



April 2002

Active Cultures: Here Come the Hacktivists

Eben English

Loyola University, Chicago, eenglish1@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/social_justice



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

English, Eben, "Active Cultures: Here Come the Hacktivists" (2002). *Social Justice*. 44.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/social_justice/44

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centers at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Justice by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

Active Cultures: here come the hacktivists

In 1999, a hacker group calling itself the Yes Men created the Web site gatt.org (now wtoo.org), designed to look exactly like an official World Trade Organization site but chock-full of articles on the hidden evils of globalization. The site was so convincing that it netted the masterminds a mistaken invitation to speak at a 2000 Austrian trade conference. The group jumped at the chance and its delegate, in attendance under the nom de guerre "Andreas Bilchbauer," proceeded to confound those present with a long speech about the laziness of Italian workers. Later, back at the

Next weekend, hacktivists from around the globe will converge in Chicago for Version>02, a four-day conference, film festival, and concert series. Focusing on art and politics in the digital age, it'll include discussions of techniques and tactics used to raise a ruckus in the on-line world: netstrikes, for example, the practice of shutting down a Web site (usually that of a corporation or government agency) by bombarding it with information, and culture jamming, as popularized by *Adbusters* magazine and practiced by the Yes Men.

The festival is the brainchild of Ed Marszewski, publisher of the long-running lefty culture and politics zine *Lumpen* and a new magazine devoted to the multimedia arts called *Select*. He got a feel for the developing digital arts underground while working at Supersphere, an on-line multimedia archive that laid off its employees last spring.

Marszewski, who tends bar at his family's Bridgeport pub when he's not building his media empire, says the concept for the festival "was an idea that I had a long time ago. I'd go to Amsterdam and encounter these amazing multimedia festivals that combined discourse on independent artists, activism, and future technologies." A regular curator of music and video exhibits for the MCA's annual

Summer Solstice celebrations, he casually discussed the idea with the museum over a year ago, and finally got a call in October asking if he could fill in a gap in the spring schedule. The multimedia program is the result of months of collaboration with other digital arts collectives including the Adbusters Media Foundation and



HOAX WEB SITE BY THE YES MEN

Guerrilla News Network and individuals such as video artist and co-organizer Brien Rullman.

The congregation of all these underground activists might be enough to arouse the suspicion of the feds. If, that is, Marszewski hadn't already asked them to participate. At Friday's "Version>Control" discussion, representatives from the FBI and the ACLU will join sociologist Saskia Sassen and multimedia artist Jim Costanzo to present varying perspectives on individual rights in the Internet era. "Some people were kind of upset that we invited them," says Marszewski, "but the idea is to talk about issues of security versus privacy, and to talk about the technologies used for surveillance in the on-line/off-line world. . . . We live in this so-called digital age and we're really not aware of the issues that are shaping our future."

Version>02 fest begins Thursday, April 18, at noon and runs through Saturday, April 20, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago. A three-day pass good for all panels, workshops, performances in the Version Lab (the Kanter Educational Center), and the film festival is \$10. Performances in the MCA theater begin at 8 PM nightly; admission is \$10 in advance, \$13 at the door. The 2002 Beige Records World Cassette Jockey Championship will be held at 10:30 Saturday night at Camp Gay, 2001 N. Point. Admission is free with a festival pass, \$5 without. On Sunday, April 21, there'll be a free gallery walk, followed by a party at 9 PM at the Fireside Bowl, 2646 W. Fullerton; admission is \$7. For ticket information, call 312-397-4010; a complete schedule can be found at www.versionfest.org.

—EBEN ENGLISH



ED MARSEWSKI

hotel, he was publicly pied in the face by one of his confederates.

For some, the word "hacker" might conjure visions of a four-eyed, pocket-protected malcontent. But nowadays there's a new breed of hacker, one bent on using his powers for good instead of evil: the hacktivist.