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:**  

2. **The Enemy Within**

3. The Enemy Without

4. Resistance is Futile

Parano SFTV (Trust No One)

5. By Your Command

6. So Say We All

7. Be Seeing You
8. The Truth is Out There
“Jose Chung’s ‘From Outer Space’,” The X-Files episode 3.20, 1996.

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

Voyagers

10. Through the Looking Glass: Sliders and Stargate

11. Rebels and Rogues Riding the Range

12. Doctor Who vs. the Technological Totalitarians

13. Occupying the Past: Continuum
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.”


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 up 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?