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ENG 5061-001: SF Avant-Gardes: New Wave and Cyberpunk

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English 5061, SF Avant-Garde: New Wave and Cyberpunk

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Office Hours: T 10:45-12, T 1:45-3:15, R 10:45-12, and by appointment

Texts

J.G. Ballard, Crash (Picador, 2001)
John Brunner, Stand on Zanzibar (Orb, 2011)
Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange (Norton, 1995)
Thomas M. Disch, Camp Concentration (Vintage, 1999)
William Gibson, Neuromancer (Ace Trade, 2000)
Heather Masri, Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008)
Joanna Russ, We Who Are About To . . . (Wesleyan, 2005)
Bruce Sterling, Schismatrix Plus (Ace Trade, 1996)

* Additional readings will be provided through library reserve, email, or photocopy

Course Description

In this seminar, we will examine the complex histories of two SF avant-garde movements, New Wave and cyberpunk. We will cover a range of significant New Wave/cyberpunk stories and novels, as well as secondary materials related to their genesis, reception, and impact. Our reading will encompass not only academic criticism but also criticism published in fanzines such as Richard E. Geis's Science Fiction Review and Bruce Sterling's Cheap Truth.

Assignments

Reading Journal 25%
Each class meeting (excluding T Jan 10, T Mar 20, T Apr 17, and T Apr 24), submit a 250- to 500-word reading journal entry. Use the journal to engage in close reading of key or difficult passages, and to record various observations and questions that come to mind as you read. Clearly indicate which part of the reading prompted your response, for instance, by indicating the first few words of the passage, indicating the text's author or title, and citing the page number: "This was a Golden Age . . ." (Stars 11). Keep the journal with an eye toward topics for the class to discuss. That is, focus on problems of interpretation, for example, "Why does Bester intercut his prose in chapter one with a snippet from a press interview, a repeated 'nursery jingle,' Gully Foyle's Merchant Marine record, and so on? What does he aim to achieve in terms of style and tone?" Try to respond to as many of the readings for each class as possible. State your ideas in clear sentences/questions/paragraphs, quoting where necessary. Write legibly or type each entry.

Biocritical Overview/Bibliography 25%
Choose an SF author of interest to you, either one included on the syllabus or one associated with (or strongly influenced by) New Wave or cyberpunk. Write a biocritical overview of the author's career. "Biocritical" means that you may make limited reference to an author's biography by way of explaining important aspects of his or her career, for instance, a lapse in productivity or a striking change in focus. A thorough biocritical overview will carefully reconsider an author's career rather than blandly reiterating critical orthodoxies; that is, it will comprise an argument. Your overview should determine the basis of the author's reputation, give a broad sense of the critical reception of the author's work at various points in his or her career, and reevaluate the author's contributions to SF in the context of recent developments in the field.

To the overview, attach a bibliography of 10-20 secondary sources. These sources may come from fanzines, SF magazines, newspapers, trade publications, academic journals, and/or the internet.
They may be reviews, criticism, interviews, obituaries, news items, or even articles, blogs, or letters the author has written about SF. However, you shouldn't choose them at random. Review as much of the material as possible and pick 10-20 of the most important sources for understanding the author's life and career.

**Research Project Proposal 25% and Presentation 10%**

Pick a topic related to the themes of the course, and consider one or two key stories or novels in that context. For instance, you could look at posthumanism in Sterling’s *Schismatrix* stories or Brunner’s approach to world construction (or “background”) in *Stand on Zanzibar*. Carefully review at least 10 of the most important sources on the topic to get a sense of the discussions that have taken place around that topic or text. What do critics explain poorly or miss? Come up with an original line of inquiry about the topic or text, or one that builds significantly on existing approaches. In your research proposal, explain this line of inquiry, engaging in close reading of primary and secondary texts, and giving examples that point toward what further research might uncover. In essence, your paper should create and justify a distinctive research agenda. It should encompass the kind of thinking, close reading, and exploratory work that one does before writing an article on a topic. The proposal should be 8-10 pages with a bibliography of a minimum of 10 secondary sources. Feel free to use a range of sources, as in the Biocritical Overview.

You will present the preliminary findings of your research to the class in a 15-20 minute presentation at the end of the semester. The presentation should give an overview of debates about the topic or text, outline your approach, and detail your preliminary findings using supporting examples.

**Participation 15%**

In a graduate seminar such as this one, good citizenship involves careful preparation of the reading and regular, measured contributions to class discussions (that is, comments that introduce, advance, or usefully complicate a specific line of inquiry into the subject matter).

Final grades will be calculated on a ten-point scale (i.e., 100 to 90 = A, 89.99 to 80 = B, and so on).

**Policies**

Late work: extensions on assignments will be granted at my discretion, that is, only in the case of truly extenuating circumstances. Presume that late work will not be accepted.

Absence: in a graduate seminar, any absence is excessive. If you must miss class, you should consult with me about the matter. Excessive absence may result in a significantly lower final grade.

Academic honesty: submit only original work in this class, and carefully document all sources according to the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook* or the 15th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**The Office of Disability Services**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

**Provisional Schedule**

Critical material about the stories and novels will be assigned on a week-to-week basis.

\[ SFSC = \text{Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts} \]

**Week 1**

T Jan 10  \quad Introduction to the course

**Week 2**

T Jan 17  \quad Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (1957)


**Week 3**

T Jan 24  \quad Rob Latham, from "Cyberpunk and the New Wave," *NYRSF* (June 2007)
Philip K. Dick, "Second Variety" (1953) in SFSC
Brunner, "Fair" (1956)
Brian W. Aldiss, "Another Little Boy" (1966)
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., "The Big Space Fuck" (1972)

Week 4
T Jan 31
Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), including Preface

Week 5
T Feb 7
Disch, *Camp Concentration* (1968)

Week 6
T Feb 14
Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968)

Week 7
T Feb 21
Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968)

Week 8
T Feb 28
J.G. Ballard, *Crash* (1973)

Week 9
T Mar 6
Samuel Delany, "Aye, and Gomorrah..." (1967)
Joanna Russ, *We Who Are About To...* (1977)

Spring Break
T Mar 13
No class

Week 10
T Mar 20
Due: Biocritical Overview/Bibliography

Week 11
T Mar 27
Donna Haraway, "An Ironic Dream" from "A Cyborg Manifesto" in SFSC (456-62)
Bruce Sterling, selections from *Cheap Truth* and *Schismatrix Plus:* "Swarm" (1982), "Spider Rose" (1982), and "Cicada Queen" (1983)

Week 12
T Apr 3
Greg Bear, "Blood Music" (1983)
Octavia E. Butler, "Bloodchild" (1984)
William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), chapters 1-4

Week 13
T Apr 10

Week 14
T Apr 17
Presentations

Week 15
T Apr 24
Presentations