

RTF 331R unique # 07965 / RTF 390N unique # 08385
An ACTLab New Media course
POSTMODERN GOthic
Cyborgs, Monsters, Dreamstates, and Desire
www.actlab.utexas.edu/pomogoth
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Class meets in the ACTLab Wed 1:00-4:00pm

Summary: In this class we will **make stuff** -- create New Media work in which theory, digital technology, and art collide. In order to make stuff about postmodern gothic, we'll need a working knowledge of monsters -- the place of the monstrous in history, how defining "monster" works to stabilize the definition of "human", how defining sexuality, gender, and ethnicity works in similar fashion; how monsters and machines are gendered; how these themes are inflected to stabilize "normal" and "abnormal"; and in general the complex ways in which That Which is Different comes to be That Which is Evil (and sometimes Powerful, and sometimes Savior, and sometimes...?). Using film, video, sound, and other media, we will compare modern representations of the monstrous with a few of the postmodern, to gain an appreciation of how the idea of the monster has changed in that transition, and what the changes imply for our own ideas of bodies, subjectivity, and desire.

Class is in studio and discussion format. This means that your active participation is a requirement of the course. During the semester I expect you to contribute your own ideas and arguments to the discussions, and to be willing to take the risks such contributions imply.

There are no written exams. Instead you will use the theories and tools you acquire during the semester to make stuff about some aspect of postmodern gothic. What you make can be in any form: sound, installation, video, computer animation, collage, sculpture, assemblage, performance -- you name it. You will do this in stages, starting with simple projects and moving to more complex ones, using humor, irony, uncommon approaches, and bizarre techniques.

Take risks! Amaze us! In ACTLab courses we assume a high level of motivation on your part and your willingness to self-start, set your own goals, think independently, collaborate with others, seek help when you need it, and take risks. Let's make it an interesting semester!

Readings and Resources: All class readings are available on the Resource webpage, <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/pomogoth/resources.html>. Some of the resources are there for you to browse as you feel the urge. Also, remember your best resource is always your own curiosity, and Google or Dogpile or Clusty are your best tools. Experiment with keywords and see what happens. When you find something interesting, share it, either in person or via the mailing list pomogoth@actlab.utexas.edu.

Other ACTLabbies are your greatest resource. A number of people in this class have taken ACTLab New Media classes before, and understand the way we do things. (We call them repeat offenders.) They can be your best resource for how to approach and complete your projects and documentation (see the documentation requirement below).

Critical information

The following six things are *required* for you to receive a grade:

1. Attendance at all classes.
2. Reading all assignments and coming to class prepared.
3. Participation in discussion.
4. Successful completion of two mini-projects and one final project.
5. Successful completion of documentation. See **documentation requirement** below.
6. Full cleanup of the ACTLab following final presentations. Leave it the way you found it -- no better, no worse.

Documentation requirement:

You must provide complete documentation of your work in the form of a web site. A web site consists of a home page that says something about you, and additional pages for each project as necessary.

Documentation means a description of each project, how it was made, its relationship to the readings and discussions (i.e., its theoretical grounding), your thoughts about the project, etc., together with sound recordings, video, and/or still photos of the work in progress and the completed project.

Your web site and all its content must be on the actlab server, nowhere else. No links to your own content on other servers are allowed, although you may provide "for further information" links to other web sites. Absolutely no links to UT Webspaces are allowed, because Webspaces are ephemeral and will break your actlab site later.

All sound files, videos, links, etc., must work, and video and audio must stream. Videos should be in QuickTime format using Sorenson3 compression hinted for streaming.

We suggest you look at other actlab students' websites, such as <http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/~samanthap02> or <http://home.actlab.utexas.edu/~mckibben>, to see what they did.

Grading:

Participation in discussion	15%
First mini-project	15%
Second mini-project	20%
Final project	25%
Documentation	25%
Total	100%

End of critical information

Mailing list: Outside of class time we keep in touch via the PoMoGoth class mailing list . Use it to swap ideas, ask questions, get and give alerts of schedule changes, share weird urls, and whatever else you can think of. Most of you have already been subscribed to the list, but we didn't have email addresses for a few. Be sure to give us your email address the first day of class.

Things we supply: In addition to the usual video and sound equipment, the ACTLab New Media digital equipment (in cmb 4.110) is there for you to use, play with, and experiment with. A lot of it is state-of-the-art. Don't waste the opportunity to stretch your creative skills in the digital domain. We have computers, DJ turntables, quadraphonic sound system, and other stuff. We'll try to help you locate odd and exotic items you may think of during the semester that you'd like to use. We also have some gear that we've never used yet, and we invite you to play with it and see what you can make it do.

Things you'll need:

Stuff to construct masks or puppets, such as scissors, glue, construction paper or board, for later in the semester (we'll talk about this in class). Anything else you stumble on or think might be useful to make evocative objects about PoMoGo. Loose clothing that you can get dirty. If we do narrative or sound work in the dark, remember the ACTLab floor is hard; so if you decide to listen while lying down on the floor, bring something soft to lie on.

What I expect you to do for a reading assignment:

1. Do the reading!
2. When you come to something that intrigues or excites you, make a note about it.
3. When you come to something that puzzles you, make a note about it.
4. When you come to something that drives you up the wall, make a note about it.

After the first class meeting: If you've been admitted but haven't received any mail from the class mailing list, sign up by surfing to the Goth list maintenance page, <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/mailman/admindb/pomogoth>.

Here's what I expect from you during discussion::

1. Ask or talk about the parts of the text that you made notes about.
2. Participate. Talk. Ask. Argue. Laugh. (some of the readings are ludicrous.) None of this stuff is holy, none of the opinions are cast in concrete.
3. Bring in stuff -- maybe text, maybe just stuff -- that you feel relates to the reading. Throw it on the table, say why it's there, and see what happens.
4. My main job during discussion is to listen. My role is to make an opening or framing statement to start from. I'll guide when necessary, and clarify tough points. Discussion time gives me my best sense of how you're thinking about the theoretical part of our work together.

Participation is one of the keys to success in this class. You can't participate in discussion in a real way unless you've done the reading. Consequently Rule Number One is: Do The Reading!

Experienced Labbies say: One of the worst mistakes you can make is to leave the documentation for the last minute! Start thinking about your web site from the very first class day. Keep notes about your ideas for it, so you'll have a good supply as you build the page.

Films: We'll see several films in class, but only a few are scheduled here. We'll choose the rest in class, based on what we think would be useful or interesting or fun or all of the above. The current list of

possibilities (plus whatever we decide to add) includes:

The Fly (David Cronenberg)
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (Kenneth Branagh)
Dracula (John Badham)
Freaks (Tod Browning)
Zelig (Woody Allen)
Blade Runner (Ridley Scott)
Alien 3 (Ridley Scott)
Terrorist She-Freaks of Texas (Holly Lewis)

Extra Credit items: There are two. One is the class web page; the other is the final presentation poster. You can volunteer to do these, on a first-come-first-served basis. If successfully completed, each one raises your final grade by one half a grade, i.e., a B+ to an A. If you volunteer and fail to complete what you said you'd do, it will lower your final grade by one half a grade.

Course Schedule:

Aug 30: Liftoff! Administrative biz - add/drop, who's on/not on the class mailing list, your ACTLab account, exchange phone numbers, etc. Introduce ourselves. Discuss the course description, syllabus, online resources. What I expect from you, what you expect from me. How to get an A. Loosening up. What is Postmodern Gothic, anyway? What is a postmodern cyborg? How do dreamstates, liminality, and rhizomatics fit in?

BREAK

Introduction to the ACTLab space. What other actlabbies have done. Review of available software and other technical stuff. What can we do in here? How can we best use this space for a monsterconf? Or should the conf be somewhere else? The dreaded website requirement and how to breeze through it.

Introductory reading assignment, to be discussed September 6: Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for In/appropriated Others" (on Resources webpage), for discussion Sept 6. A key essay. It's long, and you may find it tough; it's also smart, poetic, and hits all the buttons hard. Take your time. If you find it too tough going, email or phone me and we can walk through it.

There are things in Haraway's essay that you won't get. Make notes about them. Then ask about them during discussion. A key to reading Haraway is to understand her love of language and the careful way she assembles scholarly and scientific language in an almost poetic manner. So read her as if you were reading a Gothic story, in which the words not only convey information but set atmosphere and mood. Read it as much for the flavor of the language as for the factual material. Let the words walk around in your head a bit. Give them room to stretch and breathe.

Sept 6: Discuss *The Promises of Monsters*

In-class reading (I'll read this aloud): Poe's "The Black Cat" (also on the Resources webpage).

BREAK

Film: "Freaks" (Tod Browning, 1932)

Reading assignments for discussion Sept 13. A lot of reading, but you have five days to do it:
Monsters in Literature and Film. Good resource on monsters and meaning.
Basics of Postmodernism.
Postmodern Images and a Basic Quote or Two.
Postmodernism For Students By Students.
(All of these are on the Resources webpage)

Sept 13: Discussion: Elements of Structuralism, Situationism. Monsters and the Monstrous; Postmodernism, Postmodernity. Transgender in a PoMoGoth perspective. Urban Primitivism and the Gothic sensibility.

BREAK

Intro to Making Stuff: Materials: Construction cardboard, glue, scissors, random stuff (to be clarified in class). Developing a timeline. Project exhortations: Review of How to make a Killer Project (on the Resources webpage). Intro to making a webpage.

Tutorial: Dreamweaver.

Reading assignment: Elements of Structuralism, Theses on the Situationist International, paragraphs 1-20 (on Resources webpage) for discussion September 13.

First project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than Sept 8.

Video: Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) (8 minutes).

Discussion: What are those nuts up to?

Developing a timeline. Working on the timeline in relation to your own project and its documentation. What's important to those folks out there in industry, and how (and why) to think about what they think when they see your work.

In-class activity: Play with and discuss the Postmodern Essay Generator on the Resources page.

Making stuff: how to relate to final presentations?

Tutorial: Photoshop.

Film: Excerpts from Dracula (John Badham, 1979; Vampire as sexy raconteur). Excerpts from Black Lizard" and "King of the Zombies", Awful, wretchedly bad. Popcorn supplied.

Reading assignments for discussion September 20:

Hakim Bey, T.A.Z. (on Resources webpage). Read until you've had enough. Be sure to also read "Communications of the Association for Ontological Anarchy", Communiqué #1, Part II: "Some Poetic-Terrorist Ideas Still Sadly Languishing in the Realm of "Conceptual Art", on the T.A.Z. main page (scroll down to find it). Also read at least three chapters (choose any three) of "Dracula" the book, (on Resources) for comparison with the Badham film in terms of pace and style. Note the multiple viewpoints in the book, and think about what we've discussed about when

and why multiple viewpoints arose in textual production.

September 20: Discussion: T.A.Z., monstrosity and language. Dracula as text and film: Different worlds. Why'd they do that?

Making stuff: the monstrous as an act of showing forth. A few words about Gestalt psychology. Why indistinctness can be an advantage. The power of Near-Legibility: almost-heard sound, almost-seen images, and how to use them in projects.

BREAK

Tutorials: Protocols, Linux apps.

Making Stuff: Geeks and proto-geeks: Hit those computers! Browse for resources. Practice with your apps of choice. Ask for help and help each other. Sample/simple project due in class (we'll discuss this carefully first). Crit and self-crit (two minutes each). Physical object folx: Discuss what's doable in the time frame. Do you need/want to partner up with a geek, or vice versa? Sample/simple project due in class. Crit and self-crit (two minutes each).

Reading assignment: Gothic Architecture, Gothic Literature (on Resources webpage), for discussion October 4 (that's two weeks away, because next week will be devoted to mini-projects).

September 27: FIRST MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

October 4: Discussion: The Gothic sensibility in architecture and literature. Gender, femininity and the monstrous. Desire and technology.

BREAK

Discussion of projects. Wailing, handwringing, and gnashing of teeth. Reassurances.

Film: *Alien 4* (or class choice; possible alternative: **Film: Cronenberg's** *The Fly* (Future tech out of control produces pomo monster, and what's particularly pomo about this monster?)) Discussion to follow.

October 11: Discussion. **Film:** *Ghost in the Shell*. Discussion to follow, focusing on William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and the idea of virtual life forms and inhabitable spaces.

Second project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than Oct 13.

October 18: Discussion. **Film:** *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Not a great film, but closer to Shelley's intent than Whale's film (the one with Karloff) was. We'll discuss in some depth the background of these two films and what was (and is) at stake in dramatic representations of the monstrous.

October 25: SECOND MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

November 1: It's time to get in shape for the long pull. When we did time budgeting, you most likely found that you can't finish your project using only class hours. For the last few days before due date, most Labbies work around the clock. Remember to take breaks and keep hydrated. Drink lots of water or fruit juice. Soda tastes great but doesn't do much for your electrolyte balance. And remember the floor is cement and there are only two couches, so it's a good idea to bring some kind of bedroll for that 3 a.m.

nap.

Film: Excerpts from Metropolis (Massive Bunker Mentality urban mise-en-scene), Blade Runner (Pomo futureGoth urban mise-en-scene), Attack of the Clones (Non-Pomo, non-futureGoth urban mise-en-scene), The Fifth Element (Direct extrapolation future urban mise-en-scene), Things To Come (1939 Past-as-Future urban mise-en-scene).

November 8: Making: Your final project is out of the planning stage and ready to implement, you've got a timeline and a rough outline of your documentation, and you've discussed both of them with me and Chris.

Final Presentation equipment requests: If you need equipment for your final presentation, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than November 12.

November 15: Three class days to go! We shift to studio mode. In studio mode we work on projects full time. From now until the end of the semester you will concentrate on making the stuff the concepts for which you've developed in class over the semester. Remember the four workpoints: Theoretically informed, Historically situated, Daring, Authentic.

November 22: We'll discuss how to handle this class meeting. Have a happy Thanksgiving!

November 29: In-class studio work. One week to go! Are you suffering enough yet? Project updates. Check timelines. We'll be walking around, stopping by to see how you're coming along and making suggestions now and then. We'll also be on the alert for places where you might get stuck, but I'm not psychic--so even though we both know you're shy, please try to ask for help when you need it!

Film: The Fly (Future tech out of control produces pomo monster)

December 6: In-class studio work. Last class day before final presentations! Are you ready? Of course not. But you will be by Sunday noon, right? Drink lots of fluids. Order pizza. Take breaks, walk around, get outside. Take a nap.

Sunday, December 10, noon: Suggested final presentation date. Wrapup and farewells. Have a great vacation!

Wednesday, December 13: DROP DEAD DATE FOR DOCUMENTATION.

December 20, 9:00 a.m: Drop-Dead Date for professors to submit grades. You know what that means.

The Fine Print:

This syllabus is V.1.0. May be updated as necessary.

Regarding Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>.

About services for students with disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY.

About the Undergraduate Writing Center: The Undergraduate Writing Center, located in the FAC 211, phone 471-6222, offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop-in or appointment basis.

Warning: This class may contain explicit descriptions of, or may advocate simulations of, one or more of the following: Nudity, satanism, suicide, sodomy, incest, bestiality, sadomasochism, adultery, murder, morbid violence, paedophilia, bad grammar, deviate sexual conduct in a violent context, the use of illegal drugs or alcohol, or offensive behavior. But then again, it may not. Should your sensibilities be offended at any time, you are free to leave the classroom without penalty provided that you notify either the instructor or teaching assistant when you do so.

Fragile: Do not bend, fold, spindle or mutilate. May be hazardous to your health. Not recommended for children. Do not purchase if seal has been tampered with. Not responsible for direct, indirect, incidental or consequential damages resulting from any defect, error or failure to perform. May be too intense for some viewers. Batteries not included. For recreational use. An equal opportunity employer. Some settling of contents may occur during shipping. Use only as directed. No other warranty expressed or implied. No postage necessary if mailed in the United States. Substantial penalty for early withdrawal. Slightly higher in California. Keep away from fire or flame. Any rebroadcast, reproduction, or other use of this game without the express written consent of Major League Baseball is prohibited. Please keep your hands and arms inside the car while ride is in motion. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Contestants have been briefed before the show. Do not write below this line.