

History 1Y: History of the Future

Fall 2016

Professor Burke

Swarthmore College

This course is an exploration of the intellectual, cultural and social history of the future, meaning, how people in the past (and still in the present!) have thought about and tried to control what the future would or should become. While we will start by trying to ask how universal or widespread concepts of the future are in human history, this class largely focuses on the period from 1800 to 2016. Modern societies, particularly Western Europe and the United States, have been more insistently concerned with envisioning and controlling the future.

History 1Y is a first-year seminar and a W course. Each week we will take time during class to practice a single skill or concept that is part of college-level work in history, in the humanities, or in general across the curriculum. Students will receive an assignment sheet each week about how to prepare for the next week's exercise. In addition, we will be doing a variety of writing during the semester, some of it in class, some of it outside of class time. The major written assignments are: 1) a response paper based on a prompt distributed by the professor; 2) an "elevator speech"; 3) annotations on a "scavenger hunt"; 4) a text analysis paper that is connected to the final research paper and 5) a 12-15 page research paper and various drafts, revisions and components of that paper beforehand. In addition, students will be preparing a poster about their final research paper and participating in an end-of-semester poster session in Science Commons.

Materials for each week are available either as purchased books from the college bookstore; as pdf files on the class Moodle; as resources accessible through Tripod; or as URLs to be looked at in a web browser. We will also be watching a number of films throughout the semester, with a standard screening time during the week.

You may use a laptop in class for note-taking. Do not look at materials that are not involved in the class discussion or undertake tasks like email or social media reading.

Because we meet only once a week, regular attendance is important. If you are going to miss more than one class session, be certain to discuss this in advance with the professor. Participation is also an important part of your work for the semester.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113) or email lhempli1@swarthmore.edu arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Week 1 (August 30)

Do all societies think about the future?

What is the point of having a specific idea of the future?

What do we think of when we hear “futuristic”, “the future”, etc?

Trope catalog

Montadon, *Jetpack Dreams*, Chapter Two [pdf, Moodle]

Week 2 (September 6)

The End of the World

John Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse*, Chapter Two, Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, Chapter Twelve **[Tripod]**

Matthias Riedl, “Joachim of Fiore’s Constitution of Future Society”,
http://www.revistamirabilia.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/2012_01_03.pdf

Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, Prologue **[Tripod]**

Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, (2013 edition), Chapter 1. **[Tripod]**

List of predicted dates:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dates_predicted_for_apocalyptic_event

From reading to discussion: Find one each of the following: something unclear, something interesting, something debatable. Find one paragraph worth reading closely.

Week 3 (September 13)

The Future Can Be Made: Enlightenment Futures

Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* [pdf]

Fourier, *Selections Describing the Phalanstery* [pdf]

Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World* [pdf]

Schlomo Avineri, "Marx's Vision of Future Society", *Dissent* 3: July 1973 [pdf]

Robert Heilbroner, *Visions of the Future*, pp. 49-66 [Tripod]

Thomas Malthus, "An Essay on the Principle of Population", Ch. 1, 2 and 9,
<http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>

Response paper preparation: coming up with a strategy, an outline and a writing plan.

Week 4 (September 20)

Technological Futures: From Verne to the Turn of the Century

Lady Henry Somerset, "The Position of Woman in the Twentieth Century", in Varty, ed., *Eve's Century* [pdf]

John Elfreth Watkins, "What May Happen in the Next Hundred Years", in Varty, ed., *Eve's Century* [pdf]

"Twelve Predictions For the Year 2000", <http://mentalfloss.com/article/57835/12-predictions-year-2000-19th-century-german-chocolate-company>

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* [pdf]

France in the Year 2000, <http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/france-in-the-year-2000-1899-1910/>

Jules Verne, "An Author Before His Time?", <http://www.unmuseum.org/verne.htm>

Reactions to the World's Colombian Exposition, 1893.
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/wce/reactions.html>

Walter, *Today Then: America's Best Minds Look 100 Years Into the Future* [pdf]

Intellectual vs. social history: what a few people said vs. what most people thought, and how to research those respectively

Response paper due

Week 5 (September 27)

High Modernist Futures

Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*

Corn and Horrigan, *Yesterday's Tomorrows* [pdf]

A Visual History of the Future,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/360814/14-814-future-cities-visual-history.pdf

"1939 World's Fair", <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/11/the-1939-new-york-worlds-fair/100620/>

In-class: *Metropolis*

Film screening: *Things to Come*

Deeper understandings: find at least two definitions or discussions of "high modernism".

Revision of response paper in-class

Week 6 (October 4)

High Modernist Futures II: Dystopia

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* [pdf]

Gregory Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia" [pdf]

Gordin, Tilley, Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Introduction **[Tripod]**

In-class: *1984*, *Logan's Run*, *Children of Men*, *Brazil*, *Gattaca*

Film screening: *Clockwork Orange*

How to deal with densely 'referential' readings in academic environments: a close reading strategy for Gordin et al

SPRING BREAK

Week 7 (October 18)

Go Into Plastics: Postwar Futurism

Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: The Futurism of Walt Disney,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwLznNpJz2I>

Disneyland, "Our Friend the Atom", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDcjW1XSXN0>

Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think",

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/>

"The Future World According to Radebaugh",

<https://atomicscout.wordpress.com/2014/01/19/the-future-world-according-to-radebaugh/>

"1964: The New York World's Fair", <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/06/1964-the-new-york-worlds-fair/100749/>

In-class: "Design for Dreaming", "The Jetsons", "Walt Disney Treasures: Tomorrowland", "Sleeper"

Film screening: *The Atomic Cafe*

Conceiving a research topic: how to test for interest, plausibility, suitability

Week 8 (October 25)

Prediction and Expertise

Daniel Bell, *Towards the Year 2000* [pdf]

Toffler, *Future Shock*, [pdf]

"A Bet, Five Metals and the Future of the Planet",

<http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2013/12/31/258687278/a-bet-five-metals-and-the-future-of-the-planet>

Film screening: *Soylent Green*

Synthesis: two “elevator speeches” that would describe this history as a narrative for someone who hadn’t studied the subject

One elevator speech due as a written text (no more than 1 page)

Week 9 (November 1)

Whatever Happened to the World of Tomorrow?

Brian Feis, *Whatever Happened to the World of Tomorrow?*

Warren Ellis, *Transmetropolitan* [pdf]

In-Class: *Futurama*, *The Road Warrior*, *Idiocracy*, *Terminator 2*, *Demolition Man*

Film screening: *Blade Runner*

Scavenger hunt: annotations on “trope searches”

Week 10 (November 8)

The Singularity

Murray Shanahan, *The Technological Singularity*

Vernor Vinge, “The Coming Technological Singularity”, <https://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/vinge/misc/singularity.html>

In-class: *Colossus: The Forbin Project*

Film screening: *Ex Machina*

Emic and etic: thinking with and about singularity thinkers

Week 11 (November 15)

The World Without Us: Imagining the Anthropocene

Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*

Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*

“Climate Change No Problem, Says Futurist Ray Kurzweil”, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/feb/21/ray-kurzweill-climate-change>

Research paper drafting workshop: from research materials to outlines to writing

Text analysis paper due

Week 12 (November 22)

The Return of Professional Futurism

James Othmer, *The Futurist*

World Future Society, <http://www.wfs.org/>

Futurism.com

Tom Vanderbilt, “Why Futurism Has a Cultural Blindspot”, <http://nautil.us/issue/28/2050/why-futurism-has-a-cultural-blindspot>

Rose Eveleth, “Why Aren’t There More Women Futurists?”, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/07/futurism-sexism-men/400097/>

Possible meeting with Bryan Alexander

In-class drafting of research paper

Week 13 (November 29)

Other Futurisms

Freedom From Futurism?

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/dec/07/afrofuturism-black-identity-future-science-technology>

Ziaddun Sardar, “The Problem of Futures Studies” and “Other Futures”, in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziaddun Sardar Reader* [pdf]

Arjun Appadurai, “The Future As Cultural Fact” [pdf]

Final paper work session; preparation of poster

Bring as much of a draft of your final paper as you have available; we will do peer critique.

Poster session: Date TBA

Final paper due by December 10

