

“Hacking and Making: Meanings, Practices, Spaces”

Call for Papers for the fourth Issue of *Digital Culture & Society*

<http://digicults.org/callforpapers/hacking-and-making>

Abstract deadline: 16th May 2016

In 2014, hackerspaces in the Netherlands issued an open letter to the Dutch *Public Prosecution Service (PPS)*: In this document, members of hacker communities from Amsterdam, Heerlen, Utrecht and other cities called upon the governmental institution to revise the definition of ‘hacking’ as it was presented on its website.¹ While the *PPS* defined hacking as “breaking into computers without permission”, the hackerspace members highlighted that hacking means to creatively engage with technologies and to explore them in ways which were not foreseen by their original producers. Opposing the reduction of hacking to illegal activities, they described hacking as exploration of technological boundaries and possibilities.

Even though this particular plea was initiated in the Netherlands, the letter indicates wider, ongoing negotiations regarding the meaning(s) and origins of hacking.² In popular culture and more general public discourses, hacking is still closely associated with illegal activities related to breaking into computer systems. Attempts to dissociate such illegal practices from the term ‘hacking’ by introducing concepts such as ‘cracker/cracking’ or ‘black-hat’ were largely unsuccessful. Within hacktivism, various disruptive digital practices are utilised for activist purposes and interventions – some of them being highly contested among involved actors. Scholars such as Gabriella Coleman have empirically explored and shown how practices of hacking have been relevant to activist movements such as *anonymous*.³ Being rooted in the assumption that individuals need to be able to open up/deconstruct technology in order to improve and apply their knowledge, hacking has been and still is closely related to developers’ involvement in free/libre and open source projects. On the other hand, public institutions and corporations have long discovered the potential of hacking as highly creative, collaborative, and hence profitable practice. Hackathons are widely utilised as innovation grounds, and ‘ethical

1 Walboer, J. et al. (2014). Open Letter to the Dutch Public Prosecution Service. Retrieved from: <http://computervrede.nl/2014-08-26-OpenbaarMinisterie>.

2 See e.g. Jordan, T. (2016/forthcoming). *A genealogy of hacking. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*.

3 See Coleman, G. (2014). *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. UK and Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

hacking' is being explored by educational institutions. As form of IT competence, hacking-expertise is in high economic demand. Moreover, we can increasingly observe the use of 'hacking' in a more figurative, metaphorical sense: You can hack your food, your furniture, your wearables, spaces (such as museums), biology, and even your life – at least according to topical websites and social media. This is of course not an entirely new discourse. With regards to Stewart Brand's "Spacewar" article, published in the *Rolling Stone* in December 1972,⁴ Evgeny Morozov described the term's implications: "To convince consumers that they were rebels, [Stewart] Brand first convinced them that they were 'hackers,' [...]"⁵ Therefore, in the fourth issue of *Digital Culture & Society*, we invite contributors to critically reflect on and discuss the multiple, at times opposing, meanings of hacking, related practices, spaces, and communities.

While the term *hacking* has been around since the 1960s, during the last 15 years we have witnessed the rise of the *maker* movement and a technologically inspired revival of DIY-culture (do-it-yourself). Maker culture has been described as idealistically motivated, global community dedicated to creating (technological) objects/'things'. These practices are supposedly based on virtues such as sharing, learning, and self-expression.⁶ However, just like the term hacking, the meanings of 'making' and being a 'maker' – particularly in relation to hacking – are contested. Gui Cavalcanti illustrated the different associations with practices of making and hacking: "No amount of cajoling on my part will get a professional artist or craftsman unfamiliar with the terms to call themselves a 'hacker', or their vocation 'hacking'; in fact, if I were to say 'I like how you hacked that lumber together into that table' to a professional woodworker at *Artisan's Asylum*, [a non-profit community fabrication centre] I would run the significant risk of insulting them".⁷ While this quote hints at crucial differences with regards to the *associations* related to hacking and making, it remains to be explored how the actual *practices* of hacking and making may differ from (or resemble) each other.

For the fourth issue "Hacking and Making", the *Digital Culture & Society* journal calls for further empirical work as well as methodological and theoretical reflections on the meanings, communities, spaces, and practices of hacking and making. Approaches may be rooted in (digital) media and cultural studies, social sciences, science and technology studies, or other

4 See Brand, S. (1972, December). Spacewars. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from: http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html.

5 See Morozov, E. (2014, January). Making It. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/13/making-it-2>.

6 Hatch, M. (2013). *The maker movement manifesto: rules for innovation in the new world of crafters, hackers, and tinkerers*. New York: McGraw Hill.

7 See Cavalcanti, G. (2013, May). Is it a Hackerspace, Makerspace, TechShop, or FabLab? *Make. We are all makers*. Retrieved from: <http://makezine.com/2013/05/22/the-difference-between-hackerspaces-makerspaces-techshops-and-fablabs>.

interdisciplinary fields. We particularly welcome empirical approaches which give voice to and/or involve relevant (civic) actors in this research field.

For the fourth issue of *Digital Culture & Society*, we invite submissions which may react to and expand on to the following topics:

- meanings of hacking and/or making
- historical/genealogical perspectives on hacking and/or making
- spaces of hacking and making, e.g. hack(er)spaces, makerspaces, fablabs, or shared machine shops
- differences and similarities between hacking and making
- hacking, making and free/libre and open source software
- hacking-hype: urban hacking, space hacking, lifehacks etc.
- commercialisation of hacking and making
- hacktivism, civic organizations and grassroot movements
- hacking and technological solutionism

When sending their initial abstract, authors should state to which of the following categories they would like to submit their paper:

1. Field Research and Case Studies
2. Methodological Reflections
3. Conceptual/Theoretical and Historical reflections
4. Entering the Field (see <http://digicults.org> for more information on this category)

Deadlines and Contact Information

Initial abstracts (max. 300 words) and a short biographical note (max. 100 words) are due on: 16th May 2016.

Authors will be notified by 6th June 2016, whether they are invited to submit a full paper.

Full papers are due on: 15th September 2016.

Initial abstracts and full papers should be sent to the issue's editors:

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