



**HACKER CULTURE & POLITICS
Fall 2008**

Class # and Section: E59.1200
Class time and room: MW: 2:00 – 3:15 pm
Monday: 48 Cooper Square 111
Wednesday: Silver 404
Professor: Dr. Gabriella Coleman
Office: 713, 239 Greene Street
Office hours: By appointment (Monday & Wed afternoons after class)
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OVERVIEW & GOALS

This course takes as its object computer hackers to interrogate not only the ethics and technical practices of hacking, but to examine more broadly how hackers and hacking have transformed the politics of computing and the Internet more generally. We will examine how hacker values are realized and constituted by different legal, technical, and ethical activities of computer hacking—for example, free software production, cyberactivism and hactivism, cryptography, and the pranksih games of hacker underground. We will pay close attention to how ethical principles are variably represented and thought of by hackers, journalists, and academics and we will use the example of hacking to address various topics on law, order, and politics on the Internet such as: free speech and censorship, computer gaming, privacy and security, and intellectual property. This will allow us to critically 1) problematize thinking on computer hackers as a socio-cultural group guided by a singular ethic and set of practices 2) examine the multiple ways hackers draw on and reconfigure dominant ideas of property, freedom, and privacy through their diverse moral codes and technical activities 3) broaden our understanding of politics of the Internet by evaluating the various political effects and ramifications of hacking 4) and examine a few cases of activities and practices “on the borders” of hacking but that are centrally inspired by its techniques and ethics. Class will be conducted as a seminar. Students will be responsible for leading discussions on the readings and critically engaging the readings and class conversations.

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

See separate sheet.

SCHEDULE

The following is a “working schedule.” Class materials are subject to change based on the

interests, understanding, and general pace of the class. It is your responsibility to keep on top of any schedule changes, whether you are in class or not. If you have a concern about any of the materials, please speak to me.

Week I.

1. Wednesday September 3:

During the first meeting we will discuss the syllabus, goals, and requirements of the course. I will also discuss what won't (unfortunately) be covered.

Week II.

1. Monday Sept 8: The MIT Hackers and Hacking as Craft

Levy, Steven

1984 Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution [pp 17-49, 70-90, 102-017, 115-123]

Sennet, Richard

2008 The Craftsman [pp. 8-11 50-52, 240-252, 262-265; optional but recommended and included on BB: 37-45]

2. Wednesday September 10: Phone Phreaking and Pranking

Rosenbaum, Ron

1971 "Secrets of the Little Blue Box." Esquire Magazine

<http://www.webcrunchers.com/crunch/stories/esq-art.html>

or <http://www.lospadres.info/thorg/lbb.html>

Sterling Bruce,

1992 "Crashing the System." The Hacker Crackdown

http://sunsite.nus.sg/pub/crackdown/crackdown_4.html

Hoffam, Abie

1971 Steal this Book [Read the Introduction and pick one category under Survive!]

<http://www.tenant.net/Community/steal/steal.html>

Visit and listen to one of the audio files on the following site:

<http://www.wideweb.com/phonetrips/>

or play around here <http://www.projectmf.org/> which allows you to "blue box" telephone calls legally. For those that cannot get enough and want to learn more, check out: <http://www.historyofphonephreaking.org/>

Week III.

1. Monday September 15: Homebrew Club, Hardware Hacking, and the Personal Computer

Nelson, Theodore

1974 "Computer Lib / Dream Machines [very short selections]

Levy, Steven

1984 Hackers [pp. 201-243]

Friedman, Ted

2005 "The Many Creators of the Personal Computer and Apples 1984." Electric Dreams

Markoff, John
2006 "A Strange Brew's Buzz Lingers in Silicon Valley." New York Times (March 6)

2. Wednesday September 17: Poor Man's Networking, Free Speech, the Concentration of Power, and a First Look at the Special Class of Technologists: "The Sys Admin" **

Pfaffenberger, Bryan
1996 "If I Want It, It's OK^o: Usenet and the (Outer) Limits of Free Speech." The Information Society

Peter, John Durham
2005 Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition [selections from Introduction and Chapter 3 pp. 9-22; 123- 136]

Week IV.

1. Monday September 22: The Underground and the Pleasures of Eating the Forbidden Fruit

Sterling Bruce
1992 "The Digital Underground." The Hacker Crackdown
http://www.dina.kvl.dk/~abraham/crackdown/crackdown_5.html#SEC5

Nietzsche, Friedrich
1872 Birth Of Tragedy [selections]

Jack Hitt and Paul Tough
1990 "Is Computer Hacking a Crime?" Harpers Magazine

2. Wednesday September 24: Hacker Underground, Continued

Thomas, Douglass
2003 "Hacking as the Performance of Technology: Reading the Hacker Manifesto." Hacker Culture

Thomas, Douglass
2003 "Representing Hacker Culture: Reading Phrack." Hacker Culture

Read as much Phrack as you can stomach, including at least one of the following:
<http://www.phrack.com/issues.html?issue=65&id=13#article>
<http://www.phrack.com/issues.html?issue=65&id=2#article>

Week V.

1. Monday September 29: Theoretical Interlude. Conceptualizing Hacking in Social and Cultural Terms **

Hedbidge, Dick
1983 "Posing . . . Threats, Striking . . . Poses." The Subcultures Reader

Michael Warner
2002 "Publics and Counterpublics." Publics and Counterpublics

2. Wednesday October 1: Free Software and the Basics of Intellectual Property

Levy, Steven
1984 "Epilogue." Hackers [pp. 415-430]

Stallman, Richard
1985 "The GNU Manifesto" <http://www.gnu.org/gnu/manifesto.html>

Litman, Jessica
2001 "Copyright Basics" Digital Copyright: Protecting Intellectual Property on the Internet

Hesse, Carla
2002 "The Rise of Intellectual Property, 700 B.C - A.D. 2000: an Idea in Balance." Dædalus

Week VI.

1. Monday October 6: Free Software, Recursive Publics and the Politics of IP continued

Kelty, Chris
2008 Two Bits the Cultural Significance of Free Software
Introduction: <http://twobits.net/discuss/introduction/14>
Chapter 6: <http://twobits.net/discuss/chapter6/20>

Helprin, Mark
2007 "A Great Idea Lives Forever, Shouldn't its Copyright?"
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html>

2. Wednesday October 8: BBSes and Dwelling in Technology

Ingold, Tim
2000 "Building, Dwelling, living: How animals and people make themselves at home in the world." Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill.

In class documentary: BBS <http://www.bbsdocumentary.com/>

Essay 1: Handed out at the end of class. Due on Monday morning the 13th by 10 a.m. via email

Week VII.

1. Monday October 13:

NO CLASS, School Holiday. Essay due.

2. Wednesday October 15: UNIX **

Kelty, Chris
2008 "Sharing Source Code." Two Bits
<http://twobits.net/discuss/chapter4/18>

Stephenson, Neal
1999 In the Beginning was the ... Command Line
http://artlung.com/smorgasborg/C_R_Y_P_T_O_N_O_M_I_C_O_N.shtm

Week VIII.

1. Monday October 20: Code is Art and the Art of Code **

Black, Maurice
2002 "At the Edge of Language: The Art of Code"

Chopra, Samir and Scott Dexter
2007 "Free Software and the Aesthetics of Code." Decoding Liberation

"Why learning Haskell/Python makes you a worse programmer" [closely read the first few paragraphs and then skim the rest]
<http://lukeplant.me.uk/blog.php?id=1107301645>

2. Wednesday October 22: Code is Law: Rethinking the Politics of the Internet and Access

Lessig, Lawrence
2007 "Open Code and Open Societies." Perspectives on Free and Open Source Software

Winner, Langdon
1986 "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" The Whale and the Reactor

Listen to before class:
http://www.democracynow.org/2008/6/25/from_political_prisoner_to_cabinet_minister

Week VIII.

1. Monday October 27: Breaking the Law and Hacker Representations in the Media

Thomas, Douglass
2003 "Technology and Punishment: The Juridical Construction of the Hacker." Hacker Culture

Poulsen, Kevin
2008 "Teenage Hacker Is Blind, Brash and in the Crosshairs of the FBI"
http://www.wired.com/politics/law/news/2008/02/blind_hacker?currentPage=1

Listen to before class:
<http://www.the-fifth-hope.org/mp3/mitnick-1.mp3>
<http://www.the-fifth-hope.org/mp3/mitnick-2.mp3>

2. Wednesday October 29: Games and Play

Dibbell, Julian
2006 Play Money [$\frac{1}{2}$ book]

Levy, Steven
1984 Hackers [pp. 50-69]

Suggested Reading:

Dibbell, Julian
2008 "Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Grieferers, the Sociopaths of the Virtual World." Wired Magazine
http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons?currentPage=all

Week X.

1. Monday November 3: Games and Revisiting the Pleasures of Hacking/Gaming

Dibbell, Julian
2006 Play Money [rest of book]

Nussbaum, Martha
2004 "Mill between Aristotle & Bentham." Daedalus
<http://www.utilitarian.net/jsmill/about/20040322.htm>

2. Wednesday November 5: Privacy

Zimmerman, Phil
1999 "How PGP Works/Why Do You Need PGP?" High Noon on the Electronic Frontier

Levy, Stephen
1999 "CryptoRebels." High Noon on the Electronic Frontier

Doctorow, Cory
2007 Little Brother [1/3 of book]

Week XI.

1. Monday November 10: Privacy, Continued

Doctorow, Cory
2007 Little Brother [rest of book]

George Radwanski
2001 Privacy Commissioner releases finding on video surveillance by RCMP in Kelowna
http://www.privcom.gc.ca/media/nr-c/02_05_b_011004_e.asp

Vaidyanathan, Siva
2008 "Naked in the 'Nonopticon' Surveillance and marketing combine to strip away our privacy." Chronicle of Higher Education
<http://chronicle.com/free/v54/i23/23b00701.htm>

2. Wednesday November 12: ARRRRR Piracy

Watch at home before class: "Steal This Film"
<http://www.stealthisfilm.com/Part1/>

Roth, Daniel
2008 The Pirates Can't be Stopped
<http://www.portfolio.com/news-markets/national-news/portfolio/2008/01/14/Media-Defenders-Profile>

Mason, Matt
2008 "The Tao of Pirates, Seafronts, Patents Trolls, and Why We Need Piracy." The Pirates Dilemma

Editorial
1999 "So You Want to be a Pirate?" High Noon on the Electronic Frontier

Talking to Pirates
2008 <http://www.positech.co.uk/talkingtopirates.html>

Visit before class: <http://thepiratebay.org/>
Video Clip: <http://interaktiv.mccann.no/eng/piracy/>

Week XII.

1. Monday November 17: Social Organization

Guest: Karl Fogel who is a Free and Open Source Software Developer, author of "Producing Open Source Software," and founder of <http://www.questioncopyright.org/>

Coleman, Biella
2004 "The (copylefted)Source Code for the Ethical Production of Information Freedom."
Sarai Reader.

Fogel, Karl
2005 Producing Open Source Software. [selection]
<http://producingoss.com/en/producingoss.html#social-infrastructure>

Shirky, Clay
2008 "Failure For Free." Here Comes Everybody

2. Wednesday November 19: Old and New Net Wars: Hackers, Geeks, Anonymous, and Scientology (another look at Free Speech)

Grossman, Wendy
1997 "Copyright Terrorists" net.wars
<http://www.nyupress.org/netwars/contents/contents.html>

Landers, Chris
2008 "Serious Business Anonymous Takes On Scientology (and Doesn't Afraid of Anything)"
<http://www.citypaper.com/news/story.asp?id=15543>

Week XIII.

1. Monday November 24:

Movie: Necrocam

2. Wednesday November 26:

Class Canceled for Thanksgiving Holiday

Week XIII.

1. Monday December 1: Anarchism, The Politically Minded Geek, and the Fight Against Corporate Capitalism

Coleman, Gabriella
2005 Indymedia's Independence: From Activist Media to Free Software
<http://journal.planetwork.net/article.php?lab=coleman0704>

Graeber, David
2004 Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology

Suggested Reading:

Finnegan, William
2003 "The Economics of Empire: Notes on the Washington Consensus." Harpers.
<http://www.mindfully.org/WTO/2003/Economics-Of-EmpireMay03.htm>

2. Wednesday December 3: Nurdly (Geeks, Hackers, Freaks, and...)

Nugent, Benjamin
2008 "American Nerd: The Story of My People." [Read all of Part I and in Part II read pp. 141-183]

Seltzer, Sara
2008 The (girl) geeks stands alone. Bitch Magazine

Week XV.

1. Monday December 8: Graffiti Research Labs, A Political, Open Source Technology

Watch Video at Home: GRL the First Season
<http://graffitiresearchlab.com/>

2. Wednesday December 11: Understanding Hacker Humor, Understanding Web Comics, One Final Look and Wrap Up

Wrap up with some humor: geeky comics (kxcd, Dinosaur Comics, etc.)

McCloud, Scott
1993 Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art [Short selection TBD]

<http://www.linuxkungfu.org/images/fun/geek/project.jpg>

<http://www.inktank.com/archives/AT/index.cfm?nav=148>

<http://xkcd.com/269/>

<http://geekz.co.uk/lovesraymond/archive/gmail-behind-the-scenes-deleted-scenes>

<http://xkcd.com/149/>

<http://ars.userfriendly.org/cartoons/?id=20070406>

<http://xkcd.com/242/>

<http://xkcd.com/225/>

<http://ars.userfriendly.org/cartoons/?id=20010113>

<http://geekz.co.uk/lovesraymond/archive/gpl-killed-the-mpaa-star>

<http://www.qwantz.com/archive/000004.html>

<http://www.qwantz.com/archive/000802.html>

(these last two are geeky for its form, not content)

