

FM 340 *Rage Against the Machine: Robots, Computers and AI in Film*

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst

Email: m.hurst@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Tuesday (film screening) 19.30 – 22.00; Wednesday, 15.45 – 19.00

Lecture Hall (P98a)

A traditional, even primordial motif in literature and film, the artificial human has today become a fascinating subject not only of fiction but of a range of other discourses and practices, from natural science to economic development. As replications or Doppelgängers of human beings, such robots, computers and AI exist both in fantastic stories and in reality, invading and influencing ever larger domains of human life and endeavor. What once was pure fiction is now applied science. In films, figures like androids and cyborgs are more than mere machines; they operate as critical reflections on the possibilities and limits of technological progress and embody the central ideas of posthumanism. Through the (iconic and emblematic) figure of the robot, the genre of science fiction has addressed changing cultural attitudes toward technology, the human body and gender roles, as well as commenting on the phenomenon of consciousness and the nature of human intelligence. In this course we watch and discuss films such as *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), *A.I.* (2001), *Her* (2013) and *Ex Machina* (2015), which tell stories of robots, computers and AI and thus explore both the glorious potential and the imminent dangers of the interplay between human creativity and technological invention.

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory, and film analysis. Readiness to do independent research.

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 may 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

Individual presentations in class, based on independent research and the film screenings (starting in week 5).

Midterm essay (1500-2000 words), due in week 7, Friday, March 15, 2024, midnight.

The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Friday, May 17, 2024, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** -- Deadline for final essay: Week 13, Sunday, May 5, 2024, 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:	25 %
Presentation:	25 %
Midterm Essay:	25 %
Final Essay:	25 %

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, presentations and intensity of class discussions

WEEK 1:

Introduction (1): Robots, Computers, AI: Fictions of the Almost Human

Simone (2002, Andrew Niccol)

WEEK 2:

Introduction (2): Film Analysis and Different Modes of Film Interpretation

Origins: *Metropolis* (1927, Fritz Lang)

WEEK 3:

Workshop "Research Strategies" with Jen Vander Heide (Learning Commons Coordinator)

Man vs. Machine: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, Stanley Kubrick)

WEEK 4:

Workshop "Presentations" with Jen Vander Heide (Learning Commons Coordinator)

The Modern Frankenstein: *Saturn III* (1980, Stanley Donen)

WEEK 5:

The Ultimate Computer: *Colossus – The Forbin Project* (1970, Joseph Sargent)

WEEK 6:

The Stepford Wives (1975, Bryan Forbes)

Demon Seed (1977, Donald Cammel)

WEEK 7:

Tron (1982, Steven Lisberger)

WEEK 8:

Blade Runner (1982, Ridley Scott)

Spring Break: March 25 – April 1, 2024

WEEK 9:

The Terminator (1984, James Cameron)

WEEK 10:

Ghost in the Shell (1995, Mamoru Oshii)

WEEK 11:

A.I. (2001, Steven Spielberg)

Her (2013, Spike Jonze)

WEEK 12:

Transcendence (2014, Wally Pfister)

WEEK 13:

Ex Machina (2015, Alex Garland)

No class on Wednesday, May 1, 2024 (Public Holiday)

Final Essay deadline (Graduating students only): Sunday, May 5, 2024, midnight

WEEK 14:

I'm Your Man (Ich bin Dein Mensch), 2021, Maria Schrader)

The Creator (2023, Gareth Edwards)

WEEK 15 (Completion week, May 13 – 17, 2024)

Final Essay deadline: Friday, May 17, 2024, 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. *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.
- Bloom, Steven D. *The Physics and Astronomy of Science Fiction. Understanding Interstellar Travel, Teleportation, Time Travel, Alien Life and Other Genre Fixtures*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Kirby, David A. *Lab Coats in Hollywood. Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. Cambridge (Massachusetts)/London: The MIT Press, 2011.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. [1960] Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1997.
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- Litch, Mary M. *Philosophy Through Film*. New York/London: Routledge, 2002.
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- Micali, Simona. *Towards a Posthuman Imagination in Literature and Media. Monsters, Mutants, Aliens, Artificial Beings*. Oxford/Bern/Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. *Replications. A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
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- 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

Midterm Essay (1500-2000 words): Week 7, Friday, March 15, 2024, midnight

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