



Game on

Digital technology is bringing the film and games sectors together and Europe's film schools want to train the new workforce needed for transmedia. **Matt Mueller** reports on the best courses

In January, the UK's National Film & Television School (NFTS) added a new discipline to its two-year MA programmes. For the first time in its 41-year history, games design and development sits alongside the venerable specialisms of production design, cinematography, screenwriting and, more recently, digital post-production. The first eight students are spending their initial term collaborating on a project in which they create a navigable games universe, drawing upon the skills of the NFTS' other creative hubs.

Jon Weinbren, the programme's architect who has worked across the games industry and academia, says, "It's putting games into that collaborative environment and allowing the students to work with and contribute to the other specialist disciplines. It means the core production level for games can go up even at this level."

This comes at a time when the games industry is experiencing explosive growth (the global market for video games is projected to expand to \$90bn by 2015) while growing in confidence and making vigorous attempts to expand its cultural footprint. Although

the relationship between games and film has often left much to be desired (films spinning off terrible games and vice versa), the convergence can only help boost each sector.

France's Ubisoft, Europe's leading video-game publisher, last year launched a motion picture division to explore bringing A-list game franchises such as *Assassin's Creed* to the big screen. As the games industry pioneers visual effects that are adopted by the film industry, so a generation of budding film-makers become more interested in games design and transmedia concepts.

Where you find the major games development studios, you will also find the leading centres of excellence for games education. In Europe, the UK, France, Germany and the Nordic countries lead the way in training, skills base and innovation.



'Our approach to experience creation can really inform the film-makers' approach'

Jon Weinbren, NFTS



Assassin's Creed

"When we've set up studios, historically, in a country we first look at the schools, the level of education in the disciplines that are key to making games and make sure that we feel there is the quality and the quantity of students to staff the teams," says Diane Peyredieu du Charlat, global talent acquisitions manager at Ubisoft.

But sorting the wheat from the chaff of games-design education can be a challenge, especially with the proliferation of courses in recent years. In the UK, Skillset operates an accreditation system, established in conjunction with the industry, that highlights the best courses for games art and programming. Out of the 144 games courses offered across the UK, Skillset only accredits 10.

"There are too many old media studies courses with the word media crossed out and games inserted," says Ian Livingstone, co-author of a 2011 report which set out how to transform the UK into the leading hub for visual effects and video-games talent. "They were teaching kids the relevance of *Grand Theft Auto* in society but not giving them the skills necessary to get into the industry."

There are a few shining examples. Bournemouth University's National Centre for Computer Animation, although not Skillset-accredited, is a global leader in its field, feeding many graduates into the games sector. In Scotland, Dundee's Abertay University specialises in games production, both in programming and in art and animation, and is hailed as a centre of excellence. It boasts a strong connection with industry, an excellent track record of graduates working in the sector and runs initiatives such as Dare To Be Digital, which promotes and funds young games teams to come together for a nationwide competition. "It's important to let young people know this is a viable career," says Livingstone.

The games industry offers varied career options, from small teams making mobile-phone apps to the huge teams required to create the cinematic, graphics-intense games for consoles like Xbox 360 and PlayStation. Across that arc lies a huge difference in skills required. But even the cheerleaders acknowledge while institutions like Abertay are unsurpassed in technical education, the storytelling side is less pronounced. If a snobbishness still exists about games in »

dusty corners of the film industry, it is because many wonder whether compelling narratives and interactive environments can actually co-exist.

Recent titles indicate those lines can be blurred — Rockstar's crime-solving mystery *L.A. Noire* became the first video game to screen at the Tribeca Film Festival last year, and was nominated for nine awards at the GAME British Academy Video Games Awards. But games are still embryonic in terms of the depth of emotion that can be experienced compared to film, and that is where programmes like the one at the NFTS can help bridge the gap.

An initiative in Denmark is trying something similar. Gunnar Wille, head of animation and computer games at the National Film School of Denmark, has launched Eucroma (the European Cross Media Academy), a MEDIA-sponsored programme bringing together top students from European games and animation courses to produce a game.



'People in the games industry know films; people in the film industry don't necessarily know games'

Malte Behrmann,
European Games
Developer Federation

"We're doing it just like a film school," explains Wille. "The competencies are defined before the students come through the door."

Run with the support of five European partners (including Abertay and the Cologne Game Lab), Eucroma launched in January with 18 students. Wille aims for it to become part of the Danish film school curriculum in 2015.

"It's a strange situation," says Wille. "Games developers want their games to be cinematic but at the same time they don't want to learn how to tell stories because they believe they know the answer. And they don't. We have to develop a new way of storytelling."

Tell that to a games advocate, however, and you get a different response. "All these training initiatives that are talking about interactive storytelling? Send them all home," says Malte Behrmann, general secretary of the Helsinki-based trade body the European Games Developer Federation. "Of course you

need storytelling but people in the film industry sometimes feel the games industry is just an ancillary offshoot to them and that's absolutely not the case. People in the games industry know films; people in the film industry don't necessarily know games."

Many games studios, including Ubisoft, do recruit straight from film schools, particularly in the areas of sound design, animation and digital post-production. And the growing technological and creative convergence of video games with TV and film means a cutting-edge workforce is needed to keep pace with that rapid evolution.

"It's a question of what devices do we have around us to help us shape a story? As digital distribution gets better and cheaper, all of this stuff is going to start to connect together quite nicely," observes Ray Maguire, chair of the Bafta video games committee.

From film to experiential to online social networks, transmedia develop-

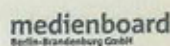


EFA Master Class 2012

The EFA Master Class 2012 **THE SOUND OF THE IMAGE** is dedicated to the topic of sound in feature films. While the impact of the musical score is widely acknowledged, the psychological effects of sound and noises are still partly unrecognised.

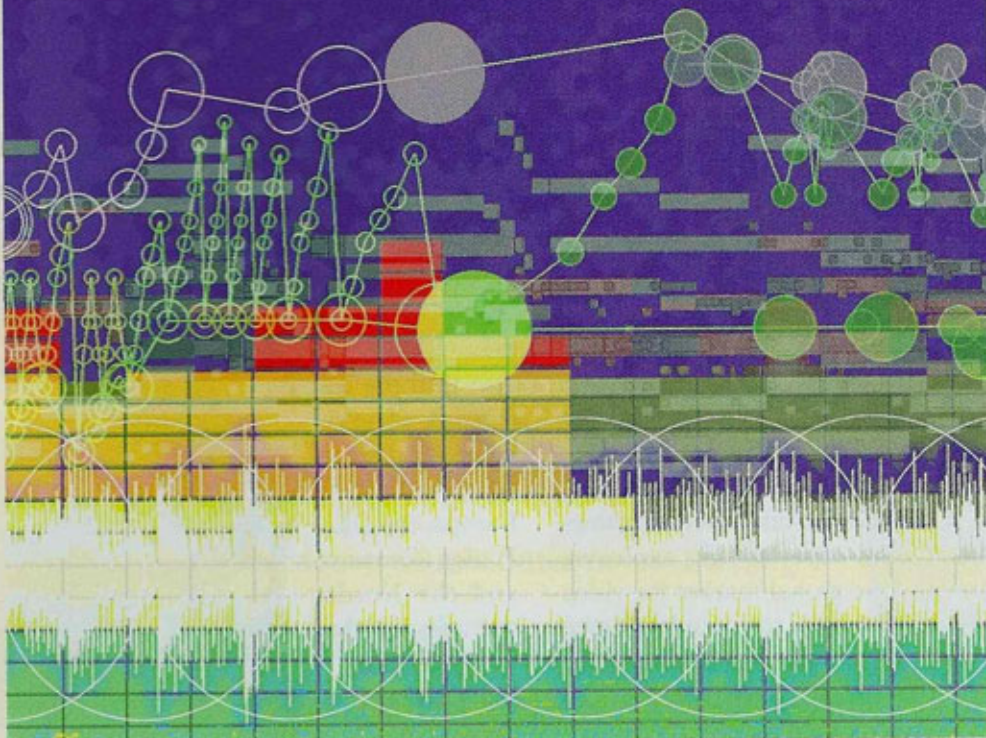
The multi-disciplinary workshop is addressed to European sound editors, sound re-recording mixers and sound designers, but also open to directors, composers and picture editors, who all have a crucial influence on the soundtrack of a film. Sound re-recording mixer Bruno Tarrière and sound editor Selim Azzazi will act as tutors for the workshop at the Film and Television University "Konrad Wolf" (HFF) in Potsdam.

More information and application form at www.europeanfilmacademy.org




THE SOUND OF THE IMAGE

for 18 creative European film professionals who work on sound
with **Bruno Tarrière and Selim Azzazi**
2 - 8 July 2012 Berlin and Potsdam (Germany)



ments are coming thick and fast, and educational institutions are responding. TransformatLab is a pioneering development lab drawing together graduate-level students from the University of Wales, Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Hungary and Gobelins L'Ecole de L'Image in France and offering a range of courses about how stories can travel across several platforms.

With the growing democratisation of content, creating sound thinkers as well as technical wizards will be of huge benefit to the games industry. Weinbren has lofty ambitions for his NFIS students to be at the forefront of the independent sector. "It's all about coming up with a world," he notes. "If you create a world you can fill it with characters and storylines, and you're looking at movies, TV series, graphic novels, web experiences, games. In games, that's what we do — we come up with worlds and our approach to experience creation can really inform the film-makers' approach." 

THE NEXT LEVEL

Selected providers of games courses across Europe

National Film & Television School (Beaconsfield, UK)

MA, Games Design & Development
Open Days: 19 April/19 July
☎ www.nfts.co.uk
✉ info@nfts.co.uk

Abertay University (Dundee, UK)

BA, Computer Arts; BSc, Computer Games Technology; MSc, Computer Games Technology; MProf, Games Development
☎ www.abertay.ac.uk
☎ +44 1382 308 600
✉ institute@abertay.ac.uk

De Montfort University

(Leicester, UK) BA, Game Art Design
☎ www.dmu.ac.uk/gameartdesign
☎ +44 116 257 7555
✉ adh@dmu.ac.uk

Sheffield Hallam University

(Sheffield, UK) BSc, Games Software Development; MComp, Games Software Development; MSc, Games Software Development
☎ www.shu.ac.uk
☎ +44 114 225 5555
✉ enquiries@shu.ac.uk

National Academy of Digital Interactive Entertainment,

the National Film School of Denmark (Copenhagen, Denmark)
☎ www.dadiu.dk
☎ +45 32 68 65 19
✉ dadiu@dadiu.dk

Gobelins, L'Ecole de L'Image

(Paris, France) MS, Interactive Digital Experiences
☎ www.gobelins.fr
☎ +33 1 40 79 92 79

ENJMIN (Angouleme, France)

MA, Games & Interactive Digital Media
☎ www.enjmin.fr
☎ +33 5 45 38 65 68
✉ contact@enjmin.fr

Creajeux (Nimes, France)

☎ www.creajeux.fr
☎ +33 4 66 35 56 20
✉ creajeux@creajeux.fr

Cologne Game Lab (part of

Cologne University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany) MA, Game Development & Research
☎ www.colognegamelab.de
☎ +49 221 8275 3095
✉ info@colognegamelab.de

SOURCES 2

STIMULATING OUTSTANDING RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE EUROPEAN SCREENWRITING

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Professional development and training: Three-month process coached by experienced advisers!

European screenwriters and teams of writers, producers or directors developing a feature film project or a creative documentary are kindly invited to benefit from a seven-day session, followed by a second session after a supervised three-month re-writing period.

Application date: 1st July 2012
Workshop in Bucharest/Romania, November 2012, with the support of Control N Cultural Association. Requested: Feature film projects and creative documentaries

PROJECTS & PROCESS

TRAINING MENTORS FOR EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS

Advanced training programme for professionals working in the field of (creative) documentary filmmaking!

European filmmakers, editors, tutors, developers, commissioning editors, producers are invited to share the SOURCES 2 methods with experienced SOURCES 2 advisers and international colleagues in a three-day session, rounded off after a three-month coaching period.

Application date: 1st June 2012
Workshop in Oulu/Finland, 26th – 30th September 2012, with the support of POEM – The Northern Film and Media Foundation, the Finnish Film Foundation and AVEK.

SOURCES 2 • Köthener Straße 44
D-10963 Berlin • tel +49.30.88 60 211
info@sources2.de • www.sources2.de



The Finnish Film Foundation

