

Video Games: Culture & Industry

MCC-UE 1008.1.002.FA13

Fall 2013

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

Instructor: Luke Stark (luke.stark@nyu.edu)

Fridays, 12:50pm – 3:20pm

Room 825, 2 Metrotech Center

(NYU Media and Games Network (MAGNET))

Office: East Building, 239 Greene Street

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

Electronic games have become not only a big business, but also a major cultural form. Over the past forty years, these games have transcended their original media technologies (the “video” monitors of TV screens and computer consoles) to weave themselves into the fabric of daily life. These games are played in a variety of milieus: through casual and social gaming, via the Internet, on consoles, smart phones and tablets. In this class, we will explore the historical and cultural roots of electronic games, the present industry landscape, and the ways in which these games are changing our experience of identity and of everyday life.

Additionally, we’ll spend a portion of each class (between 30-45 minutes or so) playing - and watching each other play - games. This experiential learning will provide an opportunity to put our discussions in perspective, as well as give us a sense of what makes both classic and contemporary games compelling from a user's vantage point. Each student should expect to spend at least one hour of the semester playing video games in front of his or her colleagues.

Course Objectives

To provide students with

- A theoretical, historical and cultural grounding for studying electronic games as a media form
- An understanding of the relationships between play, electronic games, and broader cultural, social and economic forces
- An overview of the organization and culture of the video game industry
- Knowledge to pursue employment in fields related to video games, including design, marketing, and game preservation/curation

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation – 20%

This class is a seminar, focused on close reading and discussion: attendance

and participation are therefore of paramount importance. These are the best way to demonstrate to me what you have learned, and develop your own thoughts in dialogue with your classmates. As such, I expect regular and prompt attendance, coming to class having read all the require readings, and completed any supplementary assignments.

Any pre-planned absences should be cleared with me in advance of the recitation section in question, and any extenuating circumstances (e.g., illness, family emergency) will need to be documented for missed classes. More than one absence over the course of the semester will negatively impact your grade.

Industry Memo – 25% (Due Sunday, October 13 at 11:59PM)

To your surprise, you receive an email from the development department of your favorite video game studio. Sales, the memo laments, are slow; the company desperately needs some fresh thinking and creative insight. The memo suggests that if you can think strategically about the business, you might just land yourself a dream job.

Draft a memo to the company's CEO in response: describe the company's latest creative successes or failures, identify their approach and strategy within the broader gaming industry, and suggest whatever changes or ideas you think might benefit the company's prospects.

Formatting requirements: 4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, font size 12. Use a variety of sources (minimum 5), including from industry publications and academic journals. Please submit the assignment to me via email.

Lab Time (Group Presentation) – 15%

Once during the course you will be part of a group responsible for researching and playing a game on your own time, and then presenting it to the rest of the class during "lab" time in a 10-minute presentation. We will establish groups and assign games and dates during the second meeting. While this should be fun, it should also be scholarly: discuss the game from a critical perspective, bringing our class readings and discussions to light, as well as your own experiences and interpretations. You will be graded on the following criteria:

Organization - You must send me a digital copy of the presentation via email, before class starts.

Content - You are free to pick any game you want. In presenting your game, please answer the following questions: who is the developer? Who is the publisher? When did it come out? On what platforms is it available? What is the estimated number of sales (units sold/shipped)? What does the game play look like? What is the main demographic for this game?

What do you think is noteworthy about the game (and why)?

Format - You will also be evaluated based on your ability to present in a cogent manner. This means you address the whole group, speak in a relaxed, clear manner, and engage with the class (and not simply read from a piece of paper or from a slide).

Final Paper - 40%

Your final paper should be between 10-12 pages long (roughly 3,000 words). The paper should draw directly on our class readings and discussions, and should cite at least 8 sources, 5 of them from the class readings. You should send me a two-paragraph paper topic proposal no later than **noon on Friday, November 8.**

The final paper is due on **Sunday, December 8, at 11:59 PM.** For every 24-hour period after that I will deduct a full letter from your grade for this segment.

Content - In this exercise I expect you to make a meaningful argument with regards to the main topic of this course: electronic games. You are free in deciding whether your paper covers a single game (e.g. Tetris), an entire genre (First Person Shooter), a theme (e.g. gender identity in games) or gaming practices in general (e.g. marketing, gamification).

Structure - Your paper must contain the following three components:

- An ABSTRACT, describing in about 150 words what the paper is about, its core argument, and sources of evidence;
- A BEGINNING, consisting of an introduction (e.g. what led you to the topic), a brief statement of argument, and an explanation of your topic's relevance;
- A MIDDLE, made up of the arguments that build your argument, and finally
- An ENDING, offering a conclusion that summarizes your main standpoint and arguments, and suggestions for further research and discussion, and a bibliography.

Formatting requirements: All submitted work must be typed, double spaced, and paginated in 12-point Times New Roman font, and submitted digitally, to my email address, in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or OpenOffice format. **The essay should be submitted with a cover page with the student's name, date, citation style, and essay title, and pages should be numbered.** Pictures, graphs, charts, tables and other visual aids do not count toward the final number of pages.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be marked down one letter grade for every day they are

overdue. If you think you are going to be late with an assignment, you must notify me **at least one week** before the assignment is due

Academic Honesty

The partnership between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience. This partnership takes an honor code for granted. Mutual trust, respect and responsibility are foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A University education aims not only to produce high quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

"Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do.... You violate the principle when you: cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you." (See School of Education Bulletin, 2006/8, p. 172)

For a full statement of the Academic Integrity Policy governing this course see:
[http:// http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

Grade Appeals

Any grade appeals should be submitted via e-mail with "a short note explaining your concerns about the grade in question." Please wait **AT LEAST 24 HOURS** before contacting me with your concern, and please refer to the evaluation criteria when submitting an appeal.

Grading Rubric

(Plus and minus grades indicate the standing within the above grades)

A = Excellent (numerical equivalent: 90 – 100%)

Outstanding work in all respects: comprehensive understanding, thoughtful and creative interpretations, well-focused and original insights, well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Writing is clear, analytical, and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Class participation is consistent, insightful, and respectful of others.

B = Good (numerical equivalent: 80 – 89%)

Work demonstrates complete and accurate understanding of course materials, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and a competent level of analysis with proper evidence. Writing is easy to follow and well structured. Class participation is consistent and respectful of others.

C = Adequate (numerical equivalent: 70 – 79%)

Work demonstrates adequate understanding but may be incomplete, vague or

contains some important errors or weaknesses. Work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustration. Writing may be awkward or hard to follow. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Class participation is unreliable, off-topic, and/ or disrespectful of others.

D = Unsatisfactory (numerical equivalent: 60 – 69%)

Work demonstrates a lack of understanding and fails to express basic aspects of the course. This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Class participation is spotty, superficial, and/or disrespectful of others

F = Failed. Work was not submitted or completed according to assigned parameters or completely failed to express the most basic and elementary aspects of the course.

Miscellaneous

Student Resources

Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. In addition, if you're finding consistent problems with your writing I urge you to explore the **Writing Center**: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233: you can schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

Style Manuals

Students are strongly urged to purchase at least one style manual. A good style manual will help to improve the organization and composition of your written work and, used properly, should help ensure proper citation of sources. Please be consistent with the style you use. Here are two recommendations:

- Joseph Gibaldi. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003
- Kate Turabian. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. 6th Edition. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996

Sources

An important part of academic work consists of finding information relevant to your topic. New York University offers a rich variety of literature, financial information, journals, market research reports and articles. You can find most of it online, at <https://home.nyu.edu/research>. Some major databases include Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, and JSTOR. Online encyclopedic sources such as Google and Wikipedia are excellent starting points for your research: they offer a valuable

overview of specific subjects, and link to vital primary and secondary sources for your work. However, you are not permitted to quote or cite Wikipedia pages themselves as references in your submitted work.

Religious Observance

Students who observe religious holidays that may interfere with the class schedule should inform the course instructors well in advance of anticipated absences to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the completion of course work. See NYU's Policy on Religious Holidays at www.nyu.edu/student-affairs/students-guide/policies.html, for more information.

Texts

All course readings will be available electronically via NYU Classes. Please print out the readings for each class – reading from laptops, smart phones and tablets during class discussion will not be permitted.

In addition to the class readings, I encourage you to peruse game-related web sites such as the ones listed below:

Joystiq: <http://www.joystiq.com/>

Penny Arcade: <http://www.penny-arcade.com/>

Slashdot: <http://games.slashdot.org/>

Game Industry Biz: <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/>

Water Cooler Games: <http://watercoolergames.org/>

Serious Games: <http://www.seriousgames.org/>

Int'l Game Dev Assoc: <http://www.igda.org/>

Gamasutra: <http://www.gamasutra.com>

Special Circumstances, Considerations, Needs

If you have any special circumstances, considerations, or needs that you feel will either affect your ability to complete assignments or participate in recitation discussions, please let me know as soon as possible. Documentation is critical to processing special requests, and I will help facilitate this to the best of my abilities.

A Final Note

Ideas are important things, and people often feel passionately about them. This being said, please treat your fellow classmates, and your instructor, with respect, good humor and empathy. Trust is vital to a thoughtful, open and intelligent discussion – I hope we'll be able to share a mutual trust this term.

Class Schedule

Please note that in addition to the readings below, short pieces on topical subjects may be added throughout the term.

Friday, September 6 – Welcome & Introduction

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Garden of Forking Paths." In *The New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, translated by Donald A Yates, 29–34, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2003.

Friday, September 13 – Play & Ritual

Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 56–86.

Huizinga, Johan. "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon." In *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 1–27, Boston, MA: The Beacon Press, 1950.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Translated by Peter Preuss, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980, 7-10.

Friday, September 20 – Narrative & Simulation

Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, edited by Mark J P Wolf and Bernard Perron, 221–235, New York: Routledge, 2003.

Galloway, Alexander R. "Gamic Action, Four Moments." In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, 1–38, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Juul, Jesper. "Introduction." In *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, 1–23, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2005.

Williams, Dmitri. "Bridging the Methodological Divide in Game Research." *Simulation & Gaming* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 447–463.
doi:10.1177/1046878105282275.

Friday, September 27 – Platforms & Materials

Fenlon, Wesley. "In Search of Scanlines: the Best CRT Monitor for Retro

Gaming.” *Tested.com*, July 11 2013.
<http://www.tested.com/tech/gaming/456719-best-crt-retro-games/>.

Flusser, Vilém. “Form and Material” and “The Non-Thing 1.” In *The Shape of Things: a Philosophy of Design*, 22-29 and 85-89, London: Reaktion, 1999.

Matott, Scott. “Terminator Salvation -- the Arcade Game.” *Game Developer Magazine* 8, no. 7 (August 2011): 20–25.

Montfort, Nick, and Ian Bogost. “Random and Raster: Display Technologies and the Development of Videogames.” *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* (July-September 2009): 34–43.

Scott, Jason. “What a Wonder Is a Terrible Monitor.” *Jason Scott's Weblog*, December 4 2012. <http://ascii.textfiles.com/archives/3786>.

Friday, October 4 – Video Games as History, Video Games as Art

Field Trip to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Guest Discussant - Christopher Romero (<http://www.oscillation.com/>)

Antonelli, Paola. “Video Games: 14 in the Collection, for Starters.” *MoMA Inside/Out*, November 29 2012.
http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/.

Jones, Jonathan. “Sorry MoMA, video games are not art.” *The Guardian*, November 30 2012.
<http://theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art>

Maeda, John. “Videogames Do Belong in the Museum of Modern Art.” *Wired.com*, December 4 2012.
<http://www.wired.com/opinion/2012/12/why-videogames-do-belong-in-the-museum-of-modern-art/>.

Smuts, Aaron. “Are Video Games Art?.” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 3 (2005).

Listen to the following portions of CBC Radio’s *Spark*, Episode 216: “Game On 2.0,” “Lost in Emulation,” and “Preserving Virtual Worlds.” See <http://www.cbc.ca/spark/episodes/2013/05/03/post-1/#4>. The audio files are available at <http://bit.ly/17mEZU5>

The *Spark* tumblr on emulation:

<http://sparkcbc.tumblr.com/post/49532230100/lost-in-emulation>

Friday, October 11 – NO CLASS

(Work on your *Industry Memo*, due Sunday, October 13 at 11:59PM)

Friday, October 18 – Design & Gameplay

Costikyan, Greg. "I Have No Words & I Must Design: Toward a Critical Vocabulary for Games." In *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference*, edited by Frans Mäyra, 9–33, Tampere, Finland: Tampere University Press, 2002.

Cutting, Andrew. "Interiority, Affordances, and the Possibility of Adapting Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* as a Video Game." *Adaptation* 5, no. 2 (August 7, 2012): 169–184.

Sudnow, David. "Eyeball." In *Pilgrim in the Microworld*, 25-39, New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1983.

Sutton-Smith, Brian. "The Toy as Machine: Video Games." In *Toy as Culture*, 57–75, New York and London: Gardner Press, Inc., 1986.

Friday, October 25 – Ethics & Values

Flanagan, Mary. "Critical Computer Games." In *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 223–250, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.

Konzack, Lars. "Philosophical Game Design." In *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, edited by Bernard Perron and Mark J P Wolf, 33–44, New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

Sicart, Manuel. "The Ethics of Computer Games." In *The Ethics of Computer Games*, 107–150, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.

Friday, November 1 – Politics & Rhetoric

Bogost, Ian. "Playing Politics: Videogames for Politics, Activism, and Advocacy." *First Monday* (September 2006): 1–17.

Franklin, Benjamin. "The Morals of Chess." *The Columbian Magazine* 1, no. 4 (December 1786): 158.

Friedman, Ted. "The Semiotics of SimCity." *First Monday* 4, no. 5 (April 5 1999).

Galloway, Alexander R. "Allegories of Control." In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, 85–106, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Friday, November 8 – Games & Identity

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace." *The Village Voice*, December 21 1993.

Mattos, Sal. "Final Fantasy XIV GM Responds to Banning Controversy, Users Have More to Say." *Gaygamer.Net*, August 23 2013.

<http://gaygamer.net/2013/08/final-fantasy-xiv-gm-responds-to-banning-controversy-users-have-more-to-say/#more-7565>.

Nakamura, Lisa. "Menu-Driven Identities: Making Race Happen Online." In *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, 101–135, New York and London: Routledge, 2002.

Sarkeesian, Anita. *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* (3-part video series). Available at <http://www.feministfrequency.com/2013/08/damsel-in-distress-part-3-tropes-vs-women/>. Part 1 is mandatory viewing; parts 2 and 3 are optional but highly encouraged.

Taylor, T L. "Where the Women Are." In *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, 93–124, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

Friday, November 15 – Video Games as Industry

Guest Lecturer - Joost Rietveld (<http://www.strategyguide.nl/>)

Aoyama, Yuko, and Hiro Izushi. "Hardware Gimmick or Cultural Innovation? Technological, Cultural, and Social Foundations of the Japanese Video Game Industry." *Research Policy* 32 (2003): 423–444.

Broekhuizen, Thijs L J, Joseph Lampel, and Joost Rietveld. "New Horizons or a Strategic Mirage? Artist-Led-Distribution Versus Alliance Strategy in the Video Game Industry." *Research Policy* 42, no. 4 (May 1, 2013): 954–964.

Johns, Jennifer. "Video Games Production Networks: Value Capture, Power Relations and Embeddedness." *Journal of Economic Geography* 6, no. 2 (2006): 151–180.

Optional:

Schilling, Melissa A. "Technological Leapfrogging: Lessons From the U.S. Video

Game Console Industry.” *California Management Review* 45, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 1–28.

Friday, November 22 – Casual & Social Games

Juul, Jesper. “A Casual Revolution” and “What is Casual?” In *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*, 1–64, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010.

Levine, Ketznel. “Alter Egos in a Virtual World.” *NPR.org*, July 31 2007.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12263532>.

Lofgren, Eric T, and Nina H Fefferman. “The Untapped Potential of Virtual Game Worlds to Shed Light on Real World Epidemics.” *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 7, no. 9 (September 2007): 625–629.

Spaight, Tracy. “Who Killed Miss Norway?” *Salon.com*, April 14 2003.
http://www.salon.com/2003/04/14/who_killed_miss_norway/

Friday, November 29 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Friday, December 6 – Gamification

Jagoda, Patrick. “Gamification and Other Forms of Play.” *Boundary 2* 40, no. 2 (July 10, 2013): 113–144.

McGonigal, Jane. Selections from *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, Penguin Press, 2011.

Morozov, Evgeny. Selections from *To Save Everything, Click Here: the Folly of Technological Solutionism*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.

Neilson, Susie. “When a Relationship Becomes a Game.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 8 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/08/when-a-relationship-becomes-a-game/278459/>.

Final paper due Sunday, December 8th, at 11:59 PM

Friday, December 13 – The End(s) of Games

Carse, James P. “There Are at Least Two Kinds of Games.” In *Finite and Infinite Games: a Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*, 1–34, Free Press, 1986.

Gallagher, Rob. “Playing with Death.” *The New Inquiry*, August 15 2013.

<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/playing-with-death/>.

Juul, Jesper. "Video Games Make Us All Losers!" *Salon*, July 13 2013.
http://www.salon.com/2013/07/13/video_games_make_us_all_losers/print.

Suits, Bernard. Selections from *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*,
Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2005.