

**Instructor**

Dr. Roxanne Samer
Email: samer@usc.edu
Office: SCA 215

Meeting Time

Thursdays 2-5:50pm in SCA 216
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-3pm
and Thursdays 1-2pm. Please
schedule via email at least 24
hours in advance.

Course Description

Designed as an interdisciplinary theoretical study of sexuality and science fiction, this course explores the sexualized, gendered, and racialized futures that the genre has produced through film, television, literature, and other media. Often these futures have pictured women as little more than bodies capable of biological reproduction, as earth's men struggle to keep the human race alive (and with it contemporary society's racialized heteropatriarchal norms). At the same time, science fiction has served as a genre in which women, queer people, and people of color have imagined alternative futures free of sexism, homophobia, and racism. Some of the smartest science fiction of the last thirty years has combined these two impulses, their critical dystopias asserting negative critiques of oppressive systems and conjuring utopian elsewheres through their self-aware horrific representations. In our examination of these traditions, we will discuss: How are we shaped by technology? Who counts as human? And how do science fiction's cyborgs, aliens, and other monsters give voice to, embody, or otherwise theorize the historical and material experiences of women, queer people, and people of color? We will depart from two contradictory and yet consanguineous points of inquiry: Samuel R. Delany's claim that science fiction is first and foremost a way of reading (rather than a delineable body of texts) and Joanna Russ' definition of science fiction as the subjunctive genre (it is about that which is neither possible nor impossible). Over the semester, we will then read theory as science fiction and science fiction as theory, as we explore the attempts of writers, filmmakers, and showrunners but also scholars, artists, poets, musicians, and fans to critically imagine our world otherwise.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (10%): You are expected to attend every class meeting on time. Please come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Good class participation involves contributing to the ongoing discussion in a responsible and informed manner, being attentive to that conversation, and being respectful of the participants in it.

Leading Discussion (20%): Each student will be expected to co-lead the discussion of one screening during the course of the semester. In anticipation of your week, you and your partner should watch the screening material ahead of time. Together, prepare a 10-minute presentation, introducing the text's production history and its scholarly reception. Also prepare at least five discussion questions for the class. You will submit your outline and citations for a grade.

Course Blog (20%): Each student is expected to contribute to the course blog twice across the semester. These blog posts should each be approximately 500 words in length. They should reflect critically on the week's reading and initiate a conversation to be continued in class. Posts should be made by Monday night, and all students should read them before class on Thursday.

Midterm (20%): Mid-semester students will have a take home exam, which will consist of thematic essay questions that span the first three units of course content.

Final Project (20%): As their final assignment, students have the choice to either write a traditional research paper or produce their own work of science fiction—theorizing gender, race, and/or sexuality by way of a short science fiction film, fanvid or treatment for a longer project.

Final Project Presentation (10%): On the last day of the semester, students will give 10-minute presentations of their final projects.

All assignments are due via Turn It In on Blackboard, unless noted otherwise.

Readings

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (Philip K. Dick, 1968)

Her Smoke Rose Up Forever (James Tiptree, Jr., 2004)

Kindred: The Graphic Novel (Octavia E. Butler and Damian Duffy, 2017)

NASA/TREK (Constance Penley, 1997)

Parable of the Sower (Octavia E. Butler, 1993)

When the Moon Was Ours (Anna-Marie McLemore, 2016)

The Handmaid's Tale (Margaret Atwood, 1985)

All other readings will be available through Blackboard as PDFs.

All readings should be read prior to attending the class for which they are assigned, unless noted otherwise.

Course Schedule

UNIT I. Some of Us Are Cyborgs

January 12: Introductions

Reading: “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” (Jacques Lacan, 1949); “Speculations: The Subjunctivity of Science Fiction” (Joanna Russ, 1973); and “K. Leslie Steiner Interview” (Samuel R. Delany, 1993).

Screening: “Man on the Street” and “Needs” from *Dollhouse* (2009-10).

January 19: Androids’ Dreams

Reading: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Philip K. Dick, 1968).

Screening: *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2015).

January 26: Cyborg Manifestos

Reading: “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (Donna Haraway, 1985) and “Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things to Race” (Wendy Chun, 2012).

Screening: *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999).

UNIT II. Reproduction

February 2: No Class

Screening (on own outside of class): *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985).

February 9: Race, Gender, and the Reproduction of Norms

Reading: *Kindred: The Graphic Novel* (Octavia E. Butler and Damian Duffy, 2017) and “Love Is the Plan, The Plan is Death” (James Tiptree, Jr., 1973).

Screening: *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013).

February 16: Children and the Revolution

Reading: “The Ultimate Revolution: Demands and Speculations” from *The Dialectic of Sex* (Shulamith Firestone, 1970); “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words” (Hortense Spillers, 1984); and “The Future Is Kid Stuff” from *No Future* (Lee Edelman, 2004).

Screening: *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006).

February 23: Rebel Mothers and Queer Sisters

Reading: *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Margaret Atwood, 1985) and “Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism” (micha cárdenas, 2016).

Screening: “Things Which Have Never Yet Been Done” and “By Means Which Have Never Yet Been Tried” episodes from *Orphan Black* (2013-present).

UNIT III. Sex and *Star Trek*

March 2: Kirk/Spock

Reading: Selections from *NASA/TREK* (Constance Penley, 1997); “Pornography By Women For Women, With Love” (Joanna Russ, 1985); and “Women, *Star Trek*, and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding” (Francesca Coppa, 2008).

Screening: “The City on the Edge of Forever” and “Mirror, Mirror” from *Star Trek* (1966-69); and fanvids “Closer” (T. Jonesy, 2004) and “Us” (Lim, 2007).

March 9: *Star Trek* Beyond the Binaries

Reading: “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy” and “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” from *Undoing Gender* (Judith Butler, 2004).

Screening: “The Host” from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94) and “Rejoined” from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-99).

March 23: No Class (*Midterm due at 6pm*)

UNIT IV. Science Fiction as Social Justice

March 30: Afrofuturism

Reading: *Parable of the Sower* (Octavia E. Butler, 1993); and “A Litany For Survival” and “The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action” (Audre Lorde, 1978).

Screening: *Space Is The Place* (Sun Ra, 1974) and *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu, 2010).

April 6: Lesbian Feminist Futures

Reading: “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” (James Tiptree, Jr., 1976); “Uses of the Erotic” (Audre Lorde, 1978); and “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (Adrienne Rich, 1980).

Screening: *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983).

April 13: Trans and Queer of Color Futures

Reading: “Shifting Futures: Digital Trans of Color Praxis” (micha cárdenas, 2015) and *When the Moon Was Ours* (Anna-Marie McLemore, 2016).

Screening: “Many Moons” (Janelle Monáe, 2010) and “Prime Time” (Janelle Monáe, 2013).

April 20: Sexualities and Kinship Structures on the Horizon

Reading: “Aye, and Gomorrah...” (Samuel Delany, 1966); “With Delicate Mad Hands” (James Tiptree, Jr., 1981); “Tongues without Bodies: The Wachowskis’ *Sense8*” (Cáel Keegan, 2016); and “Queerness as a Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism” from *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (José Esteban Muñoz, 2009).

Screening: “What’s Going On” and “Demons” episodes from *Sense8* (2015-present).

April 27: Final Project Presentations

May 4: *Final Project due at 4pm*

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in [SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards](#). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in [SCampus](#) and university policies on scientific misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the [Office of Equity and Diversity](#) or to the [Department of Public Safety](#). This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community—such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member—can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. [The Center for Women and Men](#) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the [sexual assault resource center webpage](#) describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the [American Language Institute](#), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. [The Office of Disability Services and Programs](#) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, [USC Emergency Information](#) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Course Exam, Project and Paper Retention Policy

It is the responsibility of all students in Cinema and Media Studies courses to retrieve all papers, projects, assignments and/or exams within one academic year of completion of a course. These records may be essential in resolving grade disputes and incompletes as well as assist in verifying that course requirements have been met. The Division of Cinema and Media Studies will dispose of all records from the previous academic year in May of the current academic year.

Computer and Phone Policy

Students may use laptop computers and tablets to take notes. All phones must be put away for the duration of the class. Should students begin to abuse their laptop privileges, I will ban all devices from the classroom. Please use your devices in a courteous manner.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will be marked down one third of a letter grade for each day late.