

Fall 2015 - GASP 151/HIST 138 Topics in Visual Culture: *Games and/as Art*

Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00-4:15pm

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:00pm and by appointment

Course Description:

Far from mere entertainment, yet protested in its new home in museums like MoMA, the video game is an important form of 21st century digital and material production. By approaching games and art from both theoretical and experiential perspectives, students in this topics of visual culture course will engage with the question of whether video games are art, and why such a question might matter, particularly in the contemporary age of digital reproducibility and global flow. Students will read texts from both game studies and visual culture, play digital games/artifacts, take field notes of gameplay, and write blog entries of various lengths. While experienced gamers are welcome, previous experience as a game player is unnecessary for participating in the class.

Requirements:

Reading : Reading should be done for the day it is listed under. Stay on top of it!

Quizzes : (14) weekly quizzes (lowest two dropped)

Assignments : Gameplay Journal; (6) blog entries + comments and responses; and (1) final essay

Formula : Attendance and Participation (~20%), Quizzes (~10%), Gameplay Journal (~10%),
Blog Entries (~30%), Final Analysis (~30%)

Materials:

- John Sharp. *Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art*. MIT Press, 2015. [<http://www.amazon.com/Works-Game-Aesthetics-Playful-Thinking/dp/0262029073>]
- all other readings available through library eBooks, library course reserves, or online PDFs
- access to course blog: <https://ucmercedgamestudies.wordpress.com/>
- 6 game(s) — Three are required; Three are chosen by you. Talk to the professor if you are having difficulty choosing or accessing games. Various free possibilities exist through online emulation at:
 - <http://game-oldies.com>
 - <http://www.ssega.com>
 - <http://www.classicdosgames.com/index.html>
 - <http://www.kongregate.com>

Course and GASP/HIST Learning Outcomes:

- Gain a general knowledge of game studies by becoming familiar with multiple schools of thoughts in game studies and visual culture.
- Engage with the questions of what games/art are, what games/art do, and why games/art matter within their specific historical, cultural and conceptual contexts.
- Practice critically analyzing a variety of media forms.
- Learn to mix academic theories with more popular writing by utilizing the blog format to describe visual, aural, and ludic texts in technical and theoretical terms.
- Acquire research methodologies specific to critical studies of the popular media and the arts.

Assignments:

- 1) Games — You must play a new game every other week. The first half are chosen by the professor and played by everybody (weeks 1, 3, 5); the second half are chosen and played by you (weeks 7, 9, 11). For the second half any game is possible, but you must change one contextual or generic marker each time (thematic or syntactic genre, context, platform, interface, etc).
- 2) Gameplay Journal — You will write journal entries at *least* 3 days a week. These journal entries should engage with the readings of the course, and should consider the games you are playing in as many ways as you can think of (ontological, industrial, cultural, experiential, etc). Think of the gameplay journal as a ‘thought dump’ on the way to writing your weekly blog post. You must hand in the journal at the end of the course, but the format is up to you. Possibilities include: paper notebook, word processor file, vlog or blog.
- 3) Course Blog — Blog Entries, Comments and Responses — (details given every other week). Blogs are a non-linear semiotic domain of learning, which means that there is no proper answer. The doing is the important thing. Thus, each blog entry must fulfill a series or requirements, but doing so gets you up to a 50% grade. To raise your grade up to the total possible 100% for each blog assignment you will need to continue to engage by commenting and responding to comments.
- 4) Final Analysis — pick a game, artwork, practice, or community (must be approved by instructor by week 14), ‘read’ it, analyze it through at least two groups of readings, and then *show how your chosen object matters*. Format is either BLOG or PAPER. Requirements/details given later. Due Monday, December 14, 6:00pm.

Questions:

If you have any questions, ask them! Short/simple questions are best through email; long/complex questions are best through office hours.

Problems:

Please talk to me if you have any problems. Email me immediately if readings are no longer available through the eLibrary, or if the links provided are dead. That said, searching for the book through the library portal (or scholar.google.com) will often solve any broken link problems.

Academic Integrity:

Students agree that by taking this course certain required assignments will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site. Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated. <http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/content/uc-conduct-standards>

Disability Accommodations: If you require or think you may require accommodations for disabilities, please communicate with the professor immediately and register with UC Merced’s Disability Services Office at 209-228-6996 or Student Services Building 222. This way we may make arrangements to fit your needs.

Syllabus:*A) Introduction*

Week 1 | Class 1 - Thursday, August 27

- *first day: in class reading - The Ebert Debacle*

B) Ontologies - "Games"

Week 2 | Class 2 - Tuesday, September 1

- Johan Huizinga. (2006 [1938]). "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon" in *Game Design Reader*. Edited by K. Salen and E. Zimmerman: pp. 96-120. [PDF]
- Roger Caillois. (2006 [1959]). "The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games" in *Game Design Reader*. Edited by K. Salen and E. Zimmerman: pp. 122-155. [PDF]

Week 2 | Class 3 - Thursday, September 3

- Raph Koster. (2004). Selections from *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*. Scottsdale: Paraglyph Press: pp. 1-99 (Chapters 1-5). [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Assignment Due - Monday, September 7, 11:59pm - Blog #1: A 'Fun' Experience

Week 3 | Class 4 - Tuesday, September 8

- Jesper Juul. (2005). "Video Games and the Classic Game Model" in *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: MIT Press: pp. 23-54. [PDF]

Week 3 | Class 5 - Thursday, September 10

- Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce. (2007). "The Hegemony of Play." In *Digital Gaming Research Association: Situated Play*. Tokyo. [<http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/the-hegemony-of-play/>]

C) Ontologies - "Art"

Week 4 | Class 6 - Tuesday, September 15

- Johann Joachim Winckelmann. (1998 [1755]). "Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by D. Preziosi. Oxford: Oxford University Press: pp. 27-34. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]
- G. W. E. Hegel. (1998 [1826]). "Philosophy of Fine Art." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by D. Preziosi. Oxford: Oxford University Press: pp. 80-88. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 4 | Class 7 - Thursday, September 17

- Walter Benjamin. (1986 [1936]). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, edited by J. C. Hanhardt. Salt Lake City: G.M. Smith in association with Visual Studies Workshop Press: pp. 27-52. [PDF]

Assignment Due - Monday, September 21, 11:59pm - Blog #2: Is it a Game?

Week 5 | Class 8 - Tuesday, September 22

- Raymond Williams. (1985 [1976]). "Aesthetic," "Art," "Culture," and "Dialectic." In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Revised Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 5 | Class 9 - Thursday, September 24

- Howard Becker. (1982). "Art Worlds and Collective Activity" in *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press: pp. 1-39. [PDF or [books.google.com](#)]

D) Art and Games

Week 6 | Class 10 - Tuesday, September 29

- Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell. (2007). "Introduction." In *Videogames and Art*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect. pp. 7-22. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]
- John Sharp. (2015). "Introduction." In *Works of Game*.

Week 6 | Class 11 - Thursday, October 1

- Axel Stockburger. (2007). "From Appropriation to Approximation" in Clarke and Mitchell's *Videogames and Art*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect. pp. 25-37. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Assignment Due - Monday, October 5, 11:59pm - Blog #3: How is it Art?

Week 7 | Class 12 - Tuesday, October 6

- Simon Niedenthal. (2009). "What We Talk About When We Talk About Game Aesthetics." In *DiGRA 2009: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. [<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/09287.17350.pdf>]

E) Artists and Authors

Week 7 | Class 13 - Thursday, October 8

- Roland Barthes. (1977 [1967]). "The Death of the Author." In *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang. [PDF]

Week 8 | Class 14 - Tuesday, October 13

- Michel Foucault. (2003 [1969]). "What is an Author?" In *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, edited by P. Rabinow and N. S. Rose. New York: New Press. [PDF]

F) Art from Games

Week 8 | Class 15 - Thursday, October 15

- John Sharp. (2015). "Game Art." In *Works of Game*.

Assignment Due - Monday, October 19, 11:59pm - Blog #4: Accounting for the Artist

Week 9 | Class 16 - Tuesday, October 20

- Suzanne Treister. (2007). "From *Fictional Videogame Stills* to *Time Traveling with Rosalind Brodsky* 1991-2005." In *Videogames and Art*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect. pp. 130-143. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]
- Francis Hunger. (2007). "Perspective Engines: An Interview with JODI." In *Videogames and Art*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect. pp. 152-158. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 9 | Class 17 - Thursday, October 22

- Matt Kelland. 2011. "From Game Mod to Low Budget Film: The Evolution of Machinima." In *The Machinima Reader*, edited by H. Lowood and M. Nitsche. Cambridge: MIT Press. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 10 | Class 18 - Tuesday, October 27

- Eddo Stern. 2011. "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto." *Journal of Visual Culture* 10: pp. 42-50. [<http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/10/1/42.full.pdf+html>]
- Eddo Stern. (1999/2000). Sheik Attack. [<https://vimeo.com/15715408>]

Week 10 | Class 19 - Thursday, October 29

- Joseph DeLappe. (2013). "Playing Politics: Machinima as Live Performance and Document." In *Understanding Machinima: Essays on Filmmaking in Virtual Worlds*, edited by J. Ng. Bloomsbury Academic. [PDF]

Assignment Due - Monday, November 2, 11:59pm - Blog #5: TBD

Week 11 | Class 20 - Tuesday, November 3

- Larissa Hjorth. (2013). "The Art of Games: Machinima and the Limits of Art Games." In *Understanding Machinima: Essays on Filmmaking in Virtual Worlds*, edited by J. Ng. Bloomsbury Academic. [PDF]

G) Art/Games

Week 11 | Class 21 - Thursday, November 5

- Alexander R. Galloway. (2006). "Counter gaming." In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: pp. 107-126. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 12 | Class 22 - Tuesday, November 10

- John Sharp. (2015). "Artgames." In *Works of Game*.
- Indie Game: The Movie. (2012).

Week 12 | Class 23 - Thursday, November 12

- John Sharp. (2015). "Artists' Games." In *Works of Game*.

Assignment Due - Monday, November 16, 11:59pm - Blog #6: TBD

Week 13 | Class 24 - Tuesday, November 17

- Ian Bogost. (2009) "Persuasive Games: The Proceduralist Style." *Gamasutra*, January 21. [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132302/persuasive_games_the_.php]

Week 13 | Class 25 - Thursday, November 19

- Mary Flanagan. (2009). "Artists' Locative Games." In *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. MIT Press: pp. 189-222. [[eBook in UC Merced Library](#)]

Week 14 | Class 26 - Tuesday, November 24

- Lindsay Grace. (2014). "Critical Games: Critical Design in Independent Games." Proceedings of DiGRA 2014: <Verb that ends in 'ing'> the <noun> of Game <plural noun>. [<http://www.lgrace.com/documents/Critical%20Games%20Critical%20Design%20in%20Independent%20Games.pdf>]

Week 14 - Thursday, November 26

- *Thanksgiving (no class)*

H) Museums and Status

Week 15 | Class 27 - Tuesday, December 1

- Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach. (1978). "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis." *Marxist Perspectives* 4 (April). [PDF]

Week 15 | Class 28 - Thursday, December 3

- Paola Antonelli. (2013). "Why I Brought Pac-Man to MoMA." TEDSalon NY2013. [https://www.ted.com/talks/paola_antonelli_why_i_brought_pacman_to_moma?language=en]

Week 16 | Class 29 - Tuesday, December 8

- Jonathan Jones. (2012). "Sorry MoMA, video games are not art." *The Guardian*, November 30. [<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art>]
- John Maeda. (2012). "Videogames Do Belong in the Museum of Modern Art." *Wired Online*. December 4. [<http://www.wired.com/2012/12/why-videogames-do-belong-in-the-museum-of-modern-art/>]

I) Games or Art? - The Big Debate

Week 16 | Class 30 - Thursday, December 10

Final Analysis Due - Monday, December 14, 6:00pm