Science Fiction Cinema: Artificial Intelligence

Fall 2016

Anna Greenspan
ag158@nyu.edu

Course Description	This 7 week course is based on an analysis of Science Fiction films and related readings. Each term the course will explore a particular theme (e.g. time & technology; memory & identity etc.). In Fall 2016 we will focus on the emergence of artificial intelligence and the possibility of machinic consciousness.
Course Objectives	To introduce students: 1) to the importance of science fiction for speculative thought; 2) to key texts and ideas in the philosophy of AI
Grading Components	• 2 film reviews – 2 x 15 = 30% • 2 response papers/blog posts –2 x 15 =30% • Final Essay = 20% • Participation =20%

Course Schedule	
Week 1	
August 31	**Introduction** **Text:** What's Next for Artificial Intelligence?: Yann LeCun of Facebook, Luke Nosek of the Founders Fund, Nick Bostrom of Oxford University and Andrew Ng of Baidu on what life will look like in the age of the machines. *Wall Street Journal*. June 14 2016 **Film:** Kubrick, Stanley. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Adventure, Sci-Fi. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Stanley Kubrick Productions, 1968.
Week 2	

September 7	**Texts:** Turing, Alan. "Computing machinery and intelligence " Mind 59, no. 236 (2007): 433. Oppy, Graham, and David Dowe. 'The Turing Test'. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*. Spring 2016 Edition, 9 April 2003. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/turing-test/. **Film:** Sargent, Joseph. *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. Sci-Fi, Thriller. Universal Pictures, 1970. **Assignment 1 Due (Film Review):** Sunday Sept 11.
Week 3	
September 14	**Texts:** Searle, John. R. (1980) Minds, brains, and programs. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (3): 417–457 Cole, David, "The Chinese Room Argument", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/chinese-room/>. **Film:** *Wargames (1983)* **Assignment 2 Due (Blog Post):** Sunday Sept 15
Week 4	
September 21	**Texts:** Scientific American. *Understanding Artificial Intelligence*. Illustrated edition. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2002. Selections. **Film:** Cameron, James. *The Terminator*. Action, Sci-Fi. Cinema '84, Euro Film Funding, Hemdale, 1985. **Assignment 3 Due (Film Review):** Sunday Sept 25
Week 5	

September 28	**Texts:**
	Vinge, Vernor. "The coming technological singularity: How to survive in the post-human era." *Science fiction criticism: An anthology of essential writings* (1993): 352-363.
	Kurzweil, Ray. 'THE SINGULARITY: A Talk With Ray Kurzweil'. edge.org, 24 March 2001. https://www.edge.org/conversation/the-singularity.
	Chalmers, David J. "The Singularity." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17, no. 9-10 (2010): 7-65.
	Film:
	Jonze, Spike. *Her*. Drama, Romance, Sci-Fi. Annapurna Pictures, Stage 6 Films, 2014.
	Schneider, Susan. 'The Philosophy of "Her"'. *Opinionator* (blog), 2 March 2014. https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/the-philosophy-of-her/.
	Assignment 4 Due (Blog Post): Sunday Oct 2

Week 6

October 12	**Texts:**
	Omohundro, Stephen M. "The basic AI drives." In *AGI*, vol. 171, pp. 483-492. 2008.
	Yudkowsky, Eliezer. "Artificial intelligence as a positive and negative factor in global risk." *Global catastrophic risks* 1, no. 303 (2008): 184.
	Film:
	Garland, Alex. *Ex Machina*. Drama, Sci-Fi, Thriller. A24, Universal Pictures, Film4, 2015.

Week 7

October 19	**Texts:** Bostrom, Nick, and Eliezer Yudkowsky. "The ethics of artificial intelligence." In *Artificial intelligence safety and security*, pp. 57–69. Chapman and Hall/CRC, 2018. Khatchadourian, Raffi. 'The Doomsday Invention'. *The New Yorker*, 16 November 2015, sec. tags. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/doomsday-invention-artificial-intelligence-nick-bostrom. **Final Essay Due:** Sunday October 23

Assignment Notes: How to write a Review

Structure of a Review: by AO Scott (film reviewer from NYT)

Reviews can be playful or serious but many times have a similar structure. Understanding the structure can help you read and understand a review better. Here are a few parts to be aware of:

Lede

The lede is the first paragraph of the review. It can be funny, thoughtful, analytical, provocative, or explanatory, but it should never be boring. It should set the stage for the points that the critic will be making in the review.

Opinion Points

Critics interweave facts and opinions in a review. A piece that is mostly a summary of the plot of a movie, play, book, or a list of the songs performed in a concert or on an album, or a regurgitation of the checklist of an art show is a flawed review. What the critic thinks of the acting, the staging, the structure of a novel, the organization of an art show, the performances and special effects in a concert is what matters.

Type of Review

Is the review a positive review, negative review, or mixed review? Rave reviews and negative reviews are pretty obvious to the reader. Mixed reviews are harder to write and require a critic to clearly explain the positives and negatives of the work under scrutiny.

Kicker

The kicker is the last line of the review and critics work hard to make that last line memorable. But it should also fit the tone of the review. If a review has been a rave, a negative last line seems wildly out of place.

Writing on film Roger Ebert

8. **Write just a little bit about the filmmaking.** Movies and TV are stories told via pictures, sound and performance. They are not purely literary media. Don't just write about the characters and themes. Write about *how* the show makes its points, because sometimes the how *is* the point. If you didn't go to film school, don't worry. It is not necessary to guess what sort of lens a director used or whether a backdrop is real or created on a computer. I'm talking about the mood or style of the show, the pace, the music or absence of music, whether the camera is making the people seem big and important or small and weak, and the way people and objects are arranged in the frame to convey a particular emotional effect or send a message. Don't worry that you'll compromise your "brand," whatever that

might be, by writing about picture, sound and performance in addition to whatever else you've been focusing on. Writing about picture, sound and performance *will not detract* from any points you wish to make otherwise. It will only make your piece stronger. It will also unlock new levels of enjoyment as you watch.