

English 243/001: Speculative Fiction
UBC 2022-23 Term 2 | TTh 12:30-2:00 p.m. SWNG 109

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Assignment 2: Group Project

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This assignment was made possible by a TLEF grant through UBC's Learning Technologies hub, which enabled me to hire our Undergraduate Academic Assistant, Alice Deng, to work with students by providing technical support for a small group project engaging students in collaborative learning. In writing this assignment, I had several aims and concerns:

- I wanted the project and the group composition to be **inclusive**, so that no group is advantaged or disadvantaged by its members' abilities, preferences, and resources, and all groups are **respectful** environments, where everyone is a valuable member of the group, and no one is compelled to do something that makes them uncomfortable.
- I wanted the project to be **pedagogically sound**: to enable exploration of our course's concern with the literary/cultural representation of various synthetic humans and to require academic work, including textual analysis and research (both primary and secondary).
- I wanted the project to be **manageable**, without taking up too much class time or too much of students' time outside class.
- I wanted the project to be **enjoyable**, to allow exploration of those what-if, alternate-reality readings that so many of our texts invite and to allow imaginative engagement with the course's central questions: what motivations might go into the development and construction of synthetic humans? how forms might such beings take? at what point might they acquire rights? what benefits and possibilities do they offer? what risks and dangers do they pose?

The Project:

- In small groups of six or seven people, **you will "construct" a synthetic human**. The form is (with some limitations described below) up to you, also the way you work with the term synthetic. Your creation can be wholly biological, wholly mechanical, or some sort of hybrid.
- Your procedures **must** arise from actual current science and must imply human designers and a relatively near future setting in the universe as we know it: no magic or supernatural intervention, no products of ancient, distant, incredibly powerful, highly evolved aliens. Your designer(s) can be pursuing a passion project in isolation, or they can be part of an institutional framework (academia, government, business, etc., even some sort of collaborative project). Motives can be straightforward or complicated. However, your synthetic human must be reasonably plausible.

- Needless to say, you **won't** literally construct this being (that would require advantages and circumstances outside our realm of possibility). However, you will produce the following:
 - A **collaborative written description** of the project, its motives, and its outcomes **as well as** an **in-class presentation**, using slides and apps for illustrative purposes (images, maps, timelines, etc.) in the presentation. Alice Deng will assist each group in finding apps to use and will provide technical support in using apps and Canvas throughout the project but will not assist in developing your approach to the project or with the required research and writing.
 - A **Works Cited** including 3-10 primary non-academic sources ("real life" context and inspiration), 3-10 secondary academic sources (on course texts and concerns), and 3-10 primary texts providing ideas and inspiration, including at least 3 of the texts set for this course ("texts" implies a full spectrum of narrative forms: fiction, film, games, comic books and graphic novels, streaming or television series, etc).
- To avoid potential difficulties in **contacting** members of your group or setting up meetings, each group will have a Discussion area on Canvas and can use Canvas Inbox; you can use Zoom for live online meetings. I will set aside at least one classroom period where you can meet with your group in person (so I will require that you give your group some sort of name); despite the limitations of our classroom, the tables and chairs are moveable.
- Please note that **all** visual materials used for the presentation **must** be properly cited and documented in current MLA format. Given the copyright concerns surrounding use of AI image generators, visual materials produced using these applications are **unacceptable** (I've posted links to articles addressing this issue on the Robots, AI, Cyberspace page in the General Resources: Web Links and Shooting Scripts Module). No exceptions will be made.
- Please note that your **secondary academic research** must be in **literary/cultural studies**; your approach must arise from thinking of the course texts and concerns in a literary/cultural studies context. You might include non-academic sources on developments in science and technology, but this is **not** a science project and your approach to it must arise much more from literary/cultural representations of synthetic humans in reasonably plausible near-future settings than from the actual state of scientific research and development.

The Approach (and these criteria are non-negotiable):

- The approach must be one **everyone** in the group is genuinely comfortable working on and presenting in front of the class as a whole.
- The approach must be one that does **not** require trauma trigger warnings both within the group and for the class during the presentation.
- **Everyone** in the group must contribute something to the "design" of its synthetic human and the context of its inception and production.
- However, some individual tasks can be **allocated** according to preferences and skills:
 - various areas of the required research
 - drafting of the report
 - revision and proofreading of the report
 - delivery of the presentation
 - development of slides or other visual material

- compilation of the bibliography and formatting of it using current MLA.

The Schedule:

- By **January 26**, I will email a short survey everyone must respond to; it will list aspects of the project and ask which you would prefer to do and which you do not want to do. It will be completely unjudgmental so you can respond honestly.
- By **February 10**, I will establish the groups and post them: if any adjustments need to be made, they will be made on time to enable the groups to meet in person in class on February 14, so you can introduce yourselves to each other.
- By **February 15**, I will create Discussion forums for the groups on Canvas and will enable Alice Deng to have access to each group.
- The **presentations** will take place over the **April 4, 6, and 11** meeting dates.
- The **collaborative presentation report** will be due by **11 p.m. April 14** and will be uploaded to a dropbox in Assignments on Canvas.

The Report (with Works Cited and Statement of Individual Contributions):

- The **body of your report** will be 4-5 double-spaced letter-sized pages, in size 12 Times New Roman font, with 1"/2.54cm margins all around (1200-1500 words). Indent the beginnings of paragraphs; do not leave an extra space between them. The Works Cited and the Statement of Individual Contributions (see below) do **not** count towards the length of the report.
- If you have used your computer abroad, check Page Setup in your word processing program and make sure the page size is set to Letter (sometimes called U.S. Letter).
- Your report must use **current MLA** documentation and citation format **both** in the body of the report **and** in the bibliography, which you will call a Works Cited (see the Writing Resources Module on our Canvas site for guides: I strongly recommend the Purdue OWL's). The Works Cited must include all primary, secondary, academic, and non-academic sources used or consulted (see The Project above).
- **Any** primary or secondary sources used in the **body** of the report **must** be both signaled and cited in the report **and** included in the Works Cited. See the essays in the Samples Module on our Canvas site for formatting guidance, both for the report body and the Works Cited.
- After the Works Cited, the report **must** include a Statement of Individual Contributions, a list identifying each member of the group and briefly (no more than a short paragraph) but specifically describing what each contributed to the development and production of the project. **Everyone** in the group must **read and approve** this statement **before** its inclusion.
- Leave time to **revise and proofread** before uploading the report, as it will be evaluated not only on content, but also on appropriate focus, coherent structure and development, and correct use throughout of standard grammar and mechanics (use the Writing Resources Module on Canvas).
- **This assignment is worth 20% of your grade for this course. All members of the group will get the same assignment grade.**