

Professor Shelley Streeby
ETHN 182 World-Making and Imagining the Future:
Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Fantasy and Science Fiction
WLH 2204, Tu/Th 2-3:20

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Office Hours: TH 11:45-1:45 and by appointment

From the beginning, writers and other makers of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) have raised thought-provoking questions about race, gender, sexuality, class, and empire, often on a global scale. SFF figures such as the alien, the last man, the zombie, and the robot are inseparable from long, unsettled histories of gender and sexuality, race and labor relations, and empire and colonization, as are tropes of space exploration and building new worlds. This course focuses especially on the 1980s to the present in order to consider how science fiction and fantasy also offers ways to imagine alternate histories and futures: borderlands near futures; post-apocalyptic worlds of race, gender, sexuality, and class; indigenous futurisms; Afrofuturisms; and more. We will also study different cultural forms of SFF and analyze texts in transmedia contexts as we consider how today SFF often jumps from form to form, including music, TV, comics, video games, and social media, as well as short stories, novels, and films.

Required Books will be available at the UCSD Bookstore: Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*; Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*; Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower and Dawn*; Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*; Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, 2nd Edition*. Also a **Recommended Book/Extra Credit Option**: Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. Everything that has **(TED)** after it will be available on **TED**. If the text is in *Keywords*, it has **(KW)** after it. **Films**: You should watch each film on the syllabus **BEFORE** the class in which we are discussing it. I want you to come to class having already generated some thoughts and ideas about each film. Films will be on reserve at the Film and Video Library; most are also available through Netflix, Amazon, and iTunes.

READING AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE:

TH 9/24 INTRODUCTION

Borderlands Near Futures

TU 9/29 Watch *The Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008); Read Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009) through page 51

TH 10/1 Finish *Lunar Braceros*

Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of Race, Gender, and Sexuality

TU 10/6 W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Comet” (1920) in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*; Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983); N.K. Jemisin, “Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows” (2004) (all on **TED**); Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, 5-24, 119-127

Presentation Questions: As a group, choose another example of the “last man” or the post-apocalyptic genre in visual culture, whether in films, TV, video games, or some other form. Bring in one example and explain how it fits the sub-genre; when it was produced and how it speaks to its historical moment; and what it is saying about race, gender, and sexuality, specifically.

TH 10/8 NO CLASS. Read Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 25-76; Edwards, “Diaspora” (KW); and Johnson, “Black” (KW). Watch *Last Angel of History* (Akomfrah, 1996)

TU 10/13 Read Womack, *Afrofuturism* 99-115; Gaines, “African” (KW); Octavia Butler, *Dawn* through Part II

Presentation Question: Bring in one example of art, music, or some other cultural text that you believe is a good example of Afrofuturism and be able to explain why. Use Womack and Gaines to define the term.

TH 10/15 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* through Part III; Halberstam, “Gender” (KW); Somerville, “Queer” (KW)

Presentation Question: How were aliens represented in film and/or TV during the 1980s? Find an especially interesting example or two that centers gender and sexuality and discuss how Butler is building on or departing from such examples. What larger meanings do these representations of aliens suggest? Draw on the two keywords to analyze how Butler was trying to do things differently in imagining these aliens.

TU 10/20 Finish Butler, *Dawn*; Read Priscilla Wald, “Cognitive Estrangement, Science Fiction, and Medical Ethics” (CR)

Presentation Questions: Who was Henrietta Lacks? Do research on Lacks and her significance. There are now several books and other texts on Lacks that you can consult to move beyond and add to Wald’s brief analysis.

Indigenous Futurisms/Alternate Histories

TH 10/22 Paper #1 Due. Read selections from Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (Dillon, “Introduction” and Vizenor, “Custer on the Slipstream”); Warrior, “Indian” (KW); and Kauanui, “Indigenous” (KW). Watch (in class) Skawennati, TimeTraveller™ episodes (see <http://www.timetravellertm.com/episodes> for more)

TU 10/27 Selections from Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, 52-60, 99-120, 143-148, 215-231; Sherman Alexie, “Ghost Dance” (TED); Kazanjian, “Colonial” (KW); Streeby, “Empire” (KW)

Presentation Questions: Where else can we find signs of a “native presence” in science fiction and fantasy? There are a lot of great examples in Dillon’s introduction; you could choose one of the films, comics, or other texts she mentions there and tell us more about it. Or come up with your own example. Draw on some of the 4 keywords for this week in your discussion.

Critical Dystopia and the Disappearing Public in the 1990s

TH 10/29 Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* through 2025

Presentation Questions: Butler’s novel is famous as a speculative reimagining of the world of the 1993 Los Angeles uprisings. Bring in another example of a science fiction or fantasy text that raises issues of race and inequality in Los Angeles. Tell us when it was produced and how it responds to its moment and speculate about what it is trying to say about those issues.

TU 11/3 Butler, *Parable* through August 28, 2027 (chapter 19 of 2027); *Keywords:* Newfield, “Corporation” (KW)

Presentation Questions: In Butler’s novel, a corporation tries to take advantage of a disaster and make people into neo-slaves. Bring in another example of a science fiction or fantasy text that focuses on abuses of corporate power; tell us when it was made and why that matters; and speculate about what it is saying about corporations in its moment. Make sure to draw on Newfield’s keyword “Corporation” to guide your discussion and provide definitions.

TH 11/5 Finish Butler, *Parable*; *Keywords:* Walter Johnson, “Slavery” (KW)

Presentation Questions: In Butler’s novel, slavery is not only part of the past but also part of our present. Drawing on Johnson’s essay, discuss one other example of a science fiction or fantasy film or other cultural text in which reimagining slavery across time and space is central and be ready to tell us how and why.

SFF World-Building: Scenes That Tell Stories After 9/11

TU 11/10 Read “Scenes that Tell Stories” (TED); Kocchar-Lindgren, “Disability” (KW); Rana, “Terror” (KW) and watch *Minority Report* (Spielberg, 2002)

Presentation Questions: *Minority Report* is based loosely on a short story by the great science fiction writer Philip K Dick. Who was Philip K Dick and what kind of impact has he had on our culture? How does the original short story speak to its moment (1956) and how does the 2002 film both build on and depart from the 1950s short story? Draw on both keywords in your presentation.

TH 11/12 Read Mark Wolf, “Worlds Within the World” (CR)

Presentation Questions: Drawing extensively on Wolf’s ideas about worlds and world-making, bring in an example of a video game world that you believe

addresses race, gender, and sexuality in especially interesting ways. Find an especially compelling example and tell us what we can learn about these issues from the game. Draw on some of the keywords we have read so far in defining terms.

TU 11/17 Watch *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon Ho, 2013). Read Mozerin Halperin, “We Talked To *Snowpiercer*'s Production Designer About Building A World Inside A Train” (CR) and Lisa Lowe, “Globalization”(KW)

Presentation Question: Find another example of a science fiction or fantasy film from the last 5 years that tries to imagine and address future class and other inequalities on a global scale. Draw on Lisa Lowe’s “globalization” essay and talk about the vision of the “globe” or the “world” that the film offers and how it represents inequalities and/or possible solutions.

TH 11/19 *Ms. Marvel, Volume 1*; Edwards, “Islam” (KW); Maira, “Youth” (KW)

Presentation Question: Find other examples of prominent characters of color in SFF comics either at earlier moments or in the contemporary period. How does their presence affect the kinds of stories that are told? Be sure to show us scenes from the comics so we can see the significance of the distinctive elements of this form of popular art.

Social Justice, SFF, and New Media

TU 11/24 Paper #2 Due. Read Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 175-193; Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* through 78.

Presentation Questions: Find especially interesting examples of how Octavia E. Butler has been remembered in popular culture. Despite her premature death in 2006, her memory lives on in powerful ways. What can we learn from the example or examples you have chosen?

TH 11/26 NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

TU 12/1 Finish Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia’s Brood*. Read Smallwood, “Freedom” (KW)

Presentation Questions: Find another example of a science fiction and fantasy text (any cultural form is fair game) that helps us think about social justice? If possible, find an example or examples where the producers of the SFF text are explicitly connecting it to a larger project that in some way involves change or social transformation and draw on Smallwood’s short essay.

TH 12/3 Ted Chiang, “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling” (TED); MacPherson, “Digital” (KW); Nakamura, “Media” (KW); Sayers, “Technology” (KW)

Class Requirements:

Class Participation (10%) is important! Please come to class ready to participate and with the day's reading/viewing completed. Class discussion is really important because, among other things, I want to help you work on developing and articulating your ideas about what you read. Improving each student's ability to articulate ideas effectively in public is one of the goals of this class; for most people this takes practice, rather than being something that comes naturally. Also, we will all learn more by encountering many different ideas about the topics we are studying. You must actively participate as well as attend to get an "A" for this part of the course. Unexcused absences will affect your grade, and if you have several unexcused absences you may fail the class. Please let me know if you have a doctor's note, family emergency, or some other serious reason for missing class so I can mark your absence as excused rather than unexcused. If you miss a substantial part of any class session, it will count as an absence. Please come to class on time. If once or twice you must leave class a little early for a very good reason, be sure to tell me before class begins.

4-Minute Class Presentation and 1-Page Write-up of Presentation (10%). Each student will be asked to speak for 4 minutes in response to a question that I have posed for that day on the syllabus. You will do this as part of a group presentation, and the group must meet before the class (take a selfie with all of you together to show me you did it) to discuss the coordination of the presentation and to think about possible connections and differences between each individual part. No more than 5 people will be allowed to sign up for any given day. The presentations invite you to focus on **one example** of your own choosing in order to develop a specific idea of your own in response to the material we are learning together. Be sure to tell the class about the sources you use in the presentation and why you chose these sources. On the day of the presentation, please hand in a one-page, typed write-up of your presentation, explaining briefly what you hoped to accomplish, what your part was, and how it fit into the whole. (But please don't read your paper out loud. Speak from notes and make the write-up a summary rather than the presentation itself.) You will have the opportunity to turn your presentation into one of the 2 papers if you desire. On the take-home final, I will also ask you one question in which you will have to draw on your presentation.

2 papers, 6-8 pages long (30% each, 60% total). I will hand out prompts for these papers at least 2 weeks in advance. These papers will focus on the cluster of texts we are studying in each unit and will ask you to develop an argument or do a creative assignment in response to the prompt by drawing on those texts and, in some cases, other sources. Papers must be double-spaced and typed in 10- or 12-point font. Late papers will not be accepted unless you have asked for and received an extension in advance.

A take-home final exam (30%). On the last day of class I will hand out the take-home final exam, which you will complete and hand in by 3:00 Thursday of finals

week in the Ethnic Studies office, which is located in SSB 201. The office is open Monday thru Friday 8 am to 12 pm and 1 pm to 4:30 pm. It closes for lunch from 12-1. This final will cover all of the material assigned in the class and will require you to identify and discuss keywords, quotes, and concepts from the class and also to write brief essays in response to questions I will pose.

ADA Statement. If you have a documented disability needing accommodations, please inform me and bring a notification letter outlining your approved accommodations. I will make all reasonable efforts to assist you. If, as a result of a disability, you cannot accept the content or terms of this syllabus, you must notify me in writing within one week of receipt of the syllabus. You may also seek assistance or information from the Office for Students with Disabilities, 858/534/4382.

Cheating and Plagiarism: Whether intentional or inadvertent, plagiarism is a serious violation. All work submitted in this course must be your own. The use of sources such as ideas, quotations, paraphrases, or anything written by someone else must be properly acknowledged and cited. If you have questions about the proper citation of sources, please ask your Teaching Assistants. Students who plagiarize, or who cheat on an exam, will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with University policy. Students are expected to be familiar with UCSD's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, available at <http://www.senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm#AP14>.

Discussion Ethics: This class is intended for students interested in challenging commonly held understandings of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation. Given the nature of the course there will likely be a wide range of opinions. Ideally the course will prompt you to think for yourself and to raise questions about conventional views and received wisdom. However, please engage one another in discussion with respect and consideration. Abusive and harsh language, the UCSD Principles of Community that we are all expected to follow (<http://www.vcb.ucsd.edu/principles.htm>).