Games and Germany: History, Culture, Thought

Course Description: From the 19th century Prussian *Kriegsspiel* (wargame), to the proliferation of the "Eurogame" boardgame genre, to digital management and simulation games in the 21st century, games and playful media have played important roles in German culture and history for centuries. They have often served multiple, overlapping purposes as aesthetic objects, methods of training and thinking, entertainment products, and objects for negotiating ideas of culture and nationality. Over the years, Germany has developed a unique culture of games and play shaped by domestic and international game industries, making the culture of games an important site of transnational economic and cultural exchange. Additionally, German culture, history, and thought often appear in games produced globally, making games an important medium for remembering, negotiating, and reinterpreting Germany's identity in the past and present.

This course will introduce learners to the history and culture of games in Germany. Participants will learn how to analyze games as aesthetic and cultural objects using multiple interpretive and theoretical frames which consider how the form, rules, and subject matter of games intersect with questions of politics, identity, and culture. We will also explore how games can be brought into conversation with other media about German history and thought. Participants will have the opportunity to develop critical and creative literacies in textual, audio, visual, and playful forms, and will demonstrate their learning through blog posts, in-class discussions, essays, and a final, group-authored, multi-media project.

Course Objectives: After completing this course, learners will be able to:

Objective 1: Describe and explain important parts of the **history** and **culture** of games **in Germany.**

Objective 2: **Analyze, interpret, and critique** games using multiple interpretive and theoretical frames

Objective 3: Describe and discuss **connections** between important concepts in German **culture, history, and thought** and **games**.

Objective 4: Demonstrate and present their learning using multiple forms of **media** (text, audio, image, moving image, game, and more)

Course Assignments: Students will work towards course objectives by 1) reading, viewing, playing, and taking notes on all assigned material and 2) completing a variety of assignments, as shown below:

Weekly blog posts: At the beginning of each week, learners will be responsible for posting a 200 – 400-word blog post related to the week's topics/themes/goals. You can use these posts to pose a question (for yourself and/or to the rest of the class), reflect on a reading, work through a complex concept, draw our attention to a contemporary event/object about games and Germany and explain how it is relevant to our course, or give your personal response to a game that we have played. Responses are due three hours before the first meeting of the week.

Participation (In-class and online): Learners will engage with the course materials individually, in partners, in small groups, and as a class as a whole both in class and online. Good participation looks like active engagement with peers in-class activities, clear evidence of having read/played/watched the material assigned for class, rigorous and scholarly discussion in-class and online by posing questions, listening actively, and taking other learners' perspectives seriously. Recaps of and reactions to in-class discussions in blog posts, or good conversations back-and-forth online are great places to get ideas for projects and to fulfill class objectives!

Mid-term Essay: In week 7, Learners will submit an essay which responds to the themes/readings/discussions in the first half of the course. This essay should **argue a thesis**, and support this thesis with evidence and examples from materials we have covered in the course. You may also support your thesis with scholarly secondary literature that we have not covered in class. During Week 3, you will submit an abstract for this essay and discuss it with the instructor. You should aim for a final draft of ~2000 words.

Group final project: In groups of two or three, learners will submit a creative project which responds to the themes and questions that we have discussed in this course. The project should engage deeply with how games in Germany (and German games) relate to broader cultural, political, social, and transnational contexts and questions, take advantage of the chosen medium's rhetorical and aesthetic qualities, and demonstrate engagement with scholarship on games. References and secondary sources will often strengthen your project, and are necessary when the project seeks to make an argument or be persuasive. Learners are encouraged to experiment with new media forms or use critical/creative skills they already possess, and to make connections with work they are doing in other classes or with other interests/hobbies. Possible project ideas include (but are not limited to): a **written, collaborative essay**, a **manifesto**, a **website**, a **podcast**, a **video essay**, a **syllabus**, or an **analogue** or **digital game**. Groups will meet with the instructor twice before submitting their project: once to discuss a project proposal, and again to discuss a draft of their project and receive feedback.

Media Workshops: in order to develop creative and critical skills needed for mid-term and final projects, we will have three workshops through the semester. All workshops will use free and/or open-source programs, and all required equipment will be provided for all participants. The following workshops will be offered throughout the semester: **Game Design, Audio recording and editing,** and **Video Recording and Editing.**

Final Portfolio: instead of a final exam, students will assemble a portfolio of work that they have completed in this course. Learners must submit a portfolio which contains selected assignments which correspond to our four course objectives, and must submit an accompanying text which argues that the evidence presented in the portfolio demonstrates that the learner has accomplished all four objectives of the course. This explanatory document should be 2 – 3 pages max. Students must submit **at least three** substantial pieces of evidence for each course objective, and no blog may be used more than once. However, in the case of mid-term and final projects, you can make the case that different points you make or things you do *in* that project satisfy multiple objectives. We will discuss the structure of the portfolio in detail, in class.

Assessment: This course adopts a primarily "formative" method of assessment. This means that the activities you complete in this course are intended to help you make progress towards achieving the course objectives, not to evaluate your performance against a standard or benchmark. You will receive feedback from the instructor and peers throughout the course to help you make progress. It is important to "keep up" with your assignments and turn them in on-time, so that you can make regular progress. Your final grade will be based on the following weighted schema:

- **Blogs: 15%**
- **Participation (in-class and online): 20%**
- **Individual mid-term essay: 15%**
- **Group final project: 20%**
- **Portfolio: 30%**

Rubrics for how these assignments are evaluated will be provided in-class and online, so that all learners have a clear sense of what excellence in each kind of assignment looks like.

Required Course Materials:

- All readings will be made available online as PDFs
- While I can make some games available to you to play for free, you will need to purchase some games. Most are available through online platforms (iTunes Store, Google Play, itch.io, or Steam). I will let you know in advance which games you will need to purchase – in many instances, we may have a group playthrough, or you may play a game with a partner or a small group, which will cut down on the number of games you need to buy.

Course Schedule

Unit	Week and Topic	Prep for Class
Unit 1: Approaches to Game Studies	Week 1 – Games as Procedures	Read: selections of "Persuasive Games" (Bogost) Read: "Against Procedurality (Sicart) – online Submit: proficiencies and literacies self-assessment Play: Universal Paperclips
	Week 2 – Games and Literature	Read: Chap. 7 – "Narrative" from "Understanding Video Games (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca) Read: "Doors and Perception: Fiction vs. Simulation in Games" (Aarseth) Workshop: Audio recording and editing Play: 80 Days

	Week 3 – Games, Gender, and Race	Read: "Gaming's Cruel Optimism" (Nakamura) Read: "Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis" (Kennedy) Read: selections of "Ready Player Two: Women Gamers and Designed Identity" (Chess) Read: "Not a Hater, Just Keepin' It Real: The Importance of Race- and Gender-Based Game Studies" (Leonard) Submit: Mid-Term Essay Abstract
	Week 4 – In, On, Around, and Through, or, What's a Game Anyway?	Read: "Introduction" in "Metagaming" (Boluk and LeMieux) Read: "What Should We Do With Our Games?: A Metagaming Manifesto" (Boluk and LeMieux) Read: "The Assemblage of Play" (Taylor) Read: "A Theory of Nonexistent Video Games" (Ruffino)
Unit 2: Games in Germany	Week 5 - *Kriegsspiele* in the 19th century	Read: "A Game Out of All Proportions: How a Hobby miniaturized War" (Peterson) Read: selections from Baring's 1871 English translation of Tschischwitz's *Anleitung zum Kriegsspiel* Workshop: Video Recording and Editing
	Week 6 - Eurogames	Read: Chps. 3+4 in "Eurogames: The Design, Culture, and Play of Modern European Board Games" (Woods) Read: "The Eurogame as Heterotopia" (Wilson) Read: "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames" (Robinson) Play: Group-assigned Eurogame Workshop: Game Design
	Week 7 – German Management Sims	Read: selections of "Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back" (Mukherjee) Read: "Allegories of Control" in "Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture" (Galloway) Play: *The Settlers Online* Submit: Mid-Term Essay
	Week 8 – Critiquing the First-Person-Shooter: *Spec Ops: The Line*	Watch: *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola) Read: selections from "Killing is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line" (Keogh) Play: *Spec Ops: The Line*
Unit 3: German Culture, History, and Thought with Games	Week 9 – Marx through Games, Games through Marx	Read: "The Communist Manifesto – Preamble and Chapter 1" (Marx) Read: "The Semiotics of Sim City" (Friedman) Play: *Anno 2205* Submit: Group Final Project Proposal
	Week 10 – Technology and Nature with Horkheimer and Heidegger	Read: "The Revolt of Nature" in "The Eclipse of Reason" (Horkheimer) Read: selections of "The Question Concerning Technology" (Heidegger)

		Play: Minecraft
	Week 11 - Nazi-Era Germany in Games (pt. 1)	Read: "Exploring the Limits of Play: A Case Study of Representations of Nazism in Games" (Chapman and Linderoth) Read: Just Less Than Total War: Simulating World War II as Ludic Nostalgia Play: *Call of Duty 2*
	Week 12 – Nazi-Era Germany in Games (pt. 2)	Watch: Hangmen Also Die! (Lang, Brecht, Eisler) Play: Attentat 1942 (Charles University/Vit Sisler, et. All) Meeting: Feedback on draft of group final project
	Week 13 – German Fairy Tales in Games	Read: "Little Red Cap," "Bluebeard," "Snow White" (Grimms) Play: *The Wolf Among Us*
Final Projects and Portfolio	Week 14 – Final Project Presentations	Submit: Group Final Projects Presentation and discussion of selected final projects
	Week 15 – Submitting Final Portfolio	Submit: Final Portfolio