
SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY ON SCREEN in Fall 2020 (FM2088)

Course Code	FM2088	Professor(s)	Russell Williams, Alice Craven, Valerio Coladonato
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	G-L20
Class Schedule	F: 16:20-17:55 in Q-A101 T: 10:50-12:25 in Q-A101	Office Hours	Thursdays 10h45-12h30 (by appointment)
Credits	4	Email	rwilliams@aup.edu, acraven@aup.edu, vcoladonato@aup.edu
Semester	Fall 2020	Office Tel. Ext.	621

Course Description

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

From its earliest inceptions, cinema has been built out of and nurtured by the Science Fiction which dominated the end of the 19th Century. Fantasy, a brainchild of the Enlightenment, has also had a profound impact on the early directions of cinema, notably with the work of Méliès. Cinema has equally been fueled by rapid transitions in early 20th century developments in psychology, notably the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Technological progress, the urban alienation associated with the Modernist aesthetic and the advent of wars fought through technologically advanced weaponry have contributed to a long-standing fascination with these cinematic genres. This fascination is informed by these genres' simultaneous escapist tendencies and their abilities to create striking allegories for the disturbing trends of the cinematic age. In this course, students explore the themes of both fantasy and science fiction cinema, such as the dichotomy of utopias and dystopias; the "trucage" of the early screen and the eminent fear of apocalypse which pervades much of these genres' canons throughout their evolutions. Pivotal theorists such as Gerard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, Susan Sontag and others are considered in order to provide the intellectual backdrop for these genres' progressive move into central cinematic areas of study. The origins of the genres and the principal film directors who have shaped the genre are also analyzed in depth.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students deepen their understanding of how genres develop through history and across different national contexts.

Students recognize and identify elements of narrative and mise-en-scene that characterize a specific film genre.

Students develop a strong understanding of the social, psychological and political issues addressed by science fiction and fantasy.

Critical analysis and written expression through individual research projects and oral expression of ideas are reinforced through presentations and/or panel discussions.

General Education

The course also supports these Film Studies Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze and differentiate filmic discourses on subjects in terms of narrative structure, cinematic techniques, and cultural contexts
- Trace the rise and development of cinema as an art form, industry and cultural product.
- Distinguish styles and techniques of selected directors in context with cinema history and aesthetics

Course Outline

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week I –Sept 25th

Taught by Prof. Craven

Week II – Sept 29th – Oct 2nd

Taught by Prof. Craven

September 30th – last day to drop/add courses online

Week III – Oct 6th – Oct 9th

Screening: [Metropolis](#) (Lang) – part 1

Video recording of the class available [here](#).

Additional resources:

- Excerpt from *Cabiria* (Pastrone): the scene on Moloch's temple which influenced Fritz Lang: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC4PcpdOsnQ>
- [Berlin: Symphony of a Great City](#): watch the first 10 minutes

Week IV – Oct 13th – Oct 16th

Video recording of the class available [here](#)

Screening: [Metropolis](#) (Lang) – part 2

Reading: 1st reading on Metropolis: Bertetto, “Metropolis and the figuration of Eidos”, available [here](#). 2nd reading on Metropolis, “The Vamp and the Machine” (until page 230), available [here](#).

Assignment: in-class group analysis of screenshots from the film, discussing: 1. How ideas are translated visually in the shot; 2. How technology is represented; 3. What role the shot plays in the narrative.

Week V – Oct 20th – Oct 23rd

Taught by Prof. Craven

Week VI – Oct 27th – Oct 30th

October 27:

Video recording of class: October 27 watch [here](#).

Reading: Todorov, "The Origin of Genres", available [here](#).

Assignment: in-class group discussion of Todorov's article (available [here](#)).

October 30:

Video recording of class: October 30 watch [here](#).

Screening: Del Toro, "[Pan's Labyrinth](#)"

Reading: chapter on *Pan's Labyrinth*'s critical reception available [here](#); and bibliography [here](#).

Assignment: Pick two reviews discussed in this chapter and read them in their entirety. You can find those reviews through the AUP library resources (and several are also freely available online). If you pick one that is impossible to find through the library, then I encourage you to change it for another one. Then you should prepare some notes and be ready to discuss the following prompt:

Do the two reviews reflect similar or different perspectives on realism, the portrayal of history (or a traumatic past), and the political value of entertainment? Do they interpret the film as being part of Hollywood cinema and/or Spanish cinema? Do they consider it as mostly influenced by the codes of genre, or rather as an auteur film that reflects Del Toro's vision?

October 28th, Mid-semester

November

Week VII – Nov 3rd – Nov 6th

Watch recording of Nov. 3 [here](#).

In-class discussion of “Pan’s Labyrinth”

Screening: [La jétée](#) (Marker)

Readings: Altman “A Syntactic-Semantic Approach to Film Genre”; Romney “La jétée: Unchained Melody” <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/485-la-jetee-unchained-melody>

Preparation for midterm presentations.

Prompt:

Choose a film from one of the science fiction or fantasy titles explored in one of these 3 books:

1) *Science Fiction Cinema* – link [here](#)

2) *The Fantasy Film* – link [here](#)

3) *the textbook by Gregg Rickman*

(You may also pick a different film from these, as long as you find other academic readings to rely upon for your presentation). In a presentation lasting between 5 and 6 minutes, discuss the following:

- 1. How the film relates to its cultural context (e.g. what influences it draws upon, or how it was received and interpreted)*
- 2. How the film constructs the relationship between fantasy and reality.*
- 3. Focus on what you consider as the most salient aspect in either the narrative or the visual strategy of the film, and pick an example that illustrates this.*

Week VIII – Nov 10th

- Midterm presentations

November 11th to 13th, fall break (no classes)

Week VIII – Nov 17th- Nov 20th

Topic: 2001: Odyssey in Space/ Solaris – confinement/technology

November 16th, Mid-semester grades due

Week IX – Nov 24th – Nov 27th

Topic: Bladerunner – cinematic noir/the posthuman/adaptation

November 27th, last day to withdraw from a course

last day to choose credit/no credit option

Week X - Nov 1st – Dec 4th

The Matrix – the spectacle, our present historical moment

December

Week XI – Dec 8th – Dec 11th

Student presentations + review for final exam

December 11th, last day of classes,

December 12th - 15th, reading days

FINAL EXAM: Friday, Dec. 18, 15h00

January 4nd, all grades due

Textbooks

Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN	Required
The Science Fiction Film Reader	Gregg Rickman	Limelight	9780879109943	Yes

Attendance Policy

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of an attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has an attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for participation in study trips related to their courses.

Covid-19 temporary amendments:

Students studying at The American University of Paris are still expected to attend ALL scheduled classes during the pandemic, students will have the option of attending classes remotely when special circumstances apply. If students are placed under quarantine by the French authorities or by their doctor, or when students present symptoms of Covid-19 and are directed, by their doctor or the AUP Health Office, to remain home. It is still the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that their professor might have set in the course syllabus. In particular, students attending remotely from distant Time Zones should check with their professors about the specific attendance policy for remote learners.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

In all cases of missed course meetings, the responsibility for communication with the professor, and for missed work, rests solely with the student.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Excessive absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may also recommend withdrawal, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and *especially during the Spring Periods*.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STATEMENT: As an Anglophone university, The American University of Paris is strongly committed to effective English language mastery at the undergraduate level. Most courses require reading and formal written and oral presentations in English, and AUP students are expected to strive to achieve proficiency in English in all domains as part of their course work. To that end, professors include English proficiency among the criteria for course evaluation, often referring students to the university Writing Lab where they may obtain help on specific assignments. Proficiency in English is monitored at various points throughout the student's academic career: during the admissions and advising processes, while the student is completing general education requirements, during the accomplishment of degree program courses and senior theses.

Grading Policy

GRADING:

(to be confirmed after consulting with Prof. Craven)

1. Attendance and participation (presentations): 10%
2. Midterm presentation: 25%
3. Response text before end of term 15%
4. Final paper: 30%

5. Final exam: 30%

Other
