Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

Rethinking the Biological Sciences: Haraway, Theory, and Culture

Fall 2011 Course IDSEM-UG 1316 T 3:30-6:10
7 E. 12 Street Room 134

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Office hours by appointment: Tuesday (10-12:30), Thurs (10-12:30), and Friday (11-1).

Course Overview

Today’s bioscience has moved out of the lab and into our hearts, our minds, our most intimate relations, and even our very nature. Genetic modification, in vitro fertilization, cloning, biomedical enhancement, neurochemical manipulation, and the early stages of a posthuman culture have all rapidly emerged. These biological developments challenge our familiar ways of thinking and they upset many of our most cherished categories and priorities. As a result, new ways of being must also emerge to understand and cope with today’s biological sciences. Rethinking biology has become a major demand on thinking in the new millennium.

One of the most creative scholars to respond to this challenge is History of Consciousness professor Donna Haraway, who, if asked, might describe herself as a postmodern feminist science historian of the present. We devote this class to a close study of Haraway’s unique interdisciplinary blend of biology, humanities, cultural studies, and science fiction. We consider both the scientific and intellectual context of her writings, and we do careful readings of her key texts on cultural history of biology. Throughout the class, we weave together Haraway’s theoretical work and her
more conversational interviews with secondary readings inspired by her work and with

science fiction portrayals of future science.

The point
is to make a difference
in the world,
to cast our lot for
some ways of life
and not others.

The point
is to learn to remember
that we might have been
otherwise,
and might yet be,
as a matter of embodied fact.

Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness*

**Required Texts**

Alaimo and Hekman: *Material Feminisms*
Donna Haraway: *How Like a Leaf*
Octavia Butler: *Parable of the Sower*
Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*
Donna Haraway: *Modest Witness@SecondMillenium*
Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*

**Class Schedule**

**SECTION ONE**

1. Introduction (9/6)

    Film: Evelyn Fox Keller

    Suggested: Whitton: Evelyn Fox Keller

2. Material Feminism (9/13)

    *Material Feminism*
    Chap 3. Constructing the Ballast (Hekman)
    Chap 4. Posthumanist Performativity (Barad)
    Chap 5. Otherworldly Conversations (Haraway)
Film: Asking Different Questions (1)

3. Material Feminism (9/20)

Latour: *We have Never Been Modern* (Chapter 1)
*Material Feminism* (Divide class between Tuana and Alaimo chaps)
  - Chap 6. Viscous Porosity (Tuana)
  - Chap 7. Trans-Corporeal Feminisms (Alaimo)
  - Chap 14. Cassies Hair (Bordo)

Film: Asking Different Questions (2)

4. Biography and Interviews (Part 1) (9/27)

Schneider: Donna Haraway: Live Theory (Introduction)
How Like a Leaf (p. 1-88)

Film: Asking Different Questions (3)

5. Situated Cyborgs (10/4)

Merchant: Death of Nature
Harding: Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology
Haraway: Situated Knowledges
Haraway: Cyborg Manifesto

Film: *Blade Runner* (1)

(NYU Holiday 10/11)

6. Cyborg Politics (10/18)

Lewis: Prozac and the Posthuman Politics of Cyborgs
Sandavol: New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed
Roy: Asking Different Questions

Film: *Blade Runner* (2)

7. Parable of the Sower (10/25)

Butler: *Parable of the Sower*

Film: *Blade Runner* (3)

First Paper Due
Topic for first paper:

Please use Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* to help you illuminate and develop the theory we considered in the first half of the semester.

**SECTION TWO**

8. Biotech Century (11/1) (instructor away)

   Rifkin: Biotech Century  
   Wolff: Biotech Investors Bible  
   Postmodern American Fiction: Technoculture Introduction  
   Russ: FemaleMan  
   Donna Haraway: *Modest_Witness* pp 1-22


   Film: *Gattaca* (1)


   Donna Haraway: *Modest_Witness* pp 125-131  
   Donna Haraway: *Modest_Witness* 131-173 (Divide class between Gene and Fetus chapters)  
   Donna Haraway: *Modest_Witness* 267-275  
   Film: *Gattaca* (2)

11. Haraway Interviews (Part II) (11/22)

   *How Like a Leaf* (p. finish)  
   Roy: Should Feminist Clone? And if so how?  
   Film: *Gattaca* (3)

12. Companion Species (11/29)

   *When Species Meet*  
   Chap 1 and 2  
   Chap 3, 4, and 5 (Divide class between these)

13. Companion Species (12/6)
When Species Meet  
Chap 6, 7, 8 (overview)  
Chap 10, 11, 12 (read close)

14. Oryx and Crake (12/13)

Topic for final paper:

Please use Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake to help you illuminate and develop the theory we considered for the second half of the semester.

Paper Due: Thursday Dec 15th at 5 PM

Course Requirements

Grades are based on three parts: attendance/participation (20%) and 2 papers (40% each). There will be an opportunity to rewrite the first paper if you desire. The attendance/participation grade is composed of weekly class attendance and participation.

Each class will begin with a short lecture on the material for that week. We then break up into small groups to select quotes we wish to discuss further. To prepare for this part of the class please type two quotes from the week’s readings which you have questions or comments (include page numbers so we can find your quotes). The last part of the class we spend discussing the quotes selected. At the end of the each section, these quotes will be collected as part of your participation grade.

The papers are 6 pages type written, double spaced. Please use the material from the class to develop the topic question. Back up your thesis with arguments and examples from the class readings (include internal citations with page numbers and a reference list at the end). A good paper demonstrates that you have integrated the material from the class discussions and readings and can use it to analyze your topic. Use the bulk of your
energy reading closely and thinking seriously about the materials you have (rather than doing outside research). Also, be sure and give your paper a title.

The grading scale for the class will be as follows: 93-100% (A) 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-86 (B), 80-82 (B-), 77-79 (C+), 70-76 (C), 63-69 (D), and below (F).