

Sci-Fi: East and West (*Slavic 0660*)
CRN: 13862
MW 3-4:15, CL 324

Professor: Helena Goscilo
Assistant: Elise Thorsen
Office: CL1417; 624-5908
Office hours: HG M 1-3
ET T 12-1, W 10:30-11:30



Course Description:

This course compares Slavic and Anglophone science fiction on page and screen. It examines how a given culture's dominant concerns are articulated in a genre popular in the East (i.e., Eastern Europe) and West (i.e., America and England). Those concerns emerge in works that imaginatively posit "fantastic" situations rooted in spatial, temporal, and technological explorations beyond those currently verified by science. On the basis of a wide range of novels, stories, and films we shall discuss such topics as progress, utopia, human perfectibility, the limits of science, the nature of knowledge, and verifiability. Throughout the course we shall focus on four key issues (1) gender; (2) male desire to bypass women in the process of reproduction; (3) capacity to detect, disguise or alter aspects of individual identity; and (4) simulacra or virtual-reality phenomena.

Course Requirements:

Students are required (1) to complete the assignments scheduled for each class meeting—normally that means read 70-120 pages or watch a film—and be prepared to discuss them in class on the pertinent day; (2) to take the 4 scheduled exams; (3) to take the regular, unannounced quizzes administered throughout the semester. **THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM.** Class participation is strongly encouraged and will count for extra credit **IF IT IS FREQUENT, INTELLIGENT, AND SUSTAINED THROUGHOUT THE 15-WEEK SEMESTER.**

Credits and attendance:

This course carries three credits and satisfies the CAS requirement in foreign/comparative culture. It meets twice a week throughout the semester and combines lecture and discussion (the latter for extra credit). Since attendance is critical to course performance, more than **three** unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade (each additional absence will reduce the grade by a notch: B to B-, C+ to C, etc.). **Six** absences automatically translate into an F for the course. If serious illness prevents class attendance, documentation of that fact is required in the form of a letter from a doctor, stating that **ON THE DAY AT THE TIME THE**

CLASS MEETS the student was too ill to attend. In order for the student's absence to be excused, that letter must be submitted THE DAY THE STUDENT RETURNS TO CLASS.

It is the students' responsibility to find out from their classmates whether important information or materials were distributed during a session they missed. Students therefore should obtain the telephone number and E-mail address of least one of their classmates.

****Neighbor's tel. _____ Neighbor's E-mail _____****

Students experiencing special problems in the course should make an appointment with the professor during her office hours (see top of p. 1). ***Please do not e-mail her***, for she will not respond to queries, explanations, etc. These should be conveyed during office hours.

Course Web Site:

The URL for the course web site, which contains the syllabus, links, visuals, etc., is <http://www.pitt.edu/~goscilo/Sci-Fi/>.

Grading:

Grades will be based on the QUALITY of student performance in the following: (1) four exams 60%; (2) periodic unannounced quizzes 40%.

Grading scale:

A 93-100	A- 90-92	B+ 86-89	B 83-85	B- 80-82	C+ 76-79
C 73-75	C- 70-72	D+ 66-69	D 63-65	D- 60-62	F 59-0

NO MAKE-UP EXAMS OR QUIZZES WILL BE ADMINISTERED. IF A STUDENT MISSES AN EXAM OR QUIZ OWING TO ABSENCE, S/HE WILL RECEIVE AN 'F' FOR THAT EXAM OR QUIZ.

Academic Integrity:

By remaining enrolled in the course, students not only agree to abide by the above stipulations, but also understand that the instructors will follow rigorously the rules regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc. spelled out in the University's Academic Integrity *Policies* (Policy 02-03-03, <http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/02/02-03-03.html>) and *Procedures* (Procedure 02-03-03, <http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/procedures/02/02-03-03.html>). It is the students' responsibility to familiarize themselves with these regulations and to observe them. Any infraction, including fraudulent signing of the attendance sheet on a classmate's behalf, will be penalized according to these rules.

Disability:

Students officially registered with the Disability Resources and Services (DRS: William Pitt Union 216) should inform the instructor of their disability during the first week of class. Anyone who needs to register should contact DRS at 412-648-7890. Information about DRS is available at <http://www.drs.pitt.edu/>.

Official University Events:

Athletes and musicians who have out-of-town/state games or performances scheduled by the University should submit a copy of their official schedule of commitments during the first week of class.

Reading List:

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*

Stanislaw Lem, *Futurological Congress*

Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*

H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (PDF available on course website)

Philip K. Dick, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (PDF available on course website)

Viewing List:

All films except *Hollywood Aliens and Monsters* (to be viewed in class) are on reserve in the Media Center in Hillman Library and may be watched there or at home, if you prefer to rent them. Local video rental stores include Classic Video (412-621-3232), Dreaming Ant (412-683-2200, 406 S. Craig St.; 412-683-7326, 4525 Liberty Ave., inside Crazy Mocha Coffee Co.), Heads Together (412-521-3700), and various branches of Blockbuster.

Hollywood Aliens and Monsters video (in class)

Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1926), enhanced by Giorgio Moroder (1984)

George Pal, *The Time Machine* (1960)

Franklin J. Schaffner, *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

James Cameron, *The Terminator* (1984)

James Cameron, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991)

Don Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)

Philip Kaufman, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978)

Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1979)

James Cameron, *Aliens* (1986)

Paul Verhoeven, *Total Recall* (1990)

Alex Proyas, *Dark City* (1998)

Syllabus (August 25-December 5):

*INDICATES homework to be prepared for the day specified. In other words, you need to complete the homework FOR that day, so as to be ready to discuss it during the relevant class.

M Aug 25 Practical matters. Introduction: What is sci-fi? How does it reflect aspects of Western philosophy and of dominant social tendencies and concerns? What is the gender disposition within major works of sci-fi (dreamers vs. screamers)?

Video in class: *Hollywood Aliens and Monsters*

TEMPORAL BOUNDARIES

W 27 Video cont. Sci-fi in historical perspective. Visual nature of sci-fi? Film as ideal medium for sci-fi?

M Sep 1 ***NO CLASS: LABOR DAY***

W 3 Quiz on the syllabus
Analyzing film; analyzing fiction.

M 8 *Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*. A vision of the future: modernity: machines, city, social class. Be prepared to discuss the film in terms of the binarisms/dualities in which the film is conceived and which structure later works on screen and page: science vs. nature; machine vs. man; logic vs. feeling, order vs. spontaneity, etc. Pay attention to cinematic representation of a modern technological world dominated by machines that control space, time, and reproduction.

W 10 Movement through time: Victorian industry and dystopia

*Wells, *The Time Machine*. Conceptual binarism; debt to Darwin; view of history and science; symptomatic of British Victorianism; predictive powers. Narrative frame.

M 15 *George Pal, *The Time Machine*. Visualizing the future; vertical spatialization of technological developments (above and below ground); the film's own technological problems. Narrative frame.

W 17 *Franklin J. Schaffner, *Planet of the Apes* (1968). Evolution inverted; time as space (chronotope).

- M 22 *Ye. Zamyatin, *We* (pp. v-106). Binarism comparable to Wells' scheme? Elements paralleling visuals of *Metropolis*? Totalitarianism anticipating the Soviet Union's systemic control; role of dystopia in sci-fi; satire; the vertical axis; dreams.
- W 24 *Zamyatin, *We* (pp. 107-232). Conclusion vs. conclusiveness: open endings.
- M 29 **EXAM I**
- W Oct 1 *S. Lem, *The Futurological Congress*: pp. 1-75. Irony and paradox in Lem's treatment of themes; skepticism about totalizing systems and misuse of science and reason; Freud's theory of the conscious/unconscious as the vertical.
- M 6 *Lem: pp. 76-149. Conclusion and its implications.
Dystopias: compare those in Lang, Wells, Zamyatin, and Lem.
- W 8 *J. Cameron, *The Terminator*. Chronotopes: indivisibility of space and time; cyborgs and robots in sci-fi; artificial intelligence versus animal intuition; consequences of unmonitored capitalist practices.
- T 14 *J. Cameron, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Apocalyptic capitalism; reversal of gender roles; soft-male mother and "family values."

SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

- W 15 *D. Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Communist threat as alien invasion; American values of the 1950s; suburbia; mind and body.
- M 20 *P. Kaufman, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Comparison of the two *Invasion...* films; shift of locale and change in social concerns.
- W 22 **EXAM II**
- M 27 *S. Lem, *Solaris*: pp. 7-114. Exploring cosmos or confronting the self; nature of "the alien"; data/information/knowledge; synthesis of genres: mystery, treatise, scientific log; philosophical speculation.
- W 29 *Lem, *Solaris*: pp. 115-223. Clips of *Solaris* on screen: view from the East in A. Tarkovsky's 1972 version; view from the West in S. Soderbergh's 2002 adaptation.
- M Nov 3 *R. Scott, *Alien*. Capitalist colonization and its discontents; problems of propagation; negative maternity.
- W 5 *J. Cameron, *Aliens*. Monstrosities and contrasting modes of maternity.

M 10 **EXAM III**

BIOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

W 12 *H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. The impersonal brutality of “God’s world”; Darwin; biological engineering; narrative frame. Clips from adaptations by Erle Kenton (1933), Don Taylor (1977), and John Frankenheimer (1996).

M 17 *Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild”[sent via e-mail as attachment]. Colonization; body and gender politics. Comparisons with *Alien(s)*.

General discussion: bypassing female reproduction; identity and kinship.

VIRTUAL REALITY

W 19 *Philip Dick, “We Can Dream it for You Wholesale” [sent via e-mail as attachment]. Mars; implantation of memories; identity; verification.

*Paul Verhoeven, *Total Recall* (1990). Colonization, mutants, Hollywoodization.

M 24 *Alex Proyas, *Dark City* (1998). Mind versus heart (cf. *Metropolis*); nature of reality; modes of empirical verification.

26-30 ***NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK***

M Dec 1 Course evaluations.

Summary, general discussion.

W 3 **EXAM IV**