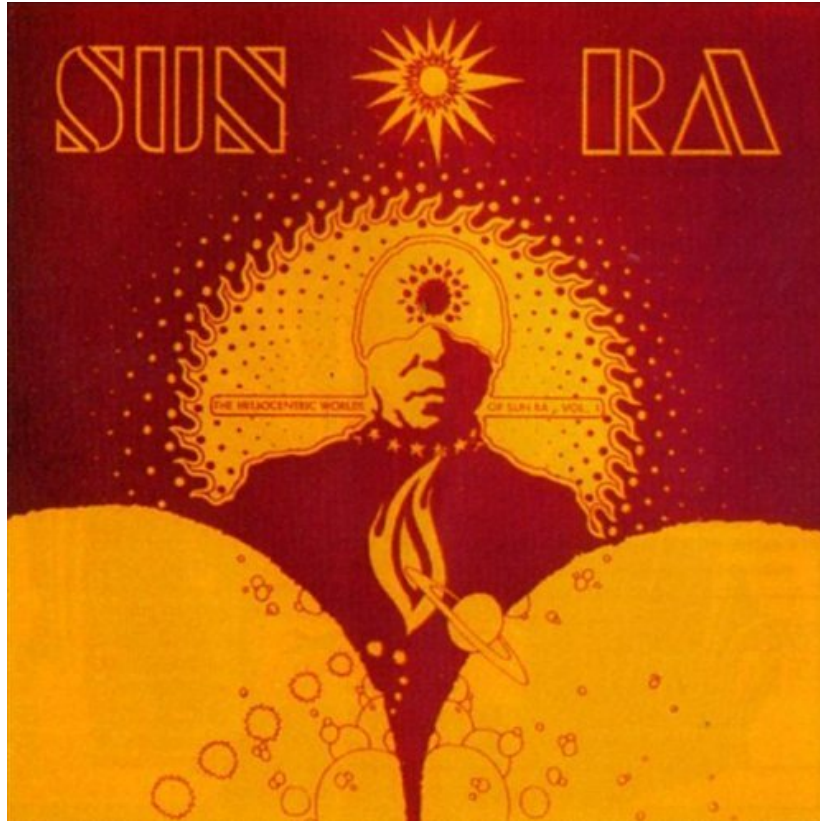


AfroAm 690E Blackness and Utopia

Spring 2013

T 2:30-5:00
302 New Africa House



Dr. Britt Rusert

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-2:30PM and by appointment

Overview

This course explores the vibrant history of utopian thought in Black Studies and African American literature and culture. It considers how the black radical tradition poses particular challenges to Western utopian thought as well as how the question of utopia might contribute to, or help to re-configure, the future(s) of Black Studies. Topics of discussion will include Afrofuturism, utopia and the black radical tradition, Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism, science fiction and speculative fiction, and blackness and metaphysics.

Course Outcomes

Expectations

Participation – 30%

- Engaged and thorough reading of the course texts
- Regular attendance and thoughtful class participation

Presentation – 40%

2-3 pp. Synthesis Paper and Afrofuturism Project – 30%

- Due **Tuesday, May 7th** (e-mailed to brusert@afroam.umass.edu no later than 5:00PM)

Assignments

Presentation

In **one class session** during the semester, you will be responsible for giving a **12-15 minute presentation** on a text, image, cultural object, artist, musician or author of your choice. You will be the instructor for this section of the class, so please prepare your presentation as if you were planning to teach a class. Feel free to bring in videos, images, music, prose excerpts, poems, or any other teaching aids that will help to bring your material alive for the class. You might also consider designing a class exercise or have students participate in a discussion for part of the presentation.

- Please consider this as an opportunity to explore a topic, figure, or text not represented on the syllabus as well as an opportunity for you to share your own areas of expertise and research interests.
- While you may decide to present on one or more of the supplemental readings for the week, you are by no means required to do so. These presentations can also work as experiments in juxtaposition – so, for example, we might have a presentation on Grace Jones before we discuss Thomas More's *Utopia*.
- Please use some of your time at the end of the presentation to reflect on the possible relationships between your chosen text/object and the reading for that class period.

Please let me know if you would like to meet to discuss your ideas for the presentation

Synthesis Paper and Afrofuturism Project

Due **Tuesday, May 7th** (e-mailed to brusert@afroam.umass.edu no later than 5:00PM)

The Afrofuturism Project is a project of your own design that allows you to do further reading, viewing, listening, and exploring into the topic of the class, tailored to your own research goals. This project can take many different forms and should be driven by your interests. Some possibilities:

- An annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources
- A multimedia bibliography, composed of both traditional print sources, visual sources, and other materials
- An index, in which you track one or two key concepts across primary and secondary texts

- A Common-place book
- A Scrapbook
- An Afrofuturism blog
- An artistic portfolio or portfolio of visual media

You should feel free to compose entries from the class reading, the supplemental reading lists, and other texts, images, videos, music that interest you. In whatever form it takes, your project will collate together your reading and thinking in a written, visual, or multimedia format. Please give yourself the license to be creative and ambitious with this project. I am more than happy to meet to discuss your ideas and to brainstorm.

In addition to your project, please hand in a **2-3 pp., single-spaced, synthesis paper**, in which you lay out your understanding of a core concept from the class (utopia; speculative fiction; blackness; etc.) or in which you provide an analysis of the course topic (blackness and utopia). The topic for your synthesis paper should emerge from your Afrofuturism project and in the paper, you should draw from entries in the project, as well as from readings on the syllabus, including the supplemental materials, and of course, class notes.

Texts

- All readings listed with an asterisk [*] are available on Moodle.
- *Space is the Place* [1974, dir. John Coney], is available on course reserve at the Du Bois Library
- Please purchase these titles. Books are available at the Food For Thought Books Collective on North Pleasant Street. Any edition is fine, and you should be able to find some of the titles used online:

Thomas More, *Three Early Modern Utopias*, ISBN: 0199537992, Oxford

Samuel Delany, *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*, ISBN: 081956298X, Wesleyan

Samuel Delany, *Tales of Nevèrjón*, ISBN: 081956270X, Wesleyan Press

Octavia Butler, *Dawn*, ISBN: 0446603775, Aspect

Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*, Minnesota, ISBN: 0816676488

Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker & the Modern Surface*, Oxford, ISBN: 0195387058

Gwendolyn Du Bois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*, Duke Press, ISBN: 0822333961

José Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, NYU Press, ISBN: 0814757286

Schedule

***Please note that the supplemental materials are not required readings. However, you should feel free to draw from these references for your class presentation, for entries in your Afrofuturism project, and/or for further reading*

The Utopian, the Dystopian, and the Anti-Utopian

- 1/22: W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet"*
 Samuel Delany, "Racism and Science Fiction"*
 Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future"*

Supplemental:

George Schuyler, *Black No More*
 Schuyler, *Black Empire*
 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
 Martin Delany, *Blake; or, the Huts of America*
 Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild"
 Sheree R. Thomas, Ed., *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction From the African Diaspora*
 Jennifer Terry, "The Fiction of W.E.B. Du Bois," in *The Cambridge Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois*
 Alondra Nelson, "Future Texts," Introduction to special issue on Afrofuturism, *Social Text* 20.2 (2002)

- 1/29: Thomas More, *Utopia*
 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Selections)*

Supplemental:

Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play* (1974), Trans. Robert A. Vollrath
 Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*
 Christopher Kendrick, "More's *Utopia* and Uneven Development," *boundary two* XIII, 2/3 (Winter/Spring 1985)

- 2/5: Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1 (Selections)*
 Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Selections)*

Supplemental:

Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*
 Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*
 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*

Black optimism/Afro-pessimism

- 2/12: Nathaniel Mackey, *Splay Anthem*, Preface and Select Poems*
 Fred Moten, "Black Op"*

Frank Wilderson, "Introduction: Unspeakable Ethics," in *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms**

Supplemental:

Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*
 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
 Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*
 Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews*
 Vincent Brown, *Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*

2/19: No class [Monday schedule followed]

2/26: Natasha Trethewey, Select Poems from *Native Guard* and *Thrall**
 Stephen Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present"*
 Jared Sexton, "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts"*

Supplemental:

Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery"
 Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiracism and the Critique of Multiracialism*
 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making In Nineteenth-century America*
 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*
 Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* and *Beloved*

Afro-futures

3/5: Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

Supplemental:

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer 1987)
 Nalo Hopkinson, *The Brown Girl in the Ring*
 Octavia Butler, "The Monophobic Response" in Sheree Thomas, ed., *Dark Matter*
 Terry Bisson, *Fire on the Mountain*

3/12 (FYI): Class Cancelled for Gene Andrew Jarrett Visit

2:00-3:30PM: Afternoon Coffee and Discussion of Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature*
 Shirley Graham Du Bois Reading Room, 2nd Floor, New Africa House

4:30 PM: Lecture, Campus Center 904

3/19: Spring Recess

Utopia and the Black Radical Tradition

3/26: Samuel Delany, *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*
Delany, "About 5,750 Words"*

Supplemental:

Jameson, "Utopia and Its Antinomies" in *Archaeologies of the Future* (section on *Trouble on Triton* and heterotopia)
Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" – on Foucault's concept of heterotopia, in *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring 1986)
Delany, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*
Ursula LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*
Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*

4/2: Samuel Delany, *Tales of Nevèrÿon*
Sun Ra, *Space is the Place* (dir. John Coney) – **View before class; on reserve at library**

Supplemental:

Jameson, "The Great Schism," (on fantasy) in *Archaeologies of the Future*
Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*
Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson
John F. Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*
Music of Sun Ra
Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise, dir. Robert Mugge
Sun Ra: Brother From Another Planet, BBC Documentary (available on YouTube)
Parliament Funkadelic, *The Mothership Connection Live 1976*

4/4 (FYI): Lynn Pasquerella Lecture, "Aesthetic Disruption and Ontological Doubt in Kara Walker's Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War [Annotated]"
4:30 PM, Gamble Auditorium, Mt. Holyoke College

4/9: The Combahee River Collective Statement*
Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic"*
Kelley, "Black Feminist Dreams" in *Freedom Dreams**

Supplemental:

Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*
Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*
Ed. Barbara A. Crow, ed., *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*

- Thursday, 4/11: Alondra Nelson Visit
- 2:00-3:30PM:** Afternoon Coffee and Discussion of Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*
Shirley Graham Du Bois Reading Room, 2nd Floor, New Africa House
- 4:30 PM:** Lecture, Campus Center 904

Race, Gender, Art, Sexuality

- 4/16: Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker & the Modern Surface*
- 4/23: Visit to Mt. Holyoke Art Museum, View Kara Walker Exhibit, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, and other pieces
Gwendolyn Du Bois Shaw, *The Art of Kara Walker*
John P. Bowles, "Introduction," *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment*

Supplemental:

Interview with Kara Walker and overview of her work on PBS Series, *Art21*; Available online:
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kara-walker>
Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. 1: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968-1992*
Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism, 1967-1982*
Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black" in *Transition* 58 [1992]
Lisa Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists*

- 4/30: José Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

Supplemental:

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*
José Estaban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*
E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*
Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*

- 5/7: Afrofuturism Projects and 2-3 pp. Synthesis Paper Due [e-mailed as Word Document to brusert@afroam.umass.edu no later than 5:00PM]