

Professor Shelley Streeby
ETHN 182 World-Making and Imagining the Future:
Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Fantasy and Science Fiction
WLH 2115 Tu/Th 2-3:20

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Office Hours: WED 1:15-3 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 1990s to the present in order to consider how science fiction and fantasy also offer ways to imagine alternate histories and futures and make different worlds. We will study visions of 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.

READING AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE:

TU 1/9 INTRODUCTION Borderlands Near Futures

TH 1/11 Watch *Sleep Dealer* in class. Start reading Sánchez and Pita, *Lunar Braceros* 2125-2148.

TU 1/16 Finish *Lunar Braceros* and talk about it in connection to *Sleep Dealer*. Read Mary Pat Brady, "Border" (KW). Draw a one-page comic of a scene from *Lunar Braceros* that you find especially significant and be ready to talk about why you chose it and what you focused on. Optional: Lynda Barry readings from *Syllabus* on making comics (TED).

Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of Race, Gender, and Sexuality

TH 1/18 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); Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, 5-24, 119-127 (all on TED). Draw a four-panel comic illustrating an important scene from either "The Comet" or "Speech Sounds" and be ready to show it to the class. Discuss why you chose that particular scene and what meanings you were trying to emphasize.

TU 1/23 Read Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 41-76; Edwards, “Diaspora” (KW); and Gaines, “African” (KW). In class, watch *Last Angel of History* (Akomfrah, 1996). Start Butler, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*.

TH 1/25 Read Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 99-115, 131-150; Johnson, “Black” (KW). Continue reading Butler, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*

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. Draw on your readings to define the term.

TU 1/30 Finish Butler, *Kindred: A Graphic Adaptation*; *Keywords:* Walter Johnson, “Slavery” and Johnson, “Black” (KW)

Presentation Questions: In Butler’s novel, slavery is not only part of the past but also part of our present. Drawing on the keywords, 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.

Indigenous Futurisms

TH 2/1 Read selections from Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*: Dillon, “Introduction” and Vizenor, “Custer on the Slipstream.” Read Warrior, “Indian” (KW); and Kauanui, “Indigenous” (KW). Watch (in class) *Anamata Future News* episodes.

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 our keywords this week as well as concepts from Dillon’s Introduction.

Friday 2/2: PAPER 1 Due before Noon in the Ethnic Studies Office

TU 2/6 Read selections from Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, 52-60, 99-131, 143-148, 215-231 and Streeby, Introduction and Chapter 1, #NoDAPL: Indigenous Science, Fiction, and Futurisms,” *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*.

Presentation Questions: Discuss one or more examples of indigenous futurisms in popular culture, either by going into more detail about one of the cases discussed in today’s readings or finding one or more of your own. Be sure to define “indigenous futurism” and draw on concepts from Dillon and Streeby.

TH 2/8 Sherman Alexie, “Ghost Dance” and Lisa Bolekaja, “Medu” and “Black Medusas in the Wild West” (TED); *Keywords:* Kazanjian, “Colonial” (KW).

Critical Dystopia and the Disappearing Public in the 1990s

TU 2/13 Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* through page 99 (through 2025); *Keywords*: Lisa Duggan, “Neoliberalism” (KW).

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. Consider when it was made and how it responds to its moment. Speculate about what it is trying to say about issues of race and inequality in that period. Connect it to Butler’s novel and to the keyword “Neoliberalism.”

TH 2/15 Butler, *Parable* through 195 (chapter 16) and *Keywords*: Newfield, “Corporation” (KW)

Presentation Questions: In Butler’s novel, a corporation tries to take advantage of 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.

TU 2/20 Butler, *Parable* through 278 (chapter 22) and *Keywords*: Halberstam, “Gender” and Somerville, “Queer” (KW).

Presentation Questions: Despite Octavia E. Butler’s premature death in 2006, her memory lives on in powerful ways. In 2016-2017, the Los Angeles arts collective Clockshop curated a yearlong program of special events called “Radio Imagination” featuring artists and scholars inspired by her writings and archive. Do research and find out more about this program and other recent efforts to remember Butler in popular culture. Go into detail about 2 or 3 examples of Butler being remembered today that you find especially significant. What issues does her memory center? Are gender and sexuality important?

TH 2/22 Finish Butler, *Parable* and read Streeby, Chapter 2, “Archiving Global Warming with Octavia E. Butler,” *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*.

SFF World-Making in Visual Culture and Visionary Fiction

TU 2/27 Watch *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon Ho, 2013). Read Mozerin Halperin, “We Talked To Snowpiercer’s Production Designer About Building A World Inside A Train” (TED) and Lisa Lowe, “Globalization” (KW). **Extra Credit:** Design another car of the train. Draw it and be ready to show it to the class and talk about it.

Presentation Questions: 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 Lowe's "globalization" keyword 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 3/1 Read Ramzi Fawaz, "Introduction: Superhumans in America" (TED); *Ms. Marvel*, Volume 1 (TED); *Keywords:* Edwards, "Islam" and Maira, "Youth" (KW).

Presentation Questions: Find examples of prominent characters of color in superhero 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 and also draw on Fawaz's ideas.

TU 3/6 Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*: Thomas, "Foreword"; Imarisha, "Introduction"; Phi, "Revolution Shuffle"; Walker, "The Token Superhero"; and Imarisha, "Black Angel." *Keywords:* Smallwood, "Freedom" (KW).

Presentation Questions: Find another example of a science fiction and fantasy text (any cultural form is fair game) that fits Imarisha's definition of visionary fiction and helps us imagine 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 also try to draw on Smallwood's short essay.

TH 3/8 Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia's Brood*: brown, "the river"; McClain, "Homing Instinct"; Abu-Jamal, "Star Wars and the American Imagination"; Brown, "outro." Streeby, Chapter 3, "Climate Change as a World Problem: Shaping Change in the Wake of Disaster," *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*. Draw a four-panel comic illustrating an important scene from either "the river" or "Homing Instinct" and be ready to show it to the class. Discuss why you chose that particular scene and what meanings you were trying to emphasize.

TU 3/13 Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life" in *Arrival and Other Stories* and start *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* (TED). Before class, watch *Arrival*.

Presentation Question: How were aliens represented in film and/or TV during the late 1990s and early 2000s? Find an especially interesting example or two that centers gender and sexuality and discuss how Chiang is building on or departing from such examples. What larger meanings do these representations of aliens suggest? How is Chiang trying to do things differently?

TH 3/15 Finish Ted Chiang, *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*. *Keywords:* MacPherson, "Digital" (KW) and Nakamura, "Media" (KW).

Class Requirements:

Most Required Books are 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*; Butler, Duffy, and Jennings, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*; Brown and Imarisha, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*; Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, 2nd Edition*; Chiang, *Arrival and Other Stories*. **One Required Book** must be ordered from Amazon or another bookseller as an ebook or paperback: Shelley Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism*. **Films:** You should watch each film on the syllabus BEFORE the class in which we are discussing it, unless the syllabus states we are watching it in class. 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. **Recommended Book/Extra Credit Options:** Butler, *Kindred*. *Everything that has (TED) after it will be available on TED. *If the text is in *Keywords*, it has (KW) after it.

Class Participation (10%) is important! Please come to class ready to participate and with the day's reading/viewing completed and any extra assignments completed such as drawing a comic of a scene from the reading. 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 three or more 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.

5-Minute Class Presentation and 1-Page Write-up of Presentation (10%). Each student will be asked to speak for 5 minutes in response to a question 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 4 people will be allowed to sign up for any given day. The presentations invite you to focus on an example of your own choice 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 (25% each, 50% 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 Thursday of finals week at 3:00. You will hand it in to 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.

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. 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. 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. Do not use abusive and harsh language, and please respect the UCSD Principles of Community that we are all expected to follow (<http://www.vcb.ucsd.edu/principles.htm>).