ARTSSCI 4ST3 / Selected Topics in Inquiry: Research Seminar "Interfaces: Our Technology, Ourselves"

Several core ideas will frame materials concerning the interface between technology and the human, as they emerge from more than a century of public discourse on science and also science fiction: our relationship with technology has always been characterized by an array of contradictory attitudes and practices (wishful thinking, creative imagination, fear and uncertainty, for example). Both scientific practice and science fiction, along with popular culture, address these in different ways, from many different angles. We'll be considering the ideology of the transhumanism movement as a frame we can return to at different stages in the term, since the movement is deeply rooted in very specific definitions of the human and the technological which provoke argument, and also because many aspects of the movement are rooted in science fiction.

Our own research will begin with an exercise to help each of you choose an area of interest to get you started: I'll provide a bibliography of academic and popular culture sources, websites and science fiction from which you select six items (you can also find other sources not in that bibliography if you wish), describing each in terms of how it defines an area of research for you in a paragraph. We'll share these, so that we become familiar with everyone else's interests, and how different people are mapping out ways of examining them. (15%)

As we discuss individual questions in class (see schedule), fine distinctions and subtle arguments will emerge. Two short papers (1200-1500 words) will each focus deeply on a single idea you want to examine more deeply; these are likely to be related to a big picture you're working towards in your chosen research area. (20% each)

In the last few weeks of term, each of you will be putting together a short audio file (or audio and video) presentation of 8-10 minutes, and will submit a handout to the class (instructions, scheduling and helpful advice will be available in advance), so that we'll be able to give feedback and ask questions over several classes (depending on class size). These presentations will outline what you want to do in your final paper, and our feedback will be helpful in framing your ideas, clarifying them, and identifying possible ways of developing your ideas. (15%)

Your final paper (30%) will have had a strong foundation by the time you complete it; the course will help you create your own area of research and produce a finished work. We'll be focusing on research and writing, appropriate referencing and how to develop workable lines of inquiry, while improving writing in general.

Some of our readings will include selections from Mark O'Connell's *To Be a Machine* (2017), Bruce Sterling's novella *Swarm* (1982), William Gibson's short story "Burning Chrome" (1982), Clifford Simak's short story "Desertion" (1944), the short science fiction film *Sunspring* (2019, written by an AI, performed by human beings), and Naomi Kritzer's short story "Cat Pictures Please" (2015). A full course outline will follow.