HACK YOUR PHD
Profiles of young researchers of the #OpenScience generation

USA
HackYourPhd in The US

“Profiles of young researchers of the Open Science generation”
Hello!

I am Célya Gruson-Daniel, cofounder of the Open Science community HackYourPhD. Open Science defines a set of initiatives whose purpose is to create a more collaborative research, transparent and open to the society. The related terms open access, open data, citizen science are important parts of Open Science, but they include many notions and lack a common vision of what this movement represents.

This is the reason why the community HackYourPhD was born in January 2013. Today, it gathers PhD students, researchers, but also people curious to understand the evolution of research. HackYourPhD explores events and initiatives regarding new approaches of research.

Fueled by the curiosity to understand what is behind the metaphor of Open Science, I made an investigation journey named HackYourPhD in the US which was made possible through a crowdfunding campaign supported by more than 90 people. For more than two months (summer 2013), I cruised the roads of the United States in order to meet with those involved in Open Science. In this “enriched” book, I want to invite you to follow this adventure city by city. You will discover not only PhD students, young researchers and persons who hacked their PhD, but also innovative places that I visited at each step along the way.

All these captured moments will allow you to get familiar with the profiles of young people who contribute to build the research of tomorrow. These enthusiasts explore and question their own practices. They also share their difficulties and moments of joy. Come to know with this notebook, the face of a dynamic research, with extensive propositions and adaptability, that take place now in different American cities.

Introduction
January 2013, HackYourPhD community was created around the theme of Open Science. Few months later, we developed the idea of a web documentary in order to better understand what is Open Science, and encounter its players.

May 31, 2013, a campaign of crowdfunding was launched. In 29 days, we were able to raise more than 5,000 euro, which was above the 3,000 euro expected. They were more than 90 people who participated: friends, family, fellows of HackYourPhD community, but also a small group of official sponsors.

This journey of HackYourPhD in the US was a project of investigation at the crossroad of research, design, entrepreneurship and hacking(PhD). It was also for me the first impulse of thesis work I started later on. In retrospect, this investigation laid the groundwork for a reflection toward an ethnographic approach to digital age and Open Science.

This journey came from a desire to understand the transformations experienced in openness of science and research practices, and the willingness to share them to the greatest number.

What do we know about research? Most of the time, not much or nothing very attractive. The community of researchers seems to be way too often walled up in the ivory towers. But there exists a set of players and initiatives that aim to open this research to make it more dynamic, more collaborative and more transparent.

This movement started widely in the USA and that is the context in which HackYourPhD invites us to go on a trip. Through a web-documentary, you will discover the state of today’s research that is far from cheering. But meet in the US those who imagine and build a more open science! This project of investigation at the crossroads between research, design, entrepreneurship and hacking is a work of advanced expertise. The freedom of speech that this campaign offers is an inexhaustible source of innovative ideas and a fertilizer of unparalleled inspiration.

Excerpt from the KissKissBankBank crowdfunding campaign page
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Credits
Thomas Strandberg: “We must think out of the beaten tracks” - San Diego

What best to meet researchers and PhD students than to sneak into a research colloquium. That’s what I did in San Diego, one of the first stage of the trip, during a conference organized by the Association for the Science Study of Consciousness. There, I met Thomas Strandberg, PhD student at the University of Lund in Sweden. He is one of the award winner for the best scientific poster at the conference. His answers to my questions are short and sharp-cut. He explains to me the issues that he faces in his field of study: social psychology. “I would like to see more innovative studies in social psychology”. To reach that goal, according to Thomas, the trick would be for researchers to look beyond their constrained perspective and try to venture out of a traditional research.

This young PhD student seems passionate about his field of research. He tells that one of his best memories is when he had his application accepted by his current PhD program. During a doctoral path, less cheerful events can also occur, and mainly at the end of the PhD process. “Every time I learn that I haven’t been hired for a position, it is quite difficult, even more when you have to wait for another year to apply again.”

Thomas, as a PhD student, is very aware of the new practices of research and particularly in terms of scientific publication in Open Access. He explains to me that his last article was published in PLoS One (a journal in Open Access). And this is this publication that he is presenting in his poster today. The prize he got for his poster is evidence that a publication in open access is also synonym of good quality.

Interview with Thomas: https://goo.gl/eCmxvK

Emma Peng Chien: “It is necessary to have more integration between philosophy and science” - San Diego

She explains to me what doesn’t suit her in the current world of scientific research. “In North America, researchers are forced to produce. That are constantly ranked. We need more freedom in the academic system to publish a research of better quality.”

Her best memories as a young researcher? Her years of Master in Taiwan have made a deep impression on her. She keeps very good memories of working in an interdisciplinary center and of her collaboration with a professor, both philosopher and researcher in psychology. He is the one that allowed her to explore the two disciplines. Luck or misfortune, her experiences have allowed her to guide her interest towards more theoretical research. Today, her studies represent a good example of interdisciplinary research.

I then meet with Emma Peng Chien, another award winner at ASSC poster session (…and this for two years in a row!). Young PhD student at the University of Alberta, Canada, Emma studies autism using concepts drawn originally from philosophy. During the session when she had to present her poster, i jump on a short moment of calm to ask her for an interview. Not easy to find even five minutes to talk to her, Emma is constantly being requested!

Emma has first studied biology during a Bachelor program in Taiwan. She kept on with a Masters in an interdisciplinary team mixing psychology and philosophy. Then started a PhD in philosophy in Canada. The repetitive work of students in biology was heavy on her. “They repeat the same tasks everyday and never wonder why they do what they do”. She was lucky enough to be able to achieve a transition between biology and philosophy, which is a rare thing, she entrusts me. “For me, it is really necessary to have more integration between biology and philosophy. Most of the philosophers don’t know anything about the so-called “hard” sciences and vice versa.” How to promote this interdisciplinarity? For her, it should come from changes in the education system.

Interview with Emma: https://goo.gl/YBMRoM
After their postdocs in San Diego (Salk institute), Ann and Elan decided to quit their lab to create their own research team. They made the choice not to accept any partnership with any company. For them, the academic realm should be autonomous and not depend on pharmaceutical companies, military projects, etc. In addition to developing an approach of open research (use of open source software, publishing in Open Access journals), the Green Neuroscience Lab is based on strong ethics and refuses to perform any experiment on animals.

The business model of this place rely on a subscription with different access fees to the place. BioTechAndBeyond was created by Joseph Jackson, co-founder of BioCurious and organizer of the OpenScience Summit. This space was created in such a way that biotech experts can materialize their ideas into the first physical prototypes to be shown to investors.

A few days later, I was attending the celebration of the first birthday of a quite uncommon laboratory of neuroscience: the Green Neuroscience Lab. Co-created by Ann Lam and Elan L. Ohayon this laboratory is located at the Ansir Innovation Center, a space regrouping co-working and startup incubator activities.

For more informations

[From July 8 to July 16 2013] First days on the "new continent" : Last preparations and beginning of the Tour (Boca Raton and San Diego)
http://goo.gl/NkqFDG

Opening of the BioTechAndBeyond, in pictures:
https://goo.gl/go8UIt
BioTechAndBeyond explained for the website EducPros:
https://goo.gl/go8UIt

Celebration night of the Green Neuroscience Lab’s first birthday, in pictures:
https://goo.gl/8OLJd4

An article about the Green Neuroscience Lab:
http://goo.gl/U3bcqu
It’s 10pm, we just finished with Victor Barres the first presentation of HackYourPhD journey. This is a first step for Victor in order to create at the University of Southern California (USC) a group to discuss Open Science. After two hours of meeting, I even asked him a few extra minutes, so that he can share with me his PhD student experience. Victor Barres decided three years ago to leave France and start a PhD at USC. He studies the links between language and brain.

One of the problems he faces everyday in research is the lack of motivation of PhD students. “I fight against the inertia of PhD students, who only think about what they are going to do later on, outside research.” These PhD students are not concerned by the improvement of research and “Today current PhD programs don’t help to train researchers”.

For Victor, collaboration is a major issue specifically in Neuroscience. He tells me what he called Einstein anecdote. “If someone asks me who will be the new Einstein of Neuroscience, I reply that there will not be one, but instead it will be a group of researchers who may solve a major problem”. In other words, interaction is crucial in research. “People often like to do things together. So why not in science?” Victor doesn’t have a ready solution. “The problem today is that these new research practices exist but they are implemented in fairly craft way. Find a way to amplify and extend them is quite difficult.”

In addition to the visit of two universities, UCLA, and USC, Los Angeles was an opportunity to discover a place representative of this city with surprising size (especially for European standards), and projects with another magnitude. On the 11th floor of a store selling kitsch furniture with tastes more or less doubtful, there is a space of over 5,000 m² dedicated to makers. Named MakercityLA, this place was still under construction in July, 2013. Few areas were then occupied, but already we find the Institute for Art and Olfaction, and also a theater group. Will follow later a FabLab, a community kitchen, and a design studio. The purpose of such space is to support creativity and makers in their projects. It’s ambition is conform to the American dream as evidence by this quote: “We start with 60,000 feet but we see great. We want to create a city of makers, a place for artists, craftsman and craftswoman, a dream factory”.

Interview with Victor : https://goo.gl/lyBMQe

For more informations
[From July 17 to July 21 2013] Los Angeles, and first step in San Francisco
http://goo.gl/cSC7J5
Open Science event organized by Victor Barres at USC
https://goo.gl/LGHl7u
Some pictures of MakerCityLab
https://goo.gl/4vtBUL
Late morning at Berkeley, I interview Jess in a nice green area of the campus: l’Eucalyptus grove. Jess is a young PhD student in the laboratory of Computational Cognitive Science Lab. With a curly blond hair and a smiling face, Jess explains to me why collaboration in research is such a crucial element. “I don’t think that research really benefits from the possible crossroads and interactions between scientists. Collaborations should be built between researchers of laboratories using increasing Internet resources.”

This young woman is very interested in projects developed to assist open Science. She referred in particular to Github, a platform built initially for programmers to share their code, but that has been used more and more by researchers.

Certainly, it’s a start but Jess sees more “I would really like to see a project which will allow to share all your research work online.” For her, the transparency and traceability of everyone’s work is crucial because they promote the recognition and evaluation of each person involved in a project ...

She tells me at the end of the interview that it’s not always easy.” Sometime, it’s hard not take personally a rejected article”.

These two hours spent with her, revealed me a young woman happy to do research. Even though, she is aware of the current difficulties of the system, she draws from it a motivation to act, and advance practices.

Todd Huffman designated himself as a research dropout. I meet him in San Francisco and stay more than 3 days in his company office which also serves as dormitory. Todd has indeed created a startup 3D scan. He developed an innovative 3D microscope to scan biological samples.

When presenting his project to me, he tells me that he stopped his PhD courses. One reason: “I did not have the right equipment to conduct the research that I wanted to do.” With his startup, he invented the tools that he lacked. And he now imagines himself returning to the world of research. “It’s important to have people of different profiles in research. I would like to see people in business or management enter the world of science.” He pointed out to me that it is very common to see researchers leave the world of research for other spheres. But it is rare that people return to research. In San Francisco, many young postdocs leave the academia world to Facebook or Google. “I would like to see research institutions make efforts to bring back these talented young people.”

Todd leads by example, he invented new ways of doing things and thinking. It opens the lines between research, business and entrepreneurship. An inspiring example to follow closely. If you go to San Francisco, Todd will always welcome you with open arms.

Jess Hamrick: “I would really like to see a project which will allow to share all our research work online.” - Berkeley

Todd Huffman: «I would like to see people in business or management enter the world of science / scientific world.» - San Francisco

Interview with Jess: https://goo.gl/lpZ60S

Interview with Todd: https://goo.gl/iPSuH0
San Francisco: the origins of Open Science culture in the American way?

San Francisco, the third step of HackYourPhD in the US, is a key city for OpenScience as many projects have started there. During my week spent in this town and its surroundings, I visited one of the core pillars of the open access movement, the scientific editor PLoS, the Public Library of Science.

Created by researchers from the universities of Stanford and Berkeley, PLoS is a nonprofit publisher of scientific articles offering various open access journals in the field of life sciences. The city also hosts a variety of areas such as hackerspaces, makerspaces. Each has a special atmosphere defined by the community that constitutes them. But they have some things in common: an opening 24/7, a 3D printer in the corner of a room, working and living spaces, free wifi. Anyone can submit a project or gather around existing initiatives. Citizen Research projects meet there. A project on the study of dreams at Noisebridge or even space of biohacking at Sudoroom.

For more informations

[July 22 to July 30 ] An Open Science week in San Francisco
http://goo.gl/Gbl6VN

PLOS explained on EducPros website
http://goo.gl/YXQ8EF

Some pictures of different hacker/maker/free spaces in San Francisco
https://goo.gl/mdqWkf
After California, the last step on the west coast brings me to Seattle. During this week, I explored a facet of Open Science different from the one in San Francisco. In fact, directions taken by big software and services companies like Amazon and Microsoft, strongly impact topics addressed by Open Science.

I discovered the University of Washington and one of his inspiring places: The Research Commons. This old library has been completely redesigned to foster creativity and collaboration within researchers and students. Flexible areas, tables and walls as whiteboards, open 7/7... Everything is done to facilitate the emergence of new ideas. The administrators of this center are also interested in the training of researchers on data management.

She tells me about unpleasant moments in research. “I feel really bad when I can’t communicate properly or when I can’t bring my ideas to the next level!” But research also has many positive moments and sharing. “I love working in a team and collectively, and accomplish a common goal. I learn new skills out of my field. It’s really satisfying!”

Interview with Cyan: http://goo.gl/P2roYY
The Institute of System Biology not far away, is also emblematic of the culture of data and their management in a collaborative and open manner. This institute adopts a policy in favor of Open Science. Articles are published in Open access journals, and the data and the software code is freely shared.

For more informations

[From August 1st to 08 2013] Open Science in Seattle : Big Data, systèmes complexes and Open Data
http://goo.gl/5UV3wl

L’Institute for System Biology explained on EducPros website
http://goo.gl/DFgt4R

Some pictures of places visited in Seattle
https://goo.gl/KAFjfV
BOSTON and its surrounding
First in Cambridge, without wasting time, I visit the MIT Media Lab, known for being an “anti-disciplinary” place of innovation. I am fortunate to be welcomed by Xiao Xiao, who will guide me for the morning. This place is truly magical! A real Ali Baba cave, where you find robots, 3D printers and legos. Research at the lab is divided into groups, each with a specific focus. Xiao is a PhD student in the Tangible Media Group, which rethinks how people may interact with computers of the future. She studies how to design more engaging experiences with the computer inspired by how people interact with music. “My study subject may seems atypical for a PhD student. It’s not usual to work with a grand piano in your office!” She has indeed developed a particular piano. Her project is named “MirrorFugue”, which gives the illusion of a virtual reflection playing a physical piano.

During our three hours spent together, I gradually discover her universe and her questions. For her, often researchers forget the reasons for doing research. “Is it not to try to understand and find truth?” she observe that many are disconnect from all that. “They only think of the prestige and publications. They forget what research is about.” Scientific communication is something important for her. “We are often stuck in our jargon, and our specific vocabulary. Instead, succeed in sharing your ideas in a free way can only improve the quality of information.” Being in one the most prestigious universities doesn’t protect Xiao from going through doubt: “My worst memories are the times when I am not inspired.” Stereotypes of geeks coding all night or researcher filled with ideas constantly are far from reality. “It’s not so fluid, and sometimes it seems like facing a wall.” Fortunately, research also has an exciting side: she tells me about her feeling of intellectual trance after a presentation. This is surely what she felt participating in TEDx Boston last summer. The pleasure of sharing her research is then at its height...

I meet with John Hess at Cambridge Center, at the heart of MIT. John is responsible of project at Edx, one of the famous MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platforms on which prestigious North American universities share college lectures. Since the launch, he analyzes data from the platform. He takes a critical look at data processing. “Today, we are especially interested in the size of data, everyone talks about Big Data.” But, he adds that what is more important isn’t the size of data but the number of meaningful data.

One of the major changes I would like to see is the involvement of communities around data. “Instead, there is still friction to allow communities to work with large data sets.” Open Data could facilitate, and improve these relations. He is very interested in the potential offered by Open Science. “I would like to see communities more involved in research.” During our conversation, we talk about PhD study or rather how to “hack” it. John has not done a PhD but questions “how to get feedback on your research without being in a PhD program.” “In PhD program, there is a mentor to help you.” But to hack your PhD for him doesn’t seem impossible. “It’s certainly possible to have other rewarding feedback on your research by a community.” Even without a formal program, you can still invent and experiment.

Xiao Xiao: “Researchers often forget the reasons for doing research” Cambridge, MediaLab (MIT)

John Hess: “I would like to see communities more involved in research” Cambridge
For Boston, it’s especially the nearby city of Cambridge that was my investigation field. Indeed, there were many round trips between the two famous universities of Cambridge: MIT and Harvard. In few miles, I felt like I had navigated between very different bubbles. Some of them were certainly innovative but seemed far from being concerned with Open Science issues. However, others created most refreshing initiatives in both content and form.

For MIT, Medialab brings together inspiring projects in terms of ideas but not necessarily in terms of the research processes themselves, which remain rooted in a traditional and competitive system. At Harvard university, a few metro stop away, was the opportunity to discover a different initiative—the dataverse Network project. It’s a platform that allows any social scientists to share and archive their data, and also cite and reuse them. It incorporates different functionalities to create meaningful interconnections with other Open Science fields.

This week in Boston, also made me discover a rich ecosystem grouping hospitals, biology institutes such as the Wyss Institute, universities and start-ups. The potential created is enormous and often held by students, PhD students, young researchers or entrepreneurs. This ecosystem provides hybrid initiatives between academia and private worlds.

For more informations
[From August 9 to 20 2013] Open Science in Montréal, and Boston : A bubble story.
http://goo.gl/9flJWq

The Dataverse Network Project explained on EducPros website
http://goo.gl/Y0pZ1J

Some pictures of places visited in Boston and its surrounding
https://goo.gl/bALFpR
Elizabeth Gilbert: “We are living a very exciting time because we’re really learning how to improve our practice” - Center for Open Science

We then discuss the reasons why she is interested in Open Science. “A few years ago, the field of social psychology experienced multiple fraud cases which got high hits in media” she told me. The cases, specially the Stapel case, dealt a serious blow to the reputation of the studies in this field. “But it’s also a very exciting time to do research, as we work to improve our practices to avoid cases such as this from happening again.”

This is the reason why this PhD student is involved at the Center for Open Science: “I would like to see data of our researches become truly public. Not only to ensure that they have been properly analyzed but especially to analyze them differently.” On her blog, she clearly states “I believe in Open Science, and I intend to share my data and materials on this blog” Inspiring, isn’t it?

The last step of HackyourPhD in the US is at the Center for Open Science, a space dedicated to making research practices more open and collaborative. It began by focussing on the field of social psychology. This is how I met Elizabeth Gilbert, she is a PhD student in her fourth year of thesis at the University of Virginia. Elizabeth at first studied law, thus allowing her to address social psychology from a particular angle: “I study social psychology in the field of law; more precisely, I analyze the processes by which individuals make different legal decision”. Elizabeth shares with me highlights she experienced as a young researcher.

“Sometimes, especially when you are a young PhD student, you feel lost, and you don’t know what you are doing. But, the first time you give a lecture or your thesis supervisor thinks that one of your ideas is good, you say to yourself that you are beginning to be part of the community.”

New York and Charlottesville: End of HackYourPhD in the US Tour.

New York was the last step of this journey. Open Science in this city seems to be at the junction of different citizen movements, artistic and technological. Under the umbrella of citizen science, the projects that I discover in this city have have common denominators, openness and the interaction of science with other spheres.

In fact, the sharing and gathering of people around a common interest appeared to me as a major trait of New York. The Public Lab initiative is one example. It promotes the prototype of new DIY (Do It Yourself) tools and kits which give every citizen the opportunity to collect data about their environment. The platform also provides the ability to share data and analyze them collaboratively.

The technological and artistic EyeBeam Center is another initiative at the crossroads between different “worlds”. This area offers residences and scholarship to artists in their work combining art and technology. Eyebeam is described as a creative incubator, a meeting accelerator, but also a place of experimentation and research with “Open” as cultural background.
And to conclude this journey, the last place visited was the Center for Open Science, which is fully dedicated to the development of a platform which will facilitate collaboration and tracking of each step of a research project. In 2013, the project was at its start but already a group of researchers and developers put in place the blocks of an initiative seeking to facilitate more integrity, reproducibility, and openness in research practices.

For more informations

[From August 21 to 28 2013] New York : At the heart of Open Science community
http://goo.gl/2yB1C

The Center for Open Science explained on EducPros website
http://goo.gl/bMALO6
And what’s next?

This book was intended to share moments captured with young researchers met during this journey. Numerous other interviews with actors involved in initiatives around OpenScience (PLOS, MozillaScienceLab...) are available online on Internet Archive.

This trip made between July and September 2013 was one of the first milestones of a thesis started in November 2014 about discourses and conceptions related to openness in science.

This PhD at the crossroads of Information and Communication Studies and STS (Science, Technology & Society), is another trip that begins: it is an immersion in the field of contemporary research in Humanities and Social Sciences.

This journey was a first step of an ethnographic study started with this doctoral research. In future writings, it will be this time the words of a researcher-PhD students who develops «a new identity building on (her) self» (Delavergne, 2007). But sharing the next steps in this ongoing research process is also a way to «hack» a PhD, isn’t it?

The number of 8 partners represent 36% of the total amount.

The closest family circle / family in law represent 7% of the total amount.

The HackYourPhD community account for more than 26 people and 27% of the total amount.

The friends of the circle represent 34 people and 22% of the total amount.

Then this campaign helped meet new people who have shown interest in the project to 16 people tonight and 7% of the total amount.

And what’s next?

The book HackYourPhD in the US “Profiles of young researchers of the Open Science generation” was born from the discussion between Mathieu Rouault et Célya Gruson-Daniel.

Mathieu Rouault, creator of @docteo_net and @speak_science and co-fondateur of @Specimen. He directed the video presentation of the crowdfunding campaign HackYourPhD States. He proposed the idea of this book to highlight profiles of PhD students, one of the key public of his initiatives.

This book was mostly written by Célya Gruson-Daniel with the help of precious reviewers (Mathieu Rouault, Elyane Daniel).

The layout was made by Jean-François Cauche then by Raphael Himpe under the coordination of Amaury Van Espen who also added all the graphic elements. The English translation was made by François Bourquin Asperti, Rodrigue Asseu, Xiao Xiao and Elizabeth Gilbert.

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Thanks

The journey HackYourPhD in the US came to life with the support of 91 participants. A list in on the website of the crowdfunding campaign HackYourPhD Staes:
http://goo.gl/gTSegN

Thanks also to the official sponsors of this trip:
For 100 euros: – Deuxième Labo – Fidus writer – ESPGG et le groupe TRACES – Grand Angle production – Lab Davanac
For 300 euros: – Prémices
For 500 euros: – Shazino – L’école des doctorants

Here is a short analysis of the participants, you can find more details on the dashboard HackYourPhD States:
http://goo.gl/klMRde

Crédits

The book HackYourPhD in the US “Profiles of young researchers of the Open Science generation” was born from the discussion between Mathieu Rouault et Célya Gruson-Daniel.

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Partnerships

Crowdfunding campaign partnerships
OpenScience means a set of initiatives that aim to create a more collaborative research, transparent and open to society. Free access (open access), open research data (open data), citizen science (citizen science) ... This term encompasses many notions of research practices and Science in evolution.

Driven by curiosity to understand what is behind the word Open Science, an investigative journey «HackYourPhD in the States» was performed by Célya Gruson, co-founder of HackYourPhD, during the summer 2013. Through a crowdfunding campaign supported by more than 90 people, Célya has traveled for more than two months american roads to meet with those involved in Open Science.

In this book, you will find city the portraits of doctoral students, young researchers or even people who «hack their PhD.» Each city is also an opportunity to highlight innovative places.

All these captured moments will allow you to get familiar with the profiles of young people who contribute to build the research of tomorrow. These enthusiasts explore and question their own practices. They also share their difficulties and moments of joy. Come to know with this notebook, the face of a dynamic research, with extensive propositions and adaptability, that take place now in different American cities.

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