

*PHL 242 H5S*

*Science Fiction and Philosophy*

*UTM (SUMMER 2018)*

*Lectures:*

*M 6-9 & W 6-9*

*Location: IB250*

***Instructor:*** Natalie Helberg

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***Office Hours:*** Monday 3:50-5:50 (***location:*** Annex 123)

***Course Description***

The re-envisioned worlds, projected futures, and invented possibilities science fiction provides us with are excellent fodder for philosophical thinking. This is at least partly because science fiction, seemingly at such a remove from the world we dwell in, through these made-up worlds, futures, and possibilities, often expresses, or translates, the anxieties, and also aspirations, we are most intimate with. In this course, we will read works of science fiction and of philosophy which pose complementary questions, or exhibit complementary themes. These are as follows: Surveillance and self-regulation; abjection; guests, parasites, and hosts: the permeable border between the self and the other; the relation between nature and technology; atrocity and the politics of eternal recurrence; queerness and the politics of the death drive; language-games and the social constitution of knowledge; the relationship between discourse and subjectivity; cruel optimism (attachments which undermine human flourishing); and, finally, the relationship between history, genealogy (alternative history-making), and social change.

***Required Texts:***

**\*Electronic versions of most readings are available**

**\*Texts you will need to purchase (UTM bookstore):**

Mat Laporte: *RATS NEST*

***Evaluation:***

1) *First essay* (1000 words): 20%

**OFFICIALLY DUE: Friday July 20<sup>th</sup>** (if you wish to receive a grade *and* comments on your work, then submit for this date)

**Second Deadline: Monday July 23<sup>th</sup>** (you may submit on this date instead of on the 20<sup>th</sup> without penalty, but, if you do, you will not receive comments on your paper, only a grade)

2) *Second essay* (1700-2000 words): 40%

**OFFICIALLY DUE: Friday August 10<sup>th</sup>** (if you wish to receive a grade *and* comments on your work, then submit for this date)

**Second Deadline: Monday August 13<sup>th</sup>** (you may submit on this date instead of on the 10<sup>th</sup> without penalty, but, if you do, you will not receive comments on your paper, only a grade)

3) *Final exam* (questions distributed in advance): 40%  
Date: TBA

***Extensions:*** Extensions may be permitted, but please request them *before* any given assignment is due. Request them as early as possible.

***Late Policy:*** There will be two deadlines for each assignment: An official deadline and a deadline occurring three days afterward. If you find it impossible to meet the official deadline, then you may submit your work for the second deadline without penalty. Note that there is no need to notify anyone if you will be missing the official deadline but meeting the second deadline. If you meet the official deadline, you will receive comments and a grade on your paper. If you miss the official deadline and meet the second deadline, you will only receive a grade on your paper (no comments). Assignments which trickle in after the second deadline will be penalized if no extension for them has been granted (2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted). If you have been granted an extension in advance, then your work will be returned after you submit it with comments and a grade.

***Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:*** Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities; competition in the academic environment should be fair). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the resources found here: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/newstudents/transition/academic/plagiarism>.

**Accessibility:** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accommodations will be provided for those students who require them. If you're not sure if your situation warrants accommodation, get in touch and ask anyway—it won't hurt to. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services: [www.accessibility.utoronto.ca](http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca)

**E-mail Policy:** Feel free to come talk to me during my office hours about the philosophical ideas and questions we're entertaining in the course. Please don't ask me to answer difficult philosophical questions or to explain tricky ideas over email, as it can be overly time-consuming to have to do this in writing. Do feel free to contact me about extensions, meetings, and other practical matters, though.

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### ***Reading Schedule***

Week 1 (half-week):

July 4 (Wednesday): ***Surveillance and Self-Regulation***

#### Readings:

Philip K. Dick: *A Scanner Darkly*

Michel Foucault: "The Body of the Condemned" (from *Discipline and Punish*)

Sandra Bartky: "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power"

Judith Butler: "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification" (from *The Psychic Life of Power*)

Week 2:

July 9: ***Cyborgs: Nature and Machines***

#### Readings:

Donna Haraway: "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"

James Tiptree Jr.: "The Girl Who Was Plugged In"

July 11: *Cruel Optimism and “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”*

Readings:

Lauren Berlant: “Introduction: Affect in the Present,” “Cruel Optimism,” and “After the Good Life, An Impass” (from *Cruel Optimism*)

Week 3:

July 16: *Abjection*

Readings:

Selections from Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*

Film: *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer)

July 18: *Powers of Horror and RATS NEST*

Readings:

Mat Laporte’s *RATS NEST*

\*\*\*Guest Speaker: Mat Laporte

\*\*\**First Essay Officially Due Friday July 20<sup>th</sup>\*\*\*  
Second Deadline (for a grade but no comments): July 23<sup>rd</sup>*

Week 4:

July 23: *Parasites and Autoimmunity*

Readings:

Jacques Derrida: “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone”

July 25: *Parasites and Autoimmunity Continued*

Readings:

“Faith and Knowledge” continued...

Octavia E Butler: Selections from “Dawn” (from *Xenogenesis*)

**\*\*\*First Assignments Returned by Sunday July 29<sup>th</sup>\*\*\*  
(Drop Deadline: July 30<sup>th</sup>)**

Week 5:

July 30: ***Eternal Recurrence: Atrocity and Politics***

Readings:

Friedrich Nietzsche: Selections *On the Genealogy of Morality, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and The Gay Science*

Theodor Adorno: Short selections from Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*

Harlan Ellison: “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream”

August 1: ***Science-Fiction and Social Transformation***

Readings:

Ken Liu: *The Man Who Ended History*

Walter Benjamin: “Theses on Philosophy of History”

Week 6:

August 6: ***The Politics of Genealogy (Science-Fiction and Social Transformation Continued)***

Readings:

Ursula Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Michel Foucault: “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

August 8: ***Self-Destruction, The Death Drive, and Queer Politics***

Readings:

Lee Edleman: “The Future is Kid Stuff” and “No Future” (from *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*)

**\*\*\*Second Essay Officially Due Friday August 10<sup>th</sup>\*\*\***  
**Second Deadline (for a grade but no comments): August 13<sup>th</sup>**

Week 7 (half-week):

August 13 (Monday): **Review**