

FM229: *Not of this World*: Aliens in Film

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 17.30 – 19.00; Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening); Wednesday, 17.30 – 19.00

Are we alone in the universe? Do other forms of (sentient) life exist beyond our home planet? Will there ever be an encounter between us and *them*? Are extraterrestrial civilizations and their envoys friendly or hostile? And will we be able to communicate? Fiction and film not only ask these dramatic questions so far unresolved by science, but have "answered" them many, many times, and in a wide variety of striking ways. Film history can be traced through the portrayal of the figure of the "alien," the creature from another planet, whether appearing as a lone entity or a massed horde. The alien crops up in the earliest manifestations of film, and features in its most popular iterations, whether as external or (quite literally) internal menace. Some explorations of the "sentient life beyond earth" story mark an absence where the alien might be expected to appear, hinting at an unknowable otherness, or even a nothingness onto which human obsession is projected. We ask about the cultural, psychological and political significance of these portrayals, as well as the technical and aesthetic transformation of film through the figure of the alien. Our voyage takes in early examples as well as modern classics by Stanley Kubrick, Nicolas Roeg, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, and more recently, Neill Blomkamp, Jonathan Glazer, Denis Villeneuve, and Jordan Peele.

Requirements

No prerequisites.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

*** Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes and film screenings is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment / Assignments

Two screening reports (1000 words each), due in week 3 (deadline for screening report # 1: Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 5:00 pm) and in week 7 (deadline for screening report # 2: Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 5:00 pm)

The topics of the screening reports will be announced before the screenings.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Friday, December 22, 2023, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

* **Please note: Graduating students** -- Deadline for final essay: Week 14, Sunday, December 17, 2023, midnight! *

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation:	33 %
Screening Reports:	33 %
Final Essay:	34 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.

If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

Schedule

* Tentative schedule depending on availability of films and intensity of class discussions

WEEK 1:

Introduction: *Not of This World* – UFOs and Aliens in Fiction and Film
Film as (Cultural) Representation (1)

No film screening in week 1!

WEEK 2:

War of the Worlds (1953, Byron Haskin)
War of the Worlds (2005, Steven Spielberg)

Film as (Cultural) Representation (2)
Different Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (1): Basic Model of Film Analysis

WEEK 3:

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951, Robert Wise)
The Thing From Another World (1951, Christian Nyby, Howard Hawks)

Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (2)

Screening report # 1, due Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 5:00 pm.

WEEK 4:

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956, Don Siegel)

Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (3)

WEEK 5:

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968, Stanley Kubrick)

Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (4)

WEEK 6:

Solaris (1972, Andrei Tarkovsky)

Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (5)

WEEK 7:

The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976, Nicolas Roeg)

Approaches to Film Analysis and Film Interpretation (6)

Screening report # 2, due Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 5:00 pm.

Fall Break: October 23 – October 29, 2023

WEEK 8:

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977, Steven Spielberg)

WEEK 9:

Alien (1979, Ridley Scott)

WEEK 10:

E.T. (1982, Steven Spielberg)

The Thing (1982, John Carpenter)

WEEK 11:

Cocoon (1985, Ron Howard)

They Live! (1988, John Carpenter)

Communion (1989, Philippe Mora)

Independence Day (1996, Roland Emmerich)

Starship Troopers (1997, Paul Verhoeven)

Contact (1997, Robert Zemeckis)

WEEK 12:

District 9 (2009, Neill Blomkamp)

Under the Skin (2013, Jonathan Glazer)

WEEK 13:

Arrival (2016, Dennis Villeneuve)

WEEK 14:

Nope (2022, Jordan Peele)

* Final essay (3000-3500 words), deadline for graduating students: Sunday, December 17, 2023, midnight! *

WEEK 15: Completion week (Monday, December 18 – Friday, December 22, 2023)

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Friday, December 22, 2023, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)
Please note: Graduating students -- Deadline for final essay: Week 14, Sunday, December 17, 2023, midnight!

Readings:

Allen, Richard and Murray Smith (eds.). *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Altman, Rick. "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." In: Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Fifth Edition. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 630-641.

Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing 1999 (reprint 2004).

Anijar, Karen. *Teaching toward the 24th Century. Star Trek as Social Curriculum*, New York/London: Falmer Press, 2000.

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 299-318.

Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema". In: André Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 23-40.

Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Vol. I & II. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1971.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In: Leo Braudy / Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 731-751.

Blandford, Steve, Barry K. Grant and Jim Hillier. *The Film Studies Dictionary*. London/New York: Arnold, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Booker, M. Keith. *Science Fiction Television*. Westport/London: Praeger, 2004.

- Bordwell, David. "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 17-34.
- Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Seventh Edition. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Brown, Larry A. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016.
- Buckland, Warren. *Directed by Steven Spielberg. Poetics of the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster*. New York / London: Continuum 2006.
- Burch, Noël. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 220-227.
- Cartmell, Deborah, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.). *Alien Identities. Exploring Differences in Film and Fiction*. London/Sterling, VA: Pluto Press 1999.
- Decker, Kevin S., and Jason T. Eberl (eds.). *The Ultimate Star Trek and Philosophy. The Search for Socrates*. Malden/Oxford/Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.
- Easton, Lee, and Randy Schroeder (eds.). *The Influence of Imagination. Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy as Agents of Social Change*. Jefferson/London: McFarland & Company, 2008.
- Eberl, Jason T., and Kevin S. Decker (eds.). *Star Trek and Philosophy. The Wrath of Kant*. Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 2008.
- Elsaesser, Thomas, and Warren Buckland. *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*. London: Arnold Publishers, 2002.
- Fischer, William B. *The Empire Strikes Out: Kurd Lasswitz, Hans Dominik, and the Development of German Science Fiction*. Bowling Green (Ohio): Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984.
- Frampton, Daniel. *Filmosophy*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'." In: *Art and Literature. Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*. The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 14, edited by Albert Dickson. London/New York: Penguin, pp. 335-376.
- Gibbs, John. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York: Wallflower Press 2003.
- Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." [1986] In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990, pp. 56-62.
- Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. Third Edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Hill, John, and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.). *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

- Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters. Interpreting otherness*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.
- King, Geoff, and Tanya Krzywinska. *Science Fiction. From Outerspace to Cyberspace*. London/New York: Wallflower, 2002.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler. A Psychological History of the German Film*. Revised and expanded edition. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. [1960] Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Kuhn, Annette (ed.). *Alien Zone. Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. London/New York: Verso, 2003.
- Lebeau, Vicky. *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Play of Shadows*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002.
- Litch, Mary M. *Philosophy Through Film*. New York/London: Routledge, 2002.
- McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press, 1996.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1994.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Monaco, James. *How To Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Morris, Nigel. *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg. Empire of Light*. London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2007.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *On Film*. London/New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 198-209.
- Nelmes, Jill (ed.). *An Introduction to Film Studies*. Third edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey (ed.). *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Penley, Constance, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel and Janet Bergstrom (eds.). *Close Encounters. Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*. Minneapolis/Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Porter, Burton F. *Philosophy Through Fiction and Film*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education/Prentice Hall, 2004.
- Read, Rupert, and Jerry Goodenough (eds.). *Film as Philosophy. Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

- Rickman, Gregg (ed.). *The Science Fiction Film Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, 2009.
- Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction*. London/New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Rose, Mark (ed.). *Science Fiction. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976.
- Rosen, Philip (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Rowlands, Mark. *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe. Philosophy Explained Through Science Fiction Films*. London: Ebury Press, 2005.
- Sanders, Steven M. (ed.). *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Films*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Sardar, Ziauddin, and Sean Cubitt (eds.). *Aliens R Us. The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*. London/Sterling (VA):Pluto Press, 2002.
- Smith, Murray, and Thomas E. Wartenberg (eds.). *Thinking Through Cinema. Film as Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006.
- Sobchack, Vivian. *Screening Space. The American Science Fiction Film*. Second Edition. New Brunswick/New Jersey/London: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Telotte, J. P. *Science Fiction Film*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Thompson, Kristin, and David Bordwell: *Film History. An Introduction*. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (Higher Education), 2003.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E., and Angela Curran (eds.). *The Philosophy of Film. Introductory Text and Readings*. Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2005.

Essay Deadlines

Screening report # 1 (1000 words): Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 5:00 pm

Screening report # 2 (1000 words): Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 5:00 pm

Final essay (3000-3500 words): Friday, December 22, 2023, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

Graduating students: Sunday, December 17, 2023, midnight!