



English/Film Studies 394

Film and Game

Stuart Moulthrop

Course Preview Fall 2021

This class explores intersections, parallels, and resonances between two major domains of the moving image: cinema and computer games. The course is not primarily concerned with adaptation, but with comparisons that illuminate the way each medium is implicated in contemporary experience. We will focus in alternating weeks on a game or a film, leaning heavily on narrative but not excluding other modes, such as the mind-game film and the "cinema of attraction(s)." Films include the classic art piece *La Jetée* (1962), Nolan's puzzler *Memento* (1999), and the neo-psychedelic *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018). Games will partly reflect the cinematic turn of the 2010s (*Portal 2*, *Death Stranding*), with an excursion into the very recent past with Netflix's "Bandersnatch" (2019). In addition to the works themselves, topics for discussion include the nature of 21st-century media, the relationship of entertainment to art, implications of interactivity for cognitive evolution, and the dynamics of convergent media.

This is an asynchronous online course. (It started in that mode pre-pandemic and continues.) Readings consist of one or two book chapters or articles per week, designed to complement the media assignment. Students are required to contribute at least twice a week to a discussion forum. Four medium-length papers are required, with writing time for each built into the schedule. There will be a brief quiz on assigned reading in weeks not reserved for paper writing.

No book or game purchases are required. Though I encourage you to play all the assigned games, you can substitute online playthrough videos for any or all titles. For the four assigned films, you will need to rent/stream from Amazon or other. The "Bandersnatch" episode is available for live play only to Netflix subscribers with appropriate equipment. If you are not a Netflix subscriber you may substitute the "featurette" on YouTube.

If you have questions, contact me at moulthro@uwm.edu.

Syllabus Outline

The final syllabus for 2021 may differ. It should be available mid-August. (Dates on this outline were for the spring offering of the class in 2020.)

Jan. 20

Focus: Steven Lisberger, *Tron* (film, 1982)

Readings:

1. Felan Parker, "Roger Ebert and the Games-as-Art Debate" (PDF)
2. – optional: Roger Ebert, "Games Can Never Be Art" (online)
<https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art>

Jan. 27

Focus: *World of Goo* (game, 2008)

Reading: TBA

Feb. 3

Focus: "Bandersnatch" episode of *Black Mirror*
View/play on Netflix or watch viewers playing at:

1. Courtney
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZIHSlSagNk>
2. Kareemie
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtrWqT8U2Eg>

Reading: D.N. Rodowick, Chapter 1 of *The Virtual Life of Film* (PDF)

Feb. 10 – No assignments; work week for Unit I paper/project

Feb. 17

Focus: Christopher Nolan, *Memento* (film, 1999)

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film" (PDF)

Feb. 24

Focus: *Tacoma* (game)

Reading: Bolter & Grusin, "Remediation" (PDF)

Mar. 2

Run, Lola, Run (film)

Reading: Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction(s)" (PDF)

Mar. 9

Her Story (game)

Reading: Gaudreault and Marion, Chapter 7 of *The End of Cinema?* (PDF)

Mar. 16: SPRING BREAK and work week for Unit II paper

Mar. 23

Focus: Davey Wreden, *The Beginner's Guide* (game, 2015)

Purchase/play on Steam or watch gameplay at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bswgQg-F3QE>

Reading: TBA

Mar. 30

Focus: Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (film, 1962)

View on Kanopy:

uwm.kanopy.com/video/la-jetee

Reading: Kawin, "Time and Stasis in *La Jetée*" (PDF)

Apr. 6

Focus: *Death Stranding* (game, 2019)

Reading: TBA

Apr. 13 – No assignments; work week for Unit III paper

Apr. 20

Focus: *The Cabin in the Woods* (film, 2012)

Reading: TBA

Apr. 27

Focus: Valve Software, *Portal 2* (game, 2011)

Purchase/play at Steam or watch gameplay at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0K5EXfgJnk

Reading:

Burden and Gouglas, "The Algorithmic Experience: *Portal* as Art" (online)
gamestudies.org/1202/articles/the_algorithmic_experience

May 4

No assignments: work week for Unit IV paper/project