

Jeff Shantz and Jordon Tomblin; Cyber Disobedience; Re://Presenting Online Anarchy. Zero Books, 2014

With this ambitious book, Shantz and Tomblin offer an engaging overview on the different practices of disobedience and resistance that define the internet as a space for antagonistic politics. While the volume comprises of seven chapters that follow a well-articulated introduction section, in fact three broad themes can be identified for the sake of this review: anarchism and hacker/hacktivist subjectivities (introduction, chapters 1 & 2); whistle-blowers and online anti-capitalism (chapters 3, 4 & 5); online commons and the prospect of cyber-syndicalism (chapters 6 & 7).

The first theme addresses the fundamental question concerning the nature and ideology that lies at the core of hacktivism. Because of its horizontal and anti-hierarchical organized methods (p.6) and its refusal for structural elements of organization, it is argued that hacktivism rests ontologically rooted in the theory and practices of anarchism. Retracing briefly the history of anarchist practices of the last century, the authors identify a set of commonalities that point to the anarchist character of cyber-disobedience. Amongst these, of particular interest is the focus on the similar ways in which offline and online anarchism is demonized in mainstream accounts to the point in which these political subjectivities are characterized as aberrant,

dehumanized and labelled with the one-size-fit-all term “terrorist” (p. 37). In the same way, as further argued in chapter two through a descriptive content analysis of hackers in films, cyber-disobedients tend to be stereotyped in banal ways that mainly focus on considerations of apolitical nature.

The book proceeds by exploring the anti-capitalist character of cyber-disobedience and the online battle over property of information and piracy as a form of resistance (chapter 3). It is argued that, similarly to other institutions, the Internet undergoes mechanisms of disciplinary power (p.81) that— through monitoring and surveillance— reduce the spaces for politics and liberty. However, because of its very nature, the Internet is characterized by spaces of obscurity that allow for unmonitored political and liberating activities. These spaces are accessible through computer virtuosity that remains “the most operative form of resistance within the online virtual community” (p. 85). In this sense, online whistle-blowers’ audacity allows for the disclosure of information that would otherwise remain unknown to the large public, de facto assigning them an avant-gardist role in the online struggle for freedom and “netizenship.”

In the last segment of the book, the authors resume an interesting debate that identifies strong similarities between those enclosure movements that characterized the period of capitalism early emergence and the Internet of our days. Similarly to those processes of dispossession, states and the capital are imposing regimes and the language of property rights to knowledge and creativity (p.104) that limit access to the commons. In this sense, cyber-anarchists recognize the web as a form of common wealth and “seek the extension of the communication commons through shared production and distribution” (p.107). The interesting debate on the online commons delineates a scenario in which future practices can be shaped in different organizational forms (as, for instance, in cyber-syndicalism).

This book undoubtedly succeeds in the ambition of mapping the different methods and goals that are at core of different forms of cyber-disobedience online while opening up a series of interesting questions for future research. The most important contribution of the book is the successful attempt to situate cyber-disobedience practices within the anarchist camp. Giving a specific focus on what cyber-

disobedients want rather than what they fight against, the book moves beyond a common impasse that characterizes scholarship on online resistances and offers a precious contribution for those interested in the issue of online commons.

Because of its broad scope and ambition, the volume also suffers from a number of minor shortcomings. While fascinating and illustrative, drawing a line that connects all the different subaltern online subjectivities and practices risks to minimize those ideological and operational differences that characterize them. In this sense, the arguments often rely on a conceptual confusion that presumes some sort of equation between anarchism and disobedience. Situating these debates within the existing scholarship on civil disobedience could have allowed for a more nuanced conceptual approach to the analysis of the different online resisters and their interactions and articulation through difference.

Overall, *Cyber Disobedience. Re://Presenting Online Anarchy* represents an important contribution to scholarship on subalternity and resistance and an engaging read for those who are interested in understanding how the online anarchist passion for destruction is articulated in creative ways.

Fabio Cristiano, Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden