

## EAS 489H1S

### Japanese Videogames: Media, History, Utopia

Instructor: Alexandre Paquet

Class Time: Monday 11:00 – 13:00 / Location: WW 119

Office Hours: By appointment

Email: alexandre.paquet@mail.utoronto.ca

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This course is meant to offer the opportunity to deeply engage with Japanese videogames while considering important problems that go beyond the particular content and are fundamental to East Asian Studies, Media Studies and Humanities as a whole. The course focuses on the interplay between intermedial entanglements, Japanese history, and the problem of utopia. This course aims to fundamentally challenge conventional understanding of contemporary structures of power and explore radical alternatives through the study of Japanese videogames.

As this is a fourth-year course, the intent is to provide a productive space for discussion on assigned readings (which will range from theoretical pieces to case studies) and popular culture material in the form of videogames. As one of the goals of this course is also to prepare students for graduate school, there will be an emphasis on in-depth analysis videogames which means both at-home and in-class reading, watching and playing. The focus is to be on this material directly in order to emphasize its specific potential, while also complimenting it with a few curated more theoretical texts on utopia, space and time, postcolonialism, queer theory, posthumanism among others. Because of the multi-media context of the course, the course also includes consideration for media studies and some of its foundational concepts such as ludonarratology, media convergence, and intermediality.

The course is organized around a week-based structure, each week focusing on a specific theme and including viewing and playing as necessary. A large portion of the class is dedicated to in-class discussion, meaning that students must come to class prepared with an established understanding of the assigned readings and recommended videogames to actively participate in discussions. Aside from in-class discussion, weekly discussion boards on Quercus will provide an additional opportunity for students to participate and engage with one another. Students are not required to play all the videogames on the syllabus but are expected to play some of these games (some of which will be available through media commons) and familiarize themselves with all games on a basic level on their own time (reading wikis, watching walkthroughs and other videos). It is encouraged, but not required that students spend some time playing these games. All mandatory readings (books and articles) will be available on Quercus. Additionally, students will be required to play one videogame of their choosing throughout the semester, report on their progress and write a final paper on said videogame. Students are expected to engage with one another by responding to these progress reports and provide thoughts, feedback, advice and stimulate discussion.

### **Marking Scheme**

#### **(1) Participation: 20%**

Each class is organized around the discussion of the weekly assigned material. Your active participation in class is indispensable. Students are expected to come to class prepared and make a clear effort to participate in discussion. As part of this participation, student will need to sign up to do a short introduction for one of the readings or videogames to the class one time in the semester. Students will also have the opportunity to expand discussions beyond the classroom by engaging on

weekly discussion boards on Quercus as well as responding to other students' progress reports.

**(2) Weekly Reading Responses: 10%**

This class requires in-depth engagement with all material. Students are required to submit a 1-2 pages commentary on the week's readings and videogame to be submitted on Quercus before the lecture. This commentary should take the form of a reflection and make connections between two or more readings (for Week 2 and 3), and between a reading and a videogame on the syllabus (for Week 4 to 12). Students need to write and submit ten (10) responses throughout the semester.

**(3) Progress Report 1: 15%**

Throughout the semester, students will be required to play one videogame of their choosing and report on their progress. This progress report is meant to be an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas about the videogame they are playing, whether it is in terms of their progress in playing the game itself, or how particular elements of the gameplay, narrative or other aspects are surfacing as particularly interesting and might start providing directions for the final paper. Submissions will be made to the whole class so as to provide the opportunity to give and receive feedback and helpful advice from classmates. This report will take the form of a video in which the students should share clips and/or walkthroughs of the videogame they have chosen with audio commentary – scripted and edited videos or more freestyle discussions are equally acceptable. Students will upload their report video on MyMedia and share the link on Quercus in the Progress Report Discussion Board. The deadline for the first Progress Report is January 30<sup>th</sup>.

**(4) Progress Report 2: 15%**

Same as Progress Report 1. The deadline for the second Progress Report is February 27<sup>th</sup>.

**(5) Final Paper Proposals: 10%**

Students are required to submit a proposal for their term paper on March 20<sup>th</sup>. This proposal should explain the general topic of the essay as well as the methodology and the sources (primary and secondary) used and include a bibliography. Students should describe in as much details as possible their topic and suggested thesis statement. In addressing their methodology, students should explain the overall structure of their essay and the choice of both primary and secondary sources by commenting on their particular relevance to the research project. The proposal should be between 3-5 pages in length, excluding the bibliography (Times New Roman 12pt double-space).

**(6) Final Paper: 30%**

The term paper is due by April 17<sup>th</sup> and should engage with one or more themes covered in class in relation to Japanese videogames. The term paper should be between 12-15 pages in length, excluding the bibliography (Times New Roman 12pt double-space). The paper should be centered on the in-depth analysis of one videogame the students has played throughout the semester as the primary source and making use of secondary sources to supplement the analysis and provide context and framework. The bulk of your paper should be dedicated to the primary source analysis. You will select one videogame of your own choosing, which can but does not have to be a videogame covered in class.

**Late papers** — unless you have a medical or other valid (and validated) excuse—will lose 5% a day for each day they are late.

## **Academic Integrity**

**Never submit anything written by someone else, copied from the Internet, copied from a book, or any other source without proper citation.** All instances of plagiarism, no matter how minor, will be reported to the Office of Student Academic Integrity (OSAI). You can find resources defining plagiarism and tips on how to avoid it at [www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources).

When you submit your assignments on Quercus, it will be automatically checked by Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. Your writing will be included among source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where it will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the [Turnitin.com](http://Turnitin.com) website.

The only acceptable reason for not receiving a penalty for a missed due date is a medical emergency. You must submit all medical notes to your college registrar for verification, with a request to send a notice to me via email. Accessibility Services is at [www.accessibility.utoronto.ca](http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca), and many forms of counseling are available to students at [www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc/feeling](http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc/feeling).

## **Course Schedule & Reading Assignments**

### **Week 1 – Introduction to Japanese Videogames: Media, History, Utopia**

*No readings assigned.*

### **Week 2 – Ludonarratology and Intermediality**

Juul, Jesper. *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005, pp. 1-22.

Fuchs, Michael and Thoss, Jeff, ed. *Intermedia Games--Games Inter Media: Video Games and Intermediality*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2019, pp. 1-12.

Bolter, Jay David and Grusin, Richard. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, pp. 2-19.

Consalvo, Mia. "Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry." *Cinema Journal* 48.3 (Spring 2009): 135-141.

Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Ecology: a Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2018, pp. 311-344.

### **Week 3 – Japan, Videogames, History**

Yoda, Tomiko. "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan." *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Edited by Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian. Durham:

Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 16-53.

Consalvo, Mia. *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016, pp. 1-17.

Picard, Martin. "The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese video games." *Game Studies* 13.2 (2013). <http://gamestudies.org/1302>

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Smith, Jonas Heide and Tosca, Susana Pajares. *Understanding Video Games: the Essential Introduction*. New York; London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 61-119.

### >>>>>Progress Report 1 Due: January 30<<<<<

#### **Week 4 – The Utopian Workshop**

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005, pp. xi-xvi and 1-21.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia*. Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 1-10, 97-122.

Karatani, Kojin. *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*. Translated by Michael K. Bourdaghs. Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 1-28, 265-307.

Navarrete-Cardero, Luis and Vargas-Iglesias, Juan J. "Can We Programme Utopia? The Influence of the Digital Ne-liberal Discourse on Utopian Videogames," in *tripleC* 16.2 (2018): 782-804.

Videogame: Katsura Hashino, dir. *Persona 5*. P-Studio, 2016.

#### **Week 5 – The Challenge of Linear Time**

Karatani, Kojin, *History and Repetition*. Translated by Seiji M. Lippit. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 1-28.

Hanson, Christopher. *Game Time: Understanding Temporality in Video Games*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 1-17.

Roth, Martin. *Thought-Provoking Play: Political Philosophies in Science Fictional Videogame Spaces from Japan* (Pittsburgh, PA; Carnegie Mellon University ETC Press, 2017), pp. 97-124.

Zagal, José P. and Mateas, Michael. "Time in Video Games: A Survey and Analysis," in *Simulation & Gaming* 41.6 (2010): 844-868.

Videogame: Tokita, Takashi, Yoshinori Kitase and Akihiko Matsui, dir. *Chrono Trigger*. Square, 1995.

## **Week 6 – Space beyond the Nation-State**

Jameson, Fredric. "An American Utopia." *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Edited by Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2016, pp. 8-56.

Harvey, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. 182-196.

Wolf, Mark J. P. "Inventing Space: Toward a Taxonomy of On- and Off-Screen Space in Video Games," in *Film Quarterly* 51.1 (1997): 11-23.

Paquet, Alexandre. "Delivering Packages in Apocalyptic Times: Utopia and Collectives in *Death Stranding*," in *Replaying Japan* 3 (2021): 77-86.

Videogame: Hideo Kojima, dir. *Death Stranding*. Kojima Productions, 2019.

**>>>>>Reading Week – No Lecture<<<<<**

**>>>>>Progress Report 2 Due: February 27<<<<<**

## **Week 7 – Games of Empire**

Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. xi-xvii.

Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004, pp. xi-xviii.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick, and Graig de Peuter. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. xi-xxxv, 185-230.

Hutchinson, Rachael. *Japanese Culture through Videogames*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 129-152.

Videogame: Yoshinori Kitase, dir. *Final Fantasy VII*. Squaresoft, 1997.

## **Week 8 – Postcolonial Struggle**

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003 (1978), pp. 1-30.

Sakai, Naoki. "'You Asians': On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary." *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Edited by Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 167-194.

Mukherjee, Souvik. *Videogames and Postcolonialism Empire Plays Back*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 1-28.

She, Yasheng. "Melancholic Vortex and Postwar Pacifism in *NieR: Automata*," in *Replaying Japan 2* (2020): 147-155.

Videogame: Hirokazu Kagawa, dir. *Tales of Arise*. Bandai Namco Studios, 2021.

### **Week 9 – Queering Gaming**

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 1-46.

Chang, Edmond Y. "Queergaming." *Queer Game Studies*, Edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 15-24.

Phillips, Amanda. "Welcome to My Fantasy Zone: *Bayonetta* and Queer Femme Disturbance." *Queer Game Studies*, Edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 109-123.

Videogame: Suehiro Hidetaka (SWERY/Swery65), dir. *The Missing: J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories*. White Owls Inc., 2018.

**>>>>Final Paper Proposal Due: March 20<<<<<**

### **Week 10 – Human-Nonhuman Entanglements**

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 1-8, 30-57, 99-103.

Mancuso, Stefano and Alessandra Viola. *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence*. Translated by Joan Benham. Washington: Island Press, 2015, pp. 9-12, 92-113.

Hemann, Kathryn. "The Cute Shall Inherit the Earth: Post-Apocalypse Posthumanity in *Tokyo Jungle*," in *Introducing Japanese popular culture*. Edited by Alisa Freedman and Toby Slade. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, pp. 81-90.

Videogame: Kojima, Koh and Genki Yokota, dir. *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*. Monolith Soft, 2017.

### **Week 11 – Beyond Space and Time**

Yar, Majid. "Virtual Utopias and Dystopias – The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet," in *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future*. Edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Keith Tester. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 179-195.

Franco "Bifo" Berardi. *After the Future*. Translated by Arianna Bove et al. Edited by Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011, pp. 17-28, 53-68.

Roth, Martin. *Thought-Provoking Play: Political Philosophies in Science Fictional Videogame Spaces*

*from Japan* (Pittsburgh, PA; Carnegie Mellon University ETC Press, 2017), pp. 35-68.

Videogame: Kamitani, George, dir. *13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim*. Vanillaware, 2019.

### **Week 12 – Collectives and their Endings**

Cazdyn, Eric. *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 1-11, 13-18, 99-104, 159-204.

Kojin Karatani. *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 11-34.

Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 1-9.

Paquet, Alexandre. "The Automata Collective: Negation of Endings and Collective Formation in *Nier: Automata*," in *Mechademia* 14.1 (2021): 113-130.

Ruffino, Paolo. "The End of Capitalism: Disengaging from the Economic Imaginary of Incremental Games," in *Games and Culture* 16.2 (2021): 208-227.

Videogame: Taro, Yoko, dir. *Nier: Automata*. Platinum Games, 2017.

**>>>>Final Paper Due: April 17<<<<<**