What a piece of work is a Man!

--Hamlet

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.

--Pope

[T]he human form is as unknown to us as the nonhuman.

--Bruno Latour

[N]ature is the idea through which we conceptualize what is “other” to ourselves. –Kate Soper

Course Description

This course is an introduction to Posthumanism, an evolving body of literary and theoretical discourse addressing the possible evolution of human beings (and human being). Our inquiry begins with the principles and history of Humanism. From this starting point we will track critiques of its normative subject(s) drawn from political theory, biology, psychology, and other disciplines. The main body of the course will then focus on three aspects of Trans/Posthumanism: Ecological Subjects and Objects, Genetic Enhancement/Transcendence, and Digital Enhancement/Transcendence.

Course Goals

LIT 524 will introduce students to the various discourses of Transhumanism and Posthumanism. Successful students will demonstrate through class discussion and written analysis

- familiarity with the traditions and principles of Humanism
- familiarity with grounds for critique of the Subject(s) of Humanism
- familiarity with the critical discourses associated with the aspects of Transhumanism and Posthumanism under consideration
- familiarity with the critical vocabularies associated with these perspectives
- an ability to apply productively critical perspectives in close reading of texts
LIT 524 Requirements

- Regular class attendance and participation, steady preparation
- Three Seminar Leadership Opportunities
- Three Seminar Reports
- An Applied Trans/Posthumanism Essay
- A portfolio of your written work

Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Leadership</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar Reports</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied Trans/Posthumanism Essay</td>
<td>40%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Course Policies and Procedures, and Unsolicited Advice

- The course schedule will require 8-12 hours of preparation each week. Please budget and manage your time carefully. I need you to stay on top of the reading and writing assignments. I especially need you to come to class prepared to engage the material at hand.
- I expect you to be in class from 6:30 to 9:20 each and every Thursday evening. I need you to be here, both in the name of your own education, but also because in a true seminar you have responsibilities to one another. This is never more true that on evenings when you are a scheduled Seminar Leader.
- I have created a Virtual Forum section on our course Moodle site. I know it can be awkward, but given that we are only meeting once a week, I want to encourage you to use this resource when you have questions, comments, or concerns regarding the texts under consideration—or to pursue threads generated during class discussion.
- If you are struggling with any of the reading or assignments in this class, please come see me during office hours—or make an appointment to see me.
- Presentation: I would like you to follow the MLA presentation, citation and documentation conventions in this class.
- The instructor and the University reserve the right to modify, amend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, etc.) as needed.

Scholarship

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrase) must be properly documented. Students who plagiarize face serious consequences that may range from receiving a failing grade on a given assignment to failing the course. Students who plagiarize also face additional University sanctions.
Accommodations

If you have a disability (physical or learning) that you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first week of the term so we can discuss whatever accommodations may be necessary.

Required Texts

Many required texts will be posted to our Moodle site. Please budget adequate $$ if you prefer to print these documents.

The Transhumanist Reader. Max More and Natasha Vita-More, eds.

This is a collection of mostly accessible arguments by unabashed proponents and defenders of Trans/Posthumanism.

Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age. Bill McKibben

In his spare time, when he wasn’t working heroically to limit atmospheric carbon dioxide to 350ppm, McKibben wrote this spirited, thoughtful, and supremely humane polemic against (some) genetic engineering.

Galatea 2.2. Richard Powers

A beautiful defense of Humanism in light of AI and its many consequences by one of our best authors.

In addition to the above (which we will address together in class), I would like you to read the following texts over the course of the term. These texts will serve as reference points as we attempt to draw out the implications of the polemics and theories under consideration. Also, these texts will inevitably play a role in your Applied Trans/Posthumanism Essay due at term’s end:

Annihilation. Jeff VanderMeer

The first book in VanderMeer’s amazing Southern Reach Trilogy—brings to bear many issues of interest to contemporary ecocritics . . .

Beggars in Spain. Nancy Kress

Beggars in Spain was first published as a novella in 1993—and promptly won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards. Kress later added three sections further developing the world of the book and exploring many of the personal and social implications of genetic enhancement technologies. {The unadorned text of the novella can be found online for free.}
*Diaspora.* Greg Egan

Crazy post-Singularity fun as a rag-tag posse of Transhumans and Posthumans hit the cosmic trail in a quest for the god-like [sic?] Transmuters.

Also, a two-pocket folder for your portfolio

**Syllabus**

1/25  Introduction: The Subject of Humanism
      Davies *Humanism* (Introduction and Ch. 1); More “A Letter to Mother Nature” *(TR 449-450)*

I. Posthumanism: Ecological Subjects and Objects

{Begin reading *Annihilation*}

2/1  “Deep Ecology” *(M)*; Jeffers *(M)*; McLaughlin *(M)*; Hạnh *(M)*; James *(M)*

2/8  Abram *(M)*; Wood *(M)*; Kohn *(M)*

2/15  Iovino and Oppermann *(M)*; Morton *(M)*, Bennett *(M)*

Posthumanism: “because why not”


II. Posthumanism: Genetic Enhancement/Transcendence

{Begin reading *Beggars in Spain*}

3/1  Mailk *(M)*; Radiolab CRISPR *(M)*+ Update *(M)*; Miah *(TR 291-301)*

3/8  Rose *(TR 196-204)*; de Grey *(TR 215-219)*; Prisco *(TR 234-240)*

3/15  Enough


*Spring Break*
III. Posthumanism: Cyborgs, Cybernetics, and Singularities

{Begin reading Diaspora}

4/5 Haraway (M); Hughes (TR 227-233); Beloff (TR 83-90);

4/12 Hayles (M); Minsky (TR 167-176); Cordio (M)

4/19 Kurzweil (M); Moravec (TR 177-181); Vinge (TR 365-375)

4/26 Galatea 2.2

5/3 Stock (TR 302-316); Blackford (TR 421-429); Kurzweil (TR 451-453)