

ATCM 3366.001
Game Studies I
Fall 2022



ATCM 3366.001 | Game Studies I

Wednesdays 4 pm – 6:45 pm | ATC 2.918

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By Appointment

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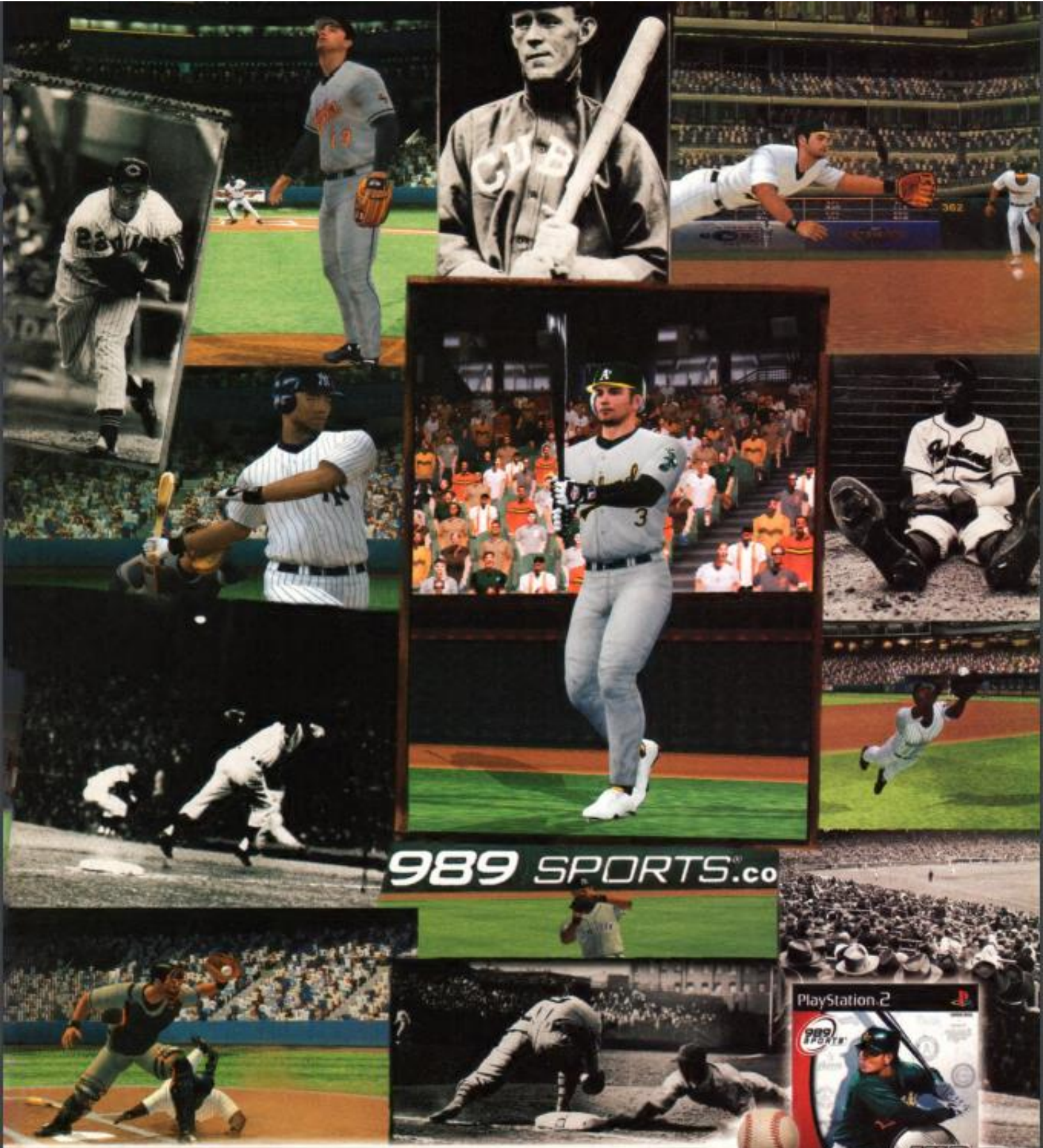
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(The games, not so much)



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Introduction to Game Studies I

What does it mean to play a game?

Can games play us?

How do games convey meaning?

Who makes games, who plays them, and who is left out?

Why do some gaming spaces encourage toxic behavior?

When does a game become work, and who profits?

This course is an introduction to basic vocabularies, frameworks, and arguments frequently discussed in game studies. Together, we will explore how established concepts and arguments about games and play can help us examine and reflect upon our experiences as game watchers/players/makers. At the same time, we will consider how our gameplay experiences can contribute to existing understandings about games and play. By extension, we will practice using these concepts and our experiences as building blocks to analyze games' historical, material, and cultural contexts as technologies of play, production, and reception in situated practices.



Figure 1 - A collection of board and card game pieces; Image by Thomas Buchholz @ Unsplash.com

To do so, each week you'll be assigned to read texts, watch videos, and/or play games to approach and analyze the phenomena of play, analog and digital gaming cultures, games industries, and more through different thematic lenses. Afterward, we will reflect on and analyze how our gameplay experiences intertwine with and/or interjects in existing arguments in the field of game studies together through class discussions. Based on our discussions throughout the semester, you will compose two essays analyzing a game of your choice through the thematic lenses introduced in our course.

A note on the intention and position of this course in your overall learning trajectory at ATEC: **This course is meant to be a companion to Game Design I, as the process and practice of dissecting and analyzing games as technologies and play as situated cultural practices explored in this course will feed into your ability to become responsible, attentive, and intentional game designers.** At the same time, your experiences as a game designer will provide you with the ability to perceive the logic of specific design choices made by other game designers.

Together, we will learn...

- ...about contemporary discussions pertaining to game playing as situated cultural practices from a variety of thematic approaches.
- ...how to practice critiquing games and constructing analyses of game playing by situating these technologies and practices within historical, material, and cultural contexts.
- ...to develop analytical writing skills for participating in the collective scholarly study of games and play.



Image
Source: Clint
Bustrillos @
Unsplash.com

Course Expectations

- **We come to class to learn from one another;** therefore, your active presence is expected and is expressed by submitting your individual assignments and participating in class discussions.
- **We have limited opportunities to meet, discuss, and work together;** therefore, your timely completion of all course assignments, including playing/watching/reading the required materials before you join the discussion, is expected.
- **We cannot learn from those who are unwilling to engage with the ideas of others;** therefore, your willingness to learn is expected and demonstrated by being open to new ideas that challenge your own assumptions as well as earnest, careful, and generous engagements with everyone in our course.



Figure 2 - A Nintendo 2DS; Image credit: Denise Jans @ Unsplash.com



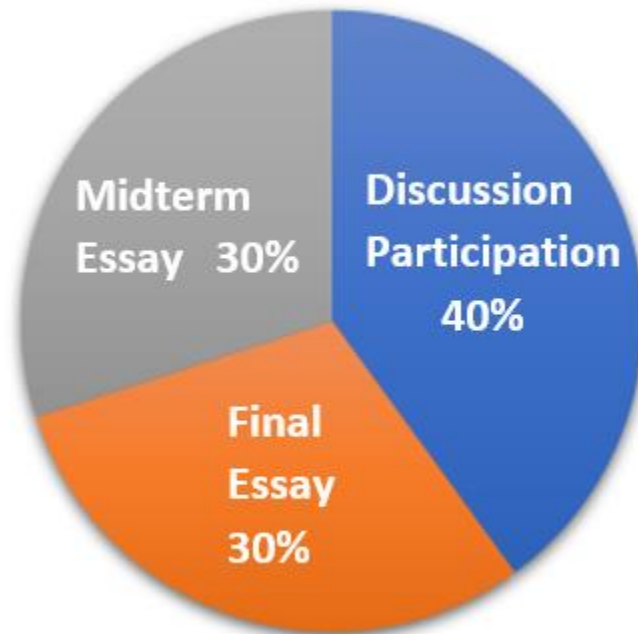
Figure 3 - Spyro the Dragon from Spyro: Reignited Trilogy

- **We will be a community of scholars, artists, and curious minds.** To facilitate a learning community for us to work together, I've included the following community agreement for our course to guide our interactions. This agreement was adapted and revised from the 2020 Allied Media Conference Community Agreement¹, and this community agreement is open to our collective revision as our course unfolds.
 - Take good care of yourself and others you live with in your life outside of our course. Make sure to nourish yourself with good food and rest as you march on in the semester.
 - Ask questions before assuming. The best way to understand the choices, actions, or intentions of one another is by asking.
 - Default to direct communication with the instructor before a public confrontation with others in the course. For any concerns you've encountered with others in our course, please email me at cli170000@utdallas.edu.
 - Please do not screenshot and share anyone's information and contributions to our course discussion outside of class without notification and consent. Stay curious, flexible, and patient as we embark on another semester of learning under an ongoing pandemic.

¹ <https://amc.alliedmedia.org/how-to-virtual-amc/community-agreements>

Grading Policy

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following:



This class uses the standard grading metric for all assignments:

- A+, A, A-: 100-90 points
- B+, B, B-: 89-80 points
- C+, C, C-: 79-70 points
- D+, D, D-: 69-60 points
- F: 59-0 points

A 'B' grade is awarded for adhering to the course expectations, following the assignment instructions, and meeting the minimum requirements for an assignment.

An 'A' grade will be granted for exceptional work, while a 'C' or lower grade will be given for failing to meet the minimum requirements, not following instructions, or for not meeting the course expectations.



The Time Bank

As we have seen in the past few years, things happen. Sometimes multiple assignments are due on the same day, and sometimes an international pandemic warps our perception of space and time.

As an acknowledgment of the chaos of the day-to-day, every participant (including myself) has **two days** that they may use for the following:

- Absence from class
- Two one-day extensions on late work
- A two-day extension on a single assignment

Should additional time be needed or for exceptional circumstances, please email me at cli170000@utdallas.edu.

Source: Super Mario Bros.



Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodations for this class, you are encouraged to register with the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA). Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) for a confidential discussion. The OSA is in the Student Services Building, SSB 3.200. They can be reached by phone at 972-883-2098, or by email at studentaccess@utdallas.edu.



Figure 4 - Navi from The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

If you do not have formal accommodations but have needs that the course is failing to meet as it is currently designed, please set up a meeting with me to discuss how I can support your learning style. Furthermore, I recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic impacts each of us differently and uniquely. Thus, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly to discuss any difficulties beyond those supported by the OSA that might hinder your full participation in our course, and we can work out an individualized plan to support your learning in this course. For additional student resources to support your learning, please visit <https://www.utdallas.edu/coronavirus/students/>.

UTD Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus. Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

Academic Integrity

I value your academic integrity, and academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade. Please review and abide by the academic integrity guidelines set forth by the University of Texas at Dallas at <https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/integrity/>.

Figure 5 - A Non-Player Character from World of Warcraft



Schedule

Note: This schedule is not final and may change as necessary to meet the needs of the class.

August 24 – Welcome!

Read: The Syllabus (Good Job!)

Play: Your favorite game and your least favorite game.

Consider: What and how will we learn together in this course?

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

Figure 6 - Sudoku

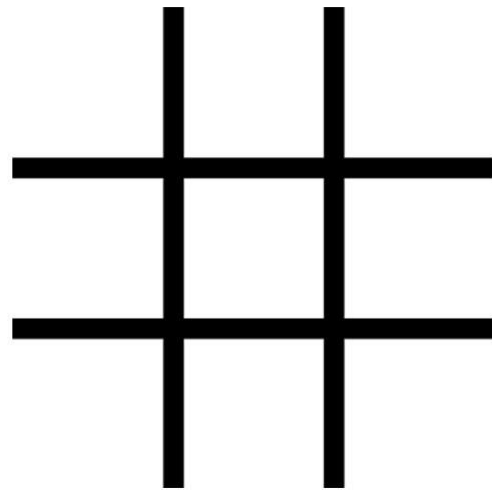


Figure 7 - Tic-Tac-Toe

August 31 - Play

Read:

“Play Is” from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart

“There is No Magic Circle” - Mia Consalvo

Play:

The Game.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Game_\(mind_game\)#Origin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Game_(mind_game)#Origin)

Consider: What is play? How does play relate to games and culture?

September 7 - Playgrounds

Read:

"Playgrounds" from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart

"Networked Broadcasting" from *In Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* - T.L. Taylor

Play:

Tag, Hopscotch, Pretend, Jump rope, Marbles, Jacks, Hide & Seek

Consider:

What is a playground? How is a play space different from a game space? How does the context and design of a playground shape games and play? Who owns the playground?

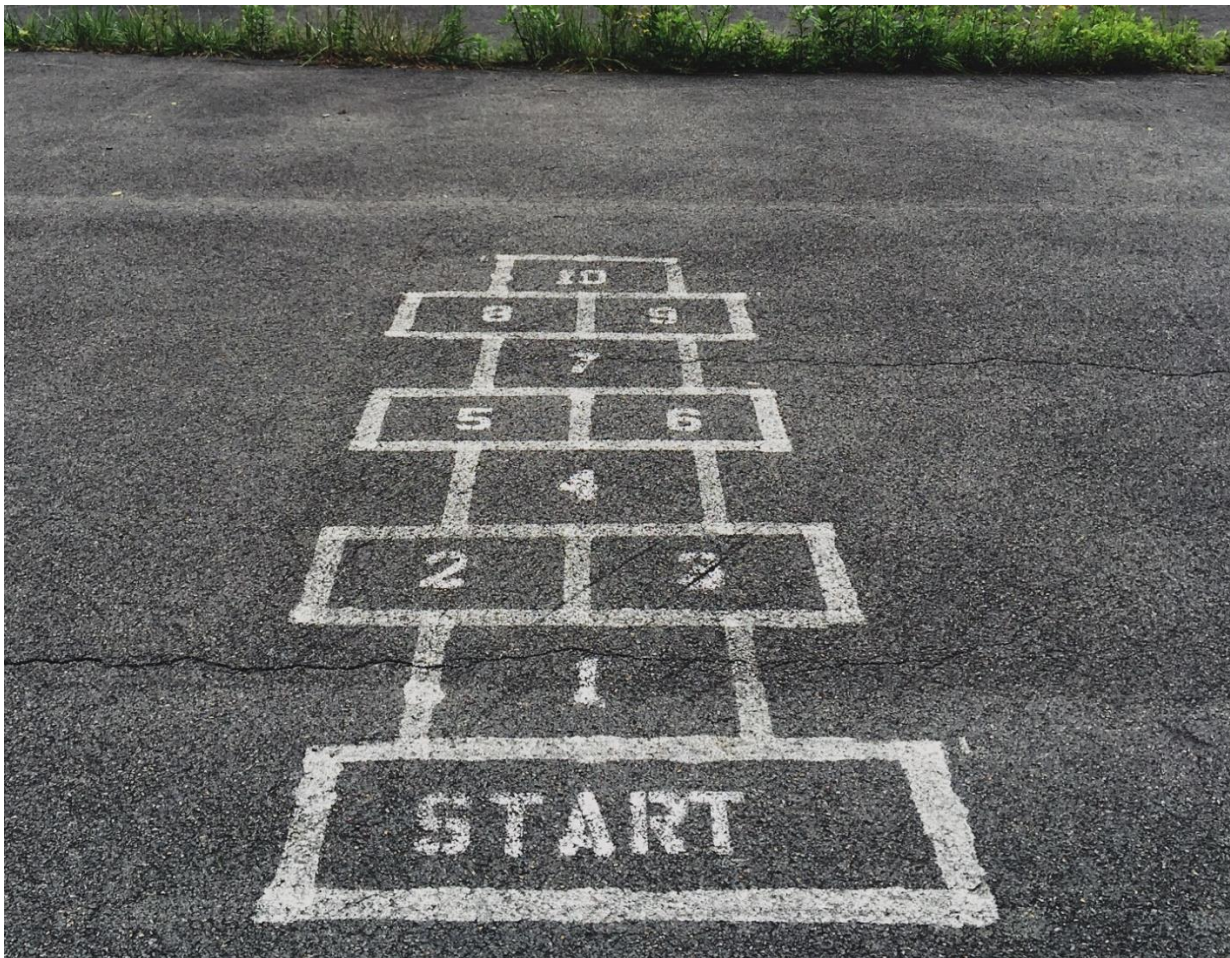


Figure 8 - A hopscotch board; image credit: Jon Tyson @ Unsplash.com



Figure 9 - The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe

September 14 – (Meta)Games

Read:

“Cardboard Poachers: Fan Cultures and Paratext in Board Games”
Chad Wilkinson

“Introduction: Metagaming: Videogames and the practice of play”
from *Metagaming: Playing, competing, spectating, cheating, trading, making, and breaking videogames*
Stephanie Boluk & Patrick LeMieux

Play:

Game Definitions by Molleindustria.
<http://www.gamedefinitions.com/>

Consider:

How do we define games?

How does the way we think about games influence the games we play?

September 21 – Games with Values

Read:

“Do Artifacts Have Politics?”

Langdon Winner

“Groundwork for Value in Games”

Mary Flanagan &
Helen Nissenbaum

Play:

Will You Press the Button?

<https://willyoupressthebutton.com>

Consider:

Why and how are technologies political? How are games as technologies political?

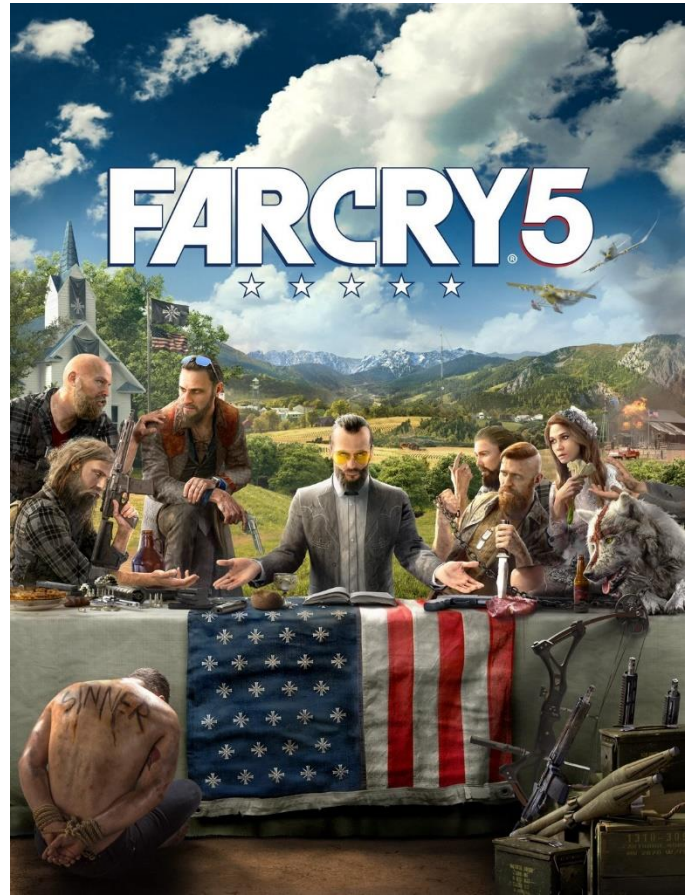


Figure 10 (Below) - Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance





September 28 – Political Games

Read:

“With Thumbs In Mind” from

A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames - Brendan Keogh

“Game Elements: The Language of Values” from *Values at Play in Digital Games* - Mary Flanagan & Helen Nissenbaum

“The Hegemony of Play” from *Proceedings of the 2007 Digital Games Research Association Conference* –

Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, & Celia Pearce

Explore:

Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally OK Now! (B.U.T.T.O.N.) by
Copenhagen Games Collective.

<http://www.brutallyunfairtactics.com>

Optional:

“Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally OK Now: On Self-Effacing Games and Unachievements” by Douglas Wilson

<http://gamestudies.org/1101/articles/wilson>.

Consider:

How do games as technologies convey their politics?

October 5 – Critical Play

Read:

“Game Engines as Creative Frameworks” from *Context Providers: Conditions of Meaning in Media Arts* – Robert Nideffer

“Introduction to Critical Play” from *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* - Mary Flanagan

Watch:

“Grand Theft Auto Pacifist: 1 - Brand New Shoes” GoldVision.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPn0x_e0zoQ&list=PL1tAmAFScYS63RrFMwkG0GuPVN70ku_G&index=2

Consider:

What does it mean to play critically? How does critical play relate to implicit cultural norms and explicit game rules?



Figure 11 - Goldvision playing Grand Theft Auto V

October 12 – Midterms (No Class)

The Midterm will be available for submission until 11:55 PM on October 12.

Remember: Use the Time Bank if you need to.



Figure 12 - (From Left to Right) Black Lotus from Magic the Gathering, Charizard from Pokémon Trading Card Game, Kuriboh from Yu-Gi-Oh!

October 19 – Midterm Review & Final Paper Discussion

Read:

The feedback on your paper.

Consider:

What have we learned so far? What are some common issues with the midterm? What should we look out for in the final paper?

October 26 - Representation



Figure 13 – Cards Against Humanity

Read:

“Diversity without defense: Reframing arguments for diversity in games” - Adrienne Shaw

“Thunderbird Strike: Survivance in/of an Indie Indigenous Game” - Elizabeth LaPensée

Play:

Thunderbird Strike - Elizabeth LaPensée
<https://www.thunderbirdstrike.com/>

Hair Nah – Mono Pixel
<http://hairnah.com/>

Optional:

“Cards Against Humanity is ____: Playing With & Playing Up Difference in Games” – Edmond Y. Chang :

<http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/cards-against-humanity-is/>

“The sobering reality of sexism in the video game industry” from *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Justice* - Stanislav Vysotsky & Jennifer Helen Allaway

“Blinded By The Roll: The Critical Fail of Disability in D&D” – Shelly Jones: <https://analoggamestudies.org/2018/03/blinded-by-the-roll-the-critical-fail-of-disability-in-dd/>

Consider:

Why and how does inclusion of diverse representations in games and the games industry matter?

November 2 - Narrative

Read:

"Coding Meritocracy: Norms of Game Design and Narrative" from *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture is the Worst* - Chris Paul

"Games to Fail With" from *Playing with Feelings: Video Games and Affect* - Audrey Anable

Play:

Spent by McKinney & Urban Ministries of Durham

<http://playspent.org/html/>

Let's Play: Ancient Greek Punishment: Teaches Typing
by Phippen Barr

<https://pippenbarr.com/lets-play-ancient-greek-punishment-teaches-typing/info/>



Figure 14 - Dark Souls

Optional:

"The Rubble and the Ruin: Race, Gender and Sites of Inglorious Conflict in *Spec Ops: The Line*" from *Gaming Representation* - Soraya Murray

Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy - Bennett Foddy:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getting_Over_It_with_Bennett_Foddy

Consider:

What is meritocracy? How do games narrate meritocracy? What are the consequences of this dominant narrative?

November 9 - Labor

Read:

“Immaterial Labor: A Workers’ History of Videogaming” from *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* – Nick Dyer-Witheford & Greig de Peuter

“Women in video games: The case of hardware production and promotion” from *Gaming Globally* – Nina B. Huntemann

Explore:

Game Workers Unite :

<https://www.gameworkersunite.org/>

“Desert Bus (Sega CD) Playthrough” by NintendoComplete :

<https://youtu.be/2LtiHla1dNg>

Play:

Phone Story by Molleindustria :

<http://www.phonestory.org/>

Optional:

“Precarious playbour: Modders and the digital games industry” - Julian Kücklich

<https://five.fibrejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>

“The Everyday Lives of Video Game Developers: Experimentally Understanding Underlying Systems/Structures” - Casey O’Donnell

<https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/73/76>

Consider:

What is immaterial labor? How are game makers and players (im)material laborers?



November 16 - Professionalization

Read:

“Professionalizing Players” from *Raising the stakes: E-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming* - T.L. Taylor

“Why Competitive Gaming Is Starting to Look a Lot Like Professional Sports” – Andrew Webster

<https://www.theverge.com/2018/7/27/17616532/overwatch-league-of-legends-nba-nfl-esports>

Watch:

State of Play, directed by Steven Dhoedt (via Kanopy)



Figure 15 – State of Play

Optional:

“Smart Play: Social Stereotypes, Identity Building, and Counter Narratives of Gold Farmers in China.” From *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Justice*
– Zixue Tai & Fengbin Hu

“Gaming’s Gold Medalists: Twin Galaxies and the Rush to Competitive Gaming” from *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade* - Carly Kocurek

Consider: What is professionalization? How is game playing becoming professionalized?

November 23 - Fall Break

Play:

Whatever you want. Perhaps try something on itch.io?

Consider:

What games have made an impact in your own life? What draws you toward a new game or brings you back to an old favorite?



Figure 16 – An avatar from VRChat; Image by Fark0n via Archive.org

November 30 - Education

Read:

"*Minecraft* and the Building Blocks of Creative Individuality" from *The Digital Is Kid Stuff* – Josef Nguyen

"Indigenizing education with the game *When Rivers Were Trails*" - Elizabeth LaPensée & Nichlas Emmons

Play:

The Oregon Trail

by Don Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann, & Paul Dillenberger :

https://archive.org/details/msdos_Oregon_Trail_The_1990

When Rivers Were Trails

by Elizabeth LaPensée & The Indian Land Tenure Foundation :

<https://indianlandtenure.itch.io/when-rivers-were-trails>

Choice: Texas by Carly A Kocurek & Allyson Whipple:

http://playchoicetexas.com/?fbclid=IwAR04ggqUafZjgScLyJFOnRarELByQ_EDi6pQW9xgT3OQD4xWf7WH2oe7ug

Optional:

"Youth, Technology, and Media Cultures" – Julian Sefton-Green

The Uncensored Library by Reporters Without Borders :

<https://www.uncensoredlibrary.com/en>

Consider:

What are we learning when we play games? How are games always already educational? What are the politics of this education?

Figure 17 – The Oregon Trail



December 7 (No Class)

Read:

Your Research.

Play:

Your Game.

Consider:

Calling your classmates to help them or to work in the same room to remind one another of what you have learned.



Figure 18 – Lady Dimitrescu from Resident Evil 8: Village

December 14 – Finals Due (No Class)

The final paper may be submitted any time before 11:55 PM on December 14.

Remember: The Time Bank applies here, too. But any work after December 16 won't be accepted.