

Beyond Star Wars

Science Fiction Film and the Extension of Genre

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UHH: Mondays 10 to 12, Room 1269

Starting Date: 19.10. (both HCU/UHH)

HCU: Mondays 4 to 6, Room 3.104

The course will only have ten sessions, as well as an additional and mandatory student conference:

"New Perspectives on Science Fiction Film" SAT 09.01. – all day (!)

For the science fiction film, *Star Wars* (1977, Dir. George Lucas) proved to be a watershed moment, after which, according to Vivian Sobchack, "space and time seemed to expand again, their experience and representation becoming what can only be called 'youthful.'" It was the defining moment of today's overwhelming SF film success and lastingly shaped the perception of the film genre. But this can also be seen as a false and limiting impression, as the SF film has in the last few years become diverse, challenging, and critically engaged with society. Smaller and less budget-driven science fiction films have established a tradition of film outside the dominant and hegemonic culture, and produced works that are more in line with the diverging interests and critical potentials identified with science fiction as a literature.

The object of this course is to introduce students to contemporary science fiction film 'beyond the global blockbuster phenomena' and view the diversity of genre. In order to do so, students will discuss contemporary science fiction criticism and its variable theoretical approaches to the genre. In addition, we will explore the structure of the medium film, film analysis, and film theory. Films discussed include: *Ex Machina* (2014), *Predestination* (2014), *Children of Men* (2006), and *District 9* (2009).

The course is offered both at the University of Hamburg and the HafenCity University and will conclude in a student conference, where students present their self-guided work as junior researchers.

The course consists of ten class sessions in which students will be introduced to specific aspects of SF theory, which will then be used in interpreting selected film examples. These sessions will take place in two groups (UHH and HCU), but students of both universities will engage in cooperative group work on specified research projects.

The course concludes in a one-day student conference on "New Perspectives on Science Fiction Film". During this conference, students will give group presentations of their research projects and engage in scholarly debate with peers. The symposium will be open to the interested public. Allowing financing, there will be a conference program incl. an invited keynote lecture by a renowned SF film scholar.

Course Credit

- Attendance (no more than two sessions missed), conference day is mandatory
- Active participation – discussion is part of the course construction
- Sessions needs to be prepared – one feature film will be assigned to be watched by students on their own discretion. There will be no screenings of films. Films should be available on streaming services or in video stores. Additionally, one chapter in the course book will be assigned for each session. The book needs to be acquired in full, no copies will be provided. Possible additional text material will be provided as PDF via the Agora platform of the UHH.

- **Research project:** Each student will need to register with agora.uni-hamburg.de (email-address is sufficient) and engage in a group research project. This group work will need to commence over the course of the seminar sessions. Research topics are based on individual science fiction films and are discussed at the beginning of the semester. Students are welcome to suggest their own topics. Each student needs to be in a group before Nov 15th, and each group needs to present an outline of their presentation by December 1st at the latest to receive feedback.
- **Presentation:** During the conference, each group will be assigned a 15 minute presentation slot (plus 5 minutes discussion time). Presentations need to address the audience of students, provide a meaningful analysis of the research topic and be engaging for further discussion.
- **SILVER SCREEN AWARD:** Presentations will be evaluated by the audience present and an award for the "best presentation of the conference" given to the winning group.
- **Term Paper:** Each student hands in a film analysis (8-10 pages, PDF only) before February 1st via email (lars.schmeink@uni-hamburg.de). Papers need to adhere to standards of academic writing (handouts available at each university) and develop a relevant thesis.
- **GRADE:** Your grade will be a composite of the following:
 - o **Oral Participation:** 10% of grade
 - o **Presentation:** 30% of grade
 - o **Term Paper:** 60% of grade
- **AGORA Platform:** Students need to register at www.agora.uni-hamburg.de (requires an email-address and a name; please use clear names). Search for "Beyond Star Wars" and register with the password "KillJarJar". More info on Agora will be given in the first session.
- **READING MATERIAL:** Mandatory textbook: Sherryl Vint, *Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) – it is low cost (24 Euros, paperback/13 Euros eBook) and should be obtained by students individually. It needs to be read in full. If necessary, additional texts might be assigned and will be provided via the Agora platform.

Session	Date	TOPIC	Films / Readings
I	19.10.	INTRODUCTION	Selected excerpts in class
II	26.10.	NEW HOLLYWOOD AND THE RISE OF SF	STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE, Dir. George Lucas (1977) -- Read: Chapter 1 – What is Science Fiction?
III	02.11.	TECHNOLOGY AS PROGRESS	EX MACHINA, Dir. Alex Garland (2014) -- Read: Chapter 2 – Lit. of Technologically Saturated Societies
IV	09.11.	SOCIAL CRITICISM	CHILDREN OF MEN, Dir. Alfonso Cuarón (2006) -- Read: Chapter 3 – Cognitive Estrangement
V	16.11.	ICONS OF SF	PREDESTINATION, Dir. Spierig Brothers (2014) -- Read: Chapter 4 – The Megatext
VI	23.11.	LIMITS OF GENRE	THE MAN FROM EARTH, Dir. Richard Schenkman (2007) -- Read: Chapter 5 – Speculative Fiction
VII	30.11.	FANDOM AND MEDIA EVENTS	THE AVENGERS, Dir. Joss Whedon (2012) -- Read: Chapter 6 – Communities of Practice
VIII	07.12.	CHALLENGING HEGEMONY	DISTRICT 9, Dir. Neill Blomkamp (2009) -- Read: Chapter 7 – Literature of Ideas
IX	14.12.	CHALLENGING HUMANISM	THE CONGRESS, Dir. Ari Folman (2013) -- Read: Chapter 8 – Literature of Change
X	04.01.	EVAPORATION OF GENRE	CONTAGION, Dir. Steven Soderbergh (2011) -- Read: Chapter 9 – Science Fictionality
XI: SAT, 09.01.		"New Perspectives on Science Fiction Film" – Student Film Conference @ UHH – ESA West, Lecture Hall 221	