

## DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S NOMADODOLOGY: THE WAR MACHINE, AND CRITICAL RESISTANCE IN CYBERSPACE

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the "nomad" and the "war machine" as approaches for charting an ethics of desire in order to better understand the virtual spaces of dissent on the Internet, which in turn helps to reformulate current imagined Internet geographies of techno-utopianism. To demonstrate the interpretive and pedagogical importance of these concepts, this paper takes examples from the use of Internet applications and social media web sites during the "Arab Spring," as well as recent cyber activities behind the Great Firewall of Mainland China. Through these examples, Deleuze and Guattari's "nomadology" is used to analyze online tactics of resistance with a particular focus on how they challenge a state's ability to control subject formation and spatial practice.*

### CRITICAL RESISTANCE AND AN ETHICS OF DESIRE

What actualizes, traces, and terminates desire like the Internet? If the unprecedented ability to locate and purchase products from around the world does not tell us, "trending" Justin Bieber and football fan blogs should. As a key mechanism for accelerated globalization and transnationalism, it services imagination with potential connectivity, continuity, and closure for vast ideoscapes, both disparate and desperate, of codes, cultures, and countries. Thus, the Internet provides a virtual space for lines of flight, or events, based on desire where destinations are not predetermined but arrived at as a consequence of its trajectory. While the Internet is often conceived of as abstract—a smooth space through which web surfers glide across borders and boundaries—this imaginary realm is rife with contestation, state borders, and neo-colonial geographies marked not just by the digital divide but by cyber-orientalism.

In a world where vast empires of wealth are created and seemingly solid markets are destroyed through speculation on desire, Deleuze and Guattari figure as an important pair for providing theorizations of desire as productive, moving away from Freudian and Lacanian notions of desire as a component of repression or "lack." Deleuze and Guattari posit that channeling desire is the challenge of an epoch marked by "capitalism" and "schizophrenia," giving the famous example of Henry Miller's desire to get drunk on "pure water" instead of alcohol as an ethics of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 286). Their ethics of desire is developed through a "global" approach to concepts, structures, and systems which accounts for incommensurability due to culture and historical specificity. Through their concepts of the "nomad" and the "war machine," they introduce a politics of spatial practice by showing how the state symbolically establishes meaning through the creation of hierarchies which limit and, or, control movement through space. They also discuss how desire can lead to a recoding of spatial practice and ultimately resistance to the state. In this paper, I hope to show how virtual spatial practice online offers new formations of collaboration and solidarity can be imagined as ways of pursuing social justice without necessarily succumbing to totalizing and utopian narratives.

### NOMADODOLOGY

One of the key figures in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus* is the nomad, which can be read as a pun upon Leibnitz's concept of the monad. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), a "monad" is the "the name of the unity from which, as from a principle

(*arche*), all number and multiplicity are derived.” The atom-like monad was Leibnitz’s way of conceiving of space as unified through language, thought, and spirit which allows for each particular monad to represent difference. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are not thinking anthropologically when they use the term, “nomad.” Instead they are returning to classical and elemental particle theory of states that goes dates back to antiquity—Democritus and Lucretius—, whereby individuals exist in coded relationships within space, resulting in either the elemental composition of the state or resistance to the state and state functions. They write: “The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space; he occupies, inhabits, holds that space; that is his territorial principle” (p. 380). They are using the figure of the nomad to understand a set of spatial practices in which the coding of meaning is not determined by discourses of the nation state; nomadic subjectivity is understood as flowing through what they call, “smooth space” instead of moving from one type of space to another. Nomadic space works in opposition to the sedentary space of a state, whereby the sovereign subject is territorialized in what is labeled, “striated space”—the patchwork quilt grids of fields, suburban housing tracks, city blocks, and so on. Deleuze and Guattari provide a means of dialectic thinking through pairing oppositional spaces and particular subjects that encode space with meaning: nomadic/state subjects; smooth/striated spaces. The advantage of these dialectic pairings is that we can think of actions by the state or resistance to the state in terms of subjective agency—an individual’s desired action—, and not in terms that are already overdetermined, such as ideology or false consciousness.

The nomad represents a form of multiplicity, because the nomad can be reterritorialized by the state, and sedentary subjects of the state can be deterritorialized as nomadic. The nomad’s resistance to the state comes through a recoding of striated space as smooth. Given the restraints on accounting for individual agency, the nomad provides a means of cognitive mapping subjectivity. For example, presently the virtual space of the Internet is a space of contestation of subject formation where processes of territorialization and deterritorialization are occurring all the time as the nomadic web surfers take up space along vectors of virtual routes by desire. In surfing, they are not always moving towards a specific destination or web site, but arriving at points along a network by virtue of their trajectory. Conversely, the state and by extension, corporate institutions, have gained the ability to territorialize the web surfer into striated spaces through technologies of observation that Foucault has identified as serving governmentality or self-management. The web surfer, aware that her virtual trajectories and dwellings are subject to scrutiny, disciplines her own behavior to comply with corporate or state demands, such as registration or monetization. As this happens the web surfer no longer is nomadic, but a virtual subject is constructed which adheres to predictable behaviors of information consumption and production within the confines of striated spaces of the Internet. That the Internet is a space for nomadic subjectivity and critical resistance is not surprising due to the relative ease one has in inventing a self, based on desire, which cannot occur as easily in physical environments. This is especially true in regimes where surveillance and identification severely restrict a sovereign subject from recoding striated space into smooth space. As a result, cyberspace has witnessed a flourishing of subcultures, countercultures, postnational cultures and other groupings which allow web surfers to travel from striated space as sovereign subjects into smooth space. It is at this point where Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology seems to anticipate cyberspace as a space where an individual can take up multiple subject positions in ways that undermine the state.

Deleuze and Guattari caution that the figure of the nomad does not guarantee any final sense of liberation—it is not a utopian horizon. In fact, they diagram how the figure of the nomad is a form of schizophrenia. It involves taking up multiple subject positions, which is a situation that is a routine in an era of late capitalism where one person has to adapt multiple identities and take on a variety of disconnected roles. However, the destabilizing elements of nomadic subjectivity can be very dangerous, psychically, to the individual whose act of recoding space

involves a situation where previously fixed social meanings are suddenly gone. Ultimately, the individual nomad recreates subjective meaning through forming an assembly and establishing solidarity, wherein the ethics of desire become paramount. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) say:

However, in conformity with the essence, the nomads do not hold the secret: an ‘ideological,’ scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war machine, to the precise extent to which it draws in relation to a *phylum*, a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement. It is not the nomad who defines this constellation of characteristics; it is this constellation that defines the nomad. (1987, pp. 422-423)

## THE WAR MACHINE

The war machine is another concept used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a part of their nomadology, and it is framed as a kind of nomadic technology. One aspect of the war machine is that it operates in smooth space, as opposed to striated space, even though those same spaces might overlap in the same territory. Deleuze and Guattari use the game of Go, as a way of thinking about smooth space, and chess as striated space (p. 353). The pieces used in international chess are coded to show how class or rank determines movement through space; this is a different concept of spatial practice than is represented by plain, undifferentiated disks that are used in Go—pieces whose movements are limited only by available territory (p. 353). The clustered assembly of nomads, taking up smooth space, would be one way of understanding a war machine, which Deleuze and Guattari liken to the pack or the band, organized less by hierarchical features than by shared desire and similar spatial practices. The pieces of a Go set are analogous to the pack or the band of undifferentiated parts, and very different from carefully delineated chess pieces like the queen, bishop, or rook whose power is represented through conventions that constrict their movement on the board. The boards themselves are very different. The Go board is set up like a network of interconnected lines, while the chess board consists of a patchwork pattern of white and black spaces which limit movement. War machines, Deleuze and Guattari theorize, can be appropriated by the state as an assemblage even though they tend to act differently than other state apparatuses. For example, a country’s navy may follow different laws; use sailors from different nations; commandeer vessels on the high seas and incorporate them into their own fleets, and so on. As a War Machine co-opted by the state, the military often functions as an exception to the normative expectations of state organizations consisting of sovereign subjects. For example, in their discussion of military, Deleuze and Guattari, discuss the ceremonies that incorporate the military into the state, and counter-intuitively suggest that one of these functions is to commit violence when needed in order to demonstrate the monopoly that the state has on violence. Furthermore, the state needs to create and maintain hierarchical structures in the military in order to properly control it and incorporate it into its political order. Deleuze and Guattari are also quick to point out that while the military is the most obvious example of “nomad science” it is far from the only one. They discuss medieval artisan guilds as war machines appropriated by the state. The state “sedentarizes” guild labor and knowledge communities because guilds threaten the divisions that are coded in the striated spaces of the state—striated spaces both figural and actual. The spaces are figural in that they are incorporated into state hierarchies of knowledge and power; actual in that their work is applied to the construction of monuments claimed by the state. This recoding of nomads into sovereign subjects is an important part of maintaining borders between the interior and exterior of the state which is paramount to any attempt at maintaining state hierarchies of authority and control. Deleuze and Guattari assert:

One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights

over an entire “exterior,” over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon [strata]. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc. (p. 386)

In saying this, Deleuze and Guattari caution against using the concept of the nomad as necessarily liberating, or the war machine as necessarily, what Althusser terms, a repressive state apparatus. When thinking of these concepts in terms of foreign policy, we can see this need to create an exterior to organize and rule over as a way to understand current foreign policy disputes about the Internet. Cyberspace becomes an actualization of a state to extend its power to control imaginary territories beyond its sovereignty as states attempt to create zones of extraterritoriality as a way of managing borders.

## **GEOGRAPHIES OF TECHNO-UTOPIANISM**

How does the Internet represent a smooth space for dissent or organized opposition to non-democratic or rigidly hegemonic activities of the state, if it is so easily recoded into the regulated and striated space of the state? This question is particularly salient now that the web is becoming more and more well-policed, approaching the coming horizon of Web 3.0—a semantic Web where computers will be able to sift through search engine results, and thus read, navigate, and process information, potentially providing more data more efficiently to the individual web surfer, making computing less and less text-based. While these changes would free both the user and the Internet from the screen and its regime of hypertext (Apple’s Siri and Google’s Google Glasses are example of the direction this is headed), to make a Web 3.0 product, like “Siri,” that can actually find what you want, web pages will need new standards, and it is through this actual recoding that transnational global corporations as well as the nation state will have much more control over an individual’s personal information, and the power to reterritorialize nomadic subjectivity.

This past year marked a meeting in Dubai where the International Telecommunications Union, now a part of the UN, which began as the International Telegraph Union in the 1860s, met to discuss the matter of standards and control for the future of the Internet (“Clashes over Internet regulation during UN talks,” 2013). The reporting that led up to the meeting encapsulates the narratives that frame the Internet’s role in enabling critical resistance to excesses of the nation state, especially when the state serves the interest of transnational capital at the costs of those who are adversely affected by land grabs, pollution, product dumping, or unfair labor competition in free trade zones, just to name a few instances. There are two fundamental narratives that the conference invokes and both are tied to long-standing techno-utopian notions. First, there is a relatively open and accessible, politically and economically neutral Internet with intrinsically liberatory horizons where users acquire an enhanced political consciousness from their free access to information and the relative freedom to set up individual sites of action; and second, that the tight Internet regulation of the state disenfranchises opposition and empowers repressive state apparatuses. One place where these narratives emerge with seemingly the most insistence is in critiques of the “Great Firewall” of China. The US and Europe often draw upon these notions to criticize the current regime in China for its awesome ability to cordon off its Internet users which now number more than half a billion, while at the same time marshaling in a robustly open and competitive cyber-business environment. The techno-utopian argument suggests that an open Chinese Internet would necessarily lead to a revolutionary transformation in the political consciousness of Mainland Chinese Internet users, who will clamor for progressive and democratizing changes. Conversely, the Chinese model, actively appropriated by other rather questionable regimes, represents the dystopian horizon—the fear that the Internet will become a weapon the state can use to crush resistance. China watchers in the popular press, like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, have

offered the successes and failures of the Arab Spring to predict China's dystopian future due to the suppression of democratic movements, or to demonstrate how resistance in China will cause a political sea change.

One noticeable aspect of these techno-utopian narratives is that they create an imaginary geography that re-inscribes an East/West dichotomy of a despotic East and a democratic West onto a late-capital, neoliberal landscape roughly along the same lines of prior imperial mappings of the Orient. This imagined geography then becomes an interiorized exterior over which the rhetoric of techno-utopianism is used to "establish a zone of rights," in the words of Deleuze and Guattari. The neo-orientalism coming out of Washington and editorials in newspapers across the global North is relayed into neo-occidentalism in places like China and Iran. These countries have histories of Western colonial and neocolonial interference, and they refer to these histories to rhetorically construct a rationale for the control over cyberspace as necessary for protecting the integrity of state sovereignty from Western interference. Meanwhile, in places like the United States these grand narratives and historiographies of progress are also appropriated into narratives of devolution, as commentators have looked at events, like the Wisconsin protests against legislation on labor unions in the US, as a case of citizens in Western countries learning from Egypt, the "despotic East," about participatory democracy. The way the Internet is conceived in these narratives becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as it is used as a rhetorical pivot for critique.

Techno-utopianism is also problematic because it replace debates over social justice with self-obsessed concerns of the state—and in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, the nomadic subjectivity of protestors as a war machine is reterritorialized or recoded into the striated space of the state. While commentators lament the lack of freedom, they ignore the fact that the information that people consume on the Internet is overwhelmingly supportive of their pre-existing opinions, prejudices, and politics. As Mueller Milton (2010) points out in *Information Revolution and Global Politics: Networks and States, the Global Politics of Internet Governance*: "But what of the politics of cyberspace? Much of the Internet's use, for commercial, academic, and military purposes, reinforces entrenched ideologies of individualism and a definition of the self through consumption" (p. 1). Desire then is turned into predictable lines of flight through striated spaces of the state, facilitated by consumerism. While global networks of computer users can potentially disrupt the national imaginary of the state, most users situate their place in cyberspace as securely within the contours of the nation. Jack L. Goldsmith and Tim Wu (2006) demonstrate this in their history of *Yahoo International*; they report, "geographical borders first emerged on the Internet not as a result of fiat by national governments, but rather organically, from below, because Internet users around the globe demanded different Internet experiences that corresponded to geography" (p. 49). Even in an imaginary space like the Internet, which is easy to conceive of as smooth, yet it is also easy to conceive of how the sovereign subject, as a default subjectivity, recodes this imaginary space as national.

While the availability of Internet connectivity may not lead to the widening of people's views, or to inspire revolutionary change, it provides a smooth space for the penetration of desire and a line of flight which can produce differences and potentially provide change. In discussing the war machine, Andrew Robinson (2010), notes that one of the useful ways that Deleuze and Guattari theorize critical resistance is through their method of distinction and division. He writes, "distinctively, they also view agency in terms of differentiation—each person or group creates itself, not by selecting among available alternatives, but by splitting existing totalities through the creation of new differences" (2010). This is how nomadology, like Leibnitz's monadology, provides ways to conceptualize change, not as created from without, but through desire, towards which a nomadic subjectivity traces a route. Adopting a nomadic subjectivity is an active switch that the user makes which can result in a resistance to hierarchies of the state.

## HOLDING RECODED SPACE IN EGYPT

Critical resistance, especially in the form of protests that challenge the state, can be read as a type of war machine assembled through the nomadic subjectivity of protestors. Even if the protestor is immobile or immobilized, she or he becomes a nomad, signifying a splitting of differences simply by latching onto space in a collective presence. One of the most obvious forms of this is the “Occupy” movement that formed without central leadership, a singular goal, or even a clear political affiliation. The protesters merely took up space, like Go pieces, in an attempt to recode symbolic spaces related to the hierarchical structure of the state—Wall Street, city halls, and state schools were just a few sites that were “occupied.” Protests, more generally, can be classified as nomadic war machines simply by virtue of the protesters’ desire to create a subject that takes up space as a form of resistance. There are countless examples, but some of the most vivid can be taken from the ongoing events in Egypt. The Tahrir Square protests that began in the winter of 2011, involved the protestors taking up space, and relaying this act of defiance through the Internet and media outlets. Meanwhile, the state attempted to clear the square and return it to its monumental function as a spatial emblem of state hierarchies. The conflict became one that played out in the field of semiotics as much as it did on the actual square. For example, tools that are typically understood as being useful for assisting routine labor in the striated space of the state became recoded as weapons when appropriated by the war machine—digital technologies allowed the protesters to enhance logistics in addition to letting them record images and video of the events that were happening on the ground. The control over self-representation through digital recording devices was tactically used in an attempt to defeat the grand narratives of the state and replace them with the mini-narratives recorded by the protestors. In Egypt this was done by:

focusing the oppositional narrative around victimization and injustice by identifying a few key symbols and iconic figures that would have currency across multiple social networks. A complex sociotechnical system was created not only between social media and the more traditional media, but also between mediated and face-to-face networks. (Lim, 2012, p. 244)

Many images and videos from protesters were uploaded to social networking platforms like Facebook, and relayed by more established media outlets. While I would argue that new media technology was not the driving force of the protest movement, it was certainly a tool that was deterritorialized and recoded as a weapon deployed against the state by the protesters.

There have been many studies of the relationship between Arab Spring protests and the use of social media with split results. For example, Sean Aday, et al. (2010) in “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” suggest that traditional media was as an important factor in motivating political mobilization and changing attitudes, particularly as they magnified, distributed, and validated protestor-generated new media. As the protesters worked with new materials, their labor was redirected not as a mode of capitalist production or accumulation but for the reproduction of events through images and video, accelerating movement and supplying affect as a corresponding weapon of the war machine—not for individual self-identification in the circus mirrors of social media, but for collective identity and narrative construction.

What happened in Tahrir Square adds another chapter to the storied history of the technological dimensions of critical resistance. The tools of work and quotidian life of the state: the computer, the cell phone, the fax machine, the twitter account, and the digital camera, are recoded, mutated into weapons, and pressed into service of a new assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) define an “assemblage” as: “every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially

and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention” (p. 406). The intervention, known as the Tahrir Square protests, constitutes such a singularity, by which the war machine’s object is “not war but the drawing of creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space...now directed against the State and against the worldwide axiomatic expressed by States” (p. 423). As an assemblage, the protest movement in Egypt was able to overcome very large barriers set by a rigid and bellicose state. However, the successful ouster of Egypt’s ruler could only have occurred with the help of the military, which, as discussed earlier, is always already a nomadic war machine that holds an exceptional place in the state. In other nations that underwent vast changes during the Arab Spring, such as Libya and Syria, the militaries adopted a different position. Not surprisingly, in Libya and Syria the military was more intensely integrated into the leadership structure of the state. During this time of revolutionary changes that were occurring in North Africa and the Middle East, the military had a major influence on the process of regime change.

The extent to which protestors not only offered resistance but mobilized the politics of resistance through digitally documenting and circulating the protests has been widely studied. For example, Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson (2012) conducted a study for their article, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations from Tahrir Square,” where they determined:

One of the most striking consequences of the new system of political communication has been the emergence of the citizen journalist, a person who may or may not have a history of activism, but suddenly appears to convey critical information to the public at a crucial moment. To gauge the level of participation in such citizen journalism, respondents were asked whether they produced pictures or videos of the protests, and their means of producing and dissemination. Almost half (48.2%) the respondents had produced and disseminated video or pictures from political protest in the streets. The leading platform for producing and disseminating visuals was Facebook, used by about fully a quarter of the sample (25%), and phones were a distant second, used by 15%. These were not mutually exclusive options; many who used their phones also used Facebook (72% of those who used their phone also used Facebook), presumably uploading videos and pictures taken on their phones to Facebook. About 5% of the sample used Twitter. A smaller proportion shared multimedia content via E-mail (2%). Respondents were allowed to select up to four different media, but few (15%) reported using more than one medium to document the protests.

This research confirms several reports about the amount of participation in the digital reproduction of the event as a means of political mobilization and reification. This self-representation and digital reproduction of the event was further facilitated by the Internet stations set up at the site of the protest where protestors could immediately upload any digital content they recorded of their experience at the protests. The result was extremely high rates of participation in the digitization of the protests—a noticeable protest tactic that has been developing alongside digital technologies, providing alternative accounts of the protests. For example, Wolfsfeld, Segev, and Sheafer (2013) demonstrate through their study of the protests that a “significant increase in the use of the new media is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it,” arguing that politics drive the press (p. 6). I would argue, though, that this analysis can be furthered by applying a notion of subjectivity and agency of the individual to exert her or his will whereby her or his liberation is thought of as a practice: the becoming of a citizen journalist who in recording events and recoding them into networked media creates a new subjectivity. The Internet provides a virtual space for nomadic subjectivity assembled in a war machine that challenges the state. In taking this line of flight, the protestors acknowledge that the virtual writing of the event takes primacy over the actual experience of protesting—meaning that while the protests are organized to send a message, the mediated reality of the protests is being mediated by the protestors. To push Marshall McLuhan’s famous axiom, “medium is the message”: the individuals mediating their

own protest, are engaging in an act of self-representation. It is in this virtual space where the particles (or nomads) of democratic action realize political desire through a collective assembly.

### **“GRASS MUD HORSE” DEFEATS “RIVER CRABS” ON THE GREAT FIREWALL**

Returning to China, the vast cloudy region in imaginary geographies of techno-dystopian futurism, the act of mediated self-representation is another case of realizing desire and becoming nomadic to form an assemblage that creates political change. Like the case of Tahrir Square, Chinese Internet users assert mini-narratives as a means of self-representation and as a form of critical resistance. Also similar to the case of Tahrir Square, the resistance takes place on a semiotic battlefield where constant recoding occurs within a tightly controlled Internet, managed by government-paid posters, ISP censorship and reporting, government filters on search engines, and police monitoring, which work together to “harmonize” the web on the Chinese side of the “Great Firewall.” Because the word, “censorship,” draws the attention of the censors, the euphemism, “harmony,” was used by Chinese Internet users to replace it. The word, “harmony,” (和諧, or in pinyin: *hexie*) was subsequently monitored by censors only to be replaced by the homophone “river crab” (河蟹, or in pinyin: *hexie*) as Internet users found ways to express censored terms through an alternative lexicon. Ironically, micro-bloggers have effectively forced the name of Hu Jintao’s policy, which included heightened control of Chinese cyberspace, “Social Harmony,” in addition to benign term, “river crabs,” to become censored, literally in the name of censorship (Wines, March 12, 2009). The state could not use its own language while the Internet users could by drawing from a flexible lexicon of homophones. In a country that spends more money on domestic security than on defense—and whose large defense budget grows at double-digit rates every year—, control over the smooth steppes of the Internet is analogous to the resources spent constructing the Great Wall in the Qin dynasty’s attempt at impeding the nomadic war machine of the *Xiong Nu* tribes. In fact, in certain instances, like the Great Wall, the Great Firewall becomes a point of contact where the objects of the territorialized war machine of the state and the nomadic subjectivity of the protesters find mutual interests; such as, the famous case of the local official with a surprisingly rich watch collection taken down through posts by activists and higher-level bureaucrats seeking to secure stability and legitimacy.

The extinction of “river crabs” occurred in 2009 when Chinese nomads of the Internet cultivated the “grass mud horse” to challenge censorship at the gates of the Great Firewall. “Grass mud horse” is a homophone for a dirty insult, involving “your mother.” It was not long before the “grass mud horse” that was able to get by the censors as Internet users posted fake natural histories of the “grass mud horse,” using images of alpaca, that culminated in a fake Youtube documentary describing how the “grass mud horse” defeated “river crabs” (Wines, March 12, 2009). The coded allegory, suggests that the Internet users have defeated “harmony,” which was a state policy. Along with the “grass mud horse,” nine other “mythical animals” found their way onto *Baidu.com*’s online encyclopedia, BaiduBaiké, giving Internet users a subversive, new vocabulary.

As much as the “grass mud horse” basically functioned as a humorous meme, it was not, to use the language of development, a sustainable project; yet, it created a fuzzy boundary between the state apparatus and lines of flight that would otherwise have resulted in self-destruction. When dealing with something that has the scale of half a billion users, like the Chinese Internet, this fuzzy boundary clears space for nomadic subjectivity; it allows for lines of flight, which can reach a critical mass if ever so briefly as seen in recent and much more explicitly critical protests concerning censorship at the *Southern Weekend* journal. As *The International Herald Tribune* reported one blogger’s assessment: “If our politicians have any quality, they should see



something terrifying within this phenomenon” (Wines, March 12, 2009). The terrifying element is the degradation of language through censorship into a subversive world of dada-esque language games, marking a decisive failure of the state in maintaining control over the symbolic order.

## **L’ENVOI: HARLEM SHAKE OR DEATH OF NOMADIC SUBJECTIVITY**

The recent Harlem Shake meme will most likely be forgotten by the time this article is completed, replaced by the myriad and insistent parade of images vying for our ever-shrinking attention spans. However, I would like to pause the Harlem Shuffle here as an example of nomadic subjectivity, *par excellence*: there gyrate soldiers of the Norwegian Army; the dance is a deterritorialized muster; the assemblage forms a kind of schizophrenia—dancers are connected not to each other, but to the recoding of space with no determinate outcome; it is an act that displays elements of speed, intensity, and the proliferation of difference even as it is so tiredly repetitive from Australia teenagers to Hong Kong retirees. However, while difference proliferates, the assemblage is encoded and contained. It has no destination except within the instant reproducibility of streaming media; identity is at once masked, and reconstituted in a collective, re-imagined conception of space, and line of flight. Pepsi cans have already started to do the Harlem Shake—does this mean the Internet as a machine of desire can merely provide empty calories and fiz gone flat within regimes of transnational capital? Before this question is even asked, reports come in from Egypt and Saudi Arabia that kids are dancing “The Harlem Shuffle.”

The meme in its repetition and difference has taken on political value in the Middle East, where small groups of mostly university students have filmed and posted the dance; the event of the filming and posting would otherwise go uncommented if it was not appropriated into narratives of universal freedom versus local cultural values reinforced by state law—narratives of technoutopian individualism, and dystopian state control. A March second *Toronto Star* (2013) report with the headline, “Harlem Shake Rocks Cairo; Egyptian Protesters Dance in Front of Muslim Brotherhood HQ,” explained that university students started making Harlem Shake videos for fun, but “Now, it’s becoming sort of activism, and resisting the government.” So privileged college students have taken a new line of flight, from dancing to dancing in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. In a near-perfect chiasmus, the Muslim Brotherhood has gone from a band of outlaws who challenged the state to holding the highest executive offices and thus becoming the law. This demonstrates that the state is able to recode nomadic subjectivity and reterritorialize it into striated space. It is a turn that leads us to assume that the dancing students, like the Muslim Brotherhood, will find an end of their line of flight in the striated space of the state. Nevertheless, it also shows that analyzing the students’ choices as recoding smooth space or being territorialized in striated space makes more sense as a framework for understanding resistance than placing them within an “Oriental” cyber-geography.

When the nomadic subject is not reterritorialized by the state, the other pole of such critical resistance is the suicide bomber or the self-immolated monk from which there is no return. Robert Deuchars (2013) notes:

It is as, Deleuze highlights in Nietzsche, a refusal to be fixed or to be pinned down, to be always moving even if one doesn’t go anywhere; for example the soldier-warrior who sits, rather than marching. Deleuze says as follows: “even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people.” In short it is *war*: a war of becoming over being, of the sedentary over the nomadic. Becoming different, to think and act differently. This form of ambiguity of the decentred self, continuously shifting defines both the warrior who “wars” without war and the warrior who “wars”

without the chance of “winning.”

Robert Deuchars describes the one who cannot be recoded; cannot be reterritorialized; the one whose deterritorialization and rejection of the state is so complete that the subjectivity retains no individual to recode; the one whose line of flight is so absolute there is no return except as a ghost through mediated spectacle, haunting this entire discussion of the protest as war machine; her or his end is in total annihilation—the suicide bomber, the one who “wars without war without a chance of winning” represents the ultimate line of flight and why Deleuze and Guattari caution that nomadic subjectivity does not have a utopian destination.

I would like to close my discussion with a return to Web 3.0 and its potential for user liberation as well as tighter state controls. I suggest that instead of thinking about the coming horizon of Internet technologies and what it means for resistance and social justice through the techno-utopian narratives that reproduce imperial geographies and historiographies of development, we should return to the question of the Internet as a virtual space for social justice through an ethics of desire whereby desire is not something to be repressed but to be channeled, cultivated, and carefully considered. Beyond being technological per se, the Internet calls into question the technologies of the self—a self that becomes a subject through the process of making choices. As it fundamentally asks us to consider who we are and what we really want, an ethics of desire should be made primal in discussions of Internet resistance. The nomadic subject not only challenges the state’s attempt to monopolize encoded spatial meaning in cyberspace, but also calls into question the re-emergence of orientalist discourse that can be seen in the reliance of techno-utopian narratives.

An ethics of desire recognizes that choosing to join a “movement” involves a decision in which differences become articulated through re-conceptualizing spatial practice. This ethics should take into consideration the object of desire, which affects the trajectory of the line of flight; it should also take into account the object of the war machine, which in turn determines its ability to critically resist the reterritorializing powers of the state. Desire is not the end in itself, but simply represents the trajectory of the nomad which needs a smooth space and thus constant thinking of ways to challenge hierarchies of the state when justice demands.

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(Word Count: 6797 Words)