

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
SLAV 0660. Sci-Fi: East and West (CL 324, Mo We 15.00-16.15)

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 Hours: Mo 16.30-17.30, We 16.30-17.30 or by appointment



COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course compares Slavic and Anglophone science fiction in literature and cinema. It examines how a given culture's dominant concerns are articulated in a genre popular in the East (i.e., Eastern Europe and Russia) and West (i.e., America, Germany, and England). Those concerns emerge in works that imaginatively posit "fantastic" situations rooted in spatial, temporal, ecological and technological explorations beyond those currently verified by science. On the basis of a wide range of novels, stories, and films we shall discuss such topics as progress, utopia, human perfectibility, gender inequality, construction of femininity and masculinity, the limits of science, the nature of knowledge, ecology, and verifiability.

The goals of this course are to improve students' critical and analytical skills by incorporating a variety of critical perspectives (Marxism, Feminism, etc.) as we read, explain, and problematize the course's texts, bringing to light ideological bias, social commentary, historical context, and narrative coherence. In studying critical theoretical framework, the students will explore the texts' representations of societies, economies, genders, ideologies, and scientific assumptions.

CLASS FORMAT:

Every class will start from a short quiz, which will often be followed by a short lecture (15-20 minutes) and a discussion of a text and/or film(s) that you read/watched at home. Sometimes we will also watch and discuss clips from the films in class. Class discussions will include elements of group and individual work and they all imply your **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION**. Participation constitutes a vital part of your grade: so, engage!

HOW TO PREPARE FOR PARTICIPATION IN DISCUSSIONS:

While reading/watching assigned material, highlight episodes (jot down ideas) that interested you the most – every discussion will include a session where you will have a chance to share your insights with your classmates, plus your ideas will be useful for group activities. To help you think through the novels and films, before every class I will put up discussion questions on CourseWeb – they will appear online the day before each class. You should answer these questions for yourself at home – in class they will be part of a group discussion.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are required (1) to complete the assignments scheduled by specific deadlines—normally that means reading 60-100 pages and/or watching 1-2 film(s) per week; (2) to participate actively and intelligently on a **REGULAR** basis in the course discussions; (3) to take 2 exams; (4) to take reading and watching quizzes; (5) to attend all class meetings during the semester.

QUIZZES AND EXAMS:

Every class will begin from a short multiple-choice quiz, which will test your preparedness for the class and simultaneously control your attendance. If you fail to answer 50 percent of the quiz questions, or I don't receive your quiz on the day, you receive an F for this particular quiz, **six Fs result in an automatic failure for the course: so, do come prepared.** There will also be two big exams in the semester: a midterm and a final exam which will test how well you know the contents of my lectures, and also the texts and films that we studied in the course. They will also test your analytical skills – there will be questions that will ask you to analyze a particular aspect of a novel or a film. **NO MAKE-UP QUIZZES OR EXAMS ARE PERMITTED IN CASE OF AN UNEXCUSED ABSENCE.**

REQUIRED READINGS (Pitt bookstore or CourseWeb):

H.G. Wells. *The Time Machine* (England)

Fedor Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*, chapter “Grand Inquisitor” (Russia) – on CourseWeb

Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (Russia)

Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog* (USSR)

Isaac Asimov. “Nightfall.” (USA) – on CourseWeb

Isaac Asimov. “The Bicentennial Man” – on CourseWeb

Philip K. Dick. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (USA) – on CourseWeb

Stanislaw Lem, *Futurological Congress* (Poland)

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic* (USSR) – on CourseWeb

Joanna Russ. *The Female Man* (USA) – on CourseWeb

William Gibson. “Johnny Mnemonic.” (USA-Canada) – on CourseWeb

William Gibson. “New Rose Hotel.” (on CourseWeb)

Viktor Pelevin, *Omon Ra* (Russia)

REQUIRED FILMS:

All films are on reserve in the Media Center in Hillman Library and should be watched there. You may also check your local library and check out these films to watch them at home. You can also try to find and watch these films on Netflix, YouTube, and through other online sources.

Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (Germany)

Iakov Protazanov, *Aelita, Queen of Mars* (USSR)

Ridley Scott. *Blade Runner* (USA)

Andrei Tarkovsky *Stalker* (USSR)

Robert Longo. *Johnny Mnemonic* (USA)

Georgii Danelia. *Kin-dza-dza* (USSR).

Garth Jennings. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (England).

COURSE WEBSITE:

In this course, we will be using a web course tool called CourseWeb. All course materials, discussion questions and announcements will be online. You will use your main Pitt account to log in to the course at CourseWeb (<http://CourseWeb.pitt.edu>). This course site will be available to you from the first day of the term.

If you have not used CourseWeb before, in order to get started, please see the Blackboard Student Manual <http://help.blackboard.com>. If you need further help, the Pitt Technology Help Desk Team provides technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can be reached at 412-624- HELP, helpdesk@pitt.edu, <https://techforms.pitt.edu/Default.aspx>.

EVALUATION AND GRADES:

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| Reading/viewing quizzes (24): | 240 points |
| Two examinations: | 360 points |
| Participation: | 200 points |

TOTAL: 800 points=100%

The following grading standards will be used in assigning grades in this course:

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|--------|----|-------|----|--------------|----|
| 93-100 | A | 80-82 | B- | 68-69 | D+ |
| 90-92 | A- | 78-79 | C+ | 65-67 | D |
| 88-89 | B+ | 73-77 | C | 64-54 | E |
| 83-87 | B | 70-72 | C- | 53 and below | F |

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Since attendance is critical to course performance, more than three unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade (each additional absence will reduce the grade by a notch: B to B-, C+ to C, etc.). Six absences automatically translate into an F for the course. If serious illness prevents class attendance, documentation of that fact is required in the form of a letter from a doctor, stating that **ON THE DAY AT THE TIME THE CLASS MEETS** the student was too ill to attend. In order for the student's absence to be excused, that letter must be submitted **THE DAY THE STUDENT RETURNS TO CLASS**.

It is the students' responsibility to find out from their classmates whether important information or materials were handed out during a session they missed. Students therefore should obtain the telephone number and/or E-mail address of least one of their classmates. ****Neighbor's tel. _____ Neighbor's E-mail _____**** Students experiencing special problems in the course should make an appointment with the instructor during office hours

Participation is a very important part of this course. You should participate in our class discussions. Your responses must be thoughtful and reference the assigned material specifically. I will judge your responses on thoughtfulness, thoroughness of understanding, depth of analysis, and how much it contributes to the discussion at hand, moving it forward in useful and interesting ways. You will also have a chance to discuss some questions in small groups during our class meetings. Your participation in small group discussions will be also counted toward your participation for that class meeting.

DISABILITY POLICY:

If a student has a disability that requires special teaching, testing accommodations, or other classroom modifications, he or she must notify the instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS) early in the semester. The student will be asked to provide documentation of the disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify DRS, call 648-7890 (Voice or TDD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. As "Student Obligations and Adjudication" (University Policy 02-03-03) states, "students have an obligation to exhibit honesty, and to respect the ethical standard of (their) chosen profession in carrying out (their) academic assignments." According to the University of Pittsburgh's policy, a student "violates this obligation" if he/she: "a) presents as one's own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or works of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgement of sources; b) submits the work of another person in a manner which represents the work to be one's own; c) knowingly permits one's work to be submitted by another person without the instructor's authorization".

The penalties for academic misconduct like plagiarism can be very severe. The immediate consequence of plagiarism will be receiving a grade zero for the particular assignment and can lead to an F for the course. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will also be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity.

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, from the February 1974 Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz or exam will be imposed. View the complete policy at www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html and see also: <http://www.as.pitt.edu/fac/policies/academic-integrity>.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS (subject to revision by the instructor)

| Dates | Assignment |
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| January 8 | Introduction. Syllabus. What is science fiction? |
| January 10 | Watch the two films, answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). 1. Fritz Lang, <i>Metropolis</i> 2. Iakov Protazanov, <i>Aelita, Queen of Mars</i> |
| January 15 | NO CLASS |
| January 17 | 1. Read the novel: H.G. Wells. <i>The Time Machine</i> . 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| January 22 | 1. Read "Grand Inquisitor" chapter from Fedor Dostoevsky's <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (on CourseWeb). 2. Read Records 1-12 from the novel: Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i> . 3. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| January 24 | 1. Read Records 13-27 from the novel: Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i> . 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| January 29 | 1. Finish the novel Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i> . 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| January 31 | 1. Read chapters 1-5 of the novella: Mikhail Bulgakov. <i>Heart of a Dog</i> 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 5 | 1. Finish the novella: Mikhail Bulgakov. <i>Heart of a Dog</i> . 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 7 | Read two short stories, answer discussion questions on CourseWeb: 1. Isaac Asimov. "Nightfall." (on CourseWeb) 2. Isaac Asimov. "The Bicentennial Man" (on CourseWeb) |
| February 12 | 1. Read chapters 1-8 of the novel: Philip K. Dick. <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 14 | 1. Read chapters 9-14 of the novel: Philip K. Dick. <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 19 | 1. Finish the novel: Philip K. Dick. <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Watch the film: Ridley Scott. <i>Blade Runner</i>. 3. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 21 | MIDTERM EXAM |
| February 26 | 1. Read half of the novel: Stanislaw Lem <i>Futurological Congress</i> 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| February 28 | 1. Finish the novel: Stanislaw Lem <i>Futurological Congress</i> 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| March 5 | NO CLASS |
| March 7 | NO CLASS |
| March 12 | 1. Read chapters 1-2 of the novel: Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. <i>Roadside Picnic</i> . (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| March 14 | 1. Read chapter 3 of the novel: Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. <i>Roadside Picnic</i> . (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |

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| March 19 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read chapter 4 of the novel: Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. <i>Roadside Picnic</i>. 2. Watch the film: Andrei Tarkovsky <i>Stalker</i>. 3. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| March 21 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Parts 1-3 of the novel: Joanna Russ's <i>The Female Man</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| March 26 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Parts 4-6 of the novel: Joanna Russ's <i>The Female Man</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| March 28 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finish the novel: Joanna Russ's <i>The Female Man</i> (on CourseWeb) 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| April 2 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the short story William Gibson. "Johnny Mnemonic." (on CourseWeb) 2. Read the short story William Gibson. "New Rose Hotel." (on CourseWeb) 3. Watch the film: Robert Longo. <i>Johnny Mnemonic</i>. 4. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb) |
| April 4 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read half of the novel: Viktor Pelevin. <i>Omon Ra</i>. 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| April 9 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finish the novel: Viktor Pelevin. <i>Omon Ra</i>. 2. Answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb). |
| April 11 | In-class screening of the film: Aleksei Fedorchenko. <i>First on the Moon</i> (Russia) |
| April 16 | Watch the films and answer discussion questions (on CourseWeb) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Georgii Danelia, <i>Kin-dza-dza</i>. 2. Garth Jennings, <i>The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy</i>. |
| April 18 | FINAL EXAM |