

DIGITAL DISOBEDIENCE: HACKTIVISM IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

Alexandra Samuel
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Government
Harvard University
Phone: 604-731-5445
E-mail: alex@samuel-cottingham.com

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Abstract

Social movement theory defines social movements in terms of their common cause, and treats movement methods as purely instrumental. Hacktivism has emerged as a movement that is defined by its methods, which include Denial of Service attacks, web site defacements, computer viruses, and other electronically enabled disruptions. While hacktivists deploy these tactics towards a range of political ends, they nonetheless define themselves as part of a common movement. This challenges prevailing models of the relationship between purpose, method, and identity in social movements. A review of messages from the *hacktivism* e-mail list discussions of Echelon and the World Trade Organization provides a basis for a revised model appropriate to understanding hacktivism as a means-based movement. The revised model holds method as constitutive of the movement, and describes the contestation of movement methods as a process of consolidating and elaborating collective identity. Movement purposes are selected as opportunities for testing specific methods of action. This model encapsulates the distinctive character of the hacktivist movement, while raising crucial theoretical questions for the broader study of social movements.

DIGITAL DISOBEDIENCE: HACKTIVISM IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

I. Introduction

On a June day in 1998, an eighteen-year-old known as JF sat down at his computer in England. The same way one of his classmates might use the Internet to do a bit of research on a history project, JF was looking for information on India's recent nuclear tests. He looked through a series of e-mails to find out more details on the tests the government had declared a success. Then he disabled the server that contained the e-mail – a highly secure server that belonged to India's Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Bombay. (Glave 1998)

When JF hacked into that web site, he was committing a crime. He was also committing a political act. JF was part of a small, international group of hackers known as milw0rm, who intended their hack as a protest against nuclear weapons. Their stunt was a conscious and deliberate act of hacktivism, a new form of political protest that uses the Internet as a tool for political change.

Hacktivism uses their knowledge of computer programming, network design, and Internet traffic to stage politically motivated disruptions on the Internet. These disruptions can take many forms, from "denial of service" (DoS) attacks that tie up web sites and other servers, to electronic graffiti that places political messages on government or corporate sites, to the theft and publication of private information on the Internet. Hacktivists' political agendas are even more diverse than their messages, including campaigns against globalization, encryption regulations, government political repression, abortion, and electronic surveillance. They are arrayed across a political spectrum that is far broader than the techno-libertarian agenda with which Internet users are often identified.

Yet despite the political and geographical diversity of individual hacktivists, hacktivists define themselves as part of a common community. They have their own web sites, discussion groups, magazines, and even conferences. And while all of these forums are marked by fractious debates over strategy and purpose, the conflicts are no more severe than those experienced by many political organizations with heterogeneous members.

In other words, hacktivism is a new social movement: a “*collective challenge... by people with...solidarity in sustained interaction with opponents and authorities.*” (Tarrow 1994, pp. 3-4). This poses a challenge to social movement scholarship, which has yet to confront a movement defined by its common method rather than its common purpose. In particular, it challenges the way that social movement theory understands the relationship between three core facets of any movement: purpose, process, and identity. This paper will offer an alternative perspective on that relationship, as illuminated by the hacktivist movement.

The relationship between purpose, method, and identity within the hacktivist movement is virtually opposite to the relationship theorized in social movement scholarship. Social movement theory assumes the existence of common purpose, which together with collective identity shapes and defines a movement; the movement then chooses the methods by which it will pursue its common purpose. In the case of hacktivism, however, methods define both the movement and the collective identity of its members, who then choose specific purposes to which they will apply their method. This reversal of the predicted model is abundantly clear in the e-mails exchanged on the

hacktivism listserv¹, an electronic community comprising a wide range of hacktivists from throughout the hacktivist movement.

This paper uses a ten-week sample of the *hacktivism* listserv to confirm and investigate the hacktivist reconfiguration of the expected relationship between purpose, method and identity in social movements. This sample was drawn from the archives of the listserv, at a time when the list had become inactive. During the period included in the sample, the *hacktivism* list tackled two very different targets: Echelon, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The former issue, which involves electronic surveillance of the Internet and other media, is of direct interest to hacktivists as hackers. In the case of the WTO, on the other hand, hacktivism was only one small piece of a much larger picture that included online (but not hacktivist) organizing in support of extensive “street” activism.

The two issues offer complementary windows into mobilization and collective identity within the hacktivist community. While it is not surprising that hacktivists banded together around the issue of Echelon, it is more startling to see the extent to which they still identify as a coherent “we” on an issue with no direct relationship to hacker culture. Although Echelon attracted much more attention on the *hacktivism* list, discussion of the WTO revealed little more connection to outside activism than was apparent on the issue of Echelon. In both cases, hacktivists approached the issue from the perspective of the hacktivist movement, rather than from the perspective of the purposive movements to which each issue was also linked.

¹ A listserv is a software program used to administer group e-mail lists; the term is often used to refer to lists themselves. I refer to the *hacktivism* listserv or the *hacktivism* list interchangeably, and italicize *hacktivism* to denote that I am specifically referring to the *hacktivism* list administered by tao.ca. Please also note that since the ellipsis seems to be a common feature of e-mail style, where I have edited the list material it is indicated by an ellipsis in square brackets [...]. Finally, please note that to prevent excessive interjections into quotations from the list, I have overlooked the frequent profanity, spelling and typographical errors contained in the messages. Please take this as a blanket [sic] and \$!&*#!

The paper will proceed by offering a brief introduction to the hacktivist movement. This will be followed by an overview of social movement theory, which will focus on establishing the prevailing perspectives on the relationship between purpose, identity and method in movements. Including in this discussion is a picture of how purpose, identity, and method function within the hacktivist movement (as seen on the *hacktivism* listserv). I then offer a deeper investigation into hacktivist method, identity, and purpose by examining the archives of the *hacktivism* listserv, focusing on the list's engagement with the Echelon and WTO issues. The paper concludes by extracting the implications and challenges for social movement theory that are posed by a movement that is defined by its means, rather than its ends.

II. A brief history of hacktivism

Hacktivism emerged out of hacker culture – the community of sophisticated computer users, mostly young, mostly male, who use a variety of tools to gain illicit (and generally illegal) access to computer systems. Among early computer enthusiasts, a “hack” was a technical “feat...imbued with innovation, style, and technical virtuosity” and people “called themselves ‘hackers’ with great pride.” (Levy 1984, p. 23) Over time the term “hacker” has come to mean specifically those who use their computer skills to engage in intrusive or disruptive activities. Hacking can be as benign as sneaking into a secure computer system in order to learn more about its underlying structure and code; the purpose here is just to learn more, without altering or disrupting the system in question. It can also be used for theft: for example, one early hacking challenge was to hack into phone systems in order to make free phone calls (a practice known as “phreaking.”) But the most notorious examples of hacking tend to be acts of vandalism, such as “denial of service” attacks that bombard one or more network servers or web sites

in order to take them offline. The purpose of vandal-style hacking is generally the personal satisfaction and public glory of pulling off a technically difficult task, for which the hacker may take credit using an on-screen pseudonym.

For some hackers, hacking has always had a political subtext. Steven Levy identified elements of a “hacker ethic” among those early computer users who believed that “essential lessons can be learned about [computer] systems – about the world – from taking things apart, seeing how they work, and using this knowledge to create new and even more interesting things.” (Levy 1984, p. 40) The correlates of this world view were that “all information should be free” and that “the best way to promote this free exchange of information is to have an open system....the last thing you want is bureaucracy.” (Levy 1984, p. 41) The hacker slogan “information wants to be free,” coined by Steward Brand (Sirius 2000), expresses a philosophical position that can justify invading any secure web site in order to “liberate” information.

But it was not until 1998 that hacking emerged as a full-blown form of political action. Following the 1987 massacre of indigenous Mexicans in Chiapas, a US-based group calling itself the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) decided to take action in support of the Zapatistas. The EDT developed a software program it called FloodNet, whose technical purpose was to flood Mexican government web sites until the overload crashed the servers. Its larger purpose was to effect a “simulated threat,” (Wray 1999, p. 5) drawing attention to the Zapatista cause. The FloodNet incident has since been enshrined as the first instance of what is now known as “hacktivism.”

It is interesting to note that even in its dawning days, hacktivism was seen as outside of the purposive movement from which it emerged. A RAND report on the Zapatistas’ electronic activities distinguished the FloodNet project from the Zapatistas’ broader (and very successful) use of the Internet as an organizing and communications

medium. The report, written before the notion of “hacktivism” entered the cultural lexicon, described the Electronic Disturbance Theater as a “faction of pro-Zapatista radicals, based in New York, drawing on ideas coming out of radical theater circles...[that] has begun to advocate ‘electronic civil disobedience.’”(Ronfeldt, Arguilla et al. 1998, p. 73) According to the report, the EDT’s activities were

not being well received by the mainstream of the Zapatista movement. And if such an effort develops, it may well have divisive effects, possibly leading to a split between those proponents of netwar (yes, they have adopted the term) who believe that new, real-world organizational designs should be the basis for activist doctrines and strategies, and the more anarchistic proponents who believe that theatrical technological strikes – “digital Zapatismo” – should lie at the heart of doctrine and strategy.(Ronfeldt, Arguilla et al. 1998, p. 73)

Since the EDT started the ball rolling, hacktivists have launched attacks on an ever-expanding range of targets. Chinese hackers, possibly with government backing, protested NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Kosovo with attacks on US web sites. Political party sites from Australia to the UK have been hacked and defaced during election campaigns. The Arab-Israeli conflict has spawned an online war between hacktivists on each side. The Nike web site has been hacked and replaced with a link to an anti-globalization organization. Most recently, the Cult of the Dead Cow, a leading hacker group, launched Hacktivism, a software project intended to break down barriers to the free flow of online information in countries with authoritarian regimes.

The disruptive nature of “hacktions” – a common term for hacktivist activities – distinguishes hacktivism from other burgeoning forms of online political activism. E-mail petitions, political web sites, discussion lists, and other electronic tools have all been widely adopted as organizing, lobbying, and communications techniques. While many social movements and political organizations thus use the Internet as part of their day-to-day activities, hacktivism stands apart as a social movement defined by its commitment to the political use of electronically-enabled disruption.

III. Social movement theory and the hacktivist challenge

Hacktivism demands a reconceptualization of three core concepts in social movement theory: purpose, method, and identity. By purpose, I mean the explicit and implicit aims or goals of a movement. By method, I mean the actions and tactics (or repertoire of actions) that a movement deploys. By identity, I refer to the group's collective self-definitions and the self-definitions of individuals in relation to the group.

I will briefly review the way that social movement theory treats each of these concepts in order to establish how hacktivism might challenge our current understanding of the relationship between them. Social movement theory has attended to identity and method but treats purpose as a given, because social movements are defined by their purpose. This is unnecessarily constraining. If we are open to reconceptualizing the relationship between purpose, method, and identity, then we can acknowledge hacktivism as a means-based, rather than purpose-based, social movement.

Purpose: Defining Social Movements

Movement purpose is at once the most crucial and the most under-theorized concept in social movement theory, because it is treated as definitional of movements themselves. The *full* version of Tarrow's widely adopted definition of social movements describes them as "*collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with opponents and authorities.*" (Tarrow 1994, pp. 3-4)

This of course poses a major challenge to the examination of hacktivism as a social movement, because hacktivists do not have the "common purposes" that Tarrow demands. Rather than precluding a consideration of hacktivism as a social movement, however, we can challenge the central role that social movement theory assigns to

purpose – because by every other theoretical and practical criterion, hacktivism looks very much like a social movement.

Let me briefly make the case for accepting hacktivism as a social movement, before turning to the more interesting question of what this means for our understanding of purpose in social movements.

First, hacktivists have an active common discourse in which they refer to themselves as their own movement. They conform to Fine’s notion of “a social movement as a *bundle of narratives*” (Fine 1995, p. 128), that promotes shared identification. This includes narratives that locate group members within a larger hacktivist history, such as the *hacktivism* list posting that stated

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the Luddites were proto-socialists who believed that technology
should improve the lives of the workers and not just the elite.
They hacked into the cotton mills of early industrial revolution
England [...] I'd consider m'self a bit of a Luddite, I reckon in
some ways they're a prototype for Haktivists. They get bad press -
in common usage it's an insult to call someone a Luddite, but when
you read the history theirs was a pretty reasonable reaction to the
inequity caused by the coming of the industrial revolution. (Dixon
30 October 1999)
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It also includes explicit (and often) heated debates over how hacktivism should define itself as a movement. Efforts at self-definition include:

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Hacktivism should be about spreading the info to the masses.
(Carrefour 12 November 1999)
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hacktivism should counter the narratives of security_states and
stay hyper_transparent. (Dominguez 24 September 1999)
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My feelings about hacktivism is that it is computer technology
action directed at social change/justice goals.(Aimee 31 October
1999)
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As will become amply apparent during my review of discussion on the hacktivism e-mail lists, hacktivists constantly offer these kinds of self-definitions. Indeed, in the instance of

the *hacktivism* listserv, hacktivists are at least as occupied with producing group narratives as they are with hacking web sites. The fact that hacktivists define themselves as a movement must be taken seriously as a theoretical claim as well as an empirical observation.

Second, hacktivists are outside the world of institutionalized politics. This is crucial to the definition of hacktivism as a social movement, since social movement theory has emerged out of “studies of revolutions, protests, and other non-institutionalized events...in contrast to more routine political activities” (Lo 1992, p. 225). Hacktivism conforms to the definition of social movements as “unconventional collective behavior,” (Lo 1992, p. 225) i.e. behavior outside the routine political channels of voting, lobbying, campaigning, and so on.

Hactivists are themselves very committed to the idea that hacktivism is outside of conventional politics, and is in fact a challenge to conventional political practice. Hactivists make a point of describing themselves as outside “the system”:

there are almost always proper outlets for any school of thought you may have, but chances are, no one who doesn't all ready agree with you will ever see it[...] hence, politically motivated hacking (Me Uh K. 16 November 1999)

Indeed, hacktivists actively avoid getting too close to the world of conventional politics:

I'm also worried that when if we rub shoulders too much with these government/industry "infowarriors", we start to incorporate their ideology and agenda into our lives. If we focus our energies on creating our alternative vision, eventually the folks at RAND and the Pentagon will become irrelevant. The decentralized DIY nature of the Internet has already demonstrated for many people that an alternative can exist. (Chuck0 1 October 1999)

Since most hacktivism is not only outside the political system, but also outside the legal system, hacktivism certainly shares the key social movement characteristic of being an unconventional, uninstitutionalized form of political behavior.

Third, hacktivism is a response to collective action problems. In practice, many social movements have emerged as responses to collective action dilemmas, and this has become central to theories of social movements. Mancur Olson's articulation of collective dilemmas has been acknowledged for its enormous influence on social movement theory. (McClurg Mueller 1992) Olson's work challenged social movement theory "to incorporate demand for the public good into an individual's utility calculus without violating the logic of free-riding." (Finkel, Muller et al. 1989, p. 886) Most accounts of social movement emergence therefore include some sort of explicit or implicit account of how the movement overcomes collective action problems in order to mobilize support.

Hacktivism can be seen as a movement that emerges out of two innovative solutions to collective action dilemmas. One is to significantly increase individual efficacy by technically enabling (and socially legitimating) new one-person forms of action. Collective action dilemmas may be overcome when participants "believe that they are personally efficacious and that their participation consequently will, in fact, help contribute to the public good." (Finkel, Muller et al. 1989, p. 886) Since a single hacktivist can bring down an entire government web site (albeit temporarily), hacktivism offers the promise of increased efficacy via identifiable contributions to the public good.

One could argue that individual hacktions, by virtue of their solitude, not only transcend collective action dilemmas – they cease to be collective action at all. As such, they might not belong in our consideration of social movement activities. This is why it is crucial to note the second type of solution that hacktivism offers to collective action dilemmas, which is to dramatically lower the costs of participation. Hacktivists use the Internet to solicit participation in modular, mass actions, to which an individual hacktivist can easily contribute. For example, the FloodNet system developed by the Electronic

Disturbance Theater asks people to download web pages that contribute to a mass “flooding” and shut-down of a target site.

The Internet thus allows hacktivists to make collective action easier – or less costly – to individuals. This actually extends into lowering the costs of individual hacktions, too, since hacktivists have become very sophisticated about using the Net to exchange knowledge and tools that make hacktivism easier at all levels. This pulls one-person hacktions back into the realm of collective action, since it highlights the role of lower-cost collective action in facilitating even single-person acts. Clearly, hacktivism conforms to the model of social movements enabling collective action by resolving collective action dilemmas.

As a self-defined, discursive, unconventional collective action movement, hacktivism clearly fits several important dimensions by which social movements are defined. This leaves us with the problem of purpose, because the one dimension on which hacktivism is clearly outside our notions of social movements is in its lack of common cause. To locate hacktivism in the world of social movements, we need to reconceptualize the role of purpose in defining social movements.

Unfortunately, social movement theory does not give us a lot of raw material for this new theory. Purpose is taken as a given, a necessary precursor to the emergence of any social movements. As Tarrow puts it, “People do not risk their skins or sacrifice their time to social movement activities unless they think they have good reason to do so. Common purpose is that reason.” (Tarrow 1994, p. 5)

Scholars have not only defined social movements by their purpose; they have also relied on purpose to explain the specific structures and success of social movements. In their synthesis of social movement theory, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald write that

In their efforts to interact successfully with the broader political and organizational environment, SMOs [social movement organizations] rely heavily on their goals. That is, the reactions of other

major parties to the conflict – the state, countermovement, the media, and so on – are shaped to a considerable degree by the group’s stated goals. Encoded in those goals are perceived threats to the interests of some groups and opportunities for the realization of others. Thus, the mix of opposition and support enjoyed by a given SMO is conditioned by the perception of threat and opportunity embodied in the group’s goals. (McAdam, McCarthy et al. 1996, p. 15)

This approach to social movements essentially boils down to “who you are defines what you do.” In the case of hacktivism, however, what you do defines who you are. Purpose is neither definitional of nor central to the dynamics of the hacktivist movement. As hacktivists themselves acknowledge, hacktivism is “a method, a tool and a way of acting up, regardless of your political leanings.” (Batz 28 October 1999)

If purpose is so central to the dynamics of social movements, and if hacktivism can nevertheless be considered a social movement, then the radically different role of purpose within the hacktivist movement should give us a new view of purpose within social movements. As I will show, hacktivism demonstrates that in some instances purpose can take a back seat to method and identity in defining and shaping social movements.

Method: Repertoires and tactics in social movements

Compared with the treatment of purpose, social movement theories of method are much richer and more nuanced. Tilly’s introduction of the idea of repertoires of collective action brought forth a body of theory and research that focused on the how, rather than the why, of collective action. Tilly observed that social movements must draw on a limited repertoire of collective actions, and that this repertoire changes only over time. He sought to explain the emergence of repertoires of collective action out of at least five elements:

1. the standards of rights and justice prevailing in the population
2. the daily routines of the population
3. the population’s internal organization
4. its accumulated experience with prior collective action

5. the pattern of repression in the world to which the population belongs (Tilly 1978, p. 156)

Tilly used this insight to explain the form that collective action might take, and to explain its gradual evolution. Yet even his emphasis on the method of mobilization retained an instrumental view of the repertoires of collective action. Repertoires determine how a movement presses its agenda, but it is the agenda that defines the movement.

Since the study of repertoires evolved out of Tilly's work, it should be no surprise that the usual understanding of repertoires of collective action does not speak to the role of method in defining hacktivism as a movement. Repertoires may be described as specific to a culture or an historical moment, but they are rarely viewed as specific to (let alone definitional of) a movement. For example, Wickham-Crowley identifies a shift in the Central American repertoire of collective action, following the Cuban revolution. (Wickham-Crowley 1989, p. 139) Traugott traces the ascendance of the barricade as a mode of protest in nineteenth-century France (Traugott 1995). In these as in other works, however, repertoires are treated as tools to be adopted by one or more movements, rather than as constitutive of the movements themselves.

The view of a movement's means as instrumental, rather than purposive, extends from the study of broad repertoires right down to analyses of specific tactics. McAdam's study of tactical innovation in the civil rights movement found that tactics played a key role in the movement's momentum:

The pace of insurgency comes to be crucially influenced by (a) the creativity of insurgents in devising new tactical forms, and (b) the ability of opponents to neutralize these moves through effective tactical counters. These processes may be referred to as tactical innovation and tactical adaptation respectively. Together they define an ongoing process of tactical interaction in which insurgents and opponents seek, in chess-like fashion, to offset the moves of the other. (McAdam 1983, p. 736)

McAdam confirmed the role of tactics in shaping the dynamics and successes of social movements, but continued to treat method as instrumental. The means may be important in this view, but the movement is still “about” its underlying goals or agenda.

Again, when it comes to hacktivism, social movement theory seems to have its story backward. Existing theory tends to treat the form of action as a strategic choice, albeit one that may have feedback effects that ultimately reshape the movement itself.

For hacktivists, the fundamental form of action is what defines the movement: hacktivism is:

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strategic activism that relies upon intelligence gathering, public
opinion swaying, the erosion of confidence in the economy and
technology. It's propaganda, disinformation, advertising,
education, manipulation, and machiavellian subversion (Batz 11
November 1999)
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Indeed, the emphasis on method seems to have become an article of faith for some hacktivists. One member of the hacktivist list wrote that:

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I used to think I was a hacktivist by virtue of being somebody
whose activism and use of tech is intrinsically tied. However, if
hacktivism is what is happening on this list, I suppose that I'm
not a hacktivist, and that the old saying ""Define yourself by your
actions, not by your -ism's"" holds very true. (Pete 10 October
1999)
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This places method, rather than purpose, as the core delimiter of the movement. While specific tactics change and evolve, the movement cannot adopt a new mode of action without becoming a different movement.

Social movement theory may take a strictly instrumental view of collective action repertoires, but the notion of repertoires nonetheless provides analytic traction in understanding a means-based movement like hacktivism. It is helpful to think of hacktivism as an innovation in the repertoire of collective action – an innovation large enough to spawn a new movement that identifies with the tactics, rather than the purpose

of the movement. To elaborate on this insight, however, we first need to incorporate a notion of identity development within social movements.

Identity: Means and end

Social movement scholarship has developed a sophisticated set of ideas about identity. According to Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield, “three distinct dimensions of identity stand out as central for participation in social movements: individual identity, collective identity, and public identity.” (Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, pp. 11-12) Individual identity consists of “wholly personal traits that...are internalized and imported to social movement participation as idiosyncratic biographies.” (Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p.12) Collective identity consists of the “agreed upon definition of membership, boundaries, and activities for the group.”(Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 15) Public identity “captures the influences that the external public have on the way social movement adherents think about themselves.”(Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 18)

While all three forms of identity are interconnected, for several reasons it is collective identity that is of widest interest to social movement scholars. One reason for emphasizing collective identity is that it “goes to the core of social movement formation” because it provides a core motivation for movement participation.(Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 18) Another reason is that collective identity helps to constitute or define the social movement: as Melucci writes, “The actors ‘produce’ the collective action because they are able to define themselves and their relationship with the environment.”(Melucci 1995, p. 43). This aspect of collective identity puts the “new” in the study of “new social movements”; as Taylor and Whittier put it, “political organizing around a common identity is what distinguishes recent social movements in Europe and the United States from the more class-based movements of the past.”(Taylor and Whittier 1992, p. 105)

Finally, collective identity is an important outcome of social movement mobilization. According to Peteet, “the very form of identity used as a mobilizing frame can be transformed during the course of social movement participation.” (Peteet 2000, p. 184)

Each of these perspectives on identity in social movements sheds light on the dynamics of the hacktivist movement. As an explanation for the emergence of social movements, identity is treated as a selective incentive, because “(t) o partake of a collective identity is to reconstitute the individual self around a new and valued identity.”(Friedman and McAdam 1992, p. 157) Identity certainly seems to be an implicitly powerful motivation for hacktivists, who to take great pride in the label — such as the *hacktivism list* member who wrote, “I am not a hacker, and I have no intention is ever being one, but I do consider myself a hacktivist.”(Waugh 10/2/ 2000 15:36:10)

As a factor in the delineation of a social movement, identity helps to define the realms of action and possibility. According to Melucci, “[i]ndividuals acting collectively....define in cognitive terms the field of possibilities and limits they perceive while at the same time activating their relationships so as to give sense to their ‘being together’ and to the goals they pursue.”(Melucci 1995, p. 43) This “social constructionist”(Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 15) perspective on identity helps explain the sometimes messy way that hacktivists define themselves and their practices in tandem. The posts to the *hacktivism list* often show this intertwining, as in:

I consider hacktivism to be a form of pranking: it's annoying, but usually fixable.(TrojZyr 6 September 1999)

Hacktivism could mean many things to many people. But if people who self-identify as hacktivists channel their hacktivism in certain ways, eventually those ways will come to be how hacktivism is described.(Chuck0 01 September 1999)

Hacktivism SHOULD NOT be about attempting to destroy or overload anything. It SHOULD be about[...]informing people and letting them

know how to get involved and protect themselves. [Buster 6 July 2000]

Finally, we can see identity as one of the outcomes of social movements, hacktivism included. Taylor and Whittier show how the lesbian feminist movement fostered identity through the movement's elaboration of boundary markers, political consciousness, and the politicization of daily life. The hacktivist movement seems to perform at least some of these functions in fostering hacktivist identity; for example, relying on a process of continuous differentiation from both activists and hackers. One e-mail reflecting that process read:

a majority of Hacktivists may more likely come from Activists who've discovered technology as a useful tool rather than the reverse; although I do not doubt in the least some Hackers may have broadened their perspective to include activism. (wyrcaat 29 March 2000)

While social movement theory offers a plausible framework for considering hacktivist identity, it runs aground when we try to locate the specific dynamics of hacktivist identity within the broader picture of hacktivism as a social movement. This is because movement identity exists in relation to the purpose and method of the movement – a relationship that, as far as hacktivism is concerned, seems misunderstood.

The relationship between purpose, method and identity

Social movement scholars have made various attempts at understanding the relationship between identity and purpose, between identity and method, and between purpose and method. To start with the first of these three binary relationships, there is some question about whether collective identity defines or is defined by the purpose of a social movement. On the one hand, Olzak notes that “some researchers stipulate that collective actions involve groups with preexisting solidarity” (Olzak 1989, p. 124) – in

other words, collective identity is a precursor to the emergence of a purposive movement. Likewise, Tarrow argues that “leaders can only create a social movement when they tap more deep-rooted feelings of solidarity or identity.” (Tarrow 1994, p. 5)

On the other hand, some scholars have acknowledged that purpose feeds back on the collective identity of a movement, and cannot be taken as a static prior construct. As Larana et al put it,

New social movements display a paradoxical relationship between identity and grievances. First, the very nature of grievances for NSMs merges them closely with the concept of identity. For movements about gender or sexual identity, for example, the collective grievances are inextricably linked with issues of identity quest in the group context. Second, where grievances have a more important place in group formation, such as in ecological groups, the NSM perspective tells us that identity quest co-occurs as a displaced (or unconscious) but nonetheless fundamental *raison d’être* of group formation. Third, for some NSM groups, such fundamental grievances as threats to the ozone level, nuclear proliferation, or saving whales are so distant from everyday life that it is the intensely personal orientations and the close melding of the group with everyday life that provide the sustaining lifeblood of cohesion.” (Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 24)

This acknowledges the interplay between collective identity and collective purpose in social movements. Note, however, that the methods by which a movement presses its demands are still sidelined as instrumental rather than constitutive of the movement. For example, Larana et al. describe collective identity as a constraint on the repertoire of individual as well as collective action, arguing that “(t)o share a collective identity means not only to have had a part in constituting it but also, in some instances, ‘obeying’ its normative proscriptions....to partake in a collective identity means also doing (and not doing) certain things.”(Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994, p. 16) To the extent that this expresses a relationship between identity, purpose, and method, method is still very much the junior partner.

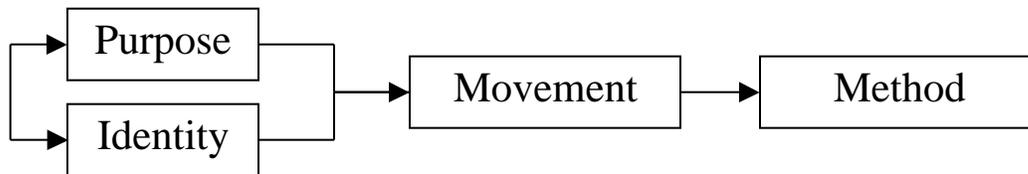
In terms of the relationship between identity and method, there have been a few efforts at understanding how method might affect movement identity, as well as being shaped by it. For example, Peteet looks at the way that practices of resistance shape the collective identity of Palestinian refugees, stating that her “point of departure in

discussing identity is a conceptualization of it as a cultural product of people's sociospatial location and their practices within a shifting field of power relations that is historically and culturally specific.” (Peteeet 2000, p. 183) In her research on American labor history, Clemens notes that

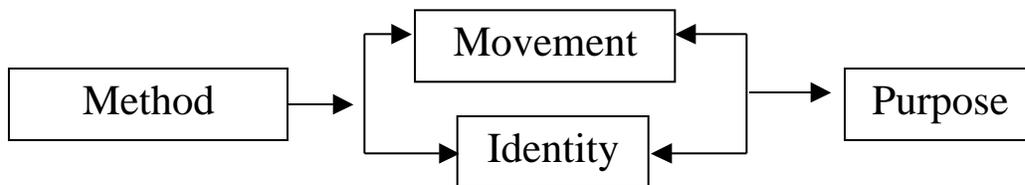
The organizational repertoire of American workers in the late nineteenth century presented a number of possible models for organization, familiar scripts for collective action....But these models implied quite different constructions of identity and orientations to political institutions and opportunities. (Clemens 1996, p. 225)

When it comes to the relationship between purpose and method, however, purpose remains king. In fact, the assumption of purpose as prior to and independent of method is so taken for granted that there is almost no discussion of the relationship between the two. McAdam’s work on tactical innovation in the civil rights movement reflects the assumed direction of the relationship: a movement is an “aggrieved population” [i.e. a group with a common set of grievances] that “must devise methodologies for pressing their demands.” (McAdam 1983, pp. 736-737)

The theorized relationship between purpose, method and identity in social movements can thus be summarized as:



The story of hacktivism, in contrast, looks like this:



For hacktivists, the repertoire of action is the starting point for the movement – quite literally, since many hacktivists are experienced hackers who have been “born again” as hacker-activists. This repertoire includes a range of hacking practices, such as denial of service attacks, mass e-mails, FloodNets, worms and viruses, site takeovers, site redirects, and site parodies. This repertoire binds hacktivists together in a self-defined movement that narrates its evolution in terms of common practices outside the conventional political arena. The means-based movement fosters a collective identity among hacktivists, who then search for specific purposes or political issues that can serve as targets for their hacktivist practices.

The *hacktivism* list offers an opportunity to investigate this revised model in greater detail. While it is only one small window on a much larger hacktivist community, it includes comments from a range of identifiable hacktivists from a variety of established hacktivist, hacker, and activist groups. The messages that these participants posted to this list often included very articulate and coherent reflections on the relationship between the movement’s methods, identity, and purpose. My account of the list therefore lets the members largely speak for themselves.

I surveyed over 800 messages posted to the list between September 24 and December 7, 1999, in order to observe the group’s construction of its own identity, purpose, and methods. I accessed these messages after they had already been archived on the list’s public archive site. I chose a sample from fall 1999 because it encompassed two significant events: Jam Echelon Day (October 21) and the WTO meeting in Seattle (November 30 – December 3).

These two events were focal points for potentially different types of group discussion. Jam Echelon Day (JED), which tackled the issue of electronic surveillance, was the prototypical hacker issue, since it married the twin hacker preoccupations of

privacy and electronic communications. It was only after choosing this as a focus that I discovered that the project actually originated on the *hacktivism* list, making it an even more compelling case study.

The WTO meeting, which proved to be a major event for street activism against globalization, offered a natural counterpoint. There was no obvious connection to hacker or hacktivist culture, and every reason to expect that hacktivism would be treated as an instrument of the broader anti-globalization movement. Despite the differences between these two issues, however, the *hacktivism* list discussions on each one reflected a very consistent relationship between the movement's methods, identity, and purpose.

IV. The *hacktivism* list

The *hacktivism* listserv was created on August 16, 1999 by tao, a Canadian-based online collective focused on political and artistic uses of electronic media. The list grew out of discussions of hacktivism taking place on a number of e-mail lists. The list's first message called for "a better understanding of what 'hacktivism' means (as a word and in a tactical, ethical and practical sense)." This "Welcome!" post invited participants to "post reports and analysis of hacktivism actions" while also suggesting "as we [tao] have enough security issues as it is it would be best if we could *_avoid_* using the list to discuss actual exploits and hacking techniques." (Grugnog 16-Aug-99)

The list's active participants included many active, recognized hackers. Richard Dominguez, one of the first posters, was the instigator of the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), which had led the electronic campaign in support of the Zapatistas – generally acknowledged to be the first instance of hacktivism. His fellow EDT members Carmin Karasic and Stephen Wray, were also frequent contributors. Another active contributor was Bronc Buster, who has been widely credited with bringing down

firewalls² in China. Paul Mobbs, a member of the ElectroHippies collective that staged a major anti-WTO protest, was also an occasional poster. Other participants included members of the tao collective, experienced street activists now moving online, novice hackers seeking inspiration and education, and online activists trying to keep on top of their more disruptive colleagues. In other words, the *hacktivism* list was a significant locus for discussion, consolidation, and debate among actual hacktivists and would-be hacktivists.

From the inception of the list, much of the discussion focussed on defining hacktivism, and by extension, hacktivists. One early poster offered a lowest-common-denominator definition:

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hacktivism sits at the intersection of social [...]and computer  
use. (Wray 27 August 1999)
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Very quickly, however, the list erupted into a heated debate over which type of activities – but not which types of causes – should be included in the big tent. This debate quickly polarized into two camps: those who saw Denial of Service (DoS) attacks as a legitimate form of hacktivism, and those who saw the shutdowns as an unacceptable violation of free speech rights. It is a debate that recurs throughout the *hacktivism* list and the broader hacktivism community.

The centrality of this issue stems from the fact that hacktivism is a method-based movement. The question of which methods are included in the movement's self-definition is as crucial to a methods-based movement as the choice of goals is to a purposive movement. The hacktivist conflict over DoS is analogous to the gay rights movement's debate over whether to pursue the legalization of gay marriage – a goal that is hotly contested because of its implications for constructing a more-or-less conformist

² Firewalls are security barriers on the Internet; in some countries they are used to restrict access to the full range of content available online.

gay identity. Hacktivists are not debating whether they are committed to the purpose of free speech; they are debating the merits of different types of hacktions as delimiters of the hacktivist movement and thus, the hacktivist identity.

If site DoS are legitimate hacktions, then people who stage DoS attacks are hacktivists, and hacktivists are defined as people who are (at least under some circumstances) willing to constrain the free flow of information and communications. If DoS attacks are not legitimate hacktions, then hacktivists are people who pursue the constant expansion of information and communication flows – even when the contents are offensive or oppressive. To hacktivists, what we do defines who we are – which means that your practices define my identity. The choice of which methods to include in the definition of hacktivism is thus a very high stakes decision.

We can see this played out in the intensity in the list's debate over the legitimacy of DoS attacks and web site defacements. As one participant put it,

Is the goal of "hacktivism" to augment avenues of speech with an opposing voice (i.e.: reworking the text of a page, adding links, fingering), or completely shutting down that avenue of speech(destroying files, the drive and other destructive methods)?
(Pan 27 August 1999)

One side of the tactical divide expressed the view that

Well, it's political activism o'er digital networks, in theory. Which by my definition of hacktivism makes it a perfect fit... (Pho 27 August 1999)

Which law are hacktivists to adhere to anyway, when they are trying to support an oppressed group of indigenous peoples in another country? Isn't the law one of the prime obstacles in any activists path? Isn't activism always a way of challenging institutionalised power without going through accepted channels? (xdaydreamx 27 August 1999)

But a much louder chorus emerged from the free speech camp, which argued:

Being an activist should have nothing to do with destroying an opposing view points communication media. This is a limitation of freedom which makes the activist look just as stupid and

hypocritical as the on being fucked with. Even if it is something as horrid as racism. (Silent235 27 August 1999)

I think hacktivism should be about delivering a message, just like good old grass roots activism. It shouldn't be about doing damage to someone else network, or taking away their right to express their views. We just want to make a fuss so people will pay attention to what the message is we wish to deliver. (Buster 27 August 1999)

A true activist should try to awake people, and not to decide which site is worth being online, and which isn't. Shutting down a site does not create anything : it just destroys. I don't understand why someone should have the right to destroy anything because he claims to be an "hacktivist". (Parsifal 27 August 1999)

The great surprise in this debate is the rapid engagement in discussion of appropriate (or effective) tactics, without establishing any sort of common cause. Indeed, the lack of common cause was explicitly acknowledged at an early stage:

There is no point in saying such and such a group are not hacktivists simply because we disagree with them. That brings us nowhere. It is about as helpful as the insistence that hackers are "good" and crackers are "evil". So what do you say we simply concur that "hacktivism" covers a very wide range of activities and concentrate on the real discussion: what the results could be, what we can learn from them, and even whether they are "good" or "bad". But not whether they are "hacktivists". (xdaydreamx 30 August 1999)

This was the most explicit acknowledgement yet of the list's own heterogeneity. At the same time, it was rapidly becoming clear that the lack of common purpose was in no way an obstacle to the construction and consolidation of a collective identity. For one participant, this took the form of a direct exhortation to emphasize group commonality:

The key is to keep positive, keep thinking, and to concentrate on commonality, so sectarianism doesn't incite us to war with each other, rather than the man. :) (Mike 27 August 1999)

Another list member seemed to share this implicit identification of a hacktivist movement; he wrote that

Hacktivism is dangerous, and to some extent requires a high degree of proficiency in technical skill. Does this make them a high-tech vanguard or a group of activists fighting the best way the know how? I think this is a debate that is yet to be had. (Jones 27 August 1999)

While this comment weighs two quite different views of hacktivism, it clearly rests on an underlying assumption that hacktivism is its own movement. While the specific nature of that movement may be contested – is it legal or extralegal? vanguard or rabble? – the fact that it is its own project is taken for granted. This allows the discussion to proceed with the elaboration of collective identity.

The process of identity consolidation frequently takes the form of debating what or whom is worthy of the hacktivist label. This is manifested in the recurring debate over whether DoS attacks are legitimate, but it also pops up in discussion of other hacktivism. The news that activists in East Timor had threatened the Indonesian government with hacktivism met with exasperation from some of the hacktivist group:

Now this is a sad story. I can not believe they call these people hacktivist in any sense of the word. They are striking back at a government they do not agree with, and threatening to shut down banks and government networks. Now I have no idea if their cause is a just one or not, but this is nothing more than a case of 'cyber terrorism' if their threats are carried out. (Buster 29 August 1999)

The effort to distinguish hacktivism from cyber-terrorism, and the concern over who can lay claim to the title of hacktivist, indicate the importance that is attached to the hacktivist label.

In the very first weeks of the list's existence, a model had already emerged for the relationship between methods, purpose, and identity. Methods define and delimit the movement; therefore they are constantly contested. This process of contestation helps to elaborate and consolidate the collective identity of movement members. Purpose is sidelined because it is neither constitutive nor reflective of the hacktivist movement or the hacktivist identity. The Echelon discussions plunged the hacktivism list into an intensified version of this same process.

Echelon

The origins of Jam Echelon Day lie in an e-mail of the type that is very routine on any sort of sub-culture listserv. The message, sent on September 24 1999, read:

I have been on this list since it started to increase in volume of mail. I have watched the list take on more and more new members. It has been very enlightening to read the regular postings, but wake up everybody!!! SECURITY!! It is of very high probability that there are some pigs that are sitting in some office somewhere who are watching this list. When the list was younger it seemed like less of a concern, but now it sounds as if you guys are going to plan an action over the fucking internet. Have you any common sense? You'll have trouble planning anything over any media when your ass is in the can. (Galvin September 24 1999)

From this message grew a discussion of who the “pigs” might be, and what technologies they might be using in their surveillance activities. One participant finally asked,

ever heard of echelon...massive puters scanning for keywords? imagine if everyone suddenly talked about everything that was on their minds as to revolution....as of now, there are relatively few with the gall to talk as they wish on the net but if we all suddenly ASSUME freedom of speech, echelon could get overloaded. (Kemp September 25 1999)

This inspired a free-form collective fantasy of potential jamming keywords, which rapidly evolved into a concrete plan. Three days after the “security” message started the ball rolling, Robert Kemp posted a first draft of the “Global Jam Echelon Day” press release. After discussion on the list, the finished press release was released on September 29, and read:

STAND UP FOR THE FREEDOM TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION!

We the monitored have decided to stand up against the very real, very intrusive, and ultimately oppressive global surveillance system known as Echelon. Echelon is a vast mainframe set up by the New World Disorder in order to monitor the world's electronic communications for subversive keywords.[...] On October 21, 1999 , netizens around the globe are implored to send out at least one email with at least 50 keyword words[...] By doing this we can at least temporarily jam the global surveillance system.

This day of action will be timed to precede Stop Police Brutality Day by one day so that emails about actions can be sent out with little scrutiny due to what will already be an enormous workload for Echelon.

[...]

After October 1, we ask global netizens to merely stop censoring themselves for fear of spooky scrutiny. By merely deciding to speak in the spirit of unabashedly subverting the DOMINANCE paradigm, we will make it quite difficult for Echelon to do its job.

The final press release was distributed electronically, and on October 6, the story was picked up by Wired online (Glave 1999). Much to the distress of list members, however, the article referred to Jam Echelon Day (JED) as October 18, and credited it to Linda Thompson and the American Justice Federation, part of the militia movement. Since Thompson was not even a member of the list, Kemp was incensed, writing,

It seems an organization in Indiana has decided to take over this movement [article below]. Obviously, someone in the American Justice Federation decided to pass on the alert about Jam Echelon Day to their boss, Linda Thompson and she seems to have decided to sponsor the event while changing the day of the event. [...] I would not have had a problem with the organization's usurpation of the campaign if it were not for the fact they have changed the date via some major internet media [Wired News for example]. She has seen to it that Jam Echelon Day will have no tangible effect, i.e. facilitating smoother and freer communications on Stop Police Brutality Day [Oct. 22]. (Kemp 6 October 1999)

After hearing from Kemp, Wired corrected its story to reflect the event's origins on the Hacktivism list, and its October 21 date. Once the story was changed, talk on the list shifted from the "Massive Disinformation Campaign" and back onto tactics for ensuring the success of JED. Both the lead-up and follow-up to JED reflected ongoing group processes of contestation and consolidation of group identity.

Much of this discussion revolved around the question of whether JED would indeed be technically effective in overloading the surveillance technologies, and over whether technical success was even relevant. Referring to an instance of street activism, one member wrote

Kind of puts Jam Echelon Day, essentially a useless waste of bandwidth, to complete shame. Why is it even going forward when we all know that they are not searching for keywords so much as patterns? (Pete 19 October 1999)

But a number of participants expressed the view that the literal jamming of Echelon was less important than jamming the *idea* of echelon. As one member wrote,

hacktitions shouldn't be about playing out our perceptions of their systems - but should be about creating, and retaking spaces of our own both in the physical world and in the electronic just a thought on a slow afternoon at work...(Megan 7 October 1999)

This was more than an abstract concept; for some members, retaking the discourse around Echelon was seen as the first step towards actually dismantling it:

when it comes to Echelon, the first step may have to be taken by a few individuals but it is the opinion of the masses that will force governments to 1) admit Echelon exists 2) give some information about Echelon's capabilities. Who knows where things go from there... My point is that the first aim is publicity in this case and publicity has been and is being achieved. (xdaydreamx 15 October 1999)

Again, the discussion of methods assumes center stage on the list. No one questions whether Echelon is a worthy cause; people question whether JED is a worthy means of tackling it. To hacktivists, it is method that matters, because methods are what constitute the movement.

On October 21 itself, the process of debating and regrouping around JED gave way to a carnival atmosphere as members flooded the list with presumed Echelon keywords. A typical message was:

Tu Madre. We are shipping an ARMED SUITCASE NUKE with infectious Hepetitus serum with intent to expose the public to LETHAL BIOWAR AGENTS. It should be under your pillow by the time you read this VIRUS CARRYING EMAIL. (Bailey 21 October 1999)

Once the day passed, the group returned to its debate over tactics. It appears that the focus on methods demands constant evaluation of method success:

depends on how you define success...brought the issue some publicity...got some more people thinking...and brought some new people to this list....(Stiens 19 November 1999)

There was at least one concrete outcome that members could point to:

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) have launched a new project called "Echelon Watch" I think, we are at least in some part responsible for that since Jam Echelon Day (JED) really did alot to publicize Echelon[...]JED, no matter how technically ineffective, atleast exposed alot more people to Echelon and got much more media attention. Perhaps, if enough people write their respective governments they will get rid of it[...] we can atleast regard JED as partially successful. (Jones 17 November 1999)

One of the recurring themes throughout the Echelon project was the question of whether JED was a reflection of the "true meaning of hacktivism," both in concept and in form. As the group navigated its way through its first native hacktion, it continued to elaborate its collective identity. This process necessarily involved a lot of finger pointing of the "us" vs "them" variety, as a way of proclaiming which individuals and activities could or could not lay claim to the hacktivist identity. This process of group definition did not involve papering over heterogeneity, however, as one member acknowledged:

hacktivism may be different for different people. Hooking up a live webcam at a protest, helping distribute computers to people who want them, education/workshop programs, setting up a bandwidth co-op, setting up some space for your community, defacing webpages, and shutting down telephone/fax/internet communications are all forms of hacktivism. They are all appropriate depending on the situation. Also note that this does not mean that DoS'ing someone or changing a webpage to read "I got root. You losers!" is hacktivism. [...]Jam Echelon Day was about awareness more then flooding Echelon. It was more of a media hack then anything else. A reasonably successful one at that. (Castonguay 29 October 1999)

His view was seconded by another participant, who wrote:

These are excellent definitions and observations. They delineate between those who hack "to solve a problem" and those who do it just to show off. Also, he makes a good case for the value of JED, because it did bring media attention to the reality of unwarranted intrusions on individual privacy. (Borden 29 October 1999)

But not everyone was satisfied with the self-definition that was gradually emerging out of the group's first venture.

I think people are missing what hacktivism, or any type of activism is about, and that is putting yourself, and your wants/needs/desires, SECOND to whatever it is you are trying to fight for. I will be unsubscribing shortly. (Buster 7 October 1999)

WTO

The *hacktivism* list discussion of the WTO meeting raised the possibility of hacktivists locating themselves in the context of the anti-globalization movement. From the beginning of the list's engagement with the impending WTO protests, however, anti-WTO hacktivism was discussed as a parallel to – rather than a component of --- street activism against globalization. This was quite literally the case when Stephen Wray raised the question

If in Seattle, activists are organizing themselves into affinity groups, small cells of people who know and trust one another, then in cyberspace, following this model, how can we organize ourselves into digital affinity groups, small cyber cells of people who know and trust one another? (Wray 18 November 1999)

The hacktivists appear to have sought a balance between offering their services to street activists, and maintaining a sense of their own agenda and relationship to the WTO protests. One list member forwarded an e-mail from a Seattle high school student whose school had forbidden her from distributing anti-WTO literature; the list swung into action, with one member suggesting to the student:

Find out what your principal's email address is, or his phone, and we'll start swamping him with messages that adults out here stand with you. You have free speech rights that the principal has no right infringing. Good luck. We're out here to support you. (Chuck0 30 October 1999)

The Seattle student's plight attracted a lot of comment from the list, and in fact was essentially the trigger for the group's first discussions of the upcoming WTO meeting. But it quickly became clear that the list's initial widespread interest in the student's story was as much a function of the free speech issue as it was a reflection of interest in the WTO. In other words, it was an opportunity for further discussion on methods.:

My suggestion would be to print her own newsletters, fax em, email em, and leave piles of them in obvious places...asking the owners first if applicable of course.....dont give up! dont give in! find other ways?(ZoeScanner 4 November 1999)

My suggestion to those who get caught up in school censorship? You have a gift. Find other ways to relay the message. With a vast array modern communication tools at our disposal, there are other methods. Use cunning and ingenuity. You won't fail.(Pan 4 November 1999)

After this initial call for help, discussion of the WTO was limited to a smaller subset of the list's membership. There were three kinds of arguments made for why the WTO should be on the list's agenda. One argument came from those planning to be involved in the broader activist campaign in Seattle, who were seeking to engage the list in their activity. Another kind of argument was that the WTO was of direct relevance to hacktivists, as a group. A third argument was that the WTO meeting in Seattle provided an opportunity to build on the list's success with Jam Echelon Day by staging another public action.

Several list members seemed to have their own commitments to participating in the anti-WTO actions, but sought advice or participation from other list members. These members partly based their appeal for WTO-oriented hacktions on the strength of the issue, and partly based it on street activists' requests for technical assistance. Yet even these participants maintained their identity as hacktivists, rather than describing themselves as part of the street movement. One such posting proclaimed:

IF this WTO is not going to be discussed here, it should be. After all, it is a world wide concern, that has gotten far and away too much out of hand...(and the US is one of the biggest problems!)I get several letters a day from various countries, UK, Sweden, Switzerland, Chili, Mexico, South American Countries, Etc. All asking for help on this one issue [...].I want to help. and one way or another I will. What I would very much like to know, is, is there going to be any coordinated effort by our hacktivism group? or are we all left to our own devices...? time is growing short, if no plans are in the works,(like the very effective JED) [...]then those of us whom are going to help fight the WTO, in some way need to know, so we can make other plans. (ZoeScanner 1 November 1999)

Another participant echoed this desire to help, while also expressing reservations about the group's technical or organizational capacity for action on this issue:

We should smash the WTO. I don't know if were up to actually interfering with the WTO with hacking over the net... but we can definately aid the spreading of information from activists on the ground [...]I imagine some folks are probably going to hack every webpage related to the WTO, and replace it with either editorials of their own making...But thats just part of the over publicity strategy. I don't think we can mount a stronger attack on international finance yet. Somebody prove me wrong. (Jones 16 November 1999)

These postings both reflect the between hacktivists and street activists -- ties that confirm the distinction between hacktivists and other street-level social movements, even as they bridge the divide. In expressing a sense of obligation or concern for less wired activists, the hacktivists further consolidated their identity as separate from street activists, while acknowledging common cause with them.

This sense of obligation was also reflected by those who felt that the success of JED provided the list with a resource that it had a duty to leverage. This resource was the public attention, and specifically media attention, that the group had already won. As one participant wrote, "in light of our recent media exposure, (JED) I imagine that most anything we would do would draw a certain amount of additional attention."(Me Uh K. 2 November 1999)

The issue of extending JED's success into an anti-WTO hacktion emerged in the course of discussing JED itself. But for at least one participant, that didn't set a high enough bar; if anything, the WTO was worthier hacktivist target:

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so if we're so hot to be international, why not translate something
for the anti-WTO movement[...] seems to me that sort of translation
work might have a bit more impact on stopping police brutality than
asking people to try to get themselves tracked. i think, like
with the EDT, i may have fundamentally missed the point of how
sending some hot words is going to either help or hurt anti-police
brutality day. and i almost laughed out loud that rdom calls jam-
echelon-day a "grassroots movement"...(Lilley 8 October 1999)
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The separate-but-obligated relationship between hacktivists and street activists was succinctly articulated by one message that simply asked,

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what can hacktivists do to help street activists shut down the wto?
It seems that a central focus for activists of all stripes is the
upcoming wto meeting in seattle (with major protests slated on nov.
30) but, is the WTO a central focus for hacktivists? Should it be?
(Wray 16 November 1999)
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This prompted some group members to articulate not just obligation to or common cause with street activists, but a particular hacktivist interest in the WTO. The effort to brand the WTO as a hacktivist issue took several forms, including:

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Think of this, an international court of law determining how
technology is to be used with the interests of the largest
corporations being the first priority. An international court to
decide domain name disputes, intellectual property, etc [...](Jones
15 November 1999)
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While the various arguments ultimately converged into a discussion of potential tactics, the *hacktivism list* did not plan its own actions for the Seattle meeting of the WTO (although list members may have worked together privately, in order to avoid exposing any extra-legal activity). The list did discuss the web site sponsored by rtmark.com, which had managed to acquire the URL "www.gatt.org." The site's creators anticipated that some observers would look for the WTO under its former name of GATT, which

would lead them to the GATT url rather than the WTO's own site at www.WTO.org. For the benefit of these misdirected souls, rtmark used the GATT address as the location for a WTO parody site, much to the distress of WTO officials. The parody site looked identical to the WTO's own site, but the text included on the site criticized the WTO and the trade practices it promotes. Rtmark's planned anti-WTO actions prompted one of the list's first discussions about whether to tackle the WTO (see Chuck0 23 September 1999)– a discussion that was rapidly pre-empted by the plans for Jam Echelon Day.

Rtmark's site was one of two widely publicized anti-WTO hacktions. The other was a "virtual sit-in" staged by the Electrohippies, who posted their announcement of the sit-in on the *hacktivism list* (among other places). Many list members seem to have at least passively supported this event. The sit-in consisted of a downloadable web page designed to overload the WTO's server; by encouraging people to download this page, the E-hippies hoped to bring down the WTO server in a distributed "denial of service" (DOS) attack.

Several months after the Seattle meeting, the list got into a heated discussion over the E-hippies announcement that they were building on their WTO action by releasing a set of electronic activism tools. This provoked reflection and debate over whether the E-hippies anti-WTO methods had been legitimate hacktions. Several members of the list applauded the E-hippies' virtual sit-in, without stating whether they had participated themselves. Others criticized the action as (surprise!) an infringement of the WTO's freedom of speech. On the side of the E-hippies, one member wrote:

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I support E-hippies...(in fact i kinda am one myself)...These guys do a great service...Ddos actually is a great tool...SOMETimes. As with ALL tools...it depends on what for & how you use them [...]  
There comes a time here n there where action is Also needed...I Do take certain "actions" in rare circumstances,like Peds, & the WTO.....these activities are also part of H-Activism. And so are the tools. How we use em makes the difference. (ZoeScanner 10 March 2000)
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Once again, the free speech issues were addressed by the argument that activists and institutions are not on a level playing field. As one member put it,

The WTO says something, and people (and governments) listen; [...] On the other hand, even if activists have a good point, nobody listens unless they can attract attention, either through marketing a "sexy" issue like the killing of cuddly creatures, or by getting attention by their own actions[...]One way of attracting attention is disruptive protests, physical or virtual, which can include (d)DoS attacks. (Earnhart 11 March 2000)

Yet another argument was that the E-hippies had indeed stayed within the parameters of the law, including the law with respect to freedom of speech:

I am perhaps hyper-sensitive to the freedom of speech. However, that freedom cannot be abridged by any level of *government.* People fail to make that distinction.[...] no one has the freedom of access to a specific medium (except Public Broadcasting, etc.) or a right to a specific time and circumstance of presenting their message. So the ehippie situation is not actually a freedom-of-speech issue as we accept it in this country.[...] I, also, find much merit in the ehippines position since they apparently support a seemingly legal way of operation, AND they take responsibility for the action in ADVANCE. (Hal 11 March 2000)

This debate was yet another replay of the debate over methods as a process of constructing hacktivist identity. It provides a resonant moment for reflecting on the unexpected relationship between method, identity, and purpose in a means-based movement.

Conclusion

In the history of social movements, many methods of action have been closely identified with particular purposive groups. The idea of a sit-in conjures up images of hippies in campus protests. The picket line is associated with labor unions. Even with the emergence of every imaginable color of lapel-ribbon, ribbon campaigns will always be

linked to the original red AIDS awareness ribbon. In each of these cases, however, it was truly purpose first, method second.

Hactivism tells a different story. The methods of hacktivists – DoS attacks, FloodNets, site takeovers, etc. – are inextricably linked to the hacktivist movement because they are what define the movement. Hactivism thus demands a redefinition of social movements to encompass means-driven as well as purpose-driven movements.

The *hactivism* list shows that this is more than an abstract challenge. The hacktivist movement is already a significant political force, and there is every reason to think that both its numbers and its influence will continue to expand. But the prevailing model of social movements is very limited in its ability to predict, or even grasp, the dynamics of a means-based movement like this one.

The hacktivist movement offers many clues about how to revise the model, however. The preceding examination of the *hactivism* list discussions of Echelon and the WTO suggest a preliminary model of how method, identity and purpose interact in the context of a means-based movement. Because method defines the movement, the choice of actions is hotly contested. The process of contestation serves to confirm and elaborate the collective identity of movement members. Purpose is a function of the interaction between method and identity, and specific causes are selected as opportunities for testing out particular methods.

This model may have broader implications for the study of purposive movements, too. It makes a stronger case for repertoires of action as influences on collective identity. It highlights the discursive production of collective identity as constitutive of social movements. Most crucially, it implies that common purpose cannot be assumed as prior to a social movement, but must be examined and explained.

The hacktivist model of a means-based movement is unlikely to displace the purposive movement as the primary focus of social movement research. Nonetheless, hacktivism raises interesting theoretical questions and offers a rich vein of empirical fodder. As a hacktivist might say, the challenge is now to hack into the code of social movement theory, and allow a new stream of ideas to burst forth.

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