

# Science Fiction Cinema

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## Course Description

Science fiction has been a popular genre since the earliest days of cinematic history, when George Méliès produced his classic *Trip to the Moon* (1902). Inviting reflection on crucial issues, SF film displaces the problems of the world we know to a fantastic or futuristic plane. In doing so, these films critique and comment on established norms, social hierarchies, and power dynamics. Though often derided as a “lesser” genre, SF film confronts some of the most fundamental questions of the human experience—such as the origin of life, our place in the universe, nature, God, and the double-edged sword of technological advancement. This course will emphasize how SF subverts our expectations of the modern world by examining the style and themes of a diverse selection of film from around the world.

## Required Readings/Films

All readings and films will be available on Moodle.

## Course Requirements

25%	Attendance and participation
10%	Imaginary Interview with a filmmaker
5%	Pitch a film
20%	Response papers
40%	Final research paper



## Attendance & Participation

I take attendance promptly at the beginning of class. Each student will begin the semester with 115% credit for attendance. This means that if you attend every session of the semester, the extra 15% will boost your overall attendance grade. Each absence after that will continue to reduce your raw attendance score in 15% increments. Lateness will also reduce your attendance score. If you arrive less than 10 minutes late, I will deduct 5%; if you arrive more than 15 minutes late, I will mark you absent. Six absences will result in immediate failure.

0 absences:	115%
1 absence:	100%
2 absences:	85%
3 absences:	70%
4 absences:	55%
5 absences:	40%
6 absences:	Immediate failure

It is essential that you read (and view) the assigned material before class so that you are able to participate in our discussions. Participation demonstrate that you are an attentive and

interested reader of the assignments; that you have read and taken notes; and are actively developing your oral skills.

### **Imaginary Interview with a Filmmaker**

You will choose one film from the list below and write a three-page imaginary interview with its filmmaker. You will craft the questions and speculate about the given answers. Please refrain from asking biographic information, but rather strive to pose analytical, critical questions about the film. I will pass on an assignment handout well in advance. The films are:

Mark Romanek, *Never Let Me Go* (2010)

David Lynch, *Eraserhead* (1977)

Francois Truffaut, *Fahrenheit 451* (1966)

### **Pitch a Film**

Write a synopsis for a SF script that fits one of the thematic groupings of our syllabus.

### **Response Papers**

Every week you will write a 300-word response paper where you examine one specific aspect of the film we have watched for that class, or an aspect pertaining to both films that we will watch that week. You can also focus on an aspect of the assigned reading, or a combination of film and reading. You may discuss a specific scene, or address briefly a theme or a concept. You may choose to focus on formal or technical elements of the film, such as the size and duration of shots, lighting, setting, costumes, music and sound, and/or editing style. This is very important: You must turn in response papers before we discuss the film in class. Thus, you may turn it in either Tuesday or Thursday, but you must give me one response paper per week. I will grade these papers with check minus, check, and check plus. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point, Times New Roman font and with one-inch margins on each side. They should also be thoroughly proofread.

### **Final Research Paper**

Your final essay (8-10 pages) will compare and contrast two of the works we studied during the semester. Your paper will be divided into two parts. In the first, you will compare and contrast the stylistic and technical features of the films. In the second part, after researching the critical reception of both films, you will position yourself within this reception and argue for your own thesis in relation to a theme or concept that you see the film expounding. You will also relate the stylistic analysis of the first part of your paper to the thesis developed in the second by connecting the technical choices the director made with your conceptual analysis of the film. Title each separate part. You must use a minimum of three critical sources. You will submit your essays through Moodle's anti-plagiarism software.

### **Course Policies**

#### CLASSROOM CONDUCT

- No electronic devices, please. This includes tablets, laptops, e-readers, cell phones, or music players. Use an old-fashioned pen and pad for taking notes.
- No eating in class, please. You may bring non-alcoholic drinks to class.
- Be thoughtful and courteous to your colleagues during class discussions.

#### LATE WORK

I do not accept late assignments of any kind, nor will I accept papers over email.

#### EXCUSED ABSENCES & ATHLETES

In order for an absence to be excused for participating in an athletic event, I must hear from your coach and you must write a 300-word response paper on the readings assigned for the missed session. You must give me a printed copy at the beginning of the following class session.

#### ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Montana Tech regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. Moreover, I am committed to enforcing academic integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to Montana Tech Integrity Procedures. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, come speak with me.

#### DISABILITY

All persons with disabilities have the right to participate fully and equally in the programs and services of Montana Tech. Montana Tech is committed to ensuring full and equal participation by eliminating barriers and making the appropriate accommodations that allow persons with disabilities to have equal opportunity in all aspects of campus life.

Student Life Counselors are the Montana Tech Disability Service Coordinators. For further information about Disability Services, please refer to the Disability Services Website—[http://www.mtech.edu/student\\_life/disability/](http://www.mtech.edu/student_life/disability/)

## Course Plan

### Introduction to Science Fiction

8/25

### What is Science Fiction?

8/27

Screening: George Méliès, *Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *Eclipse, or the Courtship of the Sun and Moon* (1907)

Reading: Darko Suvin, "Estrangement and Cognition" in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*

### Technophobic Dystopias

9/1

Screening: Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1929)

Reading: Jerold J. Abrams, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment in *Metropolis*"

9/3

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

Reading: J.P. Telotte, "Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film"

9/8

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

Reading: J.P. Telotte, "The Problem of the Real and THX 1138"

9/10

Screening: Terry Gilliam, *Brazil* (1985)

Reading: Jeffrey Melton and Eric Sterling, "The Subversion of Happy Endings in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*"

### Ideology and Interpellation

9/15

Screening: John Carpenter, *They Live* (1988)

Reading: D. Harlan Wilson, "Through a Pair of Cheap Sunglasses Darkly"

9/17

Screening: John Boorman, *ZARDOZ* (1974)

Reading: Frederic Jameson, "History and the Death Wish: Zardoz as Open Form"

9/22

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

Reading: Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto"

Peter Frase, "Smash the Engine" (Jacobin review)

9/24

Screening: René Laloux, *Fantastic Planet* (1973)

Reading: Franz Fanon, "Concerning Violence"

### **Cold War Paranoia**

9/29

Screening: Robert Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)

Reading: M. Keith Booker, "The Day the Earth Stood Still" in "Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture"

### **Invasion Narratives**

10/1

Screening: *Them!* (1954)

Reading: Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster"

### **Constructions of Masculinity**

10/6

Screening: Jack Arnold, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957)

Reading: Tania Modleski, "The Incredible Shrinking He(r)man: Male Regression, the Male Body, and Film"

### **Radical Feminism**

10/8

Screening: Lizzie Borden, *Born in Flames* (1983)

Reading: Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

### **The Cosmic id**

10/13

Screening: Fred M. Wilcox, *Forbidden Planet* (1956)

Reading: M. Keith Booker, "Forbidden Planet" in "Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture"

10/15

Screening: Ken Russell, *Altered States* (1980)

Reading: Anna Powell, "Altered States: The Return of the Repressed" in *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*

### **Time Travel**

10/20

Screening: Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1962)

Reading: Paul Coates, "Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine"

### **Image, Icon, and the Loss of Language**

10/22

Screening: Jean-Luc Godard, *Alphaville* (1985)

Reading: Alan Woolfolk, "Disenchantment and Rebellion in *Alphaville*"

### **Final Frontiers**

10/27

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

Reading: Kevin L. Stoehr, "2001: A Philosophical Odyssey"

10/29

Screening: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris* (1972)

Reading: Sean Martin, "Solaris" in *The Pocket Essential Andrei Tarkovsky*

### **The Wasteland: Visions of the Apocalyptic**

11/3

Screening: Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko* (2001)

Reading: Seung-hoon Jeong, "The Apocalyptic Sublime: Hollywood Disaster Films and 'Donnie Darko'" in *Terror and the Cinematic Sublime: Essays on Violence and the Unpresentable in Post-9/11 Films* (72-87)

11/5

Screening: Lars Von Trier, *Melancholia* (2011)

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, "Black Suns and a Bright Planet: Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* as Thought Experiment"

### **Technophilia**

11/10

Screening: David Cronenberg, *Videodrome* (1983)

Reading: Scott Bukatman, "Who Programs You? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle"

### **Cyborg**

11/12

Screening: Paul Verhoeven, *Robocop* (1987)

Reading: Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s"

### **Race**

11/17

Screening: John Sayles, *Brother From Another Planet* (1984)

Reading: Melba Boyd, "But Not the Blackness of Space: The Brother from Another Planet as Icon from the Underground"

11/19

Screening: Joe Cornish, *Attack the Block* (2011)

Reading: Yael Maurer, "Notions of Monstrosity and Race in Cornish's *Attack the Block*"

THANKSGIVING BREAK

### **Hegemonic Reversals**

12/1

Screening: Franklin J. Schaffner, *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

Reading: Susan Bridget McHugh, "Horses in Blackface: Visualizing Race as Species Difference in 'Planet of the Apes'"

### **Postmodernism**

12/3

Screening: Katsuhiro Otomo, *AKIRA* (1988)

Reading: Isolde Standish, "Akira, Postmodernism and Resistance"

### **In Class Screening: The Future of SF!**

12/8

In-class screening: Miguel Llansó, *Crumbs* (2015)