

## ISSUE NO. 6

## Hacking the Label: Hacktivism, Race, and Gender

## Leonie Tanczer

**An Interview with the Electronic Disturbance Theatre Members Carmin Karasic and Micha Cárdenas**

*This dialogue is based on a two hour-long online video call I conducted with Carmin Karasic, multimedia artist and founding member of the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT)<sup>[1]</sup> and Micha Cárdenas, transgender new media artist and part of the Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0<sup>[2]</sup>. Both consider themselves hacktivists i.e., politically motivated hackers<sup>[3]</sup> and use technology to facilitate forms of social and political activism. Carmin and Micha have not met prior to the interview. They are part of two different EDT generations, which explains the exceptional dynamic of the conversation.*

*I initiated the interview as a consequence of my current PhD research on hacking and hacktivism. Having previously conducted studies on gender and stereotypes within the Austrian Pirate Party and the general hacktivist scene, it was a great pleasure to talk to EDT members who break with the public perception of all hackers/hacktivism being allegedly “young, white, middle class males.” In this interview, we therefore delve directly into questions on the “Black/White Binary,” race, gender, and art, providing a unique insight onto the experiences of self-identified, female hacktivists.*

*Leonie:* Carmin and Micha, what does hacktivism mean for you?

*Carmin:* For me hacktivism is any form of hacking where you are creating a technology that is set up to achieve a political or social goal.

*Micha:* I think of hacktivism as political hacking and as the combination of technological creativity and imagination with activist campaigns and projects.

*Leonie:* And can you tell me a bit about your involvement in EDT?

*Carmin:* My involvement was basically being the geek-girl. Brett Stalbaum and I were the techies, whereas Ricardo Dominguez and Stefan Wray were the spin-doctors of EDT. While they were responsible for the promotion work, Brett and I were focused on the admin/tech stuff. Brett was responsible for the Java-Script and I did the HTML, the art,

and the – well, I guess you can call it – information architecture for the FloodNet project<sup>[4]</sup>.

*Micha:* I started working with EDT when Ricardo was already teaching at University of California, San Diego (UCSD). This was around 2006-2007. By that point it was already being called Electronic Disturbance Theatre 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab, because Ricardo had the ‘bits atoms neurons and genes lab’ at UCSD. I started working with them on virtual sit-ins, specifically against the Minutemen<sup>[5]</sup>. At this point I was doing tech-stuff like system administration, making HTML and Java-Script for sit-ins and helping promote them. But I became more involved when we started the Transborder Immigrant Tool<sup>[6]</sup> in 2008. I had been doing a lot of border, immigration and freedom of movement activism previously. Thus, they asked me to be the liaison between the activists and the EDT. The project itself was designed to use technology to prevent deaths on the border by making a GPS-map of the water caches placed by the Border Angels and Water Stations Inc., two humanitarian groups in San Diego.



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-8-800px->

[Transborder\\_Immigrant\\_Tool\\_Concept\\_showing\\_working\\_tool\\_and\\_screenshot\\_from\\_Nokia\\_e71.jpg](https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-8-800px-Transborder_Immigrant_Tool_Concept_showing_working_tool_and_screenshot_from_Nokia_e71.jpg))

**Transborder Immigrant Tool** in operation, showing tool and screenshot from same Nokia e71, directing user to a Water Station Inc water cache in the Anza Borrego Desert. Photo by Brett Stalbaum.

*Leonie:* What made you actually start with it? What was the intention or hope?

*Carmin:* I met Ricardo at PORT Navigating Digital Culture<sup>[7]</sup>, which happened at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in the late '90s. Ricardo was one of the artists in the show. After that I got added to his mailing list about the low intensity war against the Zapatistas. A particular email on the Acteal massacre<sup>[8]</sup> in 1997 caught my eye and moved me to action. This event really upset me. Forty-five women and children were killed during a prayer meeting by the Mexican paramilitary, who thought they were working in solidarity with the Zapatistas. As a consequence of this, I approached Ricardo and offered my support. Ricardo knew that I developed an automatic reload batch file for some people in Italy, which is why he suggested that I should work with Brett on the Java applet virtual sit-in, or what would later on become the virtual sit-in.

*Micha:* I had been doing what I would call hacking since I was a teenager. For me, hacking was always political. However, I have heard complaints at hacker meetings, such as the Hacker on Planet Earth conventions, that some talks and keynotes are too political. People try to argue that this is not what hacking is about, that it should be purely about technology, which is absurd to me. Hacking was, for me, always about wresting power back from corporations and governments. This is what really made it attractive to me. I met Ricardo when I was living in San Diego and was doing a lot of Zapatista solidarity work. Ricardo's activism around the Zapatistas really caught my interest and made me want to work with him. Due to my own background, my father is Colombian and I grew up in Miami around so much Latina culture, immigration activism always made sense to me. The direct action approach of virtual sit-ins was very appealing to people I was working with at the time. In 2005, there was this intense urgency when the Minutemen project began. It was a paramilitary group of right-wing extremists who were literally setting up a camp on the US-Mexican border to hunt immigrants. We wanted to do whatever we could to stop them, using the skills available to us.

*Carmin:* I actually want to add a little bit to that. I think it is interesting that you always saw hacking as political. When I started what I consider to be hacking, it was not political to me. It was just changing code. Of course with hacktivism I see the political side of it. But I never really thought of hacking originally as anything political until I started doing it with the EDT. But you are right – in reality it was political. I was taking somebody else's product and I gave it a more social, wider application so that anybody

could use it without any commercial interest. I repurposed a product. So it was actually political. I just did not think of it that way.

*Leonie:* On the basis of this discussion about hacking being political: Has your experience with hacktivism or specifically with EDT changed you and given you new insights?

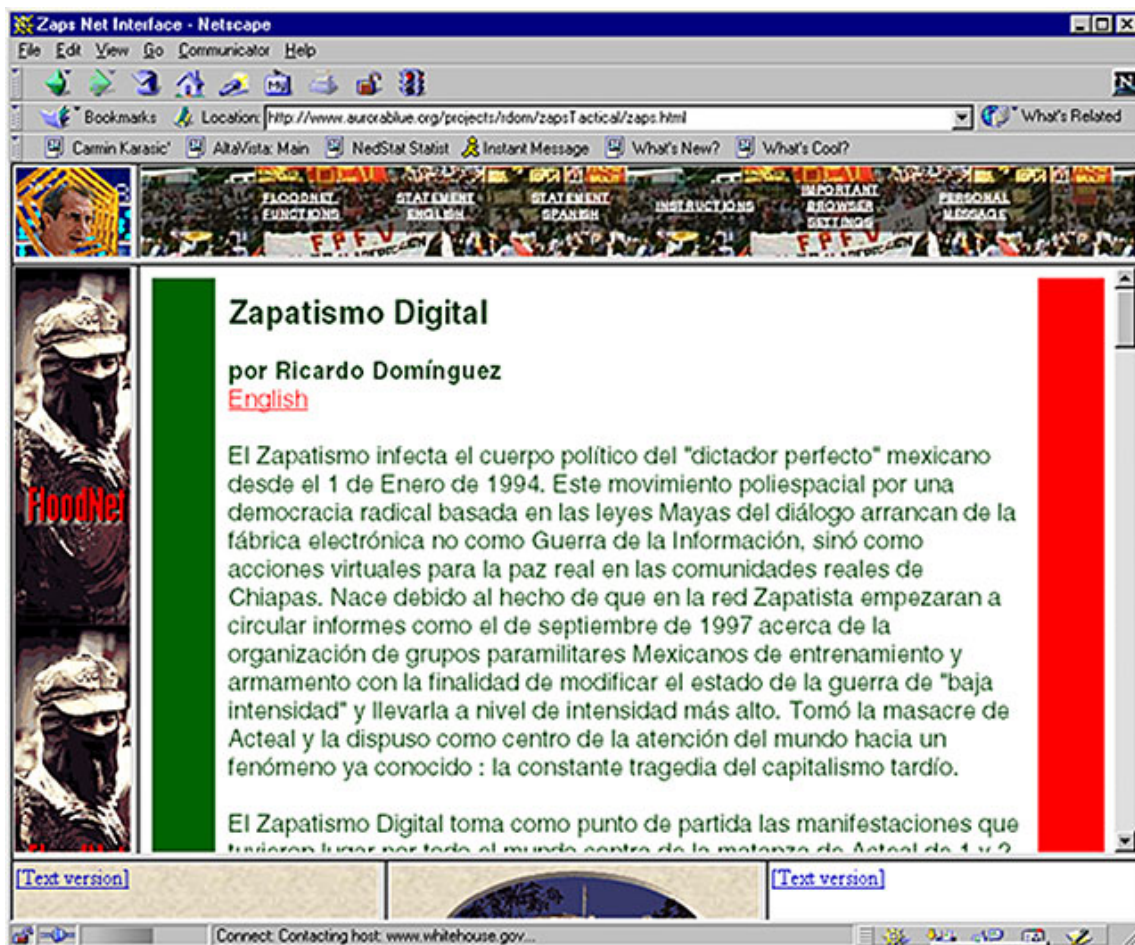
*Micha:* Certainly! I met Ricardo when I was interviewing him for radioActive sanDiego, a web-based community radio collective I worked with that was also rebroadcast on a pirate FM signal. He showed me that I could put together hacking and politics and art, which pretty much changed my life. Before that I thought you had to choose being an artist, a hacker or an activist. It seemed to me like that those were separate things.

*Carmin:* I used to work as an IT manager when I literally just one day decided to quit my job and to become a digital artist. When I went into making art and joined EDT I felt suddenly respected for my tech-skills without having to outperform my colleagues. My race, being a Black woman, and my gender just really did not matter anymore. And the kind of sexism and racism that I was used to in the IT world completely vanished when I crossed into the art world. Now I am not trying to say that there are no issues of race and gender in the art world, but when I compare them for me personally, they basically disappeared. So working in that environment was liberating and wonderful for me and I was anything but the pimply-faced white male that they normally say were the original hacktivists. Another way it changed me is the idea that software like FloodNet can help people who are unable to attend a physical demonstration. It is an opportunity to have a global action using technology. So virtual sit-ins were not only important in solidarity with the Zapatistas, but had an effect much larger than anything I could have imagined at that time. The third way it changed me was that it helped me understand that the hyperreal is actually scarier than reality. For example governments were responding to FloodNet as if it was a real threat to them<sup>[9]</sup>. Even though we are doing something virtual it is being treated as if it is a serious, real attack like a bomb. So that was surprising.

*Leonie:* This links well to the next question where I wanted to ask you what kind of resistance you have experienced as a hacktivist?

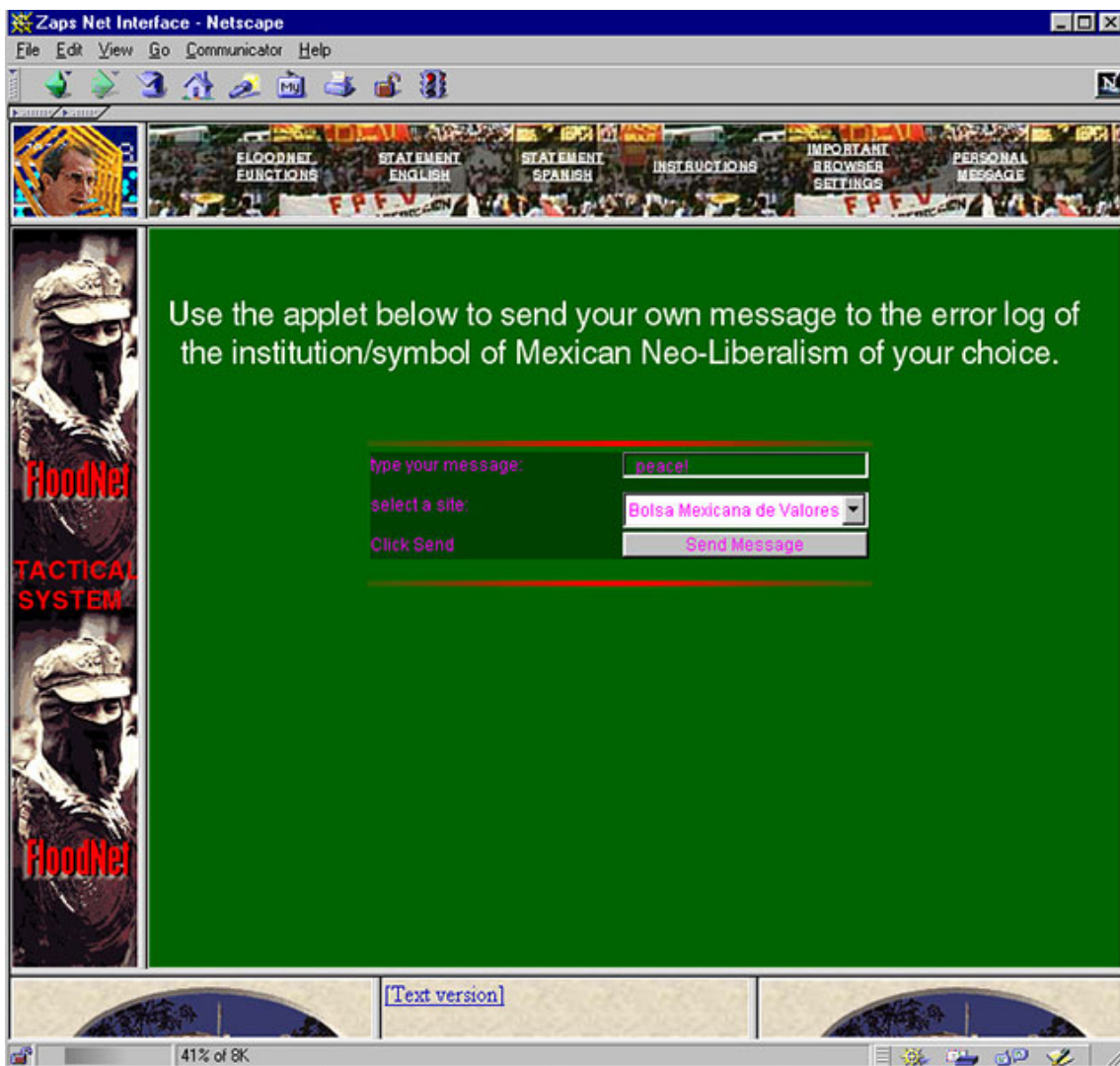
*Carmin:* I guess I could say the countermeasures that I just described were a form of resistance. Additionally we faced resistance from some Dutch hackers when FloodNet was released. These hackers questioned our ‘wimpy’ use of technology. Instead of

slowing down a company's or government's server or website, they would have preferred to close it all together, or to change the text on the website. But that is exactly what we *did not* want to do. We wanted to show that there were thousands of people joining us. The idea of writing one piece of code that would flood a server and cause it to crash was the opposite of our initial goal. They basically saw it as a misuse of technology and could not understand why we were using technology in such a way.



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-4-floodnet.jpg>)





(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-2-peaceMGS.jpg>)

*Micha:* There is one kind of resistance which I said earlier, where I am told at hacker gatherings that hacking should just be about technology and not about being political. I also received transphobic and homophobic comments at hacker conferences. But probably the biggest resistance what we as EDT faced was when we were working on the Transborder Immigrant Tool. The anti-immigration activists were very persistent about sending us hate mail and death threats, often specifically targeting my or Amy's gender presentation or Ricardo's ethnicity. This resistance also came in lots of different forms, such as institutional resistance. When we started the project I was teaching as an adjunct at UCSD, and Ricardo and Brett were both part of the Visual Arts faculty. Three right-wing congressmen wrote a letter to our university to say that we were guilty of the felony of enticing immigrants to cross the US border and that we should be fired. As a consequence we faced three investigations of our work. This was definitely a weapon of bureaucracy used to stop us. Over the course of a year we had to deal with a financial investigation, a campus-police investigation, and a FBI investigation – all at

once. The bureaucracy took up all of our time and was really the biggest form of resistance and actually the most effective one in stopping us temporarily.

*Carmin:* That is really interesting. When we were doing the first FloodNet actions they were not illegal. Hence, there was no way that the right-wing media could have considered us as criminals. I remember the time when the Electronic Frontier Foundation contacted us and said that our actions are actually going to change cyber-laws and probably reduce cyber civil liberties. I certainly did not realise this long-term possibility back then. The only sort of media resistance I encountered was when I got a call from a male journalist from the *New York Times*. He wrote an article and was asking me how FloodNet worked. After my explanation he insisted that this is not how he understood the software to operate. According to him it was allegedly designed to crash websites and he was persistent in knowing it better than me. He then proceeded to write an incorrect article based on his own opinion. I guess he just assumed that since I was a female, I did not know what I was talking about. Moreover, it highlighted to me how the media tried to change FloodNet into something that is much worse than it really was. This is again related to the idea of the hyperreal. The media was sensationalising what we were doing, while in fact all we wanted to do is to bring attention to a particular event or situation. We were not really trying to – you know – bring down companies.

*Leonie:* But despite the resistance, what do you think is the socio-political impact you foresee through hacktivism?

*Carmin:* It goes back to the idea of the far-reaching possibilities. Putting these tools out there makes people aware that they actually have power at their fingertips. To me the possibilities are therefore unlimited. However, I guess the greatest strengths of hacktivism are hybrid-actions. They deal both with the technology and also with people who are active in a physical way. We saw this for example with the Transborder Immigrant Tool, groups of people like Anonymous, and the Occupy Movement. It is people who are using all different kinds of tactics to try to effect social change based on their own believe.

*Micha:* Hacktivism as it started in the 90's was an important precursor to what we see today. More and more activism has evolved through the internet and hybrid actions like the Occupy Movement are using digital networks to mobilise people. But what I think that hacktivism still offers is to point out to people the importance of intervening at the level of infrastructure. This seems actually more important now than ever as digital

networks are becoming a crucial part of people's lives and because infrastructures shape political possibility at present. It is therefore necessary to understand them and to understand the ways we can use them for resistance. Thus, I think what hacktivism did is something really different than physical activism can achieve. Although virtual sit-in is a metaphor for real sit-ins, I think it is really different from sitting around a building. I know this idea makes it easier for people to understand what happens in a virtual sit-in, but I feel that by writing the code, you actually created this space around a virtual building that was not there before. It is not like marching through the street. It is like saying that we are going to create a different street. We are going to create a street that is not even a street, but that is something else altogether that lets us manifest our presence to the institutions being targeted in a new way.

*Carmin:* Yes, Ricardo was talking about 'a digital double'.

*Micha:* Yes! So I think that is something that hacktivism did and continues to do which is different from any other form of activism. It is actually creating new spaces; or creating new possibilities for resistance. Corporations create those possibilities for identities online and hand them to us, but at present they only perpetuate existing systems of power. This is why we need to find other ways of using them.

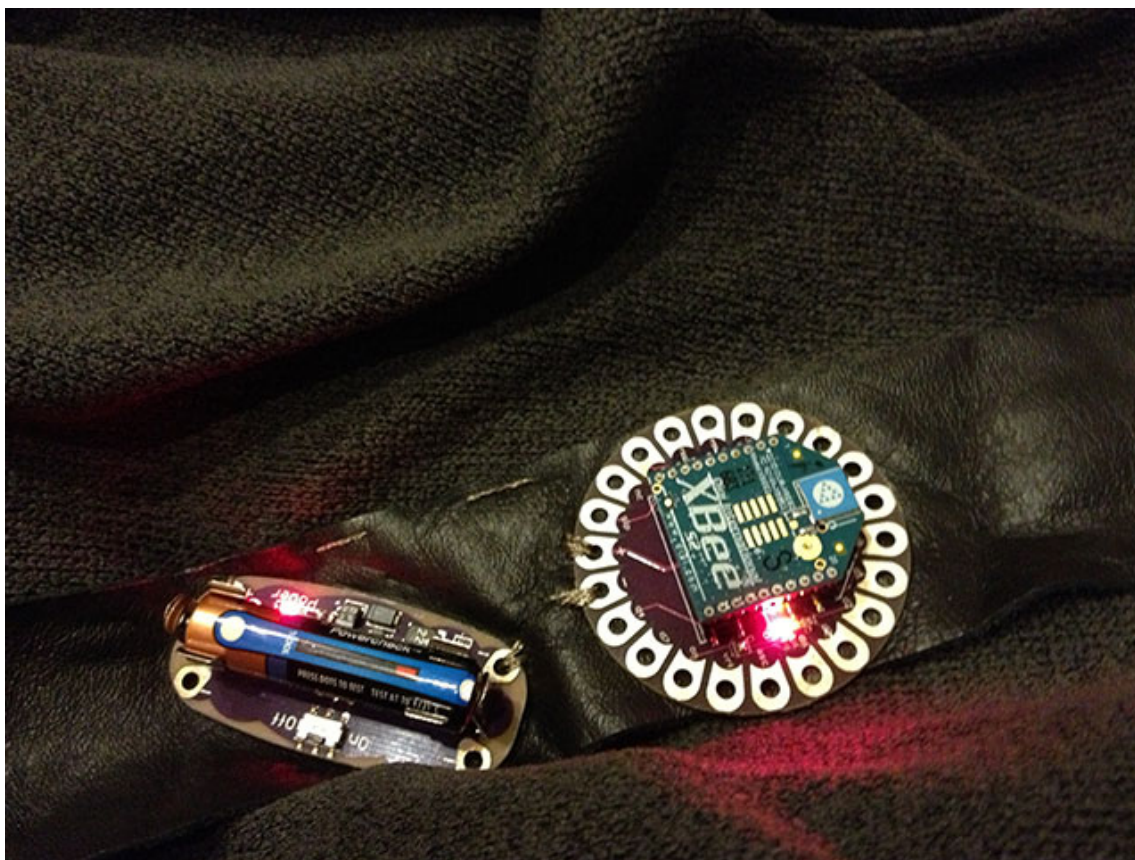
*Leonie:* And are you, and if so, how are you utilizing the internet for e.g., feminist, antiracist or antitransphobic gains or means?

*Carmin:* I am getting ready to work with Holly Eskew on a project with the working title 'Occupy Everything', which is based on the issue of rape on campus. She wants to do a documentary and I will help her to set up a virtual sit-in which is associated with it. The other thing I am working on is with a woman in India. She has two goals, but one of them is to help women who are in labour and might not be able to get help in rural areas of India. We are going to try to figure out a way to come up with a technical solution that will somehow get her help at such a critical point.

*Micha:* Definitely something that I took away from working with the EDT was this idea of 'Science of the Oppressed' by Monique Wittig<sup>[10]</sup>. I see that as a really useful framework for my own work. I start from experiences of violence or marginalisation and then use those experiences to design speculative prototypes for alternative futures or to try to design technologies that might change those situations. I have been working for a couple of years on a project called Local Autonomy Networks, or Autonets<sup>[11]</sup> for short. It actually came very directly out of working on the Transborder Immigrant Tool,



where I felt concerned about the way we were making this technology for some kind of community we were not necessarily a part of. This is why I started to think about making technologies for the safety of myself and my communities, specifically trans women of colour. As I was working at this stage on wearable electronics with wireless transmitters, I came up with the idea to build a line of clothes and accessories that send mesh networked signal if help is needed. However, these would not rely on existing cell phone networks, but on mesh networks which are independent from corporations used to activate community based response to violence, not police. This is due to the fact that trans women and people of colour often do not want to involve the state, because the police are most likely going to create more violence. This is an abolitionist tactic because I do not believe in prisons or putting people in cages, and I am working with other abolitionist people and organisations.



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-9-autonets-electronic-bracelet.jpg>)

**Local Autonomy Networks:** Mesh Networked Bracelet Prototype, by micha cárdenas, 2013

Additionally, I have worked on a project in Bogotá, Columbia, where many people have been disappeared, and the government is suspected of kidnapping and murdering students. However, Cero29<sup>[12]</sup>, the collective I was working with, felt that wearable

electronics were too expensive. To build a strategy for lessening disappearances, we developed a workshop for the local community on non-verbal communication strategies. This idea of verbal communication strategies being a form of technology is working towards a different understanding of technology, different from the Western perception of technology being only about digital technology.



([https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-3-fp\\_ui\\_mcardenas\\_alreadyknow\\_enc13\\_0003.jpg](https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/5-3-fp_ui_mcardenas_alreadyknow_enc13_0003.jpg))

**Autonets: We Already Know and We Don't Yet Know**, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics VIII Encuentro, São Paulo, Brazil, January 2013, with Micha Cárdenas, Alessandra Renzi, Frantz Jerome, Benjamin Lundberg, Lily Mengesha, Aisha Jordan, Joana Fittipaldi and Tomaz Capobanco, photos by Macarena Gomez-Barris

*Leonie*: Do these activities make you a people of colour feminist and hacktivist or even a people of colour feminist hacktivist?

*Carmin*: I have never called myself a feminist. Sometimes when I am thinking about the work that I do, I do not want to look at it as feminist work. I know I did a few minutes ago because I was answering the question, but I would rather do work that helps all people then to do work that isolates a particular group. I understand that there are groups that are oppressed and who would need more attention. Being a Black women, of course I know this. But still I see my work as something I do for people, for other humans, rather than something for women or for people of colour.

*Micha:* At the beginning of my answer I just want to ask Carmin something and see if she has anything to say about it. I think part of the problem with feminism is that it is unqualified if we just say feminism. Then it points to this much longer history of white, cisgendered, middle class feminism that has violently excluded people like me and Carmin for decades. However, I really appreciate bell hooks' definition of feminism which says that feminism is about dismantling and ending all systems of domination<sup>[13]</sup>. So this definition is for all people and maybe Carmin might identify with that one more.

*Carmin:* Yes, I definitely can identify with that one *way* more.

*Micha:* Ok. Now, I am personally interested in developing an idea around trans of colour feminism, partly because of the way that feminists have so violently excluded trans women and women of colour and continue to do so. Women of colour feminism was really the first feminism that resonated with me and made me think that I could actually call myself a feminist. When I read *This Bridge Called My Back* <sup>[14]</sup>, I realised that other women of colour also felt excluded or simply not welcome and ignored from feminism. Yet, I think the issues are really different for trans women and trans women of colour. It is problematic that there are no trans women in women of colour feminist anthologies. This seems to me like a real historical absence. Although there are definitely people like Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>[15]</sup>, who talk about experiences we might describe as transmasculine, but for instance Cherríe Moraga who is one of the main figures of women of colour feminism, has written incredibly transphobic texts. She wrote an article called 'Keeping Queer Queer'<sup>[16]</sup> where she explicitly says that people should not be trans as it is a violation of lesbianhood or being gay. She is thereby reproducing this exclusion of trans people. This is why I am interested in developing trans of colour feminism.

However, I acknowledge that there are problems with the term people of colour as well. It can be used to reduce people's identities to their skin colour, when originally it was a term created in the '70s by Black women to achieve a coalition across skin colour. It was to create a bond between Black women, Latinas, Asians and Indigenous people, all of whom share a history of colonial violence. The initial definition was therefore much broader than skin colour. It was a political identification. But sometimes people tend to make it into a simple thing, or even make it into something biological.

*Leonie:* That is very interesting. Can I just tie on that and ask whether there is a possibility for cross-racial alliance in hacktivism? Have you encountered that?

*Micha:* I feel the idea of activist is overcoded. The media and the government have told us that an activist is somebody who has too many opinions, is angry, holding a sign and you should ignore. That is what I think is useful about hacktivism. It offers a different language and opens possibilities of thinking. But I feel very few people that are doing what I think of as hacktivism would call themselves hacktivists. Kortney Ziegler, for example, has organised these hackathons called Trans Hack<sup>[17]</sup>, specifically for trans people and this is certainly a cross-racial alliance event. But also the Allied Media Conference<sup>[18]</sup> which is a huge national conference in Detroit could be described as hacktivism. They do not use the term, probably because they rely on funding and obviously hacktivism is often thought of as a negative thing, but it is an amazing event that is organised by one Black woman, one Asian woman and one Latina woman and one white guy.

*Carmin:* But wait! I am sort of curious about the question. If I understood it correctly you are asking if hacktivism is multi-racial. Is this what you were asking?

*Leonie:* I was thinking of Cyberfeminism, with the initial idea that in the internet no social categories are salient<sup>[19]</sup>. I was therefore wondering if you think that hacktivism or the online sphere would enable that. Micha just highlighted that feminism was often perceived as being so exclusive to white women, therefore I was asking whether this might be different in the hacktivist sphere.

*Carmin:* To me, hacktivism is not related to any particular gender or race. And the people who say that it is are normally people who are writing about it as supposed to actually doing it.

*Leonie:* Perhaps I can rephrase the question: Do you think that gender, race and other social categories matter online? Or are we in a post-gender, post-racial sphere?

*Carmin:* I certainly remember when I got my very first internet connection back in the '90s I definitely felt no racism and sexism in the text-based chatrooms. Then we got video and I would be the only female in a conversation and people would be like 'Show me your tits'. So obviously sexism came in. However, if you did not turn on the camera, especially with a name like mine, people did not necessarily know I was a female. Nevertheless, when I look at it now, I see it is obviously there. It is like in the physical space. Everything has just kind of moved online and we are faced with it again.

*Micha:* I definitely feel that we are not in some kind of post-racial, post-gender phase. I think all the conditions of possibility for being on the internet are still completely shaped by race and gender. Think of who has access to the internet? It is still mostly people in developed countries and I think it is still mostly straight white men who are encouraged to use technology and are therefore basically funnelled into doing that. Additionally, I also feel that more and more corporations such as Facebook are driving us towards this Western model of having just one identity that is tied to our body and never changes. This is the opposite of the early days of the internet where it was up to your phantasy. You picked whatever name or gender you wanted.

*Leonie:* This is related to the actual Call for Papers which is called 'Hacking the Black-White Binary'. I would therefore like to ask how you interpret this phrase, especially in regard to your own involvement in hacktivism and being part of the people of colour community?

*Carmin:* To me it describes a way of putting the spotlight onto a particular issue. But it goes back to what I was saying earlier, which is that I do not try to label what I am doing. So in some ways the title bothers me a little bit. I do not want to focus on a particular group, because then I have to ignore significant things that are happening elsewhere. I would rather see no labels, and we are recognised for the work that we do, rather than clustering people into different groups.

*Micha:* Carmin, what you are describing is a way of hacking the 'Black-White Binary', because if you want to reject – is this not a way of hacking it?

*Carmin:* Yes, I like that! I am hacking this label.

*Micha:* The idea of 'Hacking the Black-White Binary' seems to me like exploring, subverting or even breaking the dichotomy. Anti-Black racism is real and persists in very serious, violent ways. Among trans women of colour, the number one targets of violence within LGBTQI communities are actually Black trans women in the US. I think that is important to point out. The second group are Latina. This means that there is definitely a racism based on skin colour that very much remains as a source of violence. Therefore I think it is not enough to organise people solely around the idea of people of colour. It establishes a coalition of people which then ignores that Black people are the most common victims. I think it is therefore important for people of colour to still maintain a certain degree of black, non-black binary. This helps to point out that there are specific issues that people of different races face. I am a mixed race,

light skinned person, which provides me at times with a certain degree of white passing privilege. I have therefore definitely a very different experience of racism that is more based on my name, the history of my father's and my diaspora than my skin colour. Having said this I do want to highlight though that I still believe that it is important to organise people of colour. We have a shared history of colonial violence that white people do not have or cannot relate to. The presence of people of colour spaces is therefore a way of hacking the 'White slash Person of Colour Binary'.

*Leonie:* Have you encountered any exclusions or discriminations merely on the basis of your social group in hacktivism?

*Micha:* I think I have already talked about some of the ways that I might have felt excluded based on my social group, such as when receiving transphobic comments at conferences. Yet, I think your question is curious, because it is not like there was some hacktivist group that I was trying to be part of and which would have been like 'No, you cannot come because you are a trans woman'.

*Carmin:* Yes, that is how I feel too.

*Micha:* In fact, I was actually part of this very small group that was started by a person of colour, meaning Ricardo, and he was very welcoming to us. It is therefore almost the opposite experience.

*Leonie:* And do you know of any other examples of people of colour hacker, hacktivist groups or individuals who break the stereotype of the white, male hacker and hacktivist?

*Carmin:* There are several groups. I do not know if I would actually call all of them truly hacker groups, but there are certainly women of colour who I would consider hackers or maker fair women. These are women of colour who are interested in technology and want to work with technology and in that respect 'Hack the Black-White Binary'.

*Micha:* I think the group called Black Girls Code<sup>[20]</sup> is very exciting. Moreover I know of this artist collective Cero29<sup>[21]</sup> in Bogotá, Columbia. There is a group called Empowermentors<sup>[22]</sup> that is specifically for disabled, Queer and trans people of colour who are interested in hacking. Similarly, there is a group in Spain called Quimera Rosa<sup>[23]</sup>.



*Leonie:* Do you think it is actually harder to come up with those groups because there are simply not that many?

*Carmin:* I do not think this is because there are so few, but if you are a hacker group, you are not necessarily promoting yourself as a hacker group. You would not try to get the media to pay attention to you. You are far busier trying to do whatever it is that you are doing. Thus, it is not that they do not exist, but that they are just not that easy to find on Google or by reading a newspaper.

*Micha:* I agree, I do not think there are that many groups promoting themselves as hacktivists either.

*Carmin:* Yes, exactly. But there are other examples, like the China Girl Security Team<sup>[24]</sup>, which is this group of female hackers. Salander<sup>[25]</sup> is a Spanish woman that is trying to eliminate the mafia in her town and change the environment in which she lives. Furthermore there is this indigenous group called Idle No More<sup>[26]</sup> or Cheryl L'Hirondelle<sup>[27]</sup> who created the Native American programming language CREE++ as opposed to C++. This links to the question where and by whom computer languages are created. Lastly, Fatoumata Kande<sup>[28]</sup> is seeking a way to educate Africans, especially women, through science and technology.

*Micha:* Wait! I have more! Ramsey Nasser<sup>[29]</sup> made a programming language in Arabic called قلب to focus on how most programming languages are written in English. The book 'Race after the Internet'<sup>[30]</sup> also mentions the Tribal Digital Village which was a solar wireless internet distribution network in Indian reservations in Southern California. Moreover, refugee and immigrant projects such as No One Is Illegal<sup>[31]</sup> used hacktivism in different ways as well.

*Leonie:* And what do you think actually needs to be done to make activism, and particularly hacktivism, more inclusive?

*Carmin:* More conferences where people of colour can code and working with refugees through people of colour coding workshops. This is something I actually wanted to do since I came to the Netherlands. My interest is based on my grad school project 'Stateless Half Life'<sup>[32]</sup> which was inspired by Edward Said's essay Reflections on Exile and focuses on the idea of diaspora, immigration, refugee traffic and exile.

*Micha:* I have a couple of opinions about this question. For one, I feel the idea to make hacktivism inclusive still centres white people. It has a notion of white people having a party and people of colour are lucky enough to be invited. It is not about being included. It is about people of colour starting their own thing. Additionally, there is a need to broaden of our idea of technology. Focussing on technology as just digital technology is really only looking at this specific Western history. The books 'Race after the Internet'<sup>[33]</sup> and 'Domain Errors! Cyberfeminist Practices'<sup>[34]</sup> highlight that there were many other forms of technologies prior to, and still being developed alongside, digital technology. These were invented by Black people or other people of colour and are basically ignored now or not even thought of as technologies. It is therefore that I was trying to decolonise our idea of technology in the last couple of years. Focussing solely on digital technology means you have to have enough money to have a computer or some kind of device to be a hacker. However, writing science fiction and developing a story about a new technology that you have invented could also be a form of hacking. Working towards affordability of hacks and starting with experiences of marginalisation and violence when designing hacktivist project is important. You should really centre your activities on the concerns of marginalised people. This is important in the conversation about hacking, where hackers often do not like to engage in aspects which are political, because they would be purely interested in technology for its own sake, often as a form of entertainment. They ignore however, that centring your own concerns over others is still a political choice.

*Carmin:* I would completely agree with that. And I would like to add that there is a need to create this body of examples of people who are not fulfilling the stereotype of the straight, white, male hacker. I guess this is also the goal of 'Hacking the Black/White Binary'. All the examples we have provided point to the fact that there are other and more people who are doing this form of activism. I think this is actually really useful. It hopefully inspires people and makes them say 'Oh, I could do that too'.

*Leonie Maria Tanczer*

Leonie Maria Tanczer is PhD Candidate at the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast and Fellow at the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society in Berlin. Her inter-disciplinary PhD investigates the emerging cyber security governance strategies, with a particular focus on hacking and hacktivism. Further research interests include Gender Studies, Online Collective Action, and Science and Technology Studies.

*carmin karasic*

carmin karasic (USA) is an artist based in the Netherlands, where she makes information technology artworks, works as an education consultant, and designs and teaches graduate level online technology courses for Lesley University (USA). She has a BS in Mathematics & Computer Science, an MFA, and IT experience from software developer to senior project manager.

*micha cárdenas*

micha cárdenas is an artist, theorist, student, educator, mixed-race latina femme who works with movement as a technology of change. micha is a Provost Fellow and PhD candidate in Media Arts + Practice (iMAP) at University of Southern California and a member of the art collective Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0.

## —CITATION—

Tanczer, L.M. (2015) Hacking the Label: Hacktivism, Race, and Gender. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No.6. doi:10.7264/N37S7M22

(<http://dx.doi.org/10.7264/N37S7M22>)

This interview has been updated and revised to clarify responses – February 2, 2015.



(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>)

This work is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License** (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) .

## Footnotes ( returns to text)

1. <https://wiki.brown.edu/confluence/display/MarkTribe/Electronic+Disturbance+Theater>  
(<https://wiki.brown.edu/confluence/display/MarkTribe/Electronic+Disturbance+Theater>)
2. <http://bang.transreal.org/> (<http://bang.transreal.org/>)
3. Jordan, T., & Taylor, P. A. (2004). *Hacktivism and cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?*. New York: Routledge.
4. <http://www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ZapTact.html>  
(<http://www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ZapTact.html>)
5. <http://minutemanproject.com/> (<http://minutemanproject.com/>)

6. <http://arteutil.net/2013/04/transborder-immigrant-tool/>  
(<http://arteutil.net/2013/04/transborder-immigrant-tool/>)
7. <http://www.artnetweb.com/port/> (<http://www.artnetweb.com/port/>)
8. <http://www.economist.com/node/109450>  
(<http://www.economist.com/node/109450>)
9. Armistead, L. (2004). *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc.
10. Wittig, M. (2013). One is not born a woman. In C. Mccann, & S. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (3rd ed., pp. 246-251). New York: Routledge.
11. <http://autonets.org/> (<http://autonets.org/>)
12. <http://www.cero29.org/> (<http://www.cero29.org/>)
13. hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge: South End Press.
14. Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Watertown: Persephone Press.
15. Anzaldúa, G., & Keating, A. (2002). *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. New York: Routledge.
16. Moraga, C. (2011). Still loving in the (still) war years: On keeping queer queer. In C. Moraga (Ed.), *Xicana codex of changing consciousness* (pp. 175-192). Durham: Duke University Press.
17. <http://www.transhack.org/> (<http://www.transhack.org/>)
18. <http://amc.alliedmedia.org/> (<http://amc.alliedmedia.org/>)
19. Hawthorne, S., & Klein, R. (1999). *Cyberfeminism. connectivity, critique and creativity*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.
20. <http://www.blackgirlsgcode.com/> (<http://www.blackgirlsgcode.com/>)
21. <http://www.cero29.org/> (<http://www.cero29.org/>)
22. <http://empowermentors.org/page/view-page-slug/1/home>  
(<http://empowermentors.org/page/view-page-slug/1/home>)
23. <http://quimerarosa.net/> (<http://quimerarosa.net/>)
24. <http://www.thedarkvisitor.com/2008/05/chinese-female-hacker-group/>  
(<http://www.thedarkvisitor.com/2008/05/chinese-female-hacker-group/>)
25. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spanish-enclave-melilla-gets-its-own-hacker-under-the-name-of-salander-9180234.html>  
(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spanish-enclave-melilla-gets-its-own-hacker-under-the-name-of-salander-9180234.html>)
26. <http://www.idlenomore.ca/> (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>)

27. <http://www.cheryllhironnelle.com/> (<http://www.cheryllhironnelle.com/>)
28. <http://fksenghor.com/> (<http://fksenghor.com/>)
29. <http://nas.sr/> (<http://nas.sr/>)
30. Nakamura, L., & Chow-White, P. (2012). *Race after the internet*. New York: Routledge.
31. <http://www.noii.org.uk/> (<http://www.noii.org.uk/>)
32. <http://www.pixelyze.com/shl/> (<http://www.pixelyze.com/shl/>)
33. Nakamura, L., & Chow-White, P. (2012). *Race after the internet*. New York: Routledge.
34. Fernandez, M., Wilding, F., & Wright, M. M. (2002). *Domain errors!: Cyberfeminist practices*. New York: Autonomedia.



### **Leonie Tanczer** (<https://adanewmedia.org/author/leonietanczer>)

Leonie Maria Tanczer is PhD Student at the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast and Fellow at the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society in Berlin. Her inter-disciplinary PhD investigates the emerging cyber security governance strategies, with a particular focus on hacking and hacktivism. Further research interests include Gender Studies, Online Collective Action, and Science and Technology Studies.

## **ONE THOUGHT ON "HACKING THE LABEL: HACKTIVISM, RACE, AND GENDER"**

Pingback: [\*\*Ada Issue 6 \[Hacking the Black/White Binary\] is Live! |\*\*](#)



Copyright © 2012-2021. All work on this website is distributed under a Creative Commons license. The default license for the content on *Ada* is a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 Unported License**. Individual article copyright terms may differ. Please refer to each article for its license.

