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Encounters with Difference: The Cultural Analytics of Alien(nes)s

Within the broader field of Cultural Studies, and within work on science fiction (SF), numerous scholars have critically engaged with the notion of difference. Particularly in the areas of feminist, queer and postcolonial theoretical engagements, such cultural-political critiques have interrogated the construction(s) and representation(s) of the 'Other.' This paper provides an overview of approaches to difference within Cultural Studies and SF scholarship, with a particular focus on how theoretical approaches to the figure of the 'Other' have enriched critical engagements with cultural representations of alien(nes)s. Drawing on examples such as the film *District 9* (2009), versions of the television show *V* (1983, 2009), and Candis Jane Dorsey's novel *A Paradigm of Earth* (2001), this paper examines how the defamiliarization offered by encounters with alien difference in SF enables critical reflection and critique of the ways in which gendered, sexualized and racialized difference(s), bodies and subjectivities are both (re)constructed and problematized in contemporary Western culture.