractive potential; a resistant potency that is capable of activating lines that have yet to come, forming disruptive conditions that have not been already thought of nor imagined: a heterogeneity of resistances in media ecologies.

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[66] These terms are correlative, and are conceived by Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the broader thematic of the 'territory', which traverses all their work. The concept of the territory is used in broader terms compared with its usage in Ethology and Ethnology. In the words of Guattari: "Territory is synonymous with appropriation, subjectification closed in on itself. A territory can also be deterritorialised, i.e. open up, to be engaged in lines of flight, and even become self-destructive. Reterritorialisation consists of an attempt to recompose a territory engaged in a process of deterritorialisation". Félix Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, trans. by K. Gotman (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 421.