

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

Special Topics in Film Studies: Cinemas of Dystopia
Film Studies 2198A (001)
Fall 2022

Instructor: Dr. C.E. Gittings

Screenings: **Asynchronous online viewing**

Course Day/Time: Tuesday 3:30-5:30 pm
Synchronous via Zoom

"nations will be happy, when either philosophers become kings, or kings become philosophers."

"As long as there is property, and while money is the standard of all things, I cannot think that a nation can be governed either justly or happily; not justly, because the best things will fall to the share of the worst men; nor happily, because all things will be divided among a few (and even these are not in all respects happy), the rest being left to the absolutely miserable."

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Course Description

Dystopia is, according to the OED, "[A]n imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible." It is the opposite of Utopia. Dystopian literature and cinema take contemporary social and political concerns and displace them to fictional universes, sometimes imagined futures, to better illuminate and interrogate real-world perils facing viewers in their present. Beginning with Thomas More, this course will consider the concept of dystopia in select cinema and television through the vectors of philosophy, history, aesthetics, genre studies, and ideology, and with reference to nation, race, class, gender and sexuality.

Objectives:

This course functions as an introduction to cinemas of dystopia in select cinema and television, emphasizing both close textual analysis and key critical approaches to visual dystopias. In addition to examining the key figures in the development of the idea of dystopia on screen and dystopias' relationships to our pasts and presents, we will consider the politics and ideological components that provide the foundation for so many dystopias. The course provides opportunities to study Hollywood and European representations of dystopia. Together we will work toward understanding the selected titles' relationships to genre by answering the following questions:

- Is dystopia a unique genre?
- Is dystopia a sub-genre?
- Is this distinction important?
- What other popular genres inform the aesthetics, narrative strategies and ideologies of dystopian cinema?
- What is the relationship of dystopia to utopia?
- Is there a definable aesthetics of screen dystopias?

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, you will have a thorough grasp of the history of the dystopian film, its formal and narrative strategies, ideologies and the various critical and theoretical approaches used to examine it. You will also expand your knowledge of dystopian cinema's relationships to issues of aesthetics/genre, history, philosophy, identity, nation, and ideology. Close analysis of dystopian visual texts in class and on exams will make you a more skilled reader and critic of both cinema and cinemas of dystopia.

Course Materials

Online Coursepack [OWL].

13 titles will be selected from the provisional list below:

- *Metropolis* (Germany, Fritz Lang, 1927)
- *Fahrenheit 451* (UK, Francois Truffaut, 1966)
- *A Clockwork Orange* (UK/USA, Stanley Kubrick, 1971)
- *Westworld* (USA, Michael Crichton, 1973) Excerpt
- *The Stepford Wives* (USA, Bryan Forbes, 1975)
- *Twelve Monkeys* (USA, Terry Gilliam, 1995)
- *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)
- *1984* (UK, Michael Radford, 1984)
- *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985)
- *They Live* (USA, John Carpenter 1988)
- *Delicatessen* (France, Marc Caro Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1991)
- *eXistenZ* (Canada/UK/France, David Cronenberg, 1999)
- *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999)
- *V is For Vendetta* (James McTeigue 2005)
- *Hunger Games* (USA, Gary Ross, 2012)
- *The Handmaid's Tale* Season 1 (Bruce Miller, 2017) 2 episodes
- *Westworld* Season 1 (Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, 2016) 1-2 episodes

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Attendance /Tutorial Participation		10%
Quizzes (10 min.)	27 Sept; 25 Oct	10% each
Exam 1(50 min.)	15 October	20%
Exam 2 (50 min.)	11 November	20%
<hr/>		
Total Term:		70%
Final Exam:		30%