

In *Frankenstein's* footsteps

Science fiction in literature and film

HSTM20301 (10 credits) • HSTM20801 (20 credits)

Do scientists play God? Will machines rise up and enslave us? Is it humankind's destiny to travel among the stars, or should we worry more about saving the Earth? Does the pace of scientific and technological change point to a future paradise — or a living hell? Or just a different kind of “normal”?

Authors and film-makers have explored these questions through fiction with many different motives: to promote possible future projects in real life, or to warn of emerging dangers; to explore philosophical questions about the nature of humanity, technology or civilisation; to make money by providing popular entertainment; to comment on the politics, social issues and cultural assumptions of their own times.

This course uses science fiction literature and film from the nineteenth century to the present day to explore the changing place of science in the cultural imagination. We study how science fiction reveals (and sometimes changes) dreams and anxieties around technology, the power of science, the future of our earth, and what it means to be human.

The course typically covers the following topics:

- Creating a monster? *Frankenstein* and its legacy
- Amateurs and professionals: science fiction in the late nineteenth century
- Hell-bombs and last survivors
- Anxiety in the UK: decline and invasion fears
- Robots to replicants: a history of artificial people
- Reimagining gender and sexuality
- Cyberpunk and virtual worlds
- Worlds beyond white? Diversifying science fiction
- Cloning, eugenics, and global pandemics: bodies and medical science fiction
- After the flood: climate and environmental crisis



1931 poster for James Whale's film loosely based on Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (versions in 1818 and 1831). The make-up worn by Boris Karloff defined the signature look of “Frankenstein's Monster” that we still recognise today. Colin Clive's performance as Frankenstein himself, with his crazed enthusiasm and cry of “It's alive!”, had a similar impact on ideas of the “mad” or irresponsible scientist.

Course introduction video



Scan the code, or go to

[TinyURL.com/Footsteps23](https://tinyurl.com/Footsteps23)

Teaching and assessment

Each week's teaching includes two main elements for all students

- around one hour of **video** from the lecturer, pre-recorded for you to view at your own convenience. We use this format because much of the course content is based on film, TV and online sources: the videos will feature clips of source material and pointers to resources for independent study, alongside analytical commentary. The videos will also introduce the required reading or viewing, and introduce the wider course unit themes it relates to.
- a 50-minute **discussion seminar**, hosted by the lecturer and/or a graduate teaching assistant. Each seminar is themed around the week's required reading or viewing and will build on the ideas presented in the video through general discussion and group activities, and offer a chance to raise questions. Seminar groups will meet face-to-face on campus.

We are still waiting for confirmation of the seminar timeslots: please contact the lecturer (details below) to receive updates when they're available. We expect to be able to offer several different times during the week to cater for students with different programme schedules.

The lecturer also offers bookable one-to-one appointments both on campus and over Zoom, plus a weekly on-campus office hour for drop-in meetings, so that you can get advice on coursework and any other questions about the course.

The 10- and 20-credit versions share the same video and seminar pattern. The 20-credit version is distinguished by some extra video content and an extra assessed component, as follows:

HSTM20301 (10 credits): One source analysis of 1500 words (50%); one essay of 1500 words (50%)

HSTM20801 (20 credits): One source analysis of 1500 words (25%); one essay of 1500 words (25%); one 3000-word essay, or equivalent project such as a video or website (50%)

Prerequisites

None. The unit is accessible to students who have no background in its themes, but is also designed to help more experienced students understand how they relate to other areas.

Contact

For all queries, please contact the course co-ordinator,
Dr James Sumner, at james.sumner@manchester.ac.uk

James will also be holding a general Zoom drop-in for any queries about his courses on **Monday 12 June, 11:00 till 12:00**. You can reach the Zoom link via tinyurl.com/JamesZoomJune.

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