

Sociology and STS Through Science Fiction – An elective course for undergraduate students in Sociology and Anthropology at Krea University (Term 3, 2025-26 AY)

Course Description: “Sociology and STS Through Science Fiction” treats speculative cinema and short fiction as the basis for a comparative ethnography of power. Across eleven weeks, the course follows a curated sequence of science fiction films (*Gattaca*, *Arrival*, *Akira*, *Blade Runner*, *Snowpiercer*, *Equilibrium*, *The Matrix*, *District 9*, *Sorry to Bother You*, *Brazil*) alongside anti-caste and South Asian speculative writing drawn primarily from *The Blaft Book of Anti-Caste SF* and *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction, Volume 2*. These materials provide grounded, situated imaginaries of genetic citizenship, infrastructural domination, border regimes, racial capitalism, bureaucratic violence, and abolitionist horizons that are often only abstractly theorized in canonical social theory.

Students thus learn to read films/speculative narratives as sites where states, markets, and technical systems are made visible: how metrics fabricate “valid” and “invalid” lives; how simulations and media infrastructures encode ideology; how camps, checkpoints, databases, and documents enact caste/race, gender, and class hierarchies; how insurgent publics, underground networks, and counter-futures contest these arrangements. Each weekly module pairs one film with a small cluster of short fiction and an average of 60-70 pages of sociology, anthropology, and STS (e.g. Benjamin, Browne, Hall, Fraser, Ahmed, Bhattacharyya, Robinson, Suchman, Das & Poole, Gupta), training students to mobilize concepts such as biopolitics, infrastructures, racial capitalism, social reproduction, surveillance, and ontological politics through close formal analysis rather than decontextualized summary.

The course is explicitly comparative and decolonial in orientation. It centers anti-caste, Dalit-Bahujan, and Global South perspectives to interrogate who is rendered human, governable, expendable, or impossible in dominant techno-political imaginaries, and invites students to experiment with their own public-facing critical work (video essays, zines, policy briefs, speculative manifestos) as a mode of sociological practice.

Themes / Modules: Please provide short description (Not more than 3 or 4 lines of each module / Theme)

Week 1 — Biopolitics, Testing & “Valid/Invalid”

Students examine how *Gattaca* and “Pruning Neurons” dramatize genetic testing and cognitive metrics as technologies of classification. Theoretical readings on the “New Jim Code” and biological citizenship provide a vocabulary for tracing how seemingly neutral metrics produce hierarchies of life chances and belonging.

Week 2 — Language, Expertise, Categories

Using *Arrival* alongside *Blaft* and canonical STS texts, this week explores who gets to define meaning, risk, and threat when communicating across difference. Students learn to treat categories (e.g. “alien,” “insurgent,” “citizen”) as contested socio-technical devices rather than descriptive labels.

Week 3 — Mega-Projects, Youth & Authoritarian Urbanism

Akira anchors a discussion of infrastructures as instruments of authoritarian and casteist rule, especially in contexts of urban renewal, redevelopment, and securitization. Star, Bowker, and Larkin help students see how classification systems and mega-projects render certain populations surplus while normalizing militarized “order.”

Week 4 — Personhood, Memory & Policing

Through *Blade Runner*, “Robot S/C 5,” and work by Suchman and Mol, students interrogate how tests, records, and memories enact some beings as disposable labor and others as fully human. The module emphasizes ontological politics: personhood as an outcome of institutional practices, not metaphysical essence.

Week 5 — Race, Class, Climate & Closed Systems

Snowpiercer and the *Blaft* short story “Meen Matters” provide a closed-world laboratory for thinking racial capitalism, social reproduction, and ecological extraction. Robinson and Bhattacharya equip students to map how compartments, routes, and reproductive labor sustain unequal systems even (or especially) under crisis.

Week 6 — Surveillance, Affect Regulation & Soft Fascism

With *Equilibrium*, short stories from *Gollancz*, Browne, and Benjamin, this week analyzes surveillance, database infrastructures, and the policing of emotion as racialized and caste-marked techniques of rule. Students connect authoritarianism to everyday biometric systems, predictive tools, and cultural censorship.

Week 7 — Media Systems, Ideology & Counter-publics

The Matrix becomes a case study in encoded ideology, hyperreality, and subaltern counter-publics. Hall, Fraser, and Baudrillard (tightly excerpted) guide students to identify dominant codes, oppositional readings, and underground circuits of speech that contest totalizing media systems.

Week 8 — Sovereignty, Borders, Race/Caste & Xenophobia

District 9, *Blaft*, and *Gollancz* anchor analysis of camps, checkpoints, and “contamination” discourses as techniques of racialized/casteist bordering. Ahmed and Bhattacharyya provide tools to read how strangers are fabricated, managed, and violently contained in neoliberal and postcolonial regimes.

Week 9 — Work, Worker Identity, Strikes & Care

Building on *Sorry to Bother You* and the *Blaft* short story “This House Is Never Clean,” this week situates voice, accent, and bodily discipline within global service economies and household labor regimes. Aneesh and Bhattacharya help students connect call-center politics and warehouse/care work to social reproduction and labor strikes.

Week 10 — Bureaucracy, Absurdism & Administrative Violence

With *Brazil*, *Blaft* and *Gollancz*, and academic pieces by Das & Poole, and Gupta, students unpack how files, forms, and procedural delays enact slow violence. The module foregrounds margins, corruption talk, and absurd legality as everyday ways in which states are imagined, and inequalities are stabilized.

Week 11 — Synthesis: Sociology + Abolitionist & Anti-Caste SF

The final week consolidates key concepts through student-led synthesis and an open-note exam. Returning to the *Blaft* introduction and course films, students articulate a small set of arguments about how speculative media can function as tools for anti-caste, antiracist, and abolitionist sociological inquiry.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Critically analyze science fiction films and short stories as sociological texts**, identifying how they stage problems of power, inequality, technology, and governance through narrative, image, and sound.
2. **Apply key concepts from sociology, anthropology, and STS**—including biopolitics, infrastructures, racial capitalism, social reproduction, surveillance, ideology, and ontological politics—to close readings of speculative media.
3. **Diagnose how mechanisms such as metrics, borders, camps, files, and platforms produce “valid/invalid” subjects**, with particular attention to caste, race, gender, class, and citizenship as intersecting regimes of classification.
4. **Explain and evaluate anti-caste, Dalit-Bahujan, and Global South perspectives on technology and futurity**, and distinguish these from Euro-American canonical framings in both theory and science fiction.
5. **Interpret media systems as political infrastructures**, using frameworks from Hall, Fraser, Ahmed, Benjamin, Browne, Das & Poole, Gupta, and others to trace how ideology, counter-publics, and everyday state practices are encoded and contested.
6. **Construct clear, theoretically grounded arguments in written and multimodal formats**, integrating empirical analysis of specific scenes/texts with scholarly sources rather than relying on impressionistic commentary.
7. **Design and defend an “abolitionist” or transformative reading of a chosen science-fiction world**, specifying which institutions, technologies, and classifications would need to be reconfigured or dismantled and on what sociological grounds.

Pedagogical Style: This class would be executed as a “flipped” classroom – students will be expected to do their readings in advance of the class. Pedagogy will include lectures, review of readings, sharing audio-visual contents (short documentaries, pictures, films etc.) and discussions. Group discussions, brief oral presentations and worksheets will be an integral part of classroom activities. Students taking this course are expected to keep up with weekly readings, and be present for the required number of in-class assessments etc. All readings will be made available to the class through Canvas, except when students are specifically requested to purchase materials.

Pre-requisites if any: No, but students who have taken SOCL 306 are likely to get the most out of this course.

Required and Recommended Reading(s):

Model:

2 × ~2-hour meetings/week

1 full screening + 1 lecture/seminar every week

~60-70 pages of sociology/anthro/STS theory + 1 short-story per week

No long novels; films and short stories are the empirical spine

While all academic readings would be made available to the students on Canvas, this course also uses two non-academic books (listed below) that they would be encouraged to purchase through a bookstore or online reseller at a nominal cost. I would especially stress upon this in the case of the Blaft book. **The two books are referred to as “Blaft” and “Gollancz” in the Required Readings section below.** I would also be requesting the Krea library to add these two books to their collection, in the interest of making these books more accessible to the broader student population at Krea.

- R.T. Samuel, Rakesh Khanna, and Rashmi Ruth Devadasan (eds.) (2024), *The Blaft Book of Anti-Caste SF*. Blaft Publications.
- Tarun K. Saint (ed.) (2021), *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction: Volume 2*. Hachette India.

In the event of a holiday, students would be encouraged to watch the film for the week at home and come prepared for the lecture/seminar on the other scheduled class for that week.

Required Readings:**Week 1 — Biopolitics, Testing & “Valid/Invalid”****Screening (Class 1)**

- *Gattaca* (1997). Runtime: 106 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Short story from Blaft (~29 pages):** “Pruning Neurons” (Esther Larisa David)
- **Academic reading (~115 pages):**
 - Ruha Benjamin (2019), *Race After Technology*, Intro + Ch.1 (~77 pages)
 - Nikolas Rose & Carlos Novas (2005), “Biological Citizenship,” in *Global Anthropology* (~38 pages).
- Focus: metrics → institution → hierarchy.

Week 2 — Language, Expertise, Categories**Screening (Class 1)**

- *Arrival* (2016). Runtime: 116 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~17 pages):** “File No. 786 [The Night Journey]” (Hameedha Khan).
- **Academic reading (~56 pages):**
 - Eviatar Zerubavel (1999), *Social Mindscapes*, Chs.1–2. (~34 pages)
 - Sheila Jasanoff (2003), “Technologies of Humility.” *Minerva* 41(3). (~22 pages)
- Focus: who gets to define meaning; categories as border devices/technologies.

Week 3 — Mega-Projects, Youth & Authoritarian Urbanism

Screening (Class 1)

- *Akira* (1988). Runtime: 124 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~19 pages):** “Sanatan Gaming” (Kunal Lokhande).
- **Academic reading (~61 pages):**
 - Brian Larkin (2013), “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.” *ARA* 42. (~13 pages)
 - Susan Leigh Star & Geoffrey C. Bowker (2000), selections from *Sorting Things Out*, pp. 1-16 + Ch. 6. (~48 pages)
- Focus: infrastructures as casteist/fascist machines; youth as waste/surplus.

Week 4 — Personhood, Memory & Policing

Screening (Class 1)

- *Blade Runner* (1982). Runtime: 117 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~7 pages):** “Robot S/C 5” (Neerav Patel).
- **Academic reading (~65 pages):**
 - Lucy Suchman (2007), *Human–Machine Reconfigurations*, Ch. 13. (~15 pages)
 - Annemarie Mol (2002), *The Body Multiple*, Intro + Chs.1-2. (~50 pages)
- Focus: tests of personhood; evidence, testimony, and recognition.

Week 5 — Race, Class, Climate & Closed Systems

Screening (Class 1)

- *Snowpiercer* (2013). Runtime: 126 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~27 pages):** “Meen Matters” (Rashmi Ruth Devadasan).
- **Academic reading (~48 pages):**
 - Cedric J. Robinson (1983), *Black Marxism*, Ch.1. (~28 pages)
 - Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.) (2019), *Social Reproduction Theory*, Intro. (~20 pages)
- Focus: compartments, racial capitalism, social reproduction.

Week 6 — Surveillance, Affect Regulation & Soft Fascism

Screening (Class 1)

- *Equilibrium* (2002). Runtime: 107 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Gollancz (~26 pages):** “The Ministry of Relevance” (Arjun Raj Gaiind); “Dimensions of Life under Fascism” (Jayaprakash Satyamurthy).
- **Academic reading (~82 pages):**
 - Simone Browne (2015), *Dark Matters*, Intro + Ch.1. (~62 pages)
 - Ruha Benjamin (2019), *Race After Technology*, Ch.2 (~20 pages)
- Focus: surveillance of caste/race; emotion as a site of rule.

Week 7 — Media Systems, Ideology & Counter-publics

Screening (Class 1)

- *The Matrix* (1999). Runtime: 136 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~23 pages):** “The Last Radio Play” (V. Chandrasekhar Rao), “The R.V. Society for Promotion of Underground Sci-Fi Writings” (Rahee Punyashloka).
- **Academic reading (~77 pages):**
 - Stuart Hall (1980), “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972–79*, pp. 128–138. (~10 pages)
 - Jean Baudrillard (1994), *Simulacra and Simulation*, “The Precession of Simulacra,” pp. 1–43. (~43 pages)
 - Nancy Fraser (1990), “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26, pp. 56–80. (~24 pages)
- Focus: encoding, decoding, hyperreality, counterpublics.

Week 8 — Sovereignty, Borders, Race/Caste & Xenophobia

Screening (Class 1)

- *District 9* (2009). Runtime: 112 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~6 pages):** “In the Extreme Silence of the Agrahara” (Aswathy K. Raj)
- **Gollancz (~12 pages):** “The Crossing” (Kalsang Yangzom)
- **Academic reading (~66 pages):**
 - Sara Ahmed (2000), *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Intro + Ch.1 (~37 pages)
 - Gargi Bhattacharyya (2017), *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*, Intro + Ch.5 (~29 pages)
- Focus: camps, contamination, bureaucratic racism/caste-ism.

Week 9 — Work, Worker Identity, Strikes & Care

Screening (Class 1)

- *Sorry to Bother You* (2018). Runtime: 112 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~15 pages):** “This House Is Never Clean” (Shivani Kshirsagar)
- **Academic reading (~65 pages):**
 - A. Aneesh (2015), *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global*, Prologue + Ch. 5 (~39 pages)
 - Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.) (2019), *Social Reproduction Theory*, Ch. 4 (~26 pages)
- Focus: voice, accent, commodified bodies, strike politics.

Week 10 — Bureaucracy, Absurdism, Administrative Violence

Screening (Class 1)

- *Brazil* (1985). Runtime: 142 minutes.

Lecture/Seminar (Class 2)

- **Blaft (~7 pages):** “A Demon That Sits on Your Chest.” (Gouri)
- **Gollancz (~10 pages):** “The Pain Merchant.” (Manjula Padmanabhan)
- **Academic reading (~83 pages):**
 - Veena Das & Deborah Poole (eds.) (2004), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Chs. 1-2 (~64 pages)
 - Akhil Gupta (1995), “Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State,” *American Ethnologist* 22(2): pp. 375–394 (~19 pages)
- Focus: paperwork, absurdism, procedural cruelty, slow violence.

Week 11 — Synthesis: Sociology + Abolitionist & Anti-Caste SF

Synthesis (Class 1)

- **Blaft:** Return to the anthology's Introduction as closing text.
- No new theory. This time would be used to articulate 3–4 course theses about technology, caste/race, and power across the film corpus and the articles we've covered over the trimester.

Final exam (Class 2)

- Open note final exam, in class. Submission of student projects.

Additional (optional)/Recommended readings will be made available to the class through the final syllabus.

Assessment Components: ** (No component to exceed 40%)

The components of the assessment can contain several modes including Writing assignments, Mid Term Examinations, Group Projects, Quizzes, Class Attendance and Participation. The faculty is free to innovate other modes of assessments depending on the learning objectives and outcomes.

Sr. No.	Component	Weightage
1	Trimester-long journal	30%
2	Two multiple-choice exams (Two highest scores of three scores recorded)	30%
3	Attendance	10%
4	Film worksheets (Ten)	10%
5	Open note final exam (10%) + Creative Project (10%)	20%
	Total	100 %
