w3 wi11 ov3rf10w ur cistem g4t3s: The Hackers of Resistance

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FxDAt69, Fragmint, and CherryChapo, Hackers of Resistance, wearehors. xyz/ (accessed August 2, 2018).

The Hackers of Resistance, also known by the acronym HORs, are an elaborate cyberpunk, transfeminist, multimedia performance-art collective consisting of a semi-anonymous trio of queer women of color. The artists' personas are code-named FxDat69, Fragmint, and CherryChapo, and are characters based on the artists' own identities and personal interests. Created for "Animating the Archives: the Woman's Building," Hackers of Resistance is a diffuse project that interweaves multimedia performance art, comedy, and video games to craft a cathartic power fantasy that explores the realities of cis and trans women of color living within a neoliberal surveillance state. Taking place in an alternative universe, this hyperimmersive multisensory, speculative world manifests through an online archive, wearehors.xyz, a traveling performance-art piece revolving around an interactive, game-driven installation based in the HORhaus, a.k.a. the hacker's secret lair.

In this alternative present, three queer women of color helm a revolution, interrupting the dominant discourses of hacking, as they do not fit within the racialized, gendered, and sexualized norms of what a hacker is. Through their transmedia storytelling, rooted in transnational transfeminist theory and activism, the hackers craft a queer, women of color intervention on the ways that reproductive and surveillance technologies inform each other as manifestations of the logics and projects of necropolitics. By reclaiming these technologies and merging them with antisurveillance and hacktivism, HORs crafts a queer futurity where there are immediate and doable solutions to end neoliberalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy.

In this alternative 2017, the hackers are nostalgic for "the Snowden days," a happier time where one isn't *just* exiled by a totalitarian regime. Their 2017 is more dire, but in a way that is also more optimistic, as it presents solutions and opportunities that are more difficult to obtain in our present time, where

leaked information can spark a revolution that overthrows not only the Trump administration but the settler colonial power structures of the United States. By creating such a cathartic power fantasy in a dimension so close to our own, HORs engineers a space for reclamation that is enacted both online and offline. The hackers allude to the intersection of transmisogyny, queerphobia, and surveillance with the battle cry "w3 wi11 ov3rf10w ur cistem g4t3s," a challenge to the surveillance state that polices queerness, trans women, and gender-nonconforming people wherever they interact. In our own world that rejects Black and brown women and transfeminine people as only being hopeless and hapless victims, the hackers instead posit that those who have been marginalized by internet surveillance are able to disrupt the infinite overt and covert ways their bodies are policed and watched because they always have been able to do so, whether online or on the streets.

Cybersurveillance is identified as not the sole oppressor but an oppressive action rooted in the logics and projects of a settler colonial nation-state. The hackers also recognize the past and present contributions of Black and brown women hacktivists by providing community support and bringing hacking back to its origins in women of color. This reclamation of hacking, often regarded as destructive and the domain of vengeful white men, renders it into a generative and productive site of both alternative ways of knowing and a modality of hope. In this way, HORs works as a playful poetry from the future, as outlined by Kara Keeling in the way they interrupt normative concepts and processes of time, history, subject formation, and erasure with the imaginings and inhabiting of new futures.[1]

However, HORs are not necessarily real hackers but, rather, performance artists leading their audience to believe they are doing such inventive hacktivism. Hackers of Resistance was created as a tribute to the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, a feminist community space that operated from 1978 to 1991. The hackers, along with fifteen emerging Southern Californian women artists, were given fellowships and prompted to create new artworks driven by the Woman's Building history and legacy as a feminist nonprofit art and education center, drawing from its archives to reimagine their art in a modern context.

When the hackers first emerged online, their social media presence provided glimpses of their interactive performance-art piece. Their first performance was at Avenue 50 Studio, a community gallery in Los Angeles. The HORhaus, a small, enclosed interactive installation shrouded by drapes where the performances took place, was housed in the gallery from May 13, 2017, until June 3, 2017. HORs then toured with the IndieCade festival and was featured in

OUTsider fest, as well as setting up residence at B4BEL4B Gallery in Oakland, California, and Alex Theatre in Glendale, California. The hackers' characters were further expanded on for issue 13 of *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* in an interactive online diary that is not essential to the audience's understanding of the performance piece. Rather, it expands on their mission and goals as individuals and as a coalition, chronicling their projects, inspirations, and future plans.

Each character, FxDAt69, Fragmint, and CherryChapo, is neither an autobiographical representation nor the unified symbol of the struggles of the marginalized and internet surveillance. Much like Donna Haraway's ever-changing cyborgs made of multiple parts, the hackers are not static sovereign entities but mutable assemblages of complicated entanglements of historic and modern transnational intersections of race, class, and gender. FxDAt69 is a sex-positive biohacker who grew up in the global South admiring guerrilla activists. Hacking both for pleasure and for reproductive rights, she joined the HORs on an online forum while researching guerrilla protest technology. FxDAt69 also collaborates with the Marias Clandestinas, another speculative transnational feminist collective centered on Black and brown women and transfeminine people. The Marias research 3-D print abortion kits and have published the best methods and costs in *The 3D Additivist Cookbook*. Fragmint is the hacker's anti-recognition expert whose experiments with anti-facial-recognition makeup focus on ways to prevent detection and to clean up any tracks from the NSA and the FBI. CherryChapo is the hacker's social engineer who, in her bid to aid the Marias, has developed disguises, gadgets, and methods to train activists to act like they belong in high-security places. Often disguised as a janitor and wearing a moustache, CherryChapo spends her days sneaking into FBI headquarters to listen in on bathroom conversation, dropping a flash drive with an undetectable keylogger, and going through the trash looking for valuable information.

Troubling the essentialisms and binaries of human subject and state, the hackers play with elements of gender nihilism as a way to hack their realities by hacking the perception of their bodies as being gendered in a heteronormative and cisnormative way. Instead, they focus on how the nation-state and the body are linked in unfathomable, nuanced, and almost untraceable fusions and diffusions.[2] Although they are explicitly gendered as queer women, the characters don't play into their own gender identities and instead play with the entanglements of gender, race, and sexuality to interrogate the ways in which gender is racialized and race is gendered. Bodies are hidden and faces

are obscured as a way to both illustrate countersurveillance camouflage and to give space for the audience members to imagine themselves as the hackers. For example, Fragmint tapes a single blonde hair extension, an object associated with white femininity, under her eye as genderless antisurveillance makeup. CherryChapo's comically large fake moustache, a parody of masculinity, allows her to successfully infiltrate white male–dominated spaces that intend to keep white men dominant.

Cuteness and playfulness are not merely weaponized; they are recognized as having been weapons all along. The hackers' neon hoodies render them undetectable to radio-frequency identification, a technology used to identify and track tags attached to objects, but also make them look cute and stylish. These coveralls also play directly into the Western world's scopophilic fixation on the veil and the monstrous, terrorist, and dangerous yet erotic potential of veiled bodies. Rather than refute being "the assemblage of the monster-terrorist-fag,"[3] HORs revels in the possibilities of being undetectable, or willingly overlooked, yet seeing all.

Rejecting legibility as good neoliberal citizen-subjects, and encouraging their audience to be equally as unintelligible, is quite pertinent during the Trump administration. Often, model minority myths and affective politics of national belonging are used to render those dehumanized by racialized and gendered legislation into deserving minority subjects. However, this excludes the narratives and presence of marginalized subjects that do not fit into the racial, sexual, cultural, class, and gendered boundaries of the deserving subject. This rejection of legibility is explored by HORs via images of Fragmint, who in the archives is attributed with having cousins in Iran, wearing a garment inspired by the burka, which are peppered throughout the hacker's maximalist online presence. Embracing the trope of the terrorist as imagined by the West is a provocative alignment toward the fear of another international terrorist attack on American soil, which drives the logics behind the Trump administration's travel ban and desires for a wall at the US–Mexico border, as "the events of September 11 have been used to justify the detention of any bodies suspected of being terrorists."[4] The HORs thus claims to be exactly what the US government fears, but the work they do and how they do it does not align with the tropes of what terrorism looks like.

Furthermore, by reclaiming the mantle of the hacker from white men and freaking them out in the process, HORs creates content for and carves out a space for Black and brown women and transfeminine individuals who have interest, if not experience, with hacktivism. The inclusion of audience

members in their performances and online presence is a call that not only can anyone hack but everyone must and should do it. By centering hacking back to its origins of women, HORs rejects the masculinization of hacktivism. For example, when one first encounters the hackers' website, participants see a Guy Fawkes mask done up in a rainbow-shimmer with an adorable bob haircut, kitty whiskers, shoujo anime sparkles, and a tattooed-on tear.

Through the deployment of a DIY maximalist nineties' Geocities aesthetic, the hackers are both evoking an aesthetic mood and citing a specific point in internet history before the convenience of Facebook that reifies the mundane horrors of a surveillance state. According to Lisa Nakamura in *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, the introduction of Netscape navigator in 1995 transformed the internet from a textual form to a graphic form, catalyzing the growth of the internet from a niche hobby to a more accessible and pedestrian aspect of everyday life and popular culture through its increased accessibility.[5] This nostalgia is used by the artists to craft not only an alternative 2017 but an alternative collective memory of the possibility of the internet in the 1990s.

In contrast to the modern internet of the mid-2000s to present day, the internet of the 1990s and early 2000s existed under a different cultural context, further complicated by limited technology and access. Despite barriers to equal access, these virtual spaces hosted infinite articulations of experiences, identities, and communities. As the demographics of the internet changed due to the closing digital divide, so did the resulting culture. The internet of the 2000s grew to be more accessible through technocracies that market free platforms for expression that are therefore more surveilled. The past form of presenting oneself online required a web host as well as basic understanding of both HTML and image hosting. Now, access to one's own private space online requires an email and a password. However, the convenience of the modern internet is shaped by neoliberal logics and discourses of individuality and surveillance, discourses that are positioned as integral to preventing domestic and transnational crime, trafficking, and terrorism; mass internet surveillance perpetuates carceral violence, control, and criminalization. By re-creating the comparatively lawless internet of a pre–mass surveillance 1990s and centering this on Black and brown women, the hackers are reclaiming the modern internet through queer world making.

Inspired by the Sisters of Survival, an antinuclear, feminist performance-art collective founded in 1981 at the Woman's Building, the hackers drew from their touring performance, *END OF THE RAINBOW*, to ask, what does a modern-day feminist performance-art protest look like? Dressed in

rainbow-colored nun's robes inspired by urgent shorthand communication of semaphore flags, the sisters played with gender symbolism including the trope of the naughty nun whose bad habits are rooted in often pornographic, medieval European literature and song. The hackers engage in similar gendered play through their reclamation of the figure of the hacker, who is imagined as a white, male "anonymous" hacker from 4Chan, a power fantasy stemming from similar depictions originating in the film *The Matrix* (1999). Through the centering of Black and brown queer women and transfeminine people within this hacker fantasy, the normative narrative is greatly disrupted. Like the sisters, the hackers use interactive performance-art pieces for the general public that deploy humor and play in order to evoke hope and generate dialogue about urgent global issues.

The hackers also draw from Theatre of the Oppressed, a series of interactive theater games developed in Brazil in the 1970s by Augusto Boal, where the audience participates in exercises to rehearse taking action. Inspired by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, rather than treat the public as vessels into which educators deposit knowledge, critical thinking is encouraged through a problem-posing education that undermines the hegemony by constantly questioning it and demanding recognition of the agency of the oppressed. In the tradition of these collaborative art pieces, the hackers attempt to bridge the gap between the elite art world and the marginalized by creating immersive and interactive performance-art pieces whose goal is to give their audience an active role to feel the thrill of hacking for justice and to practice taking drastic political action.

Each HORs performance has two modes, installation and performance, with both having their own video-game build. Installation mode is centered on the hacker's den, which is open for visitors to explore between performances. Drawing visitors in with its colorful punk queer aesthetic, the den is a physical manifestation of the alternate 2017, where participants can immerse themselves in the world that informs the hacker's mission and the plot of the performance. The set is a bricolage of neon lighting design, retro technology, Fragmint's Bauhaus-like antisurveillance masks, and Chapo's fluorescent disguises, hacking experiments, political propaganda, protest gear, and a megaphone. Through the use of props and space, the hackers craft their world with items such as a radio scanner, emails from the Marias Clandestinas about the abortion kit prototype as well as their research documents, a hacked dildo, a video feed of the crowds outside the installation, a mood-board of radical resources, and tactics for dismantling drones and evading recognition. The HORs manifesto

video loops on the projector and the speaker, cutting off suddenly to then begin again. Running on a laptop on a table is a game where players navigate through an alternate-reality NSA database for educational exploration. Unlike the game in the performance, there are no puzzles, special queries can be run, the most important files are inaccessible and are unable to be leaked, and there is no high pressure.

During the performance, or secret meeting, the artists refer to a sign-up sheet to write the audience members into the fluid and adaptable script. The performance centers on the hackers attempting to free their lovers and collaborators the Marias Clandestinas, by starting a revolution that would lead to the complete abolishment of the US government. The performance begins with Fragmint and FxDAt69 waiting for Chapo to return from FBI headquarters. Throughout their opening conversation, the audience is hailed as not mere visitors but collaborators: "If you are here, and you're queer, it's because you were handpicked by us or our lovers Marias Clandestinas as trustworthy collaborators fighting for public health."[6]

CherryChapo arrives, fresh from dumpster diving, with clues written on crumpled pieces of paper that allude to a possible backdoor to the NSA's content system that can be accessed successfully if the hackers write a good rootkit, that is, software used to access computers without leaving a trace. Guided by Chapo's clues, HORs decrypts while the audience member navigates, logging into the backdoor to the NSA database and perusing archives of older files. The hackers then find the files for Operation M.A.G.A., a government conspiracy to imprison, weaken, and kill countless marginalized communities by ramping up environmental racism, lack of access to health care, and, the criminalization of radical Black and brown activists. The files are downloaded and leaked to Pastebin, spreading rapidly and spurring a radical revolution that spills into the streets.

Yet this is only the beginning of an undefined future that can be whatever the audience desires it to be. Rather than articulate a singular queer feminist futurity, the hackers instead create a multitude of nuanced and complicated possibilities and ambiguities as a way to imagine a queer/queered futurity. The horrors of necropolitics are deployed as a catalyst for the imaginings and inhabiting of new futures. In "Theorizing Transnational Feminist Praxis," Nagar and Swarr call for a transnational feminist praxis, that, to use Chandra Mohanty's terminology, is aware of its cartographies, as well as its past, present, future, and, finally, its constraints. Although the methods of this praxis have limitations, it involves constant interrogation of positionality, self-reflexivity, representational

experiments, and, enacting accountability.[7] The hackers engage in this praxis by refusing to position themselves as a stable and knowable monolithic entity; rather, they are an ever-changing collective that is always in crisis.

Notes

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1. Kara Keeling, "LOOKING FOR M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ* 15.4 (2009): 56–67.
2. Sherine F. Hamdy, "When the State and Your Kidneys Fail: Political Etiologies in an Egyptian Dialysis Ward," *American Ethnologist* 35.4 (2008): 561.
3. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 172.
4. Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text*, no. 79 (2004): 130, socialtextjournal.org/article/affective-economies/.
5. Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1.
6. Hackers of Resistance, "Script," 2017, 1.
7. Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock Swarr, "Introduction: Theorizing Transnational Feminist Praxis," in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).