



ENGLISH 386K
Science Fiction

Fall 2015

Dates / contact hours:

Academic Credit: 1 credit

Areas of Knowledge: ALP

Modes of Inquiry: EI, STS

Course format: lecture, in-class discussion, screening of films

Instructor's Information

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Prerequisite(s), if applicable: no prerequisites

Course Description

Computational entities as depicted in science fiction novels and films. How the shape or present and future worlds has been profoundly transformed, destabilizing notions of the human and the human life-world.

Course Goals / Objectives

Raise philosophical and literary questions about the human future as entwined with computational entities.

Learn to write essays on speculative and science fiction texts.

Interrogate American culture through the popular genre of science fiction novels and films.

Required Text(s)/Resources

Egan, Greg. *Permutation City* (novel). New York: Eos, 1995. ISBN 978-0061054815.

Bear, Greg. *Blood Music* (novel) . New York: e-read.com, 2008. ISBN 978-0759241749.

Johnny Mnemonic (film). Director Robert Longo, 1995.

Vinge, Vernon. *Rainbows End* (novel). New York: Tor, 2007. ISBN 978-0812536362.

Suarez, Daniel. *Daemon* (novel). New York: Signet. ISBN 978-0451228734.

Thirteenth Floor (film). Director Josef Rusnak, 1999.

Lem, Stanislaw. "Non Servium" (short story) in *A Perfect Vacuum*. Northwestern University Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0810117334.

Minority Report (film). Director Steven Spielberg, 2002.

Moon (film). Director Duncan Jones, 2009.

Recommended Text(s)/Resources

Additional Materials (optional)

Journal articles in *Science-Fiction Studies*, *Extrapolation*, *Contemporary Literature*, and elsewhere (available as pdf)

Course Requirements / Key Evidences

Read and discuss course films and novels. Write two shorter and one longer essay. Post on online discussion board on each text.

Technology Considerations, if applicable

Classroom projector for seminar discussion points; classroom VCR for showing films. Access to course Sakai website/discussion board for student postings and class information. Students will need laptops for essay composition and postings.

Assessment Information / Grading Procedures

Grading guidelines will include:

1. Essays and postings: originality and intellectual force of ideas articulated
2. Essays: ability to form a thesis and coherent argument
3. Postings: scope of ideas articulated and timely completion
4. **Participation: regular attendance and participation in discussion**

A detailed system of grading will be developed before the course begins (how many points for each assignment). Detailed rubrics of expectations for each assignment will be provided. Assignments and exams will be aligned with learning outcomes.

Diversity and Intercultural Learning (see Principles of DKU Liberal Arts Education)

Many science fiction texts imagine futures in which the present ethic/cultural configurations are radically transformed. In the process, they interrogate the assumptions underlying contemporary American hegemony and culture. These texts in particular question (the American version of) “human nature” by imagining computational futures in which humans can upload their consciousness into computers, human memory is completely entwined with computer memory, simulacra of entire worlds are created in computers, and the natural environment is all but obscured by virtual reality overlays. How does ethnicity manifest when the entities depicted no longer have organic bodies? How do cultural factions form when the environment is more virtual than real? What would it mean for a computational entity to have an “authentic” selfhood?

Course Policies and Guidelines

- Academic integrity: information will be distributed about plagiarism and unauthorized copying of someone else’s work
- Attendance : students may miss two class sessions; after that a grade penalty applies.
- Attention to assignment deadlines: all written assignments and postings are to be turned in on time. A short grace period will be allowed for essays, but postings will be penalized if late.
- Make-up work: at discretion of instruction.
- Appropriate or inappropriate use of cell phone, laptop, or other technology during class. No cell phones; laptops or pads OK during class time.
- Students will follow DKU guidelines for academic standards.

Tentative Course Outline or Schedule

(This syllabus assumes four class meetings/week for seven weeks. Note on materials: I have copies of all the course films and books. Most of the books are available as e-texts; for the remainder, I will make pdfs). If the schedule is other than four meetings per week, the topics will be adjusted to fit all of the topics into the scheduled time.

1: introduction to course and texts; overview of course objectives and goals; course procedures and rules; introduction of students to each other.

2: Greg Bear, *Blood Music*, first third.

3. Greg Bear, *Blood Music*, second third.

4. Greg Bear, *Blood Music*, final third. Postings due on this text.

5. Film viewing, *Thirteenth Floor*. First half.

6. Film viewing, *Thirteenth Floor*. Second half.
7. In-class essay responding to questions on film; discussion.
8. Continued discussion of *Thirteenth Floor*. Postings due on this text.
9. Stanislaw Lem, "Non Servium". Discussion and posting due.
10. Viewing of "Johnny Mnemonic".
11. Discussion of "Johnny Mnemoic"; posting due.
12. Greg Egan, *Permutation City*. First third; discussion.
13. Greg Egan, *Permutation City*. Second third; discussion.
14. Greg Egan, *Permutation City*. Final third; discussion; posting due.
15. Second essay due on *Permutation City*, "Non Servium," or *Blood Music*; viewing of *Moon*.
16. Continued viewing of *Moon*.
17. Discussion of *Moon*; posting due.
18. Invited lecture comparing Chinese and American science fiction.
19. Vernon Vinge, *Rainbows End*, first third. Discussion.
29. Vernon Vinge, *Rainbows End*, second third. Discussion.
21. Vernon Vinge, *Rainbows End*, final third. Discussion. Posting due.
22. Viewing of *Minority Report*.
23. Viewing of *Minority Report*; discussion; posting due.
24. Daniel Suarez, *Daemon*, first third. Discussion.
25. Daniel Suarez, *Daemon*, second third. Discussion.
26. Daniel Suarez, *Daemon*, final third. Discussion. Posting due.
27. Discussion of overall course themes.
28. Conclusion; third essay due.