University of Cyprus
Department of English Studies

University of Cyprus
Department of English Studies
Course Syllabus

ENG 524– Science Fiction and Philosophy
(7.5 ECTS)

Instructor: Tziovanis Georgakis (PhD)
Email: georgakis.tziovanis@ucy.ac.cy
Course Days: Mondays and Thursdays
Course Time: 9:00 – 10:30
Course Venue: ΧΩΔ01 / 001
Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays: 11:00 – 13:00
Office Hours Venue: M105A

Course Description

The aim of the course is to investigate the genre of science fiction as a kind of a literary representation that mediates the ontological distinction between human subjects and technological apparatuses. Specifically, the course will explore science fiction as a particular frame of reference, as a peculiar modality which represents the evasive, dubious, and often contradictory boundaries whereby human beings and technological objects are not only separated but also interbred as organisms and mechanisms. Throughout the duration of the course, the following issues will be discussed: computing and intelligence; ontogenesis; technical mentality; technology and positionality (*Gestell*); machines and machination; biological, sexual, and political identities and transgression. In-class discussions will focus on theoretical texts by seminal thinkers—in particular, by Alan Turing, Martin Heidegger, Gilbert Simondon, Bernard Stiegler, and François Laruelle—which will be juxtaposed with works of science fiction by Stanislaw Lem, H. P. Lovecraft, Ridley Scott, and William Gibson. The course is interdisciplinary, so students will develop critical thinking skills for navigating distinct but necessarily pertinent mediums.

Core Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will:
- understand and challenge the multiple and difficult issues that arise with the engagement of science fiction with philosophy and technological thinking.
- gain new insights into the related issues and surveyed questions.
- participate in different debates that take place within various literary and philosophical fields.
- interpret and analyze works of fiction and cinema.
- be in a position to distinguish, evaluate, and construct arguments.
- produce critical research essays of the kind that is assigned in upper level courses within the English major.
- develop an attentive eye for the marginal and the unconsidered.
- foster the necessary critical and analytical skills that each university student needs to utilize in every academic setting.

Bibliography

(Included in the *Course Pack*)

Heidegger, Martin. 'The Question Concerning Technology.' Trans. Lovitt, William. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. New York: Harper and Row 1977. 3-35. Print.

Laruelle, François. 'Introduction: Man as Ultimatum and as Testament.' Trans. Burk, Drew S. and Anthony Paul Smith. *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2012. 3-26. Print.

Simondon, Gilbert. 'The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis.' *Parrhesia* 7 (2009): 4-16. Print.

Stiegler, Bernard. 'Who? What? The Invention of the Human.' Trans. Beardsworth, Richard and George Collins. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 134-79. Print.

Turing, Alan. 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence.' *The Essential Turning*. Ed. Copeland, Brian Jack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 441-64. Print.

(To be purchased by students)

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2000. Print.

Lem, Stanislaw. *The Cyberiad: Fables for the Cybernetic Age*. Trans. Kandel, Michael. London: Penguin Books, 2014. Print.

Lovecraft, H. P. 'The Whisperer in Darkness.' *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*. London: Penguin Books, 2002. 200-67. Print.

(To be viewed in class)

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, Sean Young, and Edward James Olmos. Warner Bros. 1982. Film.

Class Preparation and Participation

The class will be run seminar-style, by which the class instructor will do some lecturing. At the same time, students are expected to participate actively in class discussions. This format will not work unless all students are well-prepared for the class. It is very important that students engage discussions and readings so that the whole classroom participates in a dialectic exchange of thoughts and ideas. If students are having difficulty understanding parts of the class material, they should inform the instructor. In general, the instructor will not summarize the readings for the students' sake. The readings are for the students to discuss during the discussion portion of the class. The instructor will merely supplement the assigned readings. Part of class preparation also includes taking detailed notes, noting down pressing questions, understanding and evaluating arguments, responding to complex arguments, forming new arguments, and thinking critically about one's own positions. This class will thrive only if all students take responsibility to participate. In addition, the instructor expects that all seminar members will treat each other with the respect necessary for a philosophical discussion. Students should be courteous to the other students in the classroom and avoid disrupting their right to a positive learning environment. To this end, students should not arrive late to class or leave early, engage in side conversations, or pack their belongings before class has concluded. Students should not leave their mobile phones on, use text messaging on their phones, or surf the Internet during class. If students are using a laptop in class, they must sit near the front so as not to distract other students. If students anticipate arriving late to class or need to leave

early from class, or are expecting a call (if they need to be reachable for an emergency), they should let the instructor know before class begins.

Attendance Policy

Attending class is extremely important. Missing any class, coming in late, or leaving early will detract from the final grade. If students miss a class, they are still responsible for finding out what was delivered in class that day and if there were any assignments given by the course instructor. Class success is determined by the students' active presence and by how much work they are willing to put in. Students are urged to make a commitment to the coursework for themselves and for their colleagues.

Course Assignments and Assessment

In-class Presentation: 15%
Student will form groups of 3 persons and present on the assigned readings. Each presentation will be 20 minutes long.
Midterm examination: 30%
Each student will respond to specific questions given by the instructor relevant to the assigned readings. The length of this assignment is 1,000-1,500 words.
Final examination: 50%
Each student will write one research essay relevant to the assigned readings and in-class discussions. The length of this assignment is 2,000-2,500 words.
Class attendance and participation: 5%

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to the following: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, bribes, examination by proxy, grade tampering, and submission of non-original works. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic grade of 0. Information about plagiarism and citation rules will be provided during the semester. If students have any questions or are unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty, they should ask the course instructor.

Office Hours and Availability

If students have any questions or wish to discuss course progression, course material, general philosophy or literature questions, or just to talk, the course instructor is available to them on Mondays and Thursdays from 11:00 – 13:00. If deemed necessary, they can schedule an appointment. The instructor strongly encourages all students to stop by and introduce themselves. Before students send an email with a query, they can come to office hours first. If they are unable to attend the designated office hours, they can email the instructor at georgakis.tziovanis@ucy.ac.cy. The instructor will do everything possible to respond to any questions, comments, or issues within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on the weekends.

Course Schedule

A. THINKING TECHNOLOGY THROUGH ONTOLOGY
Week 1: Turing's Computing Machinery and Intelligence

Weekly reading:
Turing, Alan. 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence.' *The Essential Turning*. Ed.
    Copeland, Brian Jack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 441-64. Print.

Week 2-3: Simondon's Problem of Ontogenesis
Weekly reading:
Simondon, Gilbert. 'The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis.' *Parrhesia*7 (2009): 4-16.
    Print.

Weeks 4-5: Heidegger's Question Concerning Technology
Weekly reading:
Heidegger, Martin. 'The Question Concerning Technology.' Trans. Lovitt, William. *The Question
    Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. New York: Harper and Row 1977. 3-35.
    Print.

Weeks 6: Lem's *Cyberiad*
Weekly reading:
Lem, Stanislaw. *The Cyberiad: Fables for the Cybernetic Age*. Trans. Kandel, Michael.
    London: Penguin Books, 2014. Print.
MIDTERM EXAMINATION ASSIGNMENT DUE: 30%

B. INVENTING AND DISSECTING HUMANITY
Weeks 7-8: Stiegler's Invention of the Human
Weekly reading:
Stiegler, Bernard. 'Who? What? The Invention of the Human.' Trans. Beardsworth, Richard and
    George Collins. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Stanford: Stanford
    University Press, 1998. 134-79. Print.

Week 9: Lovecraft's 'The Whisperer in Darkness'
Weekly reading:
Lovecraft, H. P. 'The Whisperer in Darkness.' *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird
    Stories*. London: Penguin Books, 2002. 200-67. Print.

C. RE-INVENTING AND TERMINATING HUMANITY
Weeks 10–11: Laruelle's End Times of Philosophy
Weekly reading:
Laruelle, François. 'Introduction: Man as Ultimatum and as Testament.' Trans. Burk, Drew S.
    and Anthony Paul Smith. *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*.
    Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2012. 3-26. Print.

Week 12: Scott's *Blade Runner*
Film Viewing:
Blade Runner.Dir. Ridley Scott.Perf. Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, Sean Young, and
    Edward James Olmos. Warner Bros. 1982.Film.

Week 13: Gibson' s *Neuromancer*
Weekly reading:
Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2000. Print.
FINAL EXAMINATION ASSIGNMENT DUE: 50%