

Spring 2024

## LIT 386-102, HM2: Science Fiction

Nancy SteffenFluhr

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## LIT 386-102/HM2 SCIENCE FICTION Spring, 2024

**INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Nancy Steffen-Fluhr**

Associate Professor, Humanities and Social Sciences Department  
Director, Murray Center for Women in Technology

**OFFICE:** Campus Center 265 (Murray Center)  
Virtual Office: <http://njit.webex.com/meet/steffen>  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays, 4 to 5:30 pm & by appointment  
**PHONE:** Cell: 201-919-4018 Landline: 973-208-9015  
**EMAIL:** [steffen@njit.edu](mailto:steffen@njit.edu)  
**COURSE CANVAS:** <https://njit.instructure.com/courses/34183>

**CLASS MEETINGS:** Tuesdays, 6:00-8:50 pm Cullimore Lecture Hall #1

**OFFICIAL ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY:** “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: <http://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)”

**BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In this course, we will analyze a set of science fiction novels, stories, and films in order to better understand the underlying cultural assumptions that drive the real-life US technological enterprise—with a special focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI).

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

Mary Shelley FRANKENSTEIN  
Ursula LeGuin LATHE OF HEAVEN  
Kazuo Ishiguro KLARA AND THE SUN  
Emily St. John Mandel STATION ELEVEN  
+ Online Course Pack (CP) of short stories

**NOTE:** The complete (free) E-Text of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is available at: <https://ia902908.us.archive.org/9/items/Frankenstein1818Edition/frank-a5.pdf> and at [https://archive.org/details/mary-shelley\\_frankenstein/page/n17/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/mary-shelley_frankenstein/page/n17/mode/2up)

**REQUIRED FILM VIEWING:** You are expected to see the assigned films/video clips on your own, at home or in your dorm. Some of the films are available for free at the URLs indicated in the syllabus. The others are available for a small rental fee on YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, iTunes, and/or Vudu, etc. You can also access some films through the NJIT Library. If you have trouble finding a given film, contact me. I will also screen several short films/videos in class. **Note:** the **2023 film *Poor Things*** is only in theaters for the moment. Please see it before March 5. (I’ll let you know if it becomes available to stream.)

### COURSE GRADING SCALE:

GRADE	POINTS
A	90-100
B+	88-90
B	80-87
C+	78-80
C	70-77
D	65-70
F	Below 65

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ GRADING (Here’s How You Earn Those 100 Points!)

Two analytical essays on assigned topics--

Essay #1: due February 27	20 points	
Essay #2: due April 30	20	
Midterm exam: March 5	20	
Cumulative Final Exam: May 7	25	
Weekly In-Class Quizzes	07.5	[10 quizzes @ 0.75 point each]

Weekly Class Participation Grade

07.5

[0.75 point/ week: See Rubric]

TOTAL

100 points

## COURSE APPS:

- **FLIPGRID MOBILE APP** To help jump-start the discussions that will we have in our face-to-face class sessions, I may ask several of you each week to do a **special homework assignment**: you will be asked to respond to a question on the week's reading/film by making a short, selfie-style video using a simple but powerful app called Flipgrid. The app is already embedded in our LIT 386 Canvas, so you don't need an individual Flipgrid account; however, if you are going to use a smartphone or tablet to record your videos, you will need to download the mobile version of the app. It comes in both IOS and Android flavors. **Here are the instructions:** <https://blog.flipgrid.com/gettingstarted>
- **CANVAS MOBILE APP** You can access Canvas directly from your desktop/laptop by going to [canvas.njit.edu](https://canvas.njit.edu) and logging in with your UCID. If you want to access Canvas from your smartphone or tablet, however, you will first have to download an app. Here's how: Go to the App Store on your iOS device or the Play Store on your Android device. Once you have downloaded the app, open it, tap Find my school, and then type in New Jersey Institute of Technology. When the full name appears in the search list, tap the name. The name of the university should appear in the search list. If it does not, then enter the following URL: [njit.instructure.com](https://njit.instructure.com).

**READING/ DISCUSSION SCHEDULE**

**NOTE ON READINGS & FILMS:** You should have completed the assigned reading and/or seen the assigned film by the date on which it is scheduled for discussion. That is, **you should have finished the novel *Frankenstein* by next week, January 23.**

**J16 Unit 1 What is SF?**

In-Class Film: "Frankenstein" (1931)

**J23 Unit 2 The "Mad Scientist Plot": Creators & Creations Part I****Book Reading:** Shelley. *FRANKENSTEIN*

In-class film: Excerpts from "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" (1994)

**J30 Unit 3 Creators & Creations Part II**

Film to stream: "Blade Runner" (1982) [See the complete film prior to class]

In-class film: "Metropolis" (1927) [excerpts]

**F6 Unit 4 Creators & Creations Part III**

Reading: CP #1 DelRey. "Helen O'Loy"

Film to stream: "Android" (1982)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr2FCaK\\_gTU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr2FCaK_gTU) [See the complete film prior to class]**F13 Unit 5 Creators & Creations Part IV**

Films to stream: "A.I.--Artificial Intelligence" (Spielberg, 2001) [See the complete film prior to class]

"Robot and Frank" (2012) [See the complete film prior to class]

Reading: CP #2 Turkle. "In Good Company"

**F20 Unit 6 Creators & Creations Part V**

Films to stream: "Her" (2013) [See the complete film prior to class]

"Ex Machina" (2014) [See the complete film prior to class]

Reading: CP #4 Minsky. "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?"

**F27 ESSAY #1 DUE****Unit 7 Creators & Creations Part VI**

In-Class Films: "The Original" (Westworld TV Pilot, 2016)

"Be Right Back" (Black Mirror TV Series 2)

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**M5** **MIDTERM EXAM** [1.5 hours]

In-Class film excerpts and discussion of the **2023 film *Poor Things*** (in theaters only)

**M12 SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

**NOTE: Begin reading KLARA AND THE SUN [due March 19] and LATHE OF HEAVEN [due April 2]**

**M19 Unit 8 Artificial Friends**

**Book Reading: Kazuo Ishiguro. *KLARA AND THE SUN***

Film to stream: *M3GAN* (2022) [See the complete film prior to class]

**M26 Unit 9 “White” Worlds: Dystopia, Part I**

Reading: CP #3 Forster. “The Machine Stops”

Film to stream: “Gattaca” (1997) [See the complete film prior to class]

In class film: “THX 1138” (1971) (excerpts) <https://vimeo.com/150086321>

**NOTE: Begin reading STATION ELEVEN [due April 25]**

**A2 Unit 10 Daoism & the Sustainable Planet**

**Book Reading: LeGuin. *LATHE OF HEAVEN***

**A9 Unit 11 Artificial Intelligence: Then and Now Part I**

Film to stream: *2001* (1968) [See the complete film prior to class]

Reading: Scott Aaronson Blog on AI Safety: <https://scottaaronson.blog/?m=202211>

**A16 Unit 12 Artificial Intelligence: Then and Now Part II**

Films to stream: *Max Headroom* (1985): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZY-yQYVf38>

*A Hard Problem* (2021)

In-Class Chatbot Demos

**A23 LAST CLASS**

**Unit 13 Pandemic!**

**Book Reading: St. John Mandel. *STATION ELEVEN***

**April 30 ESSAY #2 DUE**

**NO CLASS [Tuesday is Friday]**

**May 7 FINAL EXAM**