

Academic Year	2026-27	Semester	1
Course Coordinator	Asst Prof Michelle Chiang		
Course Code	HL4042		
Course Title	Being Human in Film and Literature		
Pre-requisites	HL1001 Introduction to the Study of Literature		

Course Aims

In this course, we regard the 'human' as (1) an evolving concept and (2) a lived experience. As a concept, we trace the theoretical understanding of the human from humanism, transhumanism to posthumanism. As a lived reality, we consider our place in the shifting relations between the human, the nonhuman and our environments.

By close reading selected films, literary works and critical writings, we will explore encounters between the humanities and the sciences to rethink our relationship with our immediate reality. Our central question is: What does it mean to be human in the face of rapid technological advances, digitalization, climate change and the destruction of biodiversity?

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of this course, you (as a student) would be able to:

1. Analyse and write critically about key aspects of our early twenty-first century reality.
2. Discuss the relationship between human agency, the role of technology and the environment.
3. Explain the need for dialogue between the humanities and the sciences.

Course Content

Each week, we will close read one to three texts. Please refer to the planned weekly schedule below for the list of key topics.

Humanism and Anthropocentrism

Antihumanism

Transhumanism

Posthumanism: Becoming Animal, Earth, Machine

Posthumanist Subject

Posthuman Absurd

Assessment (includes both continuous and summative assessment)

Weekly Response (30%):

The weekly response has a two-part format to allow you to measure your learning and reflect on aspects of the text that you might not have considered when you were reading it for the first time. You will keep these papers in a folder, then submit it to me twice: right before Recess and on Week 13.

Essay (40%):

In your essay, you will engage critically with a novel/film **and** a theoretical piece from the module. Your essay must begin with a thesis statement, and all points must be structured coherently with clear topic sentences.

Presentation and Video Essay* (30%):

As a group, you are expected to produce a video essay which highlights key aspects of your twenty first century reality, paying close attention to the intersection between the human, the nonhuman and their environments. No prior acting or film making experience is required. Your grade will be based on how well you advance your argument on what it means to be human in the present. At the end of the short film, you are expected to share with the class the experience of filming, the challenges you encountered and the decisions you've made as a group in its design. Every member of the group is expected to participate actively in the conception, scripting and filming. At the end of the presentation, you will take questions from your classmates and you are also expected to have prepared a list of critical questions to lead class discussion.

****To do well on the team assessment, it is necessary for you to demonstrate positive interdependence and teamwork. In principle, you will receive the same marks as your team. However, your individual score may vary based on feedback about your contributions to the group project."***

Formative feedback

Written feedback will be given when I return your essays to you. Feedback from me and your peers generated during in-class discussions will also be helpful to check your understanding of prescribed works.

Learning and Teaching approach

Approach	How does this approach support you in achieving the learning outcomes?
Lecture	The one and a half hour lecture will introduce author background and key ideas in the prescribed texts.

Short Film	The short film project will expose you to the adaptation of words to images through a digital medium. Through this, you are expected to gain an appreciation for the relationship between human agency, the role of technology and our environment.
Presentation	At the end of your presentation your group is expected to have prepared a list of critical questions to lead class discussion. Such discussions will not only allow the sharing of ideas, they are opportunities to formulate and test out potential ideas for the research essay.
Response Paper	The response papers will allow you and me to check your progress, specifically your understanding of the films and the prescribed readings.

Reading and References

Primary Texts:

Novels

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864)

P. C. Jersild's *A Living Soul* (1988)

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021)

Don DeLillo's *Zero K* (2016)

Films

Blade Runner (1982)

Downsizing (2017)

The Lobster (2015)

The Martian (2015)

Theory

Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism: Readers in Cultural Criticism*. Palgrave, 2000.

Francis Fukuyama, "Being Human." *Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), 105-177.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*. Illinois UP, 2006, pp.1-69

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.

John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*. Granta Books, 2002.

Course Policies and Student Responsibilities

(1) General

You are expected to complete all assigned pre-class readings and response papers. You will attend all seminar classes punctually. If you must miss a seminar session, you are responsible for following up with course notes, assignments and course related announcements. Since Engagement is one of the assessment components, you are expected to participate actively in all seminar discussions and activities.

(2) Absenteeism

Attendance will be taken each week. Absence from class without a valid reason can affect your course grade significantly. Valid reasons include falling sick supported by a medical certificate and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies.

If you must miss a seminar, you must inform me (the course instructor) via email prior to the start of the class.

Academic Integrity

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty. You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the [academic integrity website](#) for more information. Consult your instructor(s) if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

Course Instructors

Instructor	Office Location	Phone	Email
Asst Prof Michelle Chiang	SOH-03-69	67906714	michellechiang@ntu.edu.sg

Planned Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic	Course LO	Readings/ Activities
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1 11/8	Introduction What is Humanism?	3	Roland Barthes' "The Great Family of Man." (1993) Louis Althusser's "Marxism and Humanism." (1996) Excerpt from Emmanuel Levinas's <i>Humanism of the Other</i> . (1972)
2 18/8	Humanism	2, 3	Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Notes from the Underground</i> (1864) Michel Foucault, "The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences." (1989)
3 25/8	Humanism and Anthropocentrism	2, 3	Fyodor Dostoyevsky's <i>Notes from the Underground</i> (1864) Francis Fukuyama, "Being Human." <i>Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution</i> (2002), 105-177.
4 1/9	Antihumanism	2, 3	Excerpts from John Gray's <i>Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals</i> (2002)
5 8/9	Transhumanism I	2, 3	Don Delillo's <i>Zero K</i> (2016) Mark O'Connell's <i>To Be a Machine</i> (2017)
6 15/9	Transhumanism II	2, 3	Don Delillo's <i>Zero K</i> (2016)
7 22/9	Posthumanism	2, 3	<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)
Recess Week 28 Sep – 2 Oct			
8 6/10	Posthumanism: Becoming Animal, Earth, Machine	2, 3	Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>Klara and the Sun</i> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." (1991)

9 13/10	Posthumanist Subject	2, 3	Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>Klara and the Sun</i> Neil Badmington, "Posthumanist (Com)Promises: Diffracting Donna Haraway's Cyborg Through Marge Piercy's Body of Glass." (1998)
10 20/10	Posthuman Absurd: Becoming Animal	2, 3	<i>The Lobster</i> (2015) Rossi Braidotti's "The Posthuman as Becoming Animal" (2013) Rosalind Coward's "The Instinct" (1984)
11 27/10	Posthuman Absurd: Becoming Earth	2, 3	<i>Downsizing</i> (2017) Rossi Braidotti's "The Posthuman as Becoming Earth" (2013)
12 3/11	Posthuman Absurd: Becoming Medicanized	1, 2, 3	P. C. Jersild's <i>A Living Soul</i> (1988) Jean Baudrillard's "Prophylaxis and Virulence" (1994) Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Can Thoughts Go On Without a Body?" (1987)
13 10/11	Conclusion	1, 2, 3	<i>The Martian</i> (2015) Essay and Folder Submission.