ENGL 5380: The Future of Sin

The business of humanity has become entertainment….

—Geoffrey Miller, "Why We Haven't Met Any Aliens"

Apparently the sin of Babylon was but in being a typical great metropolis. It was moved by the pleasant spirit of parties in a penthouse, drinks served expensively in a high place, to the accompaniment of dance music over the radio, with a girl arranging unobtrusively to spend the night after the guests had departed, for the delight of a man deemed potent in office. The mystery was reduced to sexual terms, there being perhaps more dramatic incentives for such translation in those days of sacred prostitution than now, when men are given uneasily to love-among-the-machines. Then 'fornication' had much richer connotations, being recognized as not merely the satisfying of a sexual appetite, but as pious devotion to a rival god.

—Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*

The human race is not about to give up being stimulated….

—Germaine de Staël, "Essay on Fictions"

"The Future of Sin" considers some of the ways we talk about The Future as a site of indulgence or transgression, as something private that may or may not be obviously connected to public policies. Taking seriously William Gibson's claim that "the future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed," we are most interested in how futures are figured, what these visions say about our own wants, and the means through which a given future can give body to desire.

Readings will be various and may include work from psychoanalytic theory, literature, design fiction, and new futurism. Much of the coursework will be born-digital — it's the future! — but no prior knowledge or ability in specific computer applications is required. Class time will be divided between seminar discussions and studio work and will consist of both solitary and collaborative projects, including several presentations.

<u>Required Accounts:</u>

- a [Tumblr](#)page devoted to this course
- a [Soundcloud](#) account

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Recommended Accounts:

- [Evernote](#), [Pocket](#), [Dropbox](#), anything else you could use to save, share, and annotate the web; share your methods

Reading List:

Required:

- *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* — Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby
- *Sexuation* — Renata Salecl (Editor)
- *The Acoustic City* — Matthew Gandy (Author, Editor), Benny Nilsen (Editor)
- *The Private Eye* Vol. 1 (issues 1-5) — Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, and Muntsa Vicente
- *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* — Steven Shaviro

Recommended:

- *The Book of Audacity* — Carla Schroder

Projects
Critical Tumblr-ing

Mostly, people post stuff on Tumblr because they like that stuff. Often, the page has a focus to start with. Sometimes, these posts start to create a context or focus outside of what the blogger intended. Use your course Tumblr account to gather anything course-topical that you find interesting and follow others in the course, too. It's a different, public way of taking notes and keeping track of inspiration. See what happens. Also, do the below for a grade.

Make a minimum of one course post a week (title it COURSE POST #: SOME SNAPPY TITLE HERE) with the following criteria. Each of these posts must consist of a minimum of

1.
   1. two images
   2. either a link or a quote relating to or commenting on the image(s)
   3. a text box in which you make clear the connection(s) to the course readings and/or "the future of sin" as we're discussing it.

Your post may be in response to someone else's post, but you cannot repost someone else's image who is in the class. We'll have a master list so that we can all follow each other.

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We may discuss some of the most engaging or thought-provoking of these Course Posts as a group.

Speculative Archaeology - Kickstarter

Find three Kickstarter projects that haven't closed yet and that you find particularly engaging, promising, whatever. Be prepared to present them to the class and make an argument for what's special and deserving of attention therein (in 5-10 minutes total).

After these presentations, you'll use class responses and discussions to choose ONE of these Kickstarter projects to use for the assignments below throughout the rest of the semester.

1. in conjunction with **the Present Future**

Pull together the information the Kickstarter pitch gives you. What need or desire is the project addressing? What do the different levels tell you of the organizers' expectations of audience? What do the actual numbers of backers at each level tell you? Do you think it will be funded? Why or why not? Prepare this as a presentation to the rest of the class (with slides, etc.).

2. in conjunction with **the Historical Future**

Trace an incremental, speculative history for it. In six clear steps, extending 300 years back (so, from 1716 or so), trace the evolution of the technologies or innovations that made the proposed project possible. Make charts, time lines, reenactments, whatever. This is speculative history. Make it *historical*. Feel free to work and present solo, or to combine your efforts with one or two other students whose subjects or explorations overlap your own in potentially interesting ways.

3. in conjunction with **The Future**

Now, speculate via three steps about advancements that will transform the prototype in the next 20 years. The final project should take the form of a *design fiction* (as generally understood) and may take a variety of forms: prototypes and sketches, soundscapes and audio tours, print advertising series, "serious academic article," product video, etc. You should append/include detailed rationalizations/evidence to support your project (with works cited; see Hyperrhiz 13 for examples). Feel free to work and present solo, or to combine your efforts with one or two other students whose subjects or explorations overlap your own in potentially interesting ways.

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Grades will be determined via a modified version of [The Learning Record](). There will be a midterm portfolio and a final portfolio in which you will write summary interpretations and evaluations of your development in the course based on specific criteria and with specific examples from your work.

Tentative Schedule

Jan 20	Course Introduction "[Why We Haven't Met Any Aliens]()" - Geoffrey Miller
Jan 27	**Initial Readings:** [Writing Future Rhetoric]() — G. L. Ercolini and Pat J. Gehrke [The hitchhiker's guide to ubicomp]() — Mark Blythe [Forgetting to be (Post)Human: Media and Memory in a Kairotic Age]() — Collin Gifford Brooke Kickstarter Pitches
Feb 3	**the Present Future** *Sexuation* Introduction, Ch. 1-3 *Acoustic City* 1. Urban Soundscapes, 2. Acoustic Flânerie
Feb 10	*Sexuation* Ch. 4-6 *Acoustic City* 3. Sound Cultures
Feb 17	*Sexuation* Ch.7-9 *Acoustic City* 4. Acoustic Ecologies Kickstarter Archaeology #1 presentations
Feb 24	*Sexuation* Ch. 10-12 *Acoustic City* 5. The Politics of Noise

	Kickstarter Archaeology #1 presentations con't.
March 3	**the Historical Future:** "Sonic Imaginations" – Jonathan Sterne "The Three Listening Modes" – Michel Chion "The Soundscape" – R. Murray Schafer You Will Never Own a Jetpack — Steven Shapiro Interactions: 20130708-History of the Future — Aaron Marcus
March 10	"The Walkman Effect" – Shuhei Hosokawa "Sound, Modernity, and History" – Emily Thompson "The Audio-Visual iPod" – Michael Bull Weird Britain in Exile — Jamie Sexton The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology — Mark Fisher Midterm LR Portfolio due
March 17	SPRING BREAK
March 24	*Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* — Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby How to make cool stuff in Unity tutorial 3D Printing Basics
March 31	how to think about the future: hauntology — Charles Beckett Hauntologists mine the past for music's future — Mark Pilkington Scarfolk Council booktwo.org — James Bridle

	• Hauntological Futures • Starpunk
April 7	Kickstarter Archaeology #2
April 14	**The Future:** *The Private Eye* Vol. 1 (issues 1-5) — Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, and Muntsa Vicente "Transmedia Narratives, simulacra, simulation, fake and design fiction" GUEST INFORMANT: Rachel Armstrong, on Where The Future Went Three Reasons Why Your Predictions of the Future Will Be Wrong, Humanity Plus Talk, "Bad Futurism" — Jamais Cascio
April 21	*No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* — Steven Shaviro "Between Wit and Reason: Defining Associative, Speculative, and Critical Design in Practice" – Matt Malpass
April 28	Lab time
May 4	Kickstarter Archaeology #3 Final LR Portfolio due

Policies: At the University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I require attendance in order to encourage participation. A significant percentage of this course consist of workshopping each other's poems; regular class attendance is necessary.

E-mail from students will only be addressed during regular office hours.

I will not accept assignments unless you have made arrangements with me in advance. In case of illness or emergency, please contact me as soon as possible.

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All poems must be typed. Use basic fonts, no larger than 12 pt. Margins should be one inch. Titles are mandatory and fun. Be original and inventive. Always, always keep an extra hard-or-disk copy of your work.

You will be required to bring additional copies of your work for workshops. Please come to class with materials ready to distribute. We are all relying on each other.

Plagiarism will result in immediate failure.

Americans With Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of federal legislation entitled *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability.   Also, you may visit the Office for Students with Disabilities in room 102 of University Hall or call them at (817) 272-3364.

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance**. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (http://wweb.uta.edu/aao/fao/).

Academic Integrity: Students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System Regents' Rule 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

Student Support Services Available: : UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning

centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php.

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit http://www.uta.edu/sfs.

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.