

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):**

1. Mat Laporte: *RATS NEST*

Evaluation:

- 1) *First essay* (1000 words): 20% (**due Friday July 20th**)
- 2) *Second essay* (1700-2000 words): 40% (**due Friday August 10th**)
- 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. Please get in touch with me about extensions, and copy your TA, Howard Williams (howard.williams@utoronto.ca), on the email. We should BOTH be made aware of your request.

Late Policy: If you meet the official deadline for an assignment (Friday July 20th, for the first essay, and Friday August 10th, for the second), you will receive comments and a grade on your paper. No marks will be deducted from work submitted by 11:59pm on the Monday following an official deadline, but this work will be graded and returned without comments, unless an extension was granted in advance. After Monday, 2% of the grade will be subtracted each day until the assignment is submitted, unless, again, an extension was granted in advance. No marks will be deducted from your assignment if you have been granted an extension, provided you get the work in for the extended deadline, and your work will be returned 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

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.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 (half-week):

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

Readings:

Philip K. Dick: *A Scanner Darkly*

Foucault, Michel. 1995 (2nd Vintage Books Edition). "The Body of the Condemned." *Discipline & Punish*. New York: Vintage. 3-31. Print.

Bartky, Sandra. 1990. "[Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.](#)" *Femininity and Domination*. New York; London: Routledge. 63-82. Print.

Butler, Judith. 1997. "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification." *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford UP. 83-105. Print.

Week 2:

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

Readings:

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

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

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

Readings:

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. "[Introduction: Affect in the Present](#)" and "[Cruel Optimism](#)." *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP. 1-49. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. "[After the Good Life, An Impasse](#)." *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP. 191-222. Print.

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 due Friday July 20th****

Week 4:

July 23: *Parasites and Autoimmunity*

Readings:

Derrida, Jacques. 2002. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge. 42-101.

July 25: *Parasites and Autoimmunity Continued*

Readings:

“Faith and Knowledge” continued...

Selections from “Dawn” by Octavia E. Butler (on Blackboard)

*****First Assignments Returned Sunday July 29th***
(Drop Deadline: July 30th)**

Week 5:

July 30: *Eternal Recurrence: Atrocity and Politics*

Readings:

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2007. “Preface,” “First Essay,” “Second Essay.” *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Cambridge UP. 3-67.

Short selections from Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *The Gay Science*

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*

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. “Theses on Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books. 253-64.

Week 6:

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

Readings:

Ursula Le Guin *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Foucault, Michel. 2003. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *The Essential Foucault*. New York; London: The New Press. 351-69.

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

Readings:

Edleman, Lee. 2004. "[The Future is Kid Stuff](#)." *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham; London: Duke UP. 1-33.

Edleman, Lee: "[No Future](#)." *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham; London: Duke UP. 111-55.

*****Second Essay due Friday August 10th*****

Week 7 (half-week):

August 13 (Monday): **Review**

*****Final Exam (TBA)*****