Game Studies 1, Fall Semester 2016

Section 1: Tuesdays. 6:20pm – 9:00pm

Section 2: Wednesdays, 6:20pm – 9:00pm

September 6 – December 16; 2 MetroTech Center, Room 825

Syllabus developed by: Jesper Juul, Charles Pratt, Clara Fernandez-Vara, and Simon Ferrari

Instructor

Simon Ferrari, chungking.espresso@gmail.com

Adjunct Cubicle, MAGNET Center

Office hours: By appointment only.

Course Summary

An introduction to critical and analytical approaches to the subject of games. Though the history of videogames spans roughly fifty years, and although humans have played for millennia, games have only recently emerged as a field of popular study. This class introduces students to the theory of play, and it answers questions such as: How are games structured? What types of experiences do games give? Who plays games, when, and why?

The course will enable students to:

1) Understand and discuss games from a theoretical perspective.

2) Assess and discuss game concepts and the use of games in various contexts.

3) Overview the history of play theory and game studies.

4) Apply new theories and evaluate them critically.

Course Topics

The main topics of the course are as follows:

1) game genres and game history

2) games as a medium; games vs. videogames

3) theories about players and player psychology

4) game reviewing, analysis, and criticism

5) games and storytelling

6) politics, ethics, and ideology of games

7) games development as art, craft, and industry

Required Texts

Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (1998).

Sutton-Smith, Brian. *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press (2001).

All other readings will be available online. Most games will be available online.

Prerequisites

The course approaches games from several theoretical and critical perspectives; however, no special theoretical background or prior training is needed to take the course. To have had practical experience with games is a distinct advantage.

Also, an interest in theoretical and analytical issues will help. You are expected to actively participate in the lectures, which are dialogic in form, with ample room for discussion.

Class structure

One student will present a game from the weekly selection, analyzing it via the theories covered in the course so far. Then the class proceeds through a lecture on the day's readings and connected concerns, pausing for discussion wherever the class has questions or insights to share. Sometimes there will be break-out groups for daily workshops.

Students should bring a notebook to take notes. Although laptops will be used in class for certain activities, there will be certain sections that will require electronics to be off.

Each session also has a series of games to play. Demonstrating that one has played the games for the day will help raise the participation grade.

Grading and assignments

Grading: Letter

ACTIVITIES	PERCENTAGES
Participation and in-class preparedness	15%
Class presentation	15%
First essay	20%
Second essay	20%
Final essay	30%

Late Assignments

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due dates (unless otherwise specified by the instructor). You will lose half of a grade point a minute after this submission deadline has passed, then another half grade point for each subsequent day that an assignment is late. If you are not prepared to give your presentation on your assigned date, you will receive a zero (unless excused by the instructor).

Assignment Descriptions

Attendance/participation

Attending and arriving on time to all class sessions is required and expected. This includes all labs, recitations, and critiques. If you will be missing a class due to illness, or unavoidable personal circumstances, you must notify your professor in advance via email for the absence to be excused.

Unexcused absences and being late to class will lower your final grade. Three unexcused absences lower your final grade by a letter. Each subsequent unexcused absence will lower another letter grade. Two tardies will count as one unexcused absence. Arriving more than 15 minutes late to class will also count as an unexcused absence

The teacher reserves the right to implement daily pop quizzes on the assigned readings, which will then affect your attendance/participation grade.

Presentation

Every week, there are games presented as suggested playing. Each student will choose one of the suggested games during the semester, play it in depth, read up on it and give a presentation on the game, explaining how the game relates to the contents of that particular session. Each presentation should last 15 minutes and utilize slides.

First essay (October 3rd): What's in a game?

Based on the definitions of game discussed in class, find an activity that is a borderline case or is not usually discussed as game, such as the stock exchange, karaoke, flirting, or trolling. Explore what aspects of it can be identified as playful or game-like, and which ones are not game-like. Does the activity use playfulness in order to convey a set of values or ideology? How does the game encode / abstract those values? ***You may not use block quotes for a paper of this length.***

Length: 1200-1400 words.

Second essay (October 24th): Game analysis

Identify something you want to examine about one game and connect it to theories discussed in previous class sessions. Examples could be how the game teaches the player how to play, how it structures actions narratively or dramatically, or how its graphical/audio theme reinforces its rules. ***You may not use block quotes for a paper of this length.***

Length: 1400-1600 words.

Final essay (December 21st): Breaking new ground

You should choose a question about games that you think has not been answered or explored. How would you explain it? Instead of examining this aspect in relation to "games in general," focus on one or two key examples. Remember to relate to the readings we have gone through in this course. ***You may NOT use block quotes for this paper.***

Length: 2500-3000 words.

Course Plan

Introduction: What does it mean to study games? (Session 1: Sept 6 – Session 2: Sept 7)

No readings, but introduction to the study of games and overview of the course.

What is a game? What is a videogame? (Session 1: Sept 13 – Session 2: Sept 14)

Caillois, Roger. "The Classification of Games" in *The Game Design Reader*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006. <http://nideffer.net/classes/270-08/week_01_intro/Caillois.pdf>.

Suits, Bernard. "What Is a Game*?" Philosophy of Science* 34, no. 2 (June 1967): 148–156.

Waern, Annika. "Framing Games." DiGRA Nordic: Proceedings of 2012 International DiGRA Nordic Conference. N.p., 2012. <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/framing-games/>

Recommended games:

Ed Key and David Kanaga. *Proteus*. 2013.

Play theory and anthropology (Session 1: Sept 20 – Session 2: Sept 21)

Chapter 1 from Huizinga, Johan. 1949. *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge. <http://art.yale.edu/file_columns/0000/1474/homo_ludens_johan_huizinga_routledge_1949_.pdf>.

Chapters 1, 3, 11 from Sutton-Smith, Brian. 2001. *The Ambiguity of Play*. 1st ed. Harvard University Press.

Recommended games:

Namco Bandai. *Katamari Damacy*. 2004.

Historical perspectives (Session 1: Sept 27 – Session 2: Sept 28)

Graetz, J.M. "The origin of Spacewar." Creative Computing (1981). <http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/creative/SpacewarOrigin.html>.

Juul, Jesper. "Swap adjacent gems to make sets of three: A history of matching tile games." Artifact (2007). <http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/swapadjacent/>.

Burke, Peter. "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe." From *Past & Present*, No. 146, February 1995, pp 136-150.

Recommended games:

PopCap Games. *Bejeweled 2 Deluxe*. (Windows/Mac), 2004.

Russell, Steve, Martin Graetz, and Wayne Witaenem. *Spacewar!* (1962).

First Essay Due: October 3rd

Theories of fun I: Stories (Session 1: Oct 4 – Session 2: Oct 5)

Murray, Janet. Chapter 2 from *Hamlet on the Holodeck.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1997.

Jenkins, Henry. "Game design as narrative architecture." *First person: New media as story, performance, and game*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Pat Harrigan. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. 118-130. <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/lazzi-fair>.

Costikyan, Greg: Games, Storytelling and Breaking the String <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/storyish>

Recommended games:

Valve Corporation. *Left 4 Dead 2*. 2009.

Infocom. *Zork 1*. 1977.

Theories of fun II: Rules (Session 1: Oct 11 – Session 2: Oct 12)

Koster, Raph. Excerpt from *A Theory of Fun*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Paraglyph Press 2005. <http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20041203/koster_01.shtml>

Bjergstrom, Karl. "The Implicit Rules of Board Games." MindTrek 2010.

Hunicke, R., M. LeBlanc, and R. Zubek. "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research." *Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI* (2004). <http://www.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf>

Recommended games:

Play a boardgame that you've never played before. Be prepared to talk about it in class.

Games & Values (Session 1: Oct 18 – Session 2: Oct 19)

Chapter 1 from: Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007. <http://www.hfg-karlsruhe.de/~arafinski/gamestudies/txt/Bogost_PersuasiveGames.pdf>.

Flanagan, Mary, Helen Nissenbaum, Jonathan Belman, and Jim Diamond. "A Method For Discovering Values in Digital Games." *In Situated Play: Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Digital Games Research Association* (DiGRA). Tokyo, 2007. http://www.digra.org/dl/db/07311.46300.pdf.

Hocking, Clint. "Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock." In Davidson, Drew, ed. *Well Played 1.0: Video Game, Value and Meaning.* Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2009. <http://www.etc.cmu.edu/etcpress/content/bioshock-clint-hocking>**.**

Recommended games:

Pedercini, Paolo. *The McDonald's Game*. 2006. <http://www.mcvideogame.com/index-eng.html>.

Any version of *Animal Crossing* (Nintendo) or *The Sims* (EA/Maxis).

Expressive game criticism (Session 1: Oct 25 – Session 2: Oct 26)

Rogers, Tim. "Life, Nonwarp" on *Insert Credit*, 19 June 2002. <https://web.archive.org/web/20101124200218/http://insertcredit.com/features/lifenonwarp/index.html>.

Bois, Jon. "The Machine is Bleeding to Death (Breaking Madden)." *SBNation*, 29 January 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/2014/1/30/5351052/breaking-madden-super-bowl-broncos-seahawks>.

Alexander, Leigh. "Gaming Made Me: Colossal Cave Adventure" on *Rock Paper Shotgun*, 4 June 2011. <http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2011/06/04/colossal-cave-review/>.

Bissell, Tom. "Video games: the addiction" on *The Guardian*, 21 March 2010. <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2010/mar/21/tom-bissell-video-game-cocaine-addiction>.

Recommended games:

Replay some of your favorite videogame, or a game from childhood, and prepare to discuss it.

Performance (Session 1: Nov 1 – Session 2: Nov 2)

Fernandez Vara, Clara. 2009. "Play's the Thing: A Framework to Study Videogames as Performance." In Brunel University, West London.<http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/plays-the-thing-a-framework-to-study-videogames-as-performance/>

Boal, Augusto (1979): Theatre of the Oppressed. In Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort. (2003) The New Media Reader. The MIT Press.

Frasca, Gonzalo (2004) Videogames of the Oppressed. <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/Boalian>

Recommended games:

Anthropy, Anna. Mighty Jill Off, 2008. <http://mightyjilloff.dessgeega.com/>

Anthropy, Anna. Dys4ia, 2012. <http://auntiepixelante.com/?p=1515>

Player types (Session 1: Nov 8 – Session 2: Nov 9)

Bartle, Richard (1996): "HEARTS, CLUBS, DIAMONDS, SPADES: PLAYERS WHO SUIT MUDS." <http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm>.

Sunden, Jenn. "Play as Transgression: An Ethnographic Approach to Queer Game Culture." Breaking New Ground, Brunei University, 2009, <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/09287.40551.pdf>.

Jakobsson, Mikael. "The Achievement Machine: Understanding Xbox 360 Achievements in Gaming Practices." *Game Studies* 11(1), <http://gamestudies.org/1101/articles/jakobsson>.

Recommended games:

From Software. *Dark Souls*. 2009. (Any of the *Dark Souls* games will do.)

Play communities (Session 1: Nov 15 – Session 2: Nov 16)

Jakobsson, Mikael. "Playing with the Rules: Social and Cultural Aspects of Game Rules in a Console Game Club." *Situated Play: Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)*. Ed. Baba Akira. Tokyo, 2007. 386-392. 22 Jan 2008 <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/07311.01363.pdf>.

Consalvo, Mia. "There Is No Magic Circle." *Games and Culture 4(4)*, 2009, 408-417.

Taylor, T. L. "Pushing the borders: Player participation and game culture." *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*. Ed. Joe Karaganis. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007. <http://tltaylor.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Taylor-PushingTheBorders.pdf>.

Recommended games:

Sora. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*. Nintendo 2008. (Wii)

==*****THANKSGIVING RECESS*** (No sessions on Nov 22 or Nov 23)**==

Games and gender (Session 1: Nov 29 – Session 2: Nov 30)

Henry Jenkins: "COMPLETE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT": VIDEO GAMES AS GENDERED PLAY SPACES" <http://nideffer.net/classes/270-08/week_07_gender_economy/HenryJenkinsFreedomofMovementGenderedPlaySpace.pdf>.

Fron, Janine, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce. 2007. "The Hegemony of Play." http://www.digra.org/dl/db/07312.31224.pdf.

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games. New Media and Society, 11 (5), 815-834.

Recommended games:

Kopas, Merritt. *Lim*, 2012. <http://www.people.vcu.edu/~rpatton/currentlab/lim/>

Porpentine. *Howling Dogs*. 2012. <http://aliendovecote.com/uploads/twine/howling%20dogs.html#2m>.

Games and art (Session 1: Dec 6 – Session 2: Dec 7)

Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld" in *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 (19), 1964, 571-584. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/danto-artworld.pdf>.

Hocking, Clint. "On Authorship in Games." Click Nothing 10 Aug 2007. <http://clicknothing.typepad.com/click_nothing/2007/08/on-authorship-i.html>.

Jenkins, Henry. "Games, the New Lively Art". In Raessens, Joost, & Jeffrey Goldstein (eds.): *Handbook of Computer Game Studies.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2005. <http://web.mit.edu/21fms/People/henry3/GamesNewLively.html>.

Recommended games:

Jason Rohrer: *Passage*. 2007. <http://hcsoftware.sourceforge.net/passage/>

Humble, Rod. *The Marriage*. 2007. <http://www.rodvik.com/rodgames/marriage.html>

Games and sport (Session 1: Dec 13 – Session 2: Dec 14)

Dunning, Eric. "The dynamics of modern sport." From *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Elias and Dunning); Blackwell Publishing, 1986.

Hickey, Dave. "The Heresy of Zone Defense." 1995.

Taylor, T.L and Emma Witkowski. "This Is How We Play It." *Proceedings of Foundations of Digital Games 2010*, <http://tltaylor.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/TaylorWitkowski-ThisIsHowWePlayIt.pdf>.

Recommended games:

Valve: *DOTA2*. 2013. <http://blog.dota2.com/>

Final Essay Due: December 21