

UWO ✦ Fall 2015 ✦ MIT 3437F

SCIENCE FICTION TV

Tuesdays 12:30-3:30 ✦ UCC 60

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Science fiction is the most exciting genre of popular narrative over the last fifty years because it ceaselessly speculates about the future of the human race and how science and technology could alter the way we work, travel, communicate, make love, make war, and entertain ourselves. This course will examine

the history of SFTV from the 1950s to today by examining representative episodes from key series as “fantastic dialogues” situated in alternate realities. These dialogues take a variety of forms: social and political commentaries on the issues of the day (the Cold War, the “War on Terror”); metaphysical speculations about the nature of god and the cosmos; psychological speculations about the nature of the self; critiques of the power of technology on our lives; debates about narrative naturalism; debates over sexual and racial equality; and connections between present events and mythic or historical archetypes. Each week we’ll screen an episode, relating that episode to its series, its times, and to the fantastic dialogues it engages. This course will emphasize student participation and knowledge of the course materials.

Text

Doug Mann, ed. *Science Fiction Television Reader* (courseware).

Workload

Reports: 20% (10% each, one before Halloween, one after)

Participation: 10% (or replace with report)

Essay (10 pages, due December 8): 35%

Exam (2.5 hours): 35%

Your Viewing Schedule (one topic in the second half of the course will probably be cut)

Classic Science Fiction

1. Welcome to the Twilight Zone

“To Serve Man”, episode 89, 1962 and “Eye of the Beholder,” episode 42, 1960, *The Twilight Zone*. We’ll also define SFTV, list its four ages, and look at the fantastic dialogues discussed in the course.

Readings: * 1. Marc Scott Zicree. “To Serve Man” and “Eye of the Beholder.” *The Twilight Zone Companion*. New York: Bantam Books, 1982, pp. 235-237, 144-149. * 2. Damon Knight. “To Serve Man.” *The Best of Damon Knight*. New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1976, pp. 11-17.

* 3. “Introduction,” “The Eye of the Beholder” (photo-essay) “America’s Twilight Zone” (by J. Hoberman). Arlen Schumer, *Visions from the Twilight Zone*. New York: 1990, pp. 18, 21, 23, 58, 63, 74, 75, 82, 87-92, 147-151, 154-160. * 4. M. Keith Booker. *Science Fiction Television*. Westport Conn.: Praeger, 2004. “Early Predecessors to *The Twilight Zone*: The Birth of SFTV,” pp. 1-17.

2. The Enemy Within

“The Enemy Within,” *Star Trek* episode 11, 1966.

Readings: * 1. Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen. "Chapter 4 - Demons and Doppelgangers: The Inexorable Self." *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos*. Westport: Praeger, 1998, pp. 63-79. * 2. Judith Barad and Ed Robertson. "Kirk Finds the Golden Mean." *The Ethics of Star Trek*. New York: Perennial, 2002, pp. 96-114. * 3. Sigmund Freud. "I The Psychical Apparatus" and "II The Theory of the Instincts." *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1989, pp. 15-21. * We'll also take a Irwin Allen's fantastic voyages: *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Lost in Space*, *Time Tunnel*, and *Land of the Giants*.



3. The Enemy Without

"Errand of Mercy," *Star Trek*, episode 26, 1967.

Readings: * 1. Chris Gregory. "Liberalism, the new frontier and the American Dream: political themes in *Star Trek*." *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 160-167. * 2. Rick Worland. "Captain Kirk: Cold Warrior." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 16.3 (1988): 109-117. * 3. Mark P. Lagon. "'We Owe It to Them to Interfere': *Star Trek* and U.S. Statecraft in the 1960s and the 1990s." *Extrapolation* 34.3 (1993): 251-264. * 4. Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen. "Chapter 8 - Up the Long Ladder: Evolution, Progress, and Destiny." *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos*. Westport: Praeger, 1998, pp. 139-159.

4. Resistance is Futile

"The Best of Both Worlds", last 10 minutes of Part I; Part II, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Readings: * 1. Booker, *Science Fiction Television*, Chapter 3, pp. 94-106. * 2. Chris Gregory. "American Dream." *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives*, New York, 2000, pp. 167-180.

Paranoid SFTV (Trust No One)

5. By Your Command

"The Living Legend" Part 2, *Battlestar Galactica* (1978), episode 13, 1978.



Readings: * 1. James E. Ford. "Battlestar Galactica and Mormon Theology." *Journal of Popular Culture* 17.2 (1983): 83-87. * 2. A. M. Dellamonica. "Stripping the Bones." *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collections of Thoughts and Opinions on Battlestar Galatica*. Ed. Richard Hatch, Dallas: Benbella Books, 2006, pp. 161-169. We'll also look at British SFTV in the 1970s: *UFO*, *Space 1999*, *Blake's 7*.

6. So Say We All

"33", *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) episode 3, 2005.

Readings: * 1. John Hodgman. "Ron Moore's Deep Space Journey." *New York Times Magazine*, July 17, 2005: 32-37. * 2. Eric Greene. "The Mirror Frakked." *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collections of Thoughts and Opinions on Battlestar Galatica*. Ed. Richard Hatch, Dallas: Benbella Books, 2006, pp. 5-22. * 3. Lou Anders. "The Natural and the Unnatural: Verisimilitude in *Battlestar Galactica*." *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collections of Thoughts and*

Opinions on Battlestar Galatica. Ed. Richard Hatch, Dallas, 2006, pp. 83-94.

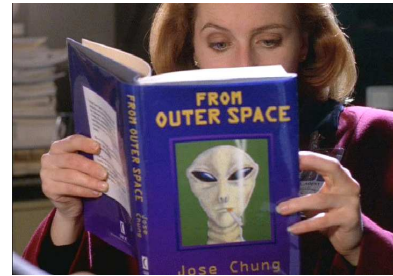
7. Be Seeing You

"Free for All," *The Prisoner* episode 4, 1967. **Readings:** * 1. "Prisoner of *The Prisoner*" (by Roger Langley), "We Are Living in the Village" (by Christian Durante), "Episode Four: Free for All." Alain Carraze and Helene Oswald. *The Prisoner: A Televisionary Materpiece*. Trans. Christine Donougher. London: W H Allen/Virgin, 1990, pp. 12, 14, 20-22, 65-72, 230. * 2. Sue Short. "Countering the Counterculture: *The Prisoner* and the 1960s." *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide*. Eds. John R. Cook and Peter Wright. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, pp. 71-92.

8. The Truth is Out There

"Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'," *The X-Files* episode 3.20, 1996.

Readings: * 1. Erich Goode. "Why Was *The X-Files* So Appealing?" *The Sceptical Inquirer* 26.5 (Sept/Oct 2002): 48-50. * 2. Joe Bellon. "The Strange Discourse of *The X-Files*: What It Is, What It Does, and What Is at Stake." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16 (1999): 136-154. * 3. Christy L. Burns. "Erasure: Alienation, Paranoia and the Loss of Memory in *The X-Files*." *Camera Obscura* 45 (2001): 195-225. * 4. Doug Mann. "Truth, *The X-Files*, and the Postmodern Condition." *Mid-Atlantic Almanack* 7 (1998): 17-27.



9. Through a Glass, Darkly: *Orphan Black* and *Black Mirror*

Clips from *Orphan Black* 1.1, opening of S3. "15 Million Credits," *Black Mirror* episode 1.2.

* 1. Ariana. "Who am I? Postmodern Ideology and Identity in *Orphan Black*." *Red Herry* May 17, 2014, www.redherry.com. * 2. Charlie Brooker. "The Dark Side of Our Gadget Addiction." *The Guardian*, December 1, 2011. * 3. Terri Murray. "Black Mirror Reflections." *Philosophy Now* 97, 2013. * 4. Marshall McLuhan. "Narcissus as Narcosis". *Understanding Media* C3.

Voyagers

10. Through the Looking Glass: *Sliders* and *Stargate*

"Window of Opportunity." *Stargate: SG1* episode 4.6, 2000.

Readings: * 1. Jo Storm. "The World of *Stargate SG-1*." *Approaching the Possible: The World of Stargate SG-1*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2005, pp. 1-4. * 2. Kelly Walters, "I'm Not An Archetype but I Play One on TV," *Stepping Through the Stargate*, eds. P. N. Elrod and Roxanne Conrad, Dallas: Benbella Books, 2004, 155-170.

11. Rebels and Rogues Riding the Range

"Our Mrs. Reynolds," *Firefly*, episode 3, 2002.

Reading: * 1. Robert C. Taylor. "The Captain May Wear the Tight Pants, but it's the Gals Who Make *Serenity* Soar," pp. 131-137. * 2. John C. Wright. "Just Shove Him in the Engine, or the Role of Chivalry in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*," pp. 155-167. Both in Glenn Yeffeth and Jane Espenson Eds. *Finding Serenity: Anti-Heroes, Lost Shepherds, and Space Hookers in Joss Wheedon's Firefly*. Benbella Books, 2005. We'll also cover *Lexx* and *Farscape*.

12. *Doctor Who* vs. the Technological Totalitarians

"Genesis of the Daleks"/"The Age of Steel"/"The Pandorica Opens"/"A Good Man Goes to War." Readings: * 1. Deborah Pless. "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, Sponsored by TARDIS." *Doctor Who and Philosophy: Bigger on the Inside*. Eds. Courtland Lewis and Paula Smithka. Chicago: Open Court, 2011, pp. 351-359. * 2. Kevin S. Decker. "The Ethics of the Last of the Time Lords." *Doctor Who and Philosophy: Bigger on the Inside*, Open Court, pp. 133-143. * 3. Bonnie Green and Chris Wilmott. "The Cybermen as Human.2." *New Dimensions of Doctor Who: Adventures in Space, Time and Television*. Ed. Matt Hills. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013, pp. 54-70.



13. Occupying the Past: *Continuum*

"Pilot," *Continuum* 1.1, 2011.

Reading: * 1. Roger Hunt. "Continuum and Philosophy: The Lessons of Time Travel."



Essays

Write a 8-10-page (11-12 point, typed) essay on one of the following topics. Read my essay-writing hints on writing cultural theory papers at <http://publish.uwo.ca/~dmann>, and make sure you take some sort of position in your papers. Due December 8. Late penalty = 2% per day based on when it's either stamped by a secretary or I get it, no excuses or extensions, gnashing of teeth or cries of anguish! I expect you to use ALL the course materials listed above in your papers that are related to the series you've chosen to write about.

1. Critically evaluate how *The Twilight Zone* engaged in dialogues about either technological progress, totalitarianism, or the dangers of mass consumer culture. Do these dialogues still speak to us today?
2. Chart the changes in political values from the original *Star Trek* to one or two of the later series – *STNG*, *DS9*, *Voyager*, or *Enterprise* – referring to a number of key episodes in each series you look at.
3. What view of human evolution do we get in “Errand of Mercy” (*Star Trek*)? Compare this to at least two other evolution-related episodes from *Star Trek* or *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, e.g. “The Cage,” “Where No Man Has Gone Before” or “Arena.”



4. What view of the self does *Star Trek* give us? Discuss three or four of “The Enemy Within,” “Mirror Mirror”, “The Naked Time”, “Wolf in the Fold”, “Dagger of the Mind,” “Elaan of Troyius”, “The Cage”.
5. Using “Errand of Mercy” and a few other original series *Star Trek* episodes, answer a simple question: is Captain Kirk the archetypal American cold warrior?
6. What sort of dialogue about sexuality and gender relations do we see in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*? Is this an advance on the dialogue presented in *TOS*, given the status of women at the time of each series, i.e. the 1960s and 1980s?
7. Do the Borg represent our fears about the invasion of body by modern technology? Have we become more Borg-like (e.g. by becoming reliant on cell phones and other portable devices, the Internet, e-mail, etc.)?
8. Was the original *Battlestar Galactica* a failure as a SFTV show for adults? Compare and contrast it to one or two British SFTV series from the 1970s: *Doctor Who*, *UFO*, *Space: 1999*, or *Blake's 7*.
9. Can the revived *Battlestar Galactica* of 2003 be seen as significantly more “realistic” or “naturalistic” series than either the earlier *BG*, *Star Trek: TNG*, or *Star Trek: Voyager*? Why or why not?
10. Critically discuss the spiritual elements in both *Battlestar Galactica* series. Do they each present a coherent cosmology or theology? Explain why or why not.
11. How does the new *Battlestar Galactica* act as a dialogue about the recent American-led “war on terror”? Are the Cylons stand-ins for Islamic fundamentalists?
12. Are we all living in the Prisoner’s Village? Discuss two or three episodes of *The Prisoner* which deal with social critique to answer this question: e.g. “Free for All” (democracy), “The General” (education), “Living in Harmony” (war), or “Fall Out” (class society and the counter-culture).
13. Does the revelation at the end of *The Prisoner* that No. 1 is a doppelganger of No. 6 make sense?
14. Is *The X-Files* a case of SFTV about alien invasion with some police procedural elements mixed in, or an “ontological detective story” as Bellon claims? Refer to several episodes.

15. Does *The X-Files* defend a postmodern epistemology against modern scientific empiricism? Does the series' attitude toward paranormal phenomena open it to the slings and arrows of outraged skeptical criticisms? Refer to both the episodes we watched and two or three more.

16. Why was *The X-Files*' atmosphere of paranoia and acceptance of the paranormal so popular in the 1990s? Does this say something about the collective consciousness of North Americans? Discuss several episodes to make your case.

17. Is Scully a sort of scientific dope to Mulder's mystic seer? Or is she an active interlocutor in the pair's attempt to find the truth? Use a few episodes as case studies.

18. How successful is *Orphan Black* at probing the question of personal identity in relation to the nature/nurture debate? Is this probe primarily focused on gender? Why or why not?

19. "*Black Mirror* is a cutting satire of the dangers of our post-millennial addiction to digital technology. We are, as it suggests, slaves to our black mirrors." Evaluate this statement in the light of at least three episodes of the series.

20. Discuss and evaluate *Stargate: SG1* as a dialogue with ancient myths and civilizations, focusing on one of the following ancient cultures: Egypt, Greece, the Norse, the Celts, pre-Columbian America (Mayans and Aztec). Does the show accurately depict this culture? Do some archaeological research.

21. Discuss in depth how the first two seasons of *Sliders* explores alternate sociological or scientific realities to open fantastic dialogues about either equality, freedom, the self, or the paranormal.

22. How successful is Joss Whedon's attempt to marry the SFTV and western genres in *Firefly*? Do westerns require chivalry? Do any of the characters in *Firefly* act in a chivalrous manner? Should they?

23. Discuss the role of the female characters in *Firefly*. Do they represent something entirely new in SFTV? Do Zoe, Kaylee, Inara and River symbolize a post-feminist consciousness?



24. Is the Doctor truly a British hero who will never catch on in an American mediascape outside of limited fan communities, or does he promote universal values associated with a heroic life? Where do Canadian fans stand in relation to the values of the seemingly indestructible Time Lord?

25. The Doctor is an enemy of technological totalitarianism, of an abandonment of the organic and emotions in favour of mechanical bodies (the Daleks, the Cybermen) and cold reason. Does this battle speak to us *more or less* in the age of digital networks in the 21st century (Eccleston, Tennant and Smith) than in the age of mechanical reproduction (Hartnell, Troughton and Baker)?

26. *Continuum* starts off in its first season seemingly defending the corporatist state of 2077 that Kiera Cameron and Liber8 come from. Over three seasons its writers slowly deconstruct the moral superiority of corporatism to "terrorism." Given the ideas of mass culture critics and the rise of ADD-style attention spans in network society, is this approach too subtle for a North American audience?

27. Compare two of the following Golden Age series in terms of technological or sociological naturalism: *Stargate SG1*, *Sliders*, *Firefly*, *Enterprise*, *Dark Angel*, *Farscape*, *Black Mirror*.

28. Compare and contrast two or three of the following SFTV captains: James T. Kirk, Commander Adama, Jean-Luc Picard, William Adama, Benjamin Sisko, Kathryn Janeway, Jonathan Archer, Malcolm Reynolds. Discuss their attitudes to one or two of the following issues: interference with local cultures, sex, violence, chivalry, diplomacy, hierarchy. Which captain is the best leader? Why?