

Society Must Be Hacked

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Across the globe, more and more of our daily experiences are managed and surveilled by networking technologies, system protocols, and algorithms. We are witnessing a 'remote control society'. Monitoring cameras and smart gateways are installed everywhere, while we are classified and atomized by automatic facial recognition and voice analyses. Algorithms determine who deviates, who contributes too little to our economy, who is to be classified as an asylum seeker or refugee, and who ends up on the kill list. Facebook directs our social lives—even of non-users—and Google links us impudently to the next big purchase.

HACKING HABITAT critically investigates how we are caught up in systems, and explores how to resist them. Ubiquitous, networked systems—from corporations to politics, from militarization to entertainment—influence and dominate our surroundings. Once established to protect and serve others they have often turned into guardians of themselves. Instead of being multi-beneficial for people, profit, planet they have become parasitic instead. The internal mechanisms of institutions have begun to lead their own life—services are automated, data is the new currency, and optimum efficiency has become the norm, as exemplified by everyone's proper adjustment to machines. In short, technology's promise of the 'quick fix' is changing power structures everywhere and the appeal of solutionism is stronger than ever.

HACKING HABITAT is a large-scale international manifestation on the boundaries between art, technology and social change, and consists of three components: a run-up with four Life Hack Marathons in 2015, a visual arts exhibition and an Open Stage in 2016. Around eighty artists, hackers, designers are flying in from all corners of the world to present work, prepare interventions and provide workshops to reflect and act upon the often invisible but structural containment we find ourselves in. Controlling technologies are simultaneously both sexy and frightening. Was the panopticum once invented as a 'humane' model to control and discipline prisoners, now we willfully accept mass surveillance and behavior regulation in exchange for free internet and smart apps. The choice for a real prison logically follows the initial concept, strengthening experiences of digital constraint, with the smartphone as our new panopticum.

The exhibition interweaves two narratives: that of a globally increasing technocracy and that of its self-organizing opposition. The narration is not about good or evil, but connects awareness of an invisible 'velvet dictatorship' with affirmative examples of human resilience. In symbiosis with intelligent machines, people are developing a new kind of sensitivity, a feeling of 'a-where-ness'. They take this 'technology' with them to the interstices of everyday life. Alongside and within the high-tech wiring people develop lowlife survival methods. Self-organizing initiatives and social networks are cropping up around the world, managing to elude intrusive forms of regulation and coding. Citizens find each other in the battle.

Life Hacking

In the run-up to the projects' ultimate realization, human feedback was collected during four Life Hack Marathons. Life hacking is not a trick or luxurious commodity to manage your time even more efficiently, but rather results from a 'maker mentality' that is still abundantly present within non-western countries. Moreover, life hacking is based on the work of Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) he examines the difference between strategies that affirm the status quo of the powerful—governments, banks, multinationals, cultural hegemonies—and the flexible tactics of those who are subjected to power. According to him, the powerless have a different kind of power. With their indirect and errant trajectories they cleverly and skilfully bend the rules in order to survive while retaining their culture, identity and dignity. During the Life Hack Marathons artists took the lead in workshops to share this hacker- and maker mentality with others. During those workshops Kars Alfrink, Martijn Engelbregt and Lino Hellings worked side by side with groups of concern to rediscover the art of life hacking together. Shared solidarity and humanness turned out to be triggers in discovering playful forms of civil disobedience.

Results of the Life Hack Marathons are to be presented during the Open Stage and are part of the exhibition. HACKING HABITAT is confident in its choice of artists that operate on the cutting edge of art and life. They play a decisive role as a channel of empowerment, self-organization, and control of 'social capital' and creativity for communities, allowing for local knowledge to become an inspirational force in a wider global context. Deliberately choosing a supporting role they develop test models for new ecologies of belonging. Interventions by Aram Bartholl, Forensic Architecture, Melanie Bonajo, Circus

Engelbregt, Else Huisman, Ahmed Ogüt, Hans van Lunteren and Lenke Kastelein, Buro Jansen & Janssen, Nicoline van Harskamp, and Merlijn Twaalfhoven substantially and constructively break the rules. Going against the flow, they plant viruses mobilizing counter forces and taking over public spaces as new places for negotiation. The emerging frictions become tools for transformation.

How to Hack

In order to successfully intervene we need to start asking the right questions. 13 articles of inspiring thinkers and activists clarify and argue why society must be hacked. Full colour images provide insight into all artworks and interventions that are part of the 'HACKING HABITAT. Art of Control' exhibition. The publication can be read as an opinion piece, an art book and a *how-to* guide with compelling ideas for concrete life hacks. Four filters serve as perspectives from which to view the world: *Data & Surveillance*, *Financial Logics*, *Destructive Forces at Work*, *Violence & its Counterstrikes*. The essays include interviews, activist statements and academic analyses. Sociologist Stefania Milan kicks off with an update on contemporary hacking in these liquid times where the digital and analogue seamlessly merge. '#Hackeverything' connects hacking, activism and civil disobedience.

Data and Surveillance

In order to maintain corporate security, risk avoidance, crowd control and migration management more and more areas of our lives fall under permanent inspection. The often-heard 'nothing to hide' argument paralyzes

all critique. However, the personal account of activist Anke Domscheit-Berg demonstrates a biting analogy: that of the iron control of the Stasi in former East Germany and the increasing threat of privacy, up to and including the large-scale violations of today. In 'Breaking the Border' political scientist Huub Dijkstra reveals the distributed nature of protocols for digital border control and surveillance. Counter surveillance practices unveil the mediated nature of border surveillance, question the institutional and ethical voids it creates and demonstrate hidden practices at the borders of Fortress Europe. New media specialist Mirko Tobias Schäfer describes how Project X Haren served as a provocation to intensify control on social media. He argues that controlling user activities on social media platforms are efficient for the sterile dullness of corporate spaces, but dangerous for the interplay of dissent and consent that is crucial for opinion forming in democratic societies.

As early as 1980 artist Teshing Hsieh locked himself up for a whole year in order to monitor himself every hour, day and night. His work can be read as the predecessor of *self-tracking*: a form of self-discipline realized by gathering data about one's body, behaviour and life. In *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* Hito Steyerl comments on the visibility of every square centimetre of our private worlds. Drones, satellites, smart gateways, hidden camera's, digital media and smartphones make it impossible *not* to be seen. James Bridle demonstrates how civil rights are no longer safe now that algorithms come to different decisions every minute of the day. Design collective Metahaven shows the traces of destruction left by mass surveillance, while Critical Engineering adopts the methods of the NSA and the secret intelligences of sovereign states breaking into the mobile

phone networks of civilians, in order to share the results with their public. Cautious optimists are also present. Taryn Simon puts equalizing tendencies into perspective by demonstrating how search engines in different countries come up with culture-typical results. Pilvi Takala shows with her adaptation of the *Invisible Boyfriend* app how the internet provides space for alternative identities and unutilized opportunities. Stanza builds computer hardware miniature cities using the current dataflow of smart city London: *The Nemesis Machine*.

Financial Logic

Knowingly, we allow ourselves to be seduced. Economics, politics and free-markets are imbedded within globally interconnected systems of algorithms. Economist Tomáš Sedláček gives short shrift to his own discipline. The only value that seems to matter in our current society is what can be expressed in money. Contemporary economy has become a self-destructive fetish that feeds itself with debt like a drug. The activist pamphlet 'I Am Capital' by economist Hannes Grassegger preaches we should advantageously sell our data instead of giving it away for free. Now that personal data are the new currency, we must consider our strategy: what do we share and what do we keep private? Next to basic income, crowdfunding gains support especially within the cultural sector. Mostly concerned with the funding of projects, crowdfunding can easily become an extension of the capitalist system. Artist Renée Ridgway critically comments on this development that is born out of sheer necessity, and demonstrates how it can be done differently.

In the exhibition Zachary Formwalt provides insights into the data obsession and logic of the financial sector, while James Beckett offers a low-tech solution with his *Voodoo Justice for People of Finance*. In front of every carefully drawn portrait of a greedy banker a stone is placed, the size of which corresponds to the crime committed. Forensic Architecture utilizes advanced technology to illuminate the concealed traces of genocide within former warzones. Other artists tell stories about carefully hidden, parallel worlds that mostly stem from similar economic motifs. For example, Johan Grimonprez presents his new film *Shadow World* about the global weapon trade, both its funding and financialisation, in which all countries—however small—participate. *Waterboarded Documents* by James Bridle demonstrates the involvement of the British government in the CIA torture practices in the Chagos Archipelago, which is hidden from view.

Destructive Consequences

Next to visible violence our society is penetrated by many other forms of violence: less on the surface, but no less far-reaching. Structural violence is the subject of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek and David Graeber. Asking what is wrong with clicking ‘like’ because you are in favour of world peace and against raping women, conflict researcher Jolle Demmers uncovers the hidden violence behind many overt human rights claims. In ‘Doing Something’ she explains how the struggle for human rights is cunningly misused to legitimate ongoing systematic violence. The seeds have been sown for the essay ‘Deadly Algorithms’ by artist and researcher Susan Schuppli. She asks which tools we need to develop in order to hold

selflearning algorithms (such as those of drones that execute orders to kill) criminally accountable within the current law system. Or do we need a different legal framework, one that is not so much determined by precedent—by what has happened in the past—but, instead, by what may take place in the future? In the dystopia 'Our Future, Alone' by Vinay Gupta, the vast majority of the population falls victim to the disastrous effects of climate change. Just imagine that it happens to you.

Assemblages of systems and selflearning algorithms are invisible, and thus artists choose different media to sharpen their research methods. Sound artworks from Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Daya Cahen, Paul Devens, Ruben Pater, Moniek Toebosch, Filip Berte and Dries Verhoeven testify: machines and objects as accomplices in espionage, monitoring practices, torture and execution, human suffering, denial of responsibility, and the ultimate symbiosis between human, machine and prison cell take turns. With drawings, paintings and films Everlyn Nicodemus, Ronald Ophuis, Andres Serrano, Angelica Mesiti and Halil Altindere bring subtle as well as brutal violence uncomfortably close, while bystanders are watching apathetically or just looking away. Painted or animated staging of war and resistance demand a reaction. Finally, information designer Laura Kurgan and Diller Scofidio + Renfro trace data flows and visualize the traces left by refugees leaving their homeland on their way to destinations full of both promise, and uncertainty.

Violence and its Counter-Strikes

Worldwide, people are subjected to systems, algorithms, bureaucracy, and structural violence. Increasingly people rise up to reclaim their lives. They try

to stand firm in a rapidly changing high-tech environment that utilizes them and their land as mere resources. The colonial practice of land grabbing has intensified under neoliberal capitalism where nation states and corporations stand to profit from the poor around the planet. Artist and researcher Nabil Ahmed describes the situation in West-Papua, where the native population fights back by claiming their territories through bottom up counter-cartography. Sociologist Saskia Sassen demonstrates how the vital city manages to gather its strengths to subvert formal power systems. Smart cities become smart when they make reciprocally use of the knowledge and experience of neighbourhood inhabitants that bring the city to life. Building on this, Robin Celikates and Daniël de Zeeuw describe how new forms of civil disobedience find their way into the current constellation in which the digital and the analogue completely melt into each other. Artist and activist collectives such as Critical Art Ensemble, Anonymous, !Mediagruppe Bitnik and Centre for Political Beauty—all of which are participating in HACKING HABITAT—are presented. They provide concrete examples ready for imitation.

Invisible violence is endemic across ages. The drawings and comments of Joseph Beuys on bunkers that were built wholesale during the Cold War in almost every NATO country demonstrate this. Rich and powerful bigwigs built bunkers for themselves and a highly select group of the privileged. Beuys coined a term for it: *Bonzenbunker*. Fernando Sanchez Castillo also turns to history in order to transform our perception of today. He bought the old ship—the Azor—that was once owned by the Spanish former dictator Franco, and initiated the long-term project *Guernica Syndrome*. Also after Franco's death the pleasure yacht—annex secret meeting place for

accomplices—provided a pilgrimage for likeminded and thus continued to nurture fascist sentiments. The artist narrates and documents how he transformed the ship into 40 blocks of compressed steel, once and for all stripped of the power to evoke perverse fantasies.

Eduardo Basualdo, Neil Beloufa, Claire Pentecost, Samson Kambalu, Ali Kazma and Navid Nuur make use of the understanding that objects, buildings and environments have an agency and vitality themselves. Systems in particular derive their intelligence and affective steering from complex network relations. These give shape to an alarming yet simultaneously consoling consciousness, and stimulate the willingness to collaborate with things and machines. Yet the strength of people who work shoulder to shoulder in order to put a stop to violence is equally tangible. For the installation *Die Gedanken sind Frei* Susan Hiller gathered hundreds of freedom and protest songs from all over the world for visitors to share with each other, or listen to in silence.

HACKING HABITAT recognizes the potential of new alliances between humans and machines and how such collaborations may lead to resilience, emancipation, creativity, and a more equal appreciation of lives across difference. These subject-object relations initiate co-creative forms of hacking. Hacking in the broad sense of the word is using an instrument in ways different from how it was intended. *Disarm* by Pedro Reyes demonstrates the possible scope of the effects of such playful forms of reuse. He collected old weapons and guns on the border between the US and Mexico to transform them into playable and self-playing musical instruments.

Society Will Be Hacked

The Refusal of Time by the South African artist William Kentridge constitutes the final piece of HACKING HABITAT. The invention of time is central, with astronomic devices, sundials, hourglasses, metronomes, pendulum clocks, and other instruments to measure time ever more precisely. Time is also a western concept, one that forced oppressed cultures to conform to a system that was not theirs. Nowadays our life world is controlled and regulated by a multiplicity of autonomous systems. A habitat in which people no longer matter. New alliances between humans and machines, more democratic usages of technology and innovation, and hybrid safety nets in which humans and technologies go around together are already in the making. It is not a wish, nor a question, but a fact: people are hacking back their habitats.