In this course we will explore contemporary examples of the paraliterary genre of science fiction. Framed largely by the insights of Samuel Delany (using as a textbook his essay collection Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary), this seminar in some ways is a course investigating Delany’s theories of Science Fiction, theories we will put in conversation with other theorists (Baudrillard, Foucault, Benjamin, Haraway, etc.) as well as other novelists (and their science fiction texts). We will interrogate the very idea of “literariness” by reading more conventional science fiction alongside so-called “literary” science fiction (by authors like Jonathan Lethem & Philip K. Dick). We will be wary of the binary style/content, asking if a "story" can exist outside of its particular textual embodiment. Another focus will be "thematization," as science fiction is often thought of in terms of its "themes." Beginning the semester with Delany’s essay, “Neither the First Word nor the Last on Deconstruction, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Semiotics for SF Readers,” the class will consider Delany’s provocative claim that themes are “actually patterns that we always impose on text (i.e., the position is always a position we position)” (142). Thus, we will deconstruct (that is, make “radically undecidable”) science fiction’s most traditional themes: New Worlds, The Alien, Technology, Time, Space, and Utopia/Dystopia. Our guiding insight will be that these themes are signs, each “a political marker, a place to start the analysis that dissolves the border that allows us to recognize it in the first place”; with this in mind, we will ask how “the traditional notion of theme" blinds us to what Althusser calls "the problematic" of a text, eliding gaps and silences, constructing the novels and stories we will be reading as unified and coherent and rendering us—the readers—"ideologically passive." Plus, we will read a bunch of cutting-edge theory and super cool stories, and even discuss a handful of movies. I'd buy that for a dollar!

WARNING/TEASER: Be aware that in this course we will be discussing race, class, sexuality, politics, violence, love and other touchy subjects, along with more conventional literary topics such as aesthetic value and form. If you believe that discussing these issues in a rigorous, intellectual fashion might be too much for you, then consider taking another course this semester. However, you might also consider staying in the course and confronting/interrogating these issues alongside your sensitivities and their ideological and cultural roots. Regardless, if you ever feel that our discussions are needlessly offensive and/or unsettling, please come to my office hours and voice your concerns, especially if you feel that I or your classmates are not treating the issues with the sensitivity they deserve.
Books (Required)

Anderson, Matthew Tobin. *Feed.*
Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*
Delany, Samuel R. *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*
Dick, Philip. *Ubik*
Ellis, Warren. *Transmetropolitan* Vol. 01: "Back on the Street"
Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*
Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*
Lethem, Jonathan. *Gun, with Occasional Music*
Moore, Alan & David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta*
Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*

Books (Recommended)

Samuel R. Delany. Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary

Online Texts & Scans on Blackboard: Partial List (See Syllabus for All Scanned Pieces)

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra"
---. "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media"
---. "Simulacra and Science Fiction"
Benjamin, Walter. "The Flâneur"
Bradbury, R. "The Pedestrian"
Crumb, R. “The Religious Experience of Philip K Dick.”
Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Parts One & Two) [Online]:
   Part One: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm
   Part Two: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm
Delany, SR. “About 5,750 Words”
---. “Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction.”
---. "Letter to a Critic"
---. "Neither the First Word nor the Last on Deconstruction, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Semiotics for SF Readers"
---. "The Para Doxa Interview: Inside and Outside the Canon"
---. "The Politics of Paraliterary Criticism"
---. "Reading at Work: Cyborg Manifesto Response"
---. "To Read The Dispossessed"
---. "The Second Science-Fiction Studies Interview"
---. "Zelazny/Varley/Gibson--and Quality"
Foucault, M. "Different Spaces"
Gibson, W. “Burning Chrome.”
---. “Johnny Mnemonic"
Haraway, D. "Cyborg Manifesto"
Houellebecq, M. *HP Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*
Kaczynski, T. *Industrial Society and Its Future* (AKA: The Unabomber Manifesto)
Lovecraft, H.P. *The Whisperer in the Darkness*
Varley, J. “Overdrawn at the Memory Bank.”
---. “The Phantom of Kansas.”
---. “Press Enter.”
Zelazny, R. “The Doors of his Face, the Lamps of His Mouth”
---. “This Moment of the Storm.”
---. “This Mortal Mountain.”
---. “A Rose for Ecclesiastes”

**Attendance and Quizzes:**

Because the success of the class depends upon your discussion and interpretations of the various texts we encounter, you should attend every class session. I will compose tests based on what we do in the classroom—from my lectures and your comments and ideas. This course is designed to facilitate your learning; thus, we will spend a large amount of our time discussing and interrogating what you find interesting and compelling about the works I assign. Of course, I will lead our analysis, playing, at times, devil's advocate, providing you with various and sometimes contentious readings of the literature. You will be evaluated on how actively you participate in and extend our classroom discussions, so please come to class with something to say. I may give reading quizzes if it seems that the class is consistently unprepared.

**Late Work:**

Work will be turned in on the date due or not at all. We all have schedules, and it is imperative that we keep to them. However, I am not completely draconian. In extreme cases I may accept late work, but don't count on it.

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is taking someone else's words, idea, or argument and claiming it as your own. Don't do it unless you have a interesting and rigorous intellectual or aesthetical reason. Cite all your sources unless you discuss your appropriation with me first. Instances of plagiarism designed to avoid intellectual work will earn you an F for the course, and, in egregious cases, may result in expulsion from the university. Please familiarize yourself with SDSU plagiarism policies, discussed in your handbook. Throughout the syllabus and my links page are links to many useful web sources. Do not take the words or ideas from any of these sources without providing the appropriate citations unless, again, you discuss your aims with me first. This goes for oral presentations as well as written work.

**GRADES:**

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<tr>
<td>Tweets</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Grades &amp; Attendance</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Author/Book Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Term</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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**Tweets (15%):**

You need to write (at least) two (2) tweets every week. (Remember: these are just 140 characters—including any hashtags—so I'm not asking too much.) They should end with the hashtag

#SF409

Don't tag ME in your tweet unless you're specifically asking me something. Typically, you'll just use the #SF409 hashtag (or tag another classmate if you want
to tweet to them). I'll see what you've tweeted; I'll visit your Twitter page every week and count your class-related tweets.

**You should have tweeted at least twenty eight (28) times by the end of the semester.**

Your tweets for class should comment on or relate to the readings. Try to make each tweet individual, so it can stand by itself (that is, avoid multiple tweets that add up to one LONG, serialized tweet: the point is to craft concise, interesting commentary.)

Again: you can engage with your classmates, tweet to me, post links to relevant online commentary or whatever. Retweets don’t count as one of your weekly tweets. But please, do retweet. They’re not “for credit,” but they’re fun. (And if I retweet one of yours, you know it's especially good. ;-) Have fun with this part! Be imaginative and playful (or imaginative and serious). But don’t stress out about it. Mostly, it’s just a way for us to all interact on Twitter—like informal chatting before or after class. It’s a way for me to get to know you. Follow me as soon as you get your account up and running. You might want to create a special account especially for this class.

*Make sure the Twitter account you use for this class is PUBLIC:* if you have your account set as “private” no one will be able to see what you tweet (and you won’t get credit).

My Twitter handle is: @josephsdsu (And, yes, feel free to unfollow me as soon as the semester is over. There’s no harm in that.)

And remember: this is a large class. I’ve added this social media assignment to my courses to build community, to get you all talking to one another. So read each other’s tweets; follow each other; interact (if our class is full, every student in this class should have at least 60 followers).

**Daily Grades & Attendance (20%):**

If the class seems consistently unprepared (if our discussions aren’t lively and engaged with specifics from the readings and films) I may give you short (usually five question) quizzes. I might also give you short, in-class writing assignments before or after we begin discussing each work. These assignments count as quiz grades, and will be graded pass/fail. To earn a passing grade, you have to show a familiarity with the assigned text and some degree of critical engagement. In-class work cannot be made up.

**Group Author/Book Presentation (20%):**

In a group of five or six, you will select a book from our reading list and prepare a 15-minute report on it and the author. You will also prepare a one-page handout outlining important information. The form of your presentation and of your handout is up to you. Ideally, your presentation will help us segue into our discussion of the work at hand. Remember, you need to have fifteen minutes of discussion planned. You can go over, but I’d like you to be as close to fifteen minutes as possible. So rehearse and plan. These should be tight, well planned, and to the point. Important: this is a group presentation, yes, but it’s **one presentation.** That is, it’s not a collection of five or six mini
presentations that don’t have much to do with one another. So work together so that your presentation works as a coherent statement about the work.

In your presentation you’ll want to:
Discuss biographical information about the author (be selective, choosing details relevant to your overarching argument or position on the work)
Engage the historical moment in which the book was produced (again, be selective: talk about history and context when it relates to your overarching position on the work)
Use terms and concepts from the course
Relate the piece to other works we’ve read and discussed so far in the semester (make connections to previous discussions, yes, including previous critical essays, but when talking about previous works we’ve read or watched for class, also consider how your work relates to themes or scenes or ideas that we didn’t discuss class)

Mid-Term: (20%):

Your mid-term will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. If you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don’t expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

Final Exam (25%):

As with the mid-term, your final will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. Again, if you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don’t expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

Note:
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Final Comments:

This class should be challenging, but it should also be fun. Remember, I want you to do well. I don’t lecture too much; mostly I like to chat with you, to get your impressions, to help you to understand some of the complexities and subtleties that might not be obvious. I’m here to give you biographical and historical data that will enable you to make your interpretations and conceptions of science fiction more convincing, to show you how other critics interpret the literature, and maybe to tell you how I interpret it. I look forward to working with each of you.
**Weekly Syllabus**

**Tentative**

This schedule can change. However, all changes will be announced in class.

**Week One:**

*No Class*

**Week Two:**
Tuesday, Jan. 27

*Introductions*

**Week Three:**
Tuesday, Feb. 3

Baudrillard, J. "The Precession of Simulacra" [Scan on Blackboard]
Baudrillard, J. "Simulacra and Science Fiction" [Scan on Blackboard]
Delany, SR. "Neither the First Word nor the Last on Deconstruction, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Semiotics for SF Readers" [Scan on Blackboard]
Delany, SR. "Letter to a Critic." [Scan on Blackboard]

**Week Four:**
Tuesday, Feb. 10

Delany, SR "To Read The Dispossessed" [Scan on Blackboard]
Delany, SR "About 5,750 Words" [Scan on Blackboard]

Le Guin, UK. *The Dispossessed*

**Week Five:**
Tuesday, Feb. 17

Delany, SR. "The Second Science-Fiction Studies Interview" [Scan on Blackboard]

Delany, SR. *Trouble on Triton*

Foucault, M. "Different Spaces" [Scan on Blackboard]

**Week Six:**
Tuesday, Feb. 24

*Anderson, M.T. Feed*
Delany, SR. "Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction"

*Ellis, W. Transmetropolitan Vol. 01: "Back on the Street"*
Kaczynski, T. *Industrial Society and Its Future* (AKA: The Unabomber Manifesto)

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Parts One & Two) [Online]:
Part One: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm
Part Two: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm

**Week Seven:**
Tuesday, Mar. 3
Haraway, D. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" [Scan on Blackboard]
Delany, SR. "Reading at Work: Cyborg Manifesto Response" [Scan on Blackboard]

**Gibson, W. Neuromancer**
---. "Johnny Mnemonic" [Scan on Blackboard]
---. "Burning Chrome" [Scan on Blackboard]

*RoboCop* (1987) [Film: In Library]

Case, Amber. “We Are All Cyborgs Now.”
http://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now?language=en

Kurzweil, Ray. From *The Colbert Report* [Interview]
http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/2gpjkk/ray-kurzweil

**Week Eight:**

Tuesday, Mar. 10
MIDTERM EXAM!!!!

**Week Nine:**

Tuesday, Mar. 17

**Collins, Suzanne. The Hunger Games**

**Week Ten:**

Tuesday, Mar. 24

Moore, Alan & David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta*

Delany, SR. "The Politics of Paraliterary Criticism"

**Week Eleven:**

NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS

**Week Twelve:**

Tuesday, Apr. 7

**Stephenson, N. Snow Crash**

Baudrillard, J. "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media" [Scan on Blackboard]

**Week Thirteen:**

Tuesday, Apr. 14

**Dick, Philip K. Ubik**

Crumb, R. "The Religious Experience of Philip K Dick"

**Week Fourteen:**
Tuesday, Apr. 21

**Lethem. J. Gun, with Occasional Music**  
Delany, SR. "The Para Doxa Interview: Inside and Outside the Canon" [Scan on Blackboard]

**Week Fifteen:**  
Tuesday, Apr. 28

Delany, SR. "Zelazny/Varley/Gibson--and Quality." [Scan on Blackboard]

Zelazny, R. "The Doors of his Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" [Scan on Blackboard]  
---. "This Mortal Mountain" [Scan on Blackboard]  
---. "This Moment of the Storm" [Scan on Blackboard]  
---."A Rose for Ecclesiastes" [Scan on Blackboard]  

Varley, J. "The Phantom of Kansas" [Scan on Blackboard]  
---. "Press Enter" [Scan on Blackboard]  
---. "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank" [Scan on Blackboard]  

Bradbury, R. "The Pedestrian" [Scan on Blackboard]  

Benjamin, W. "Flâneur" [Scan on Blackboard]  

**Week Sixteen:**  
Tuesday, May 5

**Houellebecq, Michel. HP Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life** [Scan on Blackboard]  
Lovecraft, H.P. The Whisperer in Darkness [Scan on Blackboard]

**May 8-14: Final Exam Week**