

## **Let's Make a Monster: Critical Making (Spring 2018)**

**ARTSTUDI 233, FILMSTUD 233/433: Let's Make a Monster: Critical Making**

**Thursdays 3:00-5:50  
McMurtry 011B**

**Prof. Paul DeMarinis  
Prof. Shane Denson  
TA: Victor Yanez**

### **Course Description:**

Ever since Frankenstein unleashed his monster onto the world in Mary Shelley's novel from 1818, the notion of "technology-out-of-control" has been a constant worry of modern societies, plaguing more optimistic visions of progress and innovation with fears that modern machines harbor potentials that, once set in motion, can no longer be tamed by their human makers. In this characteristically modern myth, the act of making – and especially technological making – gives rise to monsters. As a cautionary tale, we are therefore entreated to look before we leap, to go slow and think critically about the possible consequences of invention before we attempt to make something radically new. However, this means of approaching the issue of human-technological relations implies a fundamental opposition between thinking and making, suggesting a split between cognition as the specifically human capacity for reflection versus a causal determinism-without-reflection that characterizes the machinic or the technical. Nevertheless, recent media theory questions this dichotomy by asserting that technologies are inseparable from humans' abilities to think and to act in the world, while artistic practices undo the thinking/making split more directly and materially, by taking materials – including technologies – as the very medium of their critical engagement with the world. Drawing on impulses from both media theory and art practice, "critical making" names a counterpart to "critical thinking" – one that utilizes technologies to think about humans' constitutive entanglements with technology, while recognizing that insight often comes from errors, glitches, malfunctions, or even monsters. Co-taught by a practicing artist and a media theorist, this course will engage students in hands-on critical practices involving both theories and technologies. Let's make a monster!

**Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.**

### **Course Requirements:**

1. Regular attendance and active participation in class.
2. Completion and presentation of three assignments, indicated on the schedule below.

### **Grading:**

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

15% Project 1

15% Project 2

30% Final Project

10% Attendance

30% Participation in Discussions

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### Readings:

Prior to the beginning of the quarter, please read Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (e.g. online edition, with both 1818 and 1831 editions, plus study aids, contextual and comparative tools: <https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein>). All other readings will be made available electronically. Texts should be read by the date indicated on the schedule below.

### Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).

### Course Schedule:

**April 5** – Monstrosity, Making, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Lecture: "Some Reflections on Mirrors" (Paul DeMarinis)

Hands-on experiment with mirrors

**April 12** – Shane Denson, "*Frankenstein*, Bioethics, and Technological Irreversibility"; Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto"

Experimental Media Studio Orientation with Lauren Douglas

Lecture: "Frankenstein, Film, and Recombinant Monsters" (Shane Denson)

**April 19** – Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"; Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley"

**Assignment 1 Due: Recombinant Monsters!**

Critique of projects. (Please note: the class session will be extended on this day to accommodate critique of everyone's work.)

**April 26** – Rosa Menkman, *The Glitch Moment(um)*; Garnet Hertz, *Disobedient Electronics: Protest*

Lecture: "Bodies in the Regime of the Mechanical" (Paul DeMarinis)

**May 3** – Vilem Flusser and Louis Bec, *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*

Initial proposals for final projects!

Individual consultations on projects

**May 10** – H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulu"; Ali Sperling, "H. P. Lovecraft's Weird Body"

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### **Assignment 2 Due: Social Monstrosities!**

Critique of projects. (Please note: the class session will be extended on this day to accommodate critique of everyone's work.)

**May 17** – Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "How to Make Yourself a Body Without Organs"

**Final Proposal for final project Due.**

Lecture: "Recombinant, Sociotechnical, and Final Monsters" (Shane Denson)

**May 24** – Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene"

Skype presentation: "Soul, Skin, Chance." Hank Gerba and Sophia the Robot

Visit Shriram Center for Bioengineering and Chemical Engineering

**May 31** – Final Project Due: Final Monstrosities!

Critique of Projects. (Please note: the class session will be extended on this day to accommodate critique of everyone's work.)

**There will be an exhibition of works produced in the class, tentatively scheduled to take place in the Shriram Center for Bioengineering and Chemical Engineering. Dates TBA!**