

Philosophy of Disembodiment

Spring 2017

UCLA
SOCIETY AND GENETICS M71CW
BIOTECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY SEMINAR: THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISEMBODIMENT

Meetings: T 3:00-5:50 Public Affairs 1343

Instructor: Jonathan Gingerich

Email: jgingerich@humnet.ucla.edu (On weekdays, I'll typically answer emails within 24 hours during the week; I may take longer on weekends.)

Cell: [see course website] (I'm unlikely to answer texts and calls after 7 PM)

Office: Dodd 363 (but office hours will be held at Lu Valle Commons)

Office Hours: T 1:00-2:50 PM Lu Valle Commons and by appointment

Website: <https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/17S-GECLSTM71CW-4>

Course Description

This seminar explores the ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics of human disembodiment, where human disembodiment designates the detachment of the beings that we call “human” from bodies with the physiology of homo sapiens. We will explore topics including the following: First, certain strains of feminist theory have argued that sex equality can only be achieved when human reproduction no longer takes place in and through sexed human bodies. What implications do technologies that allow the conception and gestation of human embryos and fetuses to take place outside of the body have for gender and sex oppression? Second, some technologists believe that it is possible and desirable to upload human minds to computers, as doing so will allow us to eliminate death from human experience and allow more humans to come into existence. Is it philosophically possible to upload human minds to computers? And if so, what would the consequences of doing so be for politics and for our ideas of individuality? Third, some contemporary artists have developed practices that focus on how our relationships to our bodies change when it becomes easier to modify our bodies or even remove ourselves from our bodies. What is the significance of disembodiment for art and visual representation? We will explore these questions and others by looking at a variety of texts including science fiction, feminist theory, contemporary and historical works of political philosophy, and contemporary art and art criticism.

Texts

Required texts include the following:

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (ISBN 978-0449000946)

Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (ISBN 978-1597805421)

These novels will be available through the UCLA bookstore, and they are also available used through Amazon and many other online booksellers. All other required texts will be available on the course website.

It is important that you get a copy of the precise edition of these books listed here (with the ISBN number listed here), because our discussion of these books will be best if everyone is working with the same page numbers.

Many of the texts we will be reading are dense philosophical texts, and I strongly encourage you to read them at least twice. We will discuss strategies for reading philosophy essays on the first day of class.

Graded Coursework

- 25% Short reading responses submitted to the course website
- 5% Replies to other students' reading responses on the course website
- 20% Weekly participation in seminar meetings (including in-class writing exercises)
- 10% Short paper (approximately 1,000 words)
- 40% Term paper and rough draft (approximately 3,000 words)

Participation

The success of this course will depend on your preparation, attendance, and thoughtful participation. I expect you to attend every meeting, barring emergencies. Attendance is particularly important to ensure a high quality discussion because of the small size of the class. For similar reasons, it is essential to carefully read the assigned reading before the meeting at which we will discuss it.

Try to look over the text (which you have already read carefully) just before coming to class. Think about something you want to talk about, or something you find baffling, and during discussion don't hesitate to bring up your perplexities or your own take on text. Our discussions will provide an opportunity to try out different interpretations and understandings of the readings and to work through the questions that arise as we go along.

Participation will also involve completing short writing exercises in class about disembodiment in most weeks. Some weeks, these short writing exercises will serve as pre-writing exercises to help prepare you for the term paper; other weeks, these exercises will serve as a starting point for debating disembodiment technologies or reflecting on connections between our readings and your own lived experiences.

Participation grades will be based on engagement in our discussion, including actively listening to and supportively engaging with other participants, arriving fully prepared for discussion, routinely making comments that advance our discussion, and completion of weekly, short in-class writing assignments. Failure to attend class meetings, failure to participate, and failure to

engage with other participants can negatively affect your participation grade, while particularly insightful contributions and attentive engagement with other participants can positively affect your grade. I will advise you of where your participation grade stands at the end of each of the three sections of the course

Reading Responses

Throughout the term, I will ask you to write **five** brief (approximately 500 word) response papers to the reading assignment.

You may turn in a short reading response paper to the weekly discussion forum on the course website the Monday before each seminar meeting by 6:00 PM. It is important that you submit your reading response by 6:00 PM so that your classmates and I can read it before our seminar meeting.

The purpose of the reading response papers is to get you thinking about the readings before we meet and discuss them; let you practice and improve your philosophical writing; and provide you with a chance to try out ideas and arguments that you may wish to develop in your final paper.

We will have ten seminars over the course of the term. You are free to choose which five times you submit reading response papers, but because you only need to submit reading response paper before five seminars of your choice, late submissions of reading responses will not be accepted except in extraordinary circumstances. I strongly recommend that you not wait until the middle of the course to begin submitting papers so they don't pile up.

A few pointers for writing reading response papers:

- You don't need to do any additional reading or research to write these papers; you simply need to read the assigned texts and think about questions that emerge from them.
- You should avoid merely summarizing the reading. Instead, you should look for thoughts in the readings that excite, confuse, intrigue, or infuriate you and write about them. If you do this, you are likely to write about important interpretative (what does the author mean?) or critical (is the author right?) issues. Comparative points (what is the relationship between one author and another?) may also arise over the course of the term.
- You don't have to write on everything in the reading for a particular day. Indeed, it would be best to select a narrower topic, because if you try to write about everything, you're likely to end up merely summarizing.
- Keep in mind that the papers may serve as a good starting point for our discussion in class. If there is something you'd like to talk about in class, consider writing about it in a short paper.

Reading responses (and replies to other students' reading responses) will be evaluated using the grading rubric for reading responses that is posted on the course website under "resources."

Replies to Other Students' Reading Responses

In addition to submitting your own reading responses before **five** of our seminar meetings, you must write a brief (approximately 100 word) comment or question about at least one other students' reading response on the course website. **Replies to reading responses should be submitted between 6:00 PM on Mondays (when reading responses are due) and 12:00 PM on Tuesdays.** (Replies may, however, be submitted earlier, if other students post their reading responses to the course website earlier than 6:00 PM on Monday.)

You may submit replies to reading responses any Tuesday, whether or not you have submitted one of your own reading responses that week.

Additional participation and discussion on the weekly discussion forum in addition to the required replies to other students is encouraged, but is not required for grading purposes.

As with the reading response assignments, because you only need to submit replies to reading responses before five seminars of your choice, late submissions of replies to reading responses will not be accepted except in extraordinary circumstances.

Short Paper

A short paper, which should be approximately 1,000 words (give or take 100 words), double-spaced, will be **due through Turnitin on the course website by 2:50 PM on Tuesday, April 25 (week 4).** The short paper will require you to reconstruct a philosophical argument from one of the readings that we discuss in week 1, and I will distribute paper topics in week 2.

Term Paper

A longer term paper is required, of approximately 3,000 words, which is due on the last day of seminar. A proposed topic for the term paper is due in week 6 and a (complete) rough draft is due in week 8.

The term paper should be approximately 3,000 words (give or take 300 words), double-spaced, on a topic of your choosing that grows out of one of our meetings or readings. By writing the term paper, you will learn how to clearly and persuasively present a philosophical argument in writing.

I will set aside time for brief individual conferences with students to discuss potential paper topics in week 5. You will sign up for an appointment to discuss what you are thinking of writing your paper about. I will provide more details about paper topic conferences in class.

A proposed topic is due through Turnitin on the course website by 2:50 PM on Tuesday, May 9. You should also turn in a hard copy during class. The proposed topic should be a one paragraph abstract or statement of a question (and may not exceed 1 page at most). This topic is not a commitment, and you may change your mind about your paper topic.

A rough draft of the term paper is due through Turnitin on the course website by 2:50 PM on Tuesday, May 23. You should also turn in a hard copy during class. The rough draft should be a complete draft of your paper. The rough draft will not be graded separately, but failure to submit a complete draft will negatively affect your overall grade for the final paper. My comments on your rough draft will assist you in revising your draft into a strong final paper, and the more work you put into your rough draft, the more useful my comments will be.

I will set aside time for brief individual conferences with students to discuss rough drafts in week 8 or week 9. You will sign up for an appointment to discuss your rough draft with me. I will provide more details about rough draft conferences in class.

In week 9, I will set aside time in seminar for each student to give a very brief, 2-3 minute presentation about their final paper to the class. These presentations will not be formal, but will provide a chance for the whole class to hear about what you've been thinking about in writing your final paper.

The final paper is due through Turnitin on the course website by 2:50 PM on Tuesday, June 6. You should also turn in a hard copy during class.

Aside from last minute emergencies, extensions must be arranged at least 24 hours in advance.

Term papers will be graded using the rubric that is posted on the course website under "resources."

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by UCLA's policies on academic misconduct. I recommend that you read through the flyer on academic misconduct that has been prepared by the Dean of Students. It is available at <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf>.

A few important reminders about academic integrity are relevant to the writing assignments for this seminar: You should write your own papers and properly attribute ideas and words that you include in your writing. If you copy someone else's words into your assignment word for word, indicate that these words are a quotation, by enclosing them in quotation marks or setting them off from the text. Also provide a citation that includes enough information that your reader could locate the material that you're citing. (I don't care what style of citation you use. For our course materials, you can just give the author's last name and a page number.) You should also provide a citation if you paraphrase someone else's idea in your own writing. If you have any questions about whether what constitutes academic misconduct, please ask.

Accessibility

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310)825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When

possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Schedule

I. Introduction—What is Disembodiment?

A. WEEK 1 (4/4)

1. Descartes, *Meditations* (First, Second, and Sixth Meditations)
2. Quinn, “The Immortalist: Uploading the Mind to a Computer”

II. Sex Equality and Reproductive Technology

A. WEEK 2 (4/11)

1. **Guest Speaker: Dr. Moriah Eberhardt: Ex-Uterine Gestation (A Step Toward Ectogenesis?)**
2. Buletti et al., “The Artificial Womb”
3. Klass, “The Artificial Womb is Born”
4. Chemaly, “What Do Artificial Wombs Mean for Women?”
5. Robertson, “Feminists, Get Ready: Pregnancy and Abortion Are about to Be Disrupted”
6. Huxley, *Brave New World* (Chapter One)
7. **Short Paper Topics Provided**

B. WEEK 3 (4/18)

1. Butler, “Bloodchild”
2. Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

C. WEEK 4 (4/25)

1. Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex* (Chapters One and Ten)
2. Murphy, “Is Pregnancy Necessary?”
3. Smajdor, “The Moral Imperative for Ectogenesis”
4. **Short Paper Due**

III. Life in the Cloud: Uploading Human Minds

A. WEEK 5 (5/2)

1. Srinivasan, “Stop the Robot Apocalypse”
2. Egan, *Diaspora*
3. **Paper Topic Conferences**

B. WEEK 6 (5/9)

1. Miller, “Will You Ever Be Able to Upload Your Brain?”
2. Harmon, “A Dying Young Woman’s Hope in Cryonics and a Future”
3. Harmon, “The Neuroscience of Immortality”
4. Goldstein, “The Strange Neuroscience of Immortality”
5. Kurzweil, “Creating Human-Level AI: How and When” ([Video](#))
6. Bostrom, “Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up”
7. **Tentative Paper Topic Due**

C. WEEK 7 (5/16)

1. Chalmers, “Mind Uploading”
2. Pigliucci, “Mind Uploading”

D. WEEK 8 (5/23)

1. Merleau-Ponty, “The Body”
2. Young, “Throwing Like a Girl”

3. First Draft of Final Paper Due

IV. The Aesthetics of Post-Humanism

A. WEEK 9 (5/30)

1. Gessert, "An Introduction to Genetic Art"
2. Kac, "GFP Bunny"
3. Stelart, "Excess and Indifference"
4. Solon, "Bioart: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Using Living Tissue as a Medium"
5. **Brief Presentations on Final Papers in Seminar**
6. **Rough Draft Conferences**

B. WEEK 10 (6/6)

1. **Guest Speaker: Artist Kyung Hwa-Lee: Art, Fashion, and the Malleable Body**
2. Lee, "Malleable Bodies"
3. Flusser, *On Photography* (excerpt)
4. **Final Paper Due**

Note: Some weeks have a much larger number of readings than others, but many of the readings on these weeks are short magazine or newspaper articles. I think that the amount of reading should be roughly constant from week to week except for weeks 3 and 5 (when we are discussing novels). Plan accordingly!