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# 'Hacktivists' of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web

By AMY HARMON  
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Until they declared "Netwar" against the Mexican Government, Ricardo Dominguez and Stefan Wray earned their activist credentials the old-fashioned way, attending rallies in support of the Zapatista rebels, handing out pamphlets, shouting political slogans.

Now the two New Yorkers organize "virtual sit-ins" and recruit computer programmers to attack the World Wide Web sites of any person or company they deem responsible for oppression. Their new rallying cry: "The revolution will be digitized."

Mr. Wray, 37, and Mr. Dominguez, 39, are co-founders of the Electronic Disturbance Theater. It is one of several groups around the world that are beginning to experiment with computer hacking, so far largely nuisance attacks and the equivalent of electronic graffiti, as a means to a political end.

"We see this as a form of electronic civil disobedience," Mr. Wray told a group of about 75 people who had gathered in the East Village in Manhattan for an "anti-Columbus Day" event this month. "We are transferring the social-movement tactics of trespass and blockade to the Internet."

The notion is a departure for both radical activists and hackers, whose distinct, subversive subcultures have rarely intersected until recently. In some ways the two psychologies are polar opposites.

Hackers, while reliably anti-authoritarian, tend to limit their critique of the military-industrial complex to its imperfect computer security apparatus. Enamored of their image as the cowboys of the electronic frontier, most at least pay lip service to the hacker mantra -- "information wants to be free." But whatever capacity they might have to disrupt the social order has so far been largely restricted to pointless vandalism and pinching the occasional credit card number.

Political activists, on the other hand, preoccupied as they are with the power structure, have typically paid little heed to the information infrastructure on which it rests. Motivated by the desire for social change, they generally see building communities of support and cooperation as essential.

But the rapid growth of the Internet has transformed what was once a hacker playground into, among other things, a far-reaching political platform. What's more, the tricks invented by hackers have become easier for activists to learn and adopt because they are now widely published on how-to Web sites.

Radical groups are discovering what hackers have always known: Traditional social institutions are more vulnerable in cyberspace than they are in the physical world. And some members of the famously sophomoric hacker underground are becoming motivated by causes other than ego gratification.

## A New Technique To Reach Millions

In recent months, groups as diverse as the Animal Liberation Front, a militant animal-rights group; Radio4All, which supports pirate broadcasting, and international teams of teen-agers with cyber pseudonyms like Milworm and causes like anti-imperialism have increasingly begun pumping political protest through the Internet's security holes.

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On Monday, a day after China's human rights agency announced its new Web site, the official view of that nation's human rights record was replaced with an electronic trespasser's manifesto: "China's people have no rights at all, never mind human rights. How can the United States trade millions and millions of dollars with them and give them most favored trade status when they know what is happening?"

Earlier this month computer intruders scrawled "Save Kashmir" over the opening screen of a Web site that the Indian Government set up last summer to provide information about the region, whose ownership is disputed by Pakistan and several separatist groups. The hacked site included photographs of Kashmiris said to have been killed by Indian forces, overlaid with the words "massacre" and "extra-judicial execution."

In June, after the Indian Government conducted nuclear tests, college students in Britain and the Netherlands claimed credit for placing the image of a mushroom cloud on the Web site of India's major nuclear weapons research center.

In September, Portuguese hackers modified the sites of 40 Indonesian servers to display the slogan "Free East Timor" in large black letters, and they added hypertext links to Web sites describing Indonesian human rights abuses in the former Portuguese colony.

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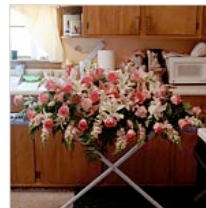
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