Assessment #1

Weight: 6%

Due: Friday, Jan 24th before 5pm

Overview

The first minor assessment will be about 800-1000 words, based upon the two readings listed below. The readings can be found on blackboard.

Benjamin Labatut (2021). First chapter from *When We Cease to Understand the World*

Ruth Cowan. (1987) "Less Work for Mother?", *American Heritage*, Sept/October.

Langdon Winner. (1980) "Do Artifacts Have Politics", *Daedalus*, 109 (1).

I would encourage you to read them in this order: Labatut, Cowan, Winner.

The Labatut reading is the first chapter from a recent novel; this novel is, well, novel, in that it begins mainly as non-fiction and then progressively becomes more fictional as the novel progresses. This first chapter is almost entirely non-fictional. As you read it, ask yourself, why is Randy assigning this chapter? Why is it the first reading? Here is a hint ... Frederic Jameson in his last book wrote "The history of philosophy is not a history of ideas: it is a history of problems" [1]. This reading is asking us questions or articulating some of the key problems that our course is focused on. Can you discern what they are?

The next two articles are quite old (they date back to your professor's undergraduate days). They are classic statements about the value and meaning of technological change (indeed Winner's is one of the most highly cited articles within all of technology and society studies). As well, they contain unexpected insights into what seems like mundane and everyday technology.

Quite often, the only way to understand the social meaning of brand-new technologies is to look at past technologies, so don't be surprised when our readings are looking at older technologies or older readings.

One of the on-going themes this semester will be recognizing how technology affects more than just the surface of our lives; it can also change modes of thinking and behaving. In particular, readings that contain perspectives that are very different from "common sense" or "common beliefs" will be a common theme with many of our readings.

You may need to read these papers more than once. Get used to this ... most of the readings will require it.

What To Do

- **The majority of the paper should be your impressions of the readings. Don't be afraid to state your opinions! Indeed, what I'm mainly interested in reading in this assessment is what you thought about the readings (i.e., your analysis). This could be criticisms of the author's logic/examples/etc, or describing how a reading relates to your own lives/experience, or why you agree or disagree, etc. But don't forget to provide evidence from the texts to support those opinions!**

- Don't do too much summarizing! A paper that is mainly summarizing the texts will be flagged as AI generated!

- The best papers will find a way to connect or link the three readings. How can you do this? To be fair, it's not an easy task and takes effort and experience. One approach that can help is to identify common concerns and themes and to articulate how the authors are doing so. Sometimes different authors make similar points but using different arguments; sometimes different authors come up with different (or even opposite) answers to the same question. That is, can you identify how these papers are connected and provide evidence for it?

- **Be sure to provide ample evidence from the texts!! Be sure as well to provide several (2-6) direct quotes from EACH OF THE THREE texts.** In academic writing in the social sciences and humanities, direct quotes and citations are used to provide evidence that the author: a) has actually read and understood the material, b) maybe is knowledgeable about the topic, and c) provides additional "data" from a source other than the author that the author's position/analysis/opinion/etc is valid.

- **All submission must use IEEE referencing style.** See this helpful summary [2] or the official guide [3] for specific details (this is the style I am using here in this sentence; the References section at the end of this document has additional information about each of these citations). I don't care about the small formatting details of your references (i.e., is it first name space last name or last name comma first name)? What I really care about in a citation is the author name, journal name, year, and page number. The page number is quite important. When you have multiple citations from the same work in a paper, you can use just the author name instead of the full citation for references after the first, e.g.

[1] Ruth Cowan. (1987) "Less Work for Mother?", *American Heritage*, Sept/October, p. 69.

[2] Cowan, p. 71

Note: you should use the page numbers that were in the original. If the original page numbers aren't available, then indicate you are using the PDF page numbers, e.g.

[3] Cowan, p. 6 [pdf]

These questions may help you if you are feeling stuck.

- Why have these three articles been assigned in a course called Computers and Society?

- Do you find them relevant? Are there aspects of your own, your friends, or your family's lives to which the readings seem particularly relevant?

- Do you agree/disagree with the authors? Why or why not?

- Were there certain parts or quotes that you actually found clever/interesting/wrong etc.?

- Would you recommend this (or these) readings for students next year? Why? Why not? Would you recommend one of them to your friends or family? Why? Why not?

You do not need to answer all, or indeed any, of these questions. They have been provided to give you writing ideas. I do think answering or at least addressing the first of these questions would be helpful. **What I DON'T want, is for you to give me a series of "here's the question", "here's my answer to that question".** Instead, I want a single essay.

Remember that you only get better at writing by writing. Try to not stress out about these few first papers; instead, try your best and trust that as you write more this semester, you will improve. Ask someone you know to read your paper ahead of time; this will help catch and eliminate common grammar problems.

If you are in need of any assistance, please consider messaging your instructor early on, well before the assignment's due date. My office hours are posted on the outline.

These readings are boring!

Every year, students tend to tell me over and over that they found reading X or reading Z to be *boring*. This is probably the least interesting (i.e., the most boring) thing that you can say about anything you read. The authors of the essays you will be reading in this course are not interested in *entertaining* you, but are trying to *enlighten* you and make you think more critically/deeply/differently about some topic.

You wouldn't criticize a superhero movie by saying it wasn't a good hockey game. Action movies and hockey games are judged using different criteria; so too are academic papers. **That is, judge our readings according to how well they made you think critically about an issue**, not by their absence of boy wizards, special effects, or comedy lines. Remember the brain is a muscle that needs workouts to get stronger!

Plagiarism Reminder

Over the past year, many students have found themselves very tempted to use AI tools like ChatGPT to write their assessments. Don't be tempted to do this!

At present it is still quite easy for me to discern AI-generated writing, so this has resulted in students receiving a zero grade and a record added to their account with the University's Office of Student Conduct.

Second, current AI tools do not produce writing with the specificity required for academic writing, nor are they fully, properly, or even honestly attributed and cited. For a course that endeavors to inculcate an awareness of the ethical responsibilities of computing professionals, this type of unethical behavior (i.e., saying something is your work when it is not) is doubly offensive.

Third, you will also have to submit an electronic version of your submission, which will provide me with additional evidence against those who use these tools.

Later in the semester, we will talk about how AI tools can be used in a legitimate manner to improve your compositions, but not yet!

Submission Information

Print out the paper, staple it (don't put it in a fancy plastic duo-tang folder), put your name on it, and drop it off in class a few days early or in the brown drop-box with my name on it outside of B175 if you will be handing it in on Jan 24.

You will also have to submit an electronic version of your document. You can do this in one of two ways.

1. If you compose using Microsoft Word, before you begin (or soon after), **turn on Track Changes** and then set the display setting beside it to **No Markup**. When completed, email me (rconnolly@mtroyal.ca) your Word document with the subject heading: COMP3309 Assessment 1.
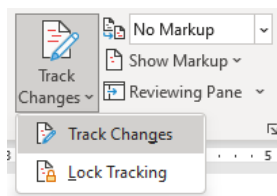
2. If you compose using Google Docs, then simply share your finished document with me: rconnolly@mtroyal.ca. ALSO, send me an email as well telling me that you have shared the document with me.

References

[1] Jameson, Fredric. 2024. *The Years of Theory: Lectures on Modern French Thought.* Verso Books.

[2] https://libguides.murdoch.edu.au/IEEE

[3] https://ieee-dataport.org/sites/default/files/analysis/27/IEEE%20Citation%20Guidelines.pdf