

Genre Across Cinema and Videogames

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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. This course will investigate the raw materials and basic forms at the disposal of videogame developers and filmmakers, taking a specific look at how *genre* manifests itself across both forms. How do differences in how each medium present space, time, and action complicate their engagement with popular genres? What aesthetic effects are open to games that are not open to cinema, and vice versa? What can the successes in each medium tell us about the enduring popularity of certain generic forms? Through hands-on examination of examples in both media, this course dives deep into issues of adaptation, technological evolution, and the future of popular mass media.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this class, students should have demonstrated an ability to:

- Define and describe the concept of genre, and use it as an analytical tool
- Understand the technological evolution of mass media forms, and also how artistic production has historically operated within this evolution
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various popular media forms for creating certain effects among audiences

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- 1) Attendance and class participation, including participation in in-class small group work. (Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions will significantly lower your final grade; continued absences will be considered reason for FX grade designation.) (25% of final grade.)
- 2) Regular participation in discussion boards on course blog postings (20% of final grade)
- 3) One course blog post (20% of final grade)
- 4) Final project: Analytical blog post—written analysis with visual accompaniment (this can be frame grabs, analytical video essay portion, etc.), due week 11 (exact date and details of assignment possibilities TBA). (35% of final grade.)

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| A | 93-100% |
| A- | 90-92% |
| B+ | 87-89% |
| B | 84-86% |
| B- | 81-83% |
| C+ | 78-80% |
| C | 75-77% |
| C- | 72-74% |
| D+ | 69-71% |
| D | 66-68% |
| F | 0-65% |

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.”

Plagiarism, as defined here, will be considered grounds for failure of a given assignment, and, given repeated offenses, failure of the course.

Consult your student handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>) for further details.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the course instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact should be made **as early as possible in the quarter**. Before approaching the course instructor, make sure that you have previously contacted the:

- PLS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370, and/or
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

All reading materials for the course will be made available online on D2L. Some games may require purchasing (TBA).

TERMS OF ENROLLMENT

1. You agree that this syllabus is a contract, and that you are abiding by its terms and polities (including grading).
2. You understand that any issues or problems you have with grading will be dealt with through the policies laid out in the DePaul Student Handbook.
3. The course instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus, given that 1) new versions are made readily available upon alteration, and 2) timely notification is given to students about any alterations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Cinema, the Moving Image, and the Concept of Genre

Week 1 Class 1

Class introduction. No readings.

Week 1 Class 2: Definitions of Genre

Rick Altman, selections from *Film/Genre*

Week 2 – Media specificity, adaptation, and models of new media development

Week 2 Class 1: Strict evolutionary models of new media

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

Week 2 Class 2: Adaptation and impurity

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

In-class clip: *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas)

In-class play excerpts: *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])

In-class clip: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Stephen Spielberg)

In-class play excerpts: *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)

Week 3 – Horror and Incoherence

Week 3 Class 1: Cinema, editing, and coherence of space

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

Week 3 Class 1: Confusion and horror

Tom Bissell, “Headshots” (from *Extra Lives*)

In-class play excerpts: *Alone in the Dark* (1992, Infogrames, Windows)

Resident Evil (1996, Capcom, PlayStation)

Week 4 – Suspense

Week 4 Class 1: Defining suspense

François Truffaut, selections from *Hitchcock*

Week 4 Class 2: Suspense and horror in cinema

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

Out-of-class viewing assignment: *Halloween* (1978, John Carpenter)

Week 5 – The player/avatar gap, lying narration

Week 5 Class 1: Narration

Kristin Thompson, “Duplicitous Narration and *Stage Fright*” (from *Breaking the Glass Armor*)

In-class clip: *Stage Fright* (1950, Alfred Hitchcock)

Week 5 Class 2: Narration, mystery, and cheating

Emily Short, “Analysis: *Heavy Rain*’s Storytelling Gaps”

In-class play excerpts: *Heavy Rain* (2010, Quantic Dream, PlayStation3)

Week 6 – Mystery and mental expertise

Week 6 Class 1:

TBA

Week 6 Class 2:

TBA

Week 7 – Action and physical expertise**Week 7 Class 1: Action cinema**

Lisa Purse, “The Action Body” (from *Contemporary Action Cinema*)

View clips from: *Casino Royale* (2006, Martin Campbell)
The Bourne Ultimatum (2007, Paul Greengrass)

Week 7 Class 1: Physical action and physical expertise in gaming

Monika Gehlawat, “Improvisation, Action, and Architecture in *Casino Royale*”

Week 8 – Comedy and physical ineptitude**Week 8 Class 1: Comedy as visual style: congruencies**

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

Week 8 Class 2: Comedy as performance: vault lines

Ian Bryce Jones, “Do the Locomotion”

Week 9 – The documentary possibilities of videogames**Week 9 Class 1: Documentary and memoir**

Take-home play assignment: *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016)

Week 9 Class 2: Games and/as journalism

Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari, and Bobby Schweitzer, selections from *Newsgames: Journalism at Play*

Week 10 – Identification and empathy**Week 10 Class 1: Cinematic theories of identification and their limits**

Adrienne Shaw, selections from *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*

Week 10 Class 2: Empathy

Ian Bogost, “Empathy”

Anna Anthropy, “Empathy Game [artist’s statement]”

Week 11**DUE: FINAL PROJECT****ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS****Course blog participation**

Each student will be responsible for one blog post, serving the purpose of animating the discussion for that day. Although engagement with the course readings can be one of the functions of this post, it should also contain elements of media analysis—either close analysis of a film or clip viewed, or a gameplay experience reflection on a game. This should be around 600–900 words in length, and will be worth 20% of the student’s grade.

In addition, regular participation in the discussion around each post will be expected of each student. This participation counts for an additional 20% of students’ grades.

Final project

As a final, students will be required to post something more substantial on the course's blog. Word count is negotiable, and in fact this assignment is quite open by nature, so as to foster the opportunity for students to engage in a wide variety of work—although a project proposal must be submitted by week 8, and subsequently approved by the instructor.

My only requirement is that this not be a traditional written assignment, simply uploaded to the course blog. As a rule, it *must* contain some sort of visual accompaniment. At the very least, frame grabs from either a film or a game are required; animated GIFs would be even better. Students interested in pushing further beyond the confines of the written assignment are welcome to upload an analytical video essay onto the blog. Projects that blur the boundaries between creative and analytical work are welcome. This final project is worth 35% of students' final grade.