

Anth 440: Cyborg Anthropology

Syllabus - Spring 2008 Kathleen Saunders

Required Texts

Weekly reading packets will be kept in AH315E. Students may remove them long enough to make a copy or read them in the room. Additional readings may be specified on the Web. The only book that needs to be purchased is William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). This book is out of print but easily found in used bookstores and online. Get a copy ASAP.

Course Overview

Cyborg Anthropology as a subdiscipline was formalized at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1992. In the words of the co-presenters at the original meeting:

The cyborg image. . .originated. . .to refer to forms of life that are part-human and part-machine, though it is by no means confined to the world of high technology. Rather, cyborg anthropology calls attention more generally to the cultural production of human distinctiveness by examining ethnographically the boundaries between humans and machines and our visions of the differences that constitute these boundaries. As a participatory activity, it empowers anthropology to be culturally reflective regarding its presence in the practices of science and technology and to imagine how these practices might be otherwise. . .

Course Objectives

To explicate the cultural issues raised by the blurring of the conceptual and physical boundaries between human and machine.

To explore the theoretical basis for analyzing science as a socio-cultural practice.

To provide deeply textured ethnographic accounts and analyses of how technoscience is experienced and understood.

To demystify the relationships between science and other socio-cultural institutions and practices.

Course Format

This is a highly interactive seminar class. The bulk of the work will be done by students in open or group discussions. The instructor will chime in with background information and thought prompts. All students should come prepared with questions, comments, outside or supplementary information (when you have it) and a willingness to share. The more interactive each of you is willing to be, the more valuable the experience will be for all of us. Critical engagement with the instructor and with fellow students is welcomed and encouraged. We will tackle some very complicated ideas about which we can disagree passionately -- but respectfully.

Requirements

I. Meaningful Participation

Weekly reading assignments are appended to this document. Class time will often be devoted to discussion, either with the entire class or in small groups. Keeping current with the reading assignments is crucial for meaningful participation. If timely preparation seems lacking, the instructor may give "pop quizzes" as part of the participation evaluation.

Meaningful participation includes: attendance, obvious preparation, and participation in group and class discussions and projects. Please note that in a class in which participation is central to learning:

-Simply "being there" is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition. Students who miss more than three classes will have to justify being allowed to continue in the course. Missing either of the class presentation days at the end of the quarter will cause a drop of a full letter grade earned unless the student provides a documented, university-approved waiver.

- Timely preparation, including notes and questions, is essential.
- Not all commentary is "meaningful."
- In the spirit of justice, students should monitor their own contributions to avoid "free-riding" (no contribution) or "dominating the floor" (more than one's share).

II. Written Work

This is a writing intensive class. You will complete three types of writing assignments: film analysis, critical journal entries, and a final paper which will be the basis for your end-of-quarter presentation to the class. Each of these writing assignments will be detailed on Blackboard. In general terms, these assignments provide you with three different types of academic writing exercises. The film paper is a short (approx. 4 pages) analytical work based on a film you select from an approved list. It is not a "research" paper per se, but if you incorporate information from published reviews or analysis, this information should be cited in AAA or MLA style and a Works Cited page included. Journal entries are less formal than papers and reflect your intellectual reaction to the assigned readings. They are not formally cited, but if you quote others, make in-text reference to the source. Journals will be collected periodically and evaluated. Grading of journals is cumulative; a final grade for the collective body of work will be assigned. Journal entries should demonstrate a progression in theoretical and argumentative proficiency as well as writing competence. The final research paper should demonstrate engagement with the course materials and mastery of the mechanics of academic paper format. These papers will be developed in stages and a ROUGH DRAFT of the final paper is REQUIRED.

(Note: every serious student should own a Manual of Style. If you do not have one, now is the time to buy one or acquire one online.)

Grading

Movie analysis 100
Journal 150
Research Paper 400
Participation 50
Total 700 pts
(Standard letter grade assignment)

Academic Honesty

Standards of academic honesty will be rigorously upheld. Consult your student handbook for WWU policies concerning academic honesty. As a rule of thumb, any five consecutive words not of the student's original composition must be cited as a quote; any information previously unknown to the writer or not "common knowledge" must be cited as to the source.

Special Needs

Students who have special needs to facilitate learning should make those needs known the first week of the term.

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