Worlds Apart ?

Cyborgs, Time Loops, and Parallel Universes
in American Science Fiction Literature

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor), Friday, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

First session: October 12, 2018 -- **Course number**: 512.233

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours**: Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. · **Email**: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: The genre of science fiction has always been used as a tool of cultural self-fashioning. The fantastic worlds portrayed in sci-fi narratives may look strange and outlandish at first glance. Yet, upon further examination, they often appear familiar, revealing crucial aspects about contemporary society and culture. Significant publications, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and, most recently Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2011) seem to deal with 'worlds apart,' distant and unrealistic spheres that seem strangely distant from the 'real world.' However, when looking at the aesthetics and imagery of these texts, one is able to discover a whole array of concerns and sensitivities that were relevant at their time of publication (and are still valid today). This course deals with the topicality of science-fiction texts, their pertinence to important social, philosophical and cultural discourses. This course is linked to the international conference "Worlding Science Fiction" at the University of Graz (6-8 Dec. 2018).

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a fact file on a handout).

Materials: All relevant texts will be made available in excerpts on Moodle. Be prepared to purchase a few books for further investigation.

Aims: The course aims at examining the cultural relevance of U.S. American science-fiction writing as well as their aesthetic function(s) in a given historical period.

Assessment: ***Regular attendance*** (no more than two absences!), ***active in-class participation***; *presentation* as part of an ***expert session*** (plus 3-page handout and online questions); ***six (!) entries in the discussion forum***; 2-page ***research proposal***, and ***final paper*** of ca. 10 pages. You will also be asked to write ***½***-page summaries of two (!) keynote lectures/conference panels. You need to receive at least a 'D-' ('4-') *in all four sections* in order to pass this class.

Deadline for Final Papers (including declaration of honesty)**:** Wednesday, February 13, 2019. You need to upload a digital version of your paper on Moodle and hand in a printed version. There is no (!) extension of this deadline. Please indicate on a ***post-it*** attached to the paper if you would like detailed feedback!

Syllabus

12 October **American Science Fiction – An Introduction**

Basic texts:

Carl D. Malmgren, "Worlds Apart: A Theory of Science Fiction" (1991), 1-22. [Moodle]

David Seed, "Introduction" to *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (2011), 1-5. [Moodle]

19 October **Possible Worlds – The 'Butterfly Effect' and Dystopian Futures**

Main text (required):

Ray Bradbury: "A Sound of Thunder" (1952). [Moodle]

Additional texts (optional):

David Wittenberg, "Time Travel and the Mechanics of Narrative" (2013), 1-32. [Moodle]

Keywords: Alternative Worlds; Butterfly Effect; Dystopia; Loops; Ripple Effect; Time Travel.

9 November **Near Futures – Socialism, Urbanity, and Utopia**

Main text (required):

Edward Bellamy, excerpts from *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888). [Moodle]

Additional texts (optional):

E. Bellamy, "How I Came to Write *Looking Backward*" (1889/1977), 194-95. [Moodle]

Stan Love, "Time Travel in Theory and Practice" (2013), 166-72. [Moodle]

Keywords: Industrialism; Progressivism; Socialism; Transportation; Urbanity; Utopia.

16 November **Independent Study Unit**
Stay at home and fill out 2-page research proposal (to be handed in on Nov. 30).

23 November **New Galaxies – Allegories of 'American Civilization'**
Main text (required):
Isaac Asimov, "Nightfall" (1951). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Gary Westfahl, "The Mightiest Machine" (2015), 17-30. [Moodle]
Keywords: Civilization; Darkness; Dichotomy; Doomsday; Madness; Societal Collapse; Sunlight.

30 November **Alternate Histories – America and the Shadows of the Past**
Main text (required):
Philip K. Dick, excerpts from *The Man in the High Castle* (1962).
Additional text (optional):
Harry Turtledove, "Introduction" to *The Best Alternate History Stories* (2001). [Moodle]
Keywords: Alternate History; Extrapolative/Speculative Fiction; Novel-within-Novel; Reversal.

DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

7 December **Join International Conference "Worlding SF"**
Note: You need to write ½-page summaries of two (!) keynote lectures/conference panels.

14 December **Interstellar Worlds – Fan Fiction and the Creation of Parallel Universes**
Main text (required):
Frank Herbert, excerpts from *Dune* (1965). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Karen Hellekson, "Fandom and Fan Culture" (2015), 153-63. [Moodle]
Keywords: Desert Planet; Ecology; Empire; Feudal Society; Fan Fiction; Prophecy.

11 January **Queer Worlds – Gendered Universes and the Subversion of Power**
Main text (required):
Ursula K. Le Guin, excerpts from *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). [Moodle]
Additional texts (optional):
Ursula K. Le Guin, "Introduction" (1976), xiii-xix. [Moodle]
Alex Lothian, "Feminist and Queer Science Fiction in America" (2015), 70-82. [Moodle]
Keywords: Feminism; Gender Roles; Intersexuality; Queer; 'Monster' Figure; Taoism.

18 January **Cyberworlds – Computer Networks and Digital Universes**
Main text (required):
William Gibson, "Burning Chrome" (1982). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Nicola Nixon, "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution" (1992), 219-35.
Keywords: Cyberspace; Cyborg; Hackers; *Neuromancer* (novel); Organized Crime; Software; Technology.

25 January **Afrofuturism – Ethnicity and Alternative Worlds**
Main text (required):
Octavia E. Butler, "Bloodchild" (1996). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism in American Science Fiction" (2015), 58-69. [Moodle]
Keywords: Afrofuturism; Feminism; Interspecies; 'Race War'; *Xenogenesis* (Butler Trilogy).

1 February **Feasible Worlds – New Frontier and Planet Mars**
Main text (required):
Andy Weir, excerpts from *The Martian* (2011). [Moodle]
Additional texts (optional):
Stanley G. Weinbaum, "Martian Odyssey" (1934). [Moodle]
John Rieder, "American Frontiers" (2015), 167-78. [Moodle]
Keywords: American Frontier; Conquest; Mars Mythology; Red Planet; Space Travel; Hard SF; Technology.

FINAL PAPER
DUE DATE: FEB. 13, 2019