

# English 192: Science Fiction: Post-Trans-Non Human

Summer 2014

**Instructor:** Zach Horton

**Meeting Time and Place:** MTWR 5:00PM-6:05PM; Girvetz 1115

**Office Hours and Location:** Tuesday and Thursday 3:30-4:30pm  
South Hall 2509 (Transcriptions Studio)

**Mailbox:** South Hall 3421

**Email:** zhorton@umail.ucsb.edu

## Introduction:

What, if anything, does “the human” mean today? Many contemporary debates about the promises and dangers of future technologies depend upon implicit assumptions about the essence of both technology and the human. Is technology anti-human? Will future technologies transform the human into something else entirely? Would this be a step forward or a great tragedy? This course explores these questions and many more by reading a number of works of science fiction that pose these problems as thought experiments, unraveling the fate of the human in various future scenarios. We will attempt to parse out three different frameworks for thinking about the future of the human, each tied to a different body of narratives and the philosophical programs developed in them: the Posthuman, the Transhuman, and the Non-Human. Posthumanism, or the abandoning of the human as a meaningful category or privileged site of agency, will be explored in both technophilic and technophobic forms through the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Margaret Atwood, and others. We'll explore Transhumanism, or the transference of the tenets of humanism into new, enhanced technological forms, through the works of James Tiptree Jr., Greg Egan, and in other forms of media. Perhaps most radically, we'll look at the intertwined fates of humans and non-humans in the work of Octavia Butler and Shane Carruth. How, we will ask, does science fiction police or irrupt the boundaries between the post-, trans-, and non-human? Regardless of how the future actually plays out, do these considerations change the way we can or should think about the human in the present?

## Required Texts:

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (purchased used or Kindle edition)

Octavia Butler, *Seed to Harvest*

*Forbidden Planet* (film; purchase on disc, online, or rent online via Amazon.com)

Course Reader, available from The Alternative on campus

## Grade Breakdown:

**Quizzes and Reading Responses: 20%** Occasionally, unannounced quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class, covering the recent reading(s). At other times, a reading response will be assigned, consisting of a one page response to a prompt given in class, to be turned in the next day at the beginning of class.

**Paper #1: 15%** This will be a 4-5 page essay which will require you to close read and analyze one of the works covered so far in the course. I will provide you with prompts / topics to choose from; you may also create your own topic, with my approval. The essay must be MLA-formatted (see the MLA Handbook, Seventh Edition) and include a works cited page.

**Paper #2: 25%** This will be a 6-7 page essay which will require you to close read and analyze one or more of the works covered in the course. I will provide you with prompts / topics to choose from; you may also create your own topic, with my approval. This essay *must include research* based on a *minimum of two scholarly sources*, and must be MLA-formatted (see the MLA Handbook, Seventh Edition) and include a works cited page.

**Participation: 15%** Please come on time and prepared to discuss the materials in a thoughtful manner. This means reading closely and carefully, taking notes, writing down questions, marking interesting, difficult, or significant passages you would like to discuss. **CELL PHONE** use is **not permitted** in class. Please keep your phones off and put away. You may use a computer or tablet to take notes if you switch it to Airplane mode.

**Final: 25%** The *cumulative* final exam will include two parts. The first part will ask for identification of passages, terms, and characters. The second part of the exam asks for a short essay.

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Please note the following:

- More than **one absence** requires a documented excuse
- More than **two unexcused absences** will result in a failing participation grade
- **Four or more absences** may result in being dropped from the course
- Every **three “lates”** will amount to one absence; you will be counted late if you are not present when attendance is taken at the beginning of each class

In the event of an unavoidable absence, please contact me before class. You are responsible for whatever material you miss, including handouts, assignments, and announcements.

### Papers and Late Work

All papers and assignments are due—in *hard-copy* format as well as an emailed digital copy—on the specified due dates indicated in the schedule below. Any work submitted after this time will be considered “late.” Late work will be accepted up to 5 days after the original due date, with a 1/3 letter-grade-deduction per day late.

### Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, of all kinds, is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes the failure to acknowledge all secondary sources in your work, passing off another person’s work as your own, or submitting a paper written for a previous class. Plagiarism can be obvious or subtle, intentional or a careless mistake. Take your work and documentation seriously: keep track of your sources as you read and take notes; document quotes and paraphrases as you write, not when you are finished, scrambling to find who said what and where. If you are ever in doubt about when and how to acknowledge a source, please ask! At the very least, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a mark on your academic record, and may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion.

## Schedule

### Unit I: Introduction

Week 1:

#### **Monday, June 23**

Overview of course

Screening of scene from *The Island of Lost Souls*

#### **Tuesday, June 24**

Edgar Allen Poe, “The Man That Was Used Up” <http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/mnusdd.htm>

Vernor Vinge, “The Coming Technological Singularity”

<http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Global/Singularity/sing.html>

### Unit II: The Posthuman

#### **Wednesday, June 25**

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp. 13-25, 50-54 (in Reader)

R.U.R. <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/capek/karel/rur/contents.html> (“Introductory Scene” and “Act I”)

**Thursday, June 26**

R.U.R. <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/capek/karel/rur/contents.html> (“Act II” and “Act III”)

Week 2:

**Monday, June 30**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chapters 1-6)

**Tuesday, July 1**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chapters 7-9)

**Wednesday, July 2**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chapters 10-11)

David Cronenberg, *Videodrome* (film, watch beginning in class)

**Thursday, July 3**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chapter 12)

David Cronenberg, *Videodrome* (film, watch in class)

Paper #1 prompts distributed in class

Week 3:

**Monday, July 7**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chapters 13-15)

Unit III: The Transhuman

**Tuesday, July 8**

Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (in Reader)

**Wednesday, July 9**

James Tiptree Jr. [Alice Sheldon], “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” (in Reader)

*Ghost in the Shell* (film, watch beginning in class)

**Thursday, July 10**

Paper #1 due

*Ghost in the Shell* (film, watch in class)

Week 4:

**Monday, July 14**

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (Part I)

**Tuesday, July 15**

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (through Chapter 8)

**Wednesday, July 16**

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (through Chapter 12)

**Thursday, July 17**

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (through Chapter 16)

Unit IV: The Non-Human

Week 5:

**Monday, July 21**

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (through end)  
*Forbidden Planet* (film, watch beginning in class)

**Tuesday, July 22**

*Forbidden Planet* (film, watch in class)

**Wednesday, July 23**

Octavia Butler, *Clay's Ark* (through "Present 8")

**Thursday, July 24**

Octavia Butler, *Clay's Ark* (through end of Part II)

Week 6:

**Monday, July 28**

Octavia Butler, *Clay's Ark* (through "Past 25")

**Tuesday, July 29**

Octavia Butler, *Clay's Ark* (through end)  
Shane Carruth, *Upstream Color* (film, watch beginning in class)

**Wednesday, July 30**

Shane Carruth, *Upstream Color* (film, watch in class)

**Thursday, July 31**

In-class final exam

Paper #2 Due Saturday, August 2nd, by noon, in instructor's mailbox and via email.