**LMC 3214: Science Fiction**

Professor Kathleen Ann Goonan

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Skiles 306

Office Hours 11-12 T/Th and by appointment

**Prerequisite**

English 1102

**Core Area/Attribute fulfilled by this class**

Core Area C: Humanities

**Course Description**

This course will introduce you to a wide diversity of science fiction novels, and thereby to the exciting and illustrative ways in which science fiction intersects with culture, technology, history, science, and other literatures. All of these modes overlap, mingle, and interact with one another; the resulting synergy is our present, and our possible futures—limned, of course, by artistic vision. This course will give you an appreciation for the frisson that occurs when science fiction writers enter, interact with, and sometimes change the zeitgeist.

Science fiction is and always has been a conversation. The modern and postmodern novels that we will analyze reference and build on previous works of science fiction; thus, this course is also a window on the rich literary and cultural history of science fiction. The promise and perils of past, present, and future technologies, the moral implications of artificial life, the use(s) of power, biology and mutation, and posthumanism are some of the topics these novels highlight in striking and imaginative ways.

I hope that you will see that the permeable nature of science fiction is a strength that allows us to access our past, our present, and our infinitely imagined futures in ways that are as varied as there are humans to imagine them.

**Learning Outcomes**

* Science and Technology Knowledge Construction: Students will understand that scientific and technological innovation occurs in a social context, and they will be able to recognize how society influences science and technical discourses.
* Textual/Visual Analysis: Students will learn to read, analyze, and interpret cultural projects such as film, literature, art, and new media.
* Interpretive Frameworks: Students will become familiar with a variety of social, political, and philosophical theories and be able to apply those theories to creative texts, as well as to their own cultural observations.
* Communication Skills: Students will be able to gather, organize, and express information clearly and accurately by using traditional media and by tapping the potential of new digital media
* Historical Analysis: Students will examine science fiction texts from the last 200 years to show how they reflect ambiguous reactions to change.
* Ethical Analysis: Science fiction can be a powerful metaphor for examining and, perhaps, revealing, our own cultural biases, expectations, and potential. This literature extrapolates, from any number of starting points, possible futures, alternate histories, and alternate pasts. Through use of unlimited literary tools and styles, it provides students with real and imagined cultures and technological vectors to use as a springboard for thought about identity and choice.

**Required Texts**

Available at the Georgia Tech Barnes and Noble and many places online

* *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula K. Le Guin
* *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick
* *Neuromancer* by William Gibson
* *Dawn* by Octavia Butler
* *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ
* *The Diamond Age* by Neal Stephenson
* *Zendegi* by Greg Egan

**Assignments and Grading**

You will take two in-class exams, participate in one group presentation, and write a final 5-7 page paper for this class. Instructions for these assignments will be given out later in the semester. You will have ample opportunity to discuss all assignments with me and with your peers before they are due; thus, ALL GRADES FOR THIS COURSE ARE FINAL—I will not listen to any arguments that your grade should be improved.

You are welcome to complete papers before they are officially due. Furthermore, I generally grant paper extensions if you ask for them by email at least 48 hours before the due date. Do not tell me why you need the extension; just give me an alternative date when you will turn in your assignment (within a week of the original due date).

Please note that failure to complete any major component of the course may result in failure of the course as a whole. If you are having difficulties meeting class requirements, talk to me immediately—again, I will not listen to arguments that your grade should be changed after the fact.

Here are the grade percentages for each assignment:

Exam #1 20%

Exam #2 20%

Presentation 20%

Final Paper 30%

Participation 10%

**Attendance and participation:** This is a mixed lecture/discussion class. Generally speaking, I will lecture for one class when we begin a new novel, and we will spend the other classes discussing aspects of that novel, including relevant technologies, the cultural and historical milieus referenced therein, and seeing related films should such films be available.

This means you must show up to class on time on a regular basis. I will allow you three absences to do with as you please, but you will need to use them wisely: beginning with your fourth absence, your overall *final* grade will be lowered by 5 points for each absence. (For example, a 92 (A) would become a 87 (B) if you were absent three times.) *If you miss six or more classes, I reserve the right to fail you in the course as a whole.* If you miss a class for any reason, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed *before* the next class meeting. You are also responsible for getting copies of any handouts that are given out in your absence.

Please note that there are three kinds of absences that will NOT be counted against your participation grade PROVIDED THAT you provide appropriate documentation within one week of the absence:

If you have a family emergency and provide me with a note from the proper authority

If you must be out of town for a GT extracurricular activity and provide me with a note from your coach or faculty advisor

If you have an internship or job interview and provide me with documentation from the company in question (the invitation to the interview is ideal in this case)

In short, your participation grade is based on your ability to be a good citizen in class. This includes

* Doing all readings and assignments
* Bringing all readings and assignments to class on the days we are scheduled to discuss them
* Actively participating in class discussions (as both a speaker and a listener)
* Actively participating in all small group activities, such as presentations

Your participation grade will be negatively affected by disruptive behavior including

* Failure to do the readings
* Failure to be courteous to others when talking in class
* Disrupting class in nonverbal ways (e.g.: habitual tardiness, doing homework, playing with your cell phone, surfing the web or sleeping during class)

If chronic participation problems arise, I reserve to the right to institute pop quizzes.

Please note that as a science fiction author with a new book release, my schedule this fall requires that I participate in science fiction related activities that are required by my publisher. These activities include book signings, a trip to New York City to the Center for Fiction, where I will participate in a Slipstream/SF panel related to a month long Celebration of Ursula Le Guin, and other possible media events as yet to be scheduled by my publicist. I will make a strong effort to avoid scheduling these (at present fictional) events in a way that interferes with the class schedule. If a conflict occurs (such as a live radio, television, or other personal appearance that requires travel time) it is my hope that podcasts or videos of these events will enhance your understanding of science fiction as a living literature that continues to evolve. I may schedule a film or other activities in lieu of my presence on those days, or I may suggest that you to watch related podcasts (by me, other science fiction writers, or critics) for those class times.

**Students with Disabilities**

Should self-report to the Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students:

220 Student Services Building

Atlanta, GA 30332-0285

404.894.2564 (voice)/404.894.1664 (voice/TDD)

www.adapts.gatech.edu/guidebook.html

**Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Misconduct**

All of the writing you submit for this course must be your own. If I suspect you of plagiarizing any part of a project, (passing off someone else’s writing as your own), I will submit your name and the particular project to the Dean of Students, who will then take the appropriatedisciplinary action. The Georgia Tech honor code (at www.honor.gatech.edu/honorcode/honorcode.html)defines academic misconduct as:

* Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;
* Unauthorized collaboration with a student in the commission of academic requirements;
* False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
* Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
* Deliberate falsification of a written or verbal statement of fact to a member of the faculty so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
* Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of a student.

**Miscellaneous**: Ultimately this is *your* class, so if you have any suggestions for readings, films or activities that you think might supplement our studies—or if you have any ideas about how to better organize our existing time and activities—please feel free to share them with me. Every semester I try to shape the course schedule in accordance with the needs of that particular class, so I really do value your input. Do not hesitate to point out mistakes in the syllabus. This is a provisional syllabus, and may change depending on various factors. If I do change it, you will have ample advance notice.

**How the class is organized:** I plan to spend three class sessions on very novel. These three sessions may include related films, podcasts, ancillary readings, and discussions. By the first discussion day, I will expect you to have read half or more of the novel. By the second day, I expect you to have finished the novel. I may administer a very short quiz to ascertain that this is the case.

As you read, you will have observations, form opinions, have arguments with the text, and be amazed and pleased. Write these reactions down and bring them to class as a basis for our discussion. I may assign questions the class before discussions or via a T-square announcement and expect you to bring your informally written reactions to class and turn them in. As we continue in our reading, your reactions may reference previous readings or films.

We will have one presentation for each author. For the presentation, you will provide a bio of the author, situate their work in the history and culture of their time and defend whatever relationships or influences you see with ancillary material, and discuss the work as science fiction, applying the critical terms we have learned.

**LMC 3214: Science Fiction**

**Weekly Schedule**

T 8/23

Introduction

Review Syllabus

Th 8/25

*The Lathe of Heaven* film

T 8/30

*The Lathe of Heaven*, SF history and definitions lecture

Th 9/1

Lecture on SF history and critical terms

Team sign up: choose an author.

T 9/6

*The Ghost in the Shell*

Th 9/8

Discussion: From robots to androids to cyborgs in art and society. Ethical and moral issues in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

T 9/13

*Blade Runner*

Th 9/15

Discussion, *Blade Runner, Ghost in the Shell, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* Gibson, the cyberpunk movement, Gibson and postmodernism, Gibson as latter-day sage.

T 9/20

Neuromancer discussion

Th 9/22

The New Wave in SF, Ursula Le Guin, and *The Lathe of Heaven* film and novel

T 9/27

*The Lathe of Heaven* discussion

Th 9/29

T 10/4

Lecture: Feminism, postmodernism, and science fiction: the Sixties.

Th 10/6

Discussion: *The Female Man*

T 10/11

Optional: attend author reading and signing at B&N at 11 am.

Ursula K. Le Guin Presentation

Th 10/13

Philip K. Dick Presentation

T 10/18

William Gibson Presentation (may change to 10/20 as Wilber may speak on the 18th)

Th 10/20

Guest Author and Dell Award Administrator Dr. Rick Wilber

T 10/25

Joanna Russ Presentation

Th 10/27

Professor away at professional conference. Study day.

T 11/1

Exam #1

Th 11/3

Presentation, Octavia Butler

T 11/8

Discussion, Dawn

Th 11/10

Neal Stephenson Presentation

T 11/15

Discussion, The Diamond Age: Nanotech, Steampunk, and Cyberpunk

Th 11/17

Science Fiction On-Campus Symposium—details TBA

T 11/22

Presentation, Greg Egan

Th 11/24

Thanksgiving Holiday

T 11/29

Discussion, Zendegi

Th 12/1

Exam #2

T 12/6

Research paper work day—no class meeting.

Th 12/8

Research paper due by 4:30 PM