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[Print this](#) • [Email it](#)**'Be Grateful for Etoy'**by **Steve Kettmann**

12:10 p.m. Dec. 17, 1999 PST

BERLIN -- John Perry Barlow, former Grateful Dead lyricist and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, is calling on the entire Internet community to rally behind the Zurich-based artists of etoy in their potentially historic domain-name battle with [www.eToys.com](http://www.eToys.com).

"This is the battle of Bull Run," Barlow said. "This is the point where people begin to realize there is a difference between the Internet industry and the Internet community, and the Internet community needs to bind itself together and find a common voice."

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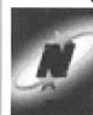
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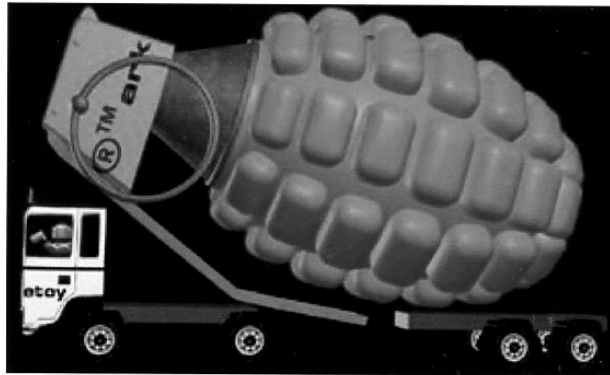
Barlow entered the battle officially on Thursday as part of an etoy "Crisis Advisory Board" that also includes Infoseek Japan chairman Joichi Ito, and author and National Public Radio commentator [Douglas Rushkoff](#).

Public figures such as these are only part of a groundswell of support for etoy, widely admired in the Internet art world. Etoy previously told Wired News that it distanced itself from any hostile attacks on the [www.eToys.com](http://www.eToys.com) Web site -- and Barlow expanded on that theme.

"I think hacks are likely to happen and I think that will be counterproductive in the long run," he said. "It plays into their hands. It makes them look responsible. And they are not responsible."

Barlow went on to say that eToys' action against etoy flies in the face of the development of the Internet, as overseen by such major figures as Jon Postel, the key authority on domain names until his death last October.

If two entities are fighting over the same thing, e.g., the domain [www.etoys.com](http://www.etoys.com), the one who wins will be the one who can convince the other that the object of desire is not as desirable as it appears. The Etoy domain was an object of desire, for eToys, because they were losing 20,000 of 300,000 hits a day to etoy.com, for etoy, because the domain name was the point of reference of their artistic existence. And the fight was particularly heated because the opponents followed different sets of logic; the economic, on the one hand, which has to do with numbers and payments, and the artistic on the other, where it has to do with anything but. The art group was in possession of a double advantage: for one, the domain was theirs, and for another, far more important one, the exhibition of the bizarre practices of the financial world was nothing less than their artistic project. While etoy could always put both sets of logic into play, eToys was never able to put the logic of economics to use against its opponent by, for example, burying the opponent in an avalanche of legal fees, nor could it use a third logic, for example, the criminal prosecution of Net activists. No one could hold it against eToys that they couldn't follow the logic of art.



When I developed, without knowing any of the participants, the core of what became the [RTMark campaign](http://www.hygrid.de/etovrhiz.html) with my "a new toy for you" (all of which is documented at [www.hygrid.de/etovrhiz.html](http://www.hygrid.de/etovrhiz.html)), the point was to set up an undeniable mirror which would make the moves by etoy.arts and etoy.politics appear as losses in the market value of eToys. This mirror was the [NASDAQ notation](http://www.nasdaq.com) of eToys, from which I was able to determine that the company had exhausted the hot air puffing up their story and that the market was looming on the verge of introducing a downward trend. The idea of focusing the campaign on the destruction of eToys's market valuation was an act of speculating on speculation, a metastory, telling once again the parallel story already autonomously programmed for a fall. As etoy.arts used the similarity of the domains as a value effect, so did etoy.politics use the fall in the stock price as a battle effect. "To hype out the hype," as Ricardo Dominguez and I coined the tactic in The Thing's BBS chat.

It wasn't a betting game. It was a thought through calculation: The stock was introduced on May 20, and starting on November 20, the insiders flooded the market. The valuation reflected the anticipation of expectations for the Christmas shopping season and was already moving downward. All etailers found themselves under pressure because the traditional companies had found their electronic footing. And the campaign would arouse so much brouhaha that the majority of new investors would be betting on the slide.

Conceptually and legally, etoy.arts was set up brilliantly. Etoy.politics followed a few days afterwards. The judge's ink was barely dry when the first attacks hit the eToys Web site. The spontaneous self-activation of hundreds and the sheer speed of the flow of information were the trump cards. A respectable batch of unmoderated mailing lists such as [Rhizome](http://www.rhizome.org), where my ["urgently needed"](http://www.rhizome.org), sent 36 minutes after I received the news to Nettime and four minutes later to Rhizome - had long since met with a wave of positive resonance, when Nettime moderator Ted Byfield (who, by the way, did a great job in the background) let me know that "we don't send out stuff like this." Even though the point was to attack eToys immediately, to hit them senseless with attacks just when they were already overworked with their monumental Christmas business. The [media and net.art scene](http://www.mediaandnetartscene.com) subscribed to Rhizome understood immediately, and shortly after "a new toy," I found myself hijacked by the brokerage [RTMark](http://www.rtmk.com) to the working group furiously toiling away.