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The Role of Insurrectionary Anarchism in Contemporary Hacktivism

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prevent us from recognizing their courage and our disagreements do not constitute an obstacle to our demand for their liberation.”²⁶

²⁶ Amorós, Miguel. “Professional Anarchy and Theoretical Disarmament.” The Anarchist Library. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/miguel-amoros-professional-anarchy-and-theoretical-disarmament>

not remain comfortably under the insurrectionary umbrella. One of the things digital algorithms, and even artificial intelligence, set out to do is create conclusions based on predictability. In that sense, the only way for people to reclaim their autonomy is to be completely unpredictable. This is not only a way to counter form and “decency,” but to remind people that guerilla tactics, horizontalism, and asymmetric warfare too are examples of resistance the physical state does not know how to counter. The ways of organizing and thinking are completely different, which more often than not, has repeatedly proven to be one of the most effective ways of countering entrenched structures.

If “digital insurrectionary anarchism” is only inconveniencing authority and failing to create widespread antagonism, then much of contemporary hacktivism should not be considered insurrectionist. However, even if these hackers make the headlines, publicly embarrass elected officials, or temporarily pause operations, they still do have a justifiable place in society. Even if their results or effects were limited, it crushes the manufactured image of institutional invulnerability. In other words, no system or government’s dominance is uncontested. The question is not whether hacktivism has overthrown states or dismantled corporate monopolies, but whether it has revealed the instability beneath the systems that present themselves as permanent. In this sense, hacktivism has proven itself by demonstrating that digital authority, exactly like physical authority, depends heavily on perception. Institutions derive power not only from law, capital, and force, but from the belief that their systems are untouchable. These moments of institutional embarrassment may not constitute revolution, but they reflect the same anti-authoritarian impulse that has defined the insurrectionary struggle for generations. If nothing else, hacktivism proves that cyberspace has become one of the newest battlegrounds where the legitimacy of power can be contested. As Spanish insurrectionist Miguel Amorós writes, “our criticisms do not

Contents

Note for readers	5
Introduction	5
Anarchism and Insurrectionary Anarchism	6
Libertarianism of Cyberspace	9
Hacktivism as Digital Insurrection	13
Examples of Hacktivist Resistance	17
Conclusion	21

creation of cyberspace has allowed for unprecedented and new forms of resistance, but it also allows authority to recover with equal speed assuming the hack had no physical or material losses. This creates a unique relationship between resistance and power where disruption can be both significant but also never enough. However, to dismiss all of hacking as insignificant or online foolishness would be incorrect. Every successful hack, breach, leak, or takedown reminds institutions that being technologically dominating does not mean they are immune. Whether carried out by decentralized Ukrainian hackers, EDT, or LulzSec, each group agrees that digital power only exists due to human built systems, which are therefore vulnerable to human interventions. If insurrectionary anarchism is only concerned with attacking power wherever it settles, then hacktivism remains one of the best modern examples of this struggle being translated into a new terrain. It is from this point that the final analysis is achieved.

Conclusion

Philosophically, an uncontested fusion of hacktivism and insurrectionary anarchism would require an updated analysis of what power looks like in the twenty-first century. Sabotaging factories, railways, and exploding banks are physical points of resistance, but are those the only points of resistance? As mentioned before, one of the key conditions of anarchism is finding or building an area where power cannot settle. Unfortunately, the internet has absolutely been settled and some may even argue it has been colonized by corporations. The more hacking only becomes a point of technical disruption of inconvenience is what makes it fall within anarchist Peter Gelderloos' concept of nonviolence protecting the state. Anything that is not directly affecting the functioning of the state must and should not be considered insurrectionary. It still may be anarchist, as nearly all non-insurrectionists will agree, but it would

fulfilling.”²⁵ However, not all politically motivated hacking is actually changing anything. Pressing keys from a bedroom is not the same as materially transforming social conditions. This asks one of the largest questions throughout this whole topic, does hacking actually frighten power or does it simply annoy it?

Hacking, in my research, has proven to exist in a space between genuine disruption and symbolic defiance. Genuine disruption could be equated to the black hats, symbolic defiance could be the tamer white hats, and the entire field of hacking could be nestled in between the both as a gray hat. Successful hacks regardless of legality can expose vulnerabilities within institutions, systems, or websites that falsely present themselves as secure. This proves that even some of the most powerful corporate and state systems remain susceptible to decentralized intervention; after all, everything is digital. Data leaks, website defacements, and service disruptions can force organizations to spend considerable amounts of financial and technical resources repairing damage. This suggests that hacking can, at least temporarily or for a single instance, unsettle structures of authority. However, websites are restored, systems are patched, and institutions often emerge with stronger defenses than before, as seen with anti-FloodNet measures both the United States and Mexico took. What appears as a rupture at first just may ultimately be another routine challenge for those who defend the systems. Insurrectionary anarchism demands immediate confrontation with systems of domination, yet digital confrontation, as seen in the examples, was lacking the permanence that a physical insurrection seeks. However, this is not only a digital problem, or a problem that only exists with the translation of anarchist tactics to cyberspace. Workers sabotaging the factory floor cannot simply be restored with a software patch, nor can digital hacks be resolved with a declaration of war. The

²⁵ Watts, Susan. “Newsnight Online ‘Chat’ with Lulz Security Hacking Group.” BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-13912836>

Note for readers

The essay you are about to read was written in the past when I was an early grad student still becoming a realized writer of anarchism’s ideas. Some of the information may be overly moralistic and other points may be overly empirical. Some of the writing may be overly casual while other areas may be overly academic. Some information that should be cited may not be, and some information that is cited may not have to be. My standpoints and interpretations of ideas throughout this piece may have changed since its writing, but it was my analysis at the time that I stood behind and defended. For any questions on the information presented, my updated perspectives and beliefs, or anything of the like, feel free to message me directly. If you believe the question you are asking is of good faith and may encourage a fruitful conversation including others, feel free to comment below to start the conversation. Be kind.

Introduction

On December 29, 2025, a hacker known as Martha Root took the stage at an annual hacking convention in Hamburg, Germany. Dressed in a pink Power Rangers outfit, she shared how for months, she had been infiltrating three white supremacist dating websites by creating AI chatbots to interact with users while collecting their personal information. In the panel’s final fifteen minutes, she remotely accessed and deleted all three websites, much to the neo-Nazi website creator’s disapproval, which he described in a tweet as “cyberterrorism.” Root noted how easy it was to hack into the websites, citing “poor cybersecurity hygiene that would make even your grandma’s AOL account blush.”¹ Root’s actions can arguably

¹ Good, Anna. “Pink Ranger Hacktivist Wiped Racist Dating Site Live at a Conference.” The Daily Dot. <https://dailymdot.com/pink-ranger-hacktivist-wiped-racist-dating-site>

show how the principles of insurrectionary anarchism, such as direct, autonomous, and disruptive intervention, can extend from physical spaces into the digital realm. Such actions can include Root's hacking/hacktivism as well as DDoS attacks and the targeted takedowns of extremist, corporate, or state-controlled websites. Cyberspace itself can be seen as a loosely-governed libertarian space that offers hackers near-total freedom to translate traditional anarchist tactics into digital actions. Insurrectionary anarchism can take form in contemporary digital spaces through autonomous hacktivism, the disruption or removal of oppressive online networks, and decentralized digital interventions.

Anarchism and Insurrectionary Anarchism

Anarchism can be defined as a sociopolitical philosophy that is against hierarchies wherever they may be found. Such hierarchies can include political ones such as the state and representative democracy, economic ones such as capitalism and wage labor, and social ones such as patriarchy, homophobia, and organized religion.² It is widely seen as one of the only ideologies that fully confronts and wishes to dismantle all forms of capitalism along with the state and its power without utilizing either for personal benefit. Although anarchistic ideas can be found throughout history and cultures, the modern anarchist movement developed in Western Europe after the Enlightenment period in the 18th century. Subsequent developments in the field of anarchism led to many variants, including but not limited to anarcho-communism, eco-anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and more. While anarchism largely began as an anti-capitalist and self-determinist philosophy, today, it has greatly expanded to include anti-racism, environmentalism, femi-

² Ervin, Lorenzo Kom'boa. *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 33–35.

America border.²³ They were one of the first groups to explicitly frame hacking-style disruption as political protest rather than cybercrime.

Another group named LulzSec notoriously entered the media in 2011, which was active for a mere month. They repeatedly shared that their motivation was simply to have fun, cause mayhem, and quite literally, do things “for the lulz.”²⁴ This was confirmed in the group's multiple manifestos where they explicitly say they are not interested in financial profit and found the attacking of certain targets to be pure entertainment. This group, which famously claimed responsibility for taking down the CIA and Sony Playstation's website, are an example of theatrical hacking. This sort of hacking still does all other forms of hacking and is not limited to interpretations or definitions of the aforementioned black, gray, or white hatted hackers. Theatrical hacking willingly chooses to “annoy” power, which can be in the form of embarrassing authority figures, demonstrating technical dominance, or also in the case of EDT, turning hacks into performance-like protests. For example, a thief stealing money from a bank would be financially motivated. Yet a punk spraypainting a large message and livestreaming it to social media would be closer to theatrical disruption. In both cases there was a subject and an action, but the differences involve both of their motivation, intent, and operational goals. As it pertains to LulzSec, their choice to do things “for the lulz” shows that they have more in common with the spraypainters than with other hacker groups who are profit-seeking or attempting to directly challenge institutional authority. LulzSec member “Whirlpool” AKA “Topiary” shared with BBC that “politically motivated ethical hacking is more

²³ “Transborder Immigrant Tool.” Arte Útil. <https://arte-util.org/projects/transborder-immigrant-tool/>

²⁴ Brodtkin, Jon. “Microsoft cracks down on software piracy with new activation system.” PC Magazine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111215213511/http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2387219,00.asp>

hardware/software engineering were necessary skills to protect oneself against surveillance.

One of the earliest groups of anarchist hackers were Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) who became active in the mid-1990s. Launched by four members, EDT's goal was to deploy computer software to spread propaganda, display their anti-military views, and most importantly, provide a home to FloodNet.²¹ On December 22nd, 1997, the Mexican government surrounded a Catholic church in the Chiapas region of Mexico, a region which is famously home to the Zapatistas, an autonomous Indigenous network of communes home to more than 300,000 people. The Mexican government has consistently been attempting to reabsorb the regions into the state, which have been resisted continuously since 1994 advocating for autonomy, liberation, forms of libertarian socialism and anarchism, and more. The Mexican government that day shot and killed 45 Indigenous men, pregnant women, and children, which today is known as the Acteal Massacre. EDT responded by creating a browser-based window that, when opened by thousands of protestors, would crash several websites belonging to the Mexican and American governments. Websites belonging to the Mexican presidency, military, and PRI (Mexico's main political party) were "flooded" with protestors around the world taking part.²² Advertised as a "digital sit-in" but functioning as a DDoS attack, protestors were instructed to input the names of the murdered victims, with the crash page updating with their names. Both governments implemented anti-FloodNet software as countermeasures against further and similar attacks. In 2007, EDT created a similar software that would transmit poetry along with water and safehouse sites to migrants along the Mexico-

²¹ Penenberg, Adam L. "Hacker Faker: You Can't Believe Everything You Read About Cyberspace." *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/1998/1214/6213050a.html>

²² Ibid.

nism, Black, Indigenous, and Queer liberation, and other intersecting struggles that reproduce domination of the many by the few.

The philosophies of anarchism vastly predate the advent of the anarchist movement in Europe. In other words, anti-authoritarian thought did not originate with the creation of a European society built around industrialism and the centralized modern state. Ancient Greek writers wrote of characters navigating conflicts brought on by the state, and Socrates himself posited that the only way to oppose Athenian authority was to encourage individuals to be able to make their own decisions. Cultures that operated for thousands of years prior to the creation of the state, and therefore private property, are anarchistic in the sense that they are non-state. Anarchists famously point towards the decision-making processes of Native and Indigenous groups around the world as existence of a complex life prior to a state. As expected, the classical anarchist movement was a response to fierce European industrialization and not a solidarity with colonized people around the world. After all, the state that European anarchists wanted dissolved was the same state that acquired wealth upon colonization of the Global South.

In 1866, European working class activists came together to discuss the material conditions of the working class. This meeting became known as the First International, which sought to bring together left-wing groups and trade unions around the idea of class struggle. The organization is remembered for the divide that formed between two major factions, Marxists and anarchists. Karl Marx, the German philosopher and economist, led the "statist" faction. His supporters argued that a temporary worker-run state would be necessary to abolish capitalism and foster socialism. The opposing faction, guided by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakunin, identified themselves as mutualists and collectivists. They shared Marx's desire of ending capitalism, but rejected the idea of establishing a workers' state. Their standpoint grew from their belief that a state run by workers would not resolve

their concerns and would only replace one group of rulers, and therefore oppressors, with another.³ While both groups agreed on opposing capitalism, abolishing the private ownership of production, and criticizing liberal capitalism, they both disagreed fundamentally on the role of the state, control, and authority. Visually, this means both groups share the same far-left point on the x-axis of the left and right spectrum, but are on opposing ends of the y-axis separating authoritarianism and libertarianism. Fierce debates erupted, eventually leading Marx to famously expel Bakunin and his supporters from the International entirely.⁴

It is from this point where anarchism splintered into its many variants and interpretations. While all anarchists believe that the state is unnecessary, their strategies and tactics for why and how it should be dissolved greatly varied. Anarcha-feminists wanted an end to the state that perpetuated the patriarchy, green anarchists desired ends to states that caused environmental degradation, and anarcho-syndicalists wished to replace corporatism and unchecked monopolies with worker-controlled systems of production. The most popular, or widely accepted, strategy within many anarchist branches is a concept called dual power, which is defined as the creation of alternative institutions that coexist with and ultimately seek to replace existing authority. Those who believe in dual power do not wish for “their authority” to replace the state’s, but to build structures to enable as many people as possible to reduce their reliance on hierarchical institutions, the market, and centralized systems of power. Rotational leadership, horizontal structures, and direct democracy are some of the core values of how these bottom-up structures would function. It is through this standpoint where insurrectionary anarchism, also known as insurrectionism, splinters from the concept of dual power.

³ Eckhardt, Wolfgang. *The First Socialist Schism: Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Working Men’s Association*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

selves are the motivation for those who act within it, not an exterior relationship with one’s own country or even personal motivations. This provides us with an analytical framework to investigate an anarchist hacker’s mind and not a moralistic one. If a hacker collective coordinates with the national military or smears the enemy sites with patriotic rhetoric, its actions are less anti-authoritarian resistance and more a form of digital warfare. This would mean that digital sabotages are not neutral, which insurrectionists would agree with, but instead further says that the form of sabotage ultimately does not matter as much as what it is intended to do. Hackers could still be seen as revolutionaries, because revolutionaries do not have to be anti-state to be considered as such.

Examples of Hacktivist Resistance

Early ideologies of anarchist hackers in the late 1980s pushed a narrative that the only entity to fear was the government.¹⁸ However, dystopian sci-fi literature like *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and *Neuromancer* pushed these hackers to also oppose corporate power since these private companies sought to extend their reach into cyberspace.¹⁹ Aesthetic movements such as cyberpunk and crypto-anarchism solidified the idea that anarchist hackers were not just overlapping identities, but entirely distinct identities forming out of punk music, the rise of technology, and arts movements. The 2011 release of “The AnarchoHacker Manifesto” showed to the world that anarchists were more than just *physical* threats.²⁰ The creations of Riseup, AntiSec, and Noisebridge told anarchists that basic knowledge of computer science and

¹⁸ “Anarchisthackers.” Noisebridge Wiki. <https://www.noisebridge.net/wiki/Anarchisthackers>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

hackers, they very clearly are aiming their cannons towards the Russian state and not the Ukrainian. This ties back into the blurred lines between the different types of hackers, and if illegal hacking is inherently bad even if the state is using it as an offensive measure. Perhaps this ties back into German philosopher Max Weber's definition of the state as one that has a monopoly on violence. Outside of hacking and cyberspace, this undoubtedly is the case even if it is not a descriptive nor analytical definition of the state, which too can be defined in a multitude of different ways. As it pertains to Weber's analysis, if murder is illegal, why are soldiers allowed to do it? Similarly, if black hat specifically engages in illegalism, why does the Ukrainian state not arrest their hackers if they are disrupting Russian banks? The state is allowed to do what it wants to do and does not seek any entity's permission. The anarchist analysis is that it both deploys violence and "prevents" violence, proving to be one of its many contradictions regarding social organizing and control. To make matters more complicated, the same BBC source shares that Viktor Zhora, deputy chairman of the State Service of Special Communications, claims that the cyber section of the Russian army is actively recruiting hackers.¹⁶ BBC managed to interview Russia's top hacking group's leader, going simply by the name Killmilk, who shared that he was determined to disrupt Ukraine and its allies.¹⁷

Perhaps the best way to differentiate between hacker groups outside of their motivations is to investigate their strategy. Ultimately, what is the difference between anarchist sabotage and digital sabotage? Our answers may lie in the overall relationships between violence, authority, and organization as it deals with the individual and/or the group. Anarchist sabotage, ideally by definition, pays no allegiance to a nation state if it is adhering to itself. In other words, the definitions and interpretations of anarchism them-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

By the 1930s, anarcho-syndicalism's methods of trade unionism had proven to be one of the more popular forms of anarchism. Earlier decades saw extensive syndicalist action in Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina culminating in state crackdowns and massacres of thousands. Insurrectionary anarchism has its roots in the Italian anarchist tradition which largely took form the 1870's. Growing out of a larger discontent with the anarchist movement, it remains one of the more controversial variants of anarchism with many devaluing it due to its structure and desires. Rather than engaging in dual power to offset reliance on state structures, insurrectionary anarchists reject dual power entirely and even syndicalism's labor unions.⁵ They believe that building up a counterpower to challenge the state is more defensive than offensive and is not removing the oppressor in the relationship, which still is the state. Insurrectionists believe in mass spontaneous actions that can spread unrest across regions faster than the state can contain it. To the countless martyred Italian insurrectionists, dismantling the state was the immediate goal and not building a dual power to counter it. In an inclusive effort to not alienate insurrectionism from the larger anarchist movement, non-insurrectionists have redeemed the current by framing the practice simply as a mode of attack and not a model for a society. This in turn means that anarchists of any variant, with exception to syndicalists, can identify as insurrectionists.

Libertarianism of Cyberspace

Anarchism is situated opposite to authoritarianism, which inherently makes anarchism a libertarian ideology. Libertarianism is defined as a philosophy that holds freedom and personal sovereignty as primary values. American society often incorrectly

⁵ Baker, Zoe. "Insurrectionist Anarchism." In *Means and Ends: The Revolutionary Practice of Anarchism in Europe and the United States*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2023, pp. 175–210. ISBN 978-1-84935-498-1. OCLC 1345217229

views it in its entirety as a right-wing ideology, typically shown through images of the Gadsden “Don’t Tread On Me” flag, individualist approaches to advocacy of the Second Amendment, and slogans such as “Live Free or Die.” These individuals also strongly support capitalist property rights and lobby against wealth redistribution. However, these are all aspects of the libertarian right and not libertarianism as a whole. Libertarianism is home to both left and right currents, similar to authoritarianism. The libertarian left is often referred to as libertarian socialism, which was historically used by anarchists at times when they could not openly identify as such.

In 1958, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (known today as DARPA) created a technology called ARPANET. Operating as a branch of the United States’ Department of Defense, this technology was the predecessor for what would become the internet which was used to connect two computers for the first time in 1970.⁶ By the end of the next year, around fifteen locations were connected to ARPANET in a decentralized fashion, yet still only at military bases and remote government centers. Without diving into a deep history of the internet, the point here is to show that the internet originally began as a military technology. The internet itself is used by nearly all entities in technological societies whether it be in private, public, business, or academic sectors. Primarily used as a communication network, older forms of media such as television, radio, and newspapers have greatly been impacted, giving rise to newer technologies such as email and video streaming websites. The internet also has physical points of measure, the most popular of which can be physical brick-and-mortar stores to respond to high activity of online shopping. This can include more mundane products such as Warby Parker selling eyeglasses, but also Google

⁶ McKenzie, A., and S. Crocker. Host/Host Protocol for the ARPA Network. RFC 6529. Independent Submission, April 2012. <https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc6529>

ity, and gray hat hackers often do both. This inherently means there are distinguishable differences between cybercrime and plain hacking.

For example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine warranted the creation of Ukrainian “hacker armies.” One of these individuals, who BBC published an article on, is 32-years old Oleksandr who has “...disabled hundreds of Russian websites, disrupted services at dozens of banks, and defaced websites with pro-Ukraine messages.”¹⁴ The “hacker army” at hand was identified by BBC as a volunteer group active with a Telegram group consisting of more than 200,000 people.¹⁵ Almost immediately, there are glaring contradictions regarding the role of these hackers and anarchism. The contradiction at hand is how a hacker group can be resituated as having anarchist tendencies if they are very clearly being utilized by Ukraine against the Russian state. National wartime goals have very clearly been established by the Ukrainians, and alignment of any group with Ukrainian defense efforts could be labeled as nationalist. In this case, would Oleksandr and the Ukrainian hackers be state-directed or even state-compatible? On top of this, does the volunteer status of the group even matter if they are still serving state strategy? Do the prior concepts of black, white, and gray hat hackers matter if Oleksandr’s illegal actions could be aligned politically with the state?

The key characteristic that sets the hackers apart from other groups is that they are defending the Ukrainian state. The only reason why their motives and interests align with the state is due to Russia declaring war on all parts of Ukraine. Had these hackers truly been anti-authoritarian to the bone, their nationalist behavior would never have been questioned. While there may be anarchists or even anarchist-adjacent members within the Ukrainian

¹⁴ Tidy, Joe. “Meet the hacker armies on Ukraine’s cyber front line.” BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-65250356>

¹⁵ Ibid.

destabilize systems. Regarding the internet, most congressional policies deal with information access, regulation, and privacy as it extends to youth, but never anything that hurts algorithmic governance and the dependence of everyday social existence on corporate-controlled networks. Even the 2020–2025 anti-trust federal court case of Federal Trade Commission v. Meta Platforms, Inc. (formerly known as Federal Trade Commission v. Facebook, Inc.) ruled in favor of billionaire-CEO Mark Zuckerberg. The U.S. District Court ruled that Meta, already in charge of Facebook, had not accumulated a social media monopoly power upon obtaining social media platforms Instagram and WhatsApp.¹³ As institutional methods of “regulation” continue to fail to meaningfully challenge digital monopolies, hacking increasingly functions as a quick and decentralized form of resistance.

“Hacking” is simply described as an action utilizing information technology to achieve goals and solutions by non-standard means. However, a “hacker” is someone with knowledge of bugs or exploits who can access information within computer systems that otherwise would not be accessible. Corporations and companies get hacked fairly often, with the most popular ones typically entering popular news coverage. The public largely thinks that less-secure companies are “easier” to hack than larger ones, but the same public does not mentally distinguish if some hackers can simply be better than others. The difference in skill levels among hackers often comes down to their experience and knowledge of systems, but as it concerns anarchism, their personal and political motivations. Around three, but oftentimes more, types of hackers have been identified and are referred to as black hat, white hat, and gray hat hackers. Black hat hackers utilize objectively illegal methods, white hat hackers protect systems and largely work in cybersecu-

¹³ “Meta prevails in historic FTC antitrust case, won’t have to break off Instagram, WhatsApp.” Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/meta-antitrust-ftc-instagram-whatsapp->

selling phones, watches, and home devices, both of which strictly began as online services. The development of the internet has also led to ecommerce, which can be simplified as digital transactions for digital or real-world products.

Aside from money-making ventures, digital communication is utilized for actions that manifest in the real world whether they are text invites for birthday parties or for coordinating mass shootings. These examples show that the digital world is not entirely unlinked from the real world. Even before the digital world was created, ARPANET itself was built due to there being a physical necessity for an encrypted form of communication by the U.S. military. Overall, the creation and development of the internet gave people new places to want to be free in, which was and continues to be an especially important desire as freedoms are often being curtailed in the physical world. As more users joined the internet upon commercialization in 1994, it felt to be a very libertarian promise as users could quite literally do whatever they wanted.⁷ The reason why anarchism and anti-authoritarian thought is deeply embedded in conversations of early digital freedoms is due to one of anarchism’s key conditions: finding or building an area where power cannot settle.

This line of anarchist logic is not new to technology nor is it new to conversations regarding the internet. The role of the internet and digital technology led to extensive anarchist theorization including crypto-anarchism, cyberstates, “pirate utopias,” and more.⁸ Cyberlibertarians, as they would come to call themselves, fused the earlier mentioned ideas of freedom and liberty with these new developing technologies. Similarly to their desires in the physical world, these cyberlibertarians wanted less governmental regulation, and

⁷ “How the Sale of a Sting CD Sparked an Entire Industry.” ETF Trends. <https://www.etftrends.com/how-the-sale-of-a-sting-cd-sparked-an-entire-industry/>

⁸ Ludlow, Peter (ed.). *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001

overall, less of anything that got in the way of a “free World Wide Web.”⁹ Over time, as the internet became larger and larger, individuals recognized there was no efficient or practical method of searching for information. Historically, librarianship was a very respected profession in which an individual was required to be able to skillfully navigate vast collections of knowledge. In the digital world, librarians manifested as search engines, the first of which was Archie in 1990.¹⁰

To cyberlibertarians, search engines were critically theorized to hold similar amounts of power that early global empires held regarding control. The power of later sites such as “Yahoo!” and “Google” were not required to own entire websites in ways people may think historic empires controlled entire seas. Whether it was empires controlling the exit/entry ports, or search engines hand-picking information to show up as top results, it was enough to shape how individuals navigated the world. Although the web itself was expanding at a very high rate, access to it increasingly depended on these centralized points, which today have evolved to become some of the largest corporations in history. The fear was not necessarily that governments alone would, or could, dominate the internet, but that new private technological creations could accumulate influence comparable to states by controlling information itself. The “anarchist fear” of the internet being ruled by corporations, some could argue, has come true. Personalized advertising, user-activity being tracked, and mass adoption of paywalls prove that the internet is no longer the open and decentralized space it was once imagined to be.

While this could be a “philosophical betrayal” of the internet’s role, it is also important to recognize that the desires of cyberlibertarians for the internet was just that, desires. The internet was

⁹ Borsook, Paulina. *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2000. ISBN 1891620789

¹⁰ Samuel, Alexandra. “Meet Alan Emtage, the Black Technologist Who Invented ARCHIE, the First Internet Search Engine.” ITHAKA (21 February 2017)

not originally built “by the people,” it was built by and for the military. Even after the creation of Instagram and Facebook, governments recognized that these creations “by the people” could still be used for surveillance and data extraction. What fuels the anarchist fire in America is that of the top fifty wealthiest businesses in the world, exactly half of them are located within the United States.¹¹ Each and every one of those companies are not state-owned while few others are, which directly means that large scale corporations have single-handedly accumulated levels of power that previously could only be reached by governments.¹² This inherently allows private wealth to shape society, labor, and even policies on a global scale. From an insurrectionist perspective, the concentration of digital power within corporate and state institutions transforms cyberspace into a terrain of conflict. In this context, the very act of hacking becomes not only a possibly justified action, but one that understands the different roles these corporations play. Ultimately, it shows centralized entities that all of their data can be extracted, leaked, or stolen if hackers can enter via a “single point of failure.”

Hacktivism as Digital Insurrection

Since cyberspace has become an increasingly centralized space flooded with corporate and governmental power, hacking has emerged as one of the clearest expressions of resistance within the digital sphere. Much like anti-authoritarians who targeted state and capitalist authorities through sabotage, expropriation, and direct action, hackers disrupt digital infrastructures that sustain systems of domination. Rather than seeking reform through institutional channels such as elections, lobbying, or corporate accountability campaigns, anarchists have fully recognized that reforms are structurally constrained and will never

¹¹ “Fortune Global 500.” Fortune. <https://fortune.com/ranking/global500/>

¹² Ibid.