The Future Of Hacking

We have heard interesting talks and performances about the history of hacking earlier today, so in this talk I will focus on the future of hacking. But because no one can predict the future in detail, let me talk about a "possible" future of hacking,.

For those who don't know me: I joined the Chaos Computer Club in 1986 at age 24 – because I was fascinated by this group of open- and like-minded people. I decided to work with them.

Until the time of the KGB hack in 1989 (we have already heard about that earlier today) I spent most of my time with hacking and lectures of different sorts for the CCC.

I took some <u>sabbaticals</u> from the Chaos during the 90's until Wau Holland – co-founder of the CCC – suddenly died. Five close friends decided to create a foundation in his name. The Wau Holland Foundation supports all projects dedicated to freedom of information, freedom of communication and privacy. I serve as a founding member of the board since 2003.

I lived 15 years in Switzerland before I moved to Berlin last year. So I helped to found the "Chaos Computer Club Switzerland" in 2012.

One last word: All I say here is my private opinion. Some other hackers (some of them are even here in the audience) seem to share it with me, but my opinion may still be very different from the opinion of any other hackers.

Of course talking about the future of hacking makes little sense without talking about the history and the current state of affairs a little bit. So let me start with some musings about the past and the present.

The history of hacking

History – we have learned in school – is written by the winner, so it is no wonder that our history books are full of thruthless stories of fame and glory that never happened.

Listening to presentations about "hacking in the past" I sometimes start to believe – in particular if the talk is given by someone from the hacker community itself – that for some strange and unknown reasons hackers have suddenly become winners (of some sort).

Now – at last – we are allowed to carve our own narratives about the past into stone – as a matter of historical »truth«.

A common aphorism among hackers is this: "Every story has four sides: your side, the other side, the truth and what really happened."

So let us stop talking about the "truth" behind the famous hacks – forget about them.

Instead let us talk about what really happened. Certainly there are historical facts known about the CCC hacks of the last three decades – a short list looks like this:

- hackers from CCC exploited the German BTX system to transfer some $100'000 from a German savings bank to their own account in 1984

- hackers from the CCC (and others) hacked into western computer systems and transferred information to the Russian KGB between 1986 and 1988

- hackers from CCC cloned a cellphone SIM card in 1997 that could be used to make calls and send or receive messages on behalf of the legitimate owner

But all of these events come with a legend about why things were done and how they happened.

And more often than not these legends are a pure transfiguration of the facts.

It is an excusable human trait to find good reasons for your own behavior in retrospect – especially if you find yourself suddenly under criminal investigation.

One good example of such romantization of the past we have heard of earlier today: Hacking for the KGB as a kind of peace mission to prevent World War III. And in real it was all about money and drugs, all about naïvety and ruthlessness...

But nonetheless I think we hackers did things right in the past; especially when it comes to our fight for civil rights and liberties in our society.

Our aim was never the „information society"; we always struggled for an „informed society" where freedom of information, freedom of communication, informational self-determination, privacy and anonymity are granted to everyone – everywhere.

And we had a hacker ethics.

I strongly believe that our former value system of how and why to do things is our most valuable legacy. We should carry that on into the future, not all these fancy hacks from our past.

The present of hacking

So what about the present then? What I can see is that more and more hackers have become pawns in a game and the latest playground for intellectuals, artists and wanne-be friends.

Nerds – often enough with severe autistic traits – are simply to naïve to take the attention of such people as what it often really is: an exploitation of their kind.

The fascination of certain circles of the establishment with hackers often reminds me of the treatment of oversea-natives as „Noble Savages" by European intellectuals in the 19th century.

I am not sure if that alone can explain why I consider the current situation of hacking to be severely threatened at its core – or is because more and more so-called hackers can compromise themselves easily enough without external pressure and temptations.

I am talking about a deteriorating value system:

- Fragmentation and Hierarchy

  - Hackers are neglecting solidarity with their own kind
    (PP14, Hammond, Assange, Brown, Warg and so many others)
  - Meritocracy on disputable grounds

- Commercialization

  - Believe it or not: there are so-called "hackers" with software patents
  - Just release as Open Source instead of Free Software
  - It is fine to use Apple hardware and Faceboogle services
  - It is fine to work for such companies

- Embracing the mainstream

  - Having fun with technology, but avoiding political positions (I am talking about most hackerspaces here)
  - Being friends with the rich and mighty
  - Preparing for a „march through the establishment"

Yes, we once had a „Hacker Ethics" as a moral guideline; but its spirit beyond the written words had become an empty shell over the years.

The Hacker Ethics certainly needs an overhaul, as it is only partially adopted to the current entanglement of technology, hackers and society at large. A discussion about a „Hacker Ethics 2.0" could be the starting point for our trip into the future...

The future of hacking

So what <u>will</u> the future of hacking look like? The answer to this question is simple and obvious: the future of hacking will be as <u>we want</u> it to be.

The more important questions that need to be answered are "What do we want?" and "How do we achieve it?"

I can't answer the question "What do we want?" on behalf of anyone. But I can contribute a small suggestion for an answer to the question "How do we achieve it?".

Just a slight shift in paradigm...

Maybe we can start with just a slight shift of paradigm:

Let us begin to appraise hacks no longer by their technical brilliance alone, but also by their usefulness to make the world a better place.

And "us" means everybody – not just hackers. Especially non-hackers – often confused by the technical details of a hack – need to get more involved in this discussions.

I would love to see people everywhere talking about the "usefulness" of a hack as much as they do about its technical details. These new discussions will certainly help us to shape answers for the question "What do we want?"

I am aware that such an innocent suggestion would trigger some commotion within the hacker community. Behind the scenes this means a hard reset and a new ranking algorithm for the hacker charts.

Old meritocratic hierarchies might break down, as the former merits of the elite are now seen in a different light.

Transition is unavoidable.

If adopted this would also change the sort of hacks we see in the future. Hacks usually don't happen out of the blue, but require a huge investment of free time and energy. A lot of them are painstakingly orchestrated and arranged.

A modified value system can shift the attention from one sort of hack to another if the latter one is more promising in terms of reward (merit) for such an investment. Useful hacks will win.

This new way of thinking about hacking can even change our perception of the history of hacking:

Maybe we start to remember other events of the past now considered more important than the former hacks:

- The CCC was founded 1981 in the editorial office of a leftist (at least at that time) newspaper "die tageszeitung" (TAZ) at the table of the former »Commune 1«

- Hackers from the CCC (and others) did technical and non-technical consulting for the Green Party in Germany about PARLACOM

- German Hackers operated the »ZAMIR« (meaning: *for peace*) mailbox network in Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Pakrac, Belgrad, Tuzla und Priština during the war in Yugoslavia starting in 1991

As you can see these points are not just about isolated hack events. Hackers are constantly involved in many different kinds of projects all the time like writing free software, teaching people about technological tools for privacy and anonymity, managing infrastructure for an NGO, providing resources for political activists or others who need our help.

In the light of the new paradigm such endeavors are probably higher ranked than many of hacks we have heard of today. So why not follow that new road?

Caring and acting in the real world

Of course the realm of hacking is not isolated from what happens around it. Our actions are at least partly directed by the current situation of society at large.

Karl Marx once said that "Religion is opium for the people". He was wrong – or at least he is wrong in our socio-economic reality. It would be more right to say: "Internet is opium for the people".

Don't get me wrong: I love the Internet. I am convinced that it can play an important role in the transformation of societies – it has already happened in a few places. It will happen again – and it can be our tools and infrastructure that is useful in these sort of events.

But the Internet has one downside: people often use it as an escape route from reality – much cheaper than the usual drugs too, not to mention its legality (well, in most cases).

Living in a parallel, virtual reality within the Internet seems to lift the burden of acting and caring in the real world – at nearly no costs. Everything is fine as long as the stream of distractions is constantly flowing...

So, who cares about the total surveillance that <u>comes with it over the same cables</u>?

<u>We</u> do!

Sometimes it is hard to say what you want. Sometime it is easier to say what you <u>don't</u> want and to apply the logical complement operator to the answer.

First: We don't want total surveillance on us by anyone. But we have to understand that no law or regulation of any kind will ever stop secret agencies or anyone else from doing so. We have to find other – technical – means to achieve our goal. Organizing cryptoparties is a good start, but we can't stop there. We have to think bigger.

Second: We don't want the old Internet back with all its messed-up protocols – we want something new on top of it.

Something that has a build-in resistance against censorship and surveillance. Something that honors your privacy and anonymity while allowing you access to all information and knowledge you want. Something that makes the <u>Internet</u> a better place for everyone.

To achieve that we could make good use of three small guidelines:

- Act! Nothing is more important than to get things done. Expecting fairies to write your code or to do your other work is childish.
- Only ask yourself if your actions areLegitimate instead Legal!
- Consider all things political!

We hackers are not alone in this world. We have to find our real friends – people who share a common value system about freedom of information, freedom of communication, informational self-determination, privacy, anonymity and civil rights for all mankind – and not only in the digital realm. Together we can achieve so much more than alone.

This is about our future. Let us start start hacking it...