KNOW YOUR COMPUTER NUT

IT HAS LONG been a fascination of mine identifying computer owners by the environment they program (or 'hack') in and by the personality traits they exhibit in said environment.

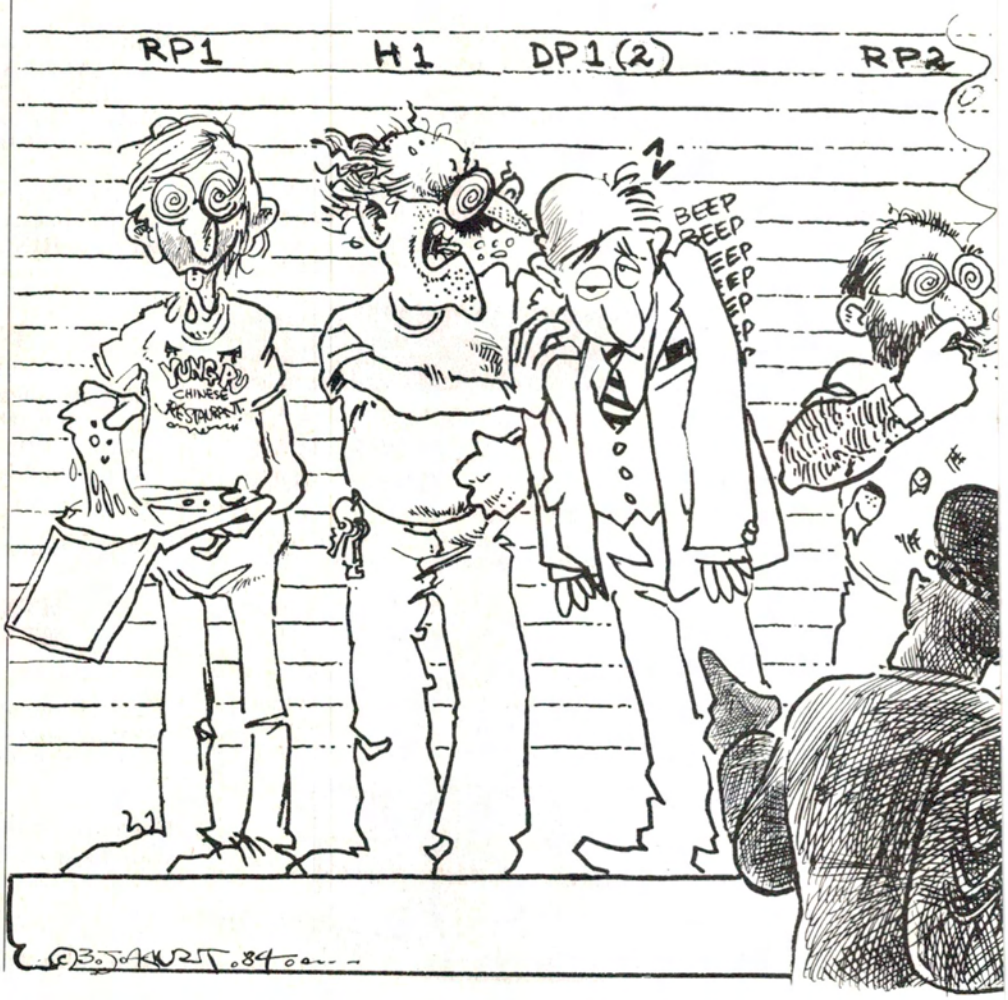
On a recent visit to a nearby system, the decaying stench of week-old pizzas and salami-soaked carpet revealed to me a true purveyor of the age-old belief that *computing precedes all evils*. Interesting to note was the chaste state of the hardware — sparkling clean with listings well filed and disks locked with labels (gasp!) updated. Exhibiting startling contrasts of personality, we shall label this individual "Real Programmer, Class 1", or simply, RP1 (to employ the acronym form, of which computer people are so fond).

Near RP1 I found a hacker of a different nature. Given to arguing a lot, this type, in order to save money, has his system talking via jam tins and wet string over the back fence at 50 baud to a like soul. This individual is totally different and can only be labelled a 'Hacker, Class 1'. A classic case, where hardware is unimportant so long as it works and the disks can't be seen through. He has an introverted nature and won't even speak to the dog lest it asked him a question. But at the keyboard — a *whiz!* His environment is unique. To minimize labour, every peripheral is stacked on top of the other in a room that makes the average broom closet look *huge*. It is specifically designed to house a system and a person. No more. It has about ten locks on the paper-thin door as a safeguard against piracy. The floor is a myriad of old listings, supposedly in a logical order on the Coke-stained carpet, now impossible to see under the pile of footworn paper. The H1 writes machine code at a huge rate, completing a program in two hours flat (regardless of its complexity) and prefers to debug it months later. The software he has sold is never pirated and pays for a box of disks a year. He never smokes or drinks and drives other hackers to suicide with his never-ending borrowing of their magazines.

H1 and RP1 types have only one thing in common: *they wear T-shirts!*

Well-dressed hackers are different. Their system room has a floor unstained but littered with shirts, pants, ties, socks and shoes, invariably strewn over a floor heating vent. The room is normally huge and the air cold. Such individuals crave money and talk of very little else. They can be observed sleeping in computer club meetings pretending to be waiting for someone to employ them on a consulting basis. They normally have pagers which they beep to check if they still work. We shall call this Herbert:'Dressing Programmer, Class 1'.

The DP1 is often confused with the DP2, a man of achieved ambition who also sleeps in strange places. DP2 actually knows things and people. He has a pager which is turned off when he dozes through a monologue.

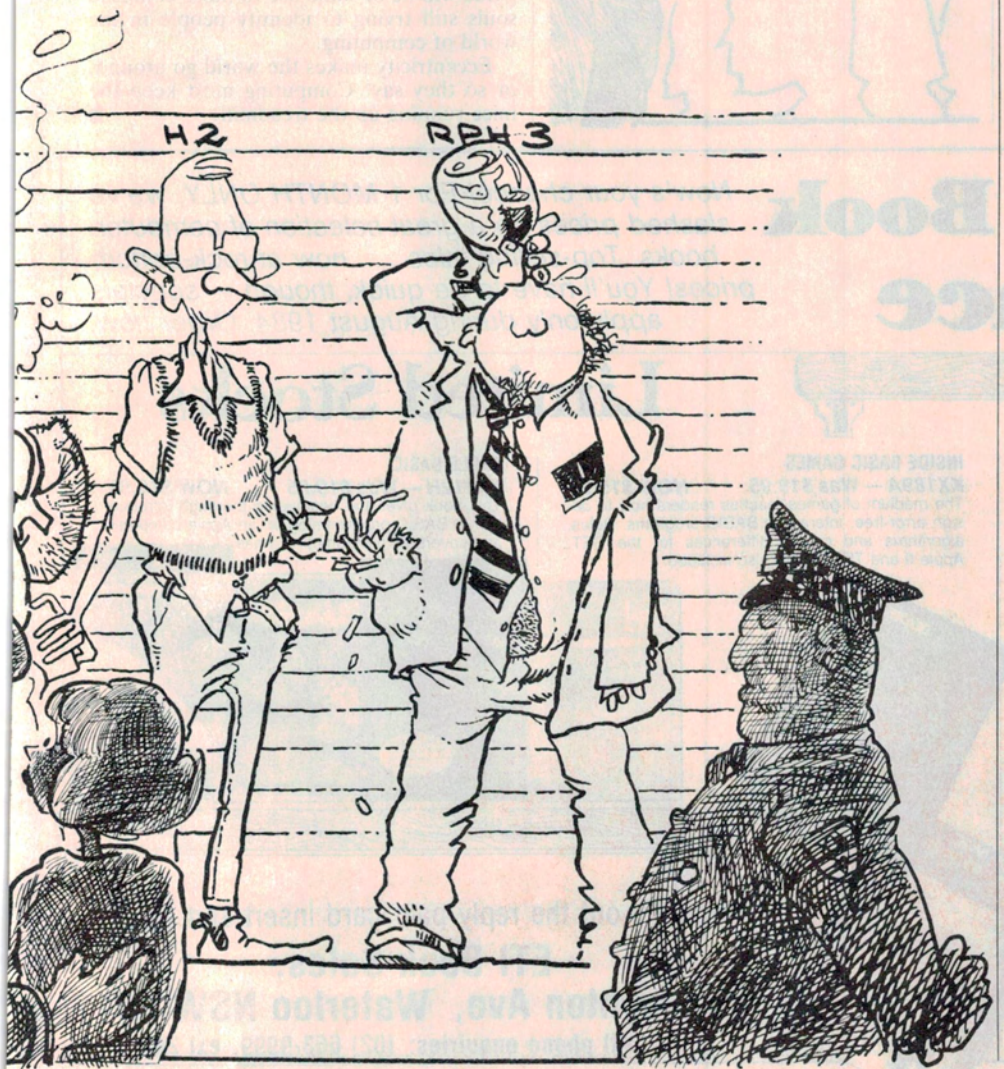


Do you know a 'Hacker, Class 1'?
How about a 'Dressing Programmer, Class 2'?
How do you become a 'Real Programmer/Hacker, Mark 3'?
Here's a humorous look at
the various 'classes'
of that modern phenomenon
— the computer nut!

Nigel Leith

DP1 types emulate DP2 and many clashes occur which the DP1 always loses, causing DP1 to move to yet another computer club with his wealth of sleeping knowledge.

A 'Real Programmer, Class 2' *never* goes to club meetings. He smokes incessantly, wears ties when asked and holed T-shirts when dress is unspecified. The RP2 has a similar system room to the RP1, with notable exceptions. Primarily, there is a closed window, shuttered, inadequate ventilation and a constant pall of smoke in the room. An RP2's cigarette butts are balanced on the table. An RP2 types gently. Finances are dedicated to the system alone, which grows internally to mammoth proportions.



The RP2 enjoys scrapes with the RP1, questions a H1 until he cries, wakes up a DP1 with an illogical statement which the DP1 invariably agrees with, and ignores the DP2 for pure satisfaction. RP2s are rarely sighted as they mainly talk by phone and communicate via modem. When sighted they size up the second party until categorised and take the appropriate action.

An RP2 can be approached by a 'Hacker, Mark 2'. The H2 is a nondescript soul who has been writing code since diaper days. The H2 has a neat room, normally his bedroom, with disks in a magnetic eraser safe should people decide to steal software. He knows all systems, from their clock speed to what type of casters they have, and is a mine of information with low morals. Where the H1 tries to break into computer systems which are well-documented and publicised via a cheap modem, the H2 backcharges OTC 'phone bills to an Australian system previously broken into with a second autodial modem attached to a remote node on the system which the engineers forgot to detach. The H2 normally has a good night when crossing the Pacific many times and closing his system down with all the used systems sending random data to each other and tying up all outside callers.

The H2 scoffs at all and regards anybody's software as public domain because he could write better code anyway. An RP2 is intimidated by an H2 and avoids the haunting hacker like the plague. Upon confrontation, the H2 downgrades the RP2 whilst the latter, exercising a superior wit, attacks all comments with a barbed tongue. An RP2 and a H2 ally only against DP1 types who unwittingly engage in futile conversations on expertise. After such talks, both the H2 and the RP2 leave the room in uncontrollable fits of laughter.

The H2 is normally morally bankrupt, untidy and unkempt. You'll find Coca-Cola bottles and glasses around the keyboard. The H2 prefers tea to coffee. The H2 enjoys $2 dinners and doesn't smoke or drink much. The H2 is often confused with the hybrid 'Real Programmer/Hacker, Mark 3'.

The RPH3 is just as lunatic as the H2 in wit and nature, lapses between H1 introversion and H2 extroversion on occasions and ▶

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drinks like a drought-striken fish. The RPH3 has flashes of inspiration which lead to six month-long programming stints which occasionally get finished. The unfinished code alone is *masterful*. The RPH3 is unconcerned with his day job and normally dedicates funds evenly between hardware and wide-ranging alcoholic delights, from apricot wine to diluted methylated spirits.

The RPH3's environment is readily recognised by a glistening, well-lit computer bench, a huge armchair in front of the detachable keyboard and a dull light in a corner overlooking a dusty science fiction novel.

The RPH3 mutilates his alarm clock every morning with great gusto and repairs it by night. On forgetting to set the clock he destroys it anyway for not waking him up. The H2 and RPH3 enjoy destruction and when seen together should be avoided, unless the observer is of a similar status. They intimidate H1s, outrage RP1s, reduce DP1s to tears, frustrate DP2s, force RP2s to violent acts and send all normal citizens into uncontrollable fits of depression and anger.

The RPH3 is only seen by visitation, voids clubs and burns magazines. The RPH3 enjoys music, food and Big M calendars almost as much as sleeping off hangovers. When programming, the RPH3 can carry on a conversation, change a tape,

drink and type simultaneously — with only a slight pause to top up his glass. When sleeping the RPH3 swears and/or rips sheets. When drunk, the RPH3 keeps typing, the phonetics of his typing matching perfectly his manner of speech. Socially, the RPH3 is a spectators' sport only. This individual ignores politics, events, newspapers, radio, comments, womens' faces, hygiene and socks. He is only affected by Hari-Krishna, Jehovas Witness, Salvation Army, Avon or Red Cross doorknockers. These force him to put on dark glasses, ear muffs and an overcoat in order to act blind, deaf and dumb. The knockers give up in fury as he mumbles about fruit bottling from behind the fly screen door.

One can only wonder about computing's effect upon society. Could we be creating a new strain of human or were they here all the time waiting for technology to catch up to them? (Radio amateurs preceded them . . . Ed.)

In possible further articles more wondrous types of computing people will be revealed. But for the time being, I trust this guide will be of some use to those confused souls still trying to identify people in the world of computing.

Eccentricity makes the world go around, or so they say. Computing must keep the mice running up the treadmill. ●