

Patrick McHugh
Brad Bouley

Girvetz 1307
HSSB 4237

pmchugh@ucsb.edu
bouley@ucsb.edu

Office Hours: T 12:00-2:00 (Bouley, via Zoom); by apt (McHugh)

INT 1770A
Science Fiction and History: Aliens, Plagues, and Isolation

Science fiction is frequently as much an evaluation of our current society as it is a meditation about the future. As such, it draws on the history and cultures of specific places and their own hopes and fears about what might lie ahead. This course will focus on three specific issues that appear in science fiction and which seem relevant to our own society in Santa Barbara, California in 2021, especially for UCSB transfer students: concerns and fears about other sorts of people (aliens); worries about plagues and their aftermaths; and the toll of social isolation.

Assignments and Expectations

Your work in this course involves thinking about the science fiction and history as it applies to life today, both in our world generally and in your specific personal situation. You'll do this thinking by writing before class about the material, attending and participating in class, and presenting final reflections to the class.

Class Preparation Response Papers: You will write a short response (maximum 300 words) to the readings/shows before class. These are meant to be quick thoughts off the top of your head about 1) your take on the material (or some part of it) and 2) how it relates to your situation as a global citizen today and/or your personal experience as a UCSB transfer student attending an in-person class for the first time.

Final Presentation: At the end of term you will present to the class a five-minute reflection on a theme or themes raised in the course.

Attendance and Participation: We are back in class, in person, Zoom-less and excited about this small seminar, in which regular attendance and participation are crucial for your success and way more fun than pixels on a screen. Since we have only six meetings, attendance is mandatory. Two or more unexcused absences will result in an automatic F in this class.

In short, to pass this pass/no pass class, we expect you to simply do the work: attend at least five seminars, complete at least five short responses, and present your final reflections.

Class Policies:

1. *Student Conduct Code:* Students should understand and follow the Student Conduct Code. If you are unfamiliar with it, please consult <http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/CMSMedia/Documents/CodeofConduct2012.pdf>

2. *Plagiarism*: Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. I will follow the sanctioning guidelines presented here
<http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/CMSMedia/Documents/Procedures%20Dealing%20with%20Academic%20Dishonesty.pdf>.
3. *Disabilities*: The University of California and we welcome students with disabilities into the University's educational programs and are happy to make appropriate accommodations. If anyone in this course has a disability, please let us know and contact the Disabled Students Program (DSP) at 805-893-2668, DSP.Help@sa.ucsb.edu, or visit <http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/> for additional information.

Schedule

Part 1: Alien Encounters

Week 1

F (8/6): **Theme:** Encountering New Life

Please watch the following before class and write a short response:

Star Trek (original series), "Arena," Season 1, Episode 18
Star Trek, The Next Generation, "Darmok," Season 5, Episode 2
Star Trek, Deep Space Nine, "Sanctuary," Season 2, Episode 10
All available on Netflix and elsewhere

In class

Intro

SNL sketch about alien contact

Bouley lecture, "A Brief History of UFOs"

Discussion of *Star Trek* episodes: Reason and the Other

Week 2

F (8/13): **Theme:** Aliens and Boundaries

Please read before class and write a response:

Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence"
<http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/the-great-silence/>

Octavia Butler, "Blood Child"

<http://english.ncu.edu.tw/Stewart/Library/ReadingPri/Bloodchild.pdf>

Vina Jie-Min Prasad, "A Guide for Working Breeds"

<https://www.tor.com/2020/03/17/a-guide-for-working-breeds-vina-jie-min-prasad/>

In class:

Brief talk on the social and literary history of “the other” in the West
Discussion of the readings

Part 2: Plague and Other Natural Disasters

Week 3

F (8/20): **Theme:** Plagues Past and Future

Please read/watch before class and write a response:

The Andromeda Strain (2008 miniseries, two episodes)
Available on tubity and elsewhere

Jill Lepore, “What Our Contagion Fables Are Really About”

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/03/30/what-our-contagion-fables-are-really-about>

In Class:

Bouley lecture: A Brief History of Plagues
Discussion of plague stories

Week 4

F (8/27): **Theme:** Science and Social Salvation

Please read and write a response:

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

In Class:

A brief history/discussion of science and its social impact and limits
Discussion of novel.

Part 3: Emerging from Social Isolation

Week 5

F (9/3) **Theme:** Mediated social life

Please read/watch before class and write a response:

Twilight Zone, "The Lonely," Season 1, Episode 7
Available on Netflix and elsewhere

E.M. Forester "The Machine Stops"
https://www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~koehl/Teaching/ECS188/PDF_files/Machine_stops.

In class:

Bouley lecture: A history of privacy and seclusion
Discussion of stories about social mediation

Week 6

F (9/10) **Theme:** Re-entering the World

Please read/watch and write a response:

"The Martian"
Available on Prime and elsewhere

Various articles on u-see.org

In Class:

Discussion of film/web site
Student presentations