



Patricia Piccinini, Big Mother, 2005, human hair, fiberglass, silicone, leather

VPAS 6300
What does it mean to be human?
Proseminar on Humanism in Visual and
Performing Arts
Dr. Charissa N. Terranova
terranova@utdallas.edu
Fall 2026
T 4:00-6:45 p.m.
Phy 1.606

Offices Hours: In person or via Teams by
appointment. Please reach out for a meeting!
Office: ATC 2.704

Description: This class explores the question “What does it mean to be human?” through a variety of humanist methodologies, including Renaissance humanism, dehumanization, natural-rights humanism, radical humanism, antihumanism, posthumanism, nonhuman lives, and cyber-feminism. Grades are based on short essays, presentations, and individual participation in classroom discussions. While no prerequisites are required, students should be comfortable dialoguing about art, art history, philosophy, and theory.

Goals:

- Students learn the history of modern humanism, c. 1400-present.
- Students learn individual humanist methodologies based on the contents and discussion of course readings.
- Students effectively explain in spoken and written language a variety of humanisms, and dehumanization and humanization therein.
- This includes a capacity to discuss how such thinking informs creative research practices thereby implementing humanist methodologies.
- Students develop and demonstrate improved public speaking, research, and writing skills.

AI Policy:

Students may not use any type of AI in the writing of essays or crafting of visual presentations.

Assignments: PechaKucha [10% each; 10 x 10 =100%]

PechaKucha is a succinct Japanese storytelling format in which a presenter shows a specific number of slides, explaining a design or art project in a short amount of time. In this class, students perform PechaKucha modified for reading and writing practices. The most important part of this type of PechaKucha is the student’s essay, of which they **read a draft in class and submit a polished form the following week**. Here’s what’s required:

1.) Essays – contents:

- Summarize specific contents of each writing assignment.
- What kind of humanist is writing?
- What kind of humanism is the text and why?
- Thesis of each assigned text
- What are the big ideas in each text?
- Topicality
 - Why did they need to read it when it was written?
 - Why do we need to read it in 2026?
- Quoted text from reading should be paraphrased (at least in part) because of limited word count.
- Type of text.
 - What kind of writing is this? Letter, journalism, academic research, manifesto, treatise, excerpt from book, etc.?
 - How does this affect its form and contents?
- Biographical information (kept to a minimum) of each author
- Historical context of each author
- First a draft of an essay that you read; then, a week later a polished version you submit.

2.) Essays – formatting:

- Word count: 1000
- double-spaced
- 12 pt. font
- Left-hand justification of heading and body of text
- Essay titles (come up with an inventive one!) should be at the center, in italics, and placed after the heading and before the text.
- Essays should have footnotes and a short bibliography (no more than five sources). This word count is extra, beyond 1000. So, they don't count with respect to word limit and are not to be read in class.
 - Making footnotes is easy; they are automated in Word software.
- Citations should follow the formatting rules of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Due dates: One week after presentation, that is, the following Thursday by 11:59 pm.
- Where: terranova@utdallas.edu

3.) Presentations:

- Students read essays while referencing information in slides.
- Up to five slides
- 8 minutes in length
- A normal speaking pace is roughly 150 words per minute.
- Time is allotted for some free-wheeling description of slides – for words not written in your essay.
- Slide contents should vary and may include:
 - biographical information about authors
 - images of the authors
 - quotes from your essay
 - quotes from the reading (see #1 above)
 - artefacts, such as works of art, design, architecture, etc. by the writers, related people, or the student themselves
 - related imagery from nature and the built landscape

4.) Grading:

- There are in total 11 essays and PechaKucha presentations.

- Each essay and presentation is graded separately.
- Then the two are averaged for the total final grade of each assignment.
- At the end of the semester, the lowest grade is dropped.
- Each of the remaining is 10% of your grade.

Requirements: Students are required to attend all classes, complete readings, participate in class, write 11 essays, and make 11 in-class presentations based on written essays.

Attendance and Behavior Policy:

Students are required to complete all assignments before meetings and arrive punctually to class ready to engage the assigned material. Students are allowed one unexcused absence after which each will result in the lowering of the final grade by one whole letter.

Readings:

Most readings may be accessed through the library reserves at eLearning.

Schedule:

August 27 Introduction

September 3 Women Who Wrote Renaissance Humanism in the 15th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) Christine de Pizan. "From the Book of the Body Politic." *The Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Press, 2018. 223-250.
- 2.) Isotta Nogarola. "The Great Gender Debate." *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, and Orations*. Eds. Margaret L. King and Diana Robin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 138-158.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Emily Zarevich. "Christine de Pizan: Europe's First Professional Female Writer." *JStor Daily*. Sept. 23. 2025.
- 2.) Lisa Jardine. "Isotta Nogarola: Women humanists – Education for what?" *History of Education*. (1983) Vol. 14, No. 4: 231-244.

September 10 Dehumanizing and Humanizing in the 17th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) Aphra Behn. "Oroonoko." *Versions of Blackness: 'Oroonoko', Race, and Slavery*. Ed. Derek Hughes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 117-190.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Derek Hughes. "Introduction." *Versions of Blackness: 'Oroonoko', Race, and Slavery*. Ed. Derek Hughes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. vii-xxviii.

September 17 Natural-Rights Humanism in the 18th Century

Reading:

- 1.) Thomas Paine. *Rights of Man*. [1791]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 89-99; 161-65.
- 2.) Mary Wollstonecraft. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. [1792] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 15-31; 32-74; 361-414.

September 24 Humanism, the Manifesto, and Critique of Political Economy in the 19th Century

Reading:

- 1.) Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *Communist Manifesto*. [1848]
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.
- 2.) Elizabeth Cady Stanton. *Declaration of Sentiments*. [1848]
https://www.womenshistory.org/sites/default/files/document/2019-08/Day%203_0.pdf.

October 1 New Consciousnesses for Humanism in the Early 20th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 7-14.
- 2.) Sigmund Freud. "The Unconscious." *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*. New York: Collier Books, 1963. 116-150.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Anonymous. "W.E.B. Du Bois at the 1900 Paris Exposition." <https://www.searchablemuseum.com/w-e-b-du-bois-at-the-1900-paris-exposition/>.

October 8 No Class Dr. Terranova @ University of Manitoba in Winnipeg

October 15 Cultural Humanism in the Early 20th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) Zora Neale Hurston. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." *The World Tomorrow*. (May 1928) 215-216.
- 2.) Alaine Locke. "The New Negro." *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Alaine Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925. 3-18. <https://scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/the-new-negro-an-interpretation-edited-by-alain-locke-1925>.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Emily Bernard. "All That She Was: *The Problem of Zora Neale Hurston*." *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Vol. 98, No. 1. (Spring 2022) 146-151.
- 2.) Corey Barnes. "Alain Locke's Theory of Black American Art." Part of *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. (2025-03) Vol.61 (2). 68-92.

October 22 Radical Humanism in the Mid 20th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) Frantz Fanon. "Introduction." *Black Skin White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 2008. 1-7.
- 2.) Sylvia Wynter. "Towards the Sociogenic Principle; Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be 'Black'." *National Identities and Socio-Political Changes in Latin America*. Eds. A. Gomez-Moriana and M. Duran Cogan/ New York: Routledge Press, 2013 [2001]. 30-66.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Ziauddin Sardar. "Foreword to the 2008 Edition." *Black Skin White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 2008. vi-xx.
- 2.) Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations." *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 9-89.

October 29 Anti-Humanism in the Late 20th Century

Primary Reading:

- 1.) Michel Foucault. "What is an Author?" *Modernity and Its Discontents*. Eds. James L. Marsh, John D. Caputo, and Merold Westphal. New York: Fordham University Press, 1992. 299-314.
- 2.) Michel Foucault. "The Discourse of Nature." *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2002: 171-179.

Explanatory Reading:

- 1.) Michael C. Behrent. "Liberalism without Humanism: Michel Foucault and the Free-Market Creed, 1976-1979." *Modern Intellectual History*. Vol. 6, No. 3. (2009) 539-68.

November 5 Technological and Ecological Posthumanisms

Primary Reading:

1.) N. Katherine Hayles. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999. 50-83.

2.) Rosi Braidotti. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013. 13-55.

Explanatory Reading:

1.) Sonpreet Kaur and Mahesh Arora. "From Humanism to Posthumanism: Theoretical Shifts in Literary Studies." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*. Vol. 11, No. 2 (Mar-April 2026).

November 12 Guest Speaker Catherine Liu on Trauma
Reading:

November 19 From One Fin de siècle to the Next: Nonhuman Humanism in the 21st Century
Primary Reading:

1.) Jakob von Uexküll. "The New Concept of Umwelt: A Link between Science and the Humanities." *Semiotica*. Vol. 134, No. 1 / 4 (2001) 111-23.

2.) Raoul Francé. *Germs of Mind in Plants*. Trans. A. M. Simons. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1908. 1-32.

Explanatory Reading:

1.) T. Nagel. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* (Oct. 1974) 435-450.

2.) D. Sagan. "Umwelt After Uexküll." *A Foray in the Worlds of Animals and Humans by Jacob Von Uexküll*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 1-34.

3.) Jim Garrison, et. al. "Anthropocosmism: An Eastern Humanist Approach to the Anthropocene." *Environmental Research Education*. Vol. 20, No. 7 (2024) 1161-1176.

November 26 No Class Fall Break

December 3 Cyber-Feminist Humanism
Reading:

1.) Hyla Willis, Irina Aristarkhova, Nathanael Mengist, Faith Wilding. "Introduction; subRosa Legacy." *Night Sweats: Cyberfeminist Practices*. H. Willis, et. al., Eds. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature for Palgrave/Macmillan, 2026. 1-30.

2.) Faith Wilding, "Techno-Rant of the Cyber Elder." *Night Sweats: Cyberfeminist Practices*. H. Willis, et. al., Eds. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature for Palgrave/Macmillan, 2026. 153-162.