

Academic Year: 2020/2021 (Semester 2)  
Study Year: N.A  
Course Code/Title: HL8025 Utopias and Dystopias: Literature and Film  
Academic Unit: 3 AU  
Pre-requisite: NIL

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### HL8025 Utopias and Dystopias: Literature and Film

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[Lectures: 39 hours; Pre-requisites: Nil; Academic Unit: 3.0]

**Lecturer:** Ho Jia Xuan

#### **Overview:**

This course examines the ways in which utopian visions of the future often critique human obsessions with power and perfectibility. It will explore the prevalence of Utopian narratives throughout history, focusing on how they have shifted with the advancement of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century developments in mass infrastructure and housing, “cheap” nuclear energy, space exploration, robotics, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and big data analysis. It seeks to come to terms with the idea that while any society would reject social/political development which force them to give up free will though pain and torture, these same societies might be more tempted by a life of pleasure, peace and absence from fear even if they came at the expense of other social liberties. Using close reading of literature and film this course will discuss what such visions of the future say about the ever-shifting moral and ethical codes which accompany social and political change—change which seems to occur with increasing frequency during periods of rapid technological growth.

#### **Course Aims:**

At the end of this course students will have:

- 1) An awareness of how structures of power and control function through visions of utopias and dystopias in the context of race, class and gender relations.
- 2) An awareness of the historical and cultural contexts that create and construct these works of utopic and dystopic fiction
- 3) An ability to analyse and evaluate different iterations and characteristics of utopian fiction through literary, filmic, and visual texts.

#### **Student Assessment Students will be assessed by:**

- a. Mid-Term essay (50%)
- b. Final 2-hour written examination (50%)

#### **Primary Reading List**

Peter Fitting, “What is Utopian Film? An Introductory Taxonomy”  
Thomas More, *Utopia* (Excerpts)  
George Orwell, *1984*, Penguin Books, 2013  
Isaac Asimov, selected short stories from *I, Robot*

#### **Primary Filmography List**

William Cameron Menzies, *Things to Come* (1936)

Spike Jones, *Her* (2013)  
 Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, *Matrix* (1999)  
 Gary Ross, *Pleasantville* (1998)  
 James McTeigue, *V for Vendetta* (2005)  
 James Cameron, *Avatar* (2013)  
 Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982)  
 Peter Weir, *The Truman Show* (1998)

### Secondary Reading List

Barbara Goodwin, Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice*  
 Marinela Freitas, *Utopia Matters: Theory, Politics, Literature, and the Arts*

Week	Topic	Lecture
1	<b>Introduction: Conceptualising Utopia/Dystopia</b>	Reading(s) Sir Thomas More, Excerpts from <i>Utopia</i> Peter Fitting, "What is utopian film? An Introductory Taxonomy" Film(s): William Cameron Menzies, <i>Things to Come</i> (1936)
2	<b>An Imperfect World of the Future</b>	Reading(s): Isaac Asimov, selected short stories from <i>I, Robot</i>
3	<b>The (Im)possibilities of Utopias through Technologies</b>	Film(s): Ridley Scott, <i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)
4	<b>Playing with Time: Causality and Dystopic Realities</b>  Essay Questions	Film(s): Robert Zemeckis, <i>Back to the Future Part II</i> (1989)
5	<b>A Time for Utopia</b>	Film(s): The Wachowskis, <i>Matrix</i> (1999)
6	<b>Totalitarian Dystopia</b>	Novel: George Orwell, <i>1984</i>
7	<b>For the Greater Good: Surveillance in Society</b>	Film(s): Gary Ross, <i>Pleasantville</i> (1998)
RECESS WEEK		
8	<b>Illusions of Utopia</b>	Film(s): Peter Weir, <i>The Truman Show</i> (1998)

9	<b>Futility of resistance</b>  Essay Due	Film(s): James McTeigue, <i>V for Vendetta</i> (2005)
10	<b>Transcending and Transgressing Human Bodies/Boundaries</b>	Film(s): Spike Jones, <i>Her</i> (2013)
11	<b>Gender and Sexuality: Utopias for Desires</b>	Film(s): San Junipero (Black Mirror Season 3, Ep 3)
12	<b>Utopic/Dystopic Ecologies</b>	Film(s): James Cameron, <i>Avatar</i> (2013)
13	<b>Course Review</b>	