

Evander Price
American Studies, Harvard University
Lowell House Residential Tutor
1201 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
evanderprice@fas.harvard.edu
(858) 252-9257

Course Descriptions

“It’s About Time”

Abstract: a writing-intensive survey of the field of time studies.

Time: it’s that thing that keeps everything from happening at once. But just what is it, precisely? Flip to a dictionary, and you’ll find the OED dedicates some seventy-five thousand words (\approx 200 pages!) to answering that very question, and the answers are not very satisfying. This course will serve as an introduction to Time Studies, or “chronocriticism”.

Chronocriticism is the amalgamation of what is a widespread interest in temporality that cuts across the traditional disciplinary landscape and sweeps up wide swaths of contemporary culture, particularly in response to environmental anxieties that raise doubts about the long-term survival of humankind. As the temporal horizon of the past ever expands, a tension arises with the reciprocal compression of the future, which seems, in comparison, terrifyingly imminent.

Time is an oft overlooked and underexamined metaphor that fundamentally shapes individuals and cultures. What individuals assume as their operating temporal metaphor shapes their world view, how they treat people around them, how they treat the world around them—in a word—their ethics. In this course, we will reflect on our own personal assumptions about what time is, we will read how philosophers have tried to define it, how historical assumptions of it have shaped American culture, how physicists and cosmologists conceive of it structuring our universe, how artists use it as a medium, and how science fiction short stories and movies dreamed it could be different. We will learn some of the many ways to re-imagine and re-evaluate what is at stake with the assumptions underlying our personal and collective temporal metaphors. Our subject is slippery, so our methods must be diverse, and our tools many. By the end of this class, you will be a trained chronocritic.

“Speculative Futures”

Abstract: a writing-intensive course focused specifically on futurology.

This course explores how the future is conceived in the American cultural imagination, and how that imagination has changed over time. To do so, we will examine objects, works of art, music, monuments, and literature from the past century that have explicitly reified an imagination of the future, and how imaginations of the future reflect upon the present. The study of the future is bound to study of ethics, utopianism, and cultural history. It reveals the greatest aspirations of a culture, as well as the greatest anxieties. And it provides an avenue for asking some temporally strange questions: Just how much future is there? Who is, and who isn’t included in that future? When and where does the future end? And how does that measurement shape individual and collective actions in the present? How do speculative temporalities form or constrain current ethical practices? What does it mean to be a good citizen of the future? What obligations do we bear to communities situated on the horizon of time? What are the normative claims of futurity? What sort of principles should frame an ethical imagination of the future? And importantly, what are the practical dimensions of the study of the future? What sort of practices or interventions are possible to divert or redirect unethical future-ideation? In the words of Arthur C. Clarke: “The future isn’t what it used to be.”