



Weird Science!

Action Between The Worlds

www.actlab.utexas.edu/weird
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Class meets in the ACTLab Thu 2:00-5:00

In the boundaries between so-called hard science and simple spoonbending lies the realm of **Weird Science** -- where certainty doesn't exist and people called "experts" battle for control of the meaning of words like "proof" or "fact".

As with all ACTLab New Media courses, we explore these ideas through **making**. There are no written assignments or exams. Instead you will produce two mini-projects, one substantial final project, and a website on which you document your semester's work. All our classwork has the goal of providing ideas and methods for those projects. ACTLab classes are about learning to think for yourself, to work creatively, cooperate in complex endeavors, and question received knowledges.

Class is in studio and discussion format. 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.

You will use the theories and conceptual tools you acquire during the semester to make stuff about some aspect of Weird Science. You will do this in stages, starting with simple projects and moving to more complex ones, using humor, irony, uncommon approaches, and bizarre techniques. Projects may be in any form -- film, video, sound, performance, animation, collage, sculpture, assemblage, or any other media or combinations of media -- but they must incorporate the theoretical and methodological work of the semester.

The Secret Sauce: How the course works

Using the term "points" metaphorically:

You get **no points** for repeating back to me anything I've said or that you've read in connection with the course.

You get **points** for expressing *your own* reasoned ideas about things I've said or that you've read in connection with the course.

You get **big points** for making stuff, with your own ideas, that relates in some way to things that came up during class discussions.

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 time!

Readings and Resources: Many class readings are available on the Resource webpage, <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/weird/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 Clusty or Dogpile are your best tools. Experiment with keywords and see what happens. When you find something interesting, share it, either in person or via the Weird Science mailing list weird@actlab.utexas.edu .

Mailing list: Outside of class time we keep in touch via the Weird Science 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: Among other things, we have Canon Elura digital video cameras for you to check out. These tiny cameras are meant for the special purposes of ACTLab projects: they are small, light, quick to set up and shoot, and they plug right into the ACTLab computers so you can download and edit quickly and easily, but they are meant to capture raw video for extensive manipulation. They aren't for full-bore production video work and don't provide that kind of image quality. In addition to the 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: Scissors, glue, construction paper or board (for class date TBA). Anything else you stumble on or think might be useful to make evocative objects about blackbox. Loose clothing that you can get dirty. If we do narrative or sound work in the dark, remember the 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 blackbox list maintenance page, <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/mailman/admin/db/weird>.

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 see films and excerpts from 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.

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.

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 webpage.
Your webpage must be on the ACTLab server, nowhere else. All links, rollovers, animations, streaming video/audio, etc., must work.
6. Cleanup of the ACTLab following final presentations. Leave it the way you found it -- no better, no worse.

Grading:

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

You are responsible for the following:

Attendance. We take attendance at each class, initially by calling your name and later, when we're familiar with everyone, without announcing that we're doing so. Failure to attend a class without an excuse will lower your grade. Specifically note that **on project days you must stay for the entire class time.** A project day is a lecture day, and the guest lecturers are you and your classmates. Listen critically to what other people are saying and doing. Be respectful and attentive as you would be to a guest professor talking about his or her research. Besides being a courtesy to your classmates, your thoughts, critiques and suggestions on everyone's projects are part of your individual coursework and of the group process which is integral to the ACTLab philosophy. When it's your turn to present, *you* are the guest lecturer, and you are taking up your classmates' time. Make it a tight, interesting show.

ACTLab server account. You are required to have an account on the ACTLab server. This is a completely separate system from the UT webspace and requires you to set a separate password. We'll set your account up as part of the first class day activities.

Back up your stuff. Nothing left on a hard drive in the studio is safe. If you intend to do video, buy a USB drive and take all your work with you. We are not responsible for lost work. You have been warned.

The books you are *required* to have for the course are:

Bruno Latour: *Science In Action*
Sigmund Freud: *Eros and Civilization*
Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

Readings in the **Weird Science Reader**, available later in the semester:

Shapin and Schaffer: *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*
Brian Winslow: *Breakages Limited*
Donna Haraway: *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*
Donna Haraway: *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*
Catherine L. Covert: *We May Hear Too Much*
Keir Keightley: *"Turn it down!" she shrieked*
Lynn Spigel: *Installing the Television Set*
James Clifford: *Writing Culture*
Sharon Traweek: *Beamtimes and Lifetimes*
Bruno Latour: *Science In Action*
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*

Some readings will be available on the class Resources website. A selection:

Hakim Bey: *TAZ*
Howard Becker: *Tricks of the Trade*
Howard Becker: *How I Learned What a Crock Was*

Other resources linked to the class website 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 AltaVista are your best tools. Experiment with keywords and see what happens. When you find something interesting, share it, either in person or via the Weird Science mailing list weird@actlab.utexas.edu.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Jan 19 Introductions, administrative-fu, intro to methods of this class: what we expect from you, what to expect from us. A peek at some projects from other Weird Science classes. Business, such as issuing ACTLab server accounts.

Jan 26

For Jan 26, read chapter 1 of Howard Becker's "Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It" (available online; visit the Weird Science "Resources" page).

Intro to journaling. Scheduling tutorials. Today's theme: Science, Dream, and Fantasy. Points for discussion: Difference(s) between science and technology, between progressive innovation and leaps of genius. Understanding "logic". Dream-logic and waking-logic. How different cultures differentiate between dreamstate and awakestate. Great moments in science that originated in dreams.

(Break)

Science and fantasy: a mutually interacting system? SciFi literature and films. In-class film: Melies' "Trip To The Moon", clips from "Destination Moon"; the FBI calls on Robert Heinlein; clips from "Forbidden Planet". Discussion. Also discuss first in-class projects.

Feb 2

For Feb 2, read "Leviathan and the Air-Pump"; "Breakages Limited".

Today's theme: Science and power. Points for discussion: Was Boyle doing "science"? Or, what was Boyle doing,

and how does it relate to last week's discussion of great moments in science? Does Winston's theory about scientific innovations and technological change explain what happened? In-class film clip: "Things To Come", an example of H.G. Wells' writing, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's design, and Alexander Korda's power; and "ExistenZ". Do we have time for this?

(Break)

Discussion, including discussing first in-class projects. Progress reports.

First project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than Feb 9.

Feb 9

For Feb 9, read "Teddy Bear Patriarchy", "A Manifesto For Cyborgs".

Optional and note that the material is mature: Watch "Poison" directed by Todd Haynes. Available at the UGL audio visual library: VIDCASS 7007 UGL Audio Visual Collection.

Today's theme: Gender, Fantasy, and Science. Points for discussion: How does symbol in the largest sense (e.g., space, sound, mimetics) influences -- or maybe creates -- subjectivity? The human experience of awe. Semiotics of the cathedral and other sacred spaces. In-class slide show: Androids, the first robots. Progress reports on the in-class presentations that are due next week.

Feb 16: FIRST MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

No readings for Feb 16.

Feb 23

Readings due for in-class discussion Feb 23: "We May Hear Too Much"; "'Turn It Down!', she shrieked"; "Installing the Television Set".

Discussion of first in-class presentations. Journal review. Discussion: What are the problems with diffusion of new science? Technology and gender. Pushing the boundaries of science. Cost and risk, "Big Science".

Mar 2

For Mar 2, read the excerpts from "Nobel Dreams" and "The Cancer Cure That Worked", and surf the web sites on Weird Science.

Today's theme: Daring Too Much? Discussion: Nobel Dreams and its implications. Boundary questions: Where do science and quackery meet? Discussion about Tesla, Reich, Royal R. Rife, Heironymus and the "Psi Machines". Talk about second in-class presentation on the theme of daring.

Mar 9

For Mar 9, read "Frankenstein".

Today's theme: Risk and technoscience; substituting quasi-guys for technicians as effort to stabilize innovation. Points for discussion: Who's doing the science in "Science In Action"? The romance of risktaking in a safe age. Risk in the cinema of technoscience, good and bad. Driven men. Science as savior. Science and death. In-class film clips: "Frankenstein" (the original), "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein", "Frankenstein" (Andy Warhol).

Second project equipment requests: If you need equipment, make sure you coordinate with Joe no later than Thursday, Mar 9, because Checkout is closed during spring break.

Mar 16: Spring Break: No class

Mar 23: SECOND MINI-PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Mar 30

For Mar 30, read the excerpts in Group One from "A Thousand Plateaus".

And then came postmodernism... Science and the invisible; science and metaphor; science and the viral. Discussion: Rhizomatics, deterritorialization, and the idea of scientific progress. In-class films: Clips from Cronenberg's "The Fly"

Apr 6

For Apr 6, read the excerpts from "TAZ" and the excerpts in Group Two from "A Thousand Plateaus".

Last in-class discussion! Give us something to remember you by. The remainder of class time between now and semester's end will be devoted to the final in-class presentations.

Apr 13 TBA

Apr 20

Studio time. The Teaching Assistants, tutors, and I will be available for support, response, assistance...

Apr 27

Studio time. The Teaching Assistant, tutors, and I will be available for support, response, assistance...

May 4: FINAL PRESENTATIONS. Wrap-up. Bring friends and family. Refreshments provided. Wrap-up, farewells. Have a great, great summer!

Sunday, May 15: Drop Dead Date for web pages.

May 19, 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. It may be updated from time to time 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 include explicit representations 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. May ignite under certain circumstances. 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.