

Video Games: Culture & Industry

MCC-UE 1008.1.002.FA15

Fall 2015

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

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

Tuesdays, 2:30pm – 4:50pm

Room 845, NYU Media and Games Network (MAGNET)

2 Metrotech Center, Brooklyn

Office: East Building 206, 239 Greene Street

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

Electronic games are not only a major industry, but also a powerful 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 through casual and social gaming, via the World Wide Web, and on 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, communication, power, and everyday life.

Course Objectives

To provide students with a theoretical, historical and cultural grounding for thinking about electronic games as a media form; an understanding of the relationships between electronic games and broader cultural, social and economic forces; an overview of the organization and culture of the video game industry as it is and where it is heading; and the 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 done all the require reading/viewing/playing, and having completed any supplementary assignments.

Some classes, we'll spend a portion of each class playing - and watching each other play – a variety of games; at other points, I will ask you to play games outside of class time, either in MAGNET's game library or on your own time. 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.

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

Midterm Paper – 25% - Due Friday, October 16th at noon

Adaptations of novels into films have long been commonplace; adaptations of video games to film are becoming increasingly so. Adapting, or “transcoding,” a novel into a video game, or a video game into a literary novel, is less common, and far more difficult.

In this short paper (5-6 pages, double-spaced), pick either a video game or a classic work of literary fiction, and make an argument for how and why the work in one medium should AND could be adapted into the other. In other words, you can describe how you would adapt a novel as a video game OR a video game as a novel. Be creative, but also aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each medium – be sure to suggest specific ways in which you would translate the features of a game or novel into the other medium, and justify those choices based on class readings and on your own experience with reading, writing, and playing games.

Please note that this piece is in part a diagnostic exercise: I want to see you pay attention to your writing style, the required format, and your citations, as well as your creative content.

Formatting requirements: **Please conform to the research paper requirements of the MLA Handbook, 7th edition.** I recommend you consult the MLA's website (<http://www.mlahandbook.org>) and other online resources. Your paper should be in Times New Roman font, size 12. Use a variety of sources, properly cited, including at least three from the course syllabus or from other academic journals.

Please submit the assignment to me via email in **both** .doc and .pdf formats.

Group Presentation – 10%

You will be part of a small group responsible for researching and playing a game

on your own time, and then reporting on it to the rest of the class during a 20-minute presentation. We will establish groups during the second meeting of the class, and begin presentations during the third meeting. This game may be related to your industry portfolio (see below) or not. While this assignment should be fun, it should also be scholarly: discuss the game from a critical perspective, bringing in our class readings and discussions as well as your own experiences and interpretations. If possible, your group should show examples of game play, either through videos or through playing the game briefly in class.

Organization - You must decide on a game a minimum of one week prior to your presentation and let me know; you must send me a digital copy of your 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 features of the game (themes, gameplay mechanics, design, impact) do you think is noteworthy about the game, and why?

Format - You will be evaluated based on your ability to present in a cogent manner: please 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).

Industry Portfolio - 45% - Due Tuesday, December 15th at noon

Some of you may be interested in working in the game industry, as designers, programmers, or artists. This cumulative assignment is designed not just to evaluate your research and writing skills, but also to serve as a tangible and usable product of the course that you can present as part of your qualifications for a career in games. The assignment consists of the following parts:

Research brief (11-12 pages)

Your research brief should be between 11-12 double-spaced pages long (roughly 3,200 words). Your brief should focus on an aspect of the game industry: possible topics might include a focus on the trajectory of a specific company or studio, the state of game crowd funding, the role of cheap creative labor in the game industry, new hardware and software advances, game marketing, or other elements of games as a business. Out of this topic, you should develop an argument that puts forward a cogent set of conclusions and recommendations. The paper should also draw directly on our class readings and discussions. You should cite at least 10 sources of various sorts. Depending on your topic, I recommend exploring the business studies, organizational management, social

psychology and sociology literatures for supplementary resources.

Your research brief must include: an *abstract*, describing in about 150 words what the paper is about, its core argument, and sources of evidence; an *introduction* (e.g. what led you to the topic), a brief statement of argument, and an explanation of your topic's relevance; several component *arguments* that build your broader argument, and finally a *conclusion* that summarizes your main standpoint and arguments, makes recommendations and offers suggestions for further research and discussion. Also include a *works cited* page, properly formatted.

In addition, you should supplement your brief with appropriate charts, graphs and illustrations, properly formatted and numbered. These figures do not count towards the length of the brief.

Annotated bibliography (4 pages)

Your annotated bibliography should include all the sources you cite in your research brief, and any additional materials you used in your research – this combination should total at least 20 citations. For each citation, write a short paragraph summarizing the gist of the piece, its utility, and its shortcomings if any. At least half of these references should be from scholarly publications; the rest might come from popular or trade magazines, reports from industry groups, or blogs devoted to gaming.

Cover letter (1 page)

Your cover letter should be addressed to me. In it, you should succinctly explain your interest in the topic at hand; highlight some of your key findings; and articulate how your research would have a real-world impact on the games industry.

Presentation slide (1 page)

In one, and only one, PowerPoint slide, you should summarize your research attractively and effectively. Take as your model the slides produced as part of the Threesis Academic Challenge (<http://gsas.nyu.edu/object/gsas.masterscollege.thethreesischallenge>).

A two-paragraph topic proposal is due no later than **noon on Friday, October 30th**

An annotated bibliography draft of at least 10 sources is due no later than **noon on Friday, November 6th**.

A draft research brief of at least 8 pages is due no later than **noon on Saturday, November 28th**.

The final version of the portfolio is due no later than **noon on Tuesday, December 15th**. For every 24-hour period this assignment is late, I will deduct a full letter from your grade – no exceptions.

Formatting requirements: **Please conform to the research paper requirements of the American Psychological Association (APA) Style Guide, 6th edition**. I recommend you consult the APA's website (<http://www.apastyle.org/>) and other online resources. Your research brief and annotated bibliography should double-spaced, in Times New Roman font, sized 12.

Please submit the assignment to me via email in **both** .doc/.ppt formats, and as one single .pdf document.

Grades

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, reflective 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 refer to the evaluation criteria when submitting an appeal.

Grading Rubric

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

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 should 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 at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. In addition, if you're having consistent problems with your writing I urge you to explore the **Writing Center**: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233; you can make an appointment online at <http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/page/writing.center>. You are also welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss your writing.

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. In addition to the course readings, I also encourage you to keep abreast of game-related web sites, including those listed below:

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

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

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

Kotaku: <http://kotaku.com>

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

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

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

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.

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 these 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.

Required Texts

Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

All other course readings will be available electronically via NYU Classes.

Class Schedule

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

Tuesday, September 8 – Welcome & Introduction

Read: 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.

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.

Tuesday, September 15 – Play, Ritual and Narrative

Read: Caillois, Roger. "The Definition of Play" and "The Classification of Games" In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, 122-155, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2006.

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

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

Tuesday, September 22 – Video Games as History

Read: Jenkins, Henry. "Games, the New Lively Art." In *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, edited by Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein, 175-189, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

Malliet, Steven, and Gust de Meyer. "The History of the Video Game." In *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, edited by Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein, 23-45, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

Wolf, Mark J. P., "Genre and the Video Game." In *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, edited by Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein, 193-204, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

The CBC Radio *Spark* tumblr on emulation:

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

Listen: 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>.

Tuesday, September 29 – Materials & Platforms

Read: 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/>.

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

Montfort, Nick and Ian Bogost. Selections from *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009.

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

Friday, October 2 - Field Trip to the Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI)
Meet at the museum at 12:40pm

Tuesday, October 6 – Video Games as Art

Watch: *Mortal Kombat* (1995), dir. Paul W. S. Anderson, Threshold/New Line

Play: Mortal Kombat (1992), Midway Games

Read: Cutting, Andrew. "Interiority, Affordances, and the Possibility of Adapting Henry James's the Turn of the Screw as a Video Game." *Adaptation* 5.2 (2012): 169–184.

Galloway, Alexander R. "Origins of the First-Person Shooter." In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, 39–69, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Jones, Jonathan. "Sorry MoMA, video games are not art." *The Guardian*, November 30 2012.
[http://theguardian.com/artandesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art](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/>.

Tuesday, October 13 – LEGISLATIVE DAY (NO CLASS)

Midterm paper due Friday, October 16th at noon

Tuesday, October 20 – Video Games as Industry

Read: 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.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on Control Societies." *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. 177–182. Print.

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

Williams, Ian. "'You Can Sleep Here All Night': Video Games and Labor." *Jacobin Magazine*, November 8 2013. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/11/video-game-industry/>.

Tuesday, October 27 – Ethics & Values in Games

Play: *Hush* (2008), Jamie Antonisse,
<http://www.jamieantonisse.com/hush/index.html>.

3rd World Farmer (2008), Hermud et al., <http://3rdworldfarmer.com/>.

Read: Galloway, Alexander R. "Social Realism." In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, 70–84, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

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

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

Two-paragraph topic proposal due Friday, October 30th at noon

Tuesday, November 3 – Gameplay Rhetorics, Game Politics

Play: A game of chess "live" with another person (perhaps in Washington Square Park)

Read: 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.

Gallagher, Rob. "Playing with Death." *The New Inquiry*, August 15 2013.
<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/playing-with-death/>.

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

Annotated bibliography draft due Friday, November 6th at noon

Tuesday, November 10 – Games and Identity I: Race & Class

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

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.

Other readings TBD

Tuesday, November 17 – Games and Identity II: Gender & Sexuality

Watch: “Online Harassment,” *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, June 21, 2015, <https://youtu.be/PuNlwYsz7PI>.

Sarkeesian, Anita. *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games: Damsels in Distress* (3-part video series).
<https://www.youtube.com/user/feministfrequency>.

Read: 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>.

Lin, Holin. “Body, Space, and Gendered Gaming Experiences: A Cultural Geography of Homes, Cybercafés, and Dormitories.” In *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*, 54 – 67, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Sarkeesian, Anita. *Feminist Frequency* (browse the last two years of posts, especially regarding GamerGate), <http://feministfrequency.com/>.

Tuesday, November 24– Casual Games & Gamification

Play: *Candy Crush Saga* (2012), King, <http://candycrushsaga.com/>.

Cookie Clicker (2013), Orteil, <http://orteil.dashnet.org/cookieclicker/>.

Read: Selection of short articles on gamification TBD

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

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

Draft research brief due Saturday, November 28th at noon.

Tuesday, December 1 – Blurred Lines: Games and “Real” Life

Watch: Ender’s Game (2013), dir. Gavin Hood, Summit Entertainment

Read: 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.

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/>.

Taylor, T.L. “Playing for Keeps.” In *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*, 1-33, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2012.

Tuesday, December 8 – Game Over, Game Everywhere?

Watch: Existenz (1999), dir. David Cronenberg, Alliance Atlantis

Read: Galloway, Alexander R. “Counter gaming.” In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, 107-126, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

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.

Final portfolio due Tuesday, December 15th at noon
