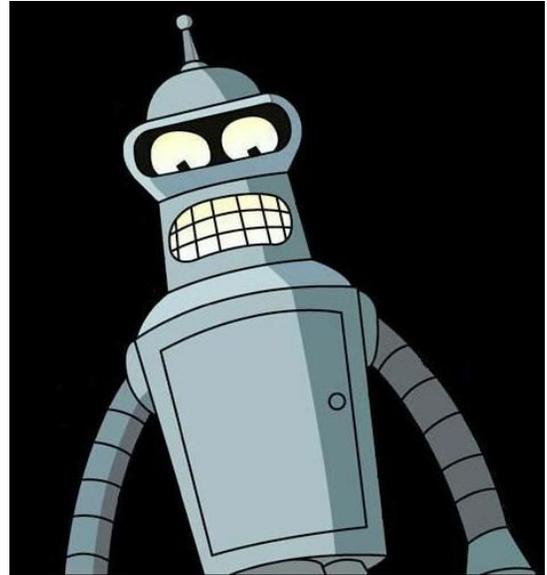


PWR 1: Rhetoric of Robots
Spring 2012: T/Th 9:00-10:50 am
Wallenberg 329

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310 Margaret Jacks Hall
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11 am-12 pm and
by appointment



Course Description:

Using texts ranging from Edgar Allan Poe's 1836 analysis of a supposed chess-playing automaton to the recent film *WALL-E*, this course will explore the role of language in humanizing machines and mechanizing humans. Some of the broad questions that we will investigate together include: How do the rhetorical choices we make when writing about robots and A.I. echo or alter our notion of human intelligence? How do mechanical or computational metaphors for the human mind shape our reactions to new technological developments? How has our conception of the relationship between humans and machines changed across various historical periods, from the elaborate automata of the Enlightenment to the futuristic robot-run households imagined in post-World War II America? How do the tasks and roles we imagine for robots reflect ongoing human conversations about class, race and gender?

Course Requirements:

PWR 1 is structured around three major assignments, each of which involves both a **rough draft** and a **final version**. For each assignment, you will schedule a 30-minute **conference** with me in which we will discuss strategies for revising your draft into a polished final product. Please come to the conference with a summary of your concerns about the assignment, and be prepared to take notes. (See course schedule below for due dates and conference days.)

You will receive detailed assignment sheets for the three papers as their due dates approach, but the course requirements and expectations can be summarized as follows:

Rhetorical Analysis (1200-1800 words, 15% of final grade)
Rough draft due Thursday 4/12; final version due Tuesday 4/24

Select a short text (editorial, movie trailer, review, advertisement, etc.) that depicts or discusses robots, identify the text's primary argument or purpose, and analyze the rhetorical strategies by which it accomplishes that end. The RA's aim is twofold: first, to familiarize you with the process of identifying the explicit or implicit claims made by a text and the persuasive devices by which it makes them; second, to give you practice in deploying those devices in the service of a clear thesis statement of your own.

Texts in Conversation (1800-2400 words, 25% of final grade)
Rough draft due Tuesday 5/8; final version due Thursday 5/17

This assignment lays the foundation for the research-based argument: after choosing a topic relevant to robots/artificial intelligence, you will write an essay exploring several perspectives and arguments on your subject (you should aim to engage deeply with about 3-4 substantial texts) and attempting to reconstruct the larger discussion that surrounds the issue. More than a mere literature review or annotated bibliography, the TiC involves constructing an argument about the patterns, trends and gaps in a field of inquiry – in other words, an argument about how several arguments fit together. This assignment should help you refine your broad area of interest into a focused thesis and find an opening in the ongoing dialogue in which to insert your own claim.

Research-Based Analysis (3600-4500 words, 40% of final grade)
Rough draft due Tuesday 5/31; final version due Thursday 6/7.

For this assignment, you will make a complex, provocative, and rhetorically situated claim about your topic, supported by a variety of primary and secondary sources. Potential research topics may be drawn from fields as diverse as medicine (the safety of surgical robots, the use of therapeutic robots for various cognitive disabilities), business (effects of industrial robots on employment and on corporate efficiency), psychology (artificial intelligence and computational models of cognition), history/sociology (culturally specific uses of automata), and literary studies (how representations of robots function in particular genres or rhetorical situations) – as well as, of course, engineering and computer science.

In-Class Work (20% of final grade)

The PWR curriculum relies heavily on small group work, peer review, in-class writing, and discussion of both readings and your written work; your consistent and productive participation in this array of classroom activities is essential to your grade and to your development as a writer. It is perfectly understandable if you are not able to bring an equal level of participation to every such exercise – for instance, you may have difficulty inserting yourself into large group discussions but give excellent written feedback on your peers' assignments; you will be

evaluated on the basis of your overall willingness to teach and learn from your peers as you all work together to become better writers.

Note: because in-class work is so important to PWR, **attendance** at every class session is essential except when an absence is unavoidable. Please notify me as early as possible if you know you will be missing a session; if a sudden and unforeseen circumstance prevents you from coming to class, contact me as soon as you can to arrange to make up the work you have missed. Unexcused absences will seriously jeopardize your performance in the course.

Grading

We will have detailed in-class discussions of the criteria that I use for evaluating your writing (and that you will use for each others' papers), but the basic intent is to grade the finished work on the basis of its persuasiveness. In other words, each of your papers must not only put forth a clear, coherent and non-obvious claim, but also offer appropriate evidence of its accuracy. Particularly essential elements of persuasive success include the skillful and conscientious use of logic and empirical evidence; the structural and stylistic elegance of one's language; and the ability to insert oneself into a community of writers and readers so as to establish rhetorical authority on the basis of their shared intellectual values.

Course Schedule

Note: All readings are available on our class's Coursework site.

Week 1

Tuesday 4/3: Introduction. Basic definitions: what is "rhetoric"? What is a "robot"?
Read for next time: Christian, "Mind vs. Machine"; Poe, "Maelzel's Chess Player."

Thursday 4/5: Basic rhetorical concepts: identification, act, scene, agent, agency, purpose.

Week 2

Tuesday 4/10: What makes a good thesis statement? *Imagining automata, part one:* in-class film clips.

Read for next time: Reviews of *Real Steel* by Ebert, Sharkey, and Schwarzbaum.

Thursday 4/12: RA DRAFT DUE IN CLASS (3 hard copies).

Imagining automata, part two: explicit claims and implicit assumptions in reviews and in the *Real Steel* trailer. Peer review, phase one.

Conferences: Friday 10:00-12:00, 1:00-4:00.

Week 3

Conferences: Monday 10:00-12:30.

Tuesday 4/17: Peer review, phase two.

Read for next time: Springer, "Woman or Machine?"; "Wall-E: The Gender-fiction of Robots"

Thursday 4/19: In-class video: “A robot ‘love story’”, BBC News.

Week 4

Tuesday 4/24: REVISED RA DUE IN CLASS (1 hard copy + cover letter).

Library workshop: introduction to research.

For next time: Bring to class at least once source that you found during the workshop.

Thursday 4/26: *Types of sources* (Background, Exhibit, Argument, Method).

Read for next time: Joy, “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us”; Bringsjord, “Ethical Robots: The Future Can Heed Us.”

Week 5

Tuesday 5/1: *Joining the debate:* contributing to existing positions and finding unexplored gray areas.

Thursday 5/3: *Mapping the conversation:* organizing multiple sources and inserting your own argument. In-class readings: selections from Raiford, “Race, Robots, and the Law”; Brayton, “The Post-White Imaginary in Alex Proyos’s *I, Robot*”; LeGuin, “American SF and the Other.”

Week 6

Tuesday 5/8: TiC DRAFT DUE IN CLASS (2 hard copies).

Peer review: Mapping your peers’ arguments.

Read for next time: Walach and Allen, “Why Machine Morality?”, from *Moral Machines*.

Conferences: Wednesday 9:00-12:00, 1:00-3:00; Thursday 1:00-3:30.

Thursday 5/10: Navigating and evaluating academic books. TiC “speed dating.”

Week 7

Tuesday 5/15: Structured brainstorming; drafting an RBA thesis.

Thursday 5/17: REVISED TiC DUE IN CLASS (1 hard copy + cover letter).

TiC mini-presentations.

Week 8

Tuesday 5/22: Producing an outline. Strategies of disagreement.

Thursday 5/24: *Argument clinic:* using style and structure persuasively. In-class reading: Manjoo, “Robot Invasion.”

Week 9

Tuesday 5/29: *Revising for style.*

Thursday 5/31: RBA DRAFT DUE IN CLASS (2 hard copies). Peer review.

Conferences: Friday 10:00-12:00, 1:00-4:00

Week 10

Conferences: Monday 10:30-1:00

Tuesday 6/5: *Revision bonanza!* Integrating style, structure, argument and evidence.

Thursday 6/7: REVISED RBA DUE IN CLASS (1 hard copy + cover letter).

Mini-presentations and celebration.