

(52 mins, 2000)

DOCUMENTARY WRITER/DIRECTOR: Ian Walker. Ian has been making documentary films since 1993 on topics such as social issues, gender politics, art and anarchy.

PRODUCERS: Chris Hilton, Peter Day, Laurent Boucaut. A Hilton Cordell (Australia) /Dominant 7 (France) co-production. Australian Film Finance Corporation & Arte France

WARNING: There is occasional coarse language used in the film.

SUITABLE FOR: upper secondary and tertiary students, community groups or professional training, non-government organisations. Relevant to Studies of Society and the Environment, English, Media Studies, Computing, Information Technology, Politics, Modern History, Law, Justice Studies, Indigenous Studies, Business Management.

INFORMATION WAR

THE HACKTIVISTS

STUDYGUIDE

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LAPTOPS TO THE FRONTLINE: **Nart Villeneuve** BRAVES THE TEAR GAS ON THE STREETS OF QUEBEC TO CHAT ON-LINE TO FELLOW 'HACKTIVISTS' ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLANET [ABOVE]

SYNOPSIS

THE *HACKTIVISTS* IS A ONE HOUR DOCUMENTARY THAT EXPLORES THE WORLD OF ON-LINE ACTIVISTS. THESE ARE COMPUTER EXPERTS WHO ARE USING THE INTERNET AND CYBERSPACE AS VERY EFFECTIVE, NEW MEANS OF PROTEST AGAINST GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE POWER OF LARGE TRANSNATIONAL COMPANIES. WE MEET FOUR MAIN CHARACTERS: NART VILLENEUVE, A CANADIAN, RENAUD COURVOISIER, A FRENCHMAN, PAUL MOBBS FROM THE UK AND RICARDO DOMINGUEZ FROM THE USA. EACH HAS DIFFERENT SKILLS AND WAYS OF OPERATING BUT THE INTERNET ALLOWS THEM TO POOL THEIR TALENTS AND WORK COLLABORATIVELY ON-LINE TO CHALLENGE GOVERNMENTS AND CORPORATIONS.



DEPENDING ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW, YOU MAY SEE THEM AS 'INTERNET WARRIORS' TRYING TO SAVE THE WORLD, AS 'CYBER-TERRORISTS' OUT TO BREAK THE LAW, OR AS FOOLISH 'GEEKBOYS' CAUSING DIGITAL MISCHIEF FROM THE SAFETY OF THEIR HOMES.

The documentary also looks at their opponents in what the documentary calls an 'information war'. The growth in web-based activism has also created an industry devoted to opposing them. 'Cybersleuths' such as Ben Venzke make a lot of money by protecting companies from cyber attack, scouring the web for evidence of intended action. It raises questions as to what kind of globalisation we want, what democracy means in a digital age and what power and responsibilities we have as citizens in this time of rapid change.

The Hacktivists is the first of a planned trilogy of films about The Information War. The second will be *The Dreamweavers*, looking at the tactics of corporate advertising and their battle for consumers' attention and the third will be *The Culture Jammers*, examining the artists who use their art skills to try to keep the media honest by re-arranging media messages and reflecting them back to those who make them.

PRECEDING PAGE: IAN WALKER, PART-TIME ANARCHIST & DIRECTOR OF *THE HACKTIVISTS*. BOTTOM: CYBERSLEUTH BEN VENZKE: 'Now you can sit halfway around the world and shut down a company's ability to operate on the other side of the world by clicking a couple of buttons'. Clockwise top left this page: 'Fences mean nothing to us'. So say the protagonists in the documentary *The Hacktivists* who scared the Quebec police into shutting their website during the Summit of the Americas protest for fear of cyber attack; DIGITAL ZAPATISTA: 'WORDS AS WAR, NOT WORDS FOR WAR'. SO SAYS RICARDO DOMINGUEZ, ONE OF THE ON-LINE AGITATORS 'UNMASKED' IN *THE HACKTIVISTS*.



BEFORE WATCHING THE VIDEO

Establish viewer understanding and awareness of the many key terms and jargon used. Here is a starting list: activist, hacker, hacktivist, cultural subversion, digital age, capitalist, anti-capitalist, globalisation, anarchism, virtual, on-line, off-line, avatar, cyber terrorist, evangelist, geekboy, digital mischief, cybersleuth, tear gas, sit-in, civil disobedience, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Zapatista, mobilise, multinational, transnational, spam, trilogy, free trade, WTO, World Bank, FTAA.

Establishing this knowledge is particularly helpful for students for whom English is a second or additional language and equally useful to establish what all students already know about the topic and where their knowledge strengths and gaps are.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Here are some topics for discussion to help you to begin your work in this complex and growing area.

1 FILM-MAKING

A) THE 'WAR' METAPHOR

- Identify some different uses of war imagery in the documentary. What are some possible effects on viewers of using this kind of language?
- Can you think of a different metaphor for this issue? How would a different metaphor change the mood of the film itself?
- Compare this language with that used in newspaper reports of anti-globalisation demonstrations or events.

B) THE OPENING SCENES

- We see a quote from Marshall McLuhan, 'World War III will be a guerilla information war, with no division between military and civilian participation'. This quote appears on screen and is then deleted as it would be on a computer screen, word by word. What purpose could this visual device serve in terms of effects on the viewer? What did McLuhan mean? Do you think he is correct in his prediction?

C) THE CLOSING SCENES

- The film uses a split screen to show the forces on both sides of a protest in Canada, the Quebec police and the protesters. Describe what you see. What are the benefits for a film-maker in using a split screen? How effective do you think it is in this context?

D) THE MUSIC

- Listen to the music in the opening scenes, without the vision. What images does it create in your mind? How well do they match and support the accompanying visual images? How important is the role of music in documentaries?

2 RESPONSIBILITY

- Find out about the 'Battle of Seattle'. There were 50,000 people protesting on the streets in this mass anti-globalisation protest but 400,000 involved in on-line protests. Groups like Electrohippies engage in virtual sit-ins, where they inform participants how to jam a web site so that they can prevent it doing any business on-line. Paul Mobbs says, 'Electrohippies don't tell them



RICARDO DOMINGUEZ FROM THE ELECTRONIC DISTURBANCE THEATRE: 'ELECTRONIC CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS NON VIOLENT, DIRECT ACTION ONLINE'. [ABOVE]

what to say, we just provide the mechanism whereby they can say something'.

- What ethical, moral or legal issues are involved in planning or participating in this kind of protest?

3 THE ROLE OF MASKS

- The hacktivists and real world protesters often wear masks or face scarves. Discuss the history and purposes of masks in cultures that you are familiar with. What are some of the roles masks play in cultural life around the world?
- What is an 'avatar' on the Internet? What avatar would you choose?
- Discuss the possible benefits and disadvantages of using avatars in Internet communications.

ACTIVITY

- Experiment with everyone wearing a mask for a lesson or a period of time. What effect does this have on you as the wearer? What effect does it have on the way others

relate to you?

4 POSSIBLE FUTURES

- Read some of the many novels and short stories depicting alternative futures for our civilisation. These may be 'utopias', depictions of ideal societies or 'dystopias', depictions of societies in crisis. e.g. *1984*, *Animal Farm*, *Brave New World*, *Blade Runner* and *Gattaca*. Some are available in both book and film versions.
- Identify common features of each of these kinds of futures. What are your own utopian and dystopian visions for Australia?

5 CYBERSLEUTHS

- Ben's website states, 'They're out there. You can't see them. They'll take you down'. His slogan is 'Intelligence is the best defence'.
- The hacktivists say they can attack their larger adversary from all directions. This is like the 'war of the flea' which the Vietcong

used so effectively against the USA in the 1960s and 1970s and the Afghanistans used against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. What other people can you identify as using similar tactics in this decade?

- Who is the 'they' in Ben's statements? What effect is this choice of words designed to have on Ben's potential clients?
- What are the obvious differences and similarities between Ben's way of life and those of the Hacktivists? How do you explain the differences?

6 GLOBALISATION

- Ask students to brainstorm the meaning of 'globalisation'. There are many definitions of globalisation. It may be defined as 'the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas ... across borders'. (Knight, 1996). It also benefits some people and disadvantages others. In 1996, James Speth, the Administrator

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Babar the Elephant...the internet alterego of French hacktivist Renaud Courvoisier from the Federation of Random Action**; THE POLITICS OF CODE: THE SYMBOLISM OF ELECTRONIC PROTEST AS DISPLAYED BY RICARDO DOMINGUEZ' STREET PERFORMANCE, WRITING OUT THE CODE TO HIS INFLUENTIAL 'FLOODNET' TOOL; **Canadian hacktivist NART VILLENEUVE**: 'We're not against globalisation, we're against how it's happening, and who's in control of how it's happening'.



of the UN Development Program, gave alarming statistics about declining standards of living in many countries. He warned, 'If present trends continue, the defining concerns of international affairs in the next century will revolve around the struggle for equity—equity among nations, equity within nations, between the sexes and for future generations'. These trends were recently up-dated by Dr Selim Jahan, the Deputy Director of the United Nations Human Development Program. At the Australian launch of the 1998 report, he stated that twenty six per cent of the world's people account for eighty six per cent of spending for personal consumption. The wealthiest twenty per cent consume forty five per cent of meat and fish, use fifty eight per cent of total energy, own seventy four per cent of all telephone lines and eighty per cent of the world's vehicles (Ellicott, 1998, p.3).

- Compare and contrast various definitions of globalisation with that given by Renaud, 'Everyone to join in and voice their concerns. Resistance is global, activism is global, hacktivism is global'.

- Ben likens the Internet to the city. Amazon.com represents the rich of the world while the Hacktivists represent groups he lists as '... the poor, organised crime, etc'. Do you agree with his description?
- Renaud talks about his work as devoted to 'politics in its noblest sense' rather than 'politicking'. What do you think he means by this? He gives an example of a successful action in early 2000 in which hacktivists targeted a company called Fidelity Investments. After five days of protest the company divested itself of twenty five per cent investment in a large petroleum company. The action was taken to protect the interests of an Indigenous group whose land was under threat from the company's oil exploration.
- How many points of view are involved in this particular issue?

7 THE LAW

- International law has not kept pace with globalisation, but under American law, Renaud would be

liable for the company's costs in re-establishing five web sites, involving fines of \$5000 or a year's jail.

- What information would a responsible web site give to potential protesters so that they know what they are agreeing to do when they take part in a web protest?

ACTIVITY



- Devise a quick and easy to understand checklist for any student who might be interested in online activity, so they can assess an activist web site they may intend using for reliability of information and for responsibility towards those who want to use it.

8 DEMOCRACY

Professor John Arquilla, a US Defence analyst argues: 'The notion of freedom of movement in cyberspace is very



THE FRENCH CONNECTION: THE FBI WERE ON THE TRAIL OF MARSEILLES HACKTIVIST RE:NO AFTER A FIVE-DAY CYBER ACTION WHICH DISRUPTED THE WEB SITES OF FINANCE MULTINATIONAL FIDELITY INVESTMENTS. [ABOVE]

closely related to physical movement. Why in the world would we want to create a fence around a meeting in which the future of two continents was being decided? If indeed we are going to leave no-one behind, why would we shut people out?' He says, 'The more they (the government and corporations) succeed (in shutting people out), the more they lose'.

What does he mean by this criticism of harsh government or corporate responses to hacktivism?

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

- Ricardo says, 'Electronic civil disobedience is non-violent direct action on-line'. He puts this in the historical context of other acts of civil disobedience in line with the thinking of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. How did these activists use civil disobedience within their societies? How successful were these campaigns in bringing about change?

ACTIVITY

One of the cyber campaigns had the slogan, 'The mouse is mightier than the baton'.

- Organise a debate on this topic. The teams could choose to take on the personae of some of the activists seen in the video.

Where do actions such as those of the refugees detained at Woomera and other detention camps in Australia, and the actions of their Australian supporters, fit into the concept of civil disobedience?

ACTIVITY

- Use print and web-based materials to identify a variety of points of view on this controversial issue in the Australian community today.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

1 HACKTIVIST PROFILES

Prepare a profile on each of the main characters you see in the documentary, on the lines of those in the computer game, *Where in the World is Carmen Miranda?*

Below is a proforma to help you. Teachers could use these to prepare a sheet for students to use while they watch the video.

[Please note that these profiles reflect the study guide writer's choice of comments. You may wish to choose different quotes for the profiles you prepare.]

PROFILE 1

NAME: Nart Villeneuve
 USERNAME: *metacom*
 URL: *thehacktivist.com*
 LOCATED: Canada
 AIM: laptops to the frontline.
 MISSION: to bring Internet protest and 'real world' activism closer together.
 DESCRIPTION:
 MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **CYBER PROTEST IN ACTION...**The Electrohippies do it from Wales, 'pinging' websites associated with the Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec; ELECTROHIPPIY PAUL MOBBS: 'WE'RE JUST DEVELOPING THE SYSTEM WHEREBY PEOPLE CAN EXPRESS. ELECTROHIPPIES DON'T TELL THEM WHAT TO SAY, WE JUST PROVIDE THE MECHANISM WHEREBY THEY CAN SAY SOMETHING'.



DOCUMENTARY AND WEB SITE.
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY INCIDENTS:

PROFILE 2

NAME: Ricardo Dominguez
NAME: Carmin Karasic (the only female hacker featured)
USERNAME: rdom
GROUP: Electronic Disturbance Theatre
LOCATION: New York City
AIM: electronic civil disobedience through software tools. Carmin says, 'It's a performance that mobilises thousands of people at a global level, therefore it's also a threat to any government. Any government is going to get upset if somebody other than them knows how to mobilise large masses of people'.
MISSION: to support Mexico's Zapatista rebels, the first revolutionary group to go on-line.
DESCRIPTIONS:
MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE DOCUMENTARY AND THEIR WEB SITE:
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY INCIDENTS/NOTEWORTHY SCENES:

PROFILE 3

NAME: Renaud Courvoisier
USERNAME: Re:no

GROUP: Federation of Random Action
LOCATION: Marseilles, France
AIM: making electronic protest fun.
MISSION: '... to create through the Internet, at a world wide level, through exchanges of thoughts, different cultures, a different way of looking at politics, not politicking, but politics in its most noble sense'.
DESCRIPTION:
MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE DOCUMENTARY AND HIS WEB SITE:
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY INCIDENTS/NOTEWORTHY SCENES:

PROFILE 4

NAME: Paul Mobbs
USERNAME: djnz
GROUP: the Electrohippies Collective
LOCATION: United Kingdom (Wales)
AIM: pc liberation evangelist
MISSION: '... to explain what computer-based activism is all about, and show it is relevant to people's everyday lives'.
DESCRIPTION:
MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE DOCUMENTARY AND HIS WEB SITE:
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY SCENES/NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS:

PROFILE 5

NAME: Ben Venzke, cybersleuth
LOCATION:
AIM:
MISSION: 'To understand who these people are, what they are capable of, what drives them in order to access what kind of a risk they pose to our clients, and in doing that you begin to develop an understanding of kind of who they are'.
DESCRIPTION:
MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE DOCUMENTARY AND HIS WEB SITE:
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY SCENES/NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS:

PROFILE 6

NAME: Jesse Hirsch
LOCATION: USA
AIM: breaking into company websites as 'inconvenience leads to education'.
MISSION: students and workers against capitalism.
DESCRIPTION:
MOTIVATION AS REVEALED BY THE DOCUMENTARY AND HIS WEB SITE:
MODUS OPERANDI:
KEY SCENES/NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS:

FOR EACH PROFILE

Add the following activities.



PC LIBERATION EVANGELIST **PAUL MOBBS** FROM THE DIGITAL MISCHIEF-MAKING GROUP ELECTROHIPPIES. [ABOVE]

- Using all this information, write your own assessment of this person and his actions.
- Compare it with another person's profile.
- Make a brief oral report on your findings.

ACTIVITY 2

- Prepare an adapted profile for the film-maker. Ian Walker is an award-winning writer/director who 'has dedicated his film career to making the "ordinary" extraordinary', a genre he describes as 'magic realist' documentary.
- What is his aim in producing this film as you understand it from the documentary?
- Could you analyse and/or critique his point of view in this documentary?
- What would you do differently if you were the film-maker?

OTHER RESOURCES

WEB SITES

A search using the term Hacktivists brings thousands of sites, most of

which include links to Hactivist sites and to those of their critics so that students can compare the arguments. Here is a sample.

DEFINITIONS

<http://www.cafedigital.com/social/hactivists.shtml>

This web site offers a useful one page description of the terms hacker and hactivist. Hackers '... usually limit their criticism of the military-industrial world to its imperfect security. Most of their activity is restricted to pointless vandalism and swiping the occasional credit card number. For hackers, the idea has been the challenge of the hack, not necessarily the message behind it'.

Compare this with hactivists. 'The message is everything for political activists. They're usually motivated by the need for social change and they've paid little attention to the information technology. Traditionally, they hold sit-ins or marches to get their message across'.

Some examples of hacktivism from this site include Animal Liberationists and also Portuguese hackers, who used their skills to highlight Indonesian human rights abuses in the former Portuguese colony, East Timor, in September 1998.

- This site contains more detail about the Electronic Disturbance Theatre featured in this video and their web tool called FloodNet.

HACKTIVISTS

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid_1614000/1614927.stm

This is an interesting story about the way that young Muslim hactivists are promoting their views on the web and the response from the USA. Another similar site is <http://news.zdnet.co.uk/story/0,,s2082450,00.html>

<http://www.cnn.com/TECH/computing/9910/08/pakistani.hack/>

This site contains a critical view of hacktivism and contains links to other

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The bizaare Zurich-based art group etoy.com...surrealist businesspeople responsible for hacktivism's finest moment so far, the legendary Toywar of 1999; INCREASINGLY, FACED WITH THOUSANDS OF RIOT POLICE AND EVER STRONGER FENCES TO KEEP THEM OUT, ANTI-GLOBALISATION PROTESTERS MAY HAVE NO OPTION BUT TO GO 'ELECTRONIC'; clockwise top left: Hacktivism unmasked...Nart Villeneuve (Canada), Renaud Corvoisier (France), Ricardo Dominguez (United States) & Paul Mobbs (UK) ... working across four continents towards a single day of cyber protest against globalisation.



sites that refer to 'Cyber War'. According to Alex Fowler, Strategic Initiatives Director for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, 'Taking responsibility is not something we see happening. One of the critical things in environmental causes and the civil rights movement was that groups who used strong tactics and intentionally broke the law eventually came forward and took responsibility for their actions. It was owning up that really helped these movements forward'.

CYBERSLEUTHS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/internet/news/story/0,7369,416954,00.html>

This is another useful site with a story that could be used as the basis for discussion or activities. It has excellent definitions and includes a critical discussion of the motivation of the hacktivists as well as some of the measures that governments are beginning to take against them. For example, 'In Britain, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act has given the police and security services the power to collect Internet data without a warrant and to demand the keys to encrypted material. In the United States, the FBI is seeking the right to capture all messages sent across

the Internet with software called Carnivore. This would allow them to trawl for emails containing particular words'. These actions have civil rights implications that you may wish to discuss and explore further.

THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE

Here is one of numerous sites about this large anti-globalisation protest in the USA. It also has links to many others, including US government sites, to provide official versions of what happened as well as the versions of those who protested.

<http://past.thenation.com/cgi-bin/framizer.cgi?url=>

<http://past.thenation.com/issue/991227/1227greider.shtml>

USEFUL WEB SITES

The Hacktivist online magazine
<http://www.thehacktivist.com/>

Electronic Disturbance Theatre
<http://www.thing.net/~rdom/>

Federation of Random Action
<http://this.is/etoytech/fra/>

Electrohippies Collective
<http://www.fraw.org.uk/ehippies/>

etoy corporation
<http://www.etoy.com/>

Defense, Ben's former employer
<http://www.iddefense.com/>



REFERENCES

Ellicott, J., 'Gadgets leave us poorer', *The Courier Mail*, Brisbane, Queensland, 10 September 1998, p.3.

Knight, J., *Internationalization: Elements and Checkpoints*, CBIE, Ottawa, 1994.

Speth, J., 'Economic Growth and Equitable Human Development', the launch of the *1996 Human Development Report*, UNDP, 16 July 1996.