Dean’s Welcome

Warm greetings to all of our alumni and other friends of the Faculty. On July 1, I began my term as dean, taking the reins from my colleague, Ken Cruikshank, who has returned happily to a focus on his research. Let me take this opportunity to thank Dean Cruikshank, once again, for a job well done. Ken left the Faculty in the best fiscal health it has seen for some time and with a new energy and sense of purpose that I hope to build on over the next five years. Our goals will be to better connect our research and academic programs with those that take place in other Faculties and provide new ways for our students to engage in meaningful experiential and international learning opportunities.

The Faculty celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and as we enter our sixth decade we have much to be proud of and much to look forward to. The incoming class in the fall of 2019 is among the most diverse ever, including a larger than ever cohort of international students. To attract the best students, we also launched our new Humanities Entrance Awards program with the help of individual donors, whose generous contributions were matched by the Faculty contribution and one large anonymous donation. In total we have raised to date $75,000.

It wasn’t only a new crop of undergraduate and graduate students who joined us in September; the Faculty was also able to welcome five new tenured and tenure track faculty members. The Philosophy Department gained two new colleagues this summer. Dr. Johannes Steizinger, from the University of Vienna, brings his expertise in post-Kantian continental philosophy to McMaster. Dr. Alexander Klein’s work in analytic philosophy will amplify the department’s existing strength in this area. In Communications Studies we were able to make three appointments in the course of 2019, reflecting the popularity that this discipline has enjoyed among McMaster students for some years. Dr. Lyndsey Beutin’s exciting work focuses on digital surveillance and the ways contemporary social movements invoke the language of slavery in their communications strategies. Dr. Selina Mincheva comes to McMaster from South Africa and brings with her expertise in unravelling discourses of power, particularly around race and ethnicity, in social media texts. Dr. Dilyana Muncheva’s research investigates Islamic feminism and the emergence of a Western-Islamic public sphere. A warm welcome to all five of our new colleagues!

We have several important appointments to make this coming year as well, which I look forward to reporting on in a future issue of this newsletter. This year will also see the continuation of the University’s ambitious Socrates Project. A full slate of events has already been planned, several of which will have direct connections to the work we do in Humanities – whether that be through performance and artistic creation or by providing the sort of critical engagement with current events that allows for meaningful reflection and productive debate. I encourage everyone to come out to one or more of these events.

Perhaps I will see you there!
I graduated from McMaster twice. The first time was in 2012 with a B.A., double majoring in English/Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, and the second was in 2013 with an M.A. in English. As any student knows, especially a student in the Humanities, their program comes with the question “what are you going to do when you’re done?” A degree like English is so general, and truly I didn’t have an answer. The best part of not having a plan is not having a plan B. With that, I learned to bet on myself. I knew that I was passionate, and that my studies in the Humanities was asking the kinds of questions and having the types of conversations that made me both passionate and curious. I followed my gut, I learned how to market my skills, and I put one foot in front of the other along a path I was carving for myself.

As an undergraduate, I worked at La Piazza between classes, at AVtek as much as I could, and did some freelance writing as the opportunities arose. I also wrote for The Silhouette and Mills Memorial Library. I was a member of the ACA, the African-Caribbean Association at McMaster and the Vice-President of the West Indian Students United. I found that the more I did — double-majoring, working three jobs and volunteering — the more I could do. I knew that university was a hub of opportunity, and that I was unearthing what energized me, discovering my impact. In my fourth year, I had the pleasure of writing a thesis and the sincere honour of having it supervised by Susan Searls Giroux. I got top marks for my work, and was also awarded First Prize in the essay competition for my year. I didn’t know what career my skills and critical eye would lead to, but I knew I was doing something right.

I was awarded a scholarship and accepted into the Master’s program. I kept up my fervent love for being involved and finding my niche. I was elected to the Graduate Student Association as a Humanities Representative, hand-selected to do research for McMaster’s Office of the President, and I was challenged by the brightest minds I had ever met. I made lifelong friends, comrades in the trenches working toward nurturing the ideologies that could combat neoliberalism, learning the tools of colonialism to use language as a mode of decolonization, and being disoriented by class struggle and then struggling to find our places in the world.

I graduated with my M.A. when I was 23 years old, and by 24 I became a communications professor at Durham College. At 25 I developed and delivered courses at OnTechU called Persuasion and Communities, Communication, and Social Change. At 28 my research on Black socialism was accepted for presentation at Harvard University’s Black Portraits conference. Then, I founded the Black Student Success Network at Durham College, the same year I was nominated and selected as one of DC’s “Leading Women.” I’m 29 now and just finished writing a manuscript for my work with the Centre for Community Engaged Narrative Arts. This work focuses on urbanism, the critique of borders and the necessary work that imagination, subaltern knowledge, and humanism are performing to bring issues such as land usage and rights to the fore.

I credit my “success” (love of learning, belief in my power) to experiences gleaned at McMaster University and its amazing faculty in the Humanities. There I learned how to think critically, how to challenge the academy to be a change-agent toward peace, how to be a smart Black woman who used hip-hop and everyday experiences as necessary examples of theoretical concepts, and my professors were not intimidated by me. I unapologetically represented Jamaica and my teachers were not distracted by my identity. My teaching philosophy’s origins are from Tupac Shakur: “I’m not saying I’m gonna rule the world or I’m gonna change the world, but I guarantee you that I will spark the brain that will change the world.” At McMaster I ate dinner with Angela Davis, got my text autographed by Robin D.G. Kelley, and had the mentorship of Henry Giroux. I was already used to having a seat at the table. I was already comfortable with asking critical questions about how to develop a transformative pedagogy, always on the side of the oppressed.

I say all of this because the heuristic nature of art is powerful and in need of defense. Not knowing what life after Mac has in store is a common experience, and a stress-inducing thought spiral. Believe in your work, believe in your choices, and realize that the academy is not the answer: you are. You are the life after Mac, and the future that we need. I am most proud to be a McMaster alumna, and I am humbled by the opportunity to inspire the next generation of thinkers who will push institutions to renew themselves.

This article was originally published on Medium.com by McMaster Alumni in an article titled “Life After Mac: Real Stories of alumni finding their way - Ashley”
Martin Waxman’s path to McMaster was … well, a little backward.

“I was invited to teach a social media class – so I started as an instructor and ended up as a student,” laughs the long-time digital, social media and communications consultant and instructor.

Waxman, who worked as an entertainment publicist and owned his own PR agencies before becoming a consultant in 2011, was an early adopter of social media – back when social media meant blogs and podcasts, before Twitter existed and Facebook moved off university campuses.

“Social media turned communicators into writers and publishers – it made us step out of the shadows and become transparent parts of the story,” he explains. “I could see the potential – even though it took a year-and-a-half of having a Twitter account before I got up the guts to send my first tweet!”

Waxman’s expertise in the ever-changing digital space eventually led to guest lectures in PR programs, as well as positions as an instructor at both U of T’s School of Continuing Studies, where he developed a Digital Strategy and Communications Management certificate, and Seneca College, where he still teaches social media and public relations.

And while he had the practical experience needed to guide students through the sometimes thorny thicket of social media practice, he started to think that further study would help him provide an academic lens to his teaching work. That led him to enrol in McMaster’s Master of Communications Management program, a unique part-time graduate program, offered in partnership with Syracuse University, that blends business, communications and leadership training.

Waxman is now the program’s official 100th graduate – an accomplishment that founding director Terry Flynn points out is just one alumni milestone over the program’s 13-year history at Mac.

“One of our graduates is now a CEO, one was the first woman to run for chief of the Dené Nation, and one has started her PhD,” explains Flynn, who will once again become director of the program when Alexandre Sévigny embarks on a research leave in July. “The program has a transformational effect on people’s lives.”

That’s partly because the MCM program emphasizes business and leadership skills as well as traditional communications training. Students, who study online and have a series of “residencies” at McMaster, take communications theory, research, finance and accounting courses, and also develop literacy in data science and artificial intelligence.

“Two or three weeks after the first residency I start getting the phone calls and emails,” says Sévigny. “The results are remarkable – there are often two or three students with a major job advancement or career change while they’re still in the program. They start to think completely differently about their jobs – there are many ‘a-ha!’ moments.”

One hundred and fifteen graduates and 13 cohorts in, those a-ha moments are still regular occurrences.

Just ask Waxman – who, at last count, has tweeted more than 26,500 times since that first 18-month tweet. He’s also joining the program for its summer semester this year — this time, revisiting his role as an instructor.

“The MCM program has given me more of an intellectual framework to use when thinking about client issues or developing a course – and it’s also opened up new areas to focus on in my work, like the role of artificial intelligence in communications,” he says.

“It was one of the best things I’ve ever done for myself professionally.” Waxman will join 20 other MCM students next month as they receive their graduate hoods and diplomas during the Faculty of Humanities convocation.
Goodbye Apu – here’s what you meant to us

By Faiza Hirji

The Simpsons’ Apu may be dead, but stereotyping of South Asians most certainly is not. In fact, from the debates that preceded the conflicting report of his demise, we can conclude a few things about Hollywood.

One, Hollywood doesn’t know how to address criticism of its racism; two, Hollywood doesn’t know how to recognize racism even when it consciously perpetuates it; and three, as audiences, we sometimes perpetuate the cycle of racist portrayals because our options seem so limited.

Even if Apu, the Indian-American convenience store owner who speaks with an exaggerated accent, is leaving, his exit would only signal the end of a character, not the end of what Apu and other South Asian characters on television have signified.

YouTube producer Adi Shankar first announced the end of Apu last week as reported on IndieWire. Shankar was running a script contest to help pivot Apu’s character for a YouTube parody. But as he was about to announce his winner, he said he found out The Simpsons is letting Apu slowly fade away. Simpsons executive producer Al Jean refuted the claim.

From the moment Hari Kondabolu released The Problem With Apu, a 2017 documentary on Apu, The Simpsons’ creator Matt Groening and Apu’s white portrayer, Hank Azaria, have found themselves under fire for what media scholar Shilpa S. Davé has called “the performance of brownface” and the stereotypical aspects of Apu’s character.

Getting rid of Apu may well be the handiest way to end the criticism. After all, while Apu is a cartoon character, South Asian characters, like other minority characters, have frequently been disposed of on television. This is all the easier when they portray sidekicks, comic relief or criminals.

NERD, TERRORIST, SIDEKICK: AS GOOD AS THE ROLES GET?

The well-known actor Kal Penn admitted to some apprehension when he accepted a role on 24, where he was a member of a seemingly successful and integrated American family. Of course, this being Hollywood, the family was really a front for a terrorist sleeper cell (spoiler alert: most of the brown people die).

Actor Kal Penn addresses the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., in September 2012. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

Abhi Sinha briefly played app developer Ravi Shapur and soap star Eileen Davidson’s love interest on The Young and the Restless, only to disappear from the screen without explanation, either for fans or for the actor himself.

However, at least Sinha’s character had some depth and was allowed the possibility of romance. Actor Utkarsh Ambudkar notes that typical Indian male roles involve being both nerdy and emasculated, although he says that as South Asian artists gain prominence, they are lobbying for change.
ISN’T EVERYONE IN ‘THE SIMPSONS’ A STEREOTYPE ANYWAY?

Apu, created by a white writer and voiced by a white actor, occupies a stereotypical role as convenience store owner, with reference to his arranged marriage and eight kids. Kondabolu’s documentary includes a clip where Azaria notes that he was asked to play up the Indian accent for laughs.

Despite the evocation of blackface and minstrel shows, Groening denies that the intention was racist. The overall defence from writers on the show, and from fans, has been consistent only in its weakness, with claims that everything on The Simpsons is a stereotype. Most recently, that defence has edged towards the discourse of neoconservatives.

In an episode earlier this year, The Simpsons responded to the controversy by having the character of Lisa — generally seen as the smartest, most liberal and most empathetic on the show — decry political correctness. Many audience members, including those with South Asian heritage, decry political correctness as well. More than 10 years ago, I conducted a study of young Canadians of South Asian descent, curious to know what value they saw in Bollywood films, which circulated widely in the diaspora and contained many offensive tropes, including portrayals of Muslim terrorists, drunken Punjabis and promiscuous Christians.

For Canadian audiences starved to see reflections of themselves, even stereotyped ones can be appreciated.

Some of the interviewees recognized these issues but noted that they had grown up in a Canada, where the media mainly showed whiteness, affecting their identity, sense of self and belonging. Even if Bollywood was problematic, it was still a platform for characters who looked like them.

MEDIA TEACHES US ABOUT THE WORLD

This is a familiar experience for television viewers, I would venture to guess, and now some Apu fans who are of South Asian descent are rolling their eyes, dismissing the claims of racism. And yes, of course, there are more significant issues involving racism in North America than pondering whether or not Apu is a racist caricature. However, as so many have argued, representation does matter.

For many of us, mass media are the way in which we learn about the world around us. If you don’t know many people of South Asian descent, or you don’t know them very well, you may come to think that the Apus and the Rajesh Koothrappalis offer great insight into what it means to be South Asian.

Luckily, with the success of actors like Priyanka Chopra, Mindy Kaling and Hasan Minhaj, the picture is becoming more diverse.

This push for change doesn’t invalidate the criticism around Apu, nor does it erase the effect his existence has had on some members of the audience. It is wholly insufficient to say that The Simpsons offered up a brown stereotype because its stock in trade is stereotypes.

A stereotype built upon someone’s ethnicity is racist, and therefore, when Azaria says, “they’ve done a really good job of being, shall we say, uniformly offensive without being outright hurtful,” one might want to ask if a white actor performing brownface is in a position to determine who is being hurt by this not-so-uniform offensiveness.

Whether Apu lives or dies, stays or goes, I would suggest that his legacy has been exposing the extent to which racism lives in Hollywood, and that’s no laughing matter.

Faiza Hirji, Associate Professor Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, McMaster University

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Mac’s first cohort of My OWN McMaster students graduate today
By Sara Laux

Today’s Humanities convocation includes a unique cohort of three history students, doing something no one’s ever done before.

They’re the first graduates of the My OWN Mac program, a part-time, fully online program that allows continuing education students to gain a diploma or professional designation as well as an undergraduate history or sociology degree.

The program is a partnership between McMaster’s Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences and McMaster Continuing Education.

“This is a way for continuing education students to bundle career-upgrading courses, such as human resources or accounting, with academic courses to gain a three-year degree,” explains Stephen Heathorn, the chair of McMaster’s history department. “The online format provides flexibility and convenience for students who are working.”

The online history courses are the same ones offered to traditional students, giving continuing education students a taste of the university experience — without having to be on campus full time.

“It feels good to know that our first cohort is graduating with their history degrees,” says Heathorn.

“It’s gratifying to be able to craft a method of course delivery for people who might not otherwise be able to attend university.”

Learn more about My OWN McMaster on the McMaster Continuing Education website: https://www.mcmastercce.ca/myownmcmaster/pathway

Do truth and reconciliation commissions heal divided nations?
By Sara Laux

As long as unresolved historic injustices continue to fester in the world, there will be a demand for truth commissions.

Unfortunately, there is no end to the need.

The goal of a truth commission — in some forms also called a truth and reconciliation commission, as it is in Canada — is to hold public hearings to establish the scale and impact of a past injustice, typically involving wide-scale human rights abuses, and make it part of the permanent, unassailable public record. Truth commissions also officially recognize victims and perpetrators in an effort to move beyond the painful past.

Over the past three decades, more than 40 countries have, like Canada, established truth commissions, including Chile, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and South Korea. The hope has been that restorative justice would provide greater healing than the retributive justice modelled most memorably by the Nuremberg Trials after the Second World War.

Most recently, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission addressed historic injustices perpetrated against Canada’s Indigenous peoples through forced assimilation and other abuses.

Its effectiveness is still being measured, with a list of 94 calls to action waiting to be fully implemented. But Canada’s experience appears to have been at least productive enough to inspire Australia and New Zealand to come to terms with their own treatment of Indigenous peoples by exploring similar processes.

Although both countries have a long history to trying to reconcile with native peoples, recent discussions have leaned toward a Canadian-style TRC model.

In this October 1998 photo, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu dance after Tutu handed over the final report of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Pretoria. (AP Photo/Zoe Selsky)
SOUTH AFRICA SET THE STANDARD

There had been other truth commissions in the 1980s and early 1990s, including Chile’s post-Pinochet reckoning.

But the most recognizable standard became South Africa’s, when President Nelson Mandela mandated a painful and necessary Truth and Reconciliation Commission to resolve the scornful legacy of apartheid, the racist and repressive policy that had driven the African National Congress, including Mandela, to fight for reform. Their efforts resulted in widespread violence and Mandela’s own 27-year imprisonment.

Through South Africa’s publicly televised TRC proceedings, white perpetrators were required to come face-to-face with the Black families they had victimized physically, socially and economically.

There were critics, to be sure, on both sides. Some called it the “Kleenex Commission” for the emotional hearings they saw as going easy on some perpetrators who were granted amnesty after demonstrating public contrition.

Others felt it fell short of its promise — benefiting the new government by legitimizing Mandela’s ANC and letting perpetrators off the hook by allowing so many go without punishment, and failing victims who never saw adequate compensation or true justice.

These criticisms were valid, yet the process did succeed in its most fundamental responsibility — it pulled the country safely into a modern, democratic era.

SAVING HUMANITY FROM ‘HELL’

Dag Hammarskjöld, the secretary general of the United Nations through most of the 1950s who faced criticism about the limitations of the UN, once said the UN was “not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.”

Similarly, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not designed to take South Africa to some idyllic utopia. After a century of colonialism and apartheid, that would not have been realistic. It was designed to save South Africa, then a nuclear power, from an implosion — one that many feared would trigger a wider international war.

To the extent that the commission saved South Africa from hell, I think it was successful. Is it a low benchmark? Perhaps, but it did its work.

Since then, other truth commissions, whether they have included reconciliation or reparation mandates, have generated varying results.

Some have been used cynically as tools for governments to legitimize themselves by pretending they have dealt with painful history when they have only kicked the can down the road.

In Liberia, where I worked with a team of researchers last summer, the records of that country’s truth and reconciliation commission are not even readily available to the public. That secrecy robs Liberia of what should be the most essential benefit of confronting past injustices: permanent, public memorialization that inoculates the future against the mistakes of the past.

U.S. NEEDS TRUTH COMMISSION

On balance, the truth commission stands as an important tool that can and should be used around the world.

It’s painfully apparent that the United States needs a national truth commission of some kind to address hundreds of years of injustice suffered by Black Americans. There, centuries of enslavement, state-sponsored racism, denial of civil rights and ongoing economic and social disparity have yet to be addressed. Like many, I don’t hold out hope that a U.S. commission will be established any time soon — especially not under the current administration. But I do think one is inevitable at some point, better sooner than later.

Wherever there is an ugly, unresolved injustice pulling at the fabric of a society, there is an opportunity to haul it out in public and deal with it through a truth commission.

Still, there is not yet any central body or facility that researchers, political leaders or other advocates can turn to for guidance, information and evidence. Such an entity would help them understand and compare how past commissions have worked — or failed to work — and create better outcomes for future commissions.

As the movement to expose, understand and resolve historical injustices grows, it would seem that Canada, a stable democracy with its own sorrowed history and its interest in global human rights, would make an excellent place to establish such a centre.

Bonny Ibhawoh, Professor of History and Global Human Rights, McMaster University

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Henry Giroux, McMaster’s Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest, has published more than 65 books on critical pedagogy, cultural criticism and educational theory. (His newest, A Terror of the Unforeseen, comes out this summer.) His work has been translated into 20 languages.

He’s delivered more than 250 public lectures. He’s one of the most cited Canadian academics in the humanities. In 2002, he was named one of the top 50 educational thinkers of the modern period.

And if he hadn’t been a decent basketball player, he wouldn’t have gone to college at all.

“I grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, in a working-class neighbourhood,” Giroux laughs. “The choices you had in your life were to become a priest, become a firefighter or go into the service. There were three choices. That was it.”

Fortunately, he did play basketball – and after a brief stint at a junior college and a couple of years working as a bank teller, a basketball scholarship to the University of Southern Maine started him down the road to becoming one of North America’s most prolific and outspoken public intellectuals. Eventually.

(Never mind that he originally wanted to be a vet, only switching into social science after his science teacher – mad that he’d quit the basketball team – gave him a poor grade.)

“This is in the early 60s, so along with studying history, I’m getting radicalized at the same time,” he says. “I started reading a lot – Marx, a lot of social criticism, a lot of I.F. Stone. It was a tumultuous time, to say the least.”

From there, he headed to a master’s degree in history at Appalachian State, followed by seven years as a history teacher at an “enormously liberal” high school in Barrington, Rhode Island.

Giroux’s career in the sociology of education really started when he went to a talk by historian (Edwin) Ted Fenton, whose books he’d been reading. “I asked four or five questions during the meeting, and afterwards, he came up to me and said, ‘How’d you like to get a PhD? Why don’t you come to Carnegie Mellon on a scholarship?’” Giroux remembers.

After his PhD, Giroux taught at Boston University, where he wrote a number of books, including Theory and Resistance in Education, considered one of the most influential books in critical education theory ever published.

After the school’s right-leaning president, John Silber – who had repeatedly raised the ire of left-leaning academics on staff, including prominent historian Howard Zinn – refused to give him tenure, Giroux started looking for a new job.

But after he sent out 50 job applications, the only place willing to hire him was Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

“I get to Miami University, and I think I’m in hell,” he recalls. “There were corn fields all around us – but then I discovered that place was filled with academics who had been fired because they were on the left. The place was an intellectual powerhouse. I’d never been somewhere where there was so much trans-disciplinary research – it was the academic version of heaven. The place was full of engaged scholars who took the notion of collaboration and community seriously.”

At Miami, he started the first centre for education and cultural studies in the United States, determined to emphasize a critical approach to the study of education as a cultural phenomenon without reducing it simply to the study of schooling.

Eventually, his perspective shifted from cultural studies, education and pedagogy to youth studies and what he called “the war on youth.”

“I spent a long time writing about the war on youth, because I was convinced the left was not paying enough attention to their problems,” he explains. “There was work on race, class, gender, but there was too little being written about youth.”
Following a position at Penn State, where he served as director of the Waterbury Forum in Education and Cultural Studies, Giroux came to McMaster in 2004 as the Global Television Network Chair in English and Cultural Studies. Ten years later, he was named to the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest, and is now the founding director of the McMaster Centre for Scholarship in the Public Interest.

Most recently, Giroux’s work has focused on American politics and the relationship between neo-liberalism and the rise of fascist ideologies around the world – including the United States.

“Neo-liberalism produces enormous amounts of inequality and misery, and creates the conditions for ideologies to be adopted,” he explains “that produce echoes of the past in the form of a fascist politics, particularly around a politics of racial purity, nativism, white supremacy and ultra-nationalism. You put those two together, and this isn’t just neo-liberalism. Nor does it mimic a fascism of the past. I think it is important to acknowledge that fascism is never entirely restricted to the past and that it can emerge in different historical periods in different forms. We are living in an era in which the conditions that produce a fascist politics are emerging once again.

“This is a new historical conjecture. Trump may not be Hitler, but there is such a thing as fascist politics.”

And while his work has never gone unnoticed – quite the contrary – it’s now catching the attention of audiences beyond the walls of academia in a big way.

In 2016, Julian Casablancas, lead singer of the Strokes, called Giroux a “living legend” and interviewed him for Rolling Stone magazine. Just recently, he appeared on Russell Brand’s podcast and YouTube show, Under the Skin. He regularly appears on mainstream media as a commentator, including regular contributions to Salon.

And that, he says, is entirely the point.

“What’s the responsibility of the intellectual in a time of tyranny? It’s to make your voice heard, hold power accountable and help people understand what counts as the truth. It’s to produce work that is both rigorous and accessible while addressing important public issues crucial to struggling for a more just world. It’s to prove to the public that the university is not just an isolated institution removed from the larger society – but so actively involved that it’s actually central to the formation of a culture that provides the foundation for enabling both critically engaged citizens and a vibrant democracy.”

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS | 2019-2020 Concerts at McMaster

Tafelmusik: Safe Haven
Saturday, January 31 | 8 p.m.
In partnership with The Socrates Project
Canada’s award-winning orchestra on period instruments. Tafelmusik has become an internationally recognized ensemble lauded by Gramophone Magazine as “one of the world’s top baroque orchestras.” Safe Haven is an exploration in music, words, and images of the influence of refugee populations on the culture of their adopted countries.

Location: Concert Hall, L.R. Wilson Hall, McMaster University
General admission: $15 | Students: $5
Buy tickets online or call 905.525.9140 ext. 20895

NEXUS in Concert
Friday, March 6 | 8 p.m.

NEXUS is composed by Bob Becker, Bill Cahn, Russell Hartenberger and Garry Kvistad. Four master percussionists internationally revered for virtuosity, innovation and extraordinary music have created repertoire ranging from novelty ragtime and haunting African rhythms through award-winning improvised film music and ground-breaking compositions. NEXUS delivers a stunningly virtuosic spectacle of sound and rhythm.
Canadians’ and Americans’ Twitter language mirrors national stereotypes

By Michelle Donovan

A new study examining differences in the language used in nearly 40-million tweets suggests national stereotypes—Canadians tend to be polite and nice while Americans are negative and assertive—are reflected on Twitter, even if those stereotypes aren’t necessarily accurate.

Linguistic experts from McMaster University used Twitter, one of the world’s most popular social media platforms, to better understand national identity on a mass scale and where stereotypes might originate.

The researchers isolated the words, emoticons, and emojis used most disproportionately on Twitter by individuals from each country.

The findings, published online today in the journal PLOS ONE, suggest national stereotypes are grounded—at least partially—in the words we choose. The work builds on earlier research from 2016 when the same team analyzed 3 million tweets.

“The most distinctive word choices of Americans and Canadians on Twitter paint a very accurate and familiar picture of the stereotypes we associate with people from these nations,” says Daniel Schmidtke, co-author of the study and a post-doctoral researcher at McMaster.

Canadians were far more positive on Twitter, using words such as: great, thanks, good, amazing, and happy. Americans tended to use more negative words like: hate, miss, mad, feel, swear, tired. Americans preferred emojis, whereas Canadians preferred emoticons. Americans also used more netspeak like ‘lol’, ‘idk’, and ‘af’.

“It’s tempting to think that Canadians tweet more nicely than Americans because they really are more nice than Americans,” says Bryor Snefjella, the lead author of the study and graduate student in the Reading Lab in McMaster’s Department of Linguistics and Languages, who was supervised by another co-author of the study, Victor Kuperman.

“But when we put all the data together, it suggests that something more complicated is happening,” he says.

The wrinkle is that other studies which have surveyed large numbers of Canadians and Americans have consistently shown that such national stereotypes are not accurate. There isn’t any hard evidence to support that an average American’s and average Canadian’s personality traits are different.

“The Twitter behaviour we observe doesn’t actually reflect the real underlying personality profile of an average American or Canadian,” says Schmidtke.

To explore further, they exposed study participants to the most typical words and emojis from each nation. The participants were not told anything about how the words were chosen. They were then asked what the personality traits were of someone who often uses the most American and most Canadian words and emojis.

The results? Someone who uses very Canadian words has a personality matching the stereotype of a Canadian, and someone who uses very American words has a personality matching the stereotype of an American.

The team argues that their results show an identity construction strategy in action: Canadians and Americans may create their national character stereotype through their language use.

In future, researchers hope to compare other stereotypes between people in different sets of countries.
I believe that the moment has come to melt down our tin plates and tin spoons and forge them into bullets

By Sara Laux

In 1837 and 1838 – 30 years or so before the Dominion of Canada “came noisily into existence” – armed uprisings took place in Lower and Upper Canada, now Quebec and Ontario.

Led by Louis-Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada and William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada, the Canadian Rebellion, as it came to be known, was a reaction to the cronyism and patronage that characterized the colonial governments of the time.

And while both were short – skirmishes in late 1837 and early 1838, and another in November 1838 – they were important: They prompted the writing of the Durham Report, which recommended that the two colonies be united. This led to the creation of the Province of Canada in 1841 and, eventually, to the formation of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867.

An important piece of Canadian history, for sure — but one that’s not very interesting to historians outside Canada.

At least, that’s what Maxime Dagenais thought when he went to do a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania in 2014.

“He soon discovered he was wrong.

“In fact, American scholars were very much interested in the Canadian Rebellion. Dagenais realized that, far from being small-scale, localized events, the rebellion as a whole had an impact felt throughout the fledgling United States, on issues from economic reform and slavery to the defeat of Martin Van Buren in the presidential election of 1840.

That perspective has now led to the publication of a book, Revolutions across Borders: Jacksonian America and the Canadian Rebellion. Co-edited by Dagenais and Wilson Institute assistant professor Julien Mauduit, the book examines the Canadian Rebellion from a transnational perspective – a way of looking at it that really hasn’t been done before.

“Traditionally, it’s been interpreted from a very local perspective – Ontario and Quebec, separately,” explains Mauduit. “We’re looking at it as a pan-Canadian event, but we’re going even further and crossing the U.S. border. Fifty per cent of the scholars in the book come from Canada, and the other half from the U.S. We have French Canadians, Anglo Canadians – the idea was to have a new look.”

Mac students are also going to get the chance to study the Canadian Rebellion this term, albeit in a slightly different way.

That’s because the rebellion is this year’s topic for History 2V03 – Remaking History, an annual experiential class that asks, “Why take history when you can make history?”

Aimed at history majors and non-history students alike, the class involves a lot of participation, but no heavy essays. Each year, the course focuses on a different moment in Canadian history, then divides students into groups to represent the different sides of the relevant issue. At the end of the term, students will have created an independent project to reflect their position, as well as participated in a class-wide debate.

“The pitch is that we’re going to bring the students to November 1837 and ask the question: will you take up arms to fight against British rule, or will you fight on the side of those rules,” says Mauduit. “When we lecture, students could become very passive. In this class, students are active every single week. It’s unique – I tell my students they won’t have this kind of opportunity anywhere else.”
In Act 1 of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, sensing her husband’s shaky resolve in committing murder to secure the crown of Scotland, asks spirits to “unsex” her to take away the “weaknesses” associated with being female.

Popular conceptions of contemporary theatre in Shakespeare’s time – think Shakespeare in Love, for example – are of an all-male domain following a strict gender binary of men’s roles and women’s roles. Lady Macbeth’s famous speech would have originally been performed by a “boy actress”: an adolescent male apprentice who would, as his voice changed and body matured, move into performing male roles.

NOT JUST AN ALL-MALE STAGE

“Gender and how gender was performed on stage was more exciting and complex than our simple idea of an all-male Shakespearean stage at Shakespeare’s Globe,” explains Melinda Gough, an associate professor in McMaster’s department of English and Cultural Studies and graduate program in Gender Studies and Feminist Research. “What was happening in England wasn’t happening in a vacuum – and on the Continent, female actors not only played female characters on stage, they also often had artistic and financial control of theatre companies.”

In fact, England’s lack of professional female performers is a peculiar quirk in an otherwise far more diverse European theatre landscape: one that involves women playing women, women playing trans men, and women doing traditionally “male” things on stage, including acrobatics, swordplay and horseback riding.

PERFORMING GENDER

Gough and her colleague Peter Cockett, an assistant professor in the School of the Arts, have embarked on Engendering the Stage, an international project examining issues around the portrayal of gender in early modern theatre. The project involves collaboration between academics and professional theatre practitioners – including those from Ontario’s Stratford Festival – and combines traditional research in early theatre history with “Performance as Research,” which is a form of inquiry that uses the artistic process – the actual making of art – to inform research questions and outputs.

Earlier this fall, Gough and Cockett began their work with five days of workshops in the Stratford Festival’s Laboratory, a platform for developing new plays and experimenting “with diverse approaches to staging the classics.” Held in conjunction with the department of English and Cultural Studies’ John Douglas Taylor Conference, the workshops brought together 15 scholars, 10 actors from the Stratford Festival’s 2018 company and four guest artists to stage scenes from four plays from the early seventeenth century, all of which featured “sword-wielding” female characters.

“Our goal was to rehearse these scenes in an open, experimental, playful way, but we also experimented with how the actors might change their bodies when they’re playing a man and when they’re playing a woman,” explains Cockett.

“How does history suggest early modern actors understood ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’ and how does that relate to our understanding? We worked on establishing a physical binary to start, then played with that and saw how the texts broke that binary down.”

Watch some behind the scenes video showing some of our work at the Stratford Festival

https://engenderingthestage.humanities.mcmaster.ca/
ACADEMICS, MEET ACTORS

For Keira Loughran, who organizes Stratford’s Laboratory, both academics and actors were able to learn from each other.

“There are practical things in the work itself that scholars are less aware of or experienced with, and there’s knowledge that scholars have that we’ve found to be refreshingly exciting for actors who are interested in engaging that part of the work,” she said. “Any opportunity to build connections between scholars and artists is really useful, particularly when you’re tackling social issues like #metoo or diversity in casting,” she says. “If we work together, maybe we can make some headway.”

BRINGING THE WORK BACK TO MAC

Following the workshops at Stratford, Gough, Cockett and their colleagues returned to McMaster for a day of public presentations and discussions, culminating in an evening forum. Held in partnership with McMaster’s Socrates Project, the forum explored issues around non-traditional gendered casting with actors Seana McKenna and Martha Henry, both of whom were cast in traditionally male roles at Stratford this season – McKenna as Julius Caesar and Henry as Prospero.

“I think this subject is extremely timely,” says Rina Fraticelli, the director of the Socrates Project. “When Shakespeare wrote, women’s roles were played by boys, so what the audiences saw was a man’s idea of a woman, according to another man’s idea of how a woman moves and acts and speaks. When Martha Henry performs Prospero as a woman and a mother and Seana McKenna performs Julius Caesar as a man, it raises questions about who we are versus how we’re represented, and the tension between the two.”

For Gough and Cockett, the complexities of the past inform the practice of the present, setting a precedent for creativity and openness when it comes to thinking about gender.

“By going to the past, we’re discovering that there’s a lot of support for more roles for women, for opening up male roles for women,” says Cockett. “This isn’t a radical diversion from what was happening when these plays were written – it’s actually more in line with what happened in the past.”

Find out more about Engendering the Stage and watch their behind the scenes video with actors at: https://engenderingthestage.humanities.mcmaster.ca/

Honouring the past, supporting the future

Winnifrede (Patterson) Kennedy (1920–2018) graduated from McMaster in 1943 with an honours degree in history. After a year at teachers’ college, she taught History and English at high schools in Thunder Bay, Windsor, Belleville, Ottawa and Sudbury. She retired in 1969 and remained an active volunteer in her community.

She had fond memories of Mac, including her time in Wallingford Hall. Over the years, she gave back in support of bursaries, scholarships and the university’s unrestricted fund. In July 2018, she passed away at the age of 98. She left a generous gift in her will to McMaster in support of undergraduate priorities in the Department of History.

The Winnifrede Kennedy Fund for Humanities will provide up to seven scholarships per year for history majors, along with grants for study abroad, travel and research expenses. Thanks to her legacy gift, generations of Humanities students will follow in her footsteps to pursue a love of history, honouring the past and looking to the future.

If you have already included a gift to McMaster University in your will, or if you’d like to learn more about creating your legacy at Mac, please contact:

Deanna Tigan, Senior Development Officer, Faculty of Humanities, McMaster University
905-525-9140, ext. 26505
tigan@mcmaster.ca
alumni.mcmaster.ca/bequest
A paddle through paradise
By Sonia Verma

A small flotilla of canoes took over Cootes Paradise this month as part of a six-month project that encourages students, faculty and staff to step out of class and offices and explore McMaster’s rich natural surroundings. Led by associate professor of art Judy Major-Girardin, the expedition started with a hike from campus to Princess Point. There, the hikers put on life jackets, grabbed paddles, paired off and got into canoes.

The trip was open to all, and the students who joined came from a range of departments and from every faculty at Mac.

For many, it was their first time attempting to paddle a canoe.

“Just take it nice and slow till you figure it out,” Major-Girardin advised, confidently setting out for spot where she likes to watch for wildlife. As the group slowly spread out across Cootes, Major-Girardin pointed out herons, a cormorant, fish and a trio of painted turtles sunning themselves on a small log.

When one canoe had trouble steering closer to the turtles to get a better look, Major-Girardin paddled up alongside and gave them a nudge in the right direction.

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That’s what the entire Paradise Revisited initiative is about, she explains: To open the door to McMaster’s wealth of natural beauty and nudge the community to go explore it.

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“One minute they’re out here, they’re hooked.” Major-Girardin says.

Plus, being outside is just good for you, she says. “I always tell my students not to cram right before an exam. Go for a walk instead!”

People from several faculties are working together for the Socrates Project’s Paradise Revisited series, which includes trips to Coldwater Creek and the McMaster Forest, a public talk by landscape architect Patricia Johanson, an interdisciplinary panel discussion on the MacMarsh initiative and a showcase of participants’ sketchbooks from these outings.

“The whole idea is to get people out in these beautiful spaces, to appreciate how precious they are, and to think about them as part of their lives and their experience at McMaster — both teaching and learning,” Major-Girardin says.

She often incorporates nature into her art and instruction, but even students who don’t consider themselves artists find themselves thinking more clearly when they head outdoors, she says.

“The minute they’re out here, they’re hooked.” Major-Girardin says.

Students learn in all kinds of ways, “and letting them observe and experience is a natural way to keep them engaged and interested while they learn.”

Plus, being outside is just good for you, she says. “I always tell my students not to cram right before an exam. Go for a walk instead!”

Creating an environmentally-responsible art program

At McMaster, Major-Girardin’s commitment to the natural world has taken shape in interesting ways. For one thing, she worked with colleagues 10 years ago to re-imagine McMaster’s new BFA degree as a green program, working over the years to replace solvents, alcohols, acids and harsh cleaners with gentler, more environmentally friendly materials.
In Other News

Assistant professor Carmela Laganse and associate professor Briana Palmer were recognized by the City of Hamilton’s Arts Awards. Palmer received the Arts Innovation award for her teaching and research into western traditions of print media and the impact of the printing press on society. Laganse was recognized with the Visual Arts award for her work that reflects critically on displacement, colonization, immigration and migration.

Dr. Henry A. Giroux was honoured with the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication’s Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award. Giroux is the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest and the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy whose work focuses several themes including the war on youth and the neoliberalization and corporatization of higher education and culture.

Laura Jakubczyk was awarded the President’s Award for Outstanding service. Laura is an administrative assistant in the Faculty of Humanities’ Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (OIS) working with both the Gender Studies and Feminist Research (GSFR) and Peace Studies Programs.

The L.R. Wilson Institute for Canadian History has been announced as a partner alongside University of Alberta and University of British Columbia in a new national initiative that aims to map the terrain of kindergarten-grade 12 history education in Canada. The project will make evidence-based policy recommendations for the history curriculum and pedagogy, through proactive connections with ministries of education, faculties of education, and other curriculum developers and teachers.

Dr. Catherine Anderson was the recipient of the MUFA Award for Outstanding Service. Dr. Anderson, a Teaching Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages, has established an impressive record of service and is well known for her creative and innovative approaches to teaching and curriculum development — including the development of a free, open access, textbook on the science of language.

Dr. Allan Downey, an associate professor of Indigenous studies and history, has won the English-language Canada Prize for his book The Creator’s Game: Lacrosse, Identity and Indigenous Nationhood.

Hollywood director and screenwriter Harris Goldberg will be teaching a Theatre & Film course (THTRFLM 1FT3) with first year students in the winter 2020 term. Goldberg who grew up on the west side of Hamilton, made a name for himself during his 30-years in the film industry but says that, in his core, he is “a Hamilton boy.”

Thirteen incoming students were recipients of the new, prestigious, Humanities Entrance Award. The award was made possible thanks to the financial support of an anonymous donor, our generous alumni, and the Dean of Humanities. Eligible students competed in an essay competition for the $2,500 awards.

Humanities Newsletter

McMaster University
1280 Main Street West, CNH 112
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4L8

Phone: (905) 525-9140 Ext. 27532
Email: humanities@mcmaster.ca
Website: https://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca

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