Hackademia: Empirical Studies in Computing Cultures

2. Lüneburg Summer School for Digital Cultures

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Background

Studying digital media today means studying those technologists – hackers, security researchers, game developers, system administrators, and designers – who create and maintain the digital worlds we live in. How much agency lies in the hands of programmers, coders, and engineers to create our digital worlds is still up for debate, yet this much is true: various hacking and related subcultures form critical nodes of practice that help shape and condition the contemporary technologies we use everyday. Whether it is an analyst or coder implementing algorithms at a large financial institution, a group of designers working on improving the user interface for a cryptographic tool, a privacy team securing a browser, a developer coding her own app, cryptographers working on an open source anonymized system, a programmer working on a P2P file sharing platform, hackers buying and selling zero days in a grey market, a team of system administrators at Google working to scale up services, a journalist-coder developing visualization tools, indie game developers seeking to write a politically minded game, or a hacker-leaker whistleblowing to salvage privacy – all have something to say about how digital technology can and should be created.

These technology workers/experts are now central to every field of social, political, and economic import. They secure our communications networks; shape the design and portals we use to connect to our banks, our friends, our loved ones, our colleagues, our business partners; inform us about the activities of our governments; design novel currencies; exfiltrate intellectual property and proof of wrongdoing from corporate actors; offer us alternative ways of organizing our political voices whether through political projects or games; function as conduits and warriors between nations; and allow us to confront the laws we don't like – through democratic engagements, as in the Free Software movement, or tools that enable outright circumvention.

This is an ideal time to understand and ultimately appraise their activities, actions, their desires, and intentions. While an increasing number of scholars – ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and media historians – are undertaking the study of hacker cultures, there are many methodological questions to pose and explore: How much technical knowledge is necessary to study the worlds of computing and programming? How does one gain access to secret nooks of hacking or corporate sites – whether a security company, gaming outfit, or black hat computer forum – where codes, designers, and hackers labor? How is the study of hackers similar and different to the study of other experts such as scientists? As participant

observers, how can we fully understand the engineering culture of the hackers we are studying, and what shortcuts in our methods must be taken in order to create an understanding?

Who Should Apply?

This summer school invites doctoral students in the field of ethnography, cultural anthropology, media studies, software studies, sociology, science, technology studies, history, or other, who are currently working on a dissertation on the life-worlds, practices, cultures, or platforms of hackers. Hackers here are understood broadly as programmers, coders, pirates, and computer engineers of all shapes and forms—and do not necessarily have to be engaged in illegal or subversive activity or self identify as hackers. Applicants who are struggling with field entry, are learning to code, or seek to expand their methods, are particularly welcome.

Who Will Attend?

This summer school will provide a dialogue between hackers and academics. As such, we will additionally invite a number of hackers, coders, programmers, and technologists. These guests will lead sessions around the topic of field entrance, knowledge transfer, work organization and hacker communication practices, feminist critiques, and standards/protocols. Keynote speakers will also provide evening lectures, and help lead sessions.

Where and when will this take place?

The Hackademia summer school will take place at the Digital Cultures Research Lab (DCRL), Leuphana University in Lüneburg, Germany (30 minutes away from Hamburg), between August 28th and September 2nd, 2016.

How to apply?

Please submit your CV along with a 500-word abstract of your dissertation, and a 500-word explanation on why you would like to attend this summer school. The deadline for applications for the summer school is January 4th, 2016. Please email your applications (compile into one PDF) to bialski@leuphana.de

All applicants will be informed about the selection of participants in mid-February.

The working language of the summer school will be English; therefore, a sufficient understanding of English is expected.

There is no participation fee. The organizers will cover accommodation costs. We have a limited amount of need-based travel funding available. Please indicate in your application letter if you wish to apply for travel funding.