

Disability, Technology, Communication

COMS 492 (001)—Special Topics in Power, Difference and Justice, Fall 2012

Tuesdays 11:30-14:30, 230 Ferrier

Professor Jonathan Sterne

Office: Arts W280

Office hours: 14:30-15:30, Tuesdays (no appointment necessary—please drop in!)
and by appointment.

Office Phone: 398-5852 (I rarely pick up; I check voicemail at least once a day TTh)

Email: jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (I check at least once daily M-F when I'm in town—please allow a couple days for a reply. If your email requires a long reply I may ask you to see me. If you have a question that is easily answered on the course website or in course materials, I will direct you there.)

Prospectus

This course explores disability scholarship in order to rethink our basic concepts of communication, technology and culture. We will consider critical accounts of disability against theories of technology and communication. Most available theories of communication and technology presuppose a fully “able” subject, even though there is little warrant for doing this when we consider the full variety of human conditions. What happens if we remove that presupposition and instead begin by presupposing the human variety?

Requirements

Books:

Davis, Lennard, ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 3rd edition. London and New York: Routledge, 2010 ISBN: 0415873762 Used copies are fine; earlier editions may have incorrect readings.

Pullin, Graham. *Design Meets Disability*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009. ISBN: 0262516748

A coursepack will also be available at the bookstore.

Copies of required readings will also be on reserve at McLennan/Redpath Reserves.

Etiquette:

1. Your goal is full attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading all of required texts. I expect the very best you can give.
2. Show 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 circumstance. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as

advanced ones. You are free to change your mind at any time; so are others. Arguments are not contests.

3. Avoid “seek and destroy” criticism of others’ ideas (or ideas in the readings). If you have something critical to say, be ready to explain how the piece could be improved. If you disagree with the premise of a piece, then read for what motivates the argument.
4. Personal experience is sometimes a necessary part of discussion, but be thoughtful before bringing it up. Is it really relevant to the topic? Do you want others to know what you are about to say? Are you prepared to seriously consider others’ (equally valid) interpretations of your experience if they differ from your own? Anecdotes are not the same thing as systematically collected scholarly evidence.
5. Be mindful of your own use of technology. You should put away laptops, mobile phones, and other personal communication technologies (apart from writing utensils, paper and class texts) except when required for an activity or necessary for a student’s accommodation.

Product (and % of Semester Grade):

I. Weekly response papers (30%)

For each class (except those noted below), write a 1-2 page (double spaced—350-500 words) response to one of the assigned readings (or part of a book if a book is assigned). The response should be “critical” in the sense that it works through and engages with an idea from the reading. Ideally, your critique will help stimulate discussion in the class. All class members should be prepared to say something about what they wrote, and I will have a few students read their critiques each week as a way of starting the discussion.

Critiques should be posted to the MyCourses site by 3pm each Monday before class. I will grade them on a pass/fail basis to encourage risk-taking, but will note exceptional effort or achievement over the course of the term.

II. Normative Project (10%)

For the class on 23 October, students will write a slightly longer, 5-page double-spaced paper (plus scholarly apparatus) based on an assignment (due on the 22nd, 3pm). Students will apply Graham Pullin’s book by planning an accessible date in Montreal, from start to finish. The date can be for any configuration of abilities, genders, sexualities or number of people: the important thing is that you think through accessibility in terms of getting around the city and engaging with its cultural life.

The assignment may be completed its own terms, but may also be folded into a larger semester project.

III. Discussion Participation and Facilitation (15%)

Participation:

I expect everyone to participate regularly in class discussion. You should come every week ready to discuss the readings. I notice (and appreciate it) when students make good contributions to the course online or in other ways besides speaking up in class. I distinguish between quantity and quality.

Facilitation:

Once during the term you (or you and a colleague) will be designated **Finder(s) of Objects**. The Finder of Objects will

- 1) locate an object or two for us to discuss in relation to the readings,
- 2) lead a discussion about the object, and
- 3) make a short post on the relevant class discussion board with links to the materials used in the presentation (if they are available online), or full bibliographic or other source information for materials that exist only in physical form (such that other class members could get ahold of them if they wanted to).

Your object may be an image, a sound recording, a video, a device, or anything else you see fit to bring in. I prefer that people bring in objects created by someone other than themselves, but if you made something particularly cool, please consult with me. The classroom is equipped with a VGA cable and 1/8th inch (3.5mm) stereo audio cable to hook up laptops. If you require other equipment, please let me know by 10:00 Monday morning before your class. Audiovisual material should be of short duration—ideally, no more than 5 minutes.

IV. Semester Project (45%)

All semester projects will result in

- a 3-4 page proposal due electronically on the 29th of October (3pm).
- a 5-minute oral précis of your project to be presented on the 30th.
- a short presentation talk on the 4th of December
- a formal scholarly paper (15-20pp, plus scholarly apparatus) or alternative due by 10 December, 3pm.

We will discuss the semester projects in more detail as the course unfolds.

How to Present on December 4th

It is my preference that students present in as fluid a fashion as possible—i.e., give a speech, don't just read a paper. However, recognizing that not everyone is comfortable doing that, students may elect to read from a written text. If you choose to read to us, please make enough copies of your text so that everyone can follow along. If time limits are short, you will need to read an excerpt.

Class Schedule

Bring Printed Copies of Readings to Class

(readings without full citations are in Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader*, 3rd Edition).

11 Sep:

Apologia: some basic concepts for the study of technology and disability

18 Sep:

Defining disability—Intersectionality and Impairment

Davis, "Enforcing Normalcy," 3-19

Linton, "Reassigning Meaning," 223-236

Clare, Eli. "Freaks and Queers." In *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation*, 67-102. Boston: South End Press, 1999.

Wendell, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability," 336-352

Siebers, "Disability and the Theory of Complex Embodiment—For Identity Politics in a New Register," 316-335

Recommended:

Barnes, "A Brief History of Discrimination and Disabled People," 20-32

Wilson, "Disability and the Human Genome," 52-62

25 Sep:

Stigma, Identity, Affiliation

Goffman, Erving. "Stigma and Social Identity." In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963, 1-40

Padden and Humphries, "Deaf People, A Different Center," 393-402

Edwards, "Hearing Aids Are Not Deaf," 403-416

Schweik, Susan. "Introduction." In *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*. New York: New York University Press, 2009, 1-20

Mills, Mara. "Hearing Aids and the History of Electronics Miniaturization." *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 33, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 24-44.

Recommended:

Brown, "Stigma: An Enigma Demystified," 179-192

Brueggemann, "On (Almost) Passing," 209-219

2 Oct

Of Different Minds

Grandin, Temple. "Thinking in Pictures: Autism and Visual Thought." *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism*, 19-42. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Bérubé, Michael. "Genetic Destiny." *Life as We Know It: A Father, a Family and an Exceptional Child*, 3-39. New York: Pantheon Books, 1996.

Peters, John Durham. "Broadcasting and Schizophrenia." *Media, Culture and Society* 32, no. 1 (2010): 123-40.

Pinchevsky, Amit "Bartleby's Autism: Wandering Along Incommunicability," *Cultural Critique* 78 (Spring 2011): 27-59.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby the Scrivener" (originally published 1853). Available lots of places online in many forms. Here's one:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11231/pg11231.html>

Recommended:

Gould, Stephen J. "Introduction" and "The Hereditarian Theory of IQ: An American Invention." *The Mismeasure of Man* (Revised and Expanded Edition), 51-61; 176-263. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.

Strauss, "Autism as Culture," 535-559

Kennedy, Helen, Simon Evans, and Siobhan Thomas. "Can the Web Be Made Accessible for People with Intellectual Disabilities." *The Information Society* 27, no. 1 (2011): 29-39.

Lewis, "A Mad Fight: Psychiatry and Disability Activism," 160-176

9 Oct

Scripting Ability: Technology and Radical Monopoly

Illich, Ivan. "Radical Monopoly," *Tools for Conviviality*, 51-57. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Akrich, Madeleine. "The De-Description of Technical Objects." In *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, edited by Wiebe Bijker and J. Law, 205-24. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence," 383-392.

Jain, Sarah S. Lochlann. "Keyboard Design." In *Injury: The Politics of Product Design and Safety Law in the United States*, 86-123. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Goggin, Gerard, and Christopher Newell. "The Business of Digital Disability." *The Information Society* 23, no. 3 (2007): 159-68.

Recommended:

Illich, Ivan. "Convivial reconstruction." *Tools for Conviviality*, 10-45. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Latour, Bruno. "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer." *Social Problems* 35, no. 1 (1988): 298-310.

16 Oct

Prosthesis: Technologies, Bodies, Abilities

- Lorde, Audrey. "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis." In *The Cancer Journals*, 55-77. Argyle, NY: Spinsters, Ink, 1980.
- Sobchack, Vivian. "A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality." In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 205-225. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. "Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environment." In *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*, edited by Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle, 229-248. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Cartwright, Lisa & Brian Goldfarb. "On the Subject of Neural and Sensory Prosthesis." In *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, edited by Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, 125-154. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Recommended:

- Ihde, Don. "Program One: A Phenomenology of Technics." *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*, 72-123. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 149-182. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Haraway, Donna. "Able Bodies and Companion Species." In *When Species Meet*, 161-179. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

23 Oct

Disability and Design (and Dates)

- Pullin, Graham. *Design Meets Disability*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

Recommended:

- Hahn, Harlan. "Disability and the Urban Environment: A Perspective on Los Angeles." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 4 (1986): 279-88.
- Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines for design:
<http://www.ada.gov/adastd94.pdf>
- And the website for the institute for human-centered design
<http://www.adaptiveenvironments.org/index.php?option=Project&Itemid=208&pid=176>

30 Oct:

Project Proposals Due: no reading assignment; come prepared to discuss your project and get feedback from classmates.

6 Nov

Politics of Self and Representation

(guest star: Susan Silton)

- Carson, Anne. 1992. "The Gender of Sound." In *Glass, Irony and God*, 118-137. New York: New Directions Books.
- Dolar, Mladen. 2006. "The Linguistics of the Voice." In *A Voice and Nothing More*, 13-32. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Downey, Gregory J. "Captioning Television for the Deaf Population." *Closed Captioning: Subtitling, Stenography, and the Digital Convergence of Text with Television*, 53-102. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

A number of artworks (TBA) will also be part of the discussion for this class session.

Recommended

- Haller, Beth A. "The Changing Landscape of Disability News" and "Pity as Oppression in the Jerry Lewis Telethon." In *Representing Disability in an Ableist World*, 1-24, 137-52. Louisville: The Avacado Press, 2010.

****5:30pm, Tuesday 6 Nov, Arts W-215: Susan Silton, "She Had a Voice Like a Beefsteak"**

13 Nov:

Representing Disability (of and for)

- Garland-Thomson, "Beholding," 199-208
- Hevey, "The Enfreakment of Photography," 507-521
- Kleege, "Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account," 522-530
- Mitchell and Snyder. "Narrative Prosthesis"
- Haller, Beth A. "Not Worth Keeping Alive? *New York Times* Narratives About Assisted Suicide." In *Representing Disability in an Ableist World*, 67-86. Louisville: The Avacado Press, 2010.

Recommended:

- Shakespeare, Tom. "Art and Lies? Representations of Disability on Film." In *Disability Discourse*, edited by Marian Corker and Sally French. 164-72. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999.
- Chivers, Sally, and Nicole Markotic, eds. *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010.
- Thomson, Rosemary Garland. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

20 Nov

Media, Politics, Accessibility

- Bérubé, Michael. "Disability and Citizenship." *Dissent*, Spring 2003.
<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=506%5D>
- D'Aubin, April. "Working for Barrier Removal in the ICT Area: Creating a More Accessible

- and Inclusive Canada." *The Information Society* 23, no. 3 (2007): 193-201.
- Ellis, Katie, and Mike Kent. "Does that Face-'Book' Come in Braille?: Social Networking Sites and Disability" and "Challenges and Opportunities: the Road Ahead for Disability in a Digital World." *Disability and New Media*, 95-112, 131-47. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Kennedy, Helen. "The Fragile Ethics of Web Accessibility," *Net-work: Ethics and Values in Web Design*, 107-130. London: Palgrave, 2011.
- Elicessor, Elizabeth. "Bridging Disability Divides." *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 3 (2010): 289-308.

Recommended:

- Constantine, Wendy (2007) "Museums and the Digital Curb Cut,"
http://www.museotech.com/?page_id=29
- Clark, Jo. "The is How the Web Gets Regulated," *A List Apart* (18 November 2008)
<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/thisishowthewebgetsregulated/>
- The Government of Canada, "Defining Disability: A Complex Issue" <http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection/RH37-4-3-2003E.pdf>
- Disability Policy in Canada: <http://www.disabilitypolicy.ca/policy/docs/gdocs.php>
- Charlton, "The Dimensions of Disability Oppression," 147-159

27 Nov:

Revisiting the Medical Model: The Politics of the Disability-Adjusted Life Year (guest star: Nicholas King)

- Canguilhem, Georg, "From the Social to the Vital," *The Normal and the Pathological*, 145-58, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1977.
- Murray, C J. "Quantifying the burden of disease: the technical basis for disability-adjusted life years." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 72, no. 3 (1994): 429-45
- McKenna MT, Michaud CM, Murray CJ, Marks JS. Assessing the burden of disease in the United States using disability-adjusted life years. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2005;28(5): 415-23.
- Grosse SD, Lollar DJ, Campbell VA, Chamie M. Disability and disability-adjusted life years: not the same. *Public Health Reports* 2009;124(2): 197-202.
- Arnesen T, Kapiriri L. Can the value choices in DALYs influence global priority-setting? *Health Policy* 2004;70(2): 137-49.
- Arnesen, Trude, and Erik Nord. "The value of DALY life: problems with ethics and validity of disability adjusted life years." *British Medical Journal* 319, no. 7222 (November 27, 1999): 1423-1425.

4 Dec: Student Presentations

Other Policies

Grades: I am eager to help you do well on assignments before they are due. Please visit me during office hours to ask questions about material for the course and assignments on which you are working.

Grades are assigned based on the scale set out in the Arts and Sciences calendar (85-100=A, etc). Grades in the “A” range are awarded only for superior work (and not merely sufficient performance). Grades in the “B” range are awarded for work that is above satisfactory. In the “C” range they are awarded for satisfactory/sufficient work. And in the “D” range, they reflect unsatisfactory work. You can always check your grades on MyCourses.

Students are allowed to miss one class during the term without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will result in a reduction of their final grade.

Accommodation: If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications of any kind, please notify both the professor and Office for Students with Disabilities by the end of the first week in which you are enrolled in the course. They are located in Room RS56, Redpath Library Bldg., 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TTY), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French. If you plan to write in French, please get in touch with me during add-drop so we can talk about how to handle it, as I am not fluent in French. Since there is a writing-intensive component to the class, we should discuss logistics.

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. In accordance with University policy, I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, 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.

Late papers may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade (one increment of letter grade for the first two days, then an increment per day, including weekends).

Activities for which you must be present (e.g., presentations, finder of objects) **cannot be made up**. If you know you will be absent on a day for which you are obligated, trade with one of your colleagues. Notify me of the trade if it happens. This is your responsibility, not mine.

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

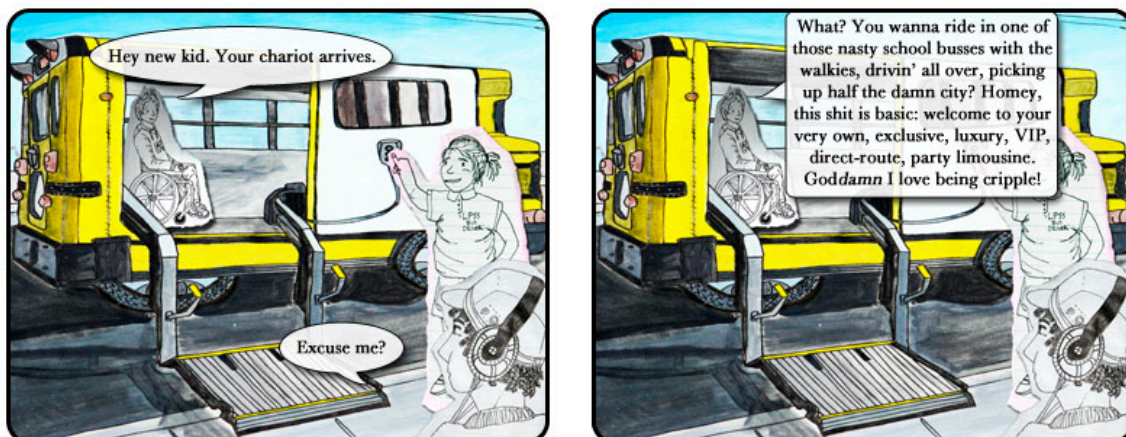
It is also your responsibility to properly back up your work: keep more than one digital copy and always have a paper copy of anything you submit.

You must complete all the major assignments (final paper, normative assignments, etc) to pass the course.

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 for more information).

Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Thanks: Dylan Mulvin.



<http://cripzthecomix.com>