Science fiction is centrally concerned with the question, “How could things be different?” Often, it has answered that question by imagining that things are much worse. And sometimes, it has imagined that things are much better. This course focuses on dystopian and utopian science fiction in both literature and film. What constitutes dystopia within these texts? How do they envision utopia? How do these fictions draw on and develop problems and scientific ideas from their historical contexts? Our investigation of these questions will be informed by readings in the cultural, scientific, and philosophical contexts of these works of fiction; we will also consider the development of science fiction and important critical statements about the genre. The class culminates with a research paper that asks students to investigate a work of dystopian or utopian fiction of their choosing.

Course Goals

The goal of this course is for you to develop a deeper understanding of a literary genre: the dystopian narrative. That understanding will consist in

- a knowledge of major works of dystopian fiction
- an ability to analyze the relationship among dystopian texts and to reflect on how individual authors/creators position their works in the field of dystopian fiction
- an awareness of how works of dystopian fiction draw on and relate to ideas and events contemporary to them
- an ability to reflect on critical statements about dystopian fiction by scholars

Course Readings

The following books have been ordered from the NYU Bookstore. You are welcome to obtain them another way, but you are required to have a hard copy (no electronic editions). I have arranged for copies of all books to be placed on reserve at Bobst.


We'll be watching *The Matrix* in Week Ten. I have put a copy on reserve but it is also available via Netflix, Amazon, and iTunes.

There will also be supplementary readings each week. Some of these will be distributed in class; some of them may be on our Classes site. For the latter: go to the Resources folder and click on the folder titled Readings. Please download and print the readings and bring them to class in hard copy unless otherwise instructed.

*Courses Requirements*

1) Formal Essays

There will be two formal papers. The first will be a six-page paper in which you will analyze one novel in conjunction with one supplementary reading. The second will be ten-page essay, with research, for which you will write about dystopian narrative (fiction or film) that we have not read together.

2) Informal Assignments.

The purpose of these assignments is to help you read actively and to prepare you for class discussion.

a) Commonplacing.

Every week after Week 1, you'll contribute an entry to an electronic commonplace book by posting two passages to the class's blog. (Full instructions will be on a separate handout.)

b) Blog entries.

On three occasions, you will also submit a response paper in the form of a post to our class blog.

After the first blog entry, which will be shorter and which everyone will complete, these should be about 400 words and will be due on different dates for different people; a detailed schedule will be circulated after the first class.

Please prepare for class by reading the commonplace entries and blog posts. To that end, both will be due by 3:00 pm on the Monday before each class.

c) Leading class discussion.

On one of the days that you have a response paper due, you will be in charge of leading a class discussion of that week's readings. (The schedule of these presentations will also be circulated after the first class.)

d) Preparatory work for final essay.

There will be some assignments to prepare you for the final paper, including a draft of the essay. More details will appear on the final paper assignment handout.
Your informal assignments will be evaluated for thoughtfulness, effort, and timeliness of submission. I will assign a grade at the end of the semester; please feel free to ask me at any time about your standing in this requirement.

3) Class participation.

This class will be run as a seminar, which means that your participation is crucial. Please arrive for class on time with all of your materials (including the texts we are reading for the week) and be ready to contribute thoughtful comments and questions, responding not only to what I ask but also to ideas and queries presented by your classmates.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

20% Participation  
20% Informal Writing  
25% Paper 1  
35% Paper 2

Policies

• Written Work: Deadlines in this class are important; for that reason, extensions will be granted only in the case of illness, family emergencies, or religious observance; they must be arranged in advance. Late papers will be penalized (normally, 1/3 of a grade for each day that they are late). Late or missing informal writing assignments will also affect your grade.

All major assignments must be completed in order for you to pass the course.

• Attendance: You may miss up to two classes without penalty; after that, absence for reasons other than documented illness, family emergency, or religious observance will affect your grade. Habitual lateness will also affect your grade. Accumulating a large number of absences will make it impossible for you to pass the course.

• Academic Integrity: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html).

• Technology: In order to make it easier for everyone to focus on the collaborative and cooperative work of the seminar, you may not use a laptop, tablet, reader, or smartphone, in class for any purpose, unless otherwise instructed. Please turn off or silence your mobile phone.
note: the reading assignments are subject to change

**Week One**

Tuesday, January 27 • class cancelled

**Week Two**

Tuesday, February 3
• introductions; what is dystopia?

**Week Three**

Tuesday, February 10
• Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, to p. 152 (end of Chapter 10)
• J. B. S. Haldane, excerpts from *Daedalus*
• Aldous Huxley, “Science and Civilization” and “What is Happening to Our Population”

**Week Four**

Tuesday, February 17
• Huxley, *Brave New World*, complete
• Theodor Adorno, “Aldous Huxley and Utopia”

**Week Five**

Tuesday, February 24
• George Orwell, *1984*, to p. 179 (end of Chapter 2, section XIII)
• George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution,” and “Burnham’s View of the Contemporary World Struggle”

**Week Six**

Tuesday, March 3
• Orwell, *1984*, complete
• Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” from *Discipline and Punish*

**Week Seven**

Tuesday, March 10
• Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, to p. 188 (to the end of section X, “Soul Scrolls”)
• Darko Suvin, “Estrangement and Cognition” and “SF and the Novum,” from *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*
• Matthew Avery Sutton, *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right*

Thursday, March 12: Paper 1 due by 6 p.m.

**Spring Break: Saturday, March 14—Sunday, March 22**
**Week Eight**

Tuesday, March 24
- Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, complete
- Margaret Atwood, “Writing Utopia” and “George Orwell: Some Personal Connections”
- Tom Moylan, “The Dystopian Turn,” in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*

**Week Nine**

Tuesday, March 31
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* + Chapters 3 and 13 of *Women and Economics*
- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” + excerpts from *The Secluded Ones*

**Week Ten**

Tuesday, April 7
- *The Matrix*
- N. Katherine Hayles, “Toward Embodied Virtuality,” from *How We Became Posthuman*

**Week Eleven**

Tuesday, April 14
- Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, to p. 213 (end of Chapter 17)
- Mike Davis, “Beyond Blade Runner,” from *Ecology of Fear*

**Week Twelve**

Tuesday, April 21
- Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, complete
- Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, “Old and New Slavery, Old and New Racisms: Strategies of Science Fiction in Octavia Butler’s Parables Series”
- Raffaella Baccolini, “Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler”

**Week Thirteen**

Tuesday, April 28
- *Le Guin, The Dispossessed*, TBD
- Peter Kropotkin, selections from *Mutual Aid*
- Paul Goodman, “The Ambiguities of Pacifist Politics”

Friday, May 1: draft of final paper due at 6 pm

**Week Fourteen**

Tuesday, May 5
- *Le Guin, The Dispossessed*, TBD
- Le Guin, “SF and the Other”
- Frederic Jameson, “World Reduction in Le Guin”
**Week Fifteen**

Tuesday, May 12: make-up class, 3:30–6:10
Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, complete course conclusions

Thursday, May 14: Paper 2 due at 6 p.m.