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The Little Coffee Shop Around the Corner

By KIM SEVERSON

THREE artists from Los Angeles walked out of the Astor Place subway stop in New York a couple of years ago, longing for **coffee** and a cafe in which to drink it. They found only a thick web of Starbucks stores, and the Delocator was born.

Part art project and part political statement, the Delocator is a Web site (delocator.net) that works like the store locator function common at retail Web sites. In this case, it helps people find out where Starbucks stores are not.

Finishing School, a tactical media collective the three artists formed three years ago, began the site in April as part of an art installation in San Francisco. Its other works include the Patriot Library, which gives people access to controversial books and other media without the fear of tracking by the government, and an art show that contrasts the lives of the chief executive of the Gap and a Guatemalan garment worker.

In the case of Starbucks, the artists are raging against what they say is a compliance-driven, coglike work force slinging **coffee** in the highly regulated architectural constructs of the chain. Their manifesto, in a nutshell: "The standardization of this spatial, social and physical experience is hostile to the historical culture of the cafe and is dangerous, ultimately, to democratic principles."

The site works more simply than their manifesto reads. Enter a ZIP code and two lists pop up. One is of independent **coffee** shops within a five-mile radius; the other is of Starbucks stores in the area.

A collective member, Xtine Hanson, a community college teacher in Los Angeles who once earned rent money as a cog in the Starbucks wheel, said the point is to gore more than the megacoffee bull. "It's about corporations and choice," she said. The popularity of the site caught the group off guard. In the month since it started, the Delocator has had more than a million hits and been linked to more than 53,000 other sites. The database stands at just over 3,000 independent cafes, and **coffee** drinkers are encouraged to add their favorites. By contrast, Starbucks has more than 9,000 locations worldwide.

The list is heavy on **coffee** shops on the East and West Coasts, and thin in the middle of the country. Plug in a Times Square ZIP code and the Delocator spins out addresses for 111 non-Starbucks **coffee** shops and 184 Starbucks stores. But enter a ZIP code in Omaha and you may get two cafes and six Starbucks locations.

The Delocator list is casually tended and self-policing, Ms. Hanson said. People who read the lists from their areas let the group know when someone has added a joke or a **shop** has closed. "We get e-mails every day from people who love to tell on other people," she said.

Starbucks would not comment on the Delocator directly. But a spokeswoman, Val Hwang, said in an e-mail message, "We are aware that people use many means to voice their opinions, including fliers, bumper stickers and Web sites."