

Core 112 | Spring 2011

Future Generations: Narratives of Reproductive Speculation

Thursday 10-11.50 | classroom: CAS 200 | section 63544
Instructor: Alexis Lothian | lothian@usc.edu | office hour Thursday 12-1pm in CAS 210

"Sexual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many." Donna Haraway

"Humanity never asked itself why it deserved to survive. Maybe you don't." Cylon Model Eight,
Battlestar Galactica.

Course description

In an age of IVF, surrogacy, genetic manipulation, and cloning, creating the next generation isn't as straightforward as it used to be. But before science increased the complexity of reproductive biology, speculative fiction was imagining the vast social, cultural, and political effects that potential alterations in the mechanics of reproduction might have. Could mothers exist without fathers, children without parents, families without differences in gender? Is there a biological imperative to keep the human race alive—and if there is, does it have to be fulfilled through heterosexual procreation? Could men (or women) become obsolete?

In this class, we'll explore many aspects of society in order to contemplate what reproductive speculations can mean. Our touchstone text will be Marge Piercy's 1976 *Woman on the Edge of Time*, a many-layered novel whose depths will unfold to us as we progress through the semester. We'll think about the intertwining of family structures, gender roles, and the organization of society through Piercy's reconfigured masculinities and femininities, paying attention to the relationship between production (creating objects and wealth, making money) and reproduction (keeping life and people going, from day to day and from generation to generation). We'll work through a range of texts, published from 1932 to 2009, to consider how reproductive technologies can blur our conceptions of humanity, contemplate how histories of racial and colonial conflict play out in reproductive narratives, and ask what our conventional understandings of children, families, and reproductive biologies can prevent us from seeing.

Course objectives

In Core 111, you learned the prerequisites of scholarly writing: analyzing texts, making an argument, and revising your work for clarity and persuasiveness. In 112, you will build on these skills by joining a larger conversation about literature and ideas. To that end, we will be exploring selected critical theories and secondary source material to supplement our engagement with the primary texts. However, as we venture into the realms of history, culture, and literary theory, please remember that close reading will still be the foundation of everything we do.

The texts with which we will work are mainly speculative fiction, though they range widely across styles and periods. They imagine situations that have never existed in order to address urgent questions about society, relationships, people, history, culture, and science. As we read, we will be less concerned with whether these scenarios could happen than with how the details of their representation help us develop original perspectives on writing, culture, ourselves, and the world.

Required reading

Books

- Octavia Butler, *Dawn*. 1987. New York: Aspect, 1997.
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*. 1932. New York: HarperPerennial Modern Classics, 2006.
- Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*. New York: Vintage, 2005.
- Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*. 1976. New York: Fawcett Books, 1985.
- Fumi Yoshinaga, *Ookii: The Inner Chambers, Volume 1*. San Francisco: Viz Signature, 2009.

Film/TV

Children of Men (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)

Selections from the TV series *Battlestar: Galactica* (Universal, 2003)

Additional theoretical and literary readings provided as handouts or downloads.

Reference

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009.

A college-level dictionary and thesaurus, such as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* or the *Oxford English Dictionary*. These resources are accessible online through the USC Library's E-Resources web page.

Course requirements

Assignments

You will write five formal essays for this class: four shorter papers (4-5 pages or 1250 words) and one 8-10 page (2500-word) seminar paper. The seminar paper will give you the opportunity to develop your own topic and do some guided research to develop and support your ideas. The fourth short paper will take the form of a creative assignment that may be produced in a collaborative group.

You will submit your assignments to me by email using **.doc, .docx, or .rtf format ONLY**, as I return comments using MS Word's Track Changes feature. If you have technical difficulties with this digital requirement, come and talk to me about it.

I expect your essays to be flawlessly presented in the format you learned in Core 111: using in-text citations in MLA style; meeting the length requirement; double-spaced with 1-inch margins in Times New Roman font; and fully proofread.

Late papers are not acceptable. Computer and printer problems are terrible excuses, so avoid them: back up frequently, and make sure you know how to access USC's computers and printers if your own has a problem. If you are having problems and don't think you will get an assignment done in time, get in touch with me **BEFORE** the due date. Remember that this is a fast moving course where the assignments come thick and fast and teach skills that build on one another; if you fall behind, it can be very difficult to catch up.

Tutorials

Intensive, one-on-one tutorial sessions are the cornerstone of the Thematic Option writing curriculum. You will sign up for a recurring half-hour slot, and meet with me six times over the course of the semester. For each session, you will bring in your completed tutorial assignment, which will be the main focus of our interaction during that session. Assignments will be stated clearly on essay prompts and/or in class, and will relate to your in-process essay. Tutorials may not be rescheduled except in the case of emergency, though you may organize swaps among yourselves as long as you let me know.

Presentations

You will make two five-minute presentations during the semester. The first will center on one of the required texts, where you will sign up in advance to lead discussion and focus on a particular theme or concept; the second presentation will be an explanation or performance of your final assignment on the last day of class.

Journals

Every week, you will write a short (3-500 word) response to the assigned reading. We will use the blogging and social networking website Dreamwidth, whose privacy settings let you choose whether to make your writing visible only to me, to your classmates, or to the internet at large. At least two of your responses must be thoughtful blog entries that you will share with the class (you will sign up for these in advance); the others may be as personal and informal as you wish.

Conference

On the evenings of April 12 and 13 the Thematic Option program will host an academic conference at which, if accepted, you will present your seminar paper. In addition, you are expected to attend at least two panels on at least one evening of the conference. This conference provides great opportunities for you to present your own research and to encounter your peers' original ideas.

Classroom policies

Grading

Your grade is based on the following:

Assignments 60%

Tutorials 20%

Participation (including presentations and journals) 20%

However, I will be grading holistically based on your overall progress as a writer. *Improvement* in your writing as you progress through the assignments, and *diligence* in the effort you put into working toward that improvement, are the most important factors. If you come to class sessions and tutorials prepared, demonstrate that you are engaged with the material, and put your heart into your assignments, you will be happy not only with your grade but with your development as a writer and a scholar.

Electronic communication

Course materials, including reading for class, will be uploaded on our course's Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.usc.edu>).

You will post your blog entries at our class group blog, <http://futuregenerations112.dreamwidth.org/>, and I expect you to keep up with your classmates' postings there, including commenting a few times over the course of the semester. I may also use the blog to post links to related content on the web.

I will email announcements and important information to your USC email accounts, so make sure you check these regularly and/or set them up to forward to your personal email addresses. Bear in mind that USC mailboxes are small; if yours fills up, you will lose incoming emails.

Don't hesitate to email me with questions, but reread the syllabus first if you are unsure about a matter of course policy. I will not read substantial drafts in email, or open attachments unless I have asked you to send them. You can expect a response to your queries within 24 hours, 48 if you email at the weekend. I will expect the same response times from you if I email you with a question.

Classroom participation

You are required to be present, punctual, prepared, and ready to engage in every scheduled class session. Bring the texts under discussion, including handouts, every day, as well as any assigned tasks. Participation in this class includes keeping up with the class blog and posting the occasional comment.

One of the most exciting things about a seminar-style class is the energy of being in a room where fifteen people are fully engaged in a task, an idea, or a discussion. This energy can dissipate quickly when people are focusing their attention elsewhere. For this reason, I ask that you take great care with your use of laptops and other electronic devices in class. Technology can enrich classroom discussion in all kinds of ways, but it is disrespectful both to me and to your fellow classmates when you allow your attention to drift to Facebook, email, etc. An easy way to keep your attention in the room is to switch off your device's internet capability unless you need it for a class-related task.

A note on discussion

Part of critical analysis is figuring out where assumptions—both yours and those of the authors you are reading—come from. This can mean raising awkward questions about complicated subjects including politics, religion, race, gender, sexuality, and identity; many of our class texts express perspectives that may challenge you. The classroom should be a space where everyone can express their thoughts as they develop and explore

their responses to the reading and writing tasks. Disagreement is encouraged, but please remember that the subject matter under discussion may affect the feelings of people around you. If at any point you feel that the classroom is not a comfortable space for you, please speak to me in office hours or by email and I will endeavor to do something about it.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you present another writer's ideas or words as your own, it will result in an automatic F; you will be asked to leave the Thematic Option program and risk being dismissed from USC. The integration of secondary sources is one of the skills you will learn in this class, so if you are at all confused about how to do it, just ask. Bear in mind that excessive help from a parent, friend, or tutor also constitutes plagiarism. Your SCampus student guidebook has more information about USC's plagiarism policies.

Academic accommodations for students with disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5pm, Monday-Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740 0776.

Dates for your diary

Assignments:

A1	analysis with small section of secondary text	week 4: Monday January 31 at 4pm
A2	analysis with full secondary text	week 7: Monday February 21 at 4pm
A3	analysis with multiple texts	week 10: Monday March 21 at 4pm
A4	creative work with accompanying analysis	week 15: Thursday April 28 in class

Seminar paper milestones

1: preliminary topic proposal	week 8 for tutorial	TO deadline: March 11
2. abstracts	week 10 by email	TO deadline: April 1
3. annotated bibliography and function outline	week 12 for tutorial	
4: draft (conference length)	week 13	TO conference: April 12-13
5: final seminar paper due	week 15: Monday April 25	

Tutorials (Monday/Tuesday)

Tutorial 1: Jan 24-25	week 3: on A1
Tutorial 2: Feb 7-8	week 5: on A2
Tutorial 3: Feb 28-Mar 1	week 8: on A3 and conference proposal
Tutorial 4: Apr 4-5	week 12: on seminar paper
Tutorial 5: Apr 18-19	week 14: group tutorials
Tutorial 6: Apr 25-26	week 15: on A4

Class Schedule (subject to change)

Week	Due	Texts for class discussion	Writing topics covered
1 1-13		Unit 1: Production and Reproduction In-class clips and quotes	Introductions; A1
2 1-20	Mon 17: Introductory blog post	Piercy, <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i> chapters 1-9 (pp 1-183)	Thesis-driven essays revisited
3 1-27	Mon & Tue: Tutorial 1	[read before tutorial] Piercy, <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i> chapters 10-20 (pp 184-376)	Close reading and quoting
4 2-3	Mon 31: A1	Unit 2: Reproductive Technologies Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> chapters 1-6 (pp 1-106); Marx and Freud handouts	A2 introduced Working with secondary sources
5 2-10	Mon & Tue: Tutorial 2	Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> chapters 7-18 (pp 107-259)	Working with sources; Conference introduction
6 2-17		<i>Battlestar: Galactica</i>	Reading a visual text Seminar paper possibilities
7 2-24	Mon 21: A2	Unit 3: Defining the Human Ishiguro, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> part one (pp 1-111)	A3 introduced Library session
8 3-3	Mon & Tue: Tutorial 3	Ishiguro, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> part two (pp 115-288); Judith Butler handout	Organizing your research and writing a proposal
9 3-10	Fri 11: conference proposals due	Handouts by Du Bois, Larsen, Lorde, Spillers	Juggling multiple sources
3-17	spring break		
10 3-24	Mon 21: A3	Octavia Butler, <i>Dawn</i> parts I and II (pp 1-111)	No class; online discussion
11 3-31	April 1: conference abstracts due	Octavia Butler, <i>Dawn</i> parts III and IV (pp 115-248)	Structuring a longer paper
12 4-7	Tutorial 4	Unit 4: Thinking of the Children <i>Children of Men</i> ; Edelman handout	Provocations and counterarguments
13 4-14	Conference draft	Yoshinaga, <i>Ooku</i>	Revision
14 4-21	Tutorial 5	Handouts by Russ and Le Guin. Additional readings suggested by class.	Class choice
15 4-28	Mon 25: seminar paper. Tutorial 6 Thurs 28: A4		A4 presentations