

## COLLOQUIUM

### CODE WORK: THINKING WITH THE SYSTEM IN MEXICO

Dr. Héctor Beltrán – UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Irvine



In this talk I explore how young people position themselves in relation to promises of technology and progress during a time of political transition in Mexico. My fieldwork takes place between 2013 and 2017, just before a newly formed leftist political party gained power after nearly a century of rule by Mexico's "revolutionary" party. For self-identified "disenchanted" youth in Mexico, skeptical of the promises of social mobility by means of formal education, "hacking" emerged as a way to make sense of their futures in a

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precarious state and economy, and as a way to let their "code work" intervene in narratives that had only delivered false hopes. Co-working spaces, hackathons, entrepreneurial initiatives, and neoliberal "reforms" were seldom differentiated by politicians. By immersing themselves in the code that underlies the technologies that promise developmentalist change, I show how fundamental

coding principles become good to think with, alongside the institutions and systems responsible for reinstating unequal opportunities, iteration after iteration. Hacker-entrepreneurs used their code work to develop heuristics for analyzing the organization of entities and relationship between them, whether they are elements in a coding environment or actors in a political-economic environment.

Héctor Beltrán is a UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Irvine. He completed his PhD in Anthropology at UC Berkeley. His current book manuscript, "Hacking Imaginaries: Full Stack Ethnography Across the Techno-Borderlands," examines the political economy of knowledge work and manifestations of "hacking" between the US and Mexico. Héctor draws on his computer science and engineering background as he develops theoretical frameworks that examine the technical aspects of computing along with issues of identity, race, ethnicity, class, and nation.

