

TEACHING NARRATIVE

“Everybody experiences far more than he understands.”
—Marshall McLuhan—

The sentiment of the above statement alludes to my primary aim as an instructor: to offer an environment in which both student and teacher might be taken up by something larger than their understanding, by a type of knowledge that is not possessed but performed. When I reflect on my own time as a student, the lessons that I remember most clearly are those that changed my mind...and the lessons that changed my mind were those where the ‘knowledge’ at stake was collaboratively shaped rather than unilaterally imparted. This is important because it implicates both the student and teacher in the classroom environment, which results in learning that is applicable across disciplines and that models professional standards in the academy and beyond.

A good teacher can foster this type of learning, both by example and by providing students with the tools to succeed in collaborative, process-oriented environments. In my own experience, the interdisciplinarity of process-oriented learning has allowed me to enrich my life through scientific discourse, music, the arts, and cultural theory, often combining all four in practice-based research.¹ Moreover, I believe that this orientation to teaching can be adopted not only in active learning environments, but also in the lecture components of a class, in the way that assignments are structured and graded, and even in traditional term papers! Ultimately, the value of process-oriented learning is reflected in the students’ adoption of professional attitudes and approaches, but is also signaled by the objective quality of the work produced; when students are engaged in the *process* of learning, they tend to produce work that is itself engaging.²

I experienced this first hand when I had the privilege of leading weekly discussion sessions as part of the *Time of Music* (MUS 323) undergraduate course in the fall of 2007. In this case, the discussions were strongly oriented towards an *exploration* (rather than explanation) of the texts being studied; since the content of the discussions was not graded, I was able to help students feel safe to explore their own personal understandings of the (often difficult) philosophical texts, and to relate them to their own personal world-views. With remarkable frequency, the students’ personal anecdotes provided a fresh perspective from which to return to the specific information that I had hoped they would glean from the text in the first place; having related the text to their own personal experience, though, the students now found themselves implicated in understanding it, and thus motivated to do so. At least one student in the class made specific reference to these class discussions in their course evaluation, commenting that they were a highlight of the class.³ In the future, I will further develop the spirit of these discussions through the use of online forums such as moodle, which additionally offer the chance to increase the multimedia resources of a course (another strategy that is popular with students).

Further to discussions that take place in the classroom, my emphasis on the process of learning also manifests itself in the way that I approach traditional assignments such as paper-writing. In

¹ See my web-portfolio: <http://www.davidcecchetto.net>

² For examples of student comments regarding interactive learning, see Appendix 1, *Student Comments*.

³ See Appendix 2, *Letter From Instructor*, par. 3.

the course mentioned above, I suggested and implemented a peer-review component into the student's final assignments. The instructor was amazed by the increased quality of the papers that resulted from this simple procedure;⁴ personally, I was most excited by the inter-student dialogue that resulted: for the first time, I heard students' discussing one another's papers before and after class! Inspired by this experience, I have since furthered this multi-stage approach to assignments in the hopes of germinating these types of student interactions earlier in the term.⁵

In addition to interactive lectures and multi-staged assignments, a true emphasis on the learning process requires an instructor to be able to successfully communicate with students on a one-to-one basis. Too often, problems arise in the classroom that could be avoided simply by keeping communication channels open to students. To this end, I schedule individual meetings with students for all major assignments, and also regularly seek their informal feedback through the use of anonymous comment slips. These techniques are only successful, though, when they are used in tandem with strong interpersonal skills and the ability to focus precisely on the task at hand. Because I have a proclivity for speaking more abstractly than is sometimes helpful to students, I have tangibly dedicated myself to crafting these attributes by completing a graduate-level education course and by taking employment as a tutor in the university writing centre.⁶ As a result of this training and experiences, I am now able to offer clear assistance to students *in the direction of their own choice*; indeed, I have also discovered that learning to listen to students—rather than simply directing them—not only improves my teaching, but also increases the satisfaction that I take from it.

Of course, not all students will be predisposed towards process-oriented learning. Indeed, some students may feel anxious when they are asked to learn in ways that are outside of their usual academic activities. I try to allow for these feelings in two ways: *firstly*, by offering a variety of activities that cater to diverse learning styles, I hope that each student can find at least one aspect of the class that is in their 'comfort zone.'⁷ Once it is established that students can succeed in different ways, it tends to be easier to develop the trust that is necessary for them to safely take risks; *secondly*, I always ensure that the learning outcomes of each exercise are clear to the students.⁸ If they know why they are doing something, and specifically why they are doing it in a particular way, then they are typically more open to the exercise. Moreover, clearly expressing the learning outcomes of an exercise reassures students that my emphasis on the process of learning is governed by a clear set of outcomes that will furnish students with the skills and knowledge that will help them to successfully achieve their own personal goals. Further, though, the confidence that comes with learning the *process* of achieving goals often results in changes to the goals themselves. Ultimately, this shift in comportment is why I am teaching: to give the students not only the opportunity to develop the skills to identify the cultural current that we all live our lives in, but also to begin to swim against it.

⁴ See Appendix 2, *Letter From Instructor*, par. 2.

⁵ See Appendix 3, *Sample Assignment*.

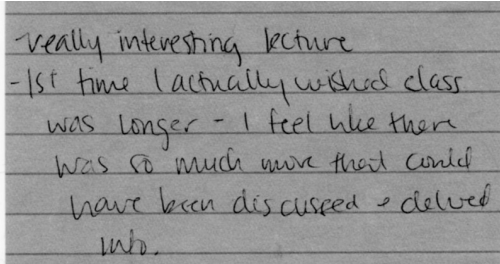
⁶ For the instructor's assessment of my teaching abilities see Appendix 4, *Letter From the Associate Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre, University of Victoria*.

⁷ For an example of the ways that I cater to diverse lesson styles, note the variety of activities displayed in Appendix 5, *Lesson Plan—Instructor Version*.

⁸ See Appendix 6, *Lesson Plan—Student Version*.

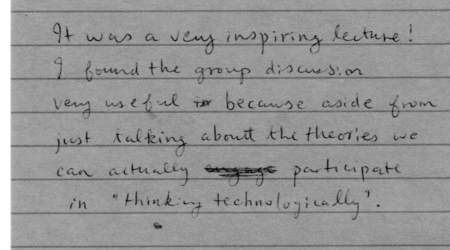
STUDENT FEEDBACK

Note: The following are comments received from students regarding a guest lecture at the University of Toronto in February 2010 (the students were asked to provide feedback). I am happy to provide original copies and/or additional comments on request.



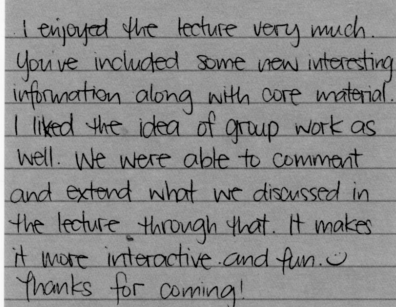
-really interesting lecture
-1st time I actually wished class was longer - I feel like there was so much more that could have been discussed & delved into.

“Really interesting lecture; first time I actually wished class was longer...I feel like there was so much more that could have been discussed and delved into.”



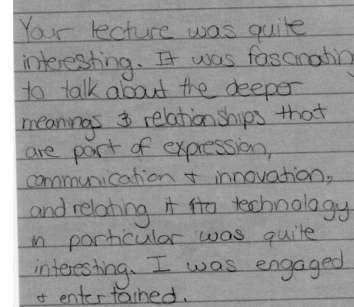
It was a very inspiring lecture!
I found the group discussion very useful ~~too~~ because aside from just talking about the theories we can actually ~~engage~~ participate in “thinking technologically”.

“It was a very inspiring lecture! I found the group discussion very useful because, aside from just talking about the theories, we can actually participate in ‘thinking technologically’.”



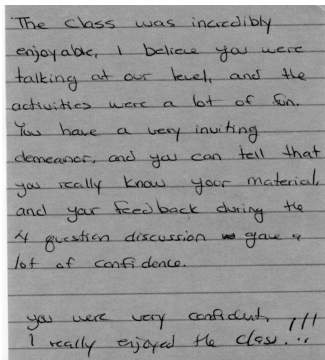
I enjoyed the lecture very much. You've included some new interesting information along with core material. I liked the idea of group work as well. We were able to comment and extend what we discussed in the lecture through that. It makes it more interactive and fun. ☺
Thanks for coming!

“I enjoyed the lecture very much. You’ve included some new interesting material. I liked the idea of group work as well. We were able to comment and extend what we discussed in the lecture through that. It makes it more interactive and fun.”



Your lecture was quite interesting. It was fascinating to talk about the deeper meanings & relationships that are part of expression, communication & innovation, and relating it to technology. In particular was quite interesting. I was engaged & entertained.

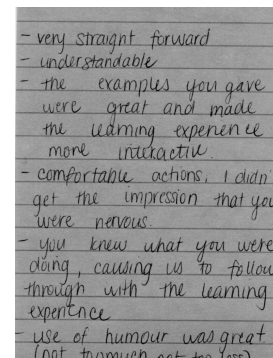
“Your lecture was quite interesting. It was fascinating to talk about the deeper meanings and relationships that are part of expression, communication, and innovation, and relating it to technology in particular was quite interesting. I was engaged and entertained.”



The class was incredibly enjoyable. I believe you were talking at our level, and the activities were a lot of fun. You have a very inviting demeanor, and you can tell that you really know your material, and your feedback during the 4 question discussion gave us a lot of confidence.

you were very confident, !!!
I really enjoyed the class!!

“The class was incredibly enjoyable. I believe you were talking at our level, and the activities were a lot of fun. You have a very inviting demeanor, you can tell you really know your material, and your feedback during the four questions discussion gave us a lot of confidence. You were very confident...I really enjoyed the class!”



- very straight forward
- understandable
- the examples you gave were great and made the learning experience more interactive.
- comfortable actions. I didn't get the impression that you were nervous.
- you knew what you were doing, causing us to follow through with the learning experience
- use of humour was great (not too much, not too late)

Very straight forward and understandable. The examples you gave were great and made the learning experience more interactive. [...] You knew what you were doing, causing us to follow through with the learning experience. Use of humour was great.”

Feb. 10, 2008

Dr. Jonathan Goldman
Assistant Professor of Music History
School of Music
University of Victoria
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250-721-7908

To Whom It May Concern:

I had the pleasure of working with David Cecchetto when he was my Teaching Assistant for the Course "The Time of Music: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives on Rhythm" (Music 323) which I gave in Fall 2007.

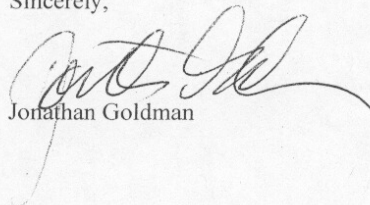
As this was my first time giving the course, I was in the situation of structuring and planning the course at the same time as giving weekly lectures. David's help was extremely beneficial to me. From the beginning, he gave me excellent suggestions relating to content and evaluation issues. For example, he suggested that we integrate a kind of peer-reviewing process, in which students correct each other's papers before handing them in. I used this idea, and I believe that students benefited from it immensely.

David was often called upon to lead class discussions, and he was always an excellent moderator and facilitator: he would always rein in the discussion to the reading topics that I wanted to cover. At least one comment on a student evaluation specifically singled out the class discussions led by the TA and myself as being a highlight of the course.

David was also an efficient marker: his comments were always well thought out and insightful, and I almost always agreed with both his comments and his suggested marks.

In general, David Cecchetto was a TA to whom I felt very comfortable giving responsibility, and have made a recommendation to my department's administration to work with him again.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Goldman

MAJOR ASSIGNMENT: RESEARCH PAPER/ARTWORK

Breakdown of Marks and due dates:
(35% of total course grade)

- 1. Discuss Topic: 5%, due between week 4 and 5 classes**
- 2. Preliminary Point-form Outline and Bibliography: 5%, due at the beginning of week 6 class**
- 3. Submission of Rough Draft to peer: ungraded (bonus marks available!), due week 11**
- 4. Evaluation of Peer's Draft: 5%, due week 12**
- 5. Final Paper/Presentation: 15%, due one week after the last class; note that a rough draft must be distributed to one or more of your peers by the week 11 class**
- 6. Cover Letter: 5%, due one week after the last class**

Assignment Description:

Choose a topic that pertains to the technological relation of New Media Art and posthuman subjectivity as we have discussed it in class. On this topic, you may write a paper, create a video or audio recording, give a performance (that must take place outside of class-time), lead a public discussion, or virtually anything else. I am extremely flexible with respect to what media I will accept, but please keep the grading criteria in mind as you are proceeding...it is often 'more work' to do a creative project well, so be sure to know what you are jumping into!

Primary Learning Outcome:

To go through the process of putting the theoretical tools that we will compile (over the course of the semester) into critical practice *in the way that is most suited to you.*

Additional Support Materials:

If you are stuck for ideas, you may want to have a look at the following two sites to see what people are making and writing in the field covered by this course:

<http://ctheory.net/>

<http://leoalmanac.org/>

I would also *strongly recommend* that you avail yourself of the services of our wonderful writing centre; you can make an appointment with a tutor here:

<http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc/tutorinfo.php>

Marshall McLuhan: "Most of our assumptions have outlived their usefulness."

Assignment Components:**1. Meeting to Discuss Topic (between the week 4 and 5 classes): 5%**

You will each schedule an individual 15-minute meeting with me **between the week 4 and 5 classes**, during which we will discuss your essay/presentation, including both your topic and presentation medium. Be prepared to come to this meeting with—at the very least—an idea of a general topic area of interest. I'll try to point you in the direction of appropriate research materials, so the more that you've thought about your topic, the more I will be able to help you. If you arrive with an idea, you will receive the full 5%.

2. Preliminary Point-form Outline and Bibliography: 5%

You will submit a one-page point-form outline that presents your primary research question/thesis statement, and contains the sub-topics you plan to address. Your bibliography (1-2 pages) should include appropriate articles, books, recordings, etc. for your topic. You may follow any accepted citation format, provided that you are consistent. If you do not have a preference, I would suggest using Chicago Style; there is a guide available here:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

This component is due **at the beginning of the week 6 class**; I will email you any comments/suggestions that I have within 48 hours of receiving them (so that you can pursue your paper during the reading break!).

Helpful Hint: if you are not sure what a thesis statement should look like, you can come to talk with me about it. Alternately, make an appointment at TWC to talk it over with a tutor (<http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc/tutorinfo.php>). Don't be shy, that is what they are there for!

3. Submission of Rough Draft for Peer Review (ungraded; 2% bonus for assignments handed in on time, 2%/day penalty still applies for late assignments)

At the **end of the week 11 class**, you will submit a rough draft of your project for peer critique (see component four).

Marshall McLuhan: "Truth is what we make in our encounter with the world that is making us."

4. Evaluation of a Peer's Rough Draft: 5%

You will submit a short critique (2-3 paragraphs) of the rough draft of at least one peer's final paper/presentation (partners will be assigned in class on week 10). This component should be **given to your peer at the beginning of the final class**. As a general guideline, your critique should note at least three strengths of the piece, as well as at least one area of suggested improvement (with examples for each). The aims of this component are (a) to improve the quality of your peer's work, (b) to offer you exposure to the projects of your classmates, and (c) to offer a chance for you to practice individually the type of reflection that we have been working on together as a group. If your critique portrays an attempt to meet these aims, you will receive full marks; you do not have to be harshly critical, nor should you be!

5. Final Paper/Presentation: 15%

We will discuss the various non-paper options during class. No matter what type of work you hand in, though, an excellent assignment will:

- Demonstrate that you have read and reflected on the material in your bibliography
- Integrate pertinent material from class discussions and materials
- Evidence your own engagement with the topic
- Demonstrate clear and cogent style
- Be 7-9 pages in length (or an equivalent amount of work in other media)

6. Final Paper/Presentation Cover Letter: 5%

Your final assignment will be accompanied by a single page cover letter that:

- Outlines the basic argument of your project
- Contextualizes the argument with respect to *your own personal experiences and opinions*
- Reflects briefly on the role that your own background and cultural biases play in your argument.

The paper and cover letter are due in my mailbox **one week after the last class**.

Late Assignments:

I have broken this major assignment down into smaller parts so that you can learn *the process* of working in an academic context. Following the timeline of this process is very important, because it gives your ideas and research time to gestate. As a result, there will be a penalty of 2% (of the total course mark)/day for late submissions, with the maximum penalty being the total marks available for each portion of the assignment.

If you have concerns about this, please come to talk about them with me.

Marvin Minsky: "You don't understand anything until you learn it more than one way."



University
of Victoria

Learning and Teaching Centre

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April 29, 2009

Letter of Recommendation for David Cecchetto,

To Whom it May Concern,

In the 2009 winter session, David was a student in my course, EDCI 560- Teaching and Learning in Higher Education – a graduate level elective course that focuses on issues of curriculum, instruction, and provides general professional development for graduate students in the area of teaching in higher education.

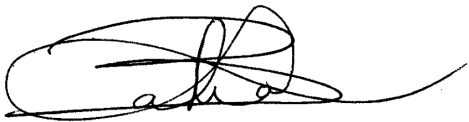
David received an A+ in this course (95%) and demonstrated excellence in both the theoretical understanding of issues in higher education, but also the practical application of teaching and learning strategies. Upon completion of the course work, David was able to create a clear course outline that represented a coherent organization of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students were expected to achieve. This was demonstrated by clearly articulated learning outcomes, by a course schedule that followed a logical flow, and by assignments that aligned with the expectations of the course. In addition to providing plenty of resources, instructions, and evaluation criteria, David developed a concept map of the course to assist more visual learners to better understand the complex ideas and their relationship to one another.

In this course, David also demonstrated that he can create high level, interesting and purposeful assignments that address students' various learning styles. He provides students with opportunities for informal feedback and peer review, and has clearly articulated criteria and standards for assignments and exams. I was most impressed with David's critical thinking skills as he always asked important and challenging questions in class, and made thoughtful and insightful comments and questions in our online forum. Given David's background and strong interest in technology, David was very comfortable in using various tools and technologies common to most teaching and learning environments, but he was very mindful of what technologies he was using and carefully considered their impact on student learning.

Finally, what I found very unique about David's in-class micro-teaching demonstration was that he was able to integrate the talent and skills he possesses in his discipline-specific area, with his teaching approach. Much like in his academic and professional life, David modeled and encouraged the qualities he values and possesses in his academic and professional life: curiosity, creativity, passion, reflection, interaction, active engagement, and excellence. His teaching will have a solid impact on student learning because he knows how to connect to his students and tries to meet their needs.

I highly recommend David for an academic position in your department. David's talent and unique contribution lies in his ability to coherently integrate research, teaching, learning, art, and technology in ways that inspire learners to reach academic, personal, and professional success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Valia Spiliotopoulos', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Valia Spiliotopoulos, Ph.D.

Associate Director and Assistant Professor

Learning and Teaching Centre

University of Victoria

Course: FA 360**Week/Lecture Number: 2****Topic/title: *Thinking Technologically*****Key educational goals/outcomes for today**

The primary outcome for today's class is for students to understand McLuhan's technological tetrad in such a way that they are able to apply it to an analysis of a particular artwork (by the artist *Stelarc*).

Reading/Preparatory activities:

1) McLuhan, Marshall. "The Technological Tetrad" (coursepack pp.1-13).

2) Click around: <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/>

Questions to guide the reading/problem sets/to think about ahead of time for students

What are the four components of technology for McLuhan?

What are some examples of technologies that you may not have previously considered to be technologies?

Can you think of any exceptions to McLuhan's tetrad?

Are there limits to this way of thinking?

AGENDA FOR CLASS**Outline:**

Video

Explain outline of class

Transition from 'Technology' to 'Thinking technologically'

Tetrad: enhance, obsolesce, reversal potential, retrieve

Small group activity (short): produce a tetrad

Review and discuss group activity

Larger group activity (longer): create a tetrad for Stelarc's *Third Arm* performance

The main concepts for today

1) McLuhan's Technological Tetrad/Thinking Technologically:

Enhancement, Obsolescence, Reversal Potential, and Retrieval

Summary and wrap up

This lesson will prepare students to understand Hayles' notion of posthuman subjectivity, which considers humans technologically. Students should remember to do the reading (coursepack pp.15-25) and to click around the website www.rhizome.org. If they enjoyed today's lecture, they might wish to have a look at the documentary *McLuhan's Wake*, which is available in the library and at Pic-a-Flic.

Teaching methods to achieve goals and demonstrate/teach concepts

- 1) Class participation in content to encourage active listening and to ensure comprehension
- 2) Small group activity (short) to apply knowledge with quick feedback
- 3) Large group activity (longer) to apply knowledge with greater degree of reflection
- 4) Short video to grab attention
- 5) Visual aids (PowerPoint) to reinforce terminology

Sample test questions

Using McLuhan's tetradic method, offer a brief technological account of one of the artworks covered in class. Your answer may be written out or rendered graphically using McLuhan's model; remember that each aspect of the tetrad has more than one answer!

Week 2: Thinking Technologically**Key educational goals/outcomes for today**

The primary outcome for today's class is for students to understand McLuhan's technological tetrad in such a way that they are able to apply it to an analysis of a particular artwork.

Reading/Preparatory activities for class

- 1) McLuhan, Marshall. "The Technological Tetrad" (coursepack pp.1-13).
- 2) Click around: <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/>

Questions to guide the reading/to think about ahead of time for students

What are the four components of technology for McLuhan?

What are some examples of technologies that you may not have previously considered to be technologies?

Can you think of any exceptions to McLuhan's tetrad?

Are there limits to this way of thinking?

Agenda for class**Outline:**

Video

Explain outline of class

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Larger group activity (longer): create a tetrad for Stelarc's *Third Arm* performance

The main concepts for today

- 1) McLuhan's Technological Tetrad/Thinking Technologically:
Enhancement, Obsolescence, Reversal Potential, and Retrieval

Summary and wrap up

This lesson will prepare students for next week's lesson on Hayles' conception of posthuman subjectivity, which considers humans technologically. Students should remember to do the reading (coursepack pp.15-25) and to click around the website www.rhizome.org. If they enjoyed today's lecture, they might wish to have a look at the documentary *McLuhan's Wake*, which is available from the library and from Pic-a-Flic.

Remember to do your weekly reflections! In case you are stuck for a topic, I have posted a couple of reflective questions on moodle.

Sample test questions

Using McLuhan's tetradic method, offer a brief technological account of one of the artworks covered in class. Your answer may be written out, or rendered graphically using McLuhan's model; remember that each aspect of the tetrad has more than one answer.