

Feminist Science Fiction Film (Criticism and Culture)

Course Convenor: Dr Sarah Dillon

Overview: There exists a well-established history of feminist science fiction literature, which emerged most strongly in the 1970s with writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ. There is now a wealth of scholarly and popular literature devoted to the connection between feminism and science fiction literature, and the renowned feminist science fiction convention WisCon has been running since 1977. When it comes to feminist science fiction film, however, it is a different story. Given that mainstream science fiction film is still almost exclusively the domain of men, both behind and in front of the camera, it might reasonably be concluded that there is no such thing as feminist science fiction film. But there is, and this course is designed to introduce students to that history and develop an analysis of feminist science fiction film's themes, concerns and styles. The course will be structured via a selection of feminist SF sub-genres, with films drawn from across historical periods and national cinemas, both features and shorts: comedy – *Born in Flames* (1983; dir. Lizzie Borden) and *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (2011; dir. Madeleine Olnek); superheroine – *Tank Girl* (1995; dir. Rachel Talalay); biopic – *Conceiving Ada* (1997; dir. Lynn Hershmann Leeson) and *Unbound* (2013; dir. Abigail Child); space opera – *Afronauts* (2011; dir. Francis Bodomo) and *No Gravity* (2011; dir. Silvia Casalino, 60 mins); experimental - *Beastliness* (2011; dir. Deborah Kelly), *We The Others* (2014; dir. Maja Borg) and *Flaming Ears* (1991; dir. Angela Hans Scheirl, Ursula Pürerer, and Dietmar Schipek); and “documentary” – *Ottica Zero* (2007; dir. Maya Borg) and *Future My Love* (2012; dir. Maja Borg).

Preliminary Viewing

Students might usefully watch all the set films in advance, but may have difficulty sourcing some of them until they have access to University of Cambridge library resources.

Preliminary Reading

On feminism and science fiction:

Most existing criticism on feminism and science fiction focuses more on literature than film, but the following might prove useful introductions to some of the ideas explored on the course:

Armitt, Lucie, *Where No Man has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Barr, Marleen S., *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (University of North Carolina Press 1993).

Hollinger, Veronica, ‘Feminist Theory and Science Fiction’, in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 125-36.

Lefanu, Sarah, *In The Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press 1988).

Wolmark, Jenny, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

On science fiction film:

To gain a wider sense of the past, present and future of science fiction film, advanced perusal of some of the following works, thought not exclusively concerned with feminism, would be useful:

Geraghty, Lincoln, *American Science Fiction Film and Television* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2009).

Kaveney, Roz, *From Alien to the Matrix: Reading Science Fiction Film* (London: IB Tauris, 2005).

Redmond, Sean and Leon Marvell (eds.), *Endangering Science Fiction Film* (AFI Film Readers, 2015).

Rickman, Gregg (ed.), *The Science Fiction Film Reader* (New York: Limelight, 2004).

King, Geoff and Tanya Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* (London: Wallflower, 2000).

Kuhn, Annette (ed.), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso 1990).

Kuhn, Annette (ed.), *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 1999).

Roberts, Adam, *The Palgrave Critical History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

Sobchack, Vivian, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, 2nd edition (New York: Ungar, 1993; 1st edn. 1980).