HACKER CULTURE & POLITICS
Draft 2010

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OVERVIEW

This course examines 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 prankish 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.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

This will allow us to 1) demonstrate familiarity with variants of hacking 2) critically 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.

READINGS

A course packet for most of the readings will be available a few weeks into the semester (the first few weeks of reading will be available on BB or in the bookstore). I will indicate which readings you will have to print from the web.

The following texts are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore:

Levy, Steven. *Hackers*

Boyer, Dominc, *Understanding Media: A Popular Philosophy*

Graeber, David. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*

Nugent, Benjamin. *American Nerd: The Story of My People*

Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash* (for final exam)

Doctorow, Cory. *Little Brother*

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. January 20

I will be away at a Free Software/Hacker conference so we will not have class. In lieu of class, please read:

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

Week II.

1. January 25: Introductions and The MIT Hackers, Hacking as a Craft

> Levy, Steven
> 1984   Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (pp. 17-49, 70-90, 102-17, 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. January 27: The MIT Hackers and Variants of Liberalism

    Levy, Steven
    1984   Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (pp TBD)

    Hall, Stuart
    1987   "Variants of Liberalism." Politics and Ideology

Week III.

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1. February 1: Phone Phreaking and Pranking

    Rosenbaum, Ron
    1971   "Secrets of the Little Blue Box." Esquire Magazine
    http://www.webcrunchers.com/crunch/stories/esq-art.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/

2. February 3: 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)

http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/26/business/a-strange-brew-s-buzz-lingers-in-silicon-valley.html?pagewanted=1

Week IV. *** Heavy Reading Week with an Exam at the End*********

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1. February 8 : Theoretical Interlude. Conceptualizing Subculture and Media

    Hebdidge, Dick

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

Boyer, Dominic
2007   Understanding Media: a Popular Philosophy

2. February 10: Poor Man's Networking vs the Internet

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

Rosenzweig, Roy
1998   "Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers: Writing the History of the Internet." The American Historical Review.

History of the Internet in a Nutshell:
http://sixrevisions.com/resources/the-history-of-the-internet-in-a-nutshell/

!!!! 24 hour take home exam !!!!!!

Week V.

1. February 15: No Class

University Holiday

2. February 17: The Hacker Underground

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

SHORT READING ON PLEASURE TBD (perhaps Barthes)

Listen to the NPR podcast before class:
The 'Wild And Woolly' World Of Bulletin Boards
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120649723

Week VI.

1. February 22: 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

2. February 24: 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

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

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Week VII.

1. March 1: Free Software, Recursive Publics and the Politics of IP continued

Kelty, Chris
2008   Two Bits the Cultural Significance of Free Software (Introduction, Chapter 6, and Chapter 3)

Intellectual Property Quiz (all of 10 minutes long)

2. March 3: UNIX

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

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Week VIII.

1. Monday: The Politics of Code

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

Coleman, Gabriella
2009   "Code is Speech: Legal Tinkering, Expertise, and Protest among Free and Open Source Software Developers" Cultural Anthropology

Fuller, Mathew
2008   "Introduction." Software Studies: A Lexicon

Brief reading on free speech and liberalism TBD

2. Wednesday: The Social Organization of F/OSS projects.

Coleman, Gabriella
2005   "Three Ethical Moments in Debian"
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=805287

Coleman, Gabriella
2010   "Hacking In-Person: The Ritual Character of Conferences and the Distillation of a LifeWorld. "
Anthropological Quarterly

Week VIIII. Spring Break

NO CLASS

Week X.

1. March 22: The Art of Programing

Ensmenger, Nathan
2010   "The Black Art of Programming" and "Chess Players Music Lovers and Mathematicians"

2. Wednesday: Cleverness in Code

Coleman, Gabriella
2005   "Codes of Value" The Social Construction of Freedom in Free and Open Source
Software: Hackers Ethics, and the Liberal Tradition

Fuller, Mathew
2008   Elegance: Software Studies: A Lexicon

Monfort, Nick
2008   Obfuscated Code. Software Studies: A Lexicon

Week XI.

1. March 29: Hacker as Trickster

 Hydle, Lewis
1999   Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art (selections)

2. March 31: 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

Week XII.

1. April 5: Privacy and Surveillance

> 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)
>
> ACLU
> 2009   What is Wrong with Fusion Centers?
> http://www.aclu.org/technology-and-liberty/whats-wrong-fusion-centers-executive-summary

2. April 7: Privacy and Surveillance

> 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
>
> Doctorow, Cory
> 2007   Little Brother (rest of book)

Week XIII.

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1. April 12: Anarchism, The Politically Minded Geek, and the Fight Against Corporate Capitalism

> Graeber, David
> 2004   Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology
>
> Juris, Jeff
> 2005 "The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization
> Movements" The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science
>
> Class Visitors: Tech Activist Geeks from Riseup and MayFirst

2. April 14: Old and New Net Wars: Hackers, Geeks, Anonymous, and Scientology (another look at Free Speech)

> Grossman, Wendy
> 1997   "Copyright Terrorists"
> 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 XIIII.

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1. April 19: 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

Lohr, Steve
2010   Nerd' and `Geek' Should Be Banned, Professor Says
http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/nerd-and-geek-should-be-banned-professor-says/

2. April 21: Representing Hackers in Film

Poppe, Ine
2001   Necrocam. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0297307/

IN CLASS MOVIE

Week XV.

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1. April 26: Piracy

Johns, Adrian
2010   "From Phreaking to Fudding" Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to
Gate A General History of the Pirates, From Gutenberg to Gates

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

2. April 28: Culture Jamming, The Yes Men

2010   Chamber of Commerce Complaint Against the Yes Men

Videos: YES MEN

Week XV.

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1. May 3: Last Day of Class

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://graffitiresearchlab.com/
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)

RESOURCES and BLOGS

http://www.rotten.com/library/bio/hackers/
http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/
http://www.techdirt.com/
http://slashdot.org/

MOVIES

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

Class will be conducted as a seminar and I have structured the assignments to encourage active and engaged class discussions focused on the readings. Students will be responsible for leading discussions on the readings and should critically engage the readings and class conversations. Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. You are allowed two unexcused absences. After this, your grade will drop by one half letter for each missed class

To aid in discussion and improve your writing skills, one of the main assignments for class is to turn in a a total of eight response papers (2-3 pages in length) where you will (1) provide a summary of the thesis and argument of each reading for the day's class in about one page (2) and provide a critical engagement with the text in the rest of the paper. On the days you are not required to turn in a paper, you will be required to post at least one question about the readings on Blackboard one hour prior to class. More details provided below. In addition, you will have one short take home essay question based on a readings, a quiz on intellectual property, and there will be a take home final exam

Bi-Weekly Questions and Response Papers: 25%
Take Home Midterm 25%
Class Participation: 15%
Final Exam: 25%
Quiz: 15%

EVALUATION
A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.
C=Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.
D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.
F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate.
Plus and minus grade indicate the standing within the above grades.
More Information about the Weekly Response Papers and other Writing Assignments

RESPONSE PAPERS

How will this work exactly?

Half of you will be placed at random into Group A and the other half in Group B.

Group A: Will turn in the response paper on and for Monday's class and turn in a discussion question for Wednesday's class
Group B: Will turn in the main paper on and for Wednesday's class and turn in a discussion question for Monday's class.

The paper and question should be sent to me via email no later than 11:30 A.M on the day they are due. You should also post them to our Blackboard site and bring a paper copy to class. All submitted work must be typed, double spaced, and paginated in 12-point Times New Roman font, and submitted in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or OpenOffice format. I cannot open .docx format. The student's name, date, and response paper number should appear on the first page, and pages should be numbered. You should save the document in the following way before sending to this email address biella.class@gmail.com (Lastname-PaperNumber.doc. For example, mine would look like: Coleman-Paper1.doc, Coleman-Paper2.doc, etc.)

The essays will be graded with a letter grade and returned to you usually within a week or two.

I will be circulating example essays the first day of class and they will be posted on BB. As you will see, I expect enough of a summary of the main arguments and methods for all of the assigned readings to convince me that you have actually done the readings as well as some critical and direct engagement with the texts and arguments. The essays should be checked for spelling and grammar. Feel free to bring in related questions and material so long as it is done in a manner that directly engages with the text.

You will only have to turn in a total of eight response papers and six questions and the lowest grade will be dropped. My only provision is you cannot turn in an essay for the last week of class as the reading assignments ar quite light.

Why are you doing this?

Practically speaking, for the here and now: On the one hand, this may seem a little torturous as you will have to give yourself enough time to read and write before the start of many (though not all) classes. On the other hand this assignment will help you read actively and critically so that you are well prepared for class discussion, which is the cornerstone of this class (and is 25% of your final grade) and will help for your take home final exam.

Practically speaking, for the future: By the end of the semester you will also be able to write a short but engaging essay, which includes summary and analysis, in a short period of time, which is a skill that I hope will be useful in the future.

Philosophically speaking: When I teach a seminar based class, I want it to be true to its spirit: we are in class to collectively engage in a discussion, exploration, and debate concerning the readings and the issues they raise. For a seminar to really work, students must do the readings and have a shared set of references to bring to the table. Otherwise, we are just talking about our general opinions, thoughts. I structured the assignments not only to encourage participatory learning but to build the necessary foundation for this seminar to run properly