

SYLLABUS

Political Science Fiction: Political Ideas in Film and Fiction

Course instructor: doc.dr.sc. Hrvoje Cvijanovic

Study program: undergraduate

Year of study: first and second

Status of the course: Elective

Type of instruction: 2L + 2S per week

Language: English

ECTS: 5

Course description and course objectives:

The title of the course “Political science fiction” is a wordplay: it means merging political science with fiction, or politics with science fiction. Science fiction provides the story or us, not predominantly or necessarily about outer space or distant future. Hence, science fiction can be seen as an allegory of ourselves and the opportunity to explore our political practices and society. The advantage of studying fiction along with social sciences, especially with politics, is the fact that fiction raises new ideas about politics that cannot be found in the mainstream social science literature. The creativity of thought found in science fiction thus helps us thinking about major political-philosophical problems we are always confronted with. The aim of this course is to examine some of the major topics in political science through the vehicle of (science) fiction narratives. We will provide these narratives with political aura giving them theoretical underpinnings. From its beginnings it is believed that science fiction represents a rich subtext for our historical and current political struggles. It deals with central political and social issues regarding our views on life in general and communal life with others, on threats to our way of life, on crossing the boundaries of traditions and existing social practices, on our enemies and human nature, on political and ethical disputes, ideal institutions, or utopian and dystopian political communities and organizations. Thus, science fiction contributes toward better understanding of political life. It is a divergent way of approaching to the grand themes of political science and social life in general. By merging politics and science fiction together this course will add to the traditional cannon of courses in political science, hence providing with the opportunity for learning about politics from the perspective of science fiction as an important part of our popular culture. Since science fiction provides a commentary on social and political evolution, it necessary resonates with current or potential problems and debates of this world. Sometimes science fiction is a product of both trans-epochal and current social problems and concerns. But our political ideals may be influenced by some idealized fictional views of the future. Hence, this course is designed to enliven a greater understanding of the seriousness of such views and debates by demanding from students to challenge their view on the genre, namely to see beyond the entertaining dimension of science fiction, but rather into its political and social potential for critique of our societies, institutions, dangers and development. As such, it is a course about politics and political thought, not (science) fiction as such. Since the relevance of political-philosophical arguments in fiction should not be explored exclusively in the genre of sci-fi media, the course is a platform to explore the politics

through film in general. In doing so, we will focus on different sources – from the political-philosophical texts to those that explore the matter in question through the lenses of international relations, comparative politics and public policy – asking from the students the ability to think in different directions, or, as it is said at the beginning of the *Star Trek* series, “to boldly go where no man has gone before”.

Course enrolment requirements and entry competences required for the course:

None, except the interest for the subject matter. The course is open for all freshmen and sophomore (first and second) year students interested in political interpretation of science fiction. Of course, basic knowledge of English language is necessary since the lectures and literature are in English.

Learning outcomes at the level of the programme to which the course contributes:

The course will provide students with the area of cognitive, intellectual, research and practical skills. The students will be able to identify political and social problems through science fiction and thus extend their knowledge on politics and political thinking by the end of the semester. This means the Political Science Fiction course will equip students to see and analyze politics in a different way while, at the same time, fostering critical thinking and discussion. In terms of research and practical skills, the students will be asked to implement their knowledge of the material to develop their own small science fiction project in a form of making a small movie trailer of their choice with their own interpretation. On top of that students will be asked to critically evaluate arguments and show their understanding of the material in a form of an essay.

Learning outcomes expected at the level of the course:

- Knowledge to decipher major political, social and philosophical themes in popular culture.
- Understanding fundamental political concepts and political ideas through science fiction.
- Understanding major discussions and debates in our contemporary world
- Ability for critical thinking through the process of interpretation
- Ability to discuss and present the themes to other students
- Skill for making and editing a short video clip that will resonate on student's understanding of a selected work of science fiction in a political context

Course content

The course material will be divided in 14 weeks schedule with 2 hours of lectures and 2 hours of seminars weekly. The themes that will be addressed during the semester are:

1. Introduction
2. Utopian political and social visions
3. Dystopian political and social visions
4. Individualism and collectivism in science fiction
5. “A Perfect World”: democracy, fundamentalism, and tyranny
6. Class-division and class-struggle
7. Gender and identity

8. Environmentalism and politics
9. Technological dependency and its political dangers
10. Cruelty and the “other”
11. National and human security
12. Enemy, war and terror
13. New World Order
14. Closing-up: Political Ideas in Fiction vs. Political Reality

Some of the readings for the course will be following:

- Stephen Mulhall, *On Film: Thinking in Action*
- Jason, Blahuta, *The Politics of Crisis: Machiavelli in the Colonial Fleet*
- Terry Eagleton, *Saints and Suicides*, in: *Holly Terror*
- Selected essays from the *Battlestar Galactica and International Relations* (I. Neumann: “Religion in sort of a global sense: the relevance of religious practices for political community in *Battlestar Galactica* and beyond”, L. Wilcox: “Machines that matter: the politics and ethics of ‘Unnatural’ bodies”, J. Bohland: “And they have a plan: critical reflections on *Battlestar Galactica* and the hyperreal genocide”, C. Carpenter, H. Cvijanovic, W. Mason: “Security or human security: Civil-military relations in *Battlestar Galactica*”).
- Selected essays from the *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* (Kind: “You Can’t Rape a Machine”, Livingston: “The Razor’s Edge: *Galactica*, *Pegasus*, and Lakoff”, Melancon: “Secrets and Lies: Balancing Security and Democracy in the Colonial Fleet”, McHenry: “Weapons of Mass Salvation”, “The Real War between *Battlestar Galacticas*...);
- Selected essays from *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*
- David Brin, ["Star Wars' despots vs. 'Star Trek' populists"](#)
- Richard Rorty, *Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality*
- Richard Rorty, *The Last intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty*, in: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*
- Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*
- Carl Schmitt, *Definition of Sovereignty*, in *Political Theology*
- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, Part III (pp. 119-143, 166-188);
- Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*
- *Shomura, Chad, Welcome to a World Without Rules: Juridical Anarchism in the “War on Terror”*
- Richard Bernstein, *Arendt: Radical Evil and Banality of Evil*, in *Radical Evil*
- Franz Fanon, *Concerning Violence*, in: *The Wretch of the Earth*, pp. 35-106
- Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Cultural Identity*, in: *National Identity*
- Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power*
- *Tiqqun, Introduction to Civil War*

Along with the readings we will pair these with selected movies as well as with the texts to illuminate the theoretical background of science fiction, showing how its content can be seen as profoundly political and thus relevant for our current political debates. Some, but not all of the films that will be watched and discussed are: *Metropolis*, *Things to*

Come, The Time Machine, Planet of the Apes, Star Wars, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica - Razor, Batman: The Dark Knight, V for Vendetta, The Matrix, Minority Report, Blade Runner, Alien, District 9, Moon

Student responsibilities:

Students are obliged to attend lectures and seminars (3 unexcused absences will be tolerated). Students need to pass the midterm in order to take the final exam. The midterm is a short video trailer project that students will make individually or in groups of two. The final is an essay on the question the course leader delivers to the students at the end of semester. On top of these, students will be having either one-minute quiz or one-minute essay each week. One minute quiz will be at the beginning on the question related to the selected movie and text. One minute essay will be at the conclusion of a lesson asking students to write a brief essay summarizing their understanding of the key idea or ideas discussed that week.

Grading and evaluating student work in class and at the final exam:

10% discussion

40% midterm

40% final

10% one-minute quiz/essay

Grading policy. 5 = excellent work (91-100%), 4 = very good but not yet excellent work (81-90), 3 = standard good work (70-80), 2 = adequate work (60-69), 1 = completely inadequate, fail (0-59)

Important points to note:

Classroom etiquette: ALL CELL PHONES must be OFF during class sessions. Please come to class on time and stay for the entire class, unless you have an emergency.

Student Ethics: A significant component of the class requires students to treat with respect their classmates, not allowing themselves to interrupt someone's arguments, or being indecent in any way.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is taking another person's words or ideas without crediting them. Anything cut and pasted from a website without quotation marks and proper citation is plagiarism. Copying anything from a book or journal or another person without putting it in quotation marks and citing your source is plagiarism. Plagiarism is cheating. There is no excuse for cheating. You will fail the course at the first instance of plagiarism or cheating of any kind on any assignment. No discussion, no negotiating.

Plagiarism usually occurs when students feel overwhelmed--by school, finances, illness, relationship problems, an assignment they don't understand, etc. If anything like this happens to you, *let me know*. We will work something out that will be a lot more beneficial to you than cheating.

Services to students with disabilities: If you are a student with any kind of disability (physical, mental, learning, etc.) and you have any concerns about access to the course or about completing the work for the class, *let me know*.

Quality assurance monitoring:

Quality of the course will be assessed by evaluation process through a standard procedure organized by the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb.