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Spring 2021

## HSS 403-464: Speculative Technologies in Science Fiction

Catherine Siemann

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## HSS403.452 & .464 Lit Seminar: Speculative Technologies in Science Fiction

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Siemann  
Office: Central King Building G17B  
Office Hours (via Webex): M 1-2  
& by appointment

Class: Asynchronous Online  
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**Course Description:** Welcome to Speculative Technologies in Science Fiction. In course, we'll be reading and using Canvas to discuss science fiction that deals with speculative technologies: space travel, communication, artificial intelligence, human survival on Mars, and more.

**Instructional Objectives:** As a senior capstone class, we will focus both on the substantive material we'll be reading and viewing, and on your communications skills as demonstrated in our Canvas discussions:

- To examine speculative technologies, as presented in science fiction, in connection with the contemporary technologies you have studied, or are otherwise interested in, and to consider the connection between imagination and innovation.
- To use Canvas to discuss your ideas with your classmates and your professor.
- To create a class presentation on the future of a specific technology of your choosing.
- To create a final research paper centered on the speculative technologies as presented in a science fiction text or film.

### Course Requirements:

35% - class participation through Canvas

15% - class presentation (slideshow with voiceover recorded in Kaltura)

50% - Final Essay, including specific assignments

### Grades and Grading Profile:

*All grading will be done numerically. If an assignment is worth 5%, it will receive a grade from 1 to 5. These grades will then be added at the end of the semester for the final grade. Please note that while your individual grades will be recorded in the Canvas Gradebook, your grades will be calculated according to the percentages given above.*

A = 90-100                      C = 70-76

B+ = 87-89                     D = 60-69

B = 80-86                      F = 0-59

C+ = 77-79

### Class Policies:

*Participation:* You are required to participate in all class activities, including the discussions on Canvas, in a timely manner. There is a point allotment for each exercise. Posting and responding on Canvas is the equivalent of class attendance and participation.

*Courtesy:* In an on-line class, just as in a class which meets in person, you must be respectful of your classmates and of me. That does not mean you may not disagree with them or with me, but rude or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

*Lateness:* All assignments, including the Canvas discussions, the online class presentation, and the final paper, must be submitted on or before the specified deadline. **Points will be deducted for late assignments. I will be unable to grant extensions on your final research paper.**

### **NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity:**

**Academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:**

**<https://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>**

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing, or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu)

### **Office Hours:**

I can meet with you via Webex or telephone by appointment. Email me to schedule either – [siemann@njit.edu](mailto:siemann@njit.edu)

### **Required Books:**

Chiang, Ted. *Exhalation*. NY: Vintage Books, 2019.

Weir, Andy. *The Martian*. NY: Broadway Books, 2014.

You will need to buy (or borrow) these books. Any edition is acceptable; you may use an eBook edition, although print is preferable because of page number citations. All other readings will be posted to Canvas.

### **Resources:**

- All of your assignments will be posted via Canvas.
- The films we will be viewing for class are widely available via online and pay-per-view services.
- You should be familiar with and use the Purdue OWL, an excellent online source for issues of grammar, style, citations, etc. It can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- You will be required to use MLA page citations for your research paper.

### **Writing Center:**

During the pandemic, the Writing Center is operating on a fully online basis. We are open M-F and evening appointments are available up until 7pm M-Th. For more information, please go to our website. <https://www5.njit.edu/writingcenter/> Appointments can be scheduled via Navigate which can be reached through NJIT Pipeline or directly at <https://njit.campus.eab.com/> While Writing Center consultations are valuable for all writers, if you have not written a research paper since (or before) your first year in college, working with the Center is particularly recommended. There is no charge for these services.

## Schedule of Assignments:

Note: all readings will be posted to Canvas, except Ted Chiang, *Exhalation* and Andy Weir, *The Martian* as specified above.

### Week 1: 1/19-1/24 -- Introduction

Class Introduction  
Introductions Forum  
Questionnaire  
Watch: *2001: A Space Odyssey*  
Read: Stephenson, "Innovation Starvation"  
Discussion: *2001*/Stephenson

### Week 2: 1/25-1/31 – The Past of the Future, Part 1

*Star Trek* slideshow  
Watch: 2 episodes of *Star Trek*, one of the original 1960s series (TOS) and one of any sequel series of your choice. Season 3 of *Star Trek: Discovery* is particularly recommended, as it takes place many centuries after TOS. *Star Trek: Enterprise* and seasons 1 & 2 of *Star Trek: Discovery*, which take place before TOS should not be used, as the point is to see how the technology has evolved in the series.  
Read: Turney, "Imagining Technology"  
Kaku, "The Physics of the Impossible"  
Discussion: *Star Trek* and technoutopia  
Exploring Speculative Technologies – Considering Potential Presentation & Paper Topics

### Week 3: 2/1-2/7 -- The Past of the Future, Part 2

Read: Asimov, "Reason"  
Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains"  
Ellison, "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"  
Sawyer, "The Purpose of Science Fiction"  
Discussion: Sawyer & 2 of the stories  
Analysis of whichever story of the 3 you didn't write about in the Sawyer response

### Week 4: 2/8-2/14 – Cyberpunk

Read: Gibson, "The Winter Market"  
"Johnny Mnemonic"  
Watch: *Blade Runner*  
Discussions: Gibson, Cyberpunk, and Present-Day Technology  
*Blade Runner*

### Week 5: 2/15-2/21 – The Martian 1

Read: Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 1-9

Class Presentations  
Discussions: *The Martian*  
Class presentations responses

**Week 6: 2/22-2/28 – The Martian 2**

Read: Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 10-18  
Class Presentations  
Discussions: *The Martian*  
Class presentations responses

**Week 7: 3/1-3/7 – The Martian 3**

Weir, *The Martian*, ch. 19-26  
Class Presentations  
Discussions: *The Martian*  
Class presentations responses  
Forum: Final Essay Proposal

**Week 8: 3/8-3/14 -- Communications**

Read: Chiang, "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling" in *Exhalation*  
Watch: *Black Mirror*, episode TBD  
Discussions: Chiang "Truth"  
*Black Mirror*

**Spring Break**

**Week 9: 3/22-3/28 -- Attachment**

Read: Chiang, "The Lifecycle of Software Objects" in *Exhalation*  
Discussion: Chiang "Lifecycle"

**Week 10: 3/29-4/4 – Athletics**

Larson: "God Decay"  
Discussion: Larson  
Annotated Bibliography Due

**Week 11: 4/5-4/11 – The Cyber & The Human**

Read: Gunn, "Computer Friendly"  
Liu, "The Perfect Match" <https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/the-perfect-match/>  
Discussion: Gunn & Liu

**Week 12: 4/12-4/18 – Tony Stark's Technological Journey**

View: *Iron Man 1*

Discussion: *Iron Man* and Technology  
Rough draft due

**Week 13: 4/19-4/25 -- Posthumanism**

Read: Stross, "Rogue Farm"

or listen to it being read here: <https://escapepod.org/2009/07/11/ep206-rogue-farm/>

Hayles, excerpt from *How We Became Posthuman*

Watch: animated version of "Rogue Farm"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2wb2DQNJsk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2wb2DQNJsk&feature=emb_logo)

Discussion: "Rogue Farm," Posthumanism, and Why the Ending Was Changed

Individual conferences on Webex

**Week 14: 4/26-5/2 -- Steampunk**

Read: Padua – from *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage*

<https://sydneypadua.com/2dgoggles/comics/>

Discussion: Lovelace and Babbage

Individual conferences on Webex

**Week 15: 5/3-5/4**

*Final Paper Due 5/4 via Canvas submission*