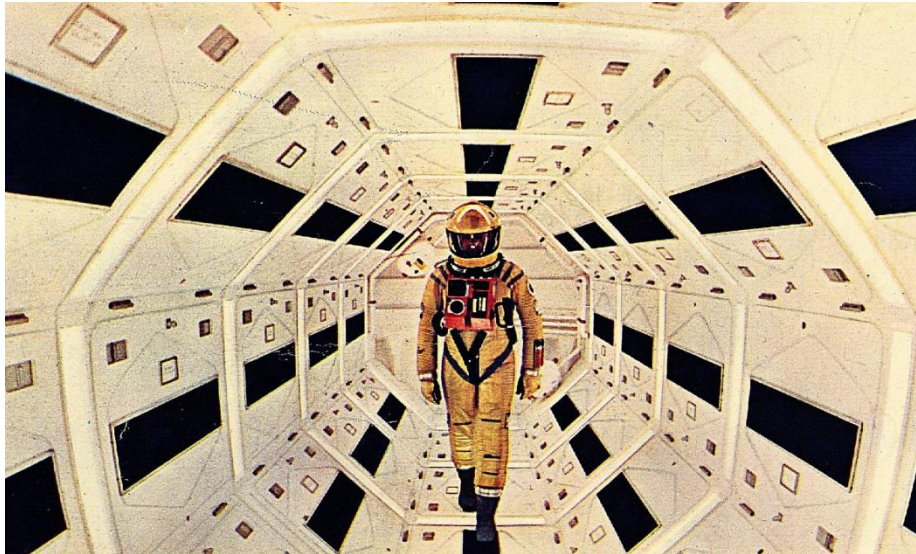


The University of Western Ontario  
Department of English/Film Studies

## 3357F – Science Fiction Cinema



### Course Description

This course provides students with a survey of Science Fiction cinema, one of the most popular and enduring genres in the history of cinema. In this course we will engage with the question of what generic elements (narrative, mise-en-scène, philosophical content, etc.) are specific to the Science Fiction film, and will analyze them in relation to larger issues, such as modernity, the relationship between technology, society and the individual, and the history of utopian thought, science and reason. How have filmmakers used Science Fiction to reflect on the social and political questions of the present? Why is it easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than radical social change? When does technology on earth or on the screen serve an ideological function, when does it allow for new ways of thinking, feeling and being? How has Science Fiction cinema envisioned radical otherness and explored the limits of what it means to be “human”? What role has Science Fiction cinema played at key points in film history to advance new filmmaking technologies or marketing strategies? How does Science Fiction cinema relate to other genres with little critical/academic recognition, but huge fan cultures, such as horror or fantasy?

**Instructor: Dr. Tobias Nagl**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30-2:30pm**

**Screenings: Monday 9:30-12:30pm (UC 1405)**

**Lectures: Tuesday 10:30-12:30am (UC 1401)**

### Readings:

- Sean Edmond (ed.), *Liquid Metal. The Science Fiction Film Reader* (Wallflower 2005) [required] [LM]
- Course readings available on OWL (<https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>) [required]
- Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space. The American Science Fiction Cinema* (Rutgers University Press 2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) [recommended]

Note: Theory “essentials” are marked with an asterix\*. They need special intellectual attention and provide general concepts that are relevant beyond individual units. Please also use the two text books independently – the more you read (and the more films you discover through reading), the better you will understand Science Fiction cinema.

### Evaluation

Participation and attendance	10%
Weekly Reading Responses	10%
Paper 1	15%
Abstract & Commented Bibliography	5%
Paper 2	30%
Final exam (see UWO exam schedule)	30%

Students also have to present their ideas for the final research paper to the class. The oral presentation is required for the completion of this course, but will not be graded.

**Note:** Research papers handed in late without prior approval will be penalized 3% per day. You must request an extension *before* the due date, and extensions will be given at my discretion. Essays must be submitted to me personally or left in the Essay Drop Box outside the English Office (across from UC 2431). Keep a copy of your essay! In addition, essays must also be uploaded to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). An essay wholly or partly plagiarized will receive a mark of 0 and may not be rewritten—other penalties as detailed in the English Department’s Regulations for Students will apply. Familiarize yourself with this document. Attendance will be taken at every class and screening, and three or more absences will be reflected in your attendance mark. Please note that this mark is for both attendance *and* participation, and thus simply showing up for class is not sufficient. You are expected to participate in class discussions. The screenings are necessary for success in the class. You should take notes, either during or shortly after the screening.

The short, one-page weekly reading responses are graded on a pass/fail basis —that is, students will receive 100% if they submit them on time and make a good-faith effort to answer all the questions. Students have to submit the assignments before class via <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>. In addition, they must bring to class a paper copy and submit it to the instructor at the beginning of the session. Late online reading assignments will be calculated as a 60%, unacceptable or non-submitted weekly reading responses will receive 0%. Late readings responses will be accepted until the last day of classes. A template and instructions for the weekly reading assignments can be found on OWL. The purpose of the reading assignments is to give students an incentive to prepare for class. If you do the readings, it is easy to score 100%!

# Course Plan

## **Week 1 (10-14 Sep): Close Encounters: Defining Science Fiction**

Screening: *The Thing* (John Carpenter, US 1982)

Reading: Vivian Sobchack "Images of Wonder" (LM); Steve Neale "You've Got to Be Fucking Kidding!" (LM), Darko Suvin, "Estrangement and Cognition" [excerpts]\*

## **Week 2 (17-21 Sep): Back to the Future: Silent Science Fiction and Modernity**

Screening: *A Trip to the Moon* (Georges Méliès, F 1902) + *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, G 1927)

Reading: Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions"\* [excerpt], Georges Méliès, "Trick Effects", J.P. Telotte, "A Picture of Distance: The German Science Fiction Film" [excerpt], Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* [excerpt], Anton Kaes, "Metropolis – City, Cinema, Modernity"

## **Week 3 (24-29 Sep): A Genre is Born: Screening Utopia/Dystopia between the Wars**

Screening: *Things To Come* (William C. Menzies, GB 1936)

Reading: Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" [excerpt]\*, Chapman/Cull, "The Prophet and the Showman: *Things to Come* (1936)"

## **Week 4 (1-5 Oct): War of the Worlds: Sci Fi and the Cold War**

Screening: *The Day The Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, US 1951) + *Design for Dreaming* (William Baudine, US 1956)

Reading: Tzvetan Todorov, "Definition of the Fantastic" [excerpt]\*, M. Keith Booker, *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture* [excerpt]

**\*\*\*\*\*8-12 Oct Thanksgiving and Reading Week: No Class\*\*\*\*\***

## **Week 5 (15-19 Oct): Space is the Place: The Genius of Kubrick**

Screening: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, GB 1968)

Reading: Chapman/Cull, "The Watershed: *2001*", Arthur C. Clarke, "The Myth of *2001*"  
Carl Freedman, "Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema"

**\*\*\*\*WED 17 Oct: PAPER ONE due in dropbox and on turnitin.com\*\*\*\***

## **Week 6 (22-26 Oct): The Dystopian Imagination of the 1970s**

Screening: *THX 1138* (George Lucas, US 1971)

Reading: Michael Ryan/Douglas Kellner, "Technophobia/Dystopia" (LM), J.P. Telotte, "The Science Fiction Film as a Fantastic Text: *THX 1138*"

**THU 25 OCT: Abstract and Commented Bibliography due on OWL**

## **Week 7 (29 Oct-2 Nov): It's After the End of the Word: Afrofuturism**

Screening: *Space is the Place* (John Coney, US 1974) + *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu, Kenya 2009)

Reading: John Corbett, "Brothers from Another Planet", Ritch Calvin "The Environmental Dominant in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*", Ramzi Fawaz, "Space, that Bottomless Pit: Planetary Exile and Metaphors of Belonging in American Afrofuturist Cinema [excerpt]"

**Week 8 (5-9 Nov): Science Fiction as Philosophy: The Genius of Tarkovsky**

Screening: *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR 1972)

Leon Marvell, "Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and the (im)possibility of a Science Fiction Cinema", Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* [excerpt]

**Week 9 (12-16 Nov): Mothers, Monsters, Aliens: Science Fiction and Feminism**

Screening: *Alien* (Ridley Scott, US 1979)

Reading: Barbara Creed, "*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine,"\* Judith Newton, "Feminism and Anxiety in *Alien*", Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema*, 150-54

**Week 10 (19-23 Nov): IN CLASS Student Presentations of Final Research Paper Topics**

**Week 11 (26-29 Nov): Postmodern Memory: Replications, Simulations and Cyborgs**

Screening: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, US 1982)

Reading: Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*", Mary Ann Doane, "Technophilia"\* (LM)

**\*\*\*FRI 28 Nov: Research Paper due in English Department dropbox and on turnitin.com\*\*\***

**Week 12 (3-6 Dec): Things to Come: Global Science Fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Screening: *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho, SKR/CZ 2013)

Reading: Brandon Taylor, "The Ideological Train to Globalization"

**\*\*\*FINAL EXAM: see UWO EXAM SCHEDULE\*\*\***

## **Information for Students:**

### **I. General Course Objectives:**

Understanding, capacity for argument, judgment and analysis will be fostered by essays, presentations and other assignments, and by in-class small-group and whole-class discussion. Communication skills will be imparted through in-class discussion and credit will be given for frequency and quality of contributions. Essays and other written assignments are marked in accordance with the grading criteria listed below and include benchmarks for the expectations associated with each grade. Awareness of the limits of knowledge will be enhanced by exploring the legitimate differences of opinion and methodology within the field, and by requiring students to negotiate the formulation of their own opinions in-class with the terms and knowledge brought to discussions by other students and the instructor. The ability to argue and decide on complex issues will be fostered by essays and in-class discussion. Time management skills will be fostered by the need to prepare properly for class and to deliver assignments in a timely manner. Academic responsibility will be developed by the need to source assignments accurately.

### **II. Specific course objectives:**

Develop critical awareness of Science Fiction cinema as a genre and the history of Science Fiction in the last century, refine critical thinking skills, identify aesthetic influences and strategies, film styles and directors (e.g. Stanley Kubrick, Andrei Tarkovsky, George Lucas, Ridley Scott) relevant to the course, learn how to analyze Science Fiction cinema in its cultural, commercial and ideological context and become aware of the theoretical/aesthetic questions it raises (e.g. realism vs. the fantastic, humanism vs. post-humanism, the self vs. the other, problems of genre classification, specifics of narrative and mise-en-scène, etc.)

### **III. Other Relevant regulations:**

For English Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions), and other matters, please consult "Student Information" on our website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>

**Please Note:** The film screenings for the course are mandatory. If you miss a class or a screening you are responsible for arranging a viewing of the assigned film at the Film Resource Centre. Please note that not all films may be available at the Film Resource Centre. More than three unexcused absences will be reflected in your attendance mark. Assignments handed in late without prior approval will be penalized 3% per day. You must request an extension *before* the due date, and extensions will be given at my discretion.

**1. Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Students must write their essays in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage, from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Scholastic offenses are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offense, at the following website:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**2. Plagiarism Checking:** All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://Turnitin.com).

**3. Prerequisites:** Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in Film Studies 1020E or Film Studies 1022 or permission of the Department.

**4. UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:** Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and or assignments must apply to their Academic Counseling Office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Medical documentation is also required for accommodation of work worth less than 10% of the total course grade. This includes absences (both class and screenings), late assignments or essays, missed exams and quizzes, etc. Medical documentation must be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office and it will be the Dean's office that will make the determination whether accommodation is warranted.

Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

For information on the examination services provided by the Student Development Centre, please visit:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd)

Additional information on student services can be found on the following website: <http://www.westernusc.ca/services/>

**5. Mental Health:** Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

**6. Registrar:** Please see the following websites for further information related to registrarial services:

<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca> (Registrar)

**7. Electronic Devices:** Electronic Devices will not be allowed during tests, examinations or screenings. Laptops will be permitted for notes only during the lecture. Please do not violate the policy and use your electronic device to access social media or email during class time.

## GRADING CRITERIA

### **A+ (90-100)**

Argument: Clear development of a specific, challenging and original thesis. The writer has taken significant risks successfully; in the resulting piece, distinctive ideas and content have discovered their necessary distinctive form. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

·Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

·Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.

·Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective, extensive and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

### **A (80 to 89)**

Argument: The writer has taken risks and most of them succeed. Clear development of a specific and challenging thesis, with proper paragraphs. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

·Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

·Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors

·Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

### **B (70 to 79)**

Argument: Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs. Adequately detailed reference to texts. Ability to expound reasonably sophisticated ideas with clarity.

·Presentation/structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. A few typographical errors.

·Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with reasonable range of sentence types and full range of punctuation. Style not too wordy, with errors relatively few and minor.

·Research Scholarship: Evidence of adequate research, with proper documentation of sources.

### **C (60 to 69)**

Argument: Reasonably clear development of a thesis, with proper paragraphs. Basic ability to expound ideas, whose development might be rather thin. Effort to support points with references to the text. Tendency to replace analysis with descriptive retelling of plot.

·Presentation/structure: Presentation showing lapses in tidiness and/or proofreading. Poor use of paragraphs.

·Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, but perhaps overly simple, with tendency to avoid punctuation besides period and comma. Errors relatively few, but occasionally serious, with evident misunderstanding of some

point of elementary grammar (comma splices, fragments, semicolon errors, subject-verb disagreements, poorly integrated quotations)

·Research/Scholarship: reasonable effort at documentation, but rather thin.

#### **D (50 to 59)**

·Argument: Difficulty with paragraphing or consecutive thought. Ideas inchoate but clouded by weak expression. Overgeneralization with inadequate support, or examples that run to lengthy paraphrase, with little or no analysis.

·Presentation/Structure: Very poor to non-existent use of paragraphs. Inadequate and inaccurate documentation. Multiple typographical errors.

·Language Skills: Errors of grammar or diction frequent enough to interfere with understanding.

·Research/Scholarship: Little serious effort to research the topic.

#### **F (49 and down)**

·Argument: Ideas too simple for level of course. Argument completely incoherent. Erroneous content showing little or no understanding of subject.

·Presentation/Structure: Very sloppy proof-reading. Documentation virtually non-existent.

·Language Skills: writing frequently ungrammatical.

·Research/Scholarship: Non-existent. Content largely “borrowed” from sources with no individual distillation, but no apparent attempt to deceive.

#### **0 (Report to Department)**

·Plagiarism with intent to deceive