STS 490: Posthuman Media Studies

"...my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival."

- N. Katherine Hayles

Instructor: J.J. Sylvia IV
Email: jsylvia@ncsu.edu
Course: STS 490-01
Meeting Time: Wed. 6-8:45 pm
Location: Marye Anne Fox Science Room 140
Office Location: Rick's Annex
**Office Hours:** By appointment

Website: go.ncsu.edu/posthuman

Course Description: From the Cylons on Battlestar Galactica to heroes such as Bionic Woman and Iron Man, the image of the cyborg in popular media speculates about what the future combination of the human and the technological will entail. In addition to the concept of the cyborg, this course will explore the philosophic idea that we are all already posthuman, not because we have modified our bodies with technological add-ons, but because of the way that our use of media and technology alters our understanding of what it means to be an individual. Learn what it means to understand media from outside of the traditional human perspective.

Required Course Materials

There are no required textbooks for this class, as reading selections will be available either digitally via our class Moodle or on reserve through the library.

Some of the assignments for this course may have associated expenses. For example, we will be creating critical making projects (hands-on productive activities that link digital technologies to society), and while the library offers many resources available for checkout, some projects may benefit from additional components not available through the library.

Course Assignments
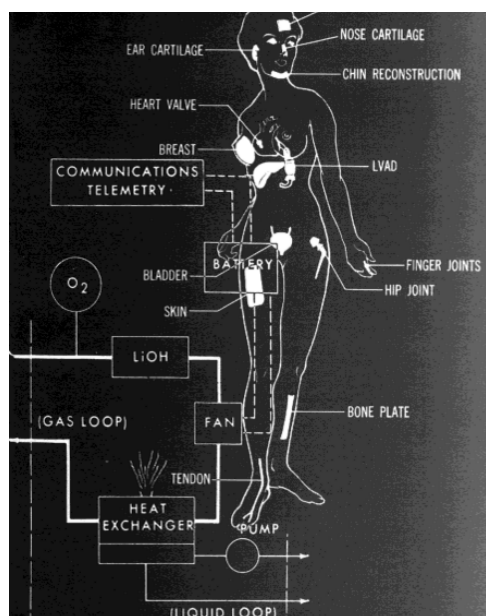
Overview:

(200 pts) Weekly Reading Response: Each week you must complete a reading response for the required readings before we discuss them in class. There are 13 weeks of assigned reading, but only 10 submissions are required so that if there is an emergency or a week in which a lot of work is due in other classes, you may opt not to complete a response for that week. Reading responses may take one of five forms and you are encouraged to try a variety of these options:

• *Connecting to the text*: This involves underlining key ideas and making marks and comments in the margins. You then go back through the reading and write five "big" questions on key concepts in the readings. Then answer two of those questions and write a commentary on why you think these are core issues in the reading. You will only submit the questions and answers themselves and do not need to furnish the marked-up copy of the text.

• *Summarizing the readings and visualizing the key ideas*: Make a visual or graphic organizer for content in the reading or make a chart or several lists that organize and categorize the ideas. You could also create an infographic. Some great examples of these can be found here: http://www.nj.gov/education/archive/frameworks/worldlanguages/appende.pdf

• *Reading response journal*: Respond to each portion of the readings with a question or comment. For weeks with multiple readings you should include a minimum of three responses to each reading. If there is only one reading, you should include a minimum of five responses. Possible approaches include: looking at a passage or episode that puzzles, moves, or upsets you; comparing this week's reading with last week's. I also encourage you to connect the course to your other classes, books, movies, TV, current events, and your own life experience. Just remember to anchor the entry in the week's reading.

- *Studying as a group:* Convene in groups of two or three to form a study group. Discuss the readings, focusing on key concepts. Record ideas and then write them up. The group should compile an outline of the readings that identifies key words and ideas and explains or defines them.

- *Create a song or rap*: Create and submit a song or rap about the readings.

(150 pts) Social Media and Subjectivation: This is a 5 week guided project in which we will work together to explore the ways that social networks, particularly Facebook, play a role in our processes of subjectivation. This assignment culminates with an artistic intervention in these processes that will be shared publicly.

(150 pts) Philosophy Through Speculative Fiction: As part of our regular weekly readings, we will explore several examples of speculative fiction that delve into related philosophic concepts. These readings will culminate in the creation of a short story that explores some of the cyborg/posthuman concepts that we discuss in class. These stories will follow the guidelines created by the Sci Phi Journal short story competition (http://blog.apaonline.org/2016/06/29/short-story-competition-philosophy-through-fiction/) and be appropriate for optional submission to this contest. Creative alternatives to this assignment such as videos, podcasts, or video games are also welcome, with approval from the instructor. These will be shared in one of a variety of possible public venues.

(500 pts) Critical Making Project & Book Chapter: Our course will wrap-up with a critical making group project that explores how we are constructed as subjects of the cyborg and posthuman variety through our use of technology and media. These projects will critically and creatively utilize maker tools such as 3D printing, laser-cutting, brain-wave reading devices, micro controllers (Arduino, Raspberry Pi, *etc.*), or augmented reality. The final project will consist of the project itself, and a multimedia book chapter that documents your project and situates it in the context of our course readings using citations.

Learn by Doing, Making, Teaching
(Adapted from Cathy Davidson)

This isn't just a content course. In this course, you will be in a leadership and maker role, and will be communicating your new insights to a general public by sharing the results of your projects. Teaching is one of the best ways to learn yourself, and you will work in project teams to "produce" critical making projects that will be featured in a showcase open to the public.

You will also learn about the challenges and opportunities of collaboration, of producing a great end-product not just for your teacher, but for the entire watching world—and you will work to make sure the world is watching. Besides being an important workplace skill, working together to make ideas public prompts what John Seely Brown calls "**metacognition**," an ability to think about our thinking. In literary and cultural criticism, this has been described as "defamiliarization" (being introspective about our own habits and reflexes).

Attendance and Participation
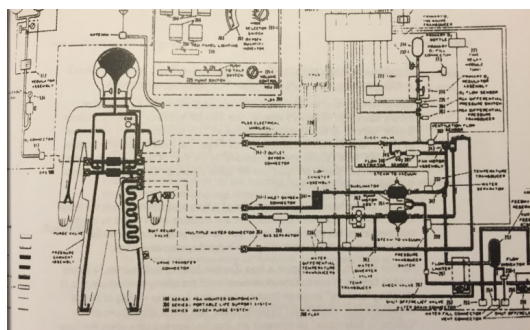
Participation includes reading/viewing/listening to all assignments, participating in guest lectures and field trips, as well as working in groups, collegiality, a good attitude, and appropriate critiques.

Class attendance is required. If you have more than two unexcused absences (see course policy for definition), your grade for the entire class automatically will drop by half of a letter grade. If you miss more than four classes, it will drop one letter grade, and so on.

Excused absences require a doctor's note. Or, in the case of other official absences, you must submit a request in advance and I will return a written acceptance or decline of the request. If you are missing for a non-medical/emergency reason, you have to have approval in advance and, at that time, state your plan for making up the missed work. You are still responsible for the readings and any assignments that are due.

Assignment Breakdown	Grading	Due Date
Reading Responses	200 pts total; 20 / week	11:59 pm weekly on Tuesday
Social Media and Subjectivation	150 pts total	
In-class Reflection	10 pts	8/17 (in-class activity)
In-class Reflection	15 pts	8/24 (in-class activity)
Ads Topics Reflection	25 pts	8/30 11:59pm
Artistic Intervention	100 pts	9/14 11:59pm
Speculative Fiction	150 pts total	
Idea Proposal (150 words)	25 pts	9/7 11:59 pm
1st Draft (Minimum 750 words)	(No points, required for PR)	9/21 11:59 pm
Peer Review	25 pts	9/28 11:59 pm
Final Draft	100 pts	10/5 11:59 pm
Critical Making	500 pts total	
Research Wiki	25 pts	10/19 11:59 pm
Make Video	25 pts	10/26 11:59 pm
Group Plan / Proposal	50 pts	11/9 6:00 pm
Multimedia Chapter	150 pts	11/30 11:59pm
Final Project Showcase	250 pts	12/12 6:00 pm

Reading Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
8/17	Overview, Welcome	N/A
8/24	Overview, Media Studies	Ch 8: "Towards a Theory of Media" in Simon Mills' *Gilbert Simondon: Information, Technology, and Media*
8/31	Speculative Fiction	"I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon" by Philip K. Dick; "The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman" by N. Katherine Hayles
9/7	Cyborgs	"Cyborg Manifesto" by Donna Haraway
9/14	Cyborgs	"Cyborg Anthropology" by G. Downey, J. Dumit, and S. Williams; "Postcolonial Cyborgs" by Joseba Gabilondo
9/21	Subjectivation	"Foucault and Technology" by Michael Behren
9/28	Media and Subjectivation	Foreword to Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900* by David Wellbery; "Life as a Work of Art" in *Negotiations* by Gilles Deleuze
10/5	Aesthetic Approaches to Life	Ch 1: "How Might One Live" from *Gilles Delueze: An Introduction* by Todd May; "Ethology: Spinoza and Us" by Gilles Deleuze
10/12	Critical Making	"Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life" by Matt Ratto; "Defining Critical Making," Matt Ratto in Conversation with Garnet Hertz
10/19	Posthumanism	Preface to *After Life* by Eugene Thacker; Ch 1: "Toward Embodied Virtuality" in *How We Became Posthuman* by N. Katherine Hayles
10/26	Posthumanism	Ch 2: "Meta(l)morphoses" in *Nomadic Theory* by Rosi Braidotti; "Prologue" in *My Mother Was a Computer* by N. Katherine Hayles
11/2	Posthumanism	Ch 1: "Post-Humanism: Life Beyond the Self" in *The Posthuman* by Rosi Braidotti
11/9	Posthumanism Media Studies	"The Genesis of the Individual" by Gilbert Simondon; Ch 4: "The Concept of Modulation" in Anne Sauvagnargues' *Artmachines*
11/16	Posthuman Media Studies	*"Informational Ontology"* by Andrew Iliadis; "Introduction: Insects in the Age of Technology" in *Insect Media* by Jussi Parrika
11/23	Thanksgiving Break	N/A
11/30	Class Wrap-up	N/A
12/12	Final Exam Period	6-9pm Critical Making Project Showcase

Course Policies

ELECTRONICALLY HOSTED COURSE
This course will be electronically hosted on Moodle and at http://www.jjsylvia.com/posthuman and complies with NCSU regulations for electronically hosted courses: http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/informationtechnology/REG08.00.11.php

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Per University regulations, excused absences must fall into one of two categories: sanctioned anticipated situations and documented emergency situations. Anticipated situations (e.g., participation in official University functions, court attendance, religious observances, or military duty) *must be submitted in writing at the beginning of the semester or one week prior to the anticipated absence.* Emergency absences (e.g., student illness, injury or death of immediate family member, *must be documented by the Student Organization Resource Center 515-3323)* within one week following the emergency. Make-up work will be allowed only in situations where absences were excused. Please consult the following website for further information on University attendance regulations: http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-03

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Strict standards of academic honesty will be enforced according to the University policy on academic integrity found in the code of student conduct. NC State Students are bound to an honor code, which states: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this test or assignment." It is my understanding and expectation that a student's signature on any test or assignment means that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Please consult the following website for further details on student conduct: http://studentconduct.ncsu.edu/

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- Using papers or work from another class.

- Using another student's paper or work from any class.

- Copying work or a paper from the Internet.

- The egregious lack of citing sources or documenting research.
  If you're not clear on what is or is not plagiarism, ASK. The BEST case scenario if caught is a zero on that assignment, and ignorance of what does or does not count is not an excuse. That being said, I'm a strong supporter of Fair Use doctrine. Just attribute what you use--and, again, ASK if there's any doubt.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)
Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-01

INCOMPLETE AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS
Points earned for late assignments will be reduced by 50% if received within 24 hours of due date and time due. Assignments received later will not be accepted unless in accordance with the excused absence policy as referenced above.

INCOMPLETE GRADE POLICY
Students will not be given a temporary grade of IN (incomplete) unless they have attended classes regularly for most of the semester, have completed at least 60% of required work, have missed required work as a result of factors beyond their control, and have submitted satisfactory documentary evidence. An IN grade not removed by the end of the next semester in which the student is enrolled or by the end of twelve months, whichever is earlier, will automatically become an F (unless the student can present a compelling, well-documented case for the extension). For the NC State policy on grading and IN grades, see http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03

CREDIT ONLY POLICY
Requirements for Credit-Only: In order to receive a grade of S, students are required to take all exams and quizzes, complete all assignments, and earn a grade of C- or better. Credit-Only courses can only be included under the Free Elective category of the student's curriculum. Conversion from letter grading to credit only (S/U) grading is subject to university deadlines. Refer to the Registration and Records calendar for deadlines related to grading. For more details refer to: http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-15

AUDIT POLICY

Requirements for Auditors: Auditors must consult with the instructor. For details refer to: http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-04

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT
NC State University provides equality of opportunity in education and employment for all students and employees. Accordingly, NC State affirms its commitment to maintain a work environment for all employees and an academic environment for all students that is free from all forms of discrimination. Discrimination based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Harassment of any person (either in the form of quid pro quo or creation of a hostile environment) based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation also is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Retaliation against any person who complains about discrimination is also prohibited. NC State's policies and regulations covering discrimination, harassment, and retaliation may be accessed at http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-05.

GRADES AND GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Grade	Grade Points
A+ A A-	4.333 4 3.667
B+ B B-	3.333 3 2.667
C+ C C-	2.333 2 1.667
D+ D D-	1.333 1 0.667
F	0

STUDENT RESOURCES
Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services: http://tutorial.ncsu.edu/wsts
Academic Policies: www.ncsu.edu/policies/sitemap.php#acad-pols_regs
University Career Center: http://www.ncsu.edu/career/
Disability Services Office (DSO): http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/
Adverse Weather: Complete information about adverse weather policies is available at http://www.ncsu.edu/human_resources/benefits/leave/adverseweather.php
Check email, news, the NCSU home page, or call 513-8888 for the latest information.

CODE OF CONDUCT
All students at North Carolina State University (NC State) are responsible for conducting themselves in a manner that helps enhance an environment of learning in which the rights, dignity, worth, and freedom of each member of the academic community are respected. Violations of campus or University policies, rules or regulations, or federal, state, or local law may result in a violation of the Code of Student Conduct and imposition of sanctions. For more information please view http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01.