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Think piece: LulzSec and the open society [1]

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The first subversive act I can remember carrying out was during the spring of my senior year in high school. At the time, I had signed up for intramural ultimate frisbee ? I didn't take to interscholastic sports and never saw the point of spending my weekends being carted off to faraway destinations in a van, just to throw a ball at some people I'd never met before. Everything was going swell until one day, after arriving to practice bare-footed as usual, I was ordered to go back to my room to throw on some shoes.

I was stunned: mandating shoes for frisbee constituted a wanton and savage violation of both natural justice and the very raison d'être of the sport. When I quite rightly asked how such a rule had come about, I was told by the supervising faculty member that it was "policy" put into place by a personal edict from the school's athletic director, a highly unpleasant man whom for present purposes we shall call "Rupert". This only made matters worse: I'd crossed paths with Rupert before and did not care much for him, nor he for me. So, within earshot of forty people or so, I offered a pithy but nonetheless colourful one-liner about Rupert's abilities as a policymaker (which I shall not repeat, save to say that it included the word "worthless"). In exchange for my wise counsel, I was invited to spend a day working in the school's mail room. But gosh, was it fun ? and totally worth it.

With that in mind, you might understand why I was disappointed when, a few weeks ago, the infamous hacker group known as Lulz Security disbanded. Claiming loose affiliation to the global Anonymous movement, LulzSec ? in a series of very public and highly illegal operations ? fiddled with the computers of major international companies and organizations including Sony, Petrobras, News Corp., and various government agencies, including the CIA. (They even hacked my brain: after visiting their website, I had the theme song to "the Love Boat" stuck in my head for over a week.)

But hacking into a computer and my brain is not, on its own, newsworthy: people do this sort of thing all the time without getting mentions in the Wall Street Journal and the FT. What makes these fellows special is that they aren't doing it for financial gain, or for fame and glory; they're doing it, above all, because it was amusing: "we've been disrupting and exposing corporations, governments, often the general population itself, and quite possibly everything in between, just because we could." But even this is insufficient to explain the popular fascination with this merry band of computer hackers ? for awhile, the whole world knew what they were doing, and seemed utterly fascinated by it. So why did they get so much attention? **[Continue reading]**[3]

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