

Seeing Expertise in Contemporary Visual Media
Proposed graduate-level lecture course
Designed around an 11-week quarter; not yet taught

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is the effect of expertise upon perception? Do experts see (or hear) the world in different ways than others, as they attune themselves to salient features others cannot grasp? This course examines ways in which expertise is represented, mediated, or—in the case of interactive media—offered up to participants across a variety of contemporary image-based media, from the moving images of cinema to the simulated words of games. Along the way, we will dive into classic and contemporary theories of expertise in phenomenology, cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind, with a special eye towards issues of embodiment, situatedness, and the outer possibilities of perception and consciousness. As a meta-exercise on issues of competency in visual media and developing new forms of expertise, all major assignments in this course will be based around the moving-image form, rather than the written word.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Games:

Super Hexagon (Terry Cavanagh, 2012 – Windows, Mac, Linux, iOS, Android)

Papers, Please (Lucas Pope, 2013 – Window, Mac, Linux, iOS)

Unmanned (Molleindustria, 2012 – Windows, Mac)

Mainichi (Mattie Brice, 2012 – Windows, Mac)

Software – At least ONE of the following (note: some of these options are free):

Open Broadcaster (Windows, Mac, Linux)

FRAPS (Windows)

QuickTime (Mac)

(All course readings will be posted online.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- 1) Attendance and participation. Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions or screenings/group 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) Participation in the course discussion board, in the form of at least six posted reflections on readings, films, and/or games. For more details on this and all other assignments, see assignment descriptions below (30% of final grade).
- 3) One collaborative creative video project, due week 6 (20% of final grade)
- 4) One analytical video essay project, due week 11 (30% of final grade)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – The world as a sphere of potential action

Readings for class session 1:

Martin Heidegger, "The Thesis of Modern Ontology," in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

Screening: *Cousin Jules* (Dominique Benicheti, 1972)

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 2012)

Readings for class session 2:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Spatiality of One's own Body and Motility," in *Phenomenology of Perception*

Week 2 – Expert coping

Readings for class session 1:

Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, "Five Steps from Novice to Expert," in *Mind Over Machine*

Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental"

Screening: *How to Train Your Dragon* (Dean BeBlois and Chris Sanders, 2010)

Readings for class session 2:

Stanley Cavell, "Photograph and Screen," "More of *The World Viewed*," in *The World Viewed*

GROUPS FOR COLLABORATIVE CREATIVE VIDEO PROJECT FORMED

Week 3 – Expertise and embodied affect

Readings for class session 1:

Noël Carroll, selections from *Comedy Incarnate*

J. Erik T. Taylor, Jessica K. Witt, and Mila Sugovic, "When Walls Are No Longer Barriers: Perception of Wall Height in Parkour"

Screening: clips from *The General* (1926, Buster Keaton with Clyde Bruckman)

College (1927, Buster Keaton with James W. Horne)

Casino Royale (2006, Martin Campbell)

The Bourne Ultimatum (2007, Paul Greengrass)

Readings for class session 2:

Lisa Purse, "The Action Body," in *Contemporary Action Cinema*

Monika Gehlawat, "Improvisation, Action and Architecture in *Casino Royale*"

Week 4 – *Verstehen*, labor, and gender

Readings for class session 1:

Vilém Flusser, "The Gesture of Making," in *Gestures*

Béatrice Han-Pile, "Describing Reality or Disclosing Worldhood?"

Screening: *Jeanne Dielmann, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1976)

Readings for class session 2:

Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality"

COLLABORATIVE CREATIVE VIDEO PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE

Week 5 – Grasping digital objects

Readings for class session 1:

James J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*
Paul Dourish, "Foundations" in *Where the Action Is*

Screening: *The Demo* [a.k.a. *The Mother of All Demos*] (Douglas Engelbart, 1968)

Hands-on: Apple Macintosh emulation

Readings for class session 2:

Susan Kozel, "Techne/Technologies," in *Closer*

Week 6 – Reception and/as proficiency

Readings for class session 1:

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Thinking in Movement," in *The Primacy of Movement*
Barbara Montero, "A Dancer Reflects"

COLLABORATIVE CREATIVE VIDEO PROJECT DUE

Play Assignment: *Super Hexagon* (Terry Cavanagh, 2012)

Readings for class session 2:

David Sudnow, selections from *Pilgrim in the Microworld*

Week 7 – Inhabiting simulated worlds

Readings for class session 1:

Paul Starr, "Policy as a Simulation Game"

Sherry Turkle, "Seeing Through Computers"

Ian Bogost, "Cellular Automata and Simulation," in *Unit Operations*

Play Assignment: selections from *Papers, Please* (Lucas Pope, 2013)
Unmanned (Molleindustria, 2012)

Readings for class session 2:

Kristine Jørgensen, "The Gameworld as Interface," in *Gameworld Interfaces*

Week 8 – Breakdown and constraint

Readings for class session 1:

S. Kay Toombs, "The Body," in *The Meaning of Illness*

Vivian Sobchack, "A Leg to Stand On"

Play Assignment: *Realistic Female First-Person Shooter* (Anna Anthropy, 2012)
Ampu-tea (SparklingGames, 2013)
Mainichi (Mattie Brice, 2012)

Readings for class session 2:

Samantha Allen, "TransMovement: Freedom and Constraint in Queer and Open World Games"

PROPOSAL FOR ANALYTICAL VIDEO PROJECT DUE

Week 9 – Knowing like an animal

Readings for class session 1:

Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

Jakob von Uexküll, selections from *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*

Collective Play Session: *Geist* (n-Space, 2005)

Readings for class session 2:

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges"

Week 10 – Knowing like an object

Readings for class session 1:

Jane Bennett, "Edible Matter," in *Vibrant Matter*

Ian Bogost, "Metaphorism: Speculating about the Unknowable Inner Lives of Units," in *Alien Phenomenology*

Screening: *Liquid Crystals* (Jean Painlevé, 1978)

20Hz (Semiconductor, 2011)

Collective Play Session: *Dyad* ([I inc, 2012)

I Am Bread (Bossa Studios, 2014)

Readings for class session 2:

no readings

Week 11

No class.

ANALYTICAL VIDEO PROJECT DUE

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Discussion board reflections

Students must complete six brief (400-500 words) written responses to questions posted on the course's Chalk discussion board. These prompts will vary in scope and precision, sometimes asking quite specific questions about the week's readings, and other times allowing for more free-form discussion of the week's films, games, or general themes. Responses should be posted no later than 11 AM on the day of the second course of the week.

Questions will be posted eight times. 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.

Collaborative creative video project

Students are required create a video, of no more than 10-15 minutes in length, responding to the readings, films, or general themes covered in the first four weeks of the course. This assignment is quite open by nature, so as to foster the opportunity for students to engage in a wide variety as work. Groups for this project will be created week 2; a short proposal for the project, either emailed or discussed in office hours, should be put forward no later than week 4.

Analytical video essay project

In addition to their collaborative creative project, students must also create one 10-20 minute analytical project in the video essay format. Although the subject matter that can be covered in this project is larger, the format is more restricted: Analytical projects must contain some footage captured from films or games (from the course or otherwise), augmented by an additional source of information, be it a voice-over track, text overlays, graphics and graphs, or some other options. An overview of software options for creating this project will be offered week 7, and additional sessions of instruction can be set up as needed.

Analytical video proposals are due during the second class of week 8. If you intend to create a video essay 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**. There are many games and films that would have fit on this syllabus if we were not constrained by the time limits

imposed upon us by the quarter system (and as beings enjoying only finite existence, in general), and so I will be generally sympathetic to proposals to look at films and/or games not covered on this syllabus. However, at the same time, I cannot be expected to devote dozens of hours of my time at the end of the quarter to playing games I have not previously played in order to grade student assignments. Because of this, *all final projects involving games or films not on this syllabus must be explicitly pre-approved by me, before proposals are turned in.*