Machine metaphors and narratives play an important role in modern literature, conveying shifting beliefs and anxieties about the nature of human intention and consciousness, the creative process, the dynamics of desire and gratification, gender roles, the organization of society, the meaning of “nature,” etc. This course explores different manifestations of the machine theme in literature, broadly clustered around the following categories: imaginary machines constituting the centerpiece of narrative plots; machine aesthetic as modernist ideal (e.g. Marinetti’s “identification of man with motor”); and mechanization of the inventive process (e.g. text-generating machines). We will read and discuss a selection of works from different periods and cultural contexts (Victorian era, Belle Époque, Futurist period, and Post-war experimental literature), representing a spectrum of dispositions and moods, ranging from the dreamy immersion in virtual realities to enlightened machine-assisted awakening, from the obsessive fear of mechanistic dehumanization to the desire for fusion with the machine.

Learning Objectives

In this course students will:
- familiarize with the evolving concept of “machine” in its distinct usages from the pre- to the postmodern era.
- recognize the shifting motivations and ideals that rendered the machine metaphor viable in an aesthetic context.
- analyze literary artifacts driven by machine-dominated plots.
- become aware of the essential role of the machine discourse within experimental art, from the Futurist movement to post-war avant-garde.
- discuss social and gender implications attached to the diffusion (in literature and beyond) of new technologies, such as phonograph and telephone.
- learn about modern strategies for the mechanization of the inventive process and connect them to historical antecedents.
- discuss the development of machine art in the field of visual art and in the musical field during the XXth century.

Course requirements

- Required course readings are either posted on nyu classes in advance of due date or accessible online through nyu libraries (links are provided in the bibliography below). Each week, you will be assigned both primary source material and a secondary source essay. In most cases, you will be asked to read an excerpt from the primary source (specific page assignments will be provided) and the whole of the accompanying essay. As a rough guide, you can expect to read
between 60 and 100 pages per week. Readings and class discussion will be in English — knowledge of foreign languages is not required.

- Attendance at every class is mandatory. Except in case of documented illness/medical emergency (doctor's note required) or religious holiday (please notify me at the beginning of the semester if you anticipate such an absence), every absence will impact your grade.

- The following graded written assignments are required as part of the course:

  3 response papers (3 pages each) (RP)
  final research draft (2 pages summary + bibliography) (FD)
  final research paper (8-10 pages) (FP)

- Papers must include a bibliography and at least parenthetical citation to any author cited or used as a source of argument and/or information. Please review the university's policy on plagiarism, as it will be strictly enforced. Students must submit their papers within the designated deadlines. Late submissions will negatively impact the grade.

- Please note that class participation is essential—you are expected to actively participate in class discussions and speak up when you have questions. Each week, I will ask for 1 or 2 student volunteers to prepare a presentation of the material for the following week. Every student is required to present at least once, and the presentation will count towards your participation grade.

- if you are having trouble with any aspect of the writing process, please be reminded of the following useful resources:

  a) The University Learning Center (ULC), which provides peer tutoring for many courses, workshops on study skills (e.g., time management or citation norms), and special programming for international students (see www.nyu.edu/ulc).

  b) The Writing Center, which provides one-on-one consultations with Expository Writing Program faculty trained in writing pedagogy. (Note: The Expository Writing Program also provides assistance in the residence halls). Additionally, the Dean’s Office, the ULC & the Writing Center have teamed up to offer writing resources specifically for the FS program. www.nyu.edu/cas/cwp/html/writing_center.html

  c) The Bobst Library online guide designed to accompany the Research Readiness Workshops: http://guides.nyu.edu/friendly.php?s=ecp

Grade breakdown: response papers (RP) 30%, final research draft (FD) 10%, final research paper (FR) 30%, oral presentation 15% class participation 15%.

Week 1  Introduction

Week 2  Supernatural by Natural Cause
E.A. Poe, *The Balloon Hoax*; Hans Phaal
Jules Verne, *The Castle of the Carpathians*

**Week 3**  
**Modern Prometheus / Modern Pygmalion**  
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*  
E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman*  
Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*

**Week 4**  
**The Imitation Game**  
Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*  
Alan Turing, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*  
Tommaso Landolfi, “Gogol’s wife”

**Week 5**  
**Machine and the Flesh**  
Alfred Jarry, *The Surmale*  
Franz Kafka, *In the Penal Colony*  
Gilles Deleuze- Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (selections)

**Week 6**  
**Futurism - Reproducing Machines**  
F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist* (selections)  
Mina Loy, Rosa Rosà, and the Women of Futurism (selections)

**Week 7**  
**Sound Machines / Ballet Mécanique**  
Music samples from Luigi Russolo, Arsenij Avraamov, George Antheil.  
Fernand Leger, *Ballet Mécanique*  
Smirnov, Andrei. 2013. *Sound In Z: Experiments In Sound And Electronic Music In Early 20th Century Russia*

**Week 8**  
**Text-Generating Devices**  
Giordano Bruno, *The Incantations of Circe*  
Juan Caramuel y Lobkowitz, *Metametrics*  
Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus; How I Wrote Certain of My Books*

**Week 9**  
**Automatic Writing (1)**  
Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons; Cultivated Motor Automatism*  
André Breton, *First Surrealist Manifesto; The Automatic Message;* (with Philippe Soupault) *The Magnetic Fields*

**Week 10**  
**Automatic Writing (2)**  
William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*  
Sigmund Freud, “A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad”

**Week 11**  
**Text-generating Devices (2)**  
Oulipo Manifesto & Texts (Queneau, Calvino, etc.)  
Nanni Balestrini, *Tristano*

**Week 12**  
**Brain in a Vat (1)**  
Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel*  
Stanislaw Lem, *Professor Corcoran*

**Week 13**  
**Brain in a Vat (2)**  
Robert Nozick, *The Experience Machine*  
Daniel Galouye, *Simulacron 3*
Week 14  Brain in a Vat (3)
Hilary Putnam, *Brain in a Vat*
Oswald Wiener, *The Improvement of Central Europe; An Ego of Her Own*