

COURSE INFORMATION

CLCS 230 Science / Fiction and Film: Envisioning the Possible

Spring 2019

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Class location: Kaletsch Classroom 6

Class meeting times: Tuesdays and Fridays 10:00 – 11:15 am

Office Hours: Kaletsch Office 6, Mondays and Thursdays, 8:30-11:30,
and Wednesday mornings only by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Science Fiction (SF) is a relatively new literary genre, originating in the early nineteenth century and flourishing in Anglo-American pop culture after the 1930s. Often maligned or ignored by "serious" academics, in recent decades SF has been adopted by a variety of disciplines as a means to contextualize scholarly inquiry on a variety of topics of contemporary relevance. SF literature and film is thus reconceived as a portal for engaged critical reflection, dialogue, and writing on, for example: the fragile relationship between humans and the natural world, the political degeneration of enlightened utopian

designs into tyrannical dystopian realities, anxieties regarding the future fallout of ongoing gender revolutions, fears about technological ambition with regard to offsetting human loss or assisting in human reproduction, the proliferation of virtual reality constructs and the impact of this trend on traditional conceptions regarding both morality and mortality.

CLCS 230 is designed as a seminar-style workshop for literary, cinematic, and philosophical discussion and debate. Equal emphasis will be placed on classic SF short fiction by authors such as Isaac Asimov, Brian W. Aldiss, E. M. Forster, Karl Capek, Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ and contemporary SF films such as *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, *The Matrix*, *Vanilla Sky*, *Minority Report*, *Blade Runner*, *Alien*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *Gattaca*.

RATIONALE

CLCS 230 counts towards fulfillment of the CLCS major or minor or Film Studies Minor. In the Core, the course fulfills one of two Social Responsibility requirements.

COURSE GOALS

- 1) To probe the potential of SF literature and film as catalysts for promoting positive social change and to reflect, more broadly, on the agency implicit to cultural production especially as it pertains to pulp and commercially successful film productions with global distribution.

- 2) To provide students with a general familiarity with the reoccurring themes of SF short fiction and film in the 20th and early 21st-century.
- 3) To survey several major philosophical systems (Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, Transcendental Idealism, Egalitarianism, Existentialism, Determinism, Marxist Feminism, etc.), as applicable to the moral dilemmas and social concerns explored by the authors and filmmakers under scrutiny.
- 4) To utilize SF fiction and film as a means to fostering lively student discussion, intellectually informed debate, and engaged essay writing and/or video-making on socio-ethical topics of contemporary relevance.
- 5) To cultivate the ability for close and thoughtful reading of fiction, film text, and cultural theory.

SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, students should expect to be able to:

1. Demonstrate informed and scholarly reflection on the SF genre, its history in literature and film, and some of the main questions recurring in the field.
2. Demonstrate ability to write critically about SF film and literature, through research and reflection appropriate for scholarly engagement at the undergraduate level in an international context.
3. Produce a portfolio of reading and screening notes, with discussion questions, intended to foster collaborative team

work when addressing key questions related to the course goals outlined above.

4. Show initiative in independent research and scholarly initiative and/or video production skill by expanding on what emerges from class reading, screenings, and discussion and designing a research project or video as a final demonstration of cumulative learning with regard to the course goals outlined above.

REQUIRED TEXTS, FILMS, AND MATERIALS

The five titles below should be purchased from the FUS Bookstore. Additional photocopied material may be distributed in class or projected as a slide. In the event of an absence, please ask a classmate for their notes as course material will not necessarily be uploaded to Moodle. Learn to take notes that are meaningful to you and potentially valuable for life-long learning.

Alien Zone: Cultural Theory

Sci Phi: Philosophy from Socrates to Schwarzenegger

The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film

Philosophy and Science Fiction

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

Students will be required to screen eight films for this class. A digital library will provide access to these titles, uploaded where appropriate with English subtitles. The full digital library will be composed of more than nine titles but you will be required to watch nine from among the following (see schedule below for details):

Blade Runner, Matrix, Black Mirror (1.02, 2.01, 3.01), Gattaca, Vanilla Sky, Minority Report, 2046, Clone Returns Home, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Alien, Moon, In the Mood for Love. A.I.

In class, use of pen and paper is preferred to digital notetaking for reasons that I will elaborate on briefly during our first lesson. While I encourage students to embrace their own paths to learning, it should be noted that I consider it extremely counterproductive when students' telephones are allowed to become an impediment to group discussion or collective work of any kind. Students are encouraged to use whatever technology they prefer in this class but to maximize learning they must learn restraint, discipline, and always show focus and self-initiative.

It is suggested that students invest in paper notebook for this class and, naturally, they are required to bring assigned reading materials to class and have writing instruments and paper on hand at all times for exercises, pop assessments, peer review. If a student feels strongly about using a laptop computer, tablet, or phone for notetaking in class instead of pen and paper, I leave it to their maturity and discretion; they will take care that the use of technology, as a tool for learning, never interfere with their dedication to teamwork and group participation. If I comment that the use of technology may be distracting or disturbing others, students should consider this an invitation to use pen and paper instead, and to visibly redirect their attention away from their technology, attending courteously and collegially to the necessary interaction with human beings that any productive work meeting necessitates our university.

Respect for your professor and classmates and the enterprise of education is a very basic requirement and I state this here so that we may cultivate more complex skills during valuable class time. Because this class is designed as a seminar where participation is

carries an important weight, students' efforts to maintain professional discipline and contribute actively to discussion are considered essential. Your sustained positive attitude and constructive contributions will be recognized in my evaluation of your participation grade and work in general.

Your running portfolio document should be saved on a USB memory stick (not a cloud, not a telephone, not a pc, not a tablets) which students will diligently bring to class for quick access to your writing. Students are expected to overcome their shyness and share their work publically, volunteering to project their reflections or drafts of their writing or video compositions for feedback on your output throughout the semester.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The student's progress and corresponding final grade will be assessed through the following:

- 1) SF Journal for Reading /Screening Notes and Student-Generated Discussion Questions

25%

The student will keep an ongoing SF Journal (as a running Word doc) in which they keep their reading and screening notes. After having completed the reading /screening assignment for each lesson, the student will be asked to reflect on what they consider to be the most important aspects of the texts and films under scrutiny. I ask for 500-1000 words of lucid and well-contextualized reflections per lesson, with a concluding question or two for stimulating class discussion, including time markers and page numbers please. SF Journals will be handed in for evaluation at Midterm as a PDF document (5 March 9.00 am) and prior to Finals (3 May 9:00). The Final PDF version of

the SF Journal should include a 1000 word preface in which the student reflects earnestly on their own learning outcomes in the course. Pop assessment on the readings and screenings may be given at any time at the discretion of the instructor to assess if students are completing the assignments with due diligence.

2) Class Discussion / Participation

20%

CLCS 230 is a student-driven seminar which relies on dialogue as the principal means for student learning and intellectual growth. To be successful in this class, students must be careful readers of theory, criticism, fiction, and film. Students must be vocal in their efforts to share thoughtful and thought-provoking considerations about the films and literature under examination. Collaborative preparatory work for class discussion and debate (in the form of small groups) is always encouraged and may be required depending on the progress of in-class dynamics.

3) SF Critical Essay

20%

During the course of the semester, the student will write one 10-page essay exploring philosophical questions (of the student's choosing) via the scholarly exploration of SF short story and/or film. Students are required to enrich their essays with independent research and provide a properly formatted bibliography (using MLA or Chicago as style guides). The essay will be uploaded to Moodle and presented in the format of a panel discussion on the day and time normally slotted for our final exam (14 May, 8:30 – 10:30 am) and may or may not be linked to the solo presentation assignment below,

4) Student Presentation on a SF Film

15%

Each student will make a presentation on a SF film that is not among those to be screened for this course *or* produce a video project. Presentations must include key clips from the film under examination (no trailers please) and must be explicitly linked by the student to some of the key concepts explored in class discussions. Credit will be given to those presentations that offer original readings and spark further student discussion on philosophical topics of contemporary relevance. Video projects need to be discussed and planned in close consultation with your professor and must be archived on a public platform, such as Vimeo, if it is to be considered for credit towards the Film Studies program credit.

5) Student Presentation on Final Project Draft 10%

In the last weeks preceding the conclusion of the course, students will project and read excerpts from their written work or screen a rough cut of their video project (video projects for Film Minors only). Presentations of work in progress should demonstrate a clear project plan and design, with substantial work achieved towards satisfactory completion.

6) Final Panel Discussion Programming and Presentation 10%

Students will design a program for panel discussions on their final papers. A mediator, not among the presenters, will introduce the panelists and develop questions prior to the presentation date (again, 14 May, 8:30 – 10:30 am).

GRADING

Assignment Grades:

A : 94-100 B+ : 88-89 C+ : 78-79 D+ : 68-69 F: 0-59
A- : 90-93 B : 84-87 C : 74-77 D : 64-67
 B- : 80-83 C- : 70-73 D- : 60-63

Final Grade:

A : 4.0 B+ : 3.3 C+ : 2.3 D+ : 1.3 F: 0.0
A- : 3.7 B : 3.0 C : 2.0 D : 1.0
 B- : 2.7 C- : 1.7 D- : 0.7

POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

Regular attendance is expected and required. **Only one absence is excused automatically.** After a second absence, whatever the reason, the student's grade may be dropped. In the event of a fourth absence, the student may receive a failing grade for the course. Documented health issues will be the only exception here and the professor reserves the right to assign a zero for poor attendance, at his discretion, if the student chooses not to document their illness by availing themselves to the guidance of the university nurse or healthcare support staff.

The number of total absences allowed includes absences due to normal seasonal illness. These need not be discussed with the professor. I remain open to more pondered consideration of exceptional circumstances which impact your ability to study: these situations should be discussed confidentially with the professor, a campus health professional, or the Academic Dean. In cases of ongoing illness or a family emergency, make an appointment in a timely and professional manner to discuss your situation, and provide the professor with any relevant documentation if applicable.

With regard to minimum standards of conduct in the classroom, rude behavior such as checking social media or messaging will result in a lowering of your participation grade. If disruptive behavior persists after a warning there may be other more serious consequences. Students wishing to avoid conduct issues will remember to manage their phone/tablet/pc use and to take notes instead of doodles; practicing here, as elsewhere, with the craft of the language arts in your notetaking skills.

Respect for other students, their opinions, and the learning process is a priority in this course.

XI. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please refer to Franklin's Statement on Cheating and Plagiarism in the Academic Catalog 2018-2020 for the full version (pp. 206-207), but, to summarize here: you are to do your own work. Behavior such as copying the work of others, using third-party services, or any other circumvention of doing your own work are dishonest and not acceptable in this class or at this institution.

- For papers and presentations, this includes proper use of references and citations. Copying text without the use of quotations or paraphrasing the ideas of others without proper citations are both examples of plagiarism and thus unacceptable.
- For testing situations, this includes (unless otherwise indicated) the use of notes, cell phones, talking to others, or copying of the exam of others.

The first case of academic dishonesty will result in an automatic grade of a zero on the assignment and a report to the Dean. The second case will result in expulsion from the university.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- January 22** Reading Syllabus and Taking Note of Professor's Expectations: How to Succeed in this Course
- Practicing with Reading Reflections and Class Participation.
- Defining and Re-Conceptualizing the Genre
Black Mirror 3.01
- Sign up now for Solo SF Presentations
- January 25** *Philosophy and Science Fiction* (1-110)
- January 29** Student Presentation 1 (*Solaris*)
The Matrix
Philosophy from Socrates to Schwarzenegger (1-56)
- February 1** Student Presentation 1 (*Bicentennial Man*)
A.I.
Philosophy and Science Fiction (111-216)
- February 5** Student Presentation 3 (*Terminator*)
Minority Report
Philosophy from Socrates to Schwarzenegger (57-154)

- February 8** Student Presentation 4 (*Total Recall*)
Vanilla Sky
Philosophy and Science Fiction (217-294)
(download from MOODLE) *Speculations on Speculation* (343-351)
- February 15** Student Presentation 5 (*Independence Day*)
Close Encounters
Philosophy from Socrates to Schwarzenegger (155-207)
- February 19** Student Presentation 6 (*Ex Machina*)
Alien
Cultural Theory and Contemporary SF (32-38; 73-90; 128-144; 214-227)
- February 22** February Break / No Classes
- February 26** Student Presentation 7 (*Battlestar Galactica* or other)
Philosophy and Science Fiction (297-389)
- March 1** Student Presentation 8 (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*)
Moon
Cultural Theory and Contemporary SF (1-72)
- March 5** Midterm Portfolios Due (9:00 am)
Student Presentation 9 (*Star Wars*)
Philosophy from Socrates to Schwarzenegger (209-258)
- March 8** Student Presentation 10 (Sense8)
Critical Theory and SF (181-200)

Black Mirror (1.02; 2.02)

- March 9 – 24** Academic Travel
- March 26** Student Presentation 11 (2046)
In the Mood for Love
- March 29** *Speculation on Speculations* (ix-140, on MOODLE)
- April 2** *Critical Theory and SF* (xv-111)
- April 5** *Blade Runner*
- April 9** *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- April 12** Final Project Presentations 1, 2
Blade Runner (revisited)
- April 16** Final Project Presentations 3, 4
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (revisited)
- April 19** Final Project Presentations 5, 6
- April 23** Final Project Presentations 7, 8
- April 26** Final Project Presentations 9, 10, 11
- April 30** **Final Portfolios Due (9.00 am)**
Final Panel Discussion Organization and Prep
- May 3** Final Panel Discussion Organization and Prep
Final Panel Discussion Program Due (to be coordinated independently and submitted as a

single PDF document via e-mail by panel
discussion mediators)

May 14 (8:30 - 10:30 am)

Final Essays Due (8:00 am)

Final Panel Discussions

Professor's Salute