

# **The Emergence of ‘Cinematic Games’: An Intermedia Archaeology of Lens-Based Game Design**

*Jonathan Rozenkrantz, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, Sweden*

## **Abstract**

The paper introduces the research project *Playing with Cinema: An Intermedia Archaeology of Cinematic Games* (Swedish Research Council, 2024-2026), zooming in on the conditions for the emergence of “cinematic games” as a concept between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s.

The influence of cinema on video games has been a matter of academic controversy, dating back to the “ludology vs. narratology” debates from which Game Studies sprung. What both camps have had in common is an unfortunate neglect of the rich and nuanced discussions on these matters, articulated within in game culture itself, predating Game Studies by decades.

Based on targeted searches in archives of more than 30,000 digitised game magazines (1970s–2010s), and subsequent *cinematoludic* analyses of eight cases thereby revealed to be of historical significance, the paper will make the following propositions:

\* As Jürgen E. Müller (2010) has suggested, “the greatest potential for intermediality studies can be found in the historical dimension: in an intermedia archaeology of media within the networks of cultural and technological series”. In effect, the cinematicity of games must be understood culturally and technologically, through the historical study of how, and on what conditions, game culture’s own discourses conceived of games as being “cinematic”.

\* This starting point guides us towards a very different set of potential cases (thus far largely neglected by scholars but of crucial historical importance), the analysis of which may even force us to rethink some of the fundamental theoretical propositions in existing scholarship.

\* One such challenge concerns the misconception of cinema and video games as belonging to two separate ontological categories, with film understood as the indexical capture of physical reality and games as pure simulation (see Girina 2015; Froehlich 2023). Not only do standard uses of photogrammetry and performance capture in contemporary game design blur such postulated boundaries. Intermedia archaeology highlights how the emergence of “cinematic

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games” as a conceptual category was always already conditioned by the use of actual lens-based technologies for the sake of merging old physical reality with those new digital worlds.

### **Keywords**

Cinema, video games, media archaeology, intermediality, lens-based media

### **Bio**

Dr. **Jonathan Rozenkrantz** is a senior lecturer in Cinema Studies at Lund University. He is the author of *Videographic Cinema: An Archaeology of Electronic Images and Imaginaries* (Bloomsbury 2020). Rozenkrantz’s PhD thesis “Electronic Labyrinths: An Archaeology of Videographic Cinema” (2019) was awarded Högskoleföreningen’s Award for outstanding scientific achievement in 2020. Rozenkrantz’s research has been published in anthology chapters and journals including *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema och montage/av: Zeitschrift für Theorie & Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation*. He is the head editor of *Filmpedagogiskt paket för undervisning om de nationella minoriteterna* (Swedish Film Institute 2020). Rozenkrantz has more recently published on Jewish representation in Swedish post-war film, including “The Precariousness of Jewish Visibility: Surviving Antisemitism in Swedish Cinema” (*Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* 2022) and “Jacobi’s Burden: ‘Jewish Figurations in *Fanny och Alexander*” in *Ingmar Bergman at the Crossroads: Between Theory and Practice* (Maaret Koskinen and Louise Wallenberg eds., Bloomsbury 2022)..

### **ORCID-ID/Websites**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3502-4873>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=iNZseacAAAAJ&hl=sv&oi=ao>

Web site: <https://www.sol.lu.se/person/JonathanRozenkrantz>