

HACKTIVISM ?!

Hactivism refers to the merging of political activism and computer hacking. It is the end product of a meeting of hackers (tech. skills) and political/social activists. In very basic terms, the hackers provided the weaponry and the activists located the target.

Hactivism (as a discrete phenomena) has roots and formative ideas that go back nearly to the beginning of the microcomputer revolution. As a means of social protest, it also draws deeply on the techniques and many years of experiences brought in by 'real life' activists. This includes knowledge on conducting sit-ins, media events, acts of civil disobedience, etc.

However, instead of just adopting wholesale these techniques, the new hactivists have taken these ideas as a basis from which to develop new and interesting techniques more suited to the medium in which they will conduct their protest. Civil disobedience was one of the first activist tools' to be translated into an electronic context.

The flow of information and technique has not been all one- way. Activists who have come from 'real life' protests are also adopting the tools and techniques of the hackers when working for a cause. Activists are finding that, by coming online, they are expanding not only the range of tools at their disposal, but also the ways they can connect with like-minded individuals and groups. Also, they can approach their targets on a dual level, both through real-life and virtual forms of protest.

As a result, radical groups are discovering what hackers have always known: Traditional social institutions are more vulnerable in cyberspace than they are in the physical world. Likewise, some members of the hacker underground are finding motivation in causes other than ego gratification.

The reasons why hackers have taken to activism are as diverse as why activists have taken to the web. However, the main reasons that come up again and again when conversing with these hacker-activists themselves are threats against their environment, and changes in their own worldview.

To date, hactivism as a concept has not truly entered the public arena. However, early public coverage seems to suggest that hactivists are an *idealized* faceless enemy. They seem capable of threatening security and stability of the average citizen, and they seem to have an almost mythic ability to destroy a computer-dominated lifestyle. And as we shall see in the next chapter, these attitudes are reinterpreted, challenged and in some cases appropriated by the hactivists themselves.