

FILM 240: Special Topics

Digital Aesthetics

Prof. Jacob Gaboury
Thursday 2:10-5:00pm

Office Hours: <https://calendly.com/gaboury>
<https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/91979943347>

This course will examine the influence of digital technology on contemporary film and visual media. Drawing on art history, cinema studies, architecture, and media studies we will historicize the radical shift brought about by digital technology while engaging in debates over our post-digital, post-internet, post-cinematic media culture. Rather than critique the “newness” of new media, we will take seriously the claim that digital technology marks a radical break with earlier media forms, and that this transformation has had a profound influence on the way we view and understand the world around us. The course readings will be divided between popular contemporary film aesthetics, critical scholarship on digital and networked art practices, and emerging debates in digital games and interactive media, with a focus on work from the past twenty years. We will hold semi-regular screenings and lab sessions to engage relevant material, and students should be prepared to play and make original works using a range of accessible tools and engines.

1_Intro

08/27

Syllabus Presentation and Introductions

2_Picturing the History of Computing

09/03

READ:

Gaboury, Jacob. "Hidden Surface Problems: On the Digital Image as Material Object." *Journal of Visual Culture* 14, no. 1 (2015): 40-60.

Gaboury, Jacob. "The Random-Access Image: Memory and the History of the Computer Screen." *Grey Room* (2018): 24-53.

Gaboury, Jacob. "Screens Shot: Parts 1-5" *Still Searching*. Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2019.

WATCH:

["The Mother of All Demos" \(Highlights 1-10\)](#) Stanford Research Institute (1968)

["Sketchpad"](#) Ivan Sutherland (1962)

SCREEN:

Desk Set (Walter Lang, 1957)

3_So-Called “New Media”

09/10

RESEARCH:

The 1990s, Y2K, World Wide Web, net.art, Web Rings, CD-ROM, Multimedia, Geocities, Hypertext Fiction, Electronic Literature, Second Wave VR, etc.

READ:

Rodowick, D. N. “The Virtual Life of Film” in *The Virtual Life of Film*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Introduction: Did Somebody Say New Media?." *New media, old media: A history and theory reader* (2006): 1-10.

Manovich, Lev. “Principles of New Media” in *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press, 2002.

Galloway, Alexander. “The Computer as a Mode of Mediation” in *The Interface Effect*. Polity, 2012.

SUPPLEMENT:

Rosen, Philip. “Old and New: Image, Indexicality, and Historicity in the Digital Age” in *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*. University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Friedberg, Anne. “The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change” in Marc Furstenau (ed.), *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*. Routledge (2010).

CLASS:

Hypercard Stack Emulator - <https://archive.org/details/hypercardstacks>

SCREEN:

The Net (Irwin Winkler, 1995)

4_Discorrelated Images

09/17

GUEST:

Shane Denson (Stanford University)

READ:

Denson, Shane. “Introduction” in *Discorrelated Images*. Duke University Press, 2020.

Denson, Shane. “Crazy Cameras, Discorrelated Images, and the Post-Perceptual Mediation of Post-Cinematic Affect” in Shane Denson & Julia Leyda (eds), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016).

Denson, Shane. "The Horror of Discorrelation: Mediating Unease in Post-Cinematic Screens and Networks." *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 60.1 (Fall 2020).

SCREEN:

Transformers 3: Dark Side of the Moon (Michael Bay, 2011)

5_Software, Hardware, Platform, Format

09/24

READ:

- Wardrip-Fruin, Noah. "Gravity in computer space." *ROMchip* 1, no. 2 (2019).
Mackenzie, Adrian. "Codec." *Software Studies* (2008): 48-54.
Finn, Ed. "House of Cards: The Aesthetics of Abstraction" in *What algorithms want: Imagination in the age of computing*. MIT Press, 2017.
Stine, Kyle. "Critical Hardware: The Circuit of Image and Data." *Critical Inquiry* 45, no. 3 (2019): 762-786.

SUPPLEMENT:

- Montfort, Nick. "Combat in context." *Game Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006).
Montfort, Nick, and Ian Bogost. *Racing the beam: The Atari video computer system*. Mit Press, 2009.
Wardrip-Fruin, Noah. *Expressive Processing: Digital fictions, computer games, and software studies*. MIT press, 2009.

SCREEN:

- Unfriended* (Levan Gabriazde, 2014)
or
Host (Rob Savage, 2020)

EVENT:

- CSTMS Colloquium: Morgan Ames in conversation with Jacob Gaboury about *The Charisma Machine*, Zoom, 4-5:30

6_Network Aesthetics

10/01

GUEST:

- Patrick Jagoda (University of Chicago)

READ:

- Patrick Jagoda, "Emergent Aesthetics," "Realist Aesthetics," and "Participatory Aesthetics" in *Network Aesthetics*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

SUPPLEMENT:

- Cohen, Kris. *Never Alone, Except for Now: Art, Networks, Populations*. Duke University Press, 2017.

STREAM:

- Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012)

SCREEN:

- Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005)

7_Metagames and Money Games

10/08

GUESTS:

Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux (University of California at Davis)

READ:

Boluk, Stephanie and Patrick LeMieux. "Introduction" and "Hundred Thousand Billion Fingers: Serial Histories of *Super Mario Bros.*" in *Metagaming: Playing, competing, spectating, cheating, trading, making, and breaking videogames*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

SUPPLEMENT:

John Sharp. *Works of game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art*. MIT Press, 2015.

Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture*. Vol. 18. U of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Wark, McKenzie. *Gamer Theory*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

PLAY:

99 Exercises in Play (Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, 2017)

WATCH:

"Everything But the Clouds" Patrick LeMieux, 2017

EVENT:

"Skin in the Game: Greymarket Gambling and Virtual Currencies in Counter-Strike" BFMS Lecture, Zoom, 5-7pm.

8_Distributed Blackness

10/15

READ:

Brock, André. "Introduction," "Distributed Blackness," "Information Inspirations," and "The Black Purposes of Space Travel" in *Distributed Blackness: African American Technocultures*. (NYU Press, 2020).

SUPPLEMENT:

Noble, Safiya Umoja, and Brendesha M. Tynes. *The intersectional internet: Race, sex, class, and culture online*. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2016.

Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*. (NYU Press, 2019).

McIlwain, Charlton D. *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2019.

Christian, Aymar Jean. *Open TV: Innovation beyond Hollywood and the rise of web television*. Vol. 20. NYU Press, 2018.

WATCH:

["Why Intersectional TV Matters and How Artists Can Break In"](#) Aymar Jean Christian, 2015

BROWSE:

[OTV | Open Television](#)

9_The Always-On Image

10/22

GUEST:

James Hodge (Northwestern University)

READ:

Hodge, James J. "Vernaculars: The Always-On Image" in in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Visual Culture*, ed. Aubrey Anable, Joan Saab, and Catherine Zuromskis.

Hodge, James J. "Sociable media: phatic connection in digital art." *Postmodern Culture* 26, no. 1 (2015).

Hodge, James J. "Screwed: Anxiety and the Digital Ends of Anticipation" (forthcoming).

WATCH:

"Somebody" (Miranda July, 2014) <https://youtu.be/iz13HMsvb6o>

"Touch" (James Hodge, 2018) <https://www.triquarterly.org/node/303191>

10_Rich and Poor Images

10/29

READ:

Kane, Carolyn. "Introduction" and "Chroma Glitch: Data as Style" in *High-Tech Trash: Glitch, Noise, and Aesthetic Failure*. Vol. 1. University of California Press, 2019.

Steyerl, Hito. "In defense of the poor image." *e-flux journal* 10, no. 11 (2009).

Menkman, Rosa. *The glitch moment (um)*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011.

SUPPLEMENT:

Alexander, Neta. "Rage against the machine: Buffering, noise, and perpetual anxiety in the age of connected viewing." *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 2 (2017): 1-24.

Rambo, David. "The Error-Image: On the Technics of Memory" in Denson, Shane, and Julia Leyda. *Post-cinema. Theorizing 21st-century film*. Reframe Books, 2016.

WATCH:

Killing Lena (2010, Jamie Allen)

Lossless #3 (2008, Rebecca Baron and Douglas Goodwin)

Monster Movie (2005, Takashi Murata)

Welcome to Heartbreak (2009, Kanye West and Kid Cudi)

SCREEN:

A Family Finds Entertainment (Ryan Trecartin, 2004)

11_Operational Images

11/05

READ:

Paglen, Trevor. "Invisible images: Your pictures are looking at you." *Architectural Design* 89, no. 1 (2019): 22-27.

Crawford, Kate, and Trevor Paglen. "Excavating AI: The politics of images in machine learning training sets." *Excavating AI* (2019).

Paulsen, Kris. "'Shitty Automation': Art, Artificial Intelligence, Humans in the Loop." *Media-N* 16, no. 1 (2020): 4-23.

SCREEN:

Harun Farocki, "Eye/Machine" (2000) and "Parallels I-IV" (2012-2014)

12_Non-Human Vision

11/12

READ:

Parks, Lisa. "Drones, vertical mediation, and the targeted class." *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016): 227-235.

Bridle, James. "[Under the Shadow of the Drone.](#)" Project Space (2015).

Zylinska, Joanna. "Nonhuman Vision" in Zylinska, Joanna. *Nonhuman photography*. MIT Press, 2017.

WATCH:

[Powers of Ten](#) (1977, Charles and Ray Eames)

SCREEN:

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

13_The Bigger Picture

11/19

GUEST:

Brooke Belisle (Stony Brook University)

READ:

Belisle, Brooke. "Whole World Within Reach: Google Earth VR." *Journal of Visual Culture* 19, no. 1 (2020): 112-136.

Belisle, Brooke. "Nature at a glance: Immersive maps from panoramic to digital." *Early Popular Visual Culture* 13, no. 4 (2015): 313-335.

EVENT:

Brooke Belisle, BFMS Lecture, Zoom, 5-7pm.

11/26

THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS

12/03

Writing / 1-on-1 Meetings

ASSESSMENT

Weekly Responses: 50%

Object Reports: 30%

Research Proposal: 20%

READING RESPONSES

Each week you will be required to write up a detailed, 500-word response to the week's readings, along with 3-5 discussion questions that you would be willing to pose to the class. We will draw on these questions to prompt our discussion with guest visitors and each other. In calculating your final grade, I will drop the two lowest graded reading responses. This means you can skip up to two reading responses with no penalty, should you choose to.

All reading responses are due by 12pm the day of class.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Throughout the semester you will be tasked with three reports based on aesthetic objects you find outside of class. The first of these reports is assigned to take place in week three of the class, but the other two reports can be given for any class where we do not have a guest speaker. Simply email to let me know if you plan to submit a report and I will schedule it for the start of our discussion. These reports should bring in objects you encounter throughout your daily engagement with digital technologies, and expand on the implications of this object to the broader field of digital aesthetics. I am suggesting you keep a dedicated journal for documenting these objects, and we will also be using a class Slack to circulate various examples to one another. These reports are not meant to be fully realized projects with complete arguments and structure, but will instead ask you to think broadly about the context and implications of a given object that has the potential to be developed into a longer work.

FINAL PROJECT/PROPOSAL

Your final project for this class will take the form of either a formal research paper related to the theme of the class, or a proposal for a long-form research project that either expands on one of your research reports or develops a new, original concept that could be turned into a dissertation-length work. The proposal will require you to identify an original research topic, describe its intervention, review relevant literature, discuss theory and methodology, and outline a general structure. Alternate project formats are also possible based on prior discussion and approval.

ZOOM

All classes will take place on Zoom here: <https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/91979943347>.

Please note you will need to be logged into Zoom in order to participate, and I will be instituting a waiting room at the start of class to prevent uninvited guests from attending. Please make sure your Zoom name matches your complete preferred name for this class. I also ask that you include your pronouns as part of your Zoom name to facilitate class discussion. All classes will be recorded and posted to bCourses the following day. These recordings include automatic transcriptions of lectures and discussion. Finally, I am asking that you unmute your video while we are in class and keep your audio muted unless you are speaking. While this is not mandatory it will greatly facilitate discussion in this small class format, though I am happy to discuss exceptions or any other issues with each student on an individual basis.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

If you are feeling overwhelmed given the many challenges of this unprecedented semester, I would encourage you to take advantage of the university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), which are available for free to all students.

<https://uhs.berkeley.edu/caps>

Student Technology Equity Program (STEP)

If you do not believe you have adequate technology to perform the various tasks described in this syllabus, please take advantage of the Student Technology Equity Program and discuss your circumstances with me so that we can make adjustments to the course content and expectations.

<https://technology.berkeley.edu/STEP>

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

If you have a documented physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Berkeley Disabled Students Program using the link below. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

<https://dsp.berkeley.edu>