

Syllabus – Summer, 2019

English 439/839: “Science Fiction Films”

Pre-Session May 20 – June 7, 2019

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CLASS MEETS Monday - Friday 9:30AM – 12:20PM in RVB 123.

OFFICE HOURS: Thursdays 1PM – 3PM; Andrews 108.

*This course satisfies Student Learning Outcome #7 of the ACE program, “Use knowledge, theories, or methods appropriate to the arts to understand their context and significance.”

* This course typically deals with the work of one, or several, key directors in cinema history, organized by genre, country, or shared thematic concerns, analyzing key films made during the course of their career(s). The purpose of the course is to learn to analyze and write about these films from a perspective informed by film aesthetics and historical, cultural and social context. Students will analyze the role of the director as the interpreter of aesthetics, history, social trends, gender, class, and race in creating the films that make up her/his canon of work. Students will be expected to develop their critical abilities, expand their vocabulary and knowledge of the field, and express themselves in writing exercises and discussions.

* Through readings in textbooks, course lectures, and film showings, students will acquire the knowledge necessary to understand and analyze the films. They will have an opportunity to display and be assessed on this knowledge by their participation in class discussion. Also, students typically write three papers, five pages each, typed, on the films screened during class and the discussion that follows. These papers should be an analytic response using the materials in the textbooks to amplify their discussion, examining editing, camerawork, lighting, soundtrack, music, acting styles, camera movement, framing, deep focus, costumes, and other cinematic and aesthetic concerns, to analyze the film in detail.

Required Text:

There is no required text for this class.

I will be sending you links on each film every day after class.

In this way, we can focus precisely on the films we're covering.

Course Requirements:

1. Three papers, five pages each, typed, on the films we see each week and the discussion that follows. These papers are due on the Friday of each class week, and will be graded over the weekend and returned. These papers should be a response to the films we are seeing, using the materials in the handouts to amplify your discussion, examining editing, camerawork, lighting, soundtrack, music, acting styles, camera movement, framing, deep focus, costumes, and whatever else you think might apply; deconstruct the film in detail. We will talk more about this the first morning. Your final paper is due on Thursday June 2nd; the final class day is Friday, June 3rd.

It is best to write on each film after class each day, when your memory of the film is fresh. In this fashion, your paper will be completed by the Friday of each week of class, ready to hand in.

2. Daily attendance at lecture/screenings is mandatory. THERE ARE NO EXCUSED ABSENCES. WE MEET ONLY 14 TIMES, AND YOU ARE EXPECTED TO BE ON TIME FOR EACH CLASS SESSION.
3. Participation: please speak up on the films, what they mean to you, what your reactions are, how you feel about them and what they say to you.
4. Please be prompt. We must start on time if we are to fit these films into the very tight slots that we have been allowed for projection and discussion.
5. Screening / lectures meet M-F 9:30AM – 12:20PM in RVB 123. There will be a daily film screening, and then discussion of the film in relation to the class handouts.
6. No recording devices of any kind are allowed in the classroom, due to personal privacy issues of class members, as well as copyright issues with the films themselves.

Your grade is figured as follows:
*25% perfect attendance at lectures and screenings
*25% class participation (speaking constructively in class)
*50% for your three papers combined.

I do not accept late papers under any circumstances.

Your Conduct in Class: As instructor, I will direct and control the discussion. All students will be expected to participate; however, no one student will be allowed to dominate the discussion. All students will be expected to honor my decisions concerning direction of the discussion. Any student who chooses not to follow these guidelines will be given a warning the first time. If after receiving a warning the violation continues, the student will be subject to disciplinary action, which could include dismissal from the course.

THE AIM OF THE COURSE, AND ABOUT YOUR PAPERS:

This class covers the science fiction film of the last seventy-five or so years, a period in cinema history that saw worldwide change in the film medium, and an unprecedented growth in the science fiction film, as well as experimentation within the film medium itself. We aim to discuss and learn to analyze as film theorists, using our films as examples. The point is to analyze the films and their makers, rather than simply offering an opinion – see the film for what it is.

On a more basic level, we learn the grammar of visual language of the cinema. In order to put these films in a theoretical context, we draw upon a number of different approaches and types of film theory. Our aim is to develop an awareness and understanding of gender representations in the cinema and to be able to analyze them in discussion and rigorous written analysis.

Your papers should be a response to the films we are seeing, using the lectures, any texts you feel are relevant, and handouts given in class to amplify your discussion, examining editing, camerawork, lighting, soundtrack, music, acting styles, camera movement, framing, deep focus, costumes, and whatever else you think might apply; deconstruct the film in detail. Focus on the films we are seeing, and what they say, rather than giving your opinion of them – it's more important to put the film at the center of your discussion. We will talk more about this the first morning.

Do not write whether or not you like or dislike the film. Avoid statements that are informal such as "it was cool," "it was radical," and do not use profanity. This is a serious class in film criticism. This is not a class in daily film reviewing, but rather a class in seriously analyzing films that we see.

Do not write plot summaries. You should be discussing these films as social and political, technical and aesthetic that reflect the social values of the eras they were made in. Analyze the film from the perspective of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Pick out a key line of dialogue or a key scene that illustrates your point, for example.

Relate the film to the culture around it. Do not use racist, sexist, or homophobic language or expressions, either in your writing, or in class discussion. Make sure you spell names of film, actors, directors, authors etc. correctly. In short, analyze the film. Don't simply summarize it.

When writing about a film, analyze how the film reflects the history of the era, the expectations of women and men, technological advances, how the shots are put together, how the lighting works, how the camera moves or doesn't move in the shot, and other technical/aesthetic questions. Ask yourself what the film says about its intended audience. Relate the film to the readings and to other films we screen in class.

You must display in all your writing rigorous theoretical *analysis*. Don't say you agree or disagree with the filmmaker, or dislike or like the film; that's simply an opinion, NOT analysis. Instead examine the film, and its contribution to the history of the cinema. Point out ideas that make you think differently about movies as you take the class. You must respond to the films being shown, not simply dismiss them with a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) provides individualized academic support for students with documented disabilities. Support services can include extended test time, textbooks and handouts in alternative formats (electronic texts, Braille, taped texts, etc.), classroom notes, sign language interpreters, and transcriptionists. SSD not only accommodates students that have visible disabilities, but students with other varying types of disabilities that impact college life.

If you have a documented disability that is impacting your academic progress, please call SSD at 472-3787 and schedule an appointment.

If you do not have a documented disability but you are having difficulties with your coursework (such as receiving low grades even though you study more than your classmates or find you run out of time for test questions when the majority of your peers finish their exams in the allotted time), you may schedule an appointment to discuss the challenges you are experiencing.

ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:

Any student found to have committed or to have attempted to commit acts of academic dishonesty including but not limited to the following is subject to disciplinary sanctions:

Cheating: Copying or attempting to copy from an academic test or examination of another student; using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids or other devices for an academic test, examination or exercise; engaging or attempting to engage the assistance of another individual in misrepresenting the academic performance of a student; or communication information in an unauthorized manner to another person for an academic test, examination or exercise.

Fabrication or Falsification: Falsifying or fabricating any information or citation in any academic exercise, work, speech, research, test or examination. Falsification is the alteration of information, while fabrication is the invention or counterfeiting of information.

Plagiarism: Presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source) and submitting examination, theses, reports, speeches, drawings, laboratory notes or other academic work in whole or in part as one's own when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person. Materials covered by this prohibition include, but are not limited to, text, video, audio, images, photographs, websites, electronic and online materials, and other intellectual property.

Abuse of Academic Materials: Destroying, defacing stealing, or making inaccessible library or other academic resource material.

Complicity in Academic Dishonesty: Helping or attempting to help another student to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Falsifying Grade Reports: Changing or destroying grades, scores or marking on an examination or in a faculty member's records.

Impermissible Collaboration: Collaborating on any academic exercise, work, speech, test or examination unless expressly authorized by the faculty member. It is the obligation of the student to know whether collaboration is permitted.

Misrepresentation to Avoid Academic Work: Misrepresentation by fabrication an otherwise justifiable excuse such as illness, injury, accident, etc., in order to avoid or delay timely submission of academic work or to avoid or delay the taking of a test or examination.

Other: Academic units and members of the faculty may prescribe and give students prior notice of additional standards of conduct for academic honesty in a particular course, and violation of any such standard of conduct shall constitute misconduct under this Student Code and the University Disciplinary Procedures.

Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty may be subject to both academic and disciplinary sanctions.

LECTURE/SCREENINGS, ALL IN RVB 123:

May 20 2019: THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD (1951) Sound. B/W. 87 minutes. Director: Howard Hawks (signed by Christian Nyby). With Kenneth Tobey, Robert Cornthwaite, Margaret Sheridan, James Arness. The scene is a distant Arctic research station, where a UFO has crashed. The investigating scientists discover that the circular craft has melted its way into the ice, which has frozen up again. While attempting to recover the ship, Captain Patrick Hendry (Kenneth Tobey) accidentally explodes the vessel, but the pilot -- at least, what seems to be the pilot -- remains frozen in a block of ice. The body is taken to base headquarters, where it is inadvertently thawed out by an electric blanket.

May 21 2019: THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951) Sound. B/W. 92 minutes. Director: Robert Wise. With Michael Rennie, Billy Gray, Patricia Neal, Sam Jaffe. All of Washington, D.C., is thrown into a panic when an extraterrestrial spacecraft lands near the White House. Out steps Klaatu (Michael Rennie, in a role intended for Claude Rains), a handsome and soft-spoken interplanetary traveler, whose "bodyguard" is Gort (Lock Martin), a huge robot who spews forth laser-like death rays when danger threatens. After being wounded by an overzealous soldier, Klaatu announces that he has a message of the gravest importance for all humankind, which he will deliver only when all the leaders of all nations will agree to meet with him.

May 22 2019: WAR OF THE WORLDS (1953) Sound. Color. 85 min. Director: Byron Haskin. With Gene Barry, Ann Robinson, Paul Birch, Lewis Martin. A meteor like object crash-lands near the small town of Linda Rosa. Among the crowd of curious onlookers is Pacific Tech scientist Gene Barry, who strikes up a friendship with Ann Robinson, the niece of local minister Lewis Martin. Because the meteor is too hot to approach at present, Barry decides to wait a few days to investigate, leaving three townsmen to guard the strange, glowing object. Left alone, the three men decide to approach the meteorite, and are evaporated for their trouble. It turns out that this is no meteorite, but an invading spaceship from the planet Mars. The hideous-looking Martians utilize huge, mushroom like flying ships, equipped with heat rays, to pursue the helpless earthlings.

May 23 2019: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE (1951) Sound. Color. 82 minutes. Director: Rudolph Maté. With Larry Keating, John Hoyt, Richard Derr, Barbara Rush, Peter Hanson. Dr. Cole Henderson (Larry Keating) announces that an extraterrestrial planet is on a collision course with the Earth. No one believes Henderson's story, save for crippled financier Stanton (John Hoyt), who finances the construction of a gigantic spaceship, built for the purpose of transporting selected survivors from the doomed Earth to another Earthlike planet. As it becomes obvious that Henderson's predictions will come true, a worldwide lottery is held to select those people who will be rescued from oblivion by Stanton's spaceship.

May 24 2019: FORBIDDEN PLANET (1956) Sound Color 98 minutes. Director: Fred M. Wilcox. With Leslie Nielsen, Anne Francis, Walter Pidgeon. MGM's first big-budget science fiction film, *Forbidden Planet*, combined state-of-the-art special effects with a storyline based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the 23rd century, Cmdr. J.J. Adams (Leslie Nielsen) guides United Planets cruiser C-57-D on a rescue mission to faraway planet Altair-4. Twenty years earlier, Earth ship Bellerophon disappeared while en route to Altair-4. Only the ship's philologist, Dr. Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), survived; in the intervening decades, Morbius has created an Edenlike world of his own, for the benefit of himself and his nubile young daughter, Altaira (Anne Francis). His private paradise is zealously guarded by Robby the Robot, a piece of technology far in advance of anything on Earth.

NO CLASS MONDAY MAY 27TH – MEMORIAL DAY

May 28, 2019: 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968) Color Sound 139 minutes. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. A mind-bending sci-fi symphony, Stanley Kubrick's landmark 1968 epic pushed the limits of narrative and special effects toward a meditation on technology and humanity. Based on Arthur C. Clarke's story *The Sentinel*, Kubrick and Clarke's screenplay is structured in four movements. At the "Dawn of Man," a group of hominids encounters a mysterious black monolith alien to their surroundings. To the strains of Strauss's 1896 *Also sprach Zarathustra*, a hominid invents the first weapon, using a bone to kill prey. As the hominid tosses the bone in the air, Kubrick cuts to a 21st century spacecraft hovering over the Earth, skipping ahead millions of years in technological development. U.S. scientist Dr. Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester) travels to the moon to check out the discovery of a strange object on the moon's surface: a black monolith.

May 29, 2019: ALIEN Dir. Ridley Scott. 1979. 117 minutes. "In space, no one can hear you scream." A close encounter of the third kind becomes a Jaws-style nightmare when an alien invades a spacecraft in Ridley Scott's sci-fi horror classic. On the way home from a mission for the Company, the *Nostromo*'s crew is woken up from hibernation by the ship's Mother computer to answer a distress signal from a nearby planet. Capt. Dallas's (Tom Skerritt) rescue team discovers a bizarre pod field, but things get even stranger when a face-hugging creature bursts out of a pod and attaches itself to Kane (John Hurt). Over the objections of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), science officer Ash (Ian Holm) lets Kane back on the ship. The acid-blooded incubus detaches itself from an apparently recovered Kane, but an alien erupts from Kane's stomach and escapes. The alien starts stalking the humans, pitting Dallas and his crew (and cat) against a malevolent killing machine that also has a protector in the nefarious Company.

May 30, 2019: STAR WARS Dir. George Lucas. 1977. 121 minutes. George Lucas's mythological popcorn movie is a two-hour roller-coaster ride that has passed into movie legend. The story, for the tiny number of people not familiar with it, concerns a farm boy named Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) who discovers that the used robot recently purchased by his family plays back a message from one Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), begging for help from Obi-Wan Kenobi. Luke asks his father's friend Ben Kenobi (Alec Guinness) about this, and he discovers that Ben and Obi-Wan are one and the same. Kenobi tells Luke of the battle of the rebels against the ruling Empire and the spiritual energy called "The Force." Soon Luke, Kenobi, and a mercenary named Han Solo (Harrison Ford) join forces to rescue Princess Leia from the Empire's mammoth warship, the Death Star, controlled by evil genius Darth Vader (David Prowse, with the voice of James Earl Jones). George Lucas has frequently cited the influence of several films on *Star Wars*, particularly Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* and *Yojimbo* and John Ford's *The Searchers*, as well as the original *Flash Gordon* serials.

May 31, 2019: BLADE RUNNER Dir. Ridley Scott. 1982. 116 minutes. A blend of science fiction and noir detective fiction, *Blade Runner* was a box office and critical bust upon its initial exhibition, but its unique postmodern production design became hugely influential within the sci-fi genre, and the film gained a significant cult following that increased its stature. Harrison Ford stars as Rick Deckard, a retired cop in Los Angeles circa 2019. L.A. has become a pan-cultural dystopia of corporate advertising, pollution and flying automobiles, as well as replicants, human-like androids with short life spans built by the Tyrell Corporation for use in dangerous off-world colonization. Deckard's former job in the police department was as a talented blade runner, a euphemism for detectives that hunt down and assassinate rogue replicants.

June 3, 2019: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND Dir. Steven Spielberg. 1977. 135 minutes. Steven Spielberg followed *Jaws* (1975), his first major box-office success, with this epic science fiction adventure about a disparate group of people who attempt to contact alien intelligence. Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) is an electrical lineman who, while sent out on emergency repairs, witnesses an unidentified flying object, and even has a "sunburn" from its bright lights to prove it. Neary's obsession eventually puts him in contact with others who've had close encounters with alien spacecraft, including Jillian (Melinda Dillon), a single mother whose son disappeared during her UFO experience, and Claude Lacombe (celebrated French filmmaker François Truffaut), a French researcher who believes that we can use a musical language to communicate with alien visitors. Lacombe's theory is put to the test when a band of government researchers and underground UFO enthusiasts (including Neary) join for an exchange with alien visitors near Devil's Tower, Wyoming.

June 4, 2019: THE THING Dir. John Carpenter. 1982. 109 minutes. John Carpenter's *The Thing* is both a remake of Howard Hawks' 1951 film of the same name and a re-adaptation of the John W. Campbell Jr. story "Who Goes There?" on which it was based. Carpenter's film is more faithful to Campbell's story than Hawks' version and also substantially more reliant on special effects, provided in abundance by a team of over 40 technicians, including veteran creature-effects artists Rob Bottin and Stan Winston. The film opens enigmatically with a Siberian Husky running through the Antarctic tundra, chased by two men in a helicopter firing at it from above. Even after the dog finds shelter at an American research outpost, the men in the helicopter (Norwegians from an outpost nearby) land and keep shooting. One of the Norwegians drops a grenade and blows himself and the helicopter to pieces; the other is shot dead in the snow by Garry (Donald Moffat), the American outpost captain. American helicopter pilot MacReady (Kurt Russell, fresh from Carpenter's *Escape From New York*) and camp doctor Copper (Richard Dysart) fly off to find the Norwegian base and discover some pretty strange goings-on. The base is in ruins, and the only occupants are a man frozen to a chair (having cut his own throat) and the burned remains of what could be one man or several men. In a side room, Copper and MacReady find a coffin-like block of ice from which something has been recently cut. That night at the American base, the Husky changes into the Thing, and the Americans learn first-hand that the creature has the ability to mutate into anything it kills. For the rest of the film the men fight a losing (and very gory) battle against it, never knowing if one of their own dwindling number is the Thing in disguise. Now considered a masterwork, *The Thing* failed at the box office during its initial run, possibly because of its release just two weeks after Steven Spielberg's warmly received *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*. Along with Ridley Scott's futuristic *Alien*, *The Thing* helped stimulate a new wave of sci-fi horror films in which action and special effects wizardry were often seen as ends in themselves.

June 5, 2019: INCEPTION Dir. Christopher Nolan. 2010. 148 minutes. Visionary filmmaker Christopher Nolan (*Memento*, *The Dark Knight*) writes and directs this psychological sci-fi action film about a thief who possesses the power to enter into the dreams of others. Dom Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) doesn't steal things; he steals ideas. By projecting himself deep into the subconscious of his targets, he can glean information that even the best computer hackers can't get to. In the world of corporate espionage, Cobb is the ultimate weapon. But even weapons have their weakness, and when Cobb loses everything, he's forced to embark on one final mission in a desperate quest for redemption. This time, Cobb won't be harvesting an idea, but sowing one. Should he and his team of specialists succeed, they will have discovered a new frontier in the art of psychic espionage.

June 6, 2019: MAD MAX: FURY ROAD Dir. George Miller. 2015. 120 minutes. After festering in the mind of writer/director George Miller for more than a decade, the fourth installment of the Mad Max series is finally here -- and boy was it worth the wait. More of a reboot of the franchise than a sequel, *Fury Road* is an aesthetic masterpiece and a truly unique 21st century action thriller.

Miller's universe has been rendered in painstaking detail, and the result is a pulse-pounding two hours of pure anarchy. The film opens with a brief monologue by Max Rockatansky (Tom Hardy) that sets the stage for the barren wasteland the story takes place in: Nuclear war has devastated the earth, and the warring factions that remain have been driven to bloodshed in their search for fossil fuels and human life. Max is quickly captured by the War Boys, the deranged, albino disciples of despot King Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne), and taken to their base, the Citadel.

June 7 2019: WALL-E Color, Sound, 97 minutes. Director: Andrew Stanton. Animated. With the voices of Fred Willard, Jeff Garlin, Ben Burtt. Disney and Pixar join forces for this computer-animated tale about a wide-eyed robot who travels to the deepest reaches of outer space in search of a newfound friend. The year is 2700, and planet Earth has long been uninhabitable. For hundreds of years, WALL-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class) has been taking out the trash, and collecting precious knick-knacks in order to stave off the boredom of his dreary routine. Little does WALL-E realize that he has recently stumbled onto a secret that could save planet Earth, and once again make the ravaged planet safe for all humankind. When highly advanced search robot EVE makes friends with WALL-E and realizes the value of his remarkable discovery, she excitedly races back to let the humans know that there's hope for their home planet after all.

ALL FILM DESCRIPTIONS ADAPTED FROM
THE ALL MOVIE GUIDE WEBSITE.