

CMLIT 122:
Global Science Fiction
Spring 2018
Elec Eng West 201 | Tue/Thu 12:05 - 1:20

Professor: Grant Wythoff
(gxw63@psu.edu)
Office Hours by appointment
Course site:
<https://gwijthoff.github.io/globalSF>



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Skip to the schedule...

Description

This class will introduce students to the history of science fiction, as well as the poetics that distinguish the genre as a unique form of literary production. Our focus will be international, surveying the global production of speculative narratives in several languages (all translated into English). Each of the novels—and some comics—we will read represent a pivotal moment in the development of the genre: from nineteenth-century utopian precursors, to pulp origins, to the postwar Golden Age, and then from New Wave explorations of race, gender, and sexuality all the way up to the contemporary drive toward dystopia on the one hand and fantasy on the other.

Grade breakdown

20% participation

The importance of the works under discussion lies not in the works themselves, but rather in their interrelationship with our discussions and other media that you and I encounter in our daily lives. This means that class participation is vital to the success of this course. Simply attending class will not be enough to earn full participation credit. Instead, you must be an active participant, someone who comes prepared and engages with all aspects of the class.

30% weekly posts

Each week, students will post a brief update (~300 words) to the CourseWorks blog by 7:00am on Tuesday. These posts can take the form of, among other things, a) an explanation, questioning, or complication of the week's readings, b) an interesting document or resource that you've found related to them, or c) an update on the progress of your midterm or final project. This is simply a means of checking in with one another as we work through the ideas of the course.

25% “Re-design” assignment

One of the aims of this course is to explore the relationship between theory and practice. To this end, you will construct a “re-design” of an existing media system for your midterm, due March 9. These interventions can range from micro-level (e.g. proposing a particular tweak to the infrastructure of the Internet and tracing its consequences) to whole-cloth (e.g. envisioning an alternate peer-to-peer messaging system). You will situate this re-design amongst our readings up to this point, using the texts to help imagine the implications of your re-design.

The final form of this assignment should be a paper of 5 to 7 pages, properly referenced, and with additional media as necessary or desired. Virtually any medium could work: paper prototypes, clay, painting, video, etc. You will additionally give an informal presentation of your re-design to the class.

[Click here for details and resources on the midterm...](#)

25% final project

For your final project, you will select a specific digital device and trace the lifecycle of its manufacture, use, re-use, and disposal. This is a very big task. A single smartphone, for instance, contains over two hundred chemical compounds, and the scale of its production is truly global: from rare-earth metal mines in Baotou, to data centers in Iowa, to grey markets in Jakarta, and electronics scrap yards in Delhi. So, there are many different methods for going about this, many different pieces of the puzzle you can choose to focus on, and no two final projects will look alike.

The project consists of two components. First, you will produce some form of **conceptual model of your artifact**, using a map, icons, matrices, or 3D modeling. Examples include any or a combination of the following:

- Create a supply chain map for your artifact using [Sourcemap](#).
- Express the composition of your artifact using a symbol system like Otto Neurath's [Isotype](#) from the 1920s, a font called the Pictorial Communication Language ([PICOL](#)), [font awesome icons](#), or a [design structure matrix](#).
- Photogrammetry using the [123D Catch](#) app, which allows you to upload photos from your smartphone to the cloud, where they're transformed into a textured 3D model.

In addition to the above, you will write a **paper of 5-7 pages** that situates your artifact within the contexts discussed in class. I expect you to draw from the readings we considered, as well as secondary research from sources we did not cover. I ask that you submit a brief proposal of your project to me the week of our April 18th class. The final project is due May 8. You will also present on your artifact during the final two class sessions for around 5 minutes.

[Click here for details and resources on the final...](#)

Summary of assignment due dates

- **7am Tuesdays:** weekly post
- **Feb 23:** re-design proposal
- **March 9:** re-design paper and presentation due
- **April 18:** final project proposal
- **May 8:** final project due

Administrivia

Weekly attendance in class is expected. If you must be absent from a session for a serious reason, then you should contact me before the missed class and explain why you will not be in attendance. Cases of continuous, unexplained absence will result in a penalty to your grade or your ineligibility to complete the course. Attendance and active participation in discussions are part of fulfilling the course requirements. I will notify an advising dean if you have three or more unwarranted absences. No extensions will be given except in extreme (and verifiable) circumstances. These circumstances include reasons of health and extenuating circumstances, such as death of a family member.

Laptop policy

Because we will be conducting exercises in class, you are asked to bring your laptop to every session. Be sure to practice good screen etiquette: keep it to the side and don't stare too long.

Academic integrity

Columbia's intellectual community relies on academic integrity and responsibility as the cornerstone of its work. Graduate students are expected to exhibit the highest level of personal and academic honesty as they engage in scholarly discourse and research. In practical terms, you must be responsible for the full and accurate attribution of the ideas of others in all of your research papers and projects; you must be honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet source. Graduate students are responsible for knowing and correctly utilizing referencing and bibliographical guidelines. When in doubt, consult your professor. Citation and plagiarism-prevention resources can be found at the GSAS page on Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research (<http://gsas.columbia.edu/academic-integrity>).

Failure to observe these rules of conduct will have serious academic consequences, up to and including dismissal from the university. If a faculty member suspects a breach of academic honesty, appropriate investigative and disciplinary action will be taken following Dean's Discipline procedures (<http://gsas.columbia.edu/content/disciplinary-procedures>).

Disabilities accommodations

If you have been certified by Disability Services (DS) to receive accommodations, please either bring your accommodation letter from DS to your professor's office hours to confirm your accommodation needs, or ask your liaison in GSAS to consult with your professor. If you believe that you may have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 or disability@columbia.edu. Important: To request and receive an accommodation you must be certified by DS.

Schedule

Week 1: Introductions (Jan 9/11)

Day 1: Introductions, Day 2: begin reading Butler, introduce in class and what to look for

Week 2: what sf can do (Jan 16/19)

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

Week 3: history 1: pulp origins (Jan 23/25)

Stories collected in *Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction*, ed. Lisa Yaszek and Patrick B. Sharp (2016 [1920s-30s])

Hugo Gernsback essay + one other pulp story? “A Martian Odyssey”?

Week 4: history 2: golden age (Jan 30/Feb 1)**Week 5: history 3: new wave (Feb 6/8)**

Samuel R. Delany, *Trouble on Triton* (1976)

Week 6: history 4: archives (Feb 13/15)

VISIT SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Week 7: urban futures: Tel Aviv (Feb 20/22)

[ISRAEL] Lavie Tidhar, *Central Station* (2010)

Week 8: urban futures: Bangkok (Feb 27/Mar 1)

Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* (2008)

MARCH 5–11 SPRING BREAK

Week 9: urban futures: Johannesburg (Mar 13/15)

[SOUTH AFRICA] Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (2010)

Week 10: historical SF 1 (Mar 20/22)

[CHINA] Cixin Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* (2008)

Week 11: historical SF 2 (Mar 27/29)

Liu cont'd

Week 12: comics (April 3/5)

- [FRANCE] Alejandro Jodorowsky and Moebius, *The Incal* (1981)
- [BELGIUM] Benoit Peeters and Francois Schuiten, *The Leaning Girl* (*The Obscure Cities*) (1996)

Week 13 utopia today 1 (April 10-12)

Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312* (2012)

Week 13 utopia today 2 (April 17-19)

Robinson, cont'd

Week 15: afrofuturism (April 24-16)

Nnendi Okorafor, *Binti* (2015)

Acknowledgments

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