

Comparative Media Poetics: Cinema and Videogames
CMST 29003
Spring 2013

Lecture: MW 1:30–2:50 PM, Logan Center 028

Screening/Play Session: M 7:00–10:00 PM, Cobb 425

Lab Time with Logan Consoles: F 1:00–3:00 PM, Logan Center 802 – *weeks 5-9 only*

Instructor: Ian Jones, Department of Cinema and Media Studies

ijones@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: M 11:00–1:00 & W 3:00–5:00 (by appointment), Café Logan

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Cinema and videogames are two moving-image-based media, and, especially over the past two decades, each has been credited with influencing the other. But how deep do their similarities actually go? This course will investigate the raw materials and basic forms at the disposal of videogame developers and filmmakers, and analyze how these materials and forms shape viewer and player responses. In what way do the possibilities available to game developers differ from those available to filmmakers? How does each medium segment and present space, time, and action? What aesthetic effects are open to games that are not open to cinema, and vice versa? What have practitioners in each medium learned from those of the other, and have some of these lessons perhaps been misapplied? All of these questions and more will be fair game for the investigations ahead, which will consist of an examination of films alongside games—including entries from the *Uncharted* franchise, the *Half-Life* franchise, and horror games such as the *Resident Evil* series).

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Tale of Tales, *The Path* (2009). Available for Windows and Mac (Intel only) at <http://tale-of-tales.com/ThePath/buy.html> and on Steam.

(All course readings will be posted on Chalk.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- 1) Attendance and participation. Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions or screenings/play sessions will significantly lower your final grade. For more details on the screenings attendance policy for this class, see below. (20% of final grade)
- 2) Six semi-weekly reflections on readings, films, and/or games. For more details on this and all other assignments, see assignment descriptions below (35% of final grade).
- 3) One longer-form gameplay reflection, 2-3 pages, due week 7 (15% of final grade)
- 4) Final paper, 7-10 pages, due week 11 (proposal due week 8) (30% of final grade)

SCREENINGS/PLAY SESSIONS ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance at weekly screenings/play sessions is **mandatory**. If you are unable to attend the screenings/play sessions for this class, you *should not take it*. The films and games to be viewed and played in this course are the primary texts of this course.

Cinema is a medium designed for collective viewing on a large screen; when at all possible, *this* should be the mode of experience one engages a film with. This is admittedly less true of the games we will be looking at, which are primarily single-player and not necessarily embedded within a tradition of social play. That said, playing these games at home (or, worse, substituting a play session with a viewing of “let’s play” videos) is *not* an adequate substitute for the class’s play sessions, which will be suffused with conversation and lecturing, and will provide necessary contexts for course discussions.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Media specificity, adaptation, and models of new media development

4/1) Readings for Monday:

Germaine Dulac, “Aesthetics, Obstacles, Integral *Cin graphie*”

A. Piotrovskij, “Toward a Theory of Cine-Genres”

Andr  Bazin, “For an Impure Cinema: In Defense of Adaptation”

4/1) Evening screening/play session:

View clip from: *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas)

Play excerpts from: *Starhawk* (1977, Cinematronics, arcade [Windows via MAME])
Star Strike (1981, Mattel, Intellivision [PlayStation 2 port])
Star Wars: The Arcade Game (1983, Atari, arcade [Atari VCS port])

View clip from: *Opera* (1987, Dario Argento)

Play excerpts from: *Phantasmagoria* (1995, Sierra On-Line, Windows)

View clip from: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Stephen Spielberg)

Play excerpts from: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1982, Atari, Atari VCS)
Tomb Raider (1996, Core Design, PlayStation)
Uncharted 3: Drake’s Deception (2011, Naughty Dog, PlayStation 3)

4/3) Readings for Wednesday:

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, “Networks of Remediation” (from *Remediation*)

Espen Aarseth, “Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation”

Week 2 – Space and the coherent presentation of action

4/8) Readings for Monday:

V. I. Pudovkin, “The Peculiarities of Film Material” (from *On Film Technique*)

Stephen Poole, “Electric Sheep” (from *Trigger Happy*)

Michael Nitsche, “Cinema and Game Spaces” (from *Video Game Spaces*—excerpt from chapter, read to pg 112, then skip head to section starting on 122)

4/8) In-class screening:

View clips from: *The Mask of Satan* [a.k.a. *Black Sunday*] (1960, Mario Bava)
The Haunting (1963, Robert Wise)
Eye of the Devil (1966, J. Lee Thompson)

4/8) Evening play session:

Play excerpts from: *Alone in the Dark* (1992, Infogrames, Windows)
Resident Evil (1996, Capcom, PlayStation)
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998, Nintendo, Nintendo 64)
Resident Evil [REmake] (2002, Capcom, GameCube)
Resident Evil 5: Lost in Nightmares DLC (2009, Capcom, PlayStation 3)

4/10) Readings for Wednesday:

Laurie N. Taylor, “Gothic Bloodlines in Survival Horror Gaming”
Tom Bissell, “Headshots” (from *Extra Lives*)

4/10) In-class screening:

View clip from: *The African Queen* (1951, John Huston)

Week 3 – Skill, perception, and knowledge

4/15) Readings for Monday:

James Paul Gee, “Full Spectrum Warrior, Thief, and Riddick” (from *Why Video Games Are Good for Your Soul*)

View videos and read text at Manuel Garin’s *Gameplaygag: Between Silent Film and New Media* project, online at gameplaygag.com/videos

4/15) In-class screening/play session:

View clip from: *Sherlock Jr.* (1924, Buster Keaton)
Play excerpts from: *Thirty Flights of Loving* (2012, Blendo Games, Mac OSX)

4/15) Evening screening/play session:

View clips from: *The General* (1926, Buster Keaton with Clyde Bruckman)
College (1927, Buster Keaton with James W. Horne)
The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957, Jack Arnold)
Casino Royale (2006, Martin Campbell)
The Bourne Ultimatum (2007, Paul Greengrass)
Play excerpts from: *Uncharted 3: Drake’s Deception* (2011, Naughty Dog, PlayStation 3)
Mirror’s Edge (2008, EA Digital Illusions CE, Windows)

4/17) Readings for Wednesday:

Noël Carroll, “Themes of *The General*” (from *Comedy Incarnate*—excerpt from chapter; read only pp 45-63)
Lisa Purse, “The Action Body” (from *Contemporary Action Cinema*)

Week 4 – Transmedia genre study 1: Suspense and mystery

4/22) Readings for Monday:

David Bordwell, “Principles of Narration” (from *Narration in the Fiction Film*)
Jesper Juul, “Introduction to Game Time”

4/22) Evening screening/play session:

View entire film: *Stage Fright* (1950, Alfred Hitchcock)
Play excerpts from: *Heavy Rain* (2010, Quantic Dream, PlayStation3)

4/24) Readings for Wednesday:

Kristin Thompson, “Duplicitous Narration and *Stage Fright*” (from *Breaking the Glass Armor*)
Emily Short, “Analysis: *Heavy Rain*’s Storytelling Gaps”

Week 5 – Point of view, staging, and guidance

4/29) Readings for Monday:

Janet H. Murray, “Agency” (from *Hamlet on the Holodeck*—selected excerpts from chapter)
Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture”

4/29) Evening screening/play session:

View entire film: *The Hold-Up of the Rocky Mountain Express* (1906, Billy Bitzer)
Play excerpts from: *Half-Life* (1998, Valve, Windows)
Half-Life 2: Episode 2 (2007, Valve, Windows)
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (2007, Infinity Ward, Windows)
Condemned 2: Bloodshot (2008, Monolith, PlayStation 3)
View entire film: *Russian Ark* (2002, Aleksandr Sokurov)

5/1) Readings for Wednesday:

Matthew Gallant, “Guiding the Player’s Eye”
Vivian Sobchack, "Toward Inhabited Space: The Semiotic Structure of Camera Movement in the Cinema"

Week 6 – Emotion and identification

5/6) Readings for Monday:

Carol Clover, “Her Body, Himself” (from *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*—excerpt from chapter; read only pp 42-64)
Noël Carroll, “Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions” (from *The Philosophy of Horror*—excerpt from chapter; read only pp 88-96)

5/6) Evening screening:

View entire film: *Gerry* (2002, Gus Van Sant)

Play assignment (to be completed between 5/6 and 5/13):

Play *The Path* (2009, Tale of Tales, Windows/Mac OSX).
Begin thinking about gameplay experience reflection due Monday of week 7 (May 13).

5/8) Readings for Wednesday:

Grant Tavinor, “Emotion in Videogaming” (from *The Art of Videogames*)
Vivian Sobchack, “Breadcrumbs in the Forest: Three Meditations on Being Lost in Space”

Week 7 – Transmedia genre study 2: Horror

5/13) Readings for Monday:

Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess”

Gameplay experience reflection due in-class.

5/13) Evening Play Session:

View entire film: *Halloween* (1978, John Carpenter)

Play excerpts from: *Siren: Blood Curse* (2008, SCE Japan Studio, PlayStation 3)

5/15) Readings for Wednesday:

Steve Neale, “*Halloween*: Suspense, Aggression and the Look”

Tanya Krzywinska, “Hands-on Horror”

Week 8 – Transmedia genre study 3: Action

5/20) Readings for Monday:

David Bordwell, “Aesthetics in Action: Kung Fu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expressivity”

5/20) Evening screening/play session:

View clips from: *A Hearty Response* (1986, Norman Law)

Above the Law, a.k.a. *Righting Wrongs* (1986, Hoi Mang)

Tiger on Beat (1988, Chia-Liang Liu)

Hard Boiled (1992, John Woo)

Play excerpts from: *Max Payne* (2001, Remedy Entertainment, Windows)

Sleeping Dogs (2012, United Front Games, Windows)

Stranglehold (2007, Midway Chicago/Tiger Hill, PlayStation 3)

5/22) Readings for Wednesday:

David Bordwell, “Motion Emotion: The Art of the Action Movie” (from *Planet Hong Kong*)

Final paper proposals due in-class.

Week 9 – Videogames and/as animation 1: Mechanics, visual pleasure, and “excess”

5/27) MEMORIAL DAY – NO CLASS OR SCREENING

5/29) Readings for Wednesday:

Kristin Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess”

Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, “The Rules of Digital Games” (from *Rules of Play*)

Frans Mäyrä, “Game Culture: Meaning in Games” (from *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*)

5/29) In-class play session:

Play excerpts from: *Dragon’s Lair* (1983, Advanced Microcomputer Systems/Don Bluth Productions, arcade [PlayStation 3 port])

Botanica (2012, Amanita Design, Mac OSX)

Week 10 – Videogames and/as animation 2: Machinima as cinematic form

6/3) Readings for Monday:

Katie Salen, “The Art of Machinima”

6/3) Evening screening:

View entire films: *Rose Hobart* (c. 1936, Joseph Cornell)
 Crossroad (2005, Phil Solomon and Mark LaPore)
 Rehearsals for Retirement (2007, Phil Solomon)

6/5) Readings for Wednesday:

Sue Zemka, “An Interview with Philip Solomon”

Week 11

No class. Final paper due.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Weekly reflections

Students must complete six brief (400-500 words) written responses to questions posted on the course’s Chalk discussion board. Monday nights, following the course’s screenings, questions relating to the week’s readings, games, movies, or some combination therefore, will be posted on the discussion board. Responses should be posted no later than 11 AM Wednesday morning.

Questions will be posted eight times, on weeks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9. As only six reflections are due, students may choose to skip this assignment for any two chosen weeks without affecting their grade, but no more (so choose wisely!). Bonus credit will be awarded for turning in more than six.

Longer-form gameplay reflection

In addition to these short weekly responses, students will also be required to write one longer (2-3 double-spaced pages) reflection on their experience of playing *The Path* (to be played by the first class meeting of week seven), in relation to both the Gus Van Sant film *Gerry* and Vivian Sobchack’s “Breadcrumbs in the Forest: Three Meditations on Being Lost in Space.” This assignment will be due in-class on Monday of week 7 (May 13).

Final paper

Students are required to complete a 7-10 page final paper, which will be due week 11. This may be a comparison/contrast piece looking at any two media artifacts viewed in this class (in pairings of either film/game, game/game, or film/film). It may also be an extended analysis of a single artifact.

Final paper proposals are due during class Wednesday of week 8 (May 22). If you intend to write about a film—or *especially* a game—that was not covered in the course, it would be in your best interest to approach me about this **earlier than week eight**.