

# Thinking About Games Syllabus

OART-UT 1606 / OART-GT 2606 / NCRD-UT 1606

## ***Instructor***

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## ***Introduction***

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.

## ***Contents***

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**

A student will present a game and analyze it using 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.

## **Grading and assignments**

Grading: Letter

ACTIVITIES	PERCENTAGES
Participation and in-class preparedness	15%
Class presentation	15%
Daily blogposts	40%
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**

You will be graded on your attendance and your contribution to class discussions and in-class exercises. Please arrive on time. Repeated lateness and unexcused absences will count against your attendance/participation grade. Not completing the assigned readings will count against your attendance/participation grade in the form of daily pop quizzes on those readings.

### **Presentation**

You will be assigned one game to present to class. You must analyze the game using the theories we have discussed in the course. Each presentation should last 15 minutes and utilize slides.

### **Daily Blogposts**

Identify something you want to examine about the day's recommended game and connect it to at least one of the day's readings. These posts should show that you read the piece and played the game, then thought deeply about connections or critiques. Some ways to show that you did this are to quote from throughout the piece, use new vocabulary that you learned while reading, and ask hard questions that the article doesn't raise itself. These must be published to a blog of your choice before class starts each day. 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 in these posts.\*\*\*

Length: 400 words; for graduate students: 500 words

### **Final essay: 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: 2000 words, for graduate students: 3000 words.

## **Course Plan**

### **Introduction: What does it mean to study games?**

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

### **What is a game? What is a videogame?**

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](http://nideffer.net/classes/270-08/week_01_intro/Caillois.pdf)>.

Juul, Jesper. "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness." 2003. <<http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/gameplayerworld/>>.

#### Recommended games:

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

#### Extra reading for grad students:

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

### **Play theory and anthropology**

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](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.

#### Extra reading for grad students:

Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." From *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

### **History**

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/>>.

#### Recommended games:

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

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

Extra readings for grad students:

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

**Theories of fun I: Stories**

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>>.

Recommended games:

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

Extra readings for grad students:

Fernandez-Vara, Clara. "The Paradox Between Player Control and Player Character in Adventure Games." From the *Proceedings of the International Communication Conference*, 2011, <<http://vagrantcursor.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/ica-2011-final.pdf>>.

**Theories of fun II: Rules**

Koster, Raph. Excerpt from *A Theory of Fun*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Paraglyph Press 2005. <[http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20041203/koster\\_01.shtml](http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20041203/koster_01.shtml)>

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.

Extra readings for grad students:

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

**The Meaning of Games**

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](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>.

### 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).

### Extra reading for grad students:

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/etcpres/content/bioshock-clint-hocking>>.

### **Expressive game criticism**

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/>>.

### Recommended games:

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

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

### Extra reading for grad students:

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>>.

### **Theories of fun III: Graphics, Sound and Feel**

Swink, Steve. "Game Feel: The Secret Ingredient." 23 Nov 2007. 16 Dec 2007

<[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2322/game\\_feel\\_the\\_secret\\_ingredient.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2322/game_feel_the_secret_ingredient.php)>.

Jarvinen, Aki. "Gran Stylissimo: The Audiovisual Elements and Styles in Computer and Video

Games." Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures 2002, <<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/05164.35393.pdf>>.

### Recommended games:

Queasy Games. *Everyday Shooter*. 2007.

Exploding Rabbit. *Super Mario Crossover*. <<http://www.explodingrabbit.com/games/super-mario-bros-crossover>>.

### Extra readings for grad students:

Grimshaw, Mark and Gareth Schott. "Situating Gaming as a Sonic Experience: The acoustic ecology of First-Person Shooters." Proceedings of DiGRA 2007, <<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07311.06195.pdf>>.

### **Player types**

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>>.

Andy Robertson: *What Gamers Want: Silver Gamers*. Gamasutra. July 10 2008. <[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3720/what\\_gamers\\_want\\_silver\\_gamers.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3720/what_gamers_want_silver_gamers.php)>

#### Recommended games:

From Software. *Dark Souls*. 2009.

#### Extra reading for grad students:

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

### **Play communities**

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.

#### Recommended games:

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

#### Extra reading for grad students:

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://taylor.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Taylor-PushingTheBorders.pdf>>.

### **Games and gender**

Kopas, Merritt. "Interrupting Play: Queer Games & Futurity." Personal Best, February 2014, <<http://mkopas.net/files/talks/InterruptingPlayQueerGamesFuturity.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>.

Recommended games:

Kopas, Merritt. *Lim*, 2012. <<http://mkopas.net/files/Lim/>>

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

Extra reading for grad students:

Henry Jenkins: "COMPLETE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT": VIDEO GAMES AS GENDERED PLAY SPACES" <[http://nideffer.net/classes/270-08/week\\_07\\_gender\\_economy/HenryJenkinsFreedomofMovementGenderedPlaySpace.pdf](http://nideffer.net/classes/270-08/week_07_gender_economy/HenryJenkinsFreedomofMovementGenderedPlaySpace.pdf)>.

### **Games and art**

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

Ebert, Roger. 2007. "Games vs. Art: Ebert vs. Barker ". <<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070721/COMMENTARY/70721001>>

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

Recommended games:

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

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

Newsgaming.com. *September 12th*. 2002. <<http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm>>

Extra reading for grad students:

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>>.

### **Games and sport**

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. <<http://thomascummins.com/the-heresy-of-zone-defense/>>.

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/>>

Extra reading for grad students:

Hutchins, Brett. "Signs of meta-change in second modernity: the growth of e-sport and the World Cyber Games." *new media & society* 10(6), 2008.