

# LT171: Speculative Fiction

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Office Hours: by appointment  
Time: Tue 9-12.15

## Course Description

Speculative fiction has been defined as exploring things that really could happen but haven't (quite) yet (Margaret Atwood), or postulating an as-yet-unknown future (Jewell Gomez). This focus gives the speculative mode a special resonance at the moment. We live in a world of shifting foundations, facing threats posed by political instability and environmental disaster, not to mention our experience of a frequently predicted but still incredible event: a global pandemic. It is no surprise that the hypothetical explorations of contemporary literature are expressed in the language of, among other genres, science fiction, fantasy, or horror. This seminar examines how post-millennial Anglo-American film and literature use speculative fiction to address the question of the human impact on nature. We will identify the narrative strategies artists have deployed to register their protest against those visions of tomorrow that are generated by relentlessly profit-oriented industries. As Daniel Heath Justice puts it: "we can't possibly live otherwise until we first *imagine* otherwise." For example, we will explore the attention given to the possibility of nonhuman sentience inscribed in landscapes endowed with intelligence, consciousness, and agency, all marks of the potential for communication and cooperation, as well as for feeling, needing, and plotting. We will learn about Afrofuturism, Indigenous Speculative Fiction, Climate Fiction, and Cyberculture. Primarily, we will discuss why speculative fiction came to matter at this historical juncture: the crossroads of colonization, decolonization, globalization, capitalism, and change. This seminar will include excursions to readings and performances.

## Requirements

Attendance  
Regular one-paragraph reading responses  
Active participation in group discussions  
One in-class presentation  
Two term papers (total 5000-7000 words)

## Required Reading:

**(please purchase or borrow the following books)**

Octavia E. Butler. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. Grand Central Publishing, 2019.  
Samanta Schweblin. *Fever Dream*. Trsl. Megan McDowell, Oneworld Publications, 2017.  
Margaret Atwood. *Oryx & Crake*. 2003. Virago, 2009.  
Jesmyn Ward. *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Ahmed Saadawi. *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Trsl. Jonathan Wright, 2013, Oneworld Publications, 2018.

**Further texts will be provided by the instructor and available in the library.**

### **Required Viewing:**

*The Last Angel of History*. Directed by John Akomfrah, performances by Octavia Butler, George Clinton, Kodwo Eshun. UK, 1996.

*District 9*. Directed by Neill Blomkamp, performances by Sharlto Copley, Jason Cope, Vanessa Haywood, Mandla Gaduka, QED International, 2009.

*Get Out*. Directed by Jordan Peele, performances by Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams, Lakeith Stanfield, Universal Pictures, 2017.

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2022:** Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Grade Breakdown

Seminar preparation and participation 30 % (15% for weeks 1-7 and 15% for weeks 8-14)  
 Essay assignments 50 % (mid-term essay 10%, final essay 40%)  
 In-class presentation 20 %

## Schedule

Date	Topic	Weekly Readings / Viewings
	<b>Part I - Race</b>	
Feb. 1	Introduction	
Feb. 8	Imagining (Different) Futures	Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i>
Feb. 15	Science Fiction and Race	Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i>  Isaiah Lavender III, <i>Race in American Science Fiction (excerpts)</i>
Feb. 22	Political Horror I	<i>Get Out</i> . Directed by Jordan Peele, performances by Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams, Lakeith Stanfield, Universal Pictures, 2017.
March 1	The Afterlife of Slavery	Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i>
March 8	Holiday	
	<b>Part II - Ecology</b>	
March 15	Ecocollapse	Schweblin, <i>Fever Dream</i>
March 22	Sustainable Futures	Le Guin, <i>The Word for World is Forest</i>
March 29	Indigenous Speculative Fiction	Grace L. Dillon, <i>Walking the Clouds (excerpts)</i>
April 5	Indigenous Speculative Fiction	Grace L. Dillon, <i>Walking the Clouds (excerpts)</i>
April 12	Spring Break	

<b>Part III – Posthumanism</b>		
April 19	Posthumanism and Interdependency	Atwood, <i>Oryx &amp; Crake</i>
April 26	Afrofuturism	Ytasha L. Womack. <i>Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture</i> (excerpts)  <i>The Last Angel of History</i> . Directed by John Akomfrah, 1996.
May 3	Aliens and the Other	<i>District 9</i> , directed by Neill Blomkamp, 2009.
May 10	Political Horror II	Saadawi, <i>Frankenstein in Baghdad</i>
May 17	Completion Week	

### Essay Deadlines

**March 18, 2021 Mid-term paper**

**May 13, 2021 Final paper**