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## **Book Review: Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?**

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social change. This section also stresses the importance of using an historical lens to understand the future. In his 'Technobiographical Reflections', Howard Rheingold warns us against the dangers of being unaware of the origins of our technological and learning tools:

One of the things that makes technology dangerous is that most people never learn where tools come from, what they were originally designed to do, and how people have evolved, appropriated, subverted, perverted, and augmented them from their original purposes and designs. (p. 255)

In his 'Historical Archaeologies', David Silver examines the origins and development of two community networks. He argues that complex histories have 'constructed' both networks to have different positions and priorities. As Silver points out, the internet is not 'a neutral, barren frontier: rootless, settlerless, waiting to be civilized' (p. 303). Ultimately, *Shaping the Network Society's* mission is to reveal, criticize and thus also rewrite the complex histories and power structures underlying the global network society.

Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?* London: Routledge, 2004. vi+186 pp. ISBN 0415260043, \$24.95 (pbk)

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The intersection between computer hacking, modern information-based society, and the anti-globalization movement in the mid-1990s, has shaped the context for a new form of virtual protest: 'hacktivism'. This is the argument made by Jordan and Taylor in their latest collaboration, *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?* They devote their text to detailing how each of the three elements developed and contributed to the emergence of hacktivism.

The term 'hacktivism' represents the merging of hacking with political protest in cyberspace: 'Hacktivism is activism gone electronic' (p. 1). While social radicalism has always been a part of the hacker ideology, the authors maintain that it has been the use of computers for direct action which has made hacktivists a unique grouping within hacker culture. They trace the development of hacking back seven generations to provide a more complete picture of the hacker culture than is typically presented in the largely pejorative media accounts of hackers. In doing so, their overview fleshes out the radical tendencies of hacker culture and provides a clear understanding of where hacktivists' technological knowledge originates.

Jordan and Taylor introduce the idea of 'viral times' as an analogy to capture the sense of uncertainty and susceptibility felt during the information age. The metaphor works double duty in characterizing modern society as an abstract context serving as fertile ground for the stigmatisation of hacktivists (as cyberterrorists) and for the all-intrusive spread of capitalism. This analogy serves them well, as it is able to capture the viral-like ways in which information flows within modern society, while showing how this sets the context for characterizing hacktivists as deviant and the extension of capitalism, and Western culture more generally, into both the material and immaterial realms.

Jordan and Taylor do a thorough job in tracing the development of social movements from the 1960s and 1970s through to present day anti-globalization protests. This overview of the history of activism will be quite familiar territory to anyone with a background in social movements literature. However, the authors' unique contribution lies in illustrating how hacktivism developed within and out of the anti-globalization movement to take on a significant role in the current state of information-based activism. In tracing the development of hacker culture, viral times and the anti-globalization movement, the authors are able to make a strong case that hacktivism would seem to be a logical extension of these contextual factors.

A major strength of this text, and Jordan and Taylor's writing more generally, is their attention to detail. Rather than treating hacktivist culture as a homogeneous entity, they delve into the intricacies and debates that both unite and divide the community. A good example of this is their discussion of the similarities and dissimilarities between mass-action hacktivism and digitally-correct hacktivism. On the one hand, mass-action hacktivists use internet technology to stage human rights protests by disrupting the flow of information over the internet through such measures as virtual blockades and sit-ins. On the other hand, digitally correct hacktivists believe in the free flow of information as a human right, and as such the two groups are often at odds with one another.

The technical know-how required to engage in mass-action hacktivism is minimal. Therefore, in reading about their activities, I found myself questioning whether these individuals represented a form of hacktivism or were simply online activists. The authors are aware of this and point out that mass-action hacktivists are 'the least hacker-like of all hacktivists' (p. 110). They also suggest that the politics of information and the increased technical ingenuity required to engage in digitally-correct hacktivism brings this second group closer to the hackers' original ideology and interests.

In a few places the text becomes a bit bogged down in what some might find to be rather lengthy descriptions of the more technical aspects of hacktivist activities. At the same time, however, these descriptions offer the benefit of putting rather technical ideas into plain terms, thus making the text accessible to a fairly wide audience.

In terms of evidence, the authors' arguments are based largely on the use of case studies of key events in the development of hacktivism and quotes from members of hacktivist groups such as the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, Critical Arts Ensemble and Cult of the Dead Cow. In making their case, Jordan and Taylor rely heavily on information about the Zapatista movement and public pronouncements from those most closely associated with this organization. They use these examples effectively to demonstrate the reliance of new social movements on the ability to efficiently propagate information to the masses, with the internet serving as the main vehicle for such transmissions. They also draw on interviews along with statements from members of various hacktivist groups, which help to give credence and validity to their arguments while bringing these arguments to life by presenting the reader with a glimpse into the hacktivist perspective.

The authors conclude by discussing hacktivism as an area worthy of research due to its 'alternative vision of society' and its unique positioning within the system to affect change – a change that will not only impact the virtual realm of politics, but one that has the potential to affect real-world action. The essential point is made that, although the virtual realm acts as a staging ground for hacktivists' political activism, the effects of these endeavours are meant to have very real consequences.

This book is highly recommended reading for anyone researching or teaching in areas such as cultural studies, social movements, cyberculture, globalization and media studies. Those who pick up the text may be familiar already with the hacktivist cause and the relevant social science literature pertaining to it. If not, you will find that Jordan and Taylor do an excellent job in introducing newcomers to this area of study – one within the social sciences which has largely been defined by their research. If you are familiar with research on hacktivism and online social movements, you will find that the authors have much to contribute.

Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf (eds),  
*Social Capital and Information Technology*,  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004. ix+416 pp.  
ISBN 0262083310, \$40.00 (hbk)

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Scholars studying the social impact of information technology have manifested an early and significant interest in the social capital research