About the Course

This course examines shifting relationships between humans and technologies from an interdisciplinary humanities perspective. Drawing on history, philosophy, cultural studies, fiction and popular culture, the course emphasizes human-machine interfaces in structures of belief, artistic practices and identity formation. The course addresses the transformation of powerful religious, political, and sexual belief structures in the wake of the growing technological mediation of knowledge and everyday life. It examines changes in social and aesthetic practices precipitated by new technologies. Finally, we turn to the issue of the human individual in this milieu, with the emergence of the individual-as-cyborg and the "virtual self" raising profound questions regarding conventional understandings of what constitutes "the human."

Interfaces: Technology and the Human is intended to provide students with an opportunity for critical reflection on the relationship between self, culture and a variety of forms of technology. The course reflects an interdisciplinary humanistic perspective focusing on deep changes and continuing dilemmas in a social environment increasingly saturated with such technologies.

About the Course Director

Jody Berland, Associate Professor of Humanities, has been at York since 1993. Her research addresses culture-technology interactions in sites as diverse as Canadian nationhood, music broadcasting, weather forecasting, water pollution, player pianos, the internet, and the world of domestic pets. Author of North of Empire (2009) and other works, her research explores everyday experiences and objects as changing intersections of technology, space and culture. She is the editor of Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies (www.yorku.ca/topia).

Required Texts

J. Berland (ed), Humanities 3925 Coursekit, 2009-2010
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Dover ed.)
Andrew Murphie and John Potts, Culture & Technology. Palgrave 2003
Philip K. Dick, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
William Gibson, Idoru
Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake
**Assignments and Evaluation**

* Reading journal, 10%
* Posting and participation in course website, 10%
* Mid term exam: 20%. Distributed November 12, due November 26.
* Term Paper: An essay that takes an in-depth look at an actual "interface" drawing upon course concepts and individual research (10 Pages): 25%. Due March 11.
* Final exam: 25%. Distributed March 25, due April 2.
* Class Attendance, preparation and participation: 10%

**Schedule of Classes/Readings**

**September 10**  Introduction, film screening

**September 17. Humans and the Interface**

**September 24. What do we mean by Technology?**

**October 1. The Interface Makes Us…**
Steven Johnson, “The Desktop,” *Interface Culture* Ch 2, pp 42-75

**October 8. Human.**
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

**October 15: Reading Week**

**October 22. When Old Technologies Were New**

**October 29. Technology and cultural change: what’s happening?**
November 5. Technology and Cultural Change, Part 2
Murphie and Potts Chapter 2, “Theoretical Frameworks.”

November 12. Interfacing Distance: Technologies of Speech
McLuhan “The telephone, Understanding Media, 233-240

November 19. Interfacing Distance: Technologies of Sight
Robert Romanyshyn, “Self as Spectator,” Ch 3, Technology as Symptom and Dream

November 26 Mechanizing Vision
Film: I am a movie camera

January 7 The (inter) Face
Virginia Blum, “The Monster and the Movie Star” in Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery
Sandor Gilman, “Judging by Appearances” in Gilman, Making the Body Beautiful
Film: Michael Jackson’s Face

January 14 Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep
Philip K. Dick, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep

January 21 Technology / body/ self
Scott Bukatman: “X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero” in Bukatman, Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century

February 4 Musicking 1
Jody Berland, The Musicking Machine

February 11 Musicking 2
Hosokawa, Shuhei and Hideaki Matsuoka. ‘On the Fetish Character of Sound and the Progression of Technology: Theorizing Japanese Audiophiles’ in Sonic Synergies: Music,
February 18: reading week

February 25 . Virtual love.
William Gibson, *Idoru*

March 4 Cyberquake: Machines and humans

March 11 Interfacing with the enemy

March 18 Playing with Life
Sarah Kember, “Cyberlife’s Creatures.” *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life,* Chapter 4, 83-115.

March 25 Oryx and Crake
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

April 1 Complete Oryx and Crake, Course summary

**Recommended Reading (on Reserve)**

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body*
Bukatman, Scott. *Blade Runner*
Franklin, Ursula. *The Real World of Technology*
Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*
Herman, Andrew and Thomas Swift. *Contemporary Theory and the World Wide Web*
Marvin, Carolyn. *When Old Technologies Were New*
McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*
Romanyshyn, Robert. *Technology as Symptom and Dream*
Tofts, Darren, Annemarie Jonson, Allessio Cavallaro (eds). *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*
Winner, Langdon. *The Whale and the Reactor*

**Other resources to be posted on course website**