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William Gillis
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The Hackers On Planet Earth (HOPE) conference has long been one of the more explicitly leftist and politically conscious hacker conferences. Unlike hacker conferences like Defcon and BlackHat, where the atmosphere has been relatively permissive of sexual harassment, state collaborators, and reactionary politics, HOPE has a reputation for being better. A little outpost of European hacker radicalism in America, HOPE has slowly improved; this year anarchists and anarchist propaganda were everywhere, talks featured reports from antifascists on their efforts to dox nazis, and heroes like Chelsea Manning were headline speakers.

And yet at this year's HOPE some shitbag got up during a Q&A and bragged about having marched in UniteTheRight in Charlottesville, the nazi rally that murdered Heather Heyer. This fascist was joined by a small crew of reactionary provocateurs including Thomas Ryan, an FBI snitch in Occupy Wall Street. Naturally conference attendees rapidly mobilized themselves to respond in a variety of ways to this explicit reactionary presence. Yet the real clusterfuck ensued when many conference organizers and security staff refused to even remove the bragging fascist and threatened conference goers if they took action themselves.

Individual staff members sneered about "SJWs," declared that wearing a nazi flag wouldn't be grounds for expulsion, and claimed that no action taken outside the conference (like marching in a famous neonazi rally) would be relevant to expulsion from the conference. This absurd and infuriating stance of "ideological neutrality," which has since set off numerous articles and the possibility of HOPE itself dissolving, must be read in context.

This was the first year HOPE banned the famous hacker John "Captain Crunch" Draper after his proclivity for sexual harassment and assault had been an open secret for decades. Indeed the first outburst of the Charlottesville fascist was to protest Draper's exclusion. Despite this very small step, HOPE still gave a prominent speaking slot to known rapist Will Scott. It should go without saying that these things are deeply interconnected.

The argument against kicking out a fascist that goes, "yeah but did he march with nazis *at this conference*?" is obviously an argument that can be applied to dismissing rapists with, "yeah but did he rape anyone *at this conference*?" But moreover the place HOPE organizers were coming from is clearly one of conflict avoidance. It's very clear that their instinct and priority was "preventing drama" in the sense of visible conflict, and not combatting oppressive power dynamics. They were, in short, welded to a naive and childish notion of apoliticism and "neutrality" that is of course anything but.

Those who set up spaces help determine the culture and norms of those spaces. And, despite the longstanding presence of anarchists, there is also unfortunately a longstanding fraction of the hacker milieu that values an acerbic and calloused environment where the unifying identity is one of nerd toughness and competitive edginess, with serious issues of ethics and politics being sidelined as minor distractions or personal affectations. "*Who cares if he's a nazi???!*" They would rather cling to policing a tiny set of "behavior" or "actions" in a myopic and context-less vacuum. The effect of such shortsighted policies has long been plain and has

been demonstrated empirically in countless other subcultures: if you ever let literal nazis into a space you encourage them to bring all their friends, to aggressively hollow out your project, and turn it into a nazi project.

What's more the first people you lose as a result of your "tolerance" for genocidal authoritarian street thugs are the people most at risk from them. While some have doubled down on staying and fighting — and some have preternatural capacities to persevere in hostile environments — the simple reality is many women, queer folk, and people of color, are never coming back to HOPE. A number of great hackers and pillars of the community already refused to attend this year because of HOPE's refusal to kick out rapists.

Before last weekend's conference and after much dragging of feet, HOPE finally adopted a "Code of Conduct." But it was clearly weaksauce and the result of contentious negotiations with those who prioritize "ideological openness" over actual fucking openness to marginalized people. Prioritizing the inclusion of those who choose to identify as nazis over those who have no choice in things like their skin color and the disadvantage such brings in our society. But never mind that the Code of Conduct preemptively carved out a justification for the inclusion of nazis — as a code its exploits were obvious and manifold. I personally heard core organizers sneer things like, "*Oh so this person got physically up in your face and loomed over you menacingly after you said something snarky about their reactionary politics? Bad on you for snarking at them, you started it.*" Meanwhile someone openly broadcasting their identity as a fascist and bragging about having marched in Charlottesville was not seen as displaying threatening behavior. It's alright for reactionaries to corner speakers, but those opposed to the explicit fascist were told that if we did the same or attempted to expel him we'd be expelled.

Devoid of any bare semblance of explicit political orientation, a "Code of Conduct" will always be interpreted by those individuals who set themselves up as a spaces' police. And a few of those

individuals doing security at HOPE were besties with the fascist, the snitch, and their reactionary buddies, hugging and meeting up with them at Hooters afterwards.

But I don't want to whine about how the Code of Conduct was "unfairly" enforced. It's quite clear that the words in it were always interpreted by different people in vastly different ways. And I care not one whit whether the explicit fascist and his buds were technically "harassing" — that is ultimately such an irrelevant and meaningless standard. Explicit fascists should not be welcome at any conference worth a damn and neither should snitches. Full stop.

This should be fucking obvious.

It takes an extremely impoverished view of free speech or freedom of information to defend the inclusion of neonazis in our communities. Freedom of information must be evaluated on the scale of a whole network. The inclusion of deeply malicious nodes out to impose fascism on everyone poisons the network, impedes the flow of information within it. Time during HOPE that would have otherwise been spent on productive conversations on hypervisors was wasted organizing impromptu security for Chelsea Manning and having the most basic 101 of conversations over and over again, arguing that yes nazis exist today, yes they constitute an active threat, yes we must stand against them, and yes the bare fucking minimum is kicking them out of our spaces.

Unfortunately it seems that for many — pickled in a proud ignorance of politics beyond their nose — "free speech" doesn't mean a world of maximally efficient information transfer and processing, but a bro-y culture where communication is stripped of nuance and attentiveness in favor of inane performative edginess and competitive callousness. This is disappointing to say the least. Because the hacker dream of freedom of information unleashing historically repressed voices online to help tear down all antiquated boundaries like borders and create a new world with new cultural norms? We got it. We actually kinda won that. It's called "social justice." There are still some unfortunate bugs and failure modes to be worked

out, but on the whole it's been a stunning success. The internet has opened up the world to countless people marginalized by systems of oppression. It's beyond infuriating that those upset with this, who want to roll back the clock and give speech welfare to the shittiest ideas imaginable like fascism have the gall to pretend they stand for "free speech."

While I understand the attachment many people have to Codes of Conduct at conferences given how hard they had to fight for them, I think a focus on appealing to a CoC is deeply flawed. Not least because codified rules of behavior will always struggle to integrate context. I don't give a shit whether a rapist happened to rape someone *at* the conference or whether a neonazi shouted "jews will not replace us" *at* said conference. Rapists & neonazis should obviously be banned entirely. We shouldn't have to legalistically argue about CoC violations.

A Code of Conduct isn't a panacea. Not everything egregious will fall cleanly under it. No code of clearly measurable behavior, whether a CoC or the NAP or some Constitution will ever provide us with everything we need. The real world is complicated and so are the threats we face. Anarchists and others have long used Points of Unity in addition to clarify our values and motivations so that we can at least argue individual situations from the same starting ethos. HOPE and the broader hacker community need to accept that there is no such thing as neutrality, that values are inescapable, and that having any values means some manner of political exclusion.

To defend an open world of freedom of information necessarily involves cutting out and routing around bad nodes in the network. If we let rapists or proud fascists and snitches invade our spaces we push out most everyone else. If we fail to resist fascists we are functionally complicit in their campaigns and aspirations.