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Tactical New Media and Electronic Civil Disobedience

Today's civic resistance often is not about storming the barricades and overturning society as a whole. Does this mean that we do not believe in change and resistance anymore? Have we accepted the capitalist ideology, even in times of economic crisis?

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism* Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) discuss the transformation of the capitalist ideology between the 1960s and 1980s. They explain that we often take recourse to artistic values and visions to provide us with the means to criticize the capitalist spirit from an autonomous position. But capitalism has shown itself to be quite creative in its response to this kind of critique. The artistic critique calling for authenticity and freedom was met with a new capitalist work ethos which incorporated artistic values of versatility, creativity, and self-management. The question is whether it is possible to form an artistic critique which can resist this kind of capitalist appropriation and at the same time be powerful enough to make a difference.

It is a common intuition that, in order to be critical, we need distance between us and the object or event we are criticizing. But how can we distance ourselves from our own involvement with society? Michel de Certeau (1984), philosopher of everyday practice, argues that even when we are immersed in a cultural structure, we still practice agency. We might lack overview, but every time we use cultural artefacts and conventions, we appropriate them and deviate from them. This tactical activity does not require distance. Today's citizens can be critical from within their engagements rather than from an external, autonomous position.

Cultural theorists Rita Raley (2009) and Geert Lovink (2002) investigate how tactical practice can be found in today's new media art. New media are used to disturb and obstruct the work of government agencies and commercial multinationals, for example with denial of service attacks. Such a temporary disturbance works much like a physical sit-in, slowing down the servers of these institutions. Other forms of civil disobedience are more playful and visual. For example, *They Rule* (2001) by Josh On and Futurefarmers visualizes power structures of large companies, by showing a map of connections between board members. Users of their website can browse through directories and investigate the connections that show up. In this paper I will discuss different kinds of new media art tactics that resist the capitalist ideology of governments and multinationals, and investigate the new understanding of critical resistance on which these practices are founded.