



PROF. NICK DAVIS / [nicholas-davis@northwestern.edu](mailto:nicholas-davis@northwestern.edu) / Office Hrs UH 307, Tu 11-12, W 2-3

GSS 350 / 373 (WINTER 2015)

MW 9:30-10:50, PARKES 223

# FUTURESEX

GENDER, SEXUALITY, & EMBODIMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SCI-FI CINEMA

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sexuality, cinema, sci fi, and scholarship: four enterprises that constantly reinvent themselves, following new paths, taking new forms, yielding new languages and habits of thought. How might we construe these projects and their evolutions as deeply related? How have the most futuristic, fantastic, and dystopian visions in modern film relied for their meaning or excitement on prevailing cultural assumptions regarding gender and sexuality? How have they challenged or advanced those assumptions? When and why have scholars devised new models of identity, desire, and the body—including “cyborg feminism” and “desiring-machines”—that sound like the stuff of science fiction? How might we interpret recent sci-fi films that explore issues like cloning, reproduction, abortion, alien invasion, eugenics, memory erasure, eugenics, robotics, time travel, and sexual consent as themselves constituting efforts at theorizing gender or sex? What happens when we read published scholarship engaging similar themes alongside these films, using each to test the other? What kinds of research can augment our thinking in these areas, deepening our readings of the movies and our responses to the essays? Discussions and writing assignments will explore all of these riddles, drawing on such theorists as Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Lee Edelman, Elizabeth Grosz, Sara Ahmed, Dorothy Roberts, and Jackie Stacey, and such recent films as *2046*, *Children of Men*, *Code 46*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Her*, *Lucy*, *Solaris*, *Teknolust*, and *Under the Skin*. GSS majors using this course to satisfy the requirement for a research-intensive course should register under the GSS 350 course rubric, and expect to write a longer final paper with a more extensive bibliography.

## OBJECTIVES FOR MEMBERS OF THIS COURSE

To practice watching and writing about films critically, attending to how formal choices reflect ideas and complicate themes; to become more proficient at using scholarship and theory as lenses for analyzing and discussing films, and film as a lens for reading and grasping theory; to discern and interpret the political and intellectual content of contemporary entertainments; to acquire crucial scholastic skills related to research, oral presentation, and the writing of abstracts.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

All films and readings are accessible on the course’s Canvas website. While this system offers a convenient (and recently improved!) means of seeing the films, you may observe more nuances, afford yourself easier access, and enable closer study by renting or buying some of the films.

Now on Amazon Instant: *Solaris* (both versions), *Eternal Sunshine...*, *Code 46*, *The Congress*, *Children of Men*, *Lucy*, *Under the Skin*, *Her*; **not** *2046*, *Teknolust*, or *The Sticky Fingers of Time*.



### ASSIGNMENTS

You will submit **two midterm essays (4-7pp.)** on the dates indicated, with guidelines distributed in advance, as well as **two shorter assignments (2-3pp.)** and a **final essay (8-10pp.)**, with slightly different expectations for 350 and 373 registrants. The final will entail a short proposal and a meeting with me to solidify your topic; with my approval, you may address a film or a television series from beyond the syllabus. Late in the quarter, you will write a short abstract and present at a **mini-conference** in class. Along the way, I may require very short response-style assignments or other activities designed to facilitate practice with formal film analysis, to help pinpoint key ideas in the readings, or to steer the beginnings of our seminar discussions.

### ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Your earnest, lively, and informed engagement is crucial in helping you to absorb and exchange ideas. Forming a genuine learning community also means learning the names of your classmates and interacting generously and directly with each other. It is therefore key that you arrive to each seminar fully versed in the assigned readings and/or viewings, and that you remain alert, open-minded, and respectful. Upon your **third** absence (barring medical or family emergencies), your participation grade is capped at a C. After four, I can't give any credit in this area.

### DEADLINES & SUBMISSIONS

Written work will typically be submitted electronically, via the Canvas website. Grades will be docked a half-point for late arrival on the due date, and a full letter for each day afterward that they are late (i.e, an A paper becomes an A- paper that evening, and a B paper the next day). Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances, in writing, and well in advance of the deadlines. Failure to submit any of the three major papers will lead to failing the course.

### OFFICE HOURS

Please note them, atop the first page of this syllabus, and please visit! Beyond our one required meeting, they offer a great chance for me to get to know you and provide personalized feedback and encouragement. I also welcome you to voice your questions or impressions about the class.

### MORE OF WHAT'S HOT

Flagging key passages in the readings; preparing questions; taking notes during class; forming study groups; peer-editing each other's papers; joining in discussion; pursuing personal interests

### MORE OF WHAT'S NOT

Laptop-based distraction; cell phones; chatter; snoozing; skipping class; inattention to your peers

### FEEDBACK ON YOUR WORK

You should expect clear and constructive **comments** on graded papers. If you ever have trouble grasping any comments or disagree strongly with something that I have said, please contact me.

I absolutely encourage you to **discuss** your ideas about films, readings, or paper topics with me, as far in advance as possible. In-person exchanges are best, but e-mail is also wonderful. The more involved you are in the course and the more you take pride in your writing, thinking, and conversation, the more likely it is that you will enjoy and profit from the experience of the class.

One **exception**: please do not ask for feedback about full drafts of your papers. These exchanges can easily become narrow or misleading, and learning to paraphrase your own arguments and to frame your own questions is an important part of the learning process. (Friends in class, blank-slate roommates, or Writing Place tutors can be terrific candidates for responding to full drafts.)

### GRADES

At the end of the term, I will calculate final grades according to the following percentages: Paper #1 (15%), Paper #2 (20%), ungraded writing exercises (20% total), participation and attendance (20%), and the final paper/project (25%). “Participation” encompasses engagement in seminar discussions, to include speaking as well as focused listening; constructive use of office hours; incorporation of feedback; and diligence in following the itinerary of assignments. Please do not assume that your participation grade is an “A” simply by dint of showing up; I am serious in expecting you to be openly and earnestly dedicated to the course and to your fellow students.

### PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Though we hope to have *no* encounters with the problem of plagiarism in this class, the scope of both the infraction and its consequences requires a brief, clear statement. Plagiarism comprises the unattributed disguising of *any portion* of another person's thoughts or writing—whether quoted verbatim or superficially rephrased—as your own original work. Also forbidden is resubmitting old work under the guise of new work. Northwestern rightly considers such behavior intolerable to genuine and responsible education. Therefore, any student engaging in any plagiarist practice is automatically vulnerable to a range of severe punishments, as determined by the office of the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Official college policies are available here: <http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/advising/academic.html>.

Your possession of this syllabus hereafter presumes your familiarity with the definition of plagiarism, your awareness of the possible penalties for dishonesty, and your agreement *not* to perpetrate these offenses at any point as a participant in this course.

### PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a verified disability requiring special accommodations should speak to me and to the AccessibleNU Office (7-5530) early in the quarter. These discussions remain confidential.

### NOW, AS FOR THE ACTUAL *LEARNING*...

All of that is crucial information, but let's move on! Administrating is no fun compared to teaching. I'm so grateful to you for taking the course—and eager to dive into the material!

# Weekly Schedule of Assignments

Complete the assigned readings and viewings *in advance* of the dates indicated.

## Week 1: Blasting Off

- M 1/5:** — Syllabus review; study terminology sheets on Canvas
- W 1/7:** VIEW *Solaris* (Steven Soderbergh, 2002)  
READ Walter Benn Michaels, “Political Science Fiction” (2000)
- F 1/9:** WRITE **Scene analysis** (500-750 words, due over Canvas by 5pm)

## Week 2: Through the Looking-Glass

- M 1/12:** VIEW *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972, excerpts)  
READ Christopher Bracken, from *Magical Criticism* (2007)  
Steven Dillon, from *The Solaris Effect* (2006)
- W 1/14:** READ Teresa de Lauretis, from *Alice Doesn't* (1984)

## Week 3: Machines and Memory-Wipes

- M 1/19:** — No class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day  
WRITE **Paper #1** (1200-1400 words, due over Canvas by 10am)
- W 1/21:** VIEW *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004)  
READ William Day, “I Don't Know, Just Wait” (2011)\*  
Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, from *Anti-Oedipus* (1972)\*

## Week 4: Amnesia, Incest, Empire, Orientation

- M 1/26:** VIEW *Code 46* (Michael Winterbottom, 2003)  
READ Jackie Stacey, from *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* (2010)\*
- W 1/28:** READ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, from *Empire* (2000)\*  
Sara Ahmed, from *Queer Phenomenology* (2006)\*

## Week 5: Cyborg Pasts and Futures

- S 2/1:** POST **Abstract/Response Assignment** (1000 words, due by 9pm)
- M 2/2:** VIEW *2046* (Wong Kar-wai, 2004)  
READ Yugin Teo, “Love, Longing, and Danger” (2013)\*
- W 2/4:** READ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1983-1991)

## Week 6: to Clone or Not to Clone or Not to Clone or Not to Clone or No

**M 2/9:** WRITE **Paper #2** (1800-2000 words, due over Canvas by start of class)  
CLASS *Teknolust* (Lynn Hershman-Leeson, 2002)

**W 2/11:** READ Jackie Stacey, from *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* (2010)  
VIEW *The Congress* (Ari Folman, 2013)

## Week 7: Queer Temporalities

**M 2/16:** VIEW *The Sticky Fingers of Time* (Hilary Brougher, 1997)  
READ Elizabeth Freeman, from *Time Binds* (2010)

**W 2/18:** VIEW *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)  
READ Lee Edelman, from *No Future* (2004)

## Week 8: Becoming-Experts

**M 2/23:** PREP **Mini-Conference** on *Children of Men* (one essay, 5min per student)

**W 2/25:** READ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)

## Week 9: Scarlett Horizons

**M 3/2:** VIEW *Lucy* (Luc Besson, 2014)  
READ Elizabeth Grosz, from *Volatile Bodies* (1994)

**W 3/4:** VIEW *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013)  
READ Rosi Braidotti, from *Metamorphoses* (2002)

## Week 10: Futures of Female Sexuality

**M 3/9:** VIEW *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013)  
READ Elizabeth Grosz, from *Time Travels* (2005)

## Week 11: Exam Week

**Th 3/19:** POST **Final Paper** (due by 11am over Canvas)  
For 373 students: ≈2400 words, standard bibliography  
For 350 students: ≈3000 words, annotated bibliography

**PLEASE NOTE:** GSS will host Lee Edelman and Elizabeth Grosz on campus in Spring 2015!