

B A D S P A C E

RHETORICS OF PLACE IN DYSTOPIAN FICTION & FILM

English 4103-01: Literary Genres

Spring 2019 | The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

TR 9:30-10:55 AM | Davis Hall 203

Instructor: Dr. Ben Wetherbee
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Office Hours: M 9:05-10:05 AM, 1:30-4:00 PM;
TR 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM;
WF 9:05-10:05 AM;
by appt.

Course Website: <https://badspaceusao.wordpress.com/>

Weekly Film Screenings: M 5:00-7:00 PM, Troutt Hall 314

It crashed downwards, exploding as it went, rending gallery after gallery with its wings of steel. For a moment they saw the nations of the dead, and, before they joined them, scraps of the untainted sky.

– E.M. Forster, “The Machine Stops”

Space is now more often a “text” than a context. Absorbing time, incorporating movement, figuring as its own discrete event, contemporary space has become experienced as self-contained, convulsive, and discontinuous ...

– Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space*

Visibility is a trap.

– Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Required Books

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Anchor, 1998; ISBN: 038549081X)
- Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Grand Central, 2000; ISBN: 0446675504)
- Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (Scho-lastic, 2010; ISBN: 9780439023528)
- **(Optional)** Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (Dover, 2005; ISBN: 0486437272; a free version is available online)
- William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (Ace, 1984; ISBN: 0441569595)
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harper Perennial, 2006; ISBN: 0060850523)

- China Miéville, *The City & the City* (Del Rey, 2010; ISBN: 034549752X)
- Thomas More, *Utopia* (Verso, 2016; ISBN: 1784787608; there are many versions of this text in print, but **be sure to get the 2016 Verso edition!**)
- Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (FSG, 2014; ISBN: 0374104093)
- Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (Modern Library, 2006; ISBN: 081297462X)

Required Feature-Length Films

- *Alien* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1979; 1h 57m)
- *Blade Runner (The Final Cut)* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1982 [orig.], 2007 [final]; 1h 57m)

- **Brazil** (Dir. Terry Gilliam, 1985; 2h 22m)
- **Children of Men** (Dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006; 1h 54m)
- **Get Out** (Dir. Jordan Peele, 2017; 1h 44m)
- **Logan's Run** (Dir. Michael Anderson, 1976; 1h 59m)
- **Mad Max: Fury Road** (Dir. George Miller, 2015; 2h)
- **Metropolis (Restored)** (Dir. Fritz Lang, 1927; 2h 28m)
- **Outland** (Dir. Peter Hyams, 1981; 1h 52m)
- **They Live** (Dir. John Carpenter, 1988; 1h 37m)
- **THX 1138** (Dir. George Lucas, 1971; 1h 35m)

Course Description and Outcomes

This course investigates the literary and cinematic genre of dystopia (literally, *bad place*), beginning with Thomas More's prototypical *Utopia* and then jumping ahead to fiction and film from the 20th and 21st centuries to inquire how utopia went awry. We'll pay special attention to how dystopian texts construct space within their narratives, as well as the rhetorical (persuasive) effects such spatial composition offers for audiences. In other words, we will take up these questions: (1) What makes "bad space" *bad*, and (2) what does dystopian space *do* to us?

We'll conduct this course in the style of a humanities seminar – this is, like the small, intellectually rigorous, discussion-driven classes one would attend in many graduate programs. *Bad Space* is an English course focused on the fields of literature (particularly science/speculative fiction), rhetoric, and film studies, but its content draws from an intentionally broad range of interdisciplinary knowledge that allows (and encourages) further exploration across the humanities and social sciences. That is, non-English majors are welcome.

Broadly speaking, this course works toward the following outcomes. Students will:

- develop a thorough critical familiarity with dystopian fiction and film, one informed by rhetorical theory and other schools of critical interpretation.
- develop individual critical stances on the social and rhetorical importance of dystopia, including those on what ought (or ought not) to "count" as a dystopian text and why.

- demonstrate the ability to write sophisticated, well-researched textual criticism using diverse critical vocabulary.
- demonstrate the engaged level of active participation and classroom citizenship befitting a graduate-style seminar.

Readings, Films, and Materials

Required readings include the assigned books listed above, as well as digital copies of short stories and critical essays that appear on the course website. Always bring copies (print or digital) of assigned readings to class, along with writing/note-taking materials.

I will screen required films on **Mondays at 5 PM in Troutt Hall 314** most weeks. (Bring friends and food if you want!) Attendance is **optional**, but students absent from screenings are individually responsible for procuring and viewing films. All assigned films are available on DVD and to rent online.

On average, we will cover one short-to-medium-length primary print text (~130-320 pp.), one film (~1.5-2.5 hrs.), and one-to-four critical readings every week. This is a substantial workload, so pace yourself appropriately. All readings and viewings are required unless otherwise noted.

Overview of Required Work

Major papers. Two major papers will allow you to apply material from the course toward individually determined subject matter you find interesting and relevant. These are: (1) a "Dystopian Summit" essay whereby you defend the cultural and rhetorical importance of a dystopian text of your choice (excluding those on the syllabus), arguing for its enshrinement in the dystopian canon; and (2) a final self-directed, researched analysis relating to themes and content from the course. Write and document essays in MLA style, and submit them in hardcopy on their specified due dates at the beginning of class. Detailed prompts for each paper will appear on the course website.

Late papers will be docked one full letter grade per weekday past the due date, so please turn them in on time. Extensions are negotiable on a case-by-case basis.

Response papers. Response papers (500-600 words each, submitted in hardcopy) should supply detailed critical analysis of course texts and/or

engagement with critical essays we read for class. In brief, these should be short, sweet, *specific* analyses and arguments that dig into textual detail and apply, extend, or challenge the conceptual vocabulary we encounter in class.

Terminal due dates on the schedule represent flexible windows within which you can submit responses papers, and the text(s) you write about should occur on the schedule within the week of submission. (For example, response paper #1 can be submitted between Jan. 15 and 24, #2 between Jan. 29 and Feb. 7, and so on. A paper submitted on Jan. 31 would respond to Zamyatin's *We*, *THX 1138*, and/or the two critical essays included that week.) Five due dates are listed. Turn in four papers; skip one of your choice. Alternatively, if you submit all five, I'll throw out the lowest grade.

Participation and discussion questions. As a small, discussion-driven, graduate-style seminar, this class thrives upon, and only upon, consistent participation from everyone, so please keep on top of readings and screenings, and come to class prepared to discuss course texts in detail. I won't tally individual verbal utterances each day or anything quite so – you know – dystopian, but I will expect persistent contribution from everyone throughout the term.

Speaking of which, you will need to draft discussion questions – one per regular class, addressing assigned readings and/or films for that day – that engage course texts at a conceptual, substantive level. (That is, these should do more than ask for clarification.) I will collect questions in hardcopy (handwritten is fine) at the beginning of each class and use them to steer our conversations.

Other work. Other work will include two presentations on your own research, response to each other's writing, and, of course, keeping up with assigned readings and films. All readings and films are required unless otherwise noted. There are **no formal exams** in this class; writing and daily participation are therefore weighted more heavily.

Attendance

For obvious reasons, attendance is crucial in a graduate-style seminar like this one. You are allowed **two** unexcused absences before the participation grade declines directly. In the event of family emergency or other unforeseen setbacks

that prevent attending class, we can negotiate an alternate plan.

Course Website

A minimal but useful course website appears at:

<https://badspaceusao.wordpress.com/>

It houses up-to-date digital copies of the syllabus and schedule, major assignment prompts, PDF copies of readings outside the assigned books, and links to resources pertinent to class. The website is private – it is not indexed by search engines – so you'll need to manually enter in and/or bookmark the URL above in your browser.

Grading Distribution

Writing

Final research/analysis essay	25%
Response papers	20%
Dystopian Summit essay	15%

Participation/Discussion

General participation/discussion	25%
Discussion questions	5%

Presentations

Final presentation	5%
Dystopian Summit presentation	5%

A: ≥ 90%	C: 70-79%	F: ≤ 59%
B: 80-89%	D: 60-69%	

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism occurs when a writer attempts to pass off the words or ideas of someone else as her/his own. I don't expect it to be an issue in this class, but deliberate and malicious plagiarism will automatically fail you and possibly bring further repercussions to your academic record – so just don't do it. That said, don't overstress about *accidentally* plagiarizing. Be careful, and it won't happen. And as always, contact me if you have questions.

Disabilities Resources

Any students with a disability or condition that may affect performance in class should meet with me to identify and discuss feasible modifications and/or accommodations. I am more than happy to work with you.

Also, note that disability services are available at the Student Center Room 305, or online at:

<https://usao.edu/current-students/services/disability-services/>

Library and Student Success Center

The Nash Library and the USAO Student Success Center (Nash 305) are valuable resources to this course. Information about each is available online:

<https://library.usao.edu/home/>

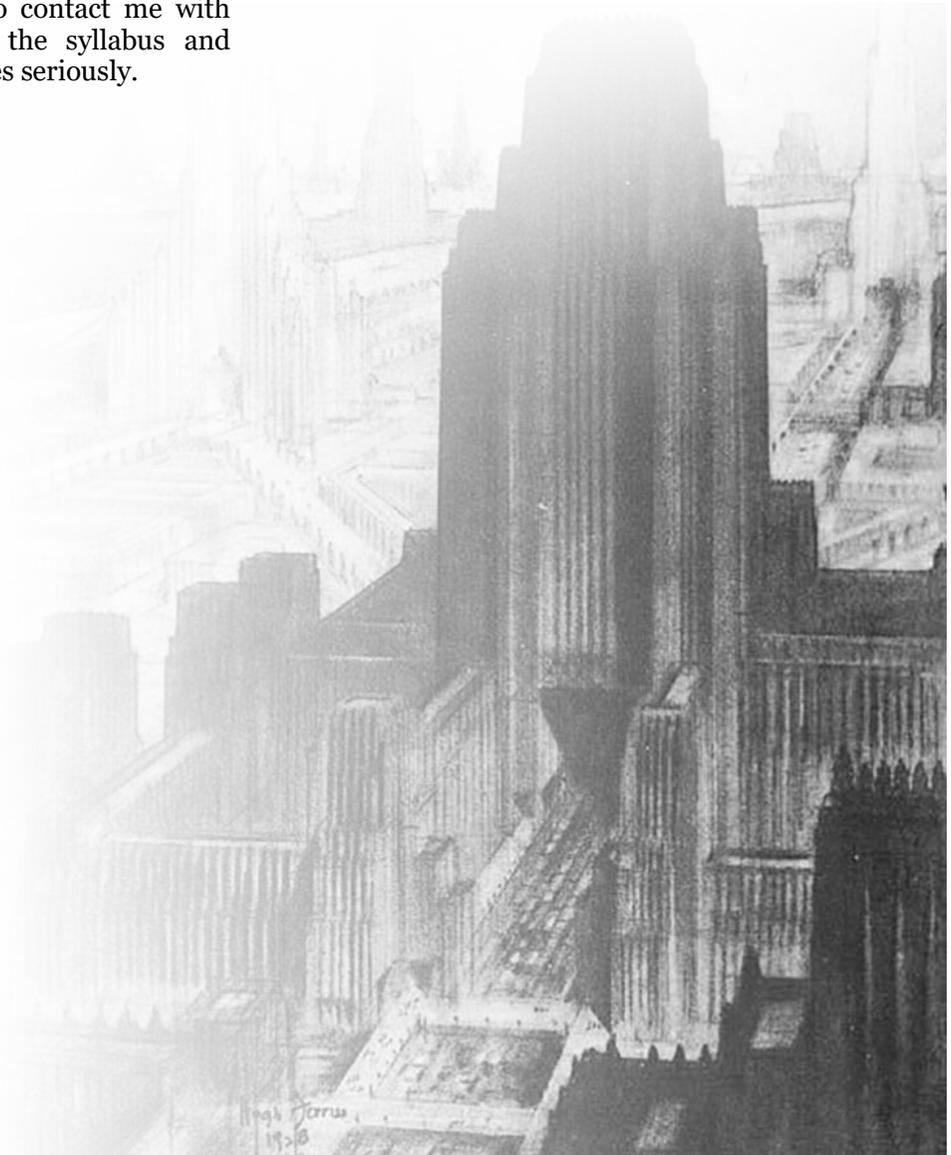
<https://usao.edu/student-success-center>

Technology Policy

You may bring laptops, tablets and smartphones to class. In fact, please do: I encourage the use of electronics toward writing and research *pertinent to class* – but only insofar as they contribute to class and avoid distracting from it.

Important Note

Things change. Weather happens; civilizations crumble. I reserve the right to revise this document. You reserve the right to contact me with questions or concerns about the syllabus and schedule; I will take such queries seriously.



BAD SPACE: COURSE SCHEDULE

English 4103-01 | Spr. 2019 | TR 9:30-10:55 AM | Davis Hall 203
 Dr. Ben Wetherbee | bwetherbee@usao.edu

-  Reading due before class
-  Film to watch (usually) before class
-  Writing assignment due in class
-  Student presentation in class

JANUARY

R	10	<p>Week 1: Introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  (in class) <i>La Jetée</i> (video online)
M	14	No film this week; no screening
T	15	<p>Week 2: Utopia & Dystopia / Rhetoric & Poetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  More, <i>Utopia</i> (including introductory essays by Miéville)  Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (PDF online)  (Optional) Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopia Reconsidered” (PDF online)
R	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Forster, “The Machine Stops” (PDF online)  Le Guin, supplementary essays included with <i>Utopia</i>  Burke, “Rhetoric and Poetics” (PDF online)
M	21	MLK Day – No screening; watch <i>Metropolis</i> on your own
T	22	<p>Week 3: The City / The Chronotope / The Rhetoric of the Image</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Ferriss, <i>The Metropolis of Tomorrow</i> (PDF and link online)  <i>Metropolis (Restored)</i> (video online)  Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image” (PDF online)  Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (PDF online)  (Optional) Hendrix & Wood, “The Rhetoric of Film” (PDF online)
R	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  (in class) excerpts from <i>Triumph of the Will</i> (video online)  Vice, “The Chronotope: Fleshing Out Time” (PDF online)  Haskins, “Time, Space, and Political Identity” (PDF online)  Response paper 1/5 due by this date
M	28	Screening of <i>THX 1138</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	29	<p>Week 4: Science Fiction & the Anti-Utopia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Zamyatin, <i>We</i> (1/2)  <i>THX 1138</i>  Claey's, from <i>Dystopia: A Natural History</i> (PDF online)
R	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Zamyatin, <i>We</i> (2/2)  Haskins & Zappen, “Totalitarian Visual ‘Monologue’” (PDF online)

FEBRUARY

M	4	Screening of <i>Logan's Run</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	5	<p>Week 5: Gender & the Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (1/3)  <i>Logan's Run</i>  Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (PDF online)

R	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (2/3)  Foucault, “Panopticism” (PDF online)  Response paper 2/5 due by this date
Friday, Feb. 8: Last day to withdraw with automatic “W”		
M	11	Screening of <i>Alien</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	12	<p>Week 6: The Postmodern Turn, Part 1: Late Capitalism ... in Spaaaaaace!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (3/3)  <i>Alien</i>  Sobchack, excerpt from <i>Screening Space</i> (PDF online)  Byers, “Commodity Futures” (PDF online)
R	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> (1/2)  Gibson, “Disneyland with the Death Penalty” (PDF online)
M	18	Screening of <i>Blade Runner (The Final Cut)</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	19	<p>Week 7: The Postmodern Turn, Part 2: Cyberpunk & Multimodal Rhetoric</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> (2/2)  <i>Blade Runner (The Final Cut)</i>  Bould, “Cyberpunk” (PDF online)  Wetherbee, “<i>Dystopoi</i> of Memory and Invention” (PDF online)  (Optional) Bruno, “Ramble City: Postmodernism and <i>Blade Runner</i>” (PDF online)  Response paper 3/5 due by this date
R	21	NO CLASS – I am out of town for a conference.
M	25	Screening of <i>Outland</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	26	<p>Week 8: Dystopian Summit Meeting / Spatial Isolation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Dystopian Summit presentations  Dystopian Summit paper due
R	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Atwood, <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> (1/2)  <i>Outland</i>
MARCH		
M	4	Screening of <i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	5	<p>Week 9: Feminist Dystopia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Atwood, <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> (2/2)  Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (PDF online)  <i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i>  Atwood, “<i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> and <i>Oryx and Crake</i> ‘In Context’” (PDF online)
R	7	 Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i> (1/2)
M	11	Screening of <i>Children of Men</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM

T	12	<p>Week 10: The Alt-Apocalypse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i> (2/2)  <i>Children of Men</i>  Phillips, “The Intuition of the Future” (PDF online)  Response paper 4/5 due by this date
R	14	NO CLASS – I am out of town for yet another conference.
T	19	Week 11: SPRING BREAK
R	21	
M	25	Screening of <i>They Live</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	26	<p>Week 12: “Put on the glasses!”: Dystopia Unseen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Miéville, <i>The City & the City</i>  <i>They Live</i>  Kuehmicel, “Thriving in the Gap” (PDF online)  Lethem, excerpts from <i>They Live</i> (PDF online)
R	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Lovecraft, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” (link online)  Stoneman & Packer, “Supernatural Horror as Pessimistic Argument” (PDF online)
APRIL		
M	1	Screening of <i>Brazil</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	2	<p>Week 13: Dystopia Gets Weird(er)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  VanderMeer, <i>Annihilation</i>  Lovecraft, “The Music of Erich Zann” (link online)  <i>Brazil</i>
R	4	<p>NO CLASS – Spring Triad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Response paper 5/5 due by this date
M	8	Screening of <i>Get Out</i> in Troutt 314 at 5 PM
T	9	<p>Week 14: Back to the Present and Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i> (1/2)  <i>Get Out</i>
Friday, Apr. 5: Last day to withdraw		
R	11	 Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i> (2/2)
T	16	<p>Week 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Student presentations on final projects
R	18	 Student presentations on final projects
		<p>Exam Week (day/time TBD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Student presentations on final projects (if needed)  Final paper due