

'Hacker's Delight'

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A remix of *A Hacker Manifesto* by Paul Mathias

125. A hacker history knows only the present tense.
- 160a. Every production is a hack formalised and repeated on the basis of its representation as property. To produce is to repeat; to hack, to differentiate. If production is the hack captured by property and repeated, the hack is production produced as something other than itself.
071. A hack touches the virtual; and transforms the actual. "To qualify as a hack, the feat must be imbued with innovation, style and technical virtuosity."ⁱ The terms hacking and hacker emerge in this sense in electrical engineering and computing. As these have been leading areas of creative production in a vectoral world, it is fitting that these names come to represent a broader activity. The hacking of new vectors of information have indeed been the turning point in the emergence of a broader awareness of the creative production of abstraction.
002. All classes fear this relentless abstraction of the world, on which their fortunes yet depend. All classes but one: the hacker class. We are the hackers of abstraction. We produce new concepts, new perceptions, new sensations, hacked out of raw data. Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colourings, we are the abstracters of new worlds. Whether we come to represent ourselves as researchers or authors, artists or biologists, chemists or musicians, philosophers or programmers, each of these subjectivities is but a fragment of a class still becoming, bit by bit, aware of itself as such.
004. Hackers create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things. In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. Hackers create these new worlds, yet we do not possess them. That which we create is mortgaged to others, and to the interests of others, to states and corporations who monopolise the means for making worlds we alone discover. We do not own what we produce -- it owns us.
070. To hack is to express knowledge in any of its forms. Hacker knowledge implies, in its practice, a politics of free information, free learning, the gift of the result in a

peer-to-peer network. Hacker knowledge also implies an ethics of knowledge open to the desires of the productive classes and free from subordination to commodity production. Hacker knowledge is knowledge that expresses the virtuality of nature, by transforming it, fully aware of the bounty and danger. When knowledge is freed from scarcity, the free production of knowledge becomes the knowledge of free producers.

058. The hack expresses knowledge in its virtuality, by producing new abstractions that do not necessarily fit the disciplinary regime that is managing and commodifying education. Knowledge at its most abstract and productive may be rare, but this rarity has nothing to do with the scarcity imposed upon it by the commodification and hierarchy of education. The rarity of knowledge expresses the elusive multiplicity of nature itself, which refuses to be disciplined. Nature unfolds in its own time.
225. Even useless hacks may come, perversely enough, to be valued for the purity of their uselessness. There is nothing that can't be valued as a representation. There is nothing that can't be critiqued, and thereby valued anyway, by virtue of the attention paid to its properties. The hack is driven into history by its condition of existence -- expression -- that calls for the renewal of difference.
008. Abstraction may be discovered or produced, may be material or immaterial, but abstraction is what every hack produces and affirms. To abstract is to construct a plane upon which otherwise different and unrelated matters may be brought into many possible relations. To abstract is to express the virtuality of nature, to make known some instance of its manifold possibilities, to actualise a relation out of infinite relationality, to manifest the manifold.
046. Through the development of abstraction, freedom may yet be wrested from necessity. The vectoralist class, like its predecessors, seeks to shackle abstraction to the production of scarcity and margin, not abundance and liberty. The formation of the hacker class as a class comes at just this moment when freedom from necessity and from class domination appears on the horizon as a possibility. Negri: "What is this world of political, ideological and productive crisis, this world of sublimation and uncontrollable circulation? What is it, then, if not an epoch-making leap beyond everything humanity has hitherto experienced?... It constitutes simultaneously the ruin and the new potential of all meaning."ⁱⁱ All that it takes is the hacking of the hacker class as a class, a class capable of hacking property itself, which is the fetter upon all productive means and on the productivity of meaning.
010. Out of the abstraction of nature comes its productivity, and the production of a surplus over and above the necessities of survival. Out of this expanding surplus over necessity comes an expanding capacity to hack, again and again, producing further abstractions, further productivity, further release from necessity -- at least in potential. But in actuality the hacking of nature, the production of surplus, does not make us free. Again and again, a ruling class arises that controls the surplus over bare necessity and enforces new necessities on those peoples who produce this very means of escaping necessity.
296. The abstraction of the objective and subjective worlds into information freely circulating via the vector opens up the virtuality of desire and its potential liberation from commodification. Information is 'non-rivalrous' -- it knows no natural scarcity. Unlike the objectified products of land and capital, one's

consumption of information need not deprive another of it. Surplus appears in its absolute form. The struggle becomes one between the hacking of the vector to open it toward the virtual and the commodification of information as scarcity and mere representation. The possibility of an overcoming of subjectivity rests on this infrastructural struggle. The means of production of desire -- the vectors along which can flow an immaterial surplus of information, is the first and last point at which the struggle to free subjectivity is to be waged. Any particular image of the subject in revolt can be turned into the image of an object to desire, but the vector itself is another matter. The liberation of the vector is the one absolute prohibition of the vectoral world, and the point at which to challenge it.

139. Information, when it is truly free, is free not for the purpose of representing the world perfectly, but for expressing its difference from what is, and for expressing the cooperative force that transforms what is into what may be. The sign of a free world is not the liberty to consume information, or to produce it, nor even to implement its potential in private worlds of one's choosing. The sign of a free world is the liberty for the collective transformation of the world through abstractions freely chosen and freely actualised.
127. Information is immaterial, but never exists without a material support. Information may be transferred from one material support to other, but cannot be dematerialised – other than in the more occult of vectoralist ideologies. Information emerges as a concept when it achieves an abstract relation to materiality. This abstracting of information from any particular material support creates the very possibility of a vectoral society, and produces the new terrain of class conflict – the conflict between the vectoralist and hacker classes.
128. Information expresses the potential of potential. When unfettered, it releases the latent capacities of all things and people, objects and subjects. Information is the plane upon which objects and subjects come into existence as such. It is the plane upon which the potential for the existence of new objects and subjects may be posited. It is where virtuality comes to the surface.
099. Production bursts free from the fetters of property, from its local and contingent representations of right and appropriation, and eventually gives rise to an abstract and universalizing form of property, private property. Private property encompasses land, capital, and eventually information, bringing each under its abstract form and making of each a commodity. It cuts land from the continuum of nature and makes of it a thing. It cuts the products made out of nature into objects to be bought and sold and makes of them things also. Finally, private property makes of information, that immaterial potential, a thing. And out of this triple objectification property produces, among other things, its objectified and lifeless brand of history.
029. Information, like land or capital, becomes a form of property monopolised by a class, a class of vectoralists, so named because they control the vectors along which information is abstracted, just as capitalists control the material means with which goods are produced, and pastoralists the land with which food is produced. This information, once the collective property of the productive classes -- the working and farming classes considered together -- becomes the property of yet another appropriating class.
320. The vectoral class may commodify information stocks or flows as well as communication vectors. A stock of information is an archive, a body of

information maintained through time that has enduring value. A flow of information is the capacity to extract information of temporary value out of events and to distribute it widely and quickly. A vector is the means of achieving either the temporal distribution of a stock, or the spatial distribution of a flow of information. Vectoral power as a class power arises from the ownership and control of all three aspects.

318. Once information has become the object of a regime of property, a vectoral class emerges who extract their margin from the ownership of information. This class competes among itself for the most lucrative ways to commodify information as a resource. With the commodification of information comes its vectoralisation. Extracting a surplus from information requires technologies capable of transporting information through space, but also through time. The storage of information may be as valuable as its transmission, and the archive is a vector through time just as communication is a vector that crosses space. The whole potential of space and time becomes the object of the vectoral class.
284. Capital merely claims the body of the worker for the duration of the working day. The vectoralist class found the means to assert a claim to every aspect of being, via its power to designate any part of that being as a resource. The struggle to limit the working day, while salutary as a means of freeing the body from commodity labour, no longer frees the worker from the commodity, but merely releases the subject as producer for the even more burdensome task of being the subject as consumer.
319. The vectoral class comes into its own once it is in possession of powerful technologies for vectoralising information. Information becomes something separate from the material conditions of its production and circulation. It is extracted from particular localities, cultures, forms, and distributed in ever widening circles, under the sign of property. The abstraction of information from the world becomes, in turn, the means of abstracting the world from itself.
329. The vectoral class ascend to the illusion of an instantaneous and global plane of calculation and control. But as the productive classes of the world come to know only too well, it is not the vectoralist class that really holds subjective power over the objective world. The vector itself usurps the commanding role, becoming the sole repository of will toward a world that can be apprehended only in its commodified form. This emerging global plane is at once totalising and emphatically partial. A totality emerges under the sign of a mere aspect.
373. The vector transforms local representations into footloose global competitors, sometimes even bringing them into violent confrontation as it breaches their seemingly natural relation to place. But the vector also opens a virtual domain for the production of qualitatively new kinds of difference. These differences too may be caught up in the war of representation, and the policing of information's domains of meaning and mattering. But the vector may also be the plane upon which a free expression of difference may affirm and renew itself. Heterogeneity flourishes alongside the imposition of uniform global commodity forms, as a new multiplicity hacked out of the vectoral.
321. The vector not only abstracts information from the particular conditions of its production, it abstracts every other relation with which it comes into contact. The expansion of the reach of markets, states, armies, cultures, from local to national to supranational forms, is conditioned by the development of the vectors along which

information travels to thread them together. The vector traverses any envelope, expanding it, exploding it, or provoking it to lick and seal itself tight.

383. The vectoral spread of commodified information produces both the commodification of things and the commodification of desire. This heightens awareness of a global exploitation that benefits the ruling classes of the overdeveloped world, but it does so by representing injustice only as material inequality. The producing classes of the overdeveloped and underdeveloped worlds come to measure themselves against representations of each other. One despises the other for what it has – and itself for what it lacks. One despises the other for what it wants – and itself what it has to lose.
341. Under the control of the vectoral class, the vector proceeds by means of objectification, and produces a corresponding subjectivity. Just as the object becomes an abstract value, so too does the subject. A vectoral subjectivity arises which is not the universal enlightened subject long dreamt of in the overdeveloped world. Vectoral subjectivity is abstract, but not universal. It acquires its specificity as the internalising of the differentiation of values that appear on the abstract plane of the vector. This subjectivity is as partial as vectoral objectivity -- the difference being that an object does not know it has been appropriated as a resource by the vector, while a subject does. The subject experiences its partiality as loss or lack, which it may seek to fulfil through the very same field of values -- the field of the vector -- as produces the lack in the first place. Or, it may hack the vector, opening it to the production of qualities excluded from the dominant form of communication under class rule.
278. The abstract subject develops incrementally, but develops apace with the objectification of the world. The history of the production of the world as a thing is at the same time the history of the production of the subject, which is to say, the production of the self as a thing that produces itself and its world as things.
277. The subject is nothing but the ghostly residue of separation, opening the possibility of appropriating from the self the objective existence it labours to create, and presenting the subject with the objective world as something that it lacks. The subject comes to feel its existence only through its lack of the object, a lack never quite satisfied by any particular object, made more and more aware of its own lack and its own abstraction.
285. In the age of telesthesia, the vector captures the body and mind and indeed soul of the dispossessed as never before. It comes closer to dispossession perfected than any other form of property. The subject at work becomes producer of commodities, and outside of work, is set to work again recognising the worth of what the commodity represents, as its consumer.
154. Once the vector reaches the point of the development of telesthesia -- the perception at a distance of the telegraph, telephone, television -- it effects a separation of the flow of communication from the flow of object and subjects, and thus produces the appearance of information as a world apart. Information -- in the commodified form of communication -- becomes the governing metaphor for the world precisely because it dominates it in actuality. Third nature emerges, as did second nature, out of the representation of nature as property. Seized as information, not merely as physical resource, the genetic makeup of the whole biosphere can become property, be it as public or private property. This may indeed be the last frontier in the struggle to appropriate the world as a resource.

This appropriation is no less false and partial than its predecessors. It is an illusory reality that conforms to the real illusion of property in our time.

042. One thing unites pastoralists, capitalists and vectoralists -- the sanctity of the property form on which class power depends. Each depends on forms of abstraction that they may buy and own but do not produce. Each comes to depend on the hacker class, which finds new ways of making nature productive, which discovers new patterns in the data thrown off by nature and second nature, which produce new abstractions through which nature may be made to yield more of a second nature -- perhaps even a 'third nature'.
332. The reign of the vector is one in which any and every thing can be apprehended as a commodity. Everything that appears is something distinct, something of value, and which may be transformed at will into any other thing, which may be brought together with any other thing of value in the creation of a new value. The reign of the vector is the reign of value.
073. The apologists for the vectoral interest want to limit the semantic productivity of the term 'hacker' to a mere criminality, precisely because they fear its more abstract and multiple potential -- its class potential. Everywhere one hears rumours of the hacker as the new form of juvenile delinquent, or nihilist vandal, or servant of organised crime. Or, the hacker is presented as a mere harmless subculture, an obsessive garage pursuit with its restrictive styles of appearance and codes of conduct. Everywhere the desire to open the virtuality of information, to share data as a gift, to appropriate the vector for expression becomes the object of a moral panic, an excuse for surveillance, and the restriction of technical knowledge to the 'proper authorities'. This is not the first time that the productive classes have faced this ideological blackmail. The hacker now appears in the official organs of the ruling order alongside its earlier archetypes, the organised worker, the revolting peasant . The hacker is in excellent company.
211. The critique of representation always maintains an artificial scarcity of 'true' interpretation. Or, what is no better, it maintains an artificial scarcity of 'true' interpreters, owners of the method, who are licensed by the zero sum game of critique and counter critique to peddle, if not true representations, then at least the true method for deconstructing false ones. "Theorists begin as authors and end up as authorities."ⁱⁱⁱ This fits perfectly with the domination of education by the vectoral class, which seeks scarcity and prestige from this branch of cultural production, a premium product for the most sensitive subjects. Critical theory becomes hypocritical theory.
195. Hackers must calculate their interests not as owners, but as producers, for this is what distinguishes them from the vectoralist class. Hackers do not merely own, and profit by owning information. They produce new information, and as producers need access to it free from the absolute domination of the commodity form. If what defines the activity of hacking is that it is a free productivity, an expression of the virtuality of nature, then its subjection to private property and the commodity form is a fetter upon it. "When the meaning of a string of characters can be bought and locked into place this is the thermodynamics of language reduced to a single cryogenic chamber."
- 160b. The representation and repetition of the singular hack as a typical form of production takes place via its appropriation by and as property. The recuperation of the hack for production takes the form of its representation to and within the social as

property. But the hack, in and of itself, is always distinct from its appropriation for commodity production. Production takes place on the basis of a prior hack that gives to production its formal, social, repeatable and reproducible form.

158. Hacking is the production of production. The hack produces a production of a new kind, which has as its result a singular and unique product, and a singular and unique producer. Every hacker is at one and the same time producer and product of the hack, and emerges as a singularity that is the memory of the hack as process.
159. The hack as pure hack, as pure production of production, expresses as a singular instance the multiplicity of the nature out of which and within which it moves as an event. Out of the singular event of the hack comes the possibility of its representation, and out of its representation comes the possibility of its repetition as production and its production as repetition.
297. The coming into being of vectors along which information flows freely, if not universally, around the world appears to usher in a new regime of scarcity even more total than that of the reign of capital before it. Everywhere are signs presented as the commodified answer to desire; everywhere there are subjects impugned into thinking of themselves as negated by the signs they do not possess. Sometimes this provokes a reactive hardening of the subject. This produces a bunkering within the envelope of some tradition or other that appears to predate the vectoral world, even if, paradoxically enough, the vectoral is now the only means by which the traditional reproduces itself, as a representation of tradition. Sometimes this hardening and bunkering in tradition produces a violence that strikes out, if none too clearly, at what it takes to be the images of a vectoral power this false tradition would resist. The vector produces its own vectoral reaction, with the paradoxical effect of accelerating the vectoral itself. We no longer have roots we have aeriels. We no longer have origins we have terminals.
344. The great challenge to the hacker class is not just to create the abstractions by which the vector may develop, but the forms of collective expression that may overcome the limits not just of commodification, but of objectification in general, of which commodification is just the most pernicious and one-sided development. But the hacker class cannot change the world on its own. It can offer itself out for hire to the vectoralist class for the maintenance of the reign of the commodity; or it can express itself as a gift to the producing classes, pushing abstraction beyond the bounds of the commodity form. The hacker class virtualises, the producing classes actualise.
387. Commodity production is in transition from the domination of capital as property to the domination of information as property. The theory of the transition to a world beyond commodity production has yet to make this same transition. This body of theory has been through two phases, which correspond to two kinds of error. In the first phase, when theory was in the hands of the worker's movement, it fetishized the infrastructure, or economy of the social formation. In the second phase, when theory was in the hands of the academic radicals, it fetishized the superstructures of culture and ideology. Theory of the first kind reduces the superstructure to being a reflection of the economy; theory of the second kind awards the superstructure a relative autonomy. Neither grasps the fundamental changes in commodity production that render obsolete this understanding of the social formation or the new kinds of class struggle now emerging under the sign of the domination of information as property. Property is a concept that occupies a liminal, undecidable place between economy and culture. Our task today is to

grasp the historical development of commodity production from the point of view of property, fulcrum on which not only infrastructure and superstructure hinge, but also the class struggle.

072. Since it's very emergence in computing circles, the hacker 'ethic' has come up against the forces of commodified education and communication. As Himanen writes, hackers, who "want to realise their passions", present "a general social challenge", but the realisation of the value of this challenge "will take time, like all great cultural changes."^{iv} And more than time, for it is more than a cultural change. It will take struggle, for what the hacker calls into being in the world is a new world and a new being. Freeing the concept of the hacker from its particulars, understanding it abstractly, is the first step in this struggle.
255. Politics can become expressive only when it is a politics of freeing the virtuality of information. In liberating information from its objectification as a commodity, it liberates also the subjective force of expression. Subject and object meet each other outside of their mere lack of each other, by their desire merely for each other, by desire as managed by the state in the interests of maintaining the commodity form of scarcity.
126. Information wants to be free but is everywhere in chains.

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- ⁱ Levy, Steven. *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1994, p23. This is the classic journalistic account of the hacker as computer engineer, and the struggles of hackers to maintain the virtual space for the hack against the forces of commodified technology and education -- and the looming behemoth of the military entertainment complex. A study of these exemplary stories quickly gives the lie to the canard that only by making information property can 'incentives' be introduced that will advance the development of new concepts and new technologies. The hackers at work in Levy's book produce extraordinary work out of desires shaped almost exclusively by the gift economy. The autonomous, self-generating circuits of prestige of the gift economy produce self-generating circuits of extraordinary innovation.
- ⁱⁱ Negri, Antonio. *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Polity, 1989, p203. Negri's is a living Marxism, but one that seeks to graft the new onto the old corpus at the wrong junctures. It is less useful to repurpose Marx's writings on immaterial labour and real subsumption than to revisit the central question of property, and reimagine the class relation in terms of the historical development of the property form. Negri, who had so much to say about the recomposition of the working class in the overdeveloped world, and how the energies of the productive classes drive the commodity economy from below, does not quite find a new language adequate to the historical moment, when labour is pushed to the periphery and an entirely new class formation arises in the overdeveloped world.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Home, Stewart. *Neoism, Plagiarism and Praxis*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995, p21. Laced with a fierce but joyful humour, Home's provocations form a bridge between the attempts, running from Dada and the Surrealists to Fluxus and the Situationist International, to free creation from subjective authorship and objective property, and the more contemporary concern of aesthetics to disavow originality and the formal and detached status of the artwork that stem, perhaps, from Conceptual Art.
- ^{iv} Himanen, Pekka. *The Hacker Ethic and the Sprit of the Information Age*. New York: Random House, 2001, p7, p18, p13. If *A Hacker Ethic* seeks to resurrect the spirit of Max Weber, then *A Hacker Manifesto* offers a crypto-Marxist response. Himanen's excellent work has much to say on hacker time and its antithesis to commodified time, and yet Himanen still seeks to reconcile the hacker with the vectoral class. He wilfully confuses the hacker with the 'entrepreneur'. The hacker produces the new; the entrepreneur merely discovers its price. In the vectoral economy, where much of what is on offer has no use value whatsoever, and exchange value is a mere speculative possibility, the entrepreneur is a heroic figure when and if he or she can invent new necessities ex nihil. Here the 'invisible hand' is a poker player's bluff. The entrepreneur merely reiterates unnecessary necessity; the hacker expresses the virtual. The confusion of one with the other is an ideological slight of hand meant to lend some glamour to the dismal necromancy of vectoral power.

¹ Ces notes de l'édition originale, traduites dans l'édition française Criticalsecret, n'ont pas été reprises dans le « mix » proposé par la revue *Rue Descartes*.