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Hacktivism as a Model of Agency for Architects: Modulating Forces and Flows of Power

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- Simon Sadler

This thesis first identifies the current conditions of Vietnam, specifically “Hackanoi,” in Vietnam on a macro and micro scale as it pertains to the internet’s physical and virtual infrastructure, and its effect on the political, economic and social spheres. My primary text includes research by Bjorn Surborg in his works, “Is it the ‘Development of Underdevelopment’ All Over Again? Internet Development in Vietnam” and “On-line with the people in line: Internet development and flexible control of the net in Vietnam.”

It then identifies and describes the current state of hacker culture, mainly abstract hacktivism, as it is described and translated in Vietnam. My primary text includes Abstract Hacktivism: The Making of a Hacker Culture by Otto Von Busch and Karl Palmas and Hacker Culture by Douglas Thomas.

From the book, The Situationist City by Simon Sadler, architecture was believed by the influential Situationist International from the 1950s and 70s as “appropriations and alternation of the environment and its space” from which political, economic and social change can be generated.

This thesis claims that architecture is not just merely materialized forms, but also a complex network of virtual flows and forces. It attempts to embrace a computer network-like conceptual model and argues that such a model more closely represents how the world operates in today’s increasingly digitized world (Internet of Things).

This thesis will attempt to materialize and bring attention to the invisible and virtual forces of the internet on the political, economic and social spaces that activate and direct the way for architecture in the contemporary world. The thesis will explore hacking, more specifically “abstract hacktivism “as a model for architects to find ways of being more proactive in the political, economic and social spheres.

This materialization of the invisible and virtual forces will be manifested and explored through drawing as a construction of narrative and spatial interpretation based on Otto Von Busch and Palmas’s concepts of “abstract hacktivism”. The thesis will attempt to bring itself to the real world by using “Hackanoi” as the testing site for the exploration and manifestation of these invisible and virtual forces through drawing.

2. Sadler, Simon. P. 12

Advisor: Brian Lonsway
[The Hypothesis]

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This materialization of the invisible and virtual forces will be manifested and explored through drawing as a construction of narrative and spatial interpretations based in the hackerspace, “Hackanoi”, in Vietnam and on Otto Von Busch and Palmas ‘s book, Abstract Hacktivism: the Making of Hacker Culture.
Hacktivism as a Model of Agency for Architects

What is “Abstract Hacktivism?”

Hacktivism has been associated with the online strategies and tactics of activists that more or less follow the autonomous anarchist tradition - squatters, phreaks, scammers, crackers and cultural jammers who engaged in anti-globalisation, direct action and resistance. Otto Von Busch and Karl Palmas make a radical break in this book by not discussing about jamming and resistance nor about online activity. This text is not about the politics of actual computers, or the use of actual computers in politics. Rather, it is about how the abstract mechanisms enacted in actual computers are adopted elsewhere, in non computer contexts. This implies that new forms of viewing politics, activism, and critique are emerging – even in social settings far removed from actual computer networks.

What is “Hacking?”

“A dialogic is about creating an interface, a platform for performing the act, a somewhat neutral ground (a space that by-passes the dominate existing politic and economic structures). This interface is a thin space or membrane of “inter” an in-between. It is not a line or border dividing as much as uniting. The space is the room ...where different disciplines converge, complement and form an alloy in symbiosis. It itself is an integrating force, as in “intermediality...We as persons have also become in-betweens...whose lives are contractions of at least two perspectives...We are hybrids of many forces. Of global and local, virtual and actual, private and public. They are no longer opposites but merge in conjunctural forms. Being and objects come to exist at the convergence point of flows and forces.”

“The dialogue happens in the in-between, it is the inter-esse between wills and intentions. In the turbulence of forces clashing. Hacking becomes a practice in the middle of it and a low-level tactic, middling between, where modding becomes the materialization of this practice. Mediators as negotiators and explorers of multiplicity of subjectivities. Inserting one into existing movements instead of a point of origin.”

Hacking as “operating at a low level, using existing infrastructure and power of a system to tinker, twist and modulate it after theism own will. Building on the existing system with local patches and modifications...adding small programs to the toolbox and presenting them with a journey on the same stream...bending the flow of power, but keeping the current on.”

[The Argument Structure]

1. This thesis first identifies the current conditions of Vietnam, specifically “Hackanoi” in Hanoi, on a macro and micro scale as it pertains to the internet’s physical and virtual infrastructure, and its effect on the political, economic and social spheres. My primary text includes research by Bjorn Surborg in his works, “Is it the ‘Development of Underdevelopment’ All Over Again? Internet Development in Vietnam” and “On-line with the people in line: Internet development and flexible control of the net in Vietnam.”

2. It then identifies and describes the current state of hacker culture, mainly abstract hacktivism, as it is described in and how that it has translated in Vietnam. My primary text includes Abstract Hacktivism: The Making of a Hacker by Otto Von Busch and Hacker Culture by Douglas Thomas.

3. Through concepts and methods of hacking explored in Abstract Hacktivism: Making of Hacking Culture by Otto Von Busch and Karl Palmas, this thesis will attempt to explore these concepts through drawing as a construction of narrative and spatial interpretations based on “Hackanoi” and on Otto and Von Busch and Palmas ‘s book, Abstract Hacktivism: the Making of Hacker Culture.
[Conditions in Vietnam]

1. It is impossible to understand the internet in Vietnam without talking about the economics and politics within the global setting and within its national boundaries. Economics and politics on the global scale shapes the hierarchical physical infrastructure of the internet. On the national scale, with pressure from the global market, Vietnam’s internet is a mechanism for it’s blooming foreign investments and trade, but a deterrent when it comes to flows on political content that might jeopardize the monopolized power of VCP. This control is done through the configuration of the internet’s infrastructure, software, and physical configuration of internet access and monitoring, specifically in internet cafes.

The internet did not officially start in Vietnam until 1997 when Decree 21/CP on new regulations relating the the management, installation and use of the internet was put into effect to allow fully access to foreign investors and commercial use while controlling information flows that would deals with the political party. All international connections glow through two gateways in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which were operated by Vietnam Data Communication Company. Control over international data traffic was thus given to the government agency responsible for communication infrastructure and interested in its economic proceeds, but restrict any activities that might jeopardize its power.
(Questions for Tom).

Detail Narrative of the implementation of the hackerspace.
What process/procedures did you go through?
What is the current condition now?

What are your short and long term goals for the hackerspace?
What are the challenges that you have to overcome to achieve it?

More about the hacker space:

What events are held in the space? How often?
Who uses the hackerspace? How often

What are you rules you have to follow?
How is the space supported?

2. “cyberpunk” - more complicate and multicultural world. Computers are being used to destroy freedom and autonomy and control over computers is an act of self defense not just power. Hackers of today justify their actions through e claiming that 60s hackers were the keepers of secret who sold out for the corporate word. These hackers consist of white suburban boys who have their own PCs and are challenging authority. Unlike 60s hackers, exploring is considered harmful for hackers today because exploring seemed harmless due to the fact that the culture of secrecy did not take full effect for the 60s hackers.

Information must be distanced through the technology of language, which can range from silence to commodification to patents and copyright to encryption. The notion of the host implies the existence of a guest, a stranger who is met with either a sense of hospitality or; if they come as an enemy, the other is met with hostility. How one determines how the other is met is often a propriety of information - a letter of introduction, a handshake, or a password. The metaphor of the host can also imply a discourse of infection within the the language of computer networks themselves. It gives rise to the notion of the virus. We can see this change happen in culture, economy, politics, theology, military thinking. Often shifting from a top down discipline and discipline and control rigidity to a bottom up perspective of self-organization and collaborative work, an opening of systems. This is a dark contrast to the opposite tendency in society of surveillance, immaterial property and exploitative aspects of global capitalism. In closed world hacking is an expanding a field of action.

2.

1. About 25 million people out of 89 million people in Vietnam partake in circumventing the web by utilizing an alternative domain name server to access Facebook. Hacking has become part of Vietnam’s internet culture. This has allowed for a growing community of political criticism and activist. Fleeting content on the web criticizing a government official one day would disappear a few days later just to make it point.

3. Through concepts and methods of hacking explored in Abstract Hacktivism: Making of Hacking Culture by Otto Von Busch and Karl Palmas, this thesis will attempt to explore these concepts through drawing as a construction of narrative and spatial interpretations based on “Hackanoi” and on Busch and Palmas’ book, Abstract Hacktivism: the Making of a Hacker Culture.
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