

Â In City Hall Park at the beginning of the month, Joshua Kinberg, a recent graduate of the Parsons School of Design, was exhibiting the device that had gotten him arrested a month earlier. It looked like a bicycle. In fact, that is what it is, though certainly state-of-the-art -- and Kinberg is what you could call a state-of-the-art bike messenger.

The bicycle has both a wireless connection to the Internet, and a printer, and is designed to receive political messages sent from the Internet or from a cell phone, and then print them in neat block letters on the street. The kind of messages he hoped to receive were unambiguous: He calls his project [Bikes Against Bush](#) .

This is not graffiti, he is quick to tell people, since the bicycle prints in water-soluble chalk. But the police were apparently not convinced of this. He was arrested a couple of days before the Republican National Convention began, and the police confiscated his bicycle. The police still have his bicycle; his next court appearance is scheduled for November 17. But he was able to bring a demo version of his bike against Bush to City Hall, one of some dozen wireless art projects exhibited as part of [Spectropolis](#) . The three-day event sought to show, as its Web site explains, how communication technologies -- cell phones, laptops, wireless internet, PDAs and radio -- are generating "new urban experiences."

Something new does seem to be happening at the intersection of art, protest, politics and technology.

The Protests

Bikes Against Bush was not the only technology developed for use during the protests against the Republican National Convention. Activists used virtually cost-free technology to coordinate hundreds of actions and mobilize thousands of activists. Independent journalists and activist groups used cell phone text-messaging developed by a free service called [TxtMob](#) to coordinate their actions. The New York Independent Media Center set up a 24-hour information line to broadcast breaking news and a calendar of events; despite little publicity, the information line received more than 2000 calls over a four-day period.

"We've appropriated technology as an essential tool for radical social change," says Evan Henshaw-Plath, the Indymedia activist that developed the information line.

"Wireless Week"

If innovations like Joshua Kinberg's bicycle make some city officials nervous, they intrigue

by Laura Forlano

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others; City Councilmember Gale Brewer announced October 4th through 8th as "Wireless Week" in honor of Spectropolis.

Spectropolis allowed New Yorkers to participate in free hands-on technology workshops, which encouraged them to play with the technologies and think about their impact on our lives and environments. In one workshop people built their own radio frequency identification detector (commonly referred to as an [RFID tag](#)); the tags are already used in a variety of ways -- "Pets are often embedded with small chips so that they may be returned to their owners if lost," according to Wikipedia, and they are also used in library books, automobile key-and-lock, anti-theft systems; to pay tolls, to track prisoners -- and the tags are expected to become ever more widely employed in an array of consumer products. Another workshop taught local community members to build their own wireless Internet hotspots.

According to Dana Spiegel, the event's producer and a director at NYCwireless, "Spectropolis was an amazing success, bringing thousands of people from New York and around the world to Lower Manhattan to experience new wireless art. The event showcases that [wireless Internet] hotspots are about local communities and connecting people, and not just about checking your email."

All of the projects used the public airwaves (technically known as electromagnetic spectrum) in some way in order to create their art. Making more and better quality airwaves available for public use is currently a vital telecommunications policy issue. This is because the majority of the airwaves are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to government agencies (such as the defense department), telecommunications companies and commercial broadcasters. Currently, only a small portion of the airwaves are available for unlicensed use despite emerging technologies, such as smart radios, which make the current system outdated.

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