

Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

 Edit

Introduction to Digital Arts and Culture

FILM.003-WI25

Instructor: John Bell (john.p.bell@dartmouth.edu (<mailto:john.p.bell@dartmouth.edu>))

Office Location: 305 Bartlett (office hours by appt, just ask!)

Class Meetings: 2A - Tu/Th 2:25-4:15PM in 007 Dartmouth Hall

Zoom link (when necessary): <http://dartgo.org/film3-zoom>  (<http://dartgo.org/film3-zoom>)

Course Description

Digital technology is a key component of culture. Looking at popular media, science fiction, computer games, and artists' projects, students will learn important approaches to digital culture including: the history of the computer as a medium; the conceptual history of interactivity; the development of film, design, extended reality, and hypermedia; the history of artificial realities; and how visions of the future may change our sense of identity and what constitutes our physical bodies.

This course will explore what it means for something to be digital beyond the reductive definition that it comes from a computer. The spine of the course will test the early promise of the Internet era—that "information wants to be free"—and examine how that idea has been reflected in the art and culture we have produced, where the notion has succeeded and failed, and how the tension between open and closed communities has become a key framework for participating in the digital world.

Course Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will:

- Read, watch, and play classic and modern critical discussion on digital art and culture
- Explore the characteristics and boundaries of 'digital' as opposed to other expressions of arts and culture throughout media history
- Analyze how digital artwork functions as a system that includes technology, individual creators and consumers, and broader social context
- Develop evidence-based theories on how digital culture has developed from the pre-computing era to today and project today's practices into the future
- Practice crafting public media and presentations that present compelling arguments to general

audiences

- Hone skills for responsible community-building, including openness, respectful social scaffolding, and collaborative work toward common goals [↪ \(https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#teaching-methods--philosophy\)](https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#teaching-methods--philosophy)

Teaching Methods & Philosophy

This course explores digital cultures and its methods embody the practices that make up those cultures. As such, it may function a bit differently than other courses you have taken. Some examples include:

- "I know Google-Fu" – classroom discussions are expected to be supported by open laptops and real-time research. I fully expect you to make use of the ability to multitask and dig up information as we talk though. Just make sure you're still paying attention to the discussion! Beyond discussion, when we're watching videos or presentations together, I expect your computer use to be more limited.
- "Plan to throw one away; you will, anyhow" – all submitted assignments may be revised and resubmitted after you receive feedback (though you do need to submit a legitimate attempt at an assignment on time in order to take advantage of this privilege).
- "It's not a bug, it's a feature" – we will undoubtedly run into places where technology fails, ideas fall apart, or schedules don't work; when we do we will adapt rather than try to force our way back to the original plan.
- "Good artists copy; great artists steal" – we encourage reuse, remix, and derivatives of existing ideas and media, so long as it is significantly transformative and pulls together divergent threads. Note that plagiarism and uncited sources are still very much against the rules and will result in adverse consequences...and that plagiarizing AI is still plagiarism.

The goal of the course is to collectively develop these and other methods that encourage critical analysis, discussion, and self-reflection as both individuals and a group. Defining, evaluating, and setting these philosophies will be an explicit part of everybody's participation in the course. [↪ \(https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#expectations--norms\)](https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#expectations--norms)

Expectations & Norms

Meatspace Participation

This course develops a shared understanding of digital culture that will evolve as your ideas bounce off of and are transformed by others in the class. If the only time you talk is when you're giving a presentation then you will have little opportunity to contribute to the shared understanding developed by the class and I will not have much information to use when evaluating your success in the class (i.e., grade). Ask questions, throw in comments, and generally add to the discussion as much as possible, particularly if you think you missed something or you have a stupid question. The odds are

good that I failed to completely explain whatever you missed and other people are as confused as you are.

You will be expected to meet with collaborators outside of class. I encourage you to use the designated x hour for these meetings when we do not use it for class, but you are free to set them as needed to accommodate your schedules.

Online Participation

This course includes both a Canvas site and a Slack group. The Canvas site will be the home of static resources like the syllabus and readings, while the Slack group is for discussion. The Slack group will include:

- Links to digital artwork that you find compelling in some way (or documentation if it is offline).
- Links to digital- and digital adjacent-artists, each of which is described by a brief paragraph justifying their inclusion on the list. You will get more details on this as I ask for you to submit them.
- Spaces for you to discuss group work with your classmates.

COVID-Related Notices

Attendance:

You are expected to attend class in person; however, there may be times when you need to miss class due to emergent circumstances like illness or other medical reasons, family emergencies, etc. Please do not attend class if you are sick, if you are in [isolation after testing positive for COVID-19 \(https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/about/covid-19-campus-information\)](https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/about/covid-19-campus-information), or if you have been instructed to stay home by Student Health Services. During the time you are not able to attend class in person, if you feel well enough, you can continue class work as detailed below. However, I encourage you to prioritize taking care of yourself if you are not feeling well or have diminished capacity. If you are unable to continue class work while absent or are out of class for longer than two weeks, I will work with you and your dean to chart the best path forward.

Reading

You will be given weekly reading assignments that you will respond to and will form the core of our discussions.

Communication Style

Everything you produce in this course will be created as though it is targeted at the general public, whether anyone outside the course ever sees it or not. That means it is more important that you write and speak using style, rigor, and persuasion than that you get every character of a particular citation style correct. The applicable norms are those of public humanities; unfortunately, those norms are not as well defined as more traditional academic writing. My biggest tip is that you remember that all

writing, even a class assignment, is storytelling. Create a clear narrative, use concrete examples, construct an argument, add own your perspective—if you do these things, then you will be on the right path. I encourage you to ask questions about how to improve your ability to work with this style of writing and media production throughout the term, but a few resources for learning more include:

- <http://www.kellyjbaker.com/writing-for-a-public-audience/> ↗ (<http://www.kellyjbaker.com/writing-for-a-public-audience/>) This blog post describes some of the common mistakes people make when moving from academic to public writing.
- <https://theconversation.com/us/arts> ↗ (<https://theconversation.com/us/arts>) Examples of this style of writing can be found on The Conversation (though how successful each author is at employing it will vary).
- <https://workingnarratives.org/story-guide/> ↗ (<https://workingnarratives.org/story-guide/>) This is a bit more in-depth, but if you're interested in this kind of writing for public impact there is a more comprehensive guide here as well.

Collaboration Policy

You are encouraged to use outside resources, including people you know from outside the course, as research sources. All such sources must be referenced in the deliverable for the assignment you discuss with them.

Collaboration within the course will vary depending on the requirements of the assignment.

Notes on Logistics

- All assignments will be submitted via Canvas. Any ongoing resource sharing and discussion should take place in Slack.
- There are several guest speakers and visitors this term. While I have tried to get a commitment from each of them for specific dates and times, we may need to adjust the schedule slightly to accommodate if a guest is not available on their scheduled date.
- I may occasionally ask to share a presentation or project outside the classroom (e.g. on BlueSky). You are under absolutely no obligation to agree to this and, if you do not, I will not penalize you in any way.
- I'm happy to chat about any concerns with the course or the material we're discussing. To schedule an appointment for office hours, send email to john.p.bell@dartmouth.edu (<mailto:john.p.bell@dartmouth.edu>) ↗ (<https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#class-climate--inclusivity>)

Class Climate & Inclusivity

As with all classes, it is expected that you will treat others with respect. Participation in discussion should be a constructive dialog integrating your ideas with mine and those of other students; while disagreements and counterarguments that test ideas are expected and encouraged, they must

always be presented in a civil fashion. If you are repeatedly abusive toward your classmates you will be asked to leave and the day will be considered an absence for purposes of the attendance policy.

↳ <https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#texts--materials>

Texts & Materials

Readings will be provided in Canvas. There is no required textbook for this course, but I will ask you to read a novel this term:

- Beggars in Spain, by Nancy Kress (ISBN 9780060733483) ↳ <https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#assessment--grading>

Assessment & Grading

Participation and Attendance: 20%

Participation includes taking an active role in both classroom discussions and Slack. Remember that the topics I introduce in class are only seeds and examples; I expect you to bring in your own related interests, respond to your classmates' ideas, and take our discussions and hands-on projects in directions that I can't predict ahead of time. One person each class will be responsible for taking notes and posting them in Slack; you will find the day you're assigned to in Canvas.

I will be taking attendance at each class meeting. If you are more than ten minutes late, that day will be marked as an absence. After two absences, your final grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each additional absence. If you need to take a planned absence or will not be attending due to illness, let me know via email ahead of the class you will be missing. Medical absences may be excused - as mentioned above, please defer to the safety of the community over trying to come to class when sick. If your circumstances lead you to believe you will not be able to meet this attendance policy, let me know and we can discuss it. Communicable disease-related absences are considered excused under this policy-if you have a question about your health status, I encourage you to let me know ahead of class and get tested rather than coming in and potentially causing a wider outbreak among your classmates.

Commentary on Readings and Media: 25%

You will need to create a brief response to each week's readings, media, and other ideas. These responses will be created in pairs that will be assigned during the first week of the course. Commentaries are due every Tuesday morning at 9AM, unless otherwise specified.

You and your partner will record a brief (5 min, give or take) conversation discussing something you found significant or felt a connection to in the week's readings. You and your partner are trying to explore an interesting set of ideas spanning the materials presented each week; an ideal commentary includes both insights gleaned from the week's ideas and new questions those ideas have posed in

your mind. It should be informative and **not** assume the viewer has knowledge of the materials we're covering for the week.

This format can be a bit tricky to do well. Five minutes is not much time to get your point across, but if you are not prepared ahead of time, filling five minutes without becoming redundant or falling back on small talk not relevant to your point can be difficult. Though I'm asking for video of a conversation, you will want to think about the structure of the conversation, what points you want to make, what supporting evidence you're leaning on, and the overall narrative of the conversation before you start recording. Also, be aware of the production quality of the video: while it doesn't need to be anything fancy, it does need to be clear, have audible sound, be appropriate for class, etc.

Deep Dive Explainer: 25%

You will be assigned to a group that will create a deep dive presentation. Each group will present once; the presentation is expected to take roughly fifteen minutes, with a few extra minutes for Q&A added to the end. These explainers will go into depth on some big idea that is tangential to the topics discussed in class. Your group will need to propose a topic and, upon approval, develop a presentation aimed at general audiences.

To submit the explainer you will need to send your presentation media, speaker's notes, and bibliography to me on Canvas within a week of the in-class presentation.

Final Project: 30%

The final project for this course will be a five-minute long explainer suitable for public dissemination. By the end of January you will propose an individual research topic related to the ideas we have discussed in class. By the end of the term you will research your topic, write a script (with bibliography), and record your explainer. We will discuss the medium of this explainer and technology used to create it in class.

To submit your final project you will need to upload the final media file, script, and bibliography to Canvas. I would also encourage you to make the media file public and will help you figure out the best distribution channel for doing so—at the very least, it should go into your student portfolio site. Publication beyond that is not a requirement of the course, however—just something that I think you should do because part of participating in digital culture is actually putting your work out there for people to see.

Dartmouth Policies  (<https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#student-accessibility-and-accommodations>)

Student Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; [Apply for Services webpage \(https://students.dartmouth.edu/student-accessibility/students/where-start/apply-services\)](https://students.dartmouth.edu/student-accessibility/students/where-start/apply-services)); student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu (<mailto:mailto:student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu>); 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center \(https://students.dartmouth.edu/student-accessibility/services/testing-center\)](https://students.dartmouth.edu/student-accessibility/services/testing-center) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Statement on Mental Health

The academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to you on campus to support your wellness, including your:

- Undergraduate Dean (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/undergraduate-deans/> (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/undergraduate-deans/>))
- Counseling and Human Development (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/counseling/about> (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/counseling/about>))
- Student Wellness Center (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/wellness-center/> (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/wellness-center/>)) [↗\(https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#religious-observances\)](https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#religious-observances)

Religious Observances

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please let me know as soon as possible—before the end of the second week of the term at the latest—to discuss appropriate course adjustments.

Offensive Materials

Due to the nature of contemporary media and subject matter, this course may include difficult materials and challenging content that may prove to be offensive due to their language, visual

features, theme, or overall orientation. Difficult content can be difficult to one individual and not difficult for another; this is the nature of interpretation. Such content may appear in readings, lectures, in-class discussions, screenings, software and game examples, student projects, and/or other materials. These forms of cultural expression are used as objects of description and analysis, not as promoting any view on sensitive issues. They are meant to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level. The ideas or perspectives contained or implied in such materials do not necessarily reflect the views of the professor, the Department of Film and Media Studies, or Dartmouth College. Students are invited to express their reactions to such material in class, sections, or during office hours, but they must do so in ways that demonstrate respect for other class participants and the faculty member in the spirit of intellectual and creative exploration. Students who enroll in the course will be deemed to have consented to these conditions (willingness to confront difficult or offensive material in readings, lectures, discussions, films, recordings, and other materials and to respect the rights of others). [↪ \(https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#academic-conduct\)](https://github.com/novomancy/film3/blob/covid/README.md#academic-conduct)

Academic Conduct

The faculty, administration, and students of Dartmouth College acknowledge the responsibility to maintain and perpetuate the principle of academic honor, and recognize that any instance of academic dishonesty is considered a violation of the Academic Honor Principle.

Honor Code Addendum

The Academic Honor Principle depends on the willingness of students to maintain and perpetuate standards of academic honesty. Students may not ask anyone other than the professor of their course to correct work for this course. Students must rely on their judgment and conscience to determine whether a specific question might be addressed to a classmate or a friend (e.g. help with an idiom not readily available in a dictionary, or the conjugation of a rare irregular verb), but in any case, such aid must be minimal, occasional, and acknowledged. Outside proofreading/correcting changes the student's work, gives the professor an inaccurate idea of the student's skills, and as such violates the Dartmouth College honor principle. As a Dartmouth Student you are required to comply with the Academic Honor Principle: <https://policies.dartmouth.edu/policy/academic-honor-principle-1> (<https://policies.dartmouth.edu/policy/academic-honor-principle-1>)

Dartmouth's Anti-Hazing Policy

The Film and Media Studies Department is a firm supporter of Dartmouth's Anti-Hazing Policy. We reject hazing in all of its manifestations. In order to promote a safe environment for all students and not interrupt the learning experience at Dartmouth College, evidence of hazing-related practices, as defined by the Dartmouth College Anti-Hazing Policy, will not be considered appropriate in the classroom



Course Schedule and Topics

Week	Class	Topic
Week 1	1/7	Introduction and a series of problematic words
	1/9	Your concept of digital art
		Reading: Koziel, Excerpt from Speedrunning Science
Week 2	1/14	Art and idea
	1/16	Performance and artifact
		Readings: Arbesman, Introduction to Overcomplicated; Levy, Hackers at 30; Manovich, Language of New Media excerpts; Paul, Digital Art excerpts
Week 3	1/21	Synthetic Art and Synthetic Markets
	1/23	Transmedia - [Guest Speaker Jennifer Chamberlain]
		Readings: Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Jenkins, Transmedia Storytelling; Jenkins, Transmedia What?; Tarnoff, A Certain Danger[...]
Week 4	1/28	Ethics and fictions
	1/30	Participatory culture - Watchalong: Rifftrax shorts
		Readings: Hopwood, Is Fake News Killing Fictive Art; Hon, What ARGs Can Teach Us About QAnon; Garber, We're Already Living in the Metaverse; Lamerichs, The Next Wave in Participatory Culture; Dzieza, The Confusing Reality of AI Friends
Week 5	2/4	Prehistories and leftovers - Hood Museum talk on Fluxus
	2/6	Deep Dive presentations
		Readings: Friedman, Intermedia, Multimedia, and Media; McLuhan, The Medium is the Message Ch. 1
Week 6	2/11	BASIC - Rauner archive talk on the history of BASIC











Week	Class	Topic
	2/13	BASIC Workshop
		Readings: McCracken, Fifty Years of BASIC, Floridi, On Good and Evil[...]
Week 7	2/18	Final project discussion
	2/20	Demoscene, live coding, AI, and generative art
		Readings: https://overcast.fm/+oiPWgxJVM Kirschenbaum, AI Is Ushering in a Textpocalypse; Hertzmann, That's Not Art; Mitchell, Fractal Art Manifesto https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/files/13536118?wrap=1
Week 8	2/25	Speculative pasts
	2/27	Speculative futures
		Readings: LeGuin, The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas; Jemesin, The Ones Who Stay and Fight; Sutherland, The Ultimate Display; Bush, As We May Think; Asimov, The Feeling of Power; Stross, We're Sorry We Created the Torment Nexus; Roanhorse, Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience; Kress, Beggars in Spain
Week 9	3/4	Watchalong: The Waldo Moment & early presentations
	3/6	Final presentations

There will be no final exam for this course.


Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Wed Jan 8, 2025	 Register for Hood Museum talk (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492550)	due by 9am
Thu Jan 9, 2025	 Digital Art Examples (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492538)	due by 9am

Date	Details	Due
	 Watch GDQ (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492553)	due by 9am
Tue Jan 14, 2025	 Week 2 Individual Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492555)	due by 9am
Tue Jan 21, 2025	 Deep Dive Proposal (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492535)	due by 9am
	 Week 3 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492556)	due by 9am
Wed Jan 22, 2025	 Register for Kavya Pearlman Talk (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492551)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Jan 24, 2025	 Hybrid classes (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492545)	due by 11:59pm
Tue Jan 28, 2025	 Week 4 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492558)	due by 9am
Wed Jan 29, 2025	 Check out the materials in your Rauner group (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492531)	due by 2pm
Tue Feb 4, 2025	 Week 5 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492559)	due by 9am
Thu Feb 6, 2025	 Deep Dive Presentation (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492533)	due by 2:30pm

Date	Details	Due
Tue Feb 11, 2025	 Attend Wendy Chun Talk (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492530)	due by 4:30pm
Tue Feb 11, 2025	 Final Project Proposal (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492541)	due by 9am
Tue Feb 11, 2025	 Week 6 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492560)	due by 9am
Tue Feb 11, 2025	 Watch Birth of BASIC video (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/501284)	due by 2pm
Thu Feb 13, 2025	 Deep Dive Presentation-Submission (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492534)	due by 9am
Thu Feb 13, 2025	 Install VICE on your computer (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492546)	due by 2:30pm
Fri Feb 14, 2025	 Kasumi Yogi talk (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492547)	due by 4:35pm
Sat Feb 15, 2025	 Hood Museum survey (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492544)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Feb 16, 2025	 Complete peer reviews on final project proposals (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492532)	due by 11:59pm
Mon Feb 17, 2025	 Final Project Text and References (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492543)	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
Tue Feb 18, 2025	 Week 7 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492561)	due by 9am
Tue Feb 18, 2025	 Develop a generative art piece in BASIC (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492537)	due by 2pm
Wed Feb 19, 2025	 Final Project Audio (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492540)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Feb 23, 2025	 Deep Dive Response (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492536)	due by 11:59pm
Mon Feb 24, 2025	 Watch Kavya Pearlman Talk (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492554)	due by 9am
Tue Feb 25, 2025	 Week 8 Commentary (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492562)	due by 9am
Tue Mar 4, 2025	 Final Project (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492539)	due by 2pm
Thu Mar 6, 2025	 Participation and Attendance (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492549)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Mar 14, 2025	 Final Project Response (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492542)	due by 11:59pm
	 Class Notes (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/499992)	
	 Memex Animation (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu)	

Date	Details	Due
	courses/70252/assignments/492548	
	 Roll Call Attendance (https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/70252/assignments/492552)	