



**ENGLISH 420**  
**SPECIAL TOPICS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
**PHILIP K. DICK**  
**SPRING 2009**

**Phil•dick•ean** (Fil-dik-yuhn) *Adj.* Of or pertaining to the science fiction and pseudo-philosophies of American author Philip K. Dick, whose work is distinguished by two thematic binaries/conflicts/ implosions: [1] Reality vs. Illusion; [2] Human vs. Android.

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**Meeting Place & Time**

188 Dwyer | MWF 11:30-1:05

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**Course Description**

This section of ENG 420 concentrates on representative novels, stories, essays and film adaptations of American author Philip K. Dick, one of the twentieth century's most influential, vibrant and provocative writers. PKD was wildly prolific; throughout his career he composed over fifty novels and hundreds of short stories. Much of this work falls into the category of "pulp" science fiction, a subgenre distinguished by adventure and wonderment, unbridled masculinity, formulaic plots and characters, technological advances, and crummy prose. PKD is simultaneously a pulp icon and literary auteur, carving out a singular niche. In this course we will explore the dynamics and vicissitudes of that niche.

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**Texts**

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1968. New York: Vintage, 1996.

Dick, Philip K. *Eye in the Sky*. 1957. New York: Vintage, 2003.

Dick, Philip K. *The Philip K. Dick Reader*. New York: Citadel, 2001.

Sutin, Lawrence. *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*. New York: Carroll & Graff, 2005.

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### **Grading Scale**

Course grades will be based on the following percentages:

Assignments & Quizzes	20%
Minithemes	50%
Final Essay	30%

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### **Assignments & Quizzes**

Throughout the semester, you will be given a number of assignments to be completed both in and out of the classroom. In-class assignments will generally not be given ahead of time; they will be issued during class and are to be completed during that class session. If you have an unexcused absence from class, you will not be able to make up those assignments. Quizzes will be given periodically to ensure that the reading schedule is being followed. They will usually be administered at the beginning of class. If you have an unexcused absence or are tardy on a day that a quiz is administered, you will not be able to make it up.

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### **Minithemes**

A minitheme is a one page, single-spaced work in which you are required to engage with the reading material for the class. The purpose of writing a minitheme is to develop your skills as a critical thinker and reader. In order to write a successful minitheme, you should keep a reading journal. As you read the course texts, look for recurring symbols, images and ideas and write them down in your journal along with anything else that seems interesting, disturbing, or provocative. Then amass the information you have collected. Take one of the themes you have focused on in your reading journal and flesh it out with details, citations, and page numbers. Minithemes should exhibit four primary criteria: [1] evidence of attentiveness to the text under consideration; [2] strong textual support for your argument; [3] an explanation of the significance of the theme you have chosen to focus on; [4] questions or concerns for further investigation.

Minithemes serve as models for the sort of process that should be undergone when you write longer essays. In short, you must first read a given text, taking notes and underlining important phrases and passages. Then gather and sort out your notes, making sure your focus is clear and sufficiently narrow. Finally, develop a meaningful and interesting reading of the text.

A total of FIVE minithemes will be due at the beginning of our discussion sessions for each major written text. Your first minitheme, for instance, will be on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and is due on the first day we discuss that novel.

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### Final Essay

This 8-10 page essay should be based on the ideas developed in your minithemes and our class discussions and assignments. Students are responsible for developing their own topics and choosing two texts on which to write a comparative and contrastive analysis. Final essays must be distinguished by the following:

12 TIMES NEW ROMAN FONT  
DOUBLE-SPACED TEXT  
1 INCH MARGINS (TOP, SIDES, BOTTOM)  
IMAGINATIVE, DISCERNING TITLE  
IMAGINATIVE, ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS  
MINIMUM 8 CITATIONS FROM PRIMARY TEXTS  
MINIMUM 8 CITATIONS FROM SECONDARY SOURCES  
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
MLA STYLE

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### Class Calendar

Week	Schedule
1	Introduction to the Course <i>Blade Runner</i> (Film) <i>Divine Invasions</i> – Chp. 1 “The Android & the Human” †
2	<i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> <i>Divine Invasions</i> – Chps. 2-3 “Who Is an SF Writer?” † <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #1
3	<i>Total Recall</i> (Film) “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale” * <i>Divine Invasions</i> – Chps. 4-5 <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #2
4	“The Father-Thing” * <i>Divine Invasions</i> – Chps. 6-7 “If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others” † <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #3
5	<i>Eye in the Sky</i> <i>Divine Invasions</i> – Chps. 8-9 <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #4

- 6 *Minority Report* (Film)  
"The Minority Report" \*  
*Divine Invasions* – Chps. 10-11  
**Due:** Minitheme #5
- 7 "Fair Game" \*  
"Second Variety" \*  
*Divine Invasions* – Chp. 12
- E **Due:** Final Essay

\* Denotes stories located in *The Philip K. Dick Reader*.  
† Denotes handouts.

(NOTE: This schedule is subject to minor changes.)