SYLLABUS

Posthumanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, Technology
Thursday, 10-14
Prof. Elana Gomel

What does it mean to be a human being? This basic question is increasingly being answered in diverse and discordant ways by science, philosophy, literature and popular culture. The rise of posthumanism as a new and powerful trend in the humanities has been impacted by new technologies, such as the Internet, neuropharmacology, and genetic engineering. But posthumanism has also profoundly influenced social applications of science, and contributed to the politics of ecology, animal rights, reproduction, and other hot-button issues.

This seminar provides an historical and issue-oriented perspective on posthumanism. From the late-19th-century emergence of Darwinism and eugenics to the contemporary debates over ethics and human rights, we will explore how the basic idea of the human has developed and mutated in many different and self-contradictory ways. Our focus on the historical trajectory of posthumanism will ensure that such familiar pop-culture icons as the superhero, the cyborg, and the zombie will be illuminated by exploring their roots. And our survey of the main issues of posthumanism, such as the problematic of human and animal rights, techno-utopianism, and the ethics of transformation, will provide students with a map to navigate this rapidly growing and central field in the humanities.

For every class, the students will have read the background material and the fictional texts listed in the syllabus below. The students will be asked to submit 3 written reports in the course of the semester and to deliver at least one class presentation, in addition to the final paper.

Class attendance and participation are mandatory!

READING LIST

WEEK 1
(October 30)
MEET THE SUPERMAN

MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS: from Blade Runner, X-Men, Superman, Watchmen
BACKGROUND READING: Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man* (excerpt), Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (excerpts), H. G. Wells, “Man of the Year Million”

**WEEK 2**  
*(November 6)*

**THE BRAVE NEW WORLD, OR DR. DEATH?**

**MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS**: from *Gattaca*  
**BACKGROUND READING**: Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics* (excerpt), Elana Gomel “From Dr. Moreau to Dr. Mengele: Biological Sublime”  
H. G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

**WEEK 3**  
*(November 13)*

**THE INVENTION OF MAN (AND OTHER MACHINES)**

**BACKGROUND READING**: Tony Davies, *Humanism* (excerpt); Michel Foucault, *Order of Things* (excerpt); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (excerpt)  

**WEEK 4**  
*(November 20)*

**REVOLUTIONS OF THE FLESH**

**BACKGROUND READING**: Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (excerpt); Peter Fritzsche and Jochen Hellbeck, “The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany”  

**WEEK 5**  
*(November 27)*

**WE, THE CYBORGS**

**MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS**: from *Robocop 2*  
William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

**WEEK 6**
*(December 4)*

**THE INHUMANITY OF THE HUMAN**

BACKGROUND READING: Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (excerpts), N. Katherine Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman* (excerpts)

Greg Egan, "Chaff", Charles Stross, *Accelerando*

**WEEK 7**
*(December 11)*

**THE SINGULARITY IS NEAR!**

MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS: from *Her*

BACKGROUND READING: Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (excerpt)

Vernon Vinge, *Marooned in Realtime*

**WEEK 8**
*(December 18)*

**THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ANIMALS**

MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS: from *Planet of the Apes*

BACKGROUND READING: Peter Singer *Animal Liberation* (excerpt)

J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

**WEEK 9**
*(December 25)*

**THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF (POST)HUMANS**

BACKGROUND READING: Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (excerpt)

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*
**WEEK 10**  
(January 1)

**ETHICS OF METAMORPHOSIS**

**BACKGROUND READING:** Elana Gomel, *Beyond the Golden Rule* (excerpt)


**WEEK 11**  
(January 8)

**THE POLITICS OF HUMAN NATURE**

**BACKGROUND READING:** Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (excerpt)

Ann Leckie, *Ancillary Justice*

**WEEK 12**  
(January 15)

**POSTHUMAN SUBJECTS IN POPULAR CULTURE 1: SUPERHEROES**

**MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS:** from *Spiderman*, *Batman*

**BACKGROUND READING:** Thomas V. Morris et al, *Superheroes and Philosophy* (excerpts)

Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (a graphic novel)

**WEEK 13**  
(January 22)

**POSTHUMAN SUBJECTS IN POPULAR CULTURE 2: ZOMBIES**

**MOVIE CLIPS SHOWN IN CLASS:** from *Walking Dead*

**BACKGROUND READING:** Wayne Yuen, “Philosophy for the Undead”

Tim Lebbon, *Coldbrook*