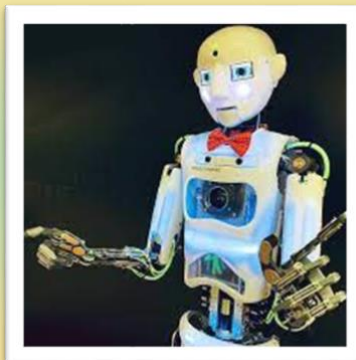# WID & COVID-ERA SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

By Ursula Misztal

(cityofrobots.org)

INTRODUCTION:

Working on my WID portfolio is something that took me a long, long time to wrap my mind around.   My own goals around what I wanted from WID might have been a bit clearer from the beginning.   I know that I wanted some help around working less hard on my lesson plans and still be the kind of teacher that I myself would respect, when facing my students. My personal bar for this has always been quite high, and so the work I do to teach reflects this. I always recall specific teachers that I've had in my life, when I think about standards; we all do. We even discussed this in WID. Yet when I applied to become a WID fellow, I wanted to become less of a perfectionist and more of a realist in how I approach teaching. I'm not at all sure that I ended up accomplishing this, yet I most certainly learned some useful things along the way that I would like to share with you by writing up my project.

While the WID readings my colleagues and I worked our way through had much advice to offer towards making me less of a workaholic and more effective in goal-oriented planning, I often found them overly abstract in terms of solving what I saw as very concrete problems in my own teaching practices.   I am someone who finds change very difficult to implement at the best of times, and after a series of false starts with my

project (ex: a blog that failed to materialize), which ended up being indefinitely postponed, then usurped by COVID-era teaching woes, and then by personal tragedy in the life of my family, I felt myself working uphill to try to complete the project that I never finished on time to submit in the first place. As time passed, I felt like I was drifting further and further away into the ocean with WID, until I was almost too far away to see where I had started.

This project that I'm submitting now is an attempt to make amends for what I should have finished earlier, and to retroactively think about how WID, which I participated in as a fellow in 2019, affected my COVID-era teaching practices and helped me find my way through some challenging days as a teacher and mentor to my students.   I realize that doing things this way is a bit like working backwards, but at this stage, it is the best that I can do to wrap things up.   In this spirit, I will try to bring closure to what I started a long time ago. Please indulge me, if I need to go off the mandated grid in order to get things done.

There are essentially three main ideas from WID that likely inspired me to find some COVID-era teaching solutions:

1. Multimodal writing strategies—which led to the idea to implement student generated audio-lectures and oral composition strategies into my classes;
2. Exploratory writing journals & their benefits for engaging students more fully into scholarly writing/reading;
3. Implementing creativity as a strategy for demystifying difficult academic/philosophical readings that supplement the kinds of courses that I often design.

To remember how all this came into focus during COVID, I did my best to recently recall WID content that addressed these strategies by re-reading some essays and reflecting on how they shaped some of what I adapted as a teacher during this difficult time for us all—teachers and students alike. Sometimes, ideas that lie dormant can be powerful when the right time comes to put them into practice.   Getting through COVID felt like running on pure adrenalin for me, and for many others.   If anything, I learned to work harder than ever, not to work less.   While

this went against my WID goals, what I ended up doing to survive these times still got me through one of the biggest teaching challenges of my teaching career to date and helped me discover some startling things about how to teach students to overcome and face intellectual tasks and to feel more engaged in the process of online learning.   In short, whatever I picked up in WID really came together then, not earlier, to help me find my way back to connecting with my students.

THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING

THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL INTERFACES

(https://www.kopernik.org.pl/en/exhibitions/robotic-theatre)
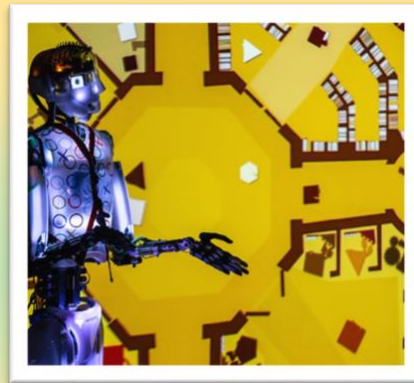
Facing the formidable task of online teaching for the first time is something that I will never forget.   I still remember how nervous I was in the moments right before my first online class—how talking to the computer for an hour and a half felt like a kind of forced blathering session that paled in comparison to a real classroom experience, and how suffocating it all was.   Shortly after I wrapped up the class, I realized how relieved I felt to have gotten through the first session but wondered how I would be able to keep this going indefinitely.   It felt so alienating to do this, for the first time, and so strange to have my students looking into my house as I taught.   I almost felt like I was doing something that I had been forced to do without a choice: and this is a situation so many teachers probably experienced very much like I did.

One essay from WID that helped me to recall some ideas that would prove useful to help alleviate my anxiety was Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe's chapter on implementing technology into teaching ("Thinking about Multimodality"); I think these ideas came back to me very unconsciously at this time. Takayoshi and Selfe's work was really the beginning of a broader interest in online teaching strategies that manifested itself for me during the online part of COVID—since their work led me to read the work of another scholar, Michelle Miller, who has even more thoughtfully explored the value of online teaching technology in general.   This value is something we were all recently forced to think about, quite intensely, as educators.

Talking to teachers now in the aftermath of this experience, I have come to appreciate how different the conclusions we took away from COVID-era teaching are.   Some of us are now transformed techno-wizards, others staunchly defend the value of face-to-face learning, especially in relation to dealing with subjects rooted in the humanities.   I think I ended up landing somewhere in the middle—mainly trying to adapt technology to bridge the distance between people, rather than trying to use it to improve on any aspect of my in-person teaching.   But it still led to some epiphanies, as a teacher, in understanding how to get results from my students.   And often, the adaptive strategies I innovated to survive this time really surprised me, in terms of how useful they could be for teaching specific skills that students often struggle to master in my courses.

Michelle Miller ponders the value of online teaching strategies in very theoretical terms, and I was drawn to trying to work this out for myself while reading one of her books. I won't refer to Miller's book, *Minds Online,* too extensively, though I did end up buying a copy out of interest, especially since Miller was a guest speaker at Ped Day at Dawson—and perhaps I took an interest in her book because I did not get a chance to see her speak in person.   I read the first few chapters to get a sense of the author's take on the topic of online teaching, something that quickly and veeringly became a reality during COVID.   Many of us learned how versatile we are as people and as teachers, against our better

judgements perhaps, when it comes to what we consider to be good teaching practices.   Adapting to COVID was both a leap in learning about educational technology and a leap of faith as well, for better or worse.

Miller opens her argument by presenting us with a series of online teaching trends in higher education contexts, trends which were adopted with varying degrees of success and failure—and she in fact looks at how specific academic institutions handled the transition to this mode of teaching.   I appreciated her critical approach, even if only to play devil's advocate sometimes, since it invited us techno-skeptics to listen to what she had to say.   Some of the drawbacks of relying on technology to teach that Miller touched upon reminded me very much of the woes of online teaching & learning that I found especially poignant from the point of view of my students.   Many found this style of learning alienating, impersonal, technically stressful, and socially confusing, in terms of how people were expected to participate as full fledged human beings in such an ephemeral forum.   Teachers also often expressed feeling devalued for what they do, when forced to generate online equivalents of their human selves.   Yet Miller does end up defending this learning forum, as something that is more and more clearly emerging as a viable educational option for students and teachers alike.   Ready or not, welcome to the future of education.   COVID provided us all with a crash course that we will never forget.   So maybe it is worth entertaining what Miller finds worth defending in this approach, since it is here to stay and will perhaps feel better for all of us in a less crisis ridden context, if we choose to embrace it as part of what we do.   Hopefully, we won't all have to, since many teachers who are excellent at what they do become their best selves precisely because they opt out of using technological aids to teach.

Specifically, the following idea from her book stayed with me as food for thought:

> *I believe that technology gives us many advantages over and above the face to face classroom techniques, but a clarification is in order.   I don't believe that instructional technology promotes learning by its mere presence.   Nor does it let us evade some of the immutable truths about how we learn—especially the fact that learning requires focussed*

attention, effortful practice and motivation. Rather, what technology allows us to do is amplify and expand the repertoire of techniques that effective teachers use to elicit the attention, effort and engagement that are the basis of learning. (Miller xii)

For me, this is true, to some extent, as long as I can hang onto the distinction that teaching and learning are a human interaction, and that technology that tries to mediate this interaction cannot replace it with anything more meaningful. The worst effect of online teaching expressed by students was rendering them powerless/invisible against a Wizard of Oz style monolith that many felt their classroom experience had become during the pandemic.

For some reason, I was deeply affected by these sentiments, when expressed by my students since maybe they also mirrored by own feelings of disempowerment from a teacher's POV. The collective grief over losing the experience of being in a classroom that many of us felt will not be something I will soon forget. Because of my sense that there was a problem with how we were trying to carry on together with the task of learning under difficult circumstances, my only real agenda in using online tools was to try to humanize them for myself and my students— almost as if to replicate the experience of really being together. I found that I could achieve this most easily through the power of voice.

THE REAL PRESENCE OF A HUMAN VOICE: AUDIO-TOOLS

(https://www.kopernik.org.pl/en/exhibitions/robotic-theatre)
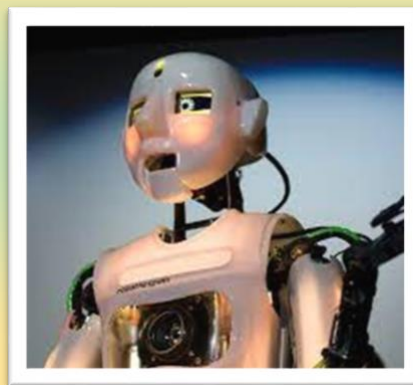
In the middle of COVID, human voices were comforting—even more comforting than the projected/fixed/sometimes frozen video images of people's faces; human faces can often appear anxious in the context of an online classroom, with all its invasions and uncertainties, and this is why so many students choose to turn off their cameras.   In the context of an online classroom, you could almost say that soundwaves were the only real tangible thing left to really hold onto; voices were the only remaining physical imprint of a human being in the Zoom environment, since one can physically feel the presence and timbre of a human voice and correlate it instinctively to the kind of person who is speaking to us. If you want to understand how powerful the voice is, just think about the difference in the presence of a student online who steps forward to participate, vs what happens in a live classroom; the online presence of a student, when they speak, is notably stronger, as is their power to 'take over' in class! The teacher's position in a live classroom is much easier to assert, in terms of any kind of authority that a teacher might want to yield over students. I think this threw many of us off, when we started online teaching.

In my own online classrooms, I decided to teach half the time synchronously and the other half through audio-lectures that I created for my students. Since we could no longer see each other as fully dimensional people, and since this was the most heartbreaking thing about the COVID-era teaching experience, the lulling comfort of a human voice was the most soothing thing I felt I could provide to my students, as the custodian of their learning experience.   Audio-lectures created stable content that I could rely on and post in the event of technological glitches and they took some pressure off in live classes.   We could use the live teaching time to discuss things.   This created the first platform of stability for me in the online environment. What was calming for my students was also calming for me.

My own audio-lectures were stronger than my online presence, which often felt fragmented in the face of technical interference; the audio-lectures were a better simulation of my human presence in a live classroom, ironically. I don't really understand why, but I know that

they were.   That is why I finally chose to create them, despite the time-consuming technical endeavor that this represented for me.   It would have been easier to get through each class period and just teach live—but I would have been less satisfied with that version of things. And maybe less effective as a teacher. Of course, this is maybe only true for myself, since other teachers experienced their synchronous teaching time very differently.   Our adaptation to online teaching was very diverse, as a college.   It is important to remember that it did not work equally well for all of us.   I'm basing this statement on conversations that I have had with teachers since online teaching was adopted at Dawson College during COVID.

The audio-lecture recording sessions additionally created a novel intellectual processing experience that I never had access to before! Being an anxious person, I tend to ride the wave of any teaching performance as best I can.   While the content of what I wish to say is very carefully planned before I walk into a classroom, the adrenalin of going live with ideas gives them another life.   Sometimes, it's even hard to recall how things came out in class, after the fact.   With audio-lectures, I could slow down and think before speaking, modulate my voice—and most importantly, improvise my thoughts through the desire to shape the lesson in the moment, instead of pre-planning.   What was even more useful was listening back and annotating my often minimalist (…though sometimes maximalist) lecture slides with some of the more interesting reflections that came out of this exercise.   What I found myself learning in a very real way as I did this was a way to orally compose and find my words, which is something I had previously only done through writing.   It ended up being a powerful discovery, partly because speaking is more exciting than writing, and more immediate. This is likely as true for my students as it is for myself.

After maybe the fifth glitchy live oral presentation in the classroom, I decided to open up the use of the audio-lecture tools to my students and allow them to do pre-recorded audio-lecture orals to accommodate COVID-era social distancing requirements and alleviate stress over orals going wrong.   What I learned is that students really enjoyed preparing

this kind of oral—partly because it gave them a controlled way to practice their public speaking skills until they arrived at a version that they were happy with.   Since these orals were posted for the class and available to everyone, I was happy to learn that students were very avidly listening to each other's orals (10 min long talks)—sometimes even as often as they listened to my own audio-lectures.   These presentations were the thing that most strongly communicated the personality of each student in an online classroom—since each person had enough airtime to present themselves and their ideas and thereby became much more real to their audience.   Audio-lectures were opportunities for anecdotal storytelling in the name of disclosing to interested listeners who you were—or making your mark on a group of people.   They gave students a much stronger voice in teaching real content in the class as well.

As a group, we very often came to a consensus around being allowed to reference the ideas of other students (by name) in papers that were written, and this made the process of learning feel more dynamic, invested and collaborative. We did this not because we had to, but because it was something that was interesting to do; it became necessary because people wanted to respond to each other's ideas in reaction to the audio-lecture content that was posted for everyone to review at anytime. Since most of the presentations were based on fictional/film works or scholarly essays that reflected important concepts in my courses, the presentations were in fact essential towards writing major papers and towards processing important reflections. Every presentation had a crucial place in the course, so everyone who contributed to the process was essential.

Ultimately, in classes where these kinds of orals were presented, we felt that we were building something together, very collaboratively. This took off a lot of the pressure that I described feeling on the first day of online teaching, but it also empowered students to become co-teachers, almost before they were aware of it. This was especially evident in the high calibre of presentations in all the classes where I introduced this practice. Each person who did a strong presentation set the bar high, and the standard reinforced itself over and over again.   It's no

overstatement to say that perhaps these orals were the strongest performance component of my online classes, and our most impressive achievement as learning groups during COVID. I only regret that I did not give them more weight in the overall grade of the courses.

Since many essential ideas were in a stable format that was accessible for the duration of the course, they could be reviewed closer to the time when they were needed by a writer of a paper, when they became most relevant.   Both my own audio-lectures and the audio-presentations of other students were content that could be reviewed, slowed down, even written against or responded to.

It was in reading the big term papers that I realized to what extent students were really listening to all this and interacting with the ideas of others since a familiarity with course content, or even an engaged intellectual sparring with the ideas of another student, became some of what would be expressed in written papers.   Ideas and people became intermeshed, since what motivated students to respond in the first place, beyond any desire for intellectual achievement, was a pure and simple desire to connect with other people.

Not everyone did this with equal rigor, but when it happened, it was very satisfying.   Not only were students actively listening to each other, but they were also getting to know each other more fully as people and connecting, through all the human quirks and narrative flourishes that were part of each person's style of communicating. For example, I remember so vividly how one student tried to explain Freud's concept of the uncanny through an anecdotal story about a nasty encounter he had with a German shepherd as a child, and how he had to live with the reappearance of the spectre of his fear because of his grandparents' love for this breed of dog, even through he himself did not fully understand the root of his fear until later in his life when the full story was explained to him by his parents.

Some of the oral presentations from class were incredibly tight, mostly because they were well-edited.   I advised students to save these as testimonies to their public speaking skills—since these were artifacts that they could show to other people, after the live performance was over.

Our collective voices were an immense comfort during a lonely time, simulating story telling experiences from other parts of our lives.

If you want to hear what these presentations were like, at the strong end, here is one by Hugh Elkin, a former student of mine in Robot Visions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYmKd_aVsbE

I ended up using this presentation as a link I posted for students in the **ORAL PRESENTATION** section on LEA.   Presentations were pre-recorded according to instructions created for this technical task and streamed using either YouTube or Office 365 Stream (the streaming app I used for my own audio-lectures).   *[see APPENDIX 1 & APPENDIX 2]* The recording features we used in PPT were quite intuitive and simple to master, and students could design their slides using whatever basic or sophisticated strategies they might have at their fingertips to optimize visual engagement.

As a teacher, I put the focus on grading the content of what they had to say, rather than the wizardry of their technical presentation.   Of course, to some extent, the mastery of both things reinforced the presentation, since students who were good at one thing were perfectionist enough to aspire to be good at the other.   I wish I could share with you more than one presentation, but it's the ones that were permanently left posted on **YouTube** that survived, since I ask students to take down their content from Office 365 Stream at the conclusion of a course, partly to protect their own intellectual property! This is a whole other way of teaching about the importance of academic integrity, from a point of view that values the originality of the student's ideas and invites them to apply this reverence for the value of original thinking in academia to others.   Good ideas are of incalculable value—and students sometimes learn this more readily when this insight is applied to their own work! Yes, this is egoistic, but it also makes sense. I guess this self-awareness about the value of their ideas is a more inspiring epiphany because they are not seen as the culprit in this scenario.

Recently, I have thought a lot about how I could provide access to such orals in a live classroom without giving students the option to opt out of a live oral entirely.   When we returned to live classes with a mask requirement in place, I gave students the option to choose whether they wanted to prepare a live oral or an audio-lecture.   Most, when given the choice, chose the pre-recorded oral, even through I emphasized how much easier it was in fact to just present live, in terms of the work required. I would play these in live class, as if I were screening a short film, and we would talk about the presentations quite seriously afterward while the ideas touched upon were fresh in our minds.   There was a kind of glamour in this experience for myself and my students. I am now thinking in the future of creating an oral that is weighted higher but includes both a pre-recorded and a live component. Why? Now that I have discovered both the enjoyment and learning value of audio-lectures, it is hard to give them up. Without a doubt, they serve as an excellent training tool for presenting orally and provide students a way to prepare for a public speaking situation by practicing speaking in advance, rather than scribbling a set of random notes that they deliver live, in a haphazard manner, fueled mainly by the anxiety of performing in front of others and securing a part of their grade.

As I mentioned before, the content also becomes a valuable tool for other students, when orals are posted online and ready for collective use when the time for serious writing comes.   Students end up teaching other students and learning collaboratively.   Because of this, there is a collective intellectual empowerment that ends up kicking in that we all benefit from as a group. We all feel grateful to each other for something, maybe even less competitive as writers sharing a classroom.   These are the benefits that I don't want to let go of, in as much as I also don't want to stagnate in and over-rely on COVID-era paradigms that no longer apply, and maybe shouldn't.   In trying to find a middle ground, I find myself in the position of having to innovate all over again.   But maybe it will be worth it since I might have found an effective way to teach public speaking skills—beyond forcing students to face the adrenalin of the live event and free-fall.

AN ADAPTATION OF THE AUDIO-LECTURE TOOL:

CREATING ESSAY WRITING PLANS

One of the most powerful adaptations of the audio-lecture tool was in the realm of composing/writing.   Just as an audio-lecture with a specific focus and plan could easily lend itself to being adapted into a piece of writing, for which ideas were worked out orally, actual essays could also be planned orally for a minority of students who preferred planning things this way.   I noticed that these were sometimes the students who did not enjoy writing that much, and who used oral planning in part of avoid it.   But the audio-format taught those students to use a skill they were better at-- speaking and thinking out loud—and to adapt that skill into a plan for something they would then write later. This was in fact a great way for a student who was intimidated by writing to warm up and get started.

Of course, an audio-plan for an essay also had a structure that needed to be followed; it's just that ideas could be worked out more in the moment of speaking.   Once recorded and in place, this audio-plan could be played back by the student and used as a writing prompt, as something

to both respond to and build upon.   With a notebook in hand, a student could use a set of spoken prompts/ideas actively to draft their way through a paper. And somehow, for a student who finds writing difficult, their own voice gives them something more authentic to anchor the process to, something that they feel attached to and that is more genuinely and intuitively theirs—less disembodied than written words are.   It did not work for everyone, but when it did, it was empowering—like finding a way to do something that you did not believe that you knew how to do well.   It often served as a breakthrough—which I realized only when some students thanked me warmly for giving them this tool to play with and adapt to their way of expressing themselves.

Often, essays written this way were more faithful to a student's way of speaking, expressing ideas, and philosophizing so that the text would more fully capture the authenticity of their voice but also capitalize on their imperative & desire to express themselves more uniquely as who they were.   When you materialize for yourself as a voice, your ideas just become more real, more present to you.   And of course, even inadvertently, you are rehearsing for a public speaking situation when you do this, even without thinking about it.

The only practical disadvantage is that to listen to a class full of essay plans like this could prove very time consuming for a teacher; but if you offer this as an optional alternative to a paper outline, only the people who need to do things this way will come forward and choose it because they have good reasons to—and simply because public speaking anxiety and the need for anonymity will have most people wanting to stick to a traditional written outline format.   Committing to an audio-outline format does not imply that it is necessarily easier to do things this way, or faster. For some people, it just feels safer, or maybe more exciting.

Either way, if you choose to offer this option to your students, my experience has taught me that it won't become overwhelming for you as a teacher—but you might discover that you suddenly have some very enthusiastic "hesitant" writers come forward, willing to try something different en route to trying to find their own thoughts.   And they are often

grateful that you had the insight to offer them a new tool to apply their efforts to.

I won't post any examples of writing plans here for you to see, but *APPENDIX 3* will show you how I provide instructions for this kind of an essay writing plan in some of my classes.   I find these recordings of what someone wants to do with an essay weirdly personal, more so than an oral presentation is. Maybe it's because of the tentativeness of what a student wants to achieve at that stage, and how vulnerable/fragile the plan for an unwritten essay often is.   To me, it would feel like an invasion of privacy to post an example of something like this.   But take my word for it: it is a lot of fun to listen to these, most of the time, and even entertaining, compared to reading a stack of student outlines; having one of these to review sort of breaks the monotony of giving feedback on writing plans, as you work your way through a stack of those!

APPLYING CREATIVITY TO BUILDING UP INSPIRED SCHOLARSHIP IN CEGEP CLASSROOMS THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES AND JOURNALLING TASKS

(https://www.kopernik.org.pl/en/exhibitions/robotic-theatre)
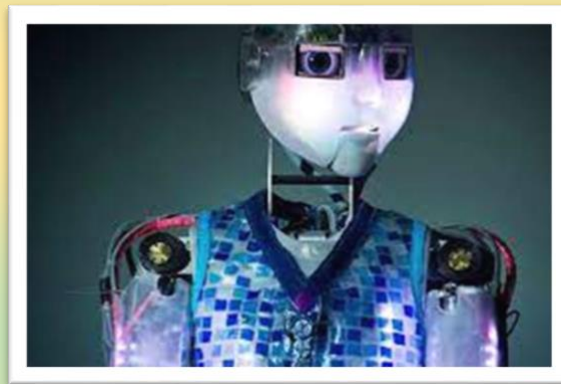
Patrick Sullivan's "The UnEssay: Making Room for Creativity in the Composition Classroom" presents another set of ideas that I would like to address in this project.   Creativity is something I had to seriously learn

to have faith in during COVID teaching, when most of my students were out of sight and working things out in their own heads.

Except for sparsely attended office hours which often turned into regular drop ins by the usual suspects who, to some extent, wanted some human company and emotional support rather than specific help with homework, much of what students were going through as they worked their way through online learning was invisible to me. I ended up inviting creativity into my teaching plans to draw students out, both in Robot Visions and ICE—through the journal component that was designed to get them to engage with ideas/texts on their own terms and to voice difficulties.

Sullivan's article went to great lengths to explain the value of creativity in learning scenarios. In fact, it begins as follows:

> *There has been a remarkable surge of interest in creativity from a wide variety of disciplines in recent years. Taken in aggregate, this body of work now theorizes creativity as a foundational aspect of human cognition and intelligence. If we theorize creativity as a highly sophisticated and valuable form of cognition, it must also be regarded as a necessary and indispensable part of the curriculum in the writing classrooms. (Sullivan 6)*

Sullivan also summarizes optimal learning attitudes that can be linked to the use of creativity as a part of teaching. I'll summarize them briefly/selectively here as a point of reference in relation to what I want to explain further in my project:

- Curiosity and the desire to know more about the world
- Openness—the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking
- Engagement—the sense of investment and involvement in learning
- Creativity—using novel approaches to generating and representing ideas
- Persistence—the ability to sustain interest in long/short term projects

- Responsibility—the ability to take ownership of one's actions and to understand their consequences
- Flexibility—the ability to adapt to situations/expectations/demands
- Metacognition—the ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge (Sullivan 16)

This list is open ended and does not elucidate the connections these skills have to creativity (…creativity is in fact linked to creativity, within this list!)—though I suppose connections can be inferred. I often found this essay lacking in substance related to more specific teaching strategies, beyond open-ended suggestions/examples, but such a list clearly implies that creativity is central to the process of learning and disseminating knowledge meaningfully for a student. I very much agree with this basic idea, after putting it into practice through a journal assignment I created to replace a major essay requirement during COVID-era online teaching. Here, I will try to make a retroactive analysis of how this came together and refer to some specific ideas in Sullivan's essay that I found fruitful for empowering CEGEP-level learners to confront academia with less intimidation.

I ended up using creativity to both prompt dialogue in breakout rooms about more difficult readings that I assigned, or to help students generate journal content in response to challenging ideas in these same readings—ideas that might get more seriously picked up in term papers. The two tasks were often connected, since journal assignments (often optional) would pivot off a warmup group discussion (often counted as a group participation grade that required groups to hand in a set of talking points at the end of their session that summarized ideas that were generated).

James C. Bean specifically talks about the benefits of informal journal writing in the chapter "Informal, Exploratory Writing Activities" (from *Engaging Ideas*):

Exploratory writing is typically loosely structured and tentative, moving off in unanticipated directions as new ideas, complications and

questions strike the writer in the process of thinking and creating. Examples of exploratory writing include journals, notebooks, thinking pieces, marginal notes in books, non-stop free-writing reading logs, diaries, day books, letters to colleagues, electronic posting notes dashed off on napkins, early drafts of essays, and what physicist James Van Allen, author of more than 270 scientific papers calls "memoranda to myself: the mere process of writing," explains Van Allen, "is one of the most powerful tools we have for clarifying our own thinking." (…) College students typically do not realize the value of exploratory writing and are not given nearly enough opportunities for doing it. Consequently, they do not get enough practice at the kind of thinking and learning that such writing can stimulate. (Bean 121)

His essay also presents a list of benefits that might emerge from this kind of unstructured writing, and this is my select summary of why he finds it so valuable in teaching:

- It immerses students in non-threatening complexity and gives them a chance to process readings and speak back;
- It serves as a steppingstone to participating in discussions through active thinking;
- It allows a teacher to get to know students better through more honestly expressed thoughts and opinions.
(121-122)

The benefit of this was especially evident in Robot Visions, a course that involves numerous challenging academic texts. In fact, the final paper that students write requires them to both cite secondary sources from class as well as research some on their own, since BXE courses (B-Block courses, as they are called across the CEGEP curriculum) require final papers to be geared to program-specific writing. My former cookie-cutter incarnation of this course included lab time spent exploring how to use library databases and to write an annotated bibliography. Now that I have a more thematically cohesive course—Robot Visions—secondary sources are part of what we explore together in class and are worked into the content more seamlessly. Not only do students sometimes choose these sources for their oral presentations, if the subject interests them,

they also become an ongoing part of course content that we discuss together as we build towards the final paper.

A student presentation based on a scholarly source might be a way to demystify ideas at the first stage; when possible, a group activity that invites students to respond intellectually to a presentation or a passage from the reading that is the subject of a presentation, empowers small groups to collectively simplify ideas for the sake of understanding and to create a common language through which to discuss texts more clearly. Giving concrete group tasks in this context also allows for creative/collective push-back against difficult readings (*see APPENDIX 4 for* FRANKENSTEIN SYNTHESIS ACTIVITY—which includes thinking about Masahiro Mori's uncanny valley in relation to fictions that we look at in this course). Whether, in the moment, this has any truly intellectual results is kind of beside the point for me. It might be nothing more than an occasion for some students to rant. But this also creates a polemical potential around the ideas in a reading that students might find challenging to face on their own. The point is to get students to take an interest in understanding what they are reading and interacting with it through a discussion that they would not otherwise be motivated to have because of the intimidation factor.

There is strength in numbers! A collective engagement with ideas creates an interest beyond just having to include a scholarly essay in a final paper. I guess this is what I improved upon in my new incarnation of a BXE class—Robot Visions. If a student chooses to use a scholarly source that they are actually interested in because of something that came up in class, rather than because they have to use four scholarly sources in an assignment, that is already progress.

Ideas in scholarly essays are often extremely interesting to talk about, if you can create the right kind of class experience that can generate this kind of discussion among students. Otherwise, we leave students to fend for themselves in a tangled forest, which we know, from our own experiences with academia, can be a disappointing and lack-lustre place. For our students, it's not about their careers, when they encounter these texts in our classrooms. They just don't care about that

yet, and maybe there is a kind of beautiful purity in this nonchalant attitude that academic writers might take some feedback from.

At times, a group response activity feels like a non-sequitur, or a tag on, but if it creates momentum and generates some reactions, I am quite happy because it means that my students care about thinking something through on their own terms, regardless of whatever their commitment to academia might be. Often, the most interesting critiques of any set of ideas come from people who see themselves as outsiders anyway. The goal here is to play, not to perform, and when the real work comes along, a lot has already been worked out through this play. For me, that is the real & effective power of creativity in the classroom at this stage of a person's intellectual development.

[*see APPENDIX 5 for ABBREVIATED COURSE JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS; exploratory journals in ROBOT VISIONS count as an essay equivalent assignment, since they are comprised of shorter writing assignments that easily add up to the length of an essay*]

Now that I have tried this exploratory writing/groupwork format with online teaching and beyond, the only thing that I would change is to maybe separate out the group discussions into a separate grading component from the journal and treat them as 'group responses' that might be counted in the same category as reading quizzes—which would take off some pressure around being quizzed, since some of the grade would be generated collectively. Some students found it confusing that the group-work was counted as the final journal assignment, since this journal was 'longer' and 'contained all the class activities together'. It's true—the groupwork was connected to the journal process very intimately, but it did represent its own unique activity. This is simply an afterthought, and maybe food for thought in another teacher's hands. I am quite certain that I will keep the journal activity as an essay equivalent now that online teaching is over, simply because it gives students the chance to do the kind of writing that they really want to do in order to respond to ideas in my courses. It frees up their creative processing of ideas, which leads to more thoughtfully developed and more intellectually mature/invested ideas in their final papers. The

journal has quite simply made their encounter with scholarship far more exciting and fun.

[I HAVE POSTED SEPARATELY THREE SAMPLES OF FINISHED STUDENT JOURNAL PROJECTS FROM THE TIME OF MY ONLINE CLASSES, AND BEYOND. THESE ARTIFACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES, IF YOU ARE CURIOUS ABOUT HOW STUDENTS HANDLE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS ASSIGNMENT AND FIND THEIR VOICES AS WRITERS/THINKERS. I HAVE OBTAINED PERMISSION FROM THESE STUDENTS TO USE THEIR WORK FOR THIS PURPOSE.]

CONCLUSION: SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON MULTI-MODAL COMPOSITION STRATEGIES AND USING CREATIVITY IN THE CEGEP LEVEL CLASSROOM

(https://www.kopernik.org.pl/en/exhibitions/robotic-theatre)

In a way, both parts of my project, multi-modal composition and creativity, come together in Sullivan's idea of rhetorical dexterity in his paper, so I would like to conclude my project with this idea:

Part of what we are discussing here can also be theorized simply in terms of twenty first century literacy, rhetorical knowledge, and the public function and situatedness of writing. Here, we would be championing rhetorical dexterity, to borrow a phrase from Shannon Carter. In fact, this kind of rhetorical adaptability may be especially

crucial for writers with only an emerging understanding of academic writing, precisely the kinds of students we often encounter in first year composition (FYC) classes (Hassel and Giordano). As Elizabeth Wardle notes in a recent essay about multimodal composition, 'If our field's task, and the task of composition courses, are understood as broadening our sense of writing, seeing writing as flexible and not static, and recognizing the many ways that writing is already multimodal, then connections between traditional "print" composing and "multimodal composing" are clear. In this view, we are not innovating or using technology or employing innovative genres simply for the sake of doing so, but instead we are acknowledging the already-existing complexities of writing in the twenty-first century and encouraging our students to gain the rhetorical dexterity championed by Shannon Carter' ("Considering" 662). (Sullivan 20)

As you can see, this idea is enfolded into the ideas of other authors who inspired Sullivan to try to understand what creativity is in relation to teaching and learning in our age. I find this to be an especially promising idea, when applied to academic style writing/content, since inviting a creative engagement with ideas, beyond structured tasks, often serves to demystify rhetoric and invites an enthusiastic and more passionate response to scholarly ideas from students. Students can meet a scholarly writer halfway more readily, when invited to draw on more intuitive styles of engagement, like journaling, re-imagining, or applying an idea to a different scenario, or even fictionally responding to an academic idea. All these approaches invite more interest in something that might first be perceived as dry and boring. And this engagement, from a different angle, becomes a pivotal moment in meaningfully owning for yourself a scholarly idea, since as a thinker, responding creatively, one goes a long way towards responding from one's own unique point of view, thereby becoming more capable of articulating original ideas.

It is hard to simply paraphrase ideas through creativity. One needs to shape the idea and deliver it meaningfully, in place of appropriating it. Also, pairing up creative/academic texts to facilitate learning, especially in the context of an English class that includes

scholarly essays as part of its content, not only invites a more spirited engagement with ideas, but also fosters a deeper understanding of movements/concepts in history, as part of the literature lesson.

Both the exploratory journal project and the audio-lecture orals that I have implemented into my courses since COVID began invite a more creative and multi-modal approach that seems to enable a deeper and more invested understanding of the often-difficult texts that I try to expose my students to as a teacher.   What I find especially reassuring in the aftermath of these pedagogical experiments is that even the weaker students feel empowered in being invited to participate in a serious/engaged way—and more often than not, the effort on their part to hold their own improves their performance in the academic context in a notable and lasting way, even if what they learn during the time I have to interact with them is only a first step in taking a deeper, more authentic interest in something that might change how they see the world of ideas in the long run.

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APPENDIX 1: Instructions for Oral Presentations

ROBOT VISIONS IN FICTION AND BEYOND:

Oral Presentation Guidelines

For MINI-AUDIO LECTURES

[10 min; 10% of grade]

[PRESENTATIONS SHOULD BE AROUND 10 MIN LONG (anything longer than 15 min PER PERSON won't be graded).

PRESENTATIONS THAT ARE IN AUDIO-LECTURE FORMAT NEED TO BE UPLOADED FOR THE CLASS IN A PROMPT AND TIMELY FASHION, SINCE WE ARE COUNTING ON THIS CONTENT TO BE READY FOR UPCOMING CLASSES.   FAILURE TO MAKE DEADLINE WITH UPLOADING A PRESENTATION (PROVIDED THE GROUP CONTACTS ME AHEAD OF TIME) WILL RESULT IN THE GROUP BEING REASSIGNED TO ANOTHER TOPIC—which is, of course, frustrating after you have already worked on something.

IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT THAT TOPICS ARE COVERED EVENLY—SINCE WE ARE DEPENDING ON STUDENTS TO CO-TEACH PARTS OF THIS COURSE AND WE WILL ALL NEED TO DIP INTO SOME OF THESE SOURCES FOR OUR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TOPICS. Sometimes, taking on something more challenging will serve you better, in the end, when it comes to writing the summative paper.

A: PRESENTATIONS ON SCHOLARLY ESSAYS:

Some general guidelines:

- *Get at the heart of a given text*
- *Respond to particular (as opposed to over-general) ideas in your author's work; SELECTIVENESS IS KEY!*
- *Closely read and point out significant passages*

- *Respond argumentatively to what you are reading/studying. You can even pose some open-ended questions at the end to get the class thinking about something related to the reading.*

HERE ARE SOME POINTERS YOU CAN FOLLOW IN PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR PRESENTATION:

1. Summarize the more important ideas in the sources. Instead of feeling responsible for covering the whole source, maybe think about what interests you in it and what you would like to talk about or connect to our course; you won't be able to cover everything in the time that you have been given.   The trick to dealing with this is just to give a general sense of the reading as a whole.

2. Do some research on the author of the essay, if possible, so you can explain who they are briefly.   Introducing an author sometimes gives your audience a better sense of where the author's ideas come from and what might motivate this person to see things as they do. BE VERY BRIEF IN PRESENTING THIS CONTEXT!

3. Decide which highlights/ideas from the reading you want to present and focus on.

4. THINK OF YOUR PRESENTATION AS A THOUGHTFUL MEDITATION ON SMALL PART OF THE ESSAY THAT YOU ARE READING and a chance to discuss some ideas in that essay in relation to OUR COURSE. You are your own person, with a unique set of life experiences through which you have seen the world; you are not a passive vessel through which someone else's ideas are flowing.   Try to act as an intelligent filter through which someone else's ideas are more meaningfully being channeled to your audience through your own intelligence/experience of life/creativity. TRY TO BOTH UNDERSTAND IDEAS AND REACT TO THEM.

B: PRESENTATIONS ON SHORT STORIES:

IF YOU ARE WORKING ON A SHORT STORY PRESENTATION, YOU CAN SELECT FROM THE LIST BELOW WHAT MIGHT BE INTERESTING TO COVER.

1. How does your story develop the ideas we are looking at in this course? Can you state the theme of this story as a thesis (ie: a statement that describes the author's main message or philosophy)? In addition to ideas related to robotics/robots, what else does this author communicate to you about down-to-earth life or reality?

2. Is the story effective? Compelling? Why or why not? What makes it work as a piece of fictional writing?

3. Explain what literary techniques the author has used to craft this story. Which techniques are predominant? Show examples from the story of some of them at work and explain why they were handled by the author in the manner s/he chose. PLEASE REFER TO LITERARY TECHNIQUES/DEVICES in your course pack, or coin other ones that describe notable patterns in the story, as you see them.

4. Discuss the ending (ie: denouement) of this story. Is it open or closed? Does it leave the author's final message ambiguous? What sorts of speculations are you left with when you reach the ending?

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C: PRESENTATIONS ON FILMS: a scene analysis (any scene of your choice)

1. *Introduce title of film and director's name & briefly describe the subject of the film.* Explain the *function of the scene in relation to the film* as a whole. What is the *relationship between your scene and the film's main concerns*? Briefly *explain the situation* that is presented in the scene.

2. Then, *break down the scene into its component parts* and explain what they mean. Do not attempt to include all the technical aspects of

the scene; *focus on the most memorable ones* that make the scene stand out.

   a. DISCUSS *specific film techniques in terms of an effect that is achieved* in the scene.

      i. GENERAL QUESTIONS TO CONSDER:

         1. What problem motivates the director? What argument is the director putting forward in the scene?
         2. What contradictions do you find in the scene? How do they affect your understanding of the film's theme?
         3. How is the scene structured? How does its structure reinforce the director's message?
         4. What cinematic choices has the director made and how have they affected the viewer's reception of the film's message?

3. OPTIONAL: CONCLUDING REMARKS (very brief)

   a. *Critique the execution of this scene*, on the part of the director, and evaluate the effectiveness of how the film transmits its intended message through this scene. *Explain what you especially liked and what might have been better handled. Please make some meaningful connections to other course material we have looked at, in wrapping up your presentation.*

NOTES ON CREATING A

SUMMARY OF A SOURCE

(These instructions are for a written summary, but you can adapt them to working through the ideas for your presentation as you need to. You will probably end up using some of these strategies as you work through the essays that are required in this class—since you will be working with scholarly essay quite frequently.)

PURPOSE OF A SUMMARY:

a. to fully understand the ideas of another writer
b. to understand the debate/discussion around a subject of interest
c. to situate yourself, as a thinker, in relation to existing research/scholarship; to prepare yourself to build on another person's ideas in developing your own view.
    a. SUMMARY= *a phase in preparing to intelligently use secondary essays in your own thinking*

APPROACH:

- highlight the main points/ideas of an essay & eliminate MOST of the supporting evidence/detail

PROCESS:

1. *Carefully read/analyze the essay to locate important ideas.*
    FIRST READING:
    a. Locate the *topic sentences* in each paragraph, since these introduce the <u>main ideas/arguments</u>
    b. Highlight underline key points/passages

    SECOND READING:
    - Make marginal notes, which will begin the process of translating the text of the essay into your own words (ie: personalizing the writer's ideas)
        - *RULE OF THUMB: <u>don't copy out more than 3 words in a row</u> from the text, since you risk plagiarism!*

2. Describe these main ideas in a new format: RE-WRITE/re-state
    a. Accurately re-state the writer's main arguments in your own words.
        i. Be accurate in your representation of the text.

    ii. Take care that you don't deviate from the essence of the original, but put ideas *IN YOUR OWN WORDS*!

        1. If wording in parts of original source is truly significant, you can quote short passages when needed

3. Use brevity; minimize supporting detail.
   - *Separate DETAILS from ABSTRACTIONS:*
     - *'abstraction'*= large, non-specific concept; a big idea
     - *'detail'*=concrete/specific example

       {MAIN IDEAS= ABSTRCTIONS that you want to focus on in your summary (the ones you want to keep)}
       *** HOW MANY SUPPORTING DETAILS YOU KEEP will depend on the required length of your summary and the weight/importance of an idea in your overall summary!

4. Clarify (if necessary) which ideas this writer is introducing from other thinkers/scholars into his/her essay (you will contextualize how these ideas are incorporated & who their author is, if such content touches on one of the ideas that are part of your summary).
   - Contextualizing: use expressions such as 'Peterson argues' OR 'Jones explains' to acknowledge contributors to ideas in the essay, beyond those of the main author.

5. Follow the order of the essay in expanding the points in your summary OR choose a logical order that presents the overall argument in a tidy, clear-to-follow fashion.

   {FINAL CRITERIA: a good summary is very streamlined; it has little extra detail and is a clearer version of the essay that you read}

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APPENDIX 2: Instructions for streaming pre-recorded PPT slides through Office 365 Stream

HOW TO MAKE A PPT AUDIO LECTURE, formatted as an MP4 video:

1. Put an outline of your desired content (point form) onto PPT slides. This content should guide you through your talking points and help you remember what you wish to say as you "audio-lecture". You can also use other hand-held pages with more notes if you need to. I do that in class all the time when I teach live!

2. If there are any images/design elements you wish to integrate into your presentation, this would be a good time to do it (before you add your audio-content). You can hit the 'design' tab on the PPT menu bar at the top of the screen, and even select 'design ides' to see what formats you can automatically select. If you use any of the design templates and cut/paste images onto you PPT slide, the design feature will integrate your images for you, with the text, and give you some suggestions. It's both easy and fun! Technically, you should reference the sources for your images, but we can waive this requirement during online teaching due to time constraints.

3. On the top PPT menu (ie: 'file, 'home' etc.), choose "insert" & click on this option. You will see an 'audio' option on the top far right side appear; click on it. Then click on 'record audio' from the drop-down menu.

4. Whatever slide is highlighted will be the one you will record over. A 'record sound' box will appear in the middle of your slide. Click on the red dot to start making your recording. Click on the red square that appears after you start recording to stop your recording when you finish. Then click OK to finalize your recording (you will be able to also select 'cancel' if you are unhappy with your recording and want to re-record). You will see a faint recording content logo in the middle of each slide you record over. You will

also be able to see, if you hover over this logo, how long your recording on this slide is. That way you can keep track of time!

5. After I finish recording over all my slides, I save my file with the words AUDIO PPT as part of my file name. This is to distinguish this file from the video file I'll create next.

6. To convert your recorded PPT slides into a video, go into 'file' and select 'save as'. Go into the format options & instead of selecting PPT, select MPEG-4 VIDEO (.mp4) from the other options below.

7. Select 'save' and you will now have to wait as your file converts (welcome to my life!).   As your file converts into mp4 format, there will be a progress bar at the bottom of your PPT screen that you can monitor.   When the conversion is finished the bar will disappear. Go into whatever folder your original PPT was saved in, and you will notice that there is now also a video version of that same file. It's this video that you will now want to stream through Office 365 STREAM (Dawson internal streaming service) or through YouTube (you are on your own, if you go with YouTube!—but for some of you, that is no big thing!).

8. To stream through Office 365, select 'stream' from the list of apps, once you are on the Office 365 screen.

9. Click on 'my content' and select 'groups' from the drop-down menu. You should now see the classes you are a part of listed as options. Click on our class code/name.

10.   Just beneath the title page of the screen for our group (representing our class), there will be an option in red that reads 'upload video'.

11.   Click on 'upload video' & select the file from your desktop that you want to stream (ie: the video you created).   Make sure

your file name includes your full name, or some identifying information related to your presentation.   There are three stages to streaming: first the video 'uploads'; then it is 'processed'. You will see a task bar that indicates how far along each process is. This takes a bit of time.   Once both these processes are complete, you then have to select 'publish video' to make the audio-lecture available to other members of our group.

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APPENDIX 3: How to Submit an Audio-Outline as a Plan for a Written Essay

HOW TO MAKE A PPT VIDEO LECTURE, WITH AUDIO CONTENT:

1.   Put each part of your thematic outline onto a PPT slide:
     a.   Thesis (which will be presented in your introduction)
     b.   Supporting argument (full sentence)
            i.   Quote
            ii.   Quote
            iii.   Quote
     c.   Supporting argument (full sentence)
            i.   Quote
            ii.   Quote
            iii.   Quote

2.   On the top PPT menu (ie: 'file, 'home' etc.), choose 'insert" & click on this option. You will see an 'audio' option on the top far right side appear; click on it.   Then click on 'record audio' from the drop down menu.

3.   Whatever slide is highlighted will be the one you will record over. A 'record sound' box will appear in the middle of your slide.   Click on the red dot to start making your recording. Click on the red square that appears after you start recording to stop your recording when you finish.   Then click OK to finalize your recording.   You will see a faint recording content logo in the middle of each slide you record over.

4.   After I finish recording over all my slides, I save the file with the words AUDIO PPT as part of my file name. This is to distinguish this file from the video file I'll create next.

5.   To convert your recorded PPT slides into a video, go into 'file' and select 'save as'. Go into the format options & instead of selecting PPT, select MPEG-4 VIDEO (.mp4) from the other options below.

6.   Select 'save' and you will now have to wait as your file converts (welcome to my life!).   As your file converts into mp4 format, there will be a progress bar at the bottom of your PPT screen that you can monitor.   When the conversion is finished the bar will disappear.   Go into whatever folder your original

PPT was saved in and you will notice that there is now also a video version of that same file.   It's this video that you will now want to stream through Office 365 STREAM (Dawson internal streaming service) or through YouTube.

7. To stream through Office 365, select 'stream' from the list of apps, once you are on the Office 365 screen.

8. Click on 'my content' and select 'groups' from the drop-down menu.   You should now see the classes you are a part of listed as options. Click on our class code. [THIS YEAR OUR GROUP IS LABELLED 'CS' in a red box—and if you hover over the group box, it should show you our section and class group & year. If you want to make sure this is our class, check the 'membership' option, since your email should be listed there with those of other students in our class]

9. Just beneath the title page of the screen you find yourself one (representing our class), there will be an option in red that reads 'upload video'.

10. Click on 'upload video' & select the file from your desktop that you want to stream (ie: the video you created).   Make sure your file name includes your full name, as well as the words 'essay 1 outline'.

11. After you have uploaded your video, create a SEPARATE small WORD DOC for me that includes a brief note telling me that you submitted your outline as a video (let me know if you uploaded it on Office 365 Stream or through You Tube—and please give me the link to your You Tube video, if applicable).

12. Submit this brief note through the assignment link I create on LEA for this outline.   AND YOU ARE DONE!

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APPENDIX 4: An example of an in-class group activity aimed at bringing together deeper connections between fictional works and ideas in a scholarly essay [ROBOT VISIONS class]

END OF CLASS GROUP WORK: *The Uncanny and The Tragic in the Lives of Artificial Human Beings*

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS: In the time remaining at the end of class, please take brainstorming notes on your group discussion of the questions below. Maximize output (…as if you were collectively free-writing) and optimize connections and thoughtful creativity.   Try to generate about a page of notes (free form) by the end of class.   Please hand in through the assignment link I've created for this activity on LEA.

PLOTTING VARIOUS ROBOT CHARACTERS FROM THE COURSE ON MASAHIRO MORI'S "UNCANNY VALLEY" GRAPH (about a page of analysis)
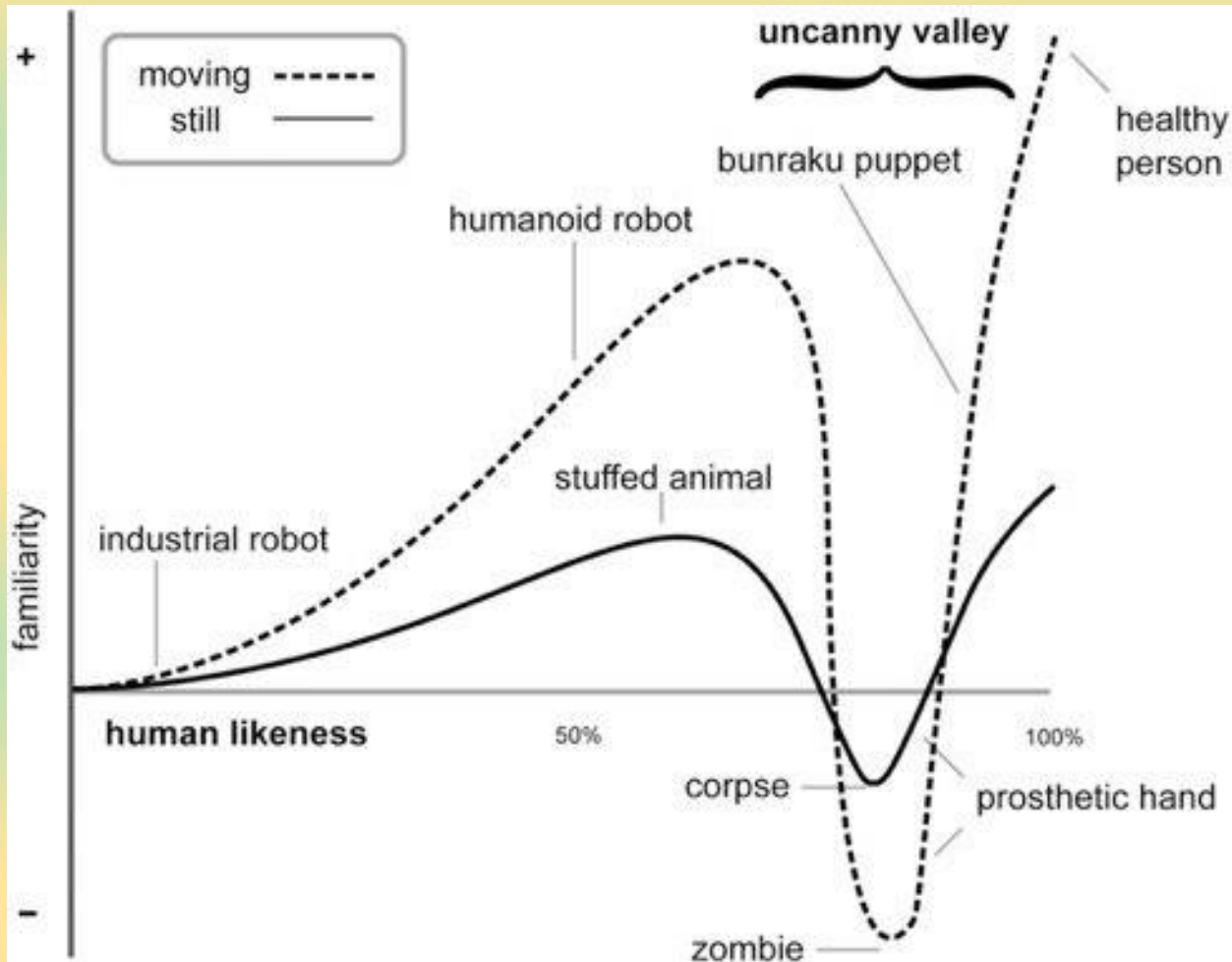
INSTRUCTIONS:

Think about how you would plot FRANKENSTEIN vs OLYMPIA on along the uncanny valley. Beyond simply plotting the characters on the uncanny valley graph and explaining why they belong where you think they do on it, try to also explain how the representations of these characters honestly make you feel,

when you imagine them physically/psychologically.   Try to analyze these feelings a little.

- ***Olympia (in "The Sandman")***

  - ○

- ***Frankenstein:***

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN *Blade Runner* films & *Frankenstein*:

1. Watch the following scenes from *Blade Runner* (original film)—that features the death of the Replicant that is hunted by Deckard, after a big violent showdown that almost ends with The Replicant (Roy) killing

Deckard, before things take a turn in another direction; hence the following scene:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoAzpa1x7jU

2. Watch (…or simply recall) the death scene at the end of *Blade Runner 2049* [let's call it 'calm acceptance in the snow', rather than 'tears in the rain').
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP1lU56o5Y4

Think about how the death scene of the focal replicant character has changed in the later film. Think about the reasons for the change, considering K's actions in the last part of the film. How does the final moment define the meaning of his life?

3. Compare this to the death of Frankenstein's monster, at the end of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. I am including below a passage that describes one of the monster's last reflections on the meaning of his life:

DYING CREATURE'S LAST WORDS:

(222): monster's last words

"Fear not that I shall be the instrument of future mischief. My work is nearly complete. Neither yours nor any man's death is needed to consummate the series of my being, and accomplish that which must be done; but it requires my own. Do not think that I shall be slow to perform this sacrifice. I shall quit your besset on the ice-raft which brought me thither, and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create another as I have been. I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me, or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched. (…)

(…) He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish. I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense will pass

away; and in this condition must I find my happiness. Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer, and heard the rustling of the leaves and the warbling of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?"

How might your compare the death of the Replicants in the *BLADE RUNNER* films to the death of Frankenstein in Shelly's classic horror story?   What other similarities/comparisons can you think of between Replicants and Frankenstein, as beings with specific experiences & predicaments?

_____

APPENDIX 5: An example of an EXLORATORY WRITING JOURNAL instructions for Robot Visions (abbreviated version)

[WID-ADAPTED VERSION WITH SOME SELECT EXAMPLES]

worth 25% of your overall grade—

—please complete 5 of the journal assignments below (…I've decided that this number is the safe equivalent of an essay) to earn your journal component grade; BY THE WAY, THE LAST JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT WILL BE DEVOTED TO OCCASIONAL IN CLASS WRITING PROMPTS & GROUP WORK DISCUSSION (…the kind you don't hand in as a group but record for your own use). EVERYONE WILL HAVE TO COMPLETE THE LAST JOURNAL—FOR A GRAND TOTAL OF 5 JOURNAL ENTIRES (4 chosen by you, and the last one which represents ongoing class activities during class time). Your journal entries should be written loosely, as if you were working on a thought puzzle for your own amusement. Don't over think them! Just let your ideas flow and enjoy the freedom of loosely structured writing.   Most journal entries are about a PAGE long—some a bit longer/shorter. Choose the ones you like! If you end up with more than just the required number of journals—that is fine. In fact—it could improve your grade, since I'll consider the overall effort that you put into your journal, in trying to work things out throughout the course.

NOTE:

I need your journals in an electronic format, like WORD (which is less heavy, in terms of memory); PDF IS OK as well, if this works out better for you.   If you want to, you can incorporate any drawings as images into a Word doc. I would also be open to a Blog format. In this case, please submit your journal through the assignment link on LEA as a Word doc with

your name on it and the address of a link to your Blog. Nothing this fancy is really required for my class—it's only if you find this format more motivating/inspiring to work with, since it allows for a more multi-modal approach. Some of you are good at that!

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GRADING CRITERIA FOR JOURNAL:

Theoretically, each journal entry will be graded out of 5 marks—although I'll grade more wholistically to make faster progress-- and the journal grade will reflect the following criteria, cumulatively (…in other words, I will fill out the criteria only once for all your journal entries together). I will not do any in-paragraph editing/commentary and will limit any additional comments to about three/+ sentences.

ASSESSMENT ABBREVIATIONS:

M+=well met

M=met

M-= not met

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:

-creative engagement with the tasks:	**m+/m/m-**
-completeness of responses:	**m+/m/m-**
-originality of ideas/insights:	**m+/m/m-**
-exploratory spirit:	**m+/m/m-**
-readability/clarity:	**m+/m/m-**

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (THREE + SENTENCES):

JOURNAL RESPONSE #1 (about a page, or ¾ of a page single spaced, 12pt font):

CYBORG MANIFESTO JOURNAL ACTIVITY:

Write down your honest reactions to "Cyborg Manifesto". What do you like/dislike about Haraway's ideas? What confuses you? What do you want to get to the bottom of? What is most important to you about what Haraway is trying to propose? Also, think about the purpose of manifestos in general (& about the *Futurist Manifesto* in particular—which we

talked about in class).   Is Haraway deliberately claiming a space for feminists when she frames the "Cyborg Manifesto" as a feminist text?   Or is feminism a side agenda to a much more complicated and multifaceted text?   In what way might Haraway be RESPONDING to the "Futurist Manifesto" when writing her own manifesto?   And why do you think she would need to do this?

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JOURNAL RESPONSE #2:

CLASS DISCUSSION ACTIVITY LEADING UP TO WRITING UP THE JOURNAL (WALL-E vs "Too Bad!": *When I give you time at the end of class to deal with this question in groups, please take notes, for your own use, which will help you write up the journal question below, when the time comes.   YOU WILL NOT BE HANDING THESE NOTES IN, but they should help you to frame some of the ideas you need for this journal assignment.   YOU CAN PERHAPS ALSO AGREE AS A GROUP TO AUDIO-RECORD YOUR DISCUSSION AND SHARE THIS FILE WITH GROUP MEMBERS.*

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION TO TAKE NOTES ON: **Compare/contrast Asimov's characterization of his robot to how WALL-E is characterized in the Pixar animation film.   Are there some striking similarities/differences? Since robots play a big role in this course as actors on the stage of human drama, if you had to create a kind of universal character profile for a robot, what would it be?   Spend a bit of time unpacking this description.   What are the deviations from this universal character profile?   Does trying to characterize robots change the approaches that you have towards characterizing people?   Change the way you see human character? Would you say that in our narratives, we are only capable to trying to depict robots in a human way, or are we trying to imagine another kind of relationship to them, one that is largely unfamiliar to us?**

JOURNAL QUESTION THAT YOU WILL EVENTUALLY WRITE UP, ONCE WE HAVE STUDIED ALL THE WORKS IT INCLUDES:

JOURNAL QUESTION ON THE UNIVERSAL CHARACTER PROFILE FOR A ROBOT (about a page, or ¾ of a page single spaced, 12pt font):

Compare/contrast Asimov's characterization of his robot in "Too Bad!" to how CD3 is characterized in Julia Elliott's story "The Love Machine".   If you watched WALL-E as a child, you might even think about how WALL-E is characterized in the Pixar animation film.   Are there some striking similarities/differences between these stories, or other robot stories that stand out in your mind? Since robots play a big role in this course as actors on the stage of human drama, if you had to create a kind of universal character profile for a robot, what would it be?   Spend a bit of time unpacking this description.   What are the deviations from this universal character profile?   Does trying to characterize robots change the approaches that you have towards characterizing people?   Change the way you see human character, because of the ways in which robots mirror humanity? Would you say that in our narratives,

we are only capable to trying to depict robots in a human way, or are we trying to imagine another kind of relationship to them, one that is largely unfamiliar to us? You might even pick up on Haraway's idea that the cyborg presents us with a new kind of unfamiliar mythology that we are still in the process of working out.

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JOURNAL RESPONSE #3:

SCENE ANALYSIS FROM *SPACE ODYSSEY 2001* BY STANLEY KUBRICK: HAL IS WATCHING YOU! [AIM FOR ABOUT A PAGE, SINGLE SPACED]

First, watch the following scene from the movie:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFSE4dUJYM8

Then, write a scene analysis about a page long analyzing this scene. Please follow the instructions below:

4. ***Introduce title of film and director's name & briefly describe the subject of the film***. Explain the ***function of the scene in relation to the film***.   What is the ***relationship between your scene and the film's main concerns***? Briefly ***explain the situation*** that is presented in the scene.
5. Then, ***break down the scene into its component parts*** and explain what they mean.   Do not attempt to include all the technical aspects of the scene***; focus on the most memorable ones*** that make the scene stand out.
   a. DISCUSS ***specific film techniques in terms of an effect that is achieved*** in the scene.
      i. **GENERAL QUESTIONS TO CONSDER:**
         1. What problem motivates the director? What argument is the director putting forward in the scene?
         2. What contradictions do you find in the scene? How do they affect your understanding of the film's theme?
         3. How is the scene structured? How does its structure reinforce the director's message?
         4. What cinematic choices has the director made and how have they affected the viewer's reception of the film's message?
6. **OPTIONAL: CONCLUDING REMARKS (very brief)**
   a. ***Critique the execution of this scene***, on the part of the director, and evaluate the effectiveness of how the film transmits its intended message through this scene. ***Explain what you especially liked and what might have been better handled.***

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JOURNAL RESPONSE #6: PLEASE WORK ON <u>ONLY ONE</u> OF THE OPTIONS BELOW

OPTION A:

Journal entry on the love story in *Blade Runner*

Q: IS THE STORY OF K & JOI A <u>REAL</u> LOVE STORY, OR AN ILLUSION?   EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER. WHAT MAKES IT REAL? WHAT MAKES IT ILLUSORY?

HOW IS THEIR "PROGRAMMING" POTENTIALLY SETTING UP THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH EACH OTHER? ARE THEY WALKING THROUGH A KIND OF STAGED PANTOMIME OF human LOVE, OR ARE THEY WORKING OUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP IN THEIR OWN WAY, on their own terms?

DO K & JOI IN <u>BLADE RUNNER</u> HAVE FREE WILL, OR ARE THEY FALLING VICTIM TO PRE-DETERMINED NARRATIVE PATTERNS…and playing out a fixed program? WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE-PLAY OF GENDER, IN THE SEDUCTION SCENES IN <u>BLADE RUNNER</u> (note: Joi is programmed to seduce/engage the customer she belongs to– and she is literally an object for sale in the marketplace). DO THEY SIMPLY DANCE THIS DANCE SO THAT K CAN FEEL MORE HUMAN?   IS JOI THE 'TOOL' TO ENABLE HIM TO DO THIS– ?

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JOURNAL RESPONSE #7: IT'S <u>CREATIVE WRITING WEEK</u> IN ROBOT VISIONS CLASS!!! This week, you will have three creative writing options to choose from if you want to work on a weekly journal task.

A.   JOURNAL QUESTION ON ROBOT CARNIVAL (available online, if you want to review this short film; it's about 33 min into the version below):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=id1eRjO4p_0

Write a script or a narrative story to go with the Frankenstein-inspired Japanese short anime I showed you in class.   Alternately, you might even challenge yourself to write a poetic text that explores the visual metaphors of the anime film.   This poetic text should deal with the nature of the mechanical metaphors presented by this short film, *thinking about how the original Frankenstein story has been adapted/changed by the film maker to explore the Frankenstein myth in different technological terms*.

OR…

B.   TAKE JORDAN'S CHALLENGE: Try your hand at writing a robot story that does not follow the same script as the stories we have been reading in class.   Jordan (from one of my classes) noticed that stories that feature robots/automatons are formulaic.   Here is the formula:
   a.   **An inventor/scientist makes a robot/automaton in the image of some aspect of a human being.**

b. **The robot/automaton discovers its own consciousness and expresses confusion about relating to people, while people in turn experience their own confusion in relating to the robot/automaton.** *This part of the story can be expressed in terms of the uncanny valley.*

c. **The robot/automaton seeks to be more fully human or to understand human experience & fails/succeeds selectively.**

d. **The story expresses the impossibility of trying to breach this divide between human/non-human subjects—and leaves the process unfinished.**

If you want to take the Jordan challenge, write a story (…or part of a story…) around a page or two in length, that presents a different kind of robot character that does not follow this formula, or that poses different kinds of questions for the reader to explore/think about.

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JOURNAL RESPONSE #9: IT'S <u>GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR 'BITCHY' INNTER-CRITIC WEEK IN ROBOT VISIONS!</u>

OPTION 1:
WRITING A PLAY REVIEW of R.U.R (…whichever performance you watched on YouTube last week): please adapt these instructions to a page long journal entry (& see the example included below, which is a review for the movie adaptation of the play)

Understand the purpose of a play review. A play review is a subjective and educated response to a piece of theater. The review should also give potential audience members a sense of the play.

- Noting that you thought the play was "good" or "bad" will not create a strong play review. Instead, you should be specific in your critique and have a thoughtful analysis of the production. Your opinion on the play should be supported by a discussion of the production elements and how they worked together as a whole.

- The review should also describe the situation or plot of the play without giving too information to the reader. Avoid spoiling any plot twists or turns for potential audience members in your review.

Look at the traditional structure of a play review. The standard play review contains five paragraphs, or areas to be covered more succinctly:
- Describe what you saw on stage. You should also give context for the play, such as the playwright or composer of the play and where the play is being staged.

- Briefly summarize the plot of the play.
- Discuss the acting and directing. React to the performers playing the characters in the play.

- Describe the design elements of the production, such as the lighting, sound, costumes, make up, and set and props.
- React to the play as a whole. Would you recommend the play to potential audience members? You can also include a recommendation, like a star rating or a thumbs up/thumbs down.

Try to adapt these instructions to a page long review (approx.)—drawing selectively on the structure suggested above.   I'm including below an example of a review for the film adaptation of MARJORIE PRIME—which I saw. The review is quite short and therefore a good example for a journal*!* **Example of a review: https://www.indiewire.com/2017/01/maa;rjorie-prime-review-jon-hamm-sundance-1201772675/**

'Marjorie Prime' Review: Jon Hamm as a Hologram Can't Save This Lifeless Adaptation — Sundance 2017

Even with a vivid Hologram and acting legend Lois Smith putting on a show, Michael Almereyda's adaptation of Jordan Harrison's Pulitzer nominee falls flat.

"Marjorie Prime"

BB Film Productions

"I will remember that now." Such is the repeated reply from the various "primes" — holograms, and damn fine ones — who populate Michael Almereyda's "Marjorie Prime," a big-screen adaptation of Jordan Harrison's Pulitzer-nominated play about artificial intelligence and the 85-year-old Marjorie, whose handsome companion is programmed to feed the story of her life back

to her. Starring acting legend and multiple Tony nominee Lois Smith (reprising the role she originated on stage in 2014) with Jon Hamm, Geena Davis, and Tim Robbins, Almereyda's feature is rich in acting talent, but this stagey, flat drama can't match the wattage of its leads.

Awkward pacing and questionable narrative choices pepper the feature, which starts strong and raises bigger questions to which it will return during its otherwise lumpy run. Now in her twilight years, Marjorie (Smith) struggles to remember things big and small, but she's aided by a handsome hologram (Hamm) designed to look and act like her deceased husband, Walter. Like all primes, Walter Prime learns more about "himself" by conversing with Lois, ingesting knowledge and memories and smartly calling them back up when required.

"Marjorie Prime"

BB Film Productions

Marjorie and Walter's grown daughter, Tess (Davis), isn't a fan of Walter Prime; Marjorie is much nicer to him than she is to her own child. Even so, Tess recognizes the comfort and stimulation he provides to her. Meanwhile, Tess' husband, Jon, is secretly feeding memories to Walter Prime, a move that initially seems kind and eventually turns needlessly cruel. As "Marjorie Prime" continues (and other primes stop by), that becomes the film's primary problem: Performances are solid, but characters are so thinly written that they prove impossible to know.

While Marjorie is the most solid construction (and one Smith knows well, drawing out all of her shades with staggering skill), Jon and Tess are so foreign to the audience that even Robbins and Davis can't quite crack them. Major plot points are baffling, if only because the characters remain so vague to us. Prime performances are purposely low key, but Hamm still breathes life into a role who's literally made out of air.

Almost entirely set in Marjorie's beach house, the film's ripped-from-the-theater feel never abates. Composer Mica Levi's work on features like "Under the Skin" and "Jackie" added unexpected layers to already rewarding works, but here it piles on unease and discomfort in ways that the rest of the film never fully reflects.

Harrison's play was concerned with the limits and abilities of technology, but Almereyda seems much more preoccupied with the notions and possibilities of storytelling. Early in "Marjorie Prime," Walter Prime tells Marjorie a story about a memorable night out at the movies when they were much younger, and while both Marjorie and the audience must take the story at face value, Marjorie throws in an alteration that will appear the next time Walter Prime tells the story. It's not true, but it doesn't matter; it's the feeling that does, and "Marjorie Prime" feels less true at every turn.

OPTION 2:
If you would like to, in place of writing a play review about R.U.R., adapt the instructions for the review to writing about Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS (see instructions above for OPTION 1). The length of this piece, if you choose to work on it, would also be about a page. Put

some focus in your review on addressing the relatability of the film to modern audiences and perhaps comparing it to more modern works that we are used to watching that feature robots. In what way is a modern audience still able to connect with this film?   In what way does the film pose challenges to modern viewers, in terms of engaging their interest?   Don't be afraid to be 'bitchy' and to have fun writing this if you want to "go there"!   [I REALLY DO WANT YOUR HONEST OPTION ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT IT MAKES SENSE TO USE THIS FILM IN MY CLASS, IN THE FUTURE.]