

Spring 2015
HONORS 2953-903
HONORS PROGRAM SECOND YEAR SEMINAR
Thematic Title: *Video Game Culture*
T 3:00-4:40 PM
Lalumiere 310

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This course is a survey of the burgeoning academic field of game studies, with a focus on the history and reception of video games. We will begin with Pong and work our way forward to the present, considering along the way the fraught ethical and political debates that have accompanied the rise of video games as multi-billion-dollar popular entertainment. Are video games addictive? Are they bad for children? Are they bad for adults? Are they a waste of time—or, to paraphrase Steven Johnson, do “bad” video games turn out to actually be good for you? We will also consider pop culture treatment of video games and gaming culture in film, literature, and journalism, as well as recent documentaries like *The King of Kong*.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify, discuss, and understand various formal characteristics of video games;
- Apply techniques of media analysis to video games;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various game and game-related have been produced;
- Utilize the emerging interdisciplinary field of “game studies” scholarship;
- Use media study and cultural analysis to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss video games on the levels of both form and content.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The only required book for this course is Alexander Galloway’s *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, available at the BookMarq on 16th Street. All other readings in the course will be available via D2L. The course will also make use of a number of other sources of games-related media, including film, television, journalism, fan practice, and, of course, video games themselves. Wherever possible I have selected games that are available for free; some games, however, are only available for a fee through Steam.

Information on how to access all material for coming weeks of the course will be available on D2L.

GRADES AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a pass/fail course, which means your work will be evaluated outside the usual discipline of graded assignments. But this fact, and the fact that our chosen object of study is video games, should not be misunderstood to mean that our collective project is somehow frivolous or unimportant. The lack of grades is an exciting and rare opportunity for us to work and learn together in a more egalitarian context than the typical college classroom—*not* an excuse for you to blow this class off or fail to take it seriously.

THAT BEING SAID

This is a course on games (which are meant to be fun!) that is itself intended to be fun. What will make this class most fun, and most useful to you as emerging scholars, is a shared dedication to diving into this experience and getting the most we can get out of it together.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is the key component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it. **Consequently, attendance in this class is absolutely mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>. You are allowed **two absences** over the course of the fall semester. **Upon the third unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.**

Merely being present in class is insufficient to earn a passing grade. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

D2L FORUMS

In addition to class participation, the other major evaluative component of this course is the forum at <http://d2l.mu.edu/>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L will be a place where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. You may choose either to begin a thread on a new topic or to respond to a thread already begun by one of your classmates.

Before class next Tuesday, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile, and post a short, 250-word response to *The Stanley Parable*.

After that, students must write **ten short posts** responding to **any ten** texts across the remainder of the course. These posts should be completed either by noon before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by the noon before the following class.

Additional posts beyond the requirement, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, are encouraged.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time except on very rare occasions for legitimate class purposes; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. Per university policy, you are required to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services.

If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by visiting the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Lower Level, Room 05, or by visiting their website at <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services.index.shtml>.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

HOW WE WILL PLAY

As I mentioned above, this is intended to be a fun course in which we study fun things. How we get there is up to you. The games I've selected to be our focus are intended to illustrate particular points about how and why we play video games; they also have the advantage of being widely available for free over the Internet or for a low price on the distribution network Steam. If you wish to play these games alone, that's great; if you want to meet up in groups and play together, that's also great. If you don't want to play at all, and simply want to study the games from a distance as aesthetic objects—or if a game that starts out fun becomes drudgery and you don't want to keep going—you can supplement your study in other ways by visiting wikis and fan sites, watching YouTube videos, reading or watching online play-throughs, etc. I'm open to whatever mode of engagement with these texts you like; the key thing for me is simply that you engage.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

DATE	KEYWORD	TEXTS
Tuesday, January 13	START	FIRST DAY OF CLASS
Tuesday, January 20	PLAY	Game: <i>The Stanley Parable</i> Corey Mohler, <i>Existential Comics</i> : “Candyland and the Nature of the Absurd”
Tuesday, January 27	RULES	Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i> : “Gamic Action, Four Moments”
Tuesday, February 3	ART	Roger Ebert, “Doom,” “Critics vs. Games on Doom,” “Why Did The Chicken Cross the Genders,” “Video Games Can Never Be Art” Ian Bogost, “Art”
Tuesday, February 10	CRITIQUE	Game: <i>Braid</i> Patrick Jagoda, “Fabulously Procedural: Braid, Historical Processing, and the Videogame Sensorium”
Tuesday, February 17	COGNITION	Stephen Johnson, <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (excerpt) Jane McGonigal, <i>Reality Is Broken</i> (excerpt) Short: “Play”
Tuesday, February 24	HABIT	Game: <i>Tetris</i> Ian Bogost, “Habituation” Chris Higgins, “Playing to Lose” Sam Anderson, “Just One More Game...”
Tuesday, March 3	OBSESSION	Film: <i>The King of Kong</i>
Tuesday, March 10	PAUSE	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS
Tuesday, March 17	VIOLENCE	Game: <i>Portal</i> Short: “Duty Calls” Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i> : “Origins of the First Person Shooter” and “Social Realism”

Tuesday, March 24	MASCULINITY	<p>Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, “Designing Militarized Masculinity: Violence, Gender, and the Bias of Game Experience”</p> <p>Todd VanDerWerff, “#GamerGate: Here's why everybody in the video game world is fighting”</p>
Tuesday, March 31	MASTERY	<p>Game: <i>FreeCiv</i></p> <p>Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming: “Allegories of Control”</i></p> <p>Trevor Owens, “Sid Meier’s <i>Colonization: Is It Offensive Enough?</i>”</p> <p>u/Lycerius, “I’ve Been Playing the Same Game of Civilization II for Almost 10 Years. This Is the Result.”</p>
Tuesday, April 7	IDEOLOGY	<p>Game: <i>SimCity</i></p> <p>Ava Kofman, “Les Simerables”</p> <p>Mike Sterry, “The Totalitarian Buddhist Who Beat Sim City”</p>
Tuesday, April 14	FREEMIUM	<p>Game: <i>Candy Crush</i></p> <p>Ramin Shokrizade, “The Top F2P Monetization Tricks”</p> <p>June Thomas, “Sugar Coma”</p> <p>Julia Lepetit and Andrew Bridgman, “The Most Realistic Game Ever”</p> <p>Ian Bogost, “Rage Against the Machines” and <i>Cow Clicker</i></p>
Tuesday, April 21	GAMIFICATION	<p>Lifehacker, “Gamify Your Life: A Guide to Incentivizing Everything”</p> <p>Michelle Greenwald, “Gamification in Everything”</p> <p>Dan Schawbel, “How Gamification Is Going To Change The Workplace”</p> <p>Ian Bogost, “Why Gamification Is Bullshit”</p> <p>Short: “Sight”</p>
Tuesday, April 28	COUNTERGAMING	<p>Games: molleindustria.org</p> <p>Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming: “Counter gaming”</i></p>

Additional Reading

Students interested in diving deeper into game studies might be interested in some of the following texts as possible starting points:

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Video Games*

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*

Game Studies Journal (www.gamestudies.org)

Richard Grusin, *Remediation*

Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greif de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*

Frans Mayra, *An Introduction to Game Studies*

Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*

Ralph Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*

Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, *The Video Game Theory Reader* and *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*