

# HACKER CULTURE & POLITICS

COMS 541 (CRN 15368) 1435-1725

Department of Art History and Communication Studies

McGill University

Professor Gabriella Coleman

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Arts W-220/ 14:35-17:25



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## OVERVIEW

This course examines computer hackers to interrogate not only the ethics and technical practices of hacking, but to examine more broadly how hackers and hacking have transformed the politics of computing and the Internet more generally. We will examine how hacker values are realized and constituted by different legal, technical, and ethical activities of computer hacking—for example, free software production, cyberactivism and hactivism, cryptography, and the prankish games of hacker underground. We will pay close attention to how ethical principles are variably represented and thought of by hackers, journalists, and academics and we will use the example of hacking to address various topics on law, order, and politics on the Internet such as: free speech and censorship, privacy, security, surveillance, and intellectual property. We finish with an in-depth look at two sites of hacker and activist action: Wikileaks and Anonymous.

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

This will allow us to 1) demonstrate familiarity with variants of hacking 2) critically examine the multiple ways hackers draw on and reconfigure dominant ideas of property, freedom, and privacy through their diverse moral

codes and technical activities 3) broaden our understanding of politics of the Internet by evaluating the various political effects and ramifications of hacking. Students will be responsible for leading discussions on the readings and critically engaging the readings and class conversations.

## READINGS

The following texts are available at Paragraph Books and the rest of the readings will be on our course website. Many of the readings are excerpts of much longer readings or blog posts. The week before the next class I will often highlight which pages to focus your attention on.

Levy, Steven. 1984 [1994] *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. Doubleday  
Doctorow, Cory. 2009 *Makers*. HaperVogager

## MOVIES

I have booked our room after class to watch four movies throughout the semester. Although not required, I highly encourage students to stay and watch the films.

## REQUIRMENTS, METHOD OF EVALUATION, AND ASSINGMENTS

Reading Responses	30% (6 total and <u>see below for more details</u> )
Class Presentation	20% (details will be provided the first day of class)
Questions/participation	20%
Final Research Project	30% (details will be given the first day of class)

*Grade Breakdown:*

Grade	Grade point	Percentages
A	4.0	85 -100
A-	3.7	80 – 84
B+	3.3	75 – 79
B	3.0	70 – 74
B-	2.7	65 – 69
C+	2.3	60 – 64
C	2.0	55 – 59
D (Conditional Pass)	1.0	50 – 54
F (Fail)	0	0 - 49

## EMAIL POLICY

During the academic year, I receive a considerable amount of email. In order for me to respond to my e-mail efficiently, please follow the following guidelines:

1. If you cannot see me during my office hours, e-mail me to set up an appointment; I will try to respond as soon as possible but I usually cannot accommodate a meeting in 24 or even 48 hours.
2. I read and reply to e-mail once a day and usually do not read or reply to e-mail after 5 PM or weekends.
3. Follow instructions for turning in assignments. For this class you are expected to turn in the reading responses via e-mail by 10 a.m. and in class. No other assignments submitted by e-mail will be accepted.
4. Grade inquiries and disputes will not be considered or discussed via e-mail. For all grade inquiries and questions about assignments, please set up an appointment with me.

5. I will not reply to e-mail inquiries regarding course matters (assignment requirements, due dates, exam structure, readings, etc.) that arise from missing class or inattention to the course syllabus. Inquiries requesting clarification will receive replies, though I would strongly prefer these inquiries to be made in class or during office hours.

## OTHER INFORMATION AND MCGILL POLICIES

*Language:* In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded

*Accommodations:* Students requiring special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications should notify Prof. Coleman and the Office for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible. The OSD is located in Suite 3100, Brown Student Services Building, ph: 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD), [www.mcgill.ca/osd/](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/).

*Academic Integrity:* McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).  
L'université McGill attaché une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour les plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).

## SCHEDULE

***[While this version provides a very good indication of what will come it is still draft. The final version will be available on the first day of class]***

The following is a "working schedule." Class materials are subject to change based on the interests, understanding, and general pace of the class. It is your responsibility to keep on top of any schedule changes, whether you are in class or not. If you have a concern about any of the materials, please speak to me.

Week 1
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### September 5: Introductions

Jack Hitt and Paul Tough  
1990 "Is Computer Hacking a Crime?" *Harpers Magazine*

Steven Levy  
1984 *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* [part one]

Coleman, Gabriella  
2013 "Hackers." *John Hopkins Dictionary of Digital Media*

Graham, David Robert  
2012 "No, "hacker" really does mean "hacker""  
<http://erratasec.blogspot.ca/2012/08/no-hacker-really-does-mean-hacker.html>

Rosenbaum, Ron  
1971 "Secrets of the Little Blue Box." *Esquire Magazine*  
<http://www.webcrunchers.com/crunch/stories/esq-art.html>

#### **Listen to before class:**

<http://www.radiolab.org/2012/feb/20/long-distance/>

**September 12: Free and Open Source Software**

Levy, Steven  
1984 "Epilogue." *Hackers*

Stallman, Richard  
1985 "The GNU Manifesto"  
<http://www.gnu.org/gnu/manifesto.html>

Kelty, Chris  
2008 *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* [Introduction, Chapter 6, and Chapter 3 and in that order]

Coleman, Gabriella  
2013 *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking* [Introduction, Chapter 2, 5, Epilogue]

Benjamin, Walter  
1986 "Author as Producer." *Cultural Resistance Reader*

**Recommended:**

Hesse, Carla  
2002 "The Rise of Intellectual Property, 700 B.C - A.D. 2000: an Idea in Balance." *Dædalus*

Hall, Stuart  
1987 "Variants of Liberalism." *Politics and Ideology*

**September 19: Contexts and Places of Making// Making Stuff, Ethical Making**

Doctorow, Cory  
2009 *Makers* [read ½ of the book]

Polleta, Francesa,  
1999 "'Free spaces' in Collective Action." *Theory and Society*

Pfaffenberger, Bryan  
1996 "If I Want It, It's OK: Usenet and the (Outer) Limits of Free Speech." *The Information Society*

Coleman, Gabriella  
2013 "Two Ethical Moments in Debian." *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*

MaxiGas  
2012 "HackLabs and HackerSpaces: Tracing Two Genealogies." *Journal of Peer Production*  
<http://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-2/peer-reviewed-papers/hacklabs-and-hackerspaces/>

**Recommended:**

Pettis, Bree  
2011 *HackerSpaces: The Beginning!*  
<http://www.brepettis.com/blog/2011/8/31/hackerspaces-the-beginning-the-book.html>

**September 26: Craft and Craftiness**

Doctorow, Cory

2009 *Makers* [Finish]

Sennet, Richard

2008 *The Craftsman* [pp. 8-11 50-52, 240-252, 262-265; optional but recommended and included 37-45]

Coleman, Gabriella

2013 "Craft and Craftiness." *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*

Seibel, Peter

2009 *Coders at Work: Reflections on the Craft of Programing* [selections]

Borgmann, Albert

1984 "Device Paradigm" *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*

Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant,

1991 "Antilochus' Race." *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*

Hyde, Lewis

1998 *Trickster Makes the World* [Introduction and selections]

**Listen to the NPR podcast before class:**

*The 'Wild And Woolly' World Of Bulletin Boards*

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120649723>

**After Hours Movie:**

BBS: The Documentary (2005, Jason Scott)

[2 DVDs otherwise, we will be pulling an all nighter]

**Recommended:**

Fuller, Mathew

2008 "Elegance." *Software Studies: A Lexicon*

Monfort, Nick

2008 "Obfuscated Code." *Software Studies: A Lexicon*

**October 3: The Underground**

Sterling Bruce

1992 "The Digital Underground." *The Hacker Crackdown*

[http://www.dina.kvl.dk/~abraham/crackdown/crackdown\\_5.html#SEC5](http://www.dina.kvl.dk/~abraham/crackdown/crackdown_5.html#SEC5)

Thomas, Douglass

2003 *Hacker Culture* [chapter 2, 4, 5]

Poulsen, Kevin

2008 “Teenage Hacker Is Blind, Brash and in the Crosshairs of the FBI.” *Wired*  
[http://www.wired.com/politics/law/news/2008/02/blind\\_hacker?currentPage=1](http://www.wired.com/politics/law/news/2008/02/blind_hacker?currentPage=1)

**Zines:**

<http://www.phrack.org/issues.html?issue=65&id=13#article>  
<http://web.textfiles.com/eazines/EL8/> [selections TBD]  
<http://gonullyyourself.org/eazines/ZF0/zf0%204.txt>

**Listen to before class, Kevin Mitnick keynote HOPE:**

<http://www.the-fifth-hope.org/mp3/mitnick-1.mp3>  
<http://www.the-fifth-hope.org/mp3/mitnick-2.mp3>

**After Hours Movie:**

War Games (1983)

**Recommended:**

Maines, Rachel  
2009 “Introduction.” *Hedonizing Technologies: Paths to Pleasure in Hobbies and Leisure*

Week 6
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**October 10: The Industry and “the Man”**

Editorial/2600  
Year The Victor Spoiled

Johnston, Jessica  
2009 *Technological Turf Wars: A Case Study of the Computer Antivirus Industry*  
[Introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2]

Ensmenger, Nathan  
2010 “The Black Art of Programming.” *The Computer Boys Take Over*

Altman, Mitch  
2012 “Hacking at the crossroad: US military funding of hackerspaces.” *Journal of Peer Production*  
<http://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-2/invited-comments/hacking-at-the-crossroad/>

The Rise of Antisec Movement [URLS, provided separately]

Guido, Dan  
2008 “Is the security industry like a lemon market?”  
<http://seclists.org/fulldisclosure/2008/Jul/399>

Greenberg, Andy  
2012 “Shopping For Zero-Days: A Price List For Hackers' Secret Software Exploits” *Forbes*

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2012/03/23/shopping-for-zero-days-an-price-list-for-hackers-secret-software-exploits/>

**In class video:**

Mikko Hypponen: Fighting viruses, defending the net //TED Talk  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/mikko\\_hypponen\\_fighting\\_viruses\\_defending\\_the\\_net.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/mikko_hypponen_fighting_viruses_defending_the_net.html)

## Watch Before Class:

Hackers Testifying at the United States Senate, May 19, 1998 (L0pht Heavy Industries)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVJldn\\_MmMY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVJldn_MmMY)

### Week 7

#### October 17: Piracy

Anonymous

1994 “The Lamahs-Guide to Pirating Software on the Internet”

<http://www.textfiles.com/piracy/warez.txt>

Editorial

1999 “So You Want to be a Pirate?” *High Noon on the Electronic Frontier*

Liang, Lawrence

2011 “Beyond Representation: The Figure of the Pirate.” *Access to Knowledge in the Age of Intellectual Property*

Biggs, John

2012 “Avast, Me Hearties: How The Pirate Bay Changed The Way We Steal”

<http://techcrunch.com/2012/02/09/avast-me-hearties-how-the-pirate-bay-changed-the-way-we-steal/>

Jonas Andersson,

2012 “The origins and impacts of Swedish filesharing: a case study, JoPP”

<http://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-0/peer-reviewed-papers/the-origins-and-impacts-of-swedish-filesharing/>

gmaxwell

2011 “Papers from Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society”

<https://thepiratebay.se/torrent/6554331>

#### In class movie:

Steal this Film (Alan Toner, Jaime King 2006)

#### Recommended:

Johns, Adrian

2010 “A General History of the Pirates” and “From Phreaking to Fudding” *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates*

### Week 8

#### IN DEPTH: THE POLITICS OF SECRECY, ANONYMITY, AND TRANSPARENCY (or how to Understand Anonymous and Wikileaks)

#### October 24: Crypto, Anonymity, and Dissent

Zimmerman, Phil

1999 “How PGP Works/Why Do You Need PGP?” *High Noon on the Electronic Frontier*

Greendberg, Andy

2012 *This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeaks, Cypherpunks, and Hacktivists Aim to Free the World's Information* [chapters TBD]

Sunstein, Cass  
2003 *Why Societies Need Dissent* [Introduction and chapter 5]

Thoreau, Henry David  
1848 "On Civil Disobedience"  
<http://art-bin.com/art/odisob.html>

Assange, Julian  
1996 "State and Terrorist Conspiracies"  
<http://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf>

## Week 9

### October 31: Roots

Greenberg, Andy  
2012 *This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeaks, Cypherpunks, and Hacktivists Aim to Free the World's Information* [chapters TBD]

Knuttila, Lee  
2011 "User unknown: 4chan, Anonymity and Contingency." *First Monday*  
<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3665/3055>

Auerbach, David  
2012 "Anonymity as Culture: Treatise." *Triple Canopy*  
[http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/anonymity\\_as\\_culture\\_\\_treatise](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/anonymity_as_culture__treatise)

Hyde, Lewis  
1998 "Speechless Shame and Shameless Speech." *Trickster Makes this World*

Domingez, Ricardo  
2002 "Electronic Disturbance: An Interview." *Cultural Resistance Reader*

Epstein, Barbara  
1988 "The Politics of Pregifurative Politics." *Cultural Resistance Reader*

## Week 10

### November 7: The Politics of Hacking

(no class but please read these pieces in anticipation of the following weeks)

Soderberg, Johan  
Forthcoming "Determining social change: The role of technological determinism in the collective action framing of hackers. *New Media & Society*

Coleman, Gabriella  
2013 "The Cultural Critique of Intellectual Property Law." *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*.

Derrida, Jacques  
1992 "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority"

## Week 11



## November 14: Understanding Anonymous

Coleman, Gabriella

2012 "Our Weirdness Is Free. The logic of Anonymous—online army, agent of chaos, and seeker of justice" *Triple Canopy*  
[http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our\\_weirdness\\_is\\_free](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our_weirdness_is_free)

Coleman, Gabriella

2012 Am I Anonymous? *Limn*  
<http://limn.it/am-i-anonymous/>

Deseriis, Marco

2012 Is Anonymous a New Form of Luddism?  
<http://www.thething.it/snafu/?p=711>

Norton, Quinn

2012 How Anonymous Picks Targets, Launches Attacks, and Takes Powerful Organizations Down  
[http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2012/07/ff\\_anonymous/](http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2012/07/ff_anonymous/)

Bakhtin, Mikhail

1988 "Rabelais and his World." *Cultural Resistance Reader*.

Galloway, Alex

2010 "Networks." *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.

Bogad, Lawrence

2006 "Tactical Carnival: Social movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance." *A Boal Companion*

Kenneth Cmiel

1994 "The Politics of Civility." *Sixties: From Memory to History*

Anonymous,

2012 Digital Sit-ins: DDOS is legitimate civil disobedience.  
<http://anonymops.org/post/16585162289/digital-sit-ins-ddos-is-legitimate-civil-disobedience>

[Links to Anonymous PR media, such as press releases and videos will be circulated before this class]

### Listen to before class:

The Hacker Law/ On the Media: <http://www.onthemediamedia.org/2011/sep/23/the-hacker-law/>

### After Hours Movie:

We are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists (Brian Knappenberger, 2011)

Week 12
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## November 21: The Broader and Historical Context

McCurdy, Patrick

2013 "From the Pentagon Papers to Cablegate: How the Network Society Has Changed Leaking." *Beyond WikiLeaks*

Coleman, Gabriella

2013 "Anonymous and the Politics of Leaking." *Beyond Wikileaks*

Chomsky, Noam

1999 "Domestic Terrorism: Notes on the State System of Oppression" *New Political Science*  
<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/199909-.htm>

Shorrock, Tim  
2005 "The Spy Who Billed Me." *Mother Jones*.  
<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/01/spy-who-billed-me>

Mueller, Robert  
2012 "Combating Threats in the Cyber World: Outsmarting Terrorists, Hackers, and Spies." RSA  
Speech  
<http://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/combating-threats-in-the-cyber-world-outsmarting-terrorists-hackers-and-spies>

Libick, Martin  
2012 Cyberdeterrence and Cyberwar. *Rand*.  
<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG877.html> [summary only]

#### **After Hours Movie:**

*Secrecy* (Peter Galison, Rob Moss 2008)

Week 13
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#### **November 28: Media and Spectacle**

Lynch, Lisa  
2013 "The Leak Heard Round the World? Cablegate in the Evolving Global Mediascape." *Beyond WikiLeaks*

Debord, Guy  
1994 "Separation Perfected." *The Society of the Spectacle*

Philip, Whitney  
Forthcoming "The House That Fox Built: Anonymous, Spectacle and Cycles of Amplification."  
*Television and New Media*  
<https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/12204>

Gitlin, Todd  
2009 "The Media in the Unmaking of the New Left." *The Social Movements Reader*

Couldy, Nick  
2003 "Rethinking Media Events." *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*

#### **Listen to Before Class:**

"Guy Debord predicted our distracted society"  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/30/guy-debord-society-spectacle>

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#### **MORE ON ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION**

Class will be conducted as a seminar and I have structured the assignments to encourage active and engaged class discussions focused on the readings. Students will be responsible for leading discussions on the readings and should critically engage the readings and class conversations. Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absences. After this, your grade will drop by one half letter for each missed class

To aid in discussion and improve your writing skills, one of the main assignments for class is to turn in a total of six response papers (2-3 pages in length) where you will (1) provide a short summary of the thesis and argument of a portion of the readings for the day's class in about one page (2) and provide a critical engagement with the text in the rest of the paper. You will also be required to turn in questions on four occasions on days you are not writing the response papers. Questions and papers are due by 11 a.m. the day of class on our class website and bring in a hard copy of the paper to class. All submitted work must be typed, double spaced, and paginated in 12-point Times New Roman font, and submitted in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or OpenOffice format. The student's name, date, and response paper number should appear on the first page, and pages should be numbered. Since you have multiple opportunities to turn in papers, no late papers will be accepted.

The essays will be graded with a letter grade and returned to you usually within a week or two. I will provide more comments for the first few weeks and then generally move to providing only a grade with some questions and commentary.

I will be circulating example essays the first day of class and they will be posted on our course website. As you will see, I expect enough of a summary of the main arguments and methods for the assigned readings to convince me that you have actually done the readings as well as some critical and direct engagement with the texts and arguments. The essays should be checked for spelling and grammar. Feel free to bring in related questions and material so long as it is done in a manner that directly engages with the text.

**You will only have to turn in a total of six response papers and four questions and these assignments must be completed on separate occasions.**

(And why are you making us do this?)

*Practically speaking, for the here and now:* On the one hand, this may seem a little torturous as you will have to give yourself enough time to read and write before the start of many (though not all) classes. On the other hand, this assignment will help you read actively and critically so that you are well prepared for class discussion, which is the cornerstone of this class and will help for your mid-term and take home final exam.

*Practically speaking, for the future:* By the end of the semester you will also be able to write a short but engaging essay, which includes summary and analysis, in a short period of time, which is a skill that I hope will prove useful in the future.

*Philosophically speaking:* When I teach a seminar-based class, I want it to be true to its spirit: we are in class to collectively engage in a discussion, exploration, and debate concerning the readings and the issues they raise. For a seminar to really work, students must do the readings and have a shared set of references to bring to the table. Otherwise, we are just talking about our general opinions and thoughts. I structured the assignments not only to encourage participatory learning but also to build the necessary foundation for this seminar to run properly.

## EVALUATION

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate.  
Plus and minus grade indicate the standing within the above grades.