"Machine Dreams"
English 90md

Department of English
Harvard University

Location: Barker 316

Professor Margaret Rhee
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Office hours by appointment.

Course Description

In 1920, Czech playwright Karel Čapek coined the term "robot" in his play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* and transformed societal conceptions of mechanical beings. This course investigates how machines, robots, and codes are represented in, and shaped by literary texts. With a focus on contemporary literature and digital theory, books include Douglas Kearny's *The Black Automaton* (2009), *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) by N. Katherine Hales, and *The Automaton Biographies* (2009) by Larissa Lai, as well as android music videos by Janelle Monae (among other media). In addition to critical reading and writing, students will explore robots, technology, and science fiction through critical, creative, and digital praxis.

In the digital age, constructionist learning—learning through creating—can be applied to all disciplines and in all learning settings to encourage "embodied" learning. As such, the pedagogical approach of this course aims to embrace creativity and constructionism in our investigation and reflection of the role of robots, machines, and codes in literature, and our lives.

This course is organized around discussions, and students should prepare for each class accordingly. Students will be required to lead the discussion of one of our main texts; present a short (3 - 5 minutes) presentation of electronic literature; provide a creative gesture; present at our class symposium; and participate in our collective class podcast interviews with invited authors.

Course Texts

Course texts should be ordered online (by Week Three) or purchased at a bookstore. Texts should also be available on course reserves at the Harvard Library. All required texts for purchase will be denoted with an asterix in the syllabus calendar. Additional readings will be posted on the course website (course website) or provided in class as a handout.

Required Texts. Larissa Lai, *The Automaton Biographies*; Katie Williams, *Tell the Machine Goodnight: A Novel*; N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Post Human*; Douglas Kearny, *The Black Automaton*; Margaret Rhee, *Love, Robot*; Eugene Lim, *Dear Cyborgs: A Novel*; Čapek. Karel. *R.U.R (Rossum's Universal Robots.*

Electronic Literature: Electronic Literature Collection Volumes I, II, III
http://collection.eliterature.org/

Libraries, educators, and individuals may request a free copy of the volume 1 and 2 USB by mail:

Electronic Literature Organization
c/o Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Ave, 14N-234
Cambridge, MA 02139

Assignments/Grading.

1. Attendance, participation, and seminar: 30% (includes discussion facilitation)
2. Four 2-page (400-word) response papers: 20%
3. Course symposium presentation and final paper (roughly 10 pages/2500 - 3000 words): 30%
4. Creative gesture: 5%
5. Podcast project 10%
6. Electronic Literature presentation: 5%

Descriptions

Discussion Facilitation

As active participants in the seminar, students will provide a 15 minute introduction on a main text, and facilitate discussion. Additionally, if we have a scheduled skype meeting with the respective author, the discussion facilitator should also pose a question or two.

Podcast project (Skype Author Visits)

We have a unique opportunity to engage with select writers through digital conversation. To facilitate our pedagogical engagement with digital and literary culture, we will collectively create a class podcast with invited guest authors. Participation in creating the class podcast will be required. At minimum, each student should aim to participate in two podcast conversations. Further information forthcoming. In participatory fashion, podcast guidelines will be created collectively.

Response Papers

One two page (400 words) paper should be written on respective unit topics (every two weeks). There are five units this semester, and you are welcome to chose the topics/dates that are best for your interest and schedules. Please see the calendar for the scheduled due dates.

Final Paper

The paper topic of your final paper needs to be original and inspired by your own interests related to the course. The final paper can delve from your seminar presentation, but should also include other major texts, outside texts, and new elements. We will aim to meet in person in regards to your final paper.

Electronic Literature Presentation

We will also engage with electronic literature, and reflect on the ways authors have created literature for machines. Starting Week Three, we will start each class with a short (5 minute) presentation on a particular author/electronic literature. You will be invited to sign up for the work that most interests you.

Creative Gesture

In addition to our critical engagement with the respective literature and concepts, we individually create a creative gesture (story, poem, digital work) inspired by robots, machines, and codes. This creative gesture will be shared at our final class symposium.

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Provisional Schedule*

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Week 1. 9-4   **Course Introduction:**

1) Cathy Davidson, "More Or Less Technology In The Classroom? We're Asking The Wrong Question," *Fast Company*, April 28, 2011 (handout)

https://www.fastcompany.com/40459966/more-or-less-technology-in-the-classroom-were-asking-the-wrong-question

2) *Why We Love Robots* by Ken Goldberg and Tiffany Shlain (short film screening in class)

3) Matthew Thorburn, "Sweet Corn" (Handout)

4) Jeannine Hall Gailey, "How Not To Be a Robot Scientist's Daughter" (Handout)

5) Class Survey

Week 2. 9-11.   **Topic I: History, the Digital, and the Automaton**

1) Edgar Allan Poe, "Maelzel's Chess Player" (Course Site)

2) Minsoo Kang, "Introduction" and "Chapter One: The Power of the Automaton" Sublime Dreams of Living Machines (Course Site)

3) Kat Eschner, "Debunking the Automaton Turk Helped Set Edgar Allen Poet on The Path To Mystery Writing" (Course Site)

4) Tara McPherson, "Digital" (Course Site)

5) Lucy Burns, "Kirby: Vacuuming Dreams" (Course Site)

or **visit:** https://issuu.com/repcollective/docs/machine_dreams_issuu

Optional: Stephen Price, "Making the Way for the Machine: Maelzel's Automaton Chess-Player and Antebellum American Culture" (Course Site)

Check out: Amazon Mechanical Turk https://www.mturk.com/

E-Lit: Young Hae Chang Heavy Collective

http://www.yhchang.com/

Podcast Exercise #1: Collective guidelines and interview practice

Week 3. 9 - 18   1) Cael Kaprek. *RUR (Rossum's Universal Robots)**

2) Keith Wilson, "Three Laws" and "Uncanny Emmett Till" (Course Site)

Optional: Peter Galison, Caroline Jones, "Introduction: Picturing Science, Producing Art"

Guest Visit: George Abraham (Poet and Ph.D. candidate, Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS))

Selections from George's poetry will be posted at our course website.

Podcast Exercise #2: Conversation with George Abraham)

E-Lit: Allison Parrish - *The Arrival*
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Due: Paper One

Topic II: Contemporary Cyborgs

Presentation: _____

Week 4. 9-25   1) Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (Watch on your own)*

2) Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (Course Website)

Optional: Timothy Yu, "Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: "Naked Lunch, Blade Runner", and "Neuromancer" (Course Website)

E-Lit: Darius Kazemi "Bot Poety"
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Activity: Twitter Conversation

Discussion Facilitation Begins

Week 5. 10 - 2

        Discussion: _____

        1) Larissa Lai, *The Automaton Biographies**

        Optional: Tamera Ho, "'New Cultural Politics of Intimacy': Asian. Animal. Cyborg" (Course Website)

        E-Lit: Nick Montfort http://io.creamcityreview.org/40-1/montfort/use_of_dust.html

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        Podcast Exercise #3

        Due: Paper Two

[N 9]

        Topic III: Cybernetics and A.I.

Week 6. 10 -16   1) N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman** (Prologue, Chapters 1 - 5)

        Discussion: _____

        2) Alan Turing, "Computer Machinery and Intelligence" (Course Website)

        Discussion: _____

        Activity: Chatbot poetry

        E-Lit: Jennifer Espinoza, https://twitter.com/sadqueer4life

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Week 7. 10 -23   1) N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman** (5 - 11)

        Discussion: _____

        Short excerpt: Mark Doten, Excerpt from *Trump Sky* (Course Website) (Skype conversation)

        Podcast Exercise #4: Conversation with Mark Doten

E-Lit: Alan Sondheim "Internet Text 1994 - 2006)

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/sondheim__internet_text.html
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Due: Paper Three

Topic IV: Machine Dreams

Week 8. 10 - 30. Katie Williams, *Tell the Machine Goodnight**

Discussion: _____

E-Lit Michael Joyce afternoon, a story:
http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/pmaf/hypertext/aft/
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Week 9. 11 - 6. Katie Williams, *Tell the Machine Goodnight** (Skype conversation)

Podcast Exercise #5 Conversation with Katie Williams

Discussion: _____

E-Lit: Donna Leishman, *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*

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Week 10. 11- 13. Margaret Rhee, *Love, Robot**

Creative Writing Workshop

Jenelle Monae, Cindy Mayweather (links will be posted at course website)

Optional: Afrofuturism (TBD)

E-Lit: Loss Pequeño Glazier

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/glazier__whitefaced_

bromeliads_on_20_hectares.html

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Due: Paper Four

Topic V: **Identities, Performance, and Cyborgs**

Week 11. 11 - 20. Eugene Lim, *Dear Cyborgs** (Skype conversation)

Podcast Exercise #6: Conversation with Eugene Lim

Discussion: _____

E-Lit: Mark Marino @BeingSpencerPratt
http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=being-spencer-pratt:
_____

[N 23: Thanksgiving]

Week 12. N 9. 11- 27.

Douglas Kearny, *The Black Automaton**

Discussion: _____

E-Lit: Judd Morrisey, The Last Performance
http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/morrissey_lastperformance.html
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Due: Paper Five

Podcast Exercise #7: Collective dialogues

Week 13. 12 -4.

Class Symposium
Creative project and presentation due

Final Paper Due (Due Date, TBD)