

Crackers

The Cyberpunk Project

A cracker is the one who does cracking. Cracking is the act of breaking into a computer system, often on a network. A cracker can be doing this for profit, maliciously, for some altruistic purpose or cause, or because the challenge is there. Some breaking-and-entering has been done ostensibly to point out weaknesses in a site's security system.

Contrary to widespread myth, cracking does not usually involve some mysterious leap of hackerly brilliance, but rather persistence and the dogged repetition of a handful of fairly well-known tricks that exploit common weaknesses in the security of target systems. Accordingly, most crackers are only mediocre hackers. These two terms should not be confused with each others. Hackers generally deplore cracking.

This is from R.U. Sirius, Mondo 2000: Users's Guide to the New Edge.

Once there were computer hackers. These early pioneers of computing were fanatically dedicated to inventing and exploring how things worked. As part of the sixties generation, they were also prone toward being anti-establishment and somewhat disrespectful toward property rights. The early hackers were fond of breaking bureaucratic laws and regulations, particularly if they got in the way of learning something or doing something useful. Eventually a pair of these early hackers, Steve Wozniak and Steven Jobs, hacked together the first commercially succesful personal computer, the Apple, and the computer industry was off to the races. The sixties generation hackers flooded into the new industry and many quickly attained positions of wealth and authority. Most of them maintained a semblance of their early antibureaucratic attitudes but generally settled down to the task of creating the information/communications ecology that dominates Western life.

Meanwhile two things happened :

1. A new generation of hackers emerged who were not yet part of the establishment. Like their predecessors, they were inventive, curious, and too smart to buy into dumb laws and bureaucratic regulations. As the earlier hackers were influenced by the idealism of the hippie and new-left movements, the new generation hackers were influenced by the nihilism and alienation of the punk movement.
2. The world economic and social order went completely digital. And so CRIME went digital too.

It is somewhere at the interstices of the new generation of alienated young hackers (they sometimes refer to themselves as "cyberpunks") and the world of sometimes-organized crime that we locate the concept of the cracker. The term is, to some degree, an attempt by the now-established older-generation hackers to separate themselves from computer crime. The debate still rages as to what constitutes the difference between hacking and cracking. Some say that cracking represents any and all forms of rule-breaking and illegal activity using a computer. Others would define cracking only as particularly DESTRUCTIVE criminal acts. Still others would claim that the early hackers were EXPLICITLY anarchistic and that acts of willful destruction against "the system" have a place in the hacker ethos, and that therefore the term cracker is unnecessary and insulting.

Following four entries are from Michael Synergy, a MONDO 2000 associate editor, and a legendary ex(?)-cracker.

On Theft of Information

Information can't be stolen. Unless they've come up with something new, phenomenologically speaking. If I tell someone a fact, I still know the fact. Property laws were set up to handle tangible objects. We're dealing with raw data, information, the stuff of dreams. The whole system to handle "ownership" is obsolete. In a world where you can copy information, leaving the original intact, and wind up with the perfect copy, the debate of ownership is over.

On Browsing

I'm an information addict. When I crack into computers, I browse and read people's mail, papers, notes, programs, etc. I'm an inquiring mind and I want to know. This is a *real* issue. I want to learn and *they* want to impose "need to know" on everything.

On the Debate over the Terms "Hacker" or "Cracker"

The only difference is that one is employed. Or runs the company.

On Money & Computer Crime

You know who was the most important president ? Richard Nixon. You know why ? Because he took us off the gold standard. Once upon a time, money in the bank had to be related to a real-world object. But suddenly the governor was removed. Money was just a bunch of bits and bytes in computers. Money became the first exploration into cyberspace. This is why the economy is messed up. This is why banks messed up. This is why computer crime is growing exponentially. This is why the damage that can be caused electronically is so great. We stopped using reality as the "acid test" for what was represented in our machines.

This comment is from a hacker/cracker who calls himself Emmanuel Goldstein. He edits [2600](#), the premier North American hacker journal.

No Fingerprints

The more digital the society gets, the more we'll be able to completely change money. We'll be able to change a date on a document. We'll be able to add a figure to a bank balance. We'll be able to change a "no" to a "yes". How do you trace things like that ? If you're a good programmer, there are no fingerprints.