COMS 648: At the Interface

Professor Jonathan Sterne
Winter 2023 | Tuesdays 14:35-17:25
W220 Arts[1]

jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (he/they) https://sterneworks.org

> You can call me Jonathan or Professor Sterne, as you prefer. Ask me about titles in the first class if you want to know more or aren't sure what to do. Please tell me what you would like to be called.

Office Location: W280 or Zoom at

Office Hours: Right after class, 5:40-6:40pm on Tuesdays. You can book a slot here: and priority will be given to those who book, though I'm happy to accept drop-ins if there are open slots. If you need longer than 15 minutes, email me or ask after class. I will usually have to wrap up by 6:40.

Seminar Description:

---

[1]   McGill University is named for James McGill who enslaved Black and Indigenous people. Learn more here at https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations_and_Report.pdf (pp. 55-67). McGill is situated on unceded Indigenous lands in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). The Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are recognized as the traditional custodians of these lands and waters. Zoom's headquarters are located on Muwekma Ohlone territory. Desire2Learn's headquarters are located on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie. The actual servers we will be using for MyCourses and Zoom may or may not be located in Quebec, but are very likely to benefit from water rights expropriated from Indigenous peoples.

This is a course about the politics of interfaces. How do technologies present themselves to people? How do people present themselves to technologies? How do decisions about command and control become implicated in broader political formations? Does design transparency lead to justice and does opacity lead to injustice? How do technologies uphold or undermine structural ableism?

After reviewing some "classic" interface theory and its roots in theories of the *dispositif* (and more recently, affordances), the course will take students through emerging critical perspectives on interfaces from a variety of approaches. Readings will be drawn from media studies, disability studies, sound studies, science and technology studies, and other fields. We will consider touchscreens, sensors, voice assistants, and computer operating systems, but also dashboards, game controllers, cochlear implants, analog synthesizers and technologies that claim to have "no" interface. Throughout the term, students follow a single interface of their choosing, building a dossier of primary documents and approaches to it.

Goals

At the end of the term students should be able to:
1. Give a good theoretical account of different perspectives on interfaces;
2. Connect debates about interfaces to broader conversations about bodies and technologies;
3. Develop a repertoire of approaches and techniques for describing, analyzing, historicizing and/or ethnographizing (←not a word) interfaces;
4. Frame those approaches in terms of a critique of power and difference;
5. Produce an original analysis of an interface by working hard to not produce an original analysis of an interface (see semester project below);
6. Leave the course more precise, confident, and skilled in your thinking and scholarly practice than when you went in.

Class credos:

More than one thing can be true: cultural analysis only works if it is possible to hold onto apparently contradictory ideas at once, and explain how they can both be true in specific circumstances.

No bullshit: we will avoid easy, prepackaged explanations of complex phenomena, and we will greet the claims of interested parties as open to interpretation and analysis. We will also not bullshit one another.

You have the right to be wrong: part of learning is changing one's own perspective. This is only possible where ideas can be expressed and challenged, and people are allowed to change their minds. But: no "devil's advocates" will be allowed (see: "no bullshit").

It is everyone's job to imagine a better world: any critique of how something is raises the question of how it ought to be. You will be asked to think carefully and imaginatively about alternatives to the way things are.

Follow the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated.

And three special graduate-level credos:

Precision, precision, precision: humanists value precision in the use of language. We should be precise and intentional even when we are being ambiguous.

Make your own problems: don't accept prepackaged, mechanistic, or psychologistic explanations for complex cultural phenomena. Break with common sense. Our job as scholars is to frame new questions and objects of study, and then go about researching them.

Be patient with yourself and with others: at our best, we are all beginners in some way.

Delivery Plan

Class sessions: *At the Interface* is a student-driven, discussion-intensive seminar. Your attendance and engagement are essential. The first meeting of the term has more lecturing, but after that, it is a mix of discussion, mini-lectures and in-class exercises. Large group discussions will follow a speakers' list to prevent interruptions, and people will say "and that's my thought" or "and that's my question" to indicate they have finished talking.

As of today and per McGill regulations, the course will be in person. On the first day we will discuss access policies.

Covid: I am immunocompromised. Therefore, I will be teaching in a mask. I will provide you with procedural masks throughout the term. I ask that you wear them and not take them off to speak. (Though of course you can take them off for a moment to have a drink of water or whatever).

The Course Website: We will use McGill's MyCourses system.

Readings will be available on MyCourses. In addition, I recommend you order the following books in ink print form through your favourite bookseller:

Friedner, Michele. *Sensory Futures: Deafness and Cochlear Implant Infrastructures in India.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.
Plotnick, Rachel. *Power Button: A History of Pleasure, Panic, and the Politics of Pushing.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018.

Here's a link to help you do the readings:
Paul Edwards, How to Read a Book, http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf

Another scorching hot tip: pay attention to the publication date. Some of what you're reading is itself historical.

Class Schedule

Please bring readings to class. I strongly recommend ink print and will discuss why in class, but screens are acceptable as well (see technology policy below).

10 Jan Apologia + Walkthrough Method
Welcome to the course! I'll lecture a bit more than usual (maybe), provide an introduction to my approach and to the first assignment. Then we will do some "walkthroughs" in small groups.

This syllabus.
Light, Ben, Jean Burgess and Stefanie DuGuay. "The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps." *New Media and Society* 23:3 (2018): 881-900.
Cramer, Florian and Matthew Fuller. "Interface," *Software Studies: A Lexicon, ed.* Matthew Fuller, 149-152. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

Highly Recommended:
Hamraie, Aimi. "Normate Template: Knowing-Making the Architectural Inhabitant." *Building Access: Universal Access and the Politics of Disability,* 19-39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

17 Jan "Oh look, some interfaces!" + Introduction to Hermeneutic Reverse-Engineering (commitment due on the 16th– more on this below in the semester project section)
These readings are designed to give you a sense of the expansiveness of the term "interface" and the range of approaches that can be brought to it—you'll read about graphical user interfaces (GUIs) but also thermostats, lungs, and airport scanners. In class, we will discuss how authors construct the interface as an object of study, and hermeneutically reverse-engineer one of the articles as practice for your weekly assignments.

Starosielski, Nicole. "Thermostat." *Media Hot and Cold,* 31-71. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.
Jue, Melody. "Interface: Breathing Under Water," *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater,* 34-70. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
Costanza-Chock, Sasha. "Introduction: #TravelingWhileTrans, Design Justice, and Escaping the Matrix of Domination," *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the World We Need*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020. Read it online here: https://designjustice.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/ap8rgw5e/release/1
Artist, American. "Black Gooey Universe." *Unbag #2* (Jan 2018): 36-44. Now available here (the publication itself has disappeared from the internet): https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59238d36d2b8575d127794a4/t/5a60bdecf9619 a7f881b02a0/1516289526013/UNBAG_2_AmericanArtist.pdf (Also, there's art to check out: https://americanartist.us/works/black-gooey-universe)

24 Jan Cochlear Implants

I thought it would be nice to start our weekly writing practice with a single author so people can experience the range of approaches one can take in drawing from a single writer. Also, beginning from an anthropological perspective helps to center our attention on technologies as part of webs of relationships rather than autonomous actors.

Friedner, Michele. *Sensory Futures: Deafness and Cochlear Implant Infrastructures in India.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

31 Jan Software: Concealment, Revelation, and Ideology
Also known as "crunchy theory week," these readings (and many below) are meant to be read in order. Chun and Galloway are two of the "must-cite" writers on interfaces in media studies. These texts are over a decade old but shape debates about the politics of interfaces. Beaudry is added (I suggest you read it last) because he is a hidden source for both of them: the claims about interface and ideology continue a conversation that was originally located in psychoanalytic cinema studies.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Daemonic Interfaces, Empowering Obfuscations," *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory,* 59-95. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

Galloway, Alexander. "Software and Ideology" and "Are Some Things Unrepresentable?" *The Interface Effect,* 54-100. Cambridge: Polity, 2012.

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," translated by Alan Williams. *Film Quarterly* 28:2 (1974): 39-47.

Recommended:
Van den Boomen, Marrianne. "Interfacing by Matieral Metaphors: How Your Mailbox May Fool You." *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology,* eds. Marianna van den Boomen, Sybille Lammes, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Joost Raessens, and Mirko Tobias Schäfer, 253-265. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009.
Emerson, Lori. "Indistinguishable from Magic: Invisible Interfaces and Digital Literature as Demystier," *Reading Writing Interfaces*, 1-46. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

7 Feb Black Boxes: Even more concealment and revelation
Concealment is ideological for last week's writers, but for people working in Science & Technology Studies, concealment is a social process. Pinch and Bijker's social construction and Latour's actor-network theory are two canonical approaches and both take the black box concept from engineering to describe the social process of science and technology. Unlike Chun and Galloway, these particular texts are less-often cited today in S&TS (though the authors still are), but the debate around black boxes still continues within the same parameters. Burrell, meanwhile, takes a more heterodox approach to the black box issue as it appears in machine learning (AI).

Last revision: 5 Jan

Pinch, Trevor and Wiebe Bijker. "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or, How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other." *Social Studies of Science* 14:3 (1984): 399-441.

Latour, Bruno. "Opening Pandora's Black Box," *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society,* 1-21, (check out his summary of the intro in the first few paragraphs of the next chapter)*.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Burrell, Jenna. "How the Machine 'Thinks': Understanding Opacity in Machine Learning Algorithms." *Big Data and Society* 3:1 (Jan-Jun 2016): 1-12.

Recommended:
Geoghegan, Bernard Dionysius. "Introduction: Codification," *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory,* 2-20. Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. (*note especially the definitions on 11-14—these will be especially useful if you are new to thinking about cybernetics and information theory*).

Siegel, Greg. "Black Boxes," *Forensic Media: Reconstructing Accidents in Accelerated Modernity,* 89-142. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

14 Feb **Online: Between Friction and Seamlessness**
This week we turn to online culture more directly. Nagy and Neff give an excellent overview of the concept of "affordance" and retool it for media studies. James Ash et al consider interfaces for high-cost short term loans, which primarily target poor and working class people, while Duguay considers the interfacial and platform politics of Tinder.

Nagy, Peter and Gina Neff. "Imagined Affordances: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory." *Social Media + Society* (September 2015): 1-9.

Ash, James, Ben Anderson, Rachel Gordon and Paul Langley. "Digital Interface Design and Power: Friction, Threshold, Transition." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36:6 (2018): 1136-1153.

DuGuay, Stefanie. "Queering Tinderella: Personal Identifiability in Platform-Generated Identities," *Personal but not Private: Queer Women, Sexuality and Identity Modulation on Digital Platforms,* 32-54. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Recommended:
Hu, Tung-Hui. "Introduction," *Digital Lethargy: Dispatches from the Age of Disconnection.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022 (the library does not yet have a digital copy but I will share when it does).

Morris, Jeremy and Sarah Murray, eds., *Appified: Culture in the Age of Apps.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018. (Pick a chapter or two that looks interesting.)

21 Feb **Augmentation, Substitution, Prosthesis**
This week is all about disability, and we will shuttle between textuality and the built environment. Dokumaci retools the affordance concept—again—for thinking with disability; Kleege discusses the practicalities and aesthetics of audiodescription—how to pluralize our sensory understandings of interfaces; Hendren rethinks the idea of a prosthesis.

Dokumaci, Arseli. "Introduction: Arseli's Story." In *Activist Affordances: How Disabled People Improvise More Habitable Worlds,* 1-27. Durham: Duke University Press, 2023.

Kleege, Georgina. "Audiodescription Described," *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Hendren, Sara. "Limb," *What Can a Body Do?: How We Meet the Built World,* 33-64. New York: Riverhead Books, 2020.

Recommended:

Zdenek, Sean. "A Rhetorical View of Captioning." In *Reading Sounds: Closed-Captioned Media and Popular Culture*, 1-32. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Alper, Meryl. "Talking iPads and the Partial Promise of Voice: What Is Voice?" *Giving Voice: Mobile Communication, Disability, and Inequality,* 35-64. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.

28 Feb no class post a picture of a palm tree

7 March **Buttons**
This is an expansive history of the push button in the United States, and it puts the politics of labour at the very centre of an interface history.

Plotnick, Rachel. *Power Button: A History of Pleasure, Panic, and the Politics of Pushing.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018.

14 March **Reading, Scanning, and Playback**

Alexander, Neta. "The Right to Speed Watch (or, when Netflix Discovered Its Blind Users)" *Interface Frictions* (book manuscript in preparation, 2023; provided by the author for us; please do not share this draft with anyone, and remember it's a draft)

Mattern, Shannon. "Command and Control: A History of the Urban Dashboard" *Places Journal* (March 2015): https://placesjournal.org/article/mission-control-a-history-of-the-urban-dashboard]/

Drucker, Johanna. "Interface and Interpretation." *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production,* 138-179. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Recommended:

(co-authored with Mara Mills) "Aural Speed Reading: Some Historical Bookmarks," *PMLA* (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*) 135:2 (2020): 401-411.

21 March **TBA (Prof probably away), probably a week to beef up your lit reviews and take stock of where you are in the term project.**

28 March **Controls and Controllers**

Last revision: 5 Jan

These readings all deal with hardware in a world full of software. McKittrick and Weheliye use drum machines as a jumping off point for cultural analysis; Parisi considers the commercialization of touch-based interfaces for everything from smartphones to teledildonics; and Mike D'Errico considers musical controllers for DJs alongside game controllers and anxieties around live performance.

McKittrick, Katherine and Alexander Weheliye. "808s and Heartbreak." *Propter Nos* 2:1 (Fall 2017): 13-42.

Parisi, David. "The Cultural Construction of Technologized Touch," *Archaeologies of Touch: Interfacing with Haptics from Electricity to Computing,* 265-321. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

D'Errico, Mike. "Controller Cultures," *Push: Software Design and the Cultural Politics of Music Production,* 123-149*.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Recommended:
Rose, Tricia. "Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice in Rap Music," *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, 62-97. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

Simon, Victoria. "Democratizing Touch: Xenakis' UPIC, Disability, and Avant-Gardism." *Amodern 9* (April 2020): https://amodern.net/article/democratizing-touch/

4 April **Keyboards and Switchboards**
This week we dive into keyboards, switchboards, and their alternatives. Venus Green describes the labour processes behind early telephone switchboards; Trevor Pinch examines how piano keyboards got attached to synthesizers and introduces the concept of path dependency; and Thomas Mullaney discusses Chinese typing practices through the concept of input.

Green, Venus. "Hello, Central?" *Race on the Line: Gender, Technology, and Labor in the Bell System 1880-1980.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Pinch, Trevor. "Why You Go To a Music Store to Buy a Synthesizer: Path Dependence and the Social Construction of Technology," *Path Dependence and Creation,* eds. Raghu Garud and Peter Karnoe, 381-99. New York: Psychology Press, 2001.

Mullaney, Thomas. "QWERTY is Dead! Long Live QWERTY!" and "Conclusion: Toward a History of Chinese Computing and the Age of Input." *The Chinese Typewriter: A History,* and 237-281 and 315-321 (be clever and read the conclusion first). Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.

Recommended:
Jain, Lochlann. "Keyboard Design: The Litigation Wave of the 1990s," *Injury: The Politics of Product Design and Safety Law in the United States,* 86-123. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Bates, Eliot. "The Interface and Instrumentality of Modular Synthesis." *Rethinking Music Through Science and Technology Studies,* eds Antoine Hennion and Christophe Levaux, 170-188. London: Routledge, 2021.

11 April **Term Project work-in-progress feedback sessions** + Jonathan's aspirational term paper (I reserve the right to request an extension)

Jonathan Sterne, "A Newish Theory of the Interface" (working title)

<u>Not for a particular week but recommended if you're curious:</u>

Some additional texts I have written or co-written that deal with or analyze interfaces:

"Meet the Dork-o-Phone," *Diminished Faculties: A Political Phenomenology of Impairment,* 41-67*.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.

(co-authored with Elena Razlogova) "Machine Learning in Context, or Learning from LANDR: Artificial Intelligence and the Platformization of Music Mastering," *Social Media + Society* 5:2 (April-June 2019): 1-18.

"Space Within Space: Artificial Reverb and the Detachable Echo," *Grey Room* 60 (Summer 2015): 110-131.

"The Software Passes the Test When the User Fails It: Constructing Digital Models of Analog Signal Processors," *Testing Hearing,* eds. Viktoria Traczyk, Mara Mills and Alexandra Hui, 159-185. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

"Spectral Objects: On the Fetish Character of Music Technologies," *Sound Objects*, eds. Rey Chow and James Steintrager, 94-109. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

"Analog." In *Digital Keywords*, ed. Ben Peters, 31-44. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

"Compression: A Loose History." In *Signal Traffic*, eds. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, 31-52. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

"Of MPEG, Measurement, and Men" and "Is Music a Thing?" in *MP3: the Meaning of a Format,* 148-226*.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

"Audile Technique and Media" and "The Social Genesis of Sound Fidelity," *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction,* 137-78 and 215-286*.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Product (and % of semester grade):

I.   Contribution to the course (10%)

To earn this 10% of the grade you should:
1. Take a turn as The Cleaner (see below) and work with the other Cleaners for the week if there are any.
2. Show up regularly to seminar.
3. Participate actively across the term. Some ways to actively participate actively include: listening attentively, making thoughtful contributions to discussion in person or online (I am more interested in quality than quantity), helping out and supporting classmates, asking for help when you need it. I understand people can

have better and worse days, this is meant as a holistic goal for the term, not a micro-goal for each week.

4. Keep up with course announcements and emails.
5. See Etiquette below for more about class discussions.

The Cleaner: Each week, 1-2 students will "clean up" from discussions. Discussions routinely involve references to readings, topics and ideas not covered in class. We will make a "Classography" for these references, and when it is your turn to be cleaner, you will keep track of references to outside materials on a given day. That means following up with me or classmates. For instance, if someone were to reference an author we did not read in class, as cleaner you would ask you to provide a reference or explanation for what you mentioned in class. (A nice side effect is that this discourages name-dropping a bit.)

II.   Semester Project (85%), aka, "The Process. Commit to the process."

1.   <u>16 January: The commitment.</u>

By 5pm on 16 January, you must submit a proposed topic to me for your semester project. The 1-2 page document will offer a 1-paragraph description of what you intend to research, and a list of potential places to go looking for primary source materials that matches well with the kinds of materials discussed in the readings. Please also list 5 secondary sources you can consult, ideally other scholars in your field (or a related field) who have written about your topic.

Note: This commitment is <u>not</u> provisional; once I approve it (and I may ask you to modify), <u>you are committed to it</u> for the entire term, though you can take it anywhere you like.

Your topic should be broad enough to keep you interested for 12 weeks, narrow enough to actually yield something like a conference talk or a journal article.

<u>Importantly, your topic does not have to be completely original.</u> You can research something that's already been researched. There is no burden of originality at all in object choice. In fact, I recommend avoiding the impulse to be too clever at this stage.

<u>I strongly recommend that you also avoid your planned dissertation or thesis topic (you can apply for an exception).</u> Choose something similar, allied, orthogonal or completely different to it, so long as you're comfortable with the topic and it's interesting to you. This will allow you greater room to experiment and also, free you of a certain amount of ego-investment in the topic. I will provide examples from prior seminars.

2.   <u>Weekly (except as noted): the dossier.</u>

Each week (by Monday, 5pm), you will acquire at least one artifact or document for your semester project in that has some relation to the week's reading assignment. Some weeks I will

give more direct guidance than others. If your object is not digital, you will find a way to document it digitally, and post your document to a folder on the MyCourses site for this class.

You are, of course, welcome to collect more, but this is meant to be a process of weekly accumulation. Even if you collect a lot of documents in a single week, you are expected to keep at it week after week.

3.   Weekly (except as noted): papers.

Each week (by Monday, 5pm), you will upload to MyCourses a short paper of approximately 300-600 words (1-3 pages double-spaced in a standard font, excluding citations). If the class prefers to do this by listserv, we can share work that way. The paper will make use of the document or artifact you acquired for the week (if you acquired more than one, focus on one, though others may be mentioned if necessary; you may also refer to material from previous weeks).

The paper must be written in the style of the author we have read for the week. Based on your own hermeneutic reverse-engineering of the text, choose an aspect of the week's assigned reading to imitate and try your best to imitate it. Your job is to try and occupy the same discursive headspace as the reading, except with your own material. The relevant aspects of "style" here are up to your interpretation. Is it something about the author's prose style that is relevant? Her analytical approach or theoretical commitments? The types of source materials he uses? We will discuss the mechanics of this in class on 13 January.

Bring your paper to class (and your artifact if it's good for show-and-tell) and be prepared to discuss your choices.

4.   Weekly (except as noted): in-class readings.

Each week, we will have one or more students read from their papers, which will lead us into a discussion of the assigned text for the week. I may revise or modify this practice as seems fitting for class discussion. I may not do this when guests are visiting if it makes people too nervous. We will discuss.

5.   18 April, 5pm: The "Not-Really-Final" paper (posted in the appropriate place on the course website). By the time you reach this stage, you will have produced over 20 pages of text, in many different styles. For this project, you will revise them into a single paper, with a coherent argumentative arc and style. This is strictly an exercise in writing and revision. You must get my permission to do additional research; new research at this stage will interfere with the main purposes of this assignment, which is to focus on writing and revision. In exchange for this requirement, you are allowed factual gaps in the paper, noting places where you would need to do more research on a topic before actually presenting or submitting the work somewhere beyond this class. That's why it's "not really final."

For the purpose of this assignment, you may choose to produce either:

a)   a paper of no less than 1800 and no more than 2000 words <u>excluding</u> footnotes and bibliography, suitable for conference presentation. The word limit is strict because at most conferences you would have a strict time limit between 12 and 20 minutes. I'm giving you somewhere between 15-20 minutes as if you were to read 2000 words aloud at a reasonable pace. (I don't endorse the practice of just reading papers aloud at conferences, but it's a guide for what you could cover.)

b)   a paper of at least 7000 but no more than 9000 words <u>including notes and bibliography</u> in the format of something that could be submitted to a journal. Again, the upper limit is strict because it would be strict with a journal.

III.   Reflection paper (5%)

Within 48 hours of submitting your not-really-final paper (<u>by 20 April, 5pm</u>), you will write me an informal email (literally, start it with "Dear Jonathan" and write it as an email) answering the following questions:

1. What did you learn about being a scholar doing the various writing exercises for the course?

2. What do you think you did particularly well? Is there an area you feel you improved on over the course of the term? What did you struggle with and how will you deal with that going forward?

3. What skill or skills do you want to work on next as you go forward in your education?

4. Do you have any questions or additional thoughts to share with me?

Course Policies

Access Needs/Accommodation: I study disability, have disabilities, and believe firmly in the right to access. Just come talk with me at the beginning of term, or send me an email, and we will figure out what works for you and for the class. I only ask that you be forthright and clear with me from the beginning to avoid surprises later in the term. You do <u>not</u> need any kind of medical documentation (what we call "biocertification" in disability studies) in order to seek accommodation. You also do not need to contact the Office for Student Accessibility and Achievement in order to ask for an accommodation, though you are certainly welcome to work with them if you are so inclined. I work with them all the time for my undergrad classes. The SAA can be reached at 514-398-6009 (voice), access.achieve@mcgill.ca (email) https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/ (web).

The above commitment to accommodate applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus. Survivors are encouraged to consult the resources provided by the Students' Society of McGill University (https://ssmu.ca/resources/sexual-violence/), the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society (http://www.sacomss.org/wp/) and the McGill Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/).

Universal/Resonant Design: My courses are intentionally designed to be modular and flexible and to address different learning styles and needs. Nevertheless, aspects of this syllabus—requirements, expectations, etc.—may conflict with your access needs. <u>I can be flexible if you come to me within the first two weeks of class to discuss your access needs.</u> Note that some accommodation requests could potentially conflict with *others'* access needs (or mine), and/or the pedagogical goals of the course, in which case they might need to be negotiated.

Etiquette:

1. I expect you to really **try**.

2. **Ask!** The best students admit ignorance. We are all beginners. Imposter syndrome and other afflictions ("not my home discipline," etc.) often leads students to not ask for clarification or explanation when they need it. If you don't "get" something being discussed or why it is being discussed in the way it is, it is very likely you are not alone, so asking will help others as well.

3. **Good faith and good humor** toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. There will be a strict limit on seek-and-destroy hermeneutics. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

4. Related to 1-3, **avoid seek-and-destroy hermeneutics**. You are allowed only one (1) application of "seek-and-destroy" hermeneutics per semester. Use yours wisely.

5. Your job as a participant is to listen actively to what others have to say and advance the discussion. **If you are a confident contributor,** use your confidence for good and not evil. Help bring others into discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be encouraging about the contributions of those who do not say as much.

6. While **personal anecdotes** are allowed, keep in mind this is a seminar. Others may disagree with your interpretation of your experience. This is encouraged and allowed. If you are not comfortable with this, do not share your story. If you share your story and *then* decide you are uncomfortable with others discussing it, just ask us to stop and I will move the discussion along.

7. **Silences** and hesitation are okay. They are not awkward. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious.

8. **Difficult subject matter**: As your prof, I will never do anything intentionally to shock or traumatize students. At the same time, sometimes we discuss difficult subjects in class, and nobody can predict the effect some materials may have on someone. I try to do content warnings when needed, but I can't always predict when they are needed. If I forget, feel free to ask. If you are having difficulty dealing with a class discussion or a reading or recording, you may raise the issue as part of the discussion (keeping in mind #5 above), or you may simply discretely leave class. A note to me (the prof) would be helpful after the fact so that we know what happened and don't think you just got up and left.

Technology Policy: We will discuss a technology policy on the first day of class.

Pre-Covid, my technology policy stated that I would like to avoid an atmosphere of "ambient computing" and "availability to apps and social media." I still want to establish the same baseline: the classroom should be a space of focused discussion, a place to come together. Please try to resist multitasking. If you need to look something up (for the class discussion, not a dinner recipe), please do so quickly and then close that window.

How to Interpret McGill's Inflated Graduate-Level Grades:
(ask for the Zizek version!)
A: Good work
A-:   Satisfactory
B+:   There is a problem with what you submitted
B: There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
B-:   Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
C+ or lower: Officially considered a "fail" by the Graduate Studies Office.

In rare cases, if your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.

You must complete all the major assignments to pass the course.

It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in.

Digital files only exist if they exist in three places. It is your responsibility to properly back up your work. I recommend syncing your important documents to a cloud storage service and having an external hard drive.

Policy regarding incompletes:

I do not believe in extensions of more than a couple weeks for end of term submissions—mostly, they create more problems for graduate students. These are for emergencies only, not for perfectionism.

The K contract: At McGill, grades of incomplete are called "K" grades and they are only supposed to be assigned after the student and professor have agreed upon a contract, which means you need to approach me ahead of time and propose a timeline for getting your work done. I do not give incompletes ("K" grades) except in truly extraordinary circumstances. K grades revert to "F" grades at the end of the next term unless a contract extension is signed by both professor and student.

The Passive-Aggressive K: Should a student fail to turn in a final project and fail to contact me well before my deadline for submission of grades, I will issue a K grade without a contract. McGill Graduate Studies, however, still expects a contract to be filed and it will be the student's responsibility to contact Jonathan and get one in place. In these circumstances, should the project be completed before the next semester's deadline for a KF, it will receive a mark. However, students who receive a "K" in this fashion will not be eligible to receive an "A" or "A-" for the course. I will not sign an extension for a K grade that was granted without a contract, and no late paper will be graded without a K contract being in place beforehand. I also cannot promise comments on a paper submitted after a passive-aggressive K.

Late Work: A big part of this class is "doing the work" which means developing a weekly writing practice as part of your thinking. I am not generally of a punitive mindset but repeatedly submitting late work is contrary to the intent of the weekly assignments.

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French. If you plan to write in French, please let me know. I'm also not good enough at French to give you feedback on style, but I can read for comprehension.

Class discussions are in English, but you're certainly welcome to resort to French if you can't find the right word in English and we'll figure it out together.

Nondiscrimination: I value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, appearance, size, personal difference or the use of assistive technology in negotiating that difference. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher, the assigned readings, or the majority of your classmates in order to do well in this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it.* If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know.

You must complete all the major assignments to pass the course. It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in. It is also your responsibility to properly back up your work: keep more than one digital copy and always have a paper copy of anything you submit.

Required Academic Integrity Statement: 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/integrity)

Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control [HAHAHAHAHAHA WHAT WOULD THAT LOOK LIKE CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE SUCH A THING?!?!?!?], the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

I am keenly aware that I am still teaching in the middle of a global pandemic and that many of us could find ourselves in difficult situations beyond our control during the semester. Please do not hesitate to contact me if anything happens that makes learning and engaging difficult for you. The sooner, the better.

I also strongly recommend that you make 1-2 class buddies early in the term whom you can text if you miss an entire class meeting, or need help from a peer on something. To facilitate this buddy-making process, I will create some arbitrary "pods" for you to join and use them a couple times for class discussion.

Thanks! Carrie Rentschler, Shannon Mattern, and almost everyone on this twitter thread.