HL8025 Utopias and Dystopias: Literature and Film

[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 20th and 21st 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)
Isaac Asimov, selected short stories from I, Robot

Primary Filmography List
William Cameron Menzies, Things to Come (1936)

**Secondary Reading List**
Marinela Freitas, *Utopia Matters: Theory, Politics, Literature, and the Arts*

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<th>Week</th>
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| 1    | **Introduction: Conceptualising Utopia/Dystopia** | Reading(s): Sir Thomas More, Exceptions from *Utopia*  
Peter Fitting, “What is utopian film? An Introductory Taxonomy”  
Film(s): William Cameron Menzies, *Things to Come* (1936) |
| 2    | **An Imperfect World of the Future** | Reading(s): Isaac Asimov, selected short stories from *I, Robot* |
| 3    | **The (Im)possibilities of Utopias through Technologies** | Film(s): Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982) |
| 4    | **Playing with Time: Causality and Dystopic Realities** | Film(s): Robert Zemeckis, *Back to the Future Part II* (1989)  
Essay Questions |
| 5    | **A Time for Utopia** | Film(s): The Wachowskis, *Matrix* (1999) |
| 6    | **Totalitarian Dystopia** | Novel: George Orwell, *1984* |
| 7    | **For the Greater Good: Surveillance in Society** | Film(s): Gary Ross, *Pleasantville* (1998) |
|      | **RECESS WEEK** | |
| 8    | **Illusions of Utopia** | Film(s): Peter Weir, *The Truman Show* (1998) |
|    | **Futility of resistance**  
Enter Due | Film(s):  
|----|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 10 | **Transcending and Transgressing**  
**Human Bodies/Boundaries** | Film(s):  
| 11 | **Gender and Sexuality: Utopias for**  
**Desires** | Film(s):  
San Junipero (Black Mirror Season 3, Ep 3) |
| 12 | **Utopic/Dystopic Ecologies** | Film(s):  
| 13 | **Course Review** |  |