



Course ATCM 6336.001
Course Title Critical Game Studies
Professor Josef Nguyen
Term Fall 2017
Meetings Mondays, 4:00-6:45PM in ATC 2.101

Professor's Contact Information

Office Phone 972-883-7552
Office Location ATC 1.513
Email Address jdn160330@utdallas.edu
Office Hours Mondays and Wednesday, 2:00-3:00PM; and by appointment
Other Information Please allow up to 24 hours for responses to emails
Please do not leave voicemail messages on the office phone

General Course Information

Pre-requisites n/a

Course Description Focusing on classical texts as well as contemporary debates, this graduate seminar prepares students for advanced research work in the field of play and game studies. This course introduces students to a variety of theories, approaches, methods, and frameworks for the material, semiotic, and socioeconomic analysis of play and games. Interrogating definitions and devices, platforms and practices, the readings for this course include foundational works as well as recent scholarship concerned with play and games that are analog, digital, and anywhere in between. Readings for this course also include perspectives from other fields with insights to contribute to the critical investigation of play and games, including but not limited to anthropology, sociology, literary and media studies, gender and sexuality studies, performance studies, and science and technology studies.

Students will each choose a particular game title that they will refract through the various approaches presented throughout the course. In so doing, the course tasks students to explore how any given game is much more complex and contested than a hermetically sealed object or entity. Students will emulate and modify existing approaches for analyzing the many sociocultural and material facets of games and game cultures by bringing their primary phenomena of study into dialogue with existing scholarship.

Students will complete short writing assignments analyzing their chosen game title through several of the weekly thematics, complete an embedded play analysis, and compose an article-length research paper that intervenes in a contemporary debate in play and game studies.

Learning Outcomes Students will:

- Become familiar with both classical and contemporary debates in the field of play and game studies
- Investigate play and games as material, socioeconomic, and semiotic phenomena
- Develop proficiency in locating, reading, and synthesizing scholarly

materials from the field of play and game studies as well as other research areas

- Integrate existing scholarship into their own original research with awareness of the concerns of academic publishing

Required Texts & Materials Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, *Metagaming: Playing, Competing, Spectating, Cheating, Trading, Making, and Breaking Videogames* [ISBN: 978-0816687169]

All other assigned texts and materials will be available online through the learning management system.

Course Policies

Grading Criteria	4 Position papers (roughly 500 words each)	30%
	Embedded play analysis (roughly 1000 words)	10%
	Class participation and discussion	20%
	12-15 page research paper, with abstract (double spaced)	40%

Accommodation Students with disabilities are encouraged to utilize the on-campus resources at the Office of Student AccessAbility. You can contact the office at 972-883-6104 or by email: studentaccessability@utdallas.edu. Their office is located in the Student Service Building (SSB), suite 3.200. They can provide documentation and details for accommodations to address your individual needs. If you need any special accommodations to complete this course successfully, please provide me with this information as soon as possible, so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Classroom Citizenship It is our responsibility to work together to produce a classroom environment where everyone can share, discuss, and question the materials being discussed respectfully.

Disagreements and conflicting perspectives will unavoidably emerge. To ensure that participants feel comfortable voicing a diverse set of thoughts, comments, and views, we will not tolerate harassment, personal attacks, and other forms of actions and expressions that unduly distract from the educational mission at-hand and inflict emotional, physical, or psychological harm on those involved.

Part of the role of encouraging a diverse learning environment is acknowledging that individuals should feel safe and respected to contribute to the classroom. This involves not only allowing everyone opportunities to contribute their thoughts but to be mindful of how we recognize and address others. Do not assume things about others' identities, backgrounds, or experiences—whether that is age, race, gender, sexuality, class, etc... Refer to people by the names, pronouns, and other identifiers that they prefer. Avoid insisting on imposing identity markers onto others. Allow people to self-identify as they feel comfortable.

Please discuss with me any concerns you have regarding an unsafe or hostile classroom environment, particularly if something arises that causes distress.

Late Work Late work will be penalized 10% (a full letter grade) for each 24-hour period beyond the deadline. If you need an extension, let me know well in advance, so we can make arrangements.

Academic Honesty All work must be original for this class. Unless you are specifically told to collaborate with classmates, complete your graded work individually. Plagiarism is using the words and materials of others as if they were your own. It is a serious offense with

serious consequences. Use proper citation to indicate the use of other people's work to support and strengthen your own. All suspicions of plagiarism will be investigated.

For more information on academic honesty, please consult <http://www.utdallas.edu/dept/graddean/gspolDishonesty.htm>

Class Attendance Attend class regularly and in full. Any absences should include documentation of a valid excuse (family or medical emergency, for example). Unexcused absences may impact course grades. Discuss upcoming potential absences with me to make appropriate arrangements.

Arriving more than 30 minutes late or leaving more than 30 minutes early, without prior clearance, may be grounds for marking that day as an absence. Failure to prepare for class participation (such as not having done the necessary reading) will also be regarded as conditions for an absence.

Technology in the Classroom Laptops and computers can be used in the classroom solely for purposes directly pertinent to the activities and discussions at-hand. Do not use computers for other purposes, including but not limited to idle web-surfing, social media management, and completing work for other courses. The use of cell phones is prohibited during class time. I should not see them on your desk or in your hand at any point. Excessive misuse of technology in the classroom will result in an absence for the day.

Campus Carry For more on campus carry policy, see <http://www.utdallas.edu/campuscarry/>

Comet Creed *This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:*

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

UT Dallas 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.*

Assignments & Academic Calendar

Week 1: Monday, 21 August 2017

Theorizing Play

COURSE INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*

Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play” in *Man, Play, and Games*

Miguel Sicart, “Play Is” and “Playfulness” in *Play Matters*

Optional: Brian Sutton-Smith, “Play and Ambiguity” in *The Ambiguity of Play*

Week 2: Monday, 28 August 2017

Theorizing Games

Roger Caillois, “The Classification of Games” in *Man, Play, and Games*

Bernard Suits, “Construction of a Definition” in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*

Jane McGonigal, “What Exactly is a Game?” in *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*

Bonnie Ruberg, “No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt”
Optional: Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*

Week 3: Monday, 4 September 2017
Labor Day NO CLASS MEETING

Week 4: Monday, 11 September 2017
Form and Genre Jesper Juul, “Video Games and the Classical Game Model” in *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*
Mark J. P. Wolff, “Genre and the Video Game” in *The Medium of the Video Game* (edited by Mark J. P. Wolff)
Christopher Goetz, “Tether and Accretions: Fantasy as Form in Videogames”
Nadav Lipkin, “Examining Indie’s Independence: The Meaning of ‘Indie’ Games, the Politics of Production, and Mainstream Cooptation”
Optional: Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre”

Friday, 15 September 2017
Position paper 1, responding to Weeks 1-4, due by 5:00PM

Week 5: Monday, 18 September 2017
Interactivity and Narrative Brenda Laurel, “Dramatic Foundations: Part Two – Orchestrating Action” in *Computers as Theater*
Janet Murray, “Agency” and “Agency: 2016 Update” in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*
Espen Aarseth, “Ergodic Literature” in *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*
Gonzalo Frasca, “Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes from a Debate that Never Took Place”
Optional: Noah Wardrip-Fruin, “The Eliza Effect,” “The Tale-Spin Effect,” and “The Sim City Effect” in *Expressive Processing: Digital Fictions, Computer Games, and Software Studies*

Week 6: Monday, 25 September 2017
Values, Procedures, and Algorithms Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum, “Groundwork for Values in Games” and “Uncovering Values at Play” in *Values at Play in Digital Games*
Alexander Galloway, “Allegories of Control” in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*
Ian Bogost, “Videogames and Ideological Frames”
Miguel Sicart, “Against Procedurality”
[\[gamestudies.org/1103/articles/sicart_ap\]](http://gamestudies.org/1103/articles/sicart_ap)
Optional: Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”

Week 7: Monday, 2 October 2017
Platform Studies Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, “Pac-Man” in *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Game Computer System*

Matthew Kirschenbaum, “‘An Old House with Many Rooms’: The Textual History of Mystery_House.dsk” in *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*

Nathan Altice, “The Playing Card Platform”

[\[analoggamestudies.org/2014/11/the-playing-card-platform/\]](http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/11/the-playing-card-platform/)

Aaron Trammell and Emma Waldron, “Playing for Intimacy: Love, Lust, and Desire in the Pursuit of Embodied Design” in *Rated M for Mature: Sex and Sexuality in Video Games* (edited by Matthew Wysocki and Evan Lauteria)

Ryuto138, “(TAS) Brain Age ‘Art Academy’ in 6:33.51”

[\[youtube.com/watch?v=GOfcvPf-22k\]](https://youtube.com/watch?v=GOfcvPf-22k)

Optional: Miguel Sicart, “Toys” *Play Matters*

Friday, 6 October 2017

Position paper 2, responding to Weeks 5-7, due by 5:00PM

Week 8: Monday, 9 October 2017

Players, Audiences, and Fans

Bernard Suits, “Triflers, Cheats, and Spoilsports” in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*

Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce, “The Hegemony of Play”

Espen Aarseth, “I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player”

Mia Consalvo, “Gaining Advantage” in *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*

Optional: Cornel Sandvoss, “The Dominant Discourse of Resistance: Fandom and Power” in *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*

Week 9: Monday, 16 October 2017

Places and Performances

Carly A. Kocurek. “The Microcosmic Arcade: Playing at the Cultural Vanguard” in *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade*

Carlin Wing, “Hitting Walls (v. XXVIII): Captured Play”

T. L. Taylor, “Computer Games as Professional Sport” in *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*

James Newman, “Superplay, Sequence Breaking, and Speedrunning” in *Playing with Videogames*

Eric Grundhauser, “How to be Cool (According to a Video Game Magazine From 1982)” [\[atlasobscura.com/articles/how-to-be-cool-according-to-a-video-game-magazine-from-1982\]](http://atlasobscura.com/articles/how-to-be-cool-according-to-a-video-game-magazine-from-1982)

Optional: Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*

Week 10: Monday, 23 October 2017

Representation, Identification, and Inclusion

Michael Messner, “Playing Center: The Triad of Violence in Men’s Sports” in *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*

Edmond Chang, “*Cards against Humanity* Is ____: Playing Up and Playing Difference in Games”

[\[firstpersonscholar.com/cards-against-humanity-is/\]](http://firstpersonscholar.com/cards-against-humanity-is/)

Adrienne Shaw, “Does Anyone Really Identify with Lara Croft? Unpacking Identification in Games” in *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*

Evan Lauteria, “Assuring Quality: Early 1990s Nintendo Censorship and the Regulation of Queer Sexuality and Gender” in *Rated M for Mature: Sex and Sexuality in Video Games* (edited by Matthew Wysocki and Evan Lauteria)

Optional: Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, “Chess for Girls?: Feminism and Computer Games” in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (edited by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins)

Friday, 27 October 2017

Position paper 3, responding to Weeks 8-10, due by 5:00PM

Week 11: Monday, 30 October 2017
Educational Play

Mizuko Ito, “Academics” in *Engineering Play: A Cultural History of Children’s Software*

Constance Steinkuehler and Sean Duncan, “Scientific Habits of Mind in Virtual Worlds”

Patrick Jagoda, “Gamification and Other Forms of Play”

Josef Nguyen, “*Minecraft* and the Building Blocks of Creative Individuality”

Optional: Kurt Squire, “From Content to Context: Videogames and Designed Experience”

Week 12: Monday, 6 November 2016
The Military-Entertainment Complex

Patrick Crogan, “Introduction: From the Military-Industrial to the Military-Entertainment Complex” in *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture*

Ed Halter, “Introduction: America’s Army Goes to War” in *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Videogames*

Amanda Phillips, “Shooting to Kill: Headshots, Twitch Reflexes, and the Mechropolitics of Video Games”

Marisa Brandt, “Simulated War: Remediating Trauma Narratives in Military Psychotherapy”

Optional: Tim Lenoir, “All but War Is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex”

Week 13: Monday, 13 November 2017
Labor and Economics

Edward Castronova, “Free Commerce” in *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*

Julian Kücklich, “Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry”

[\[journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/kucklich_print.html\]](http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/kucklich_print.html)

Lisa Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in *World of Warcraft*”

Hector Postigo, “The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money”

Optional: Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labour" in *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*

**FALL BREAK Monday, 20 November 2017
NO CLASS MEETING**

Week 14: Monday, 27 November 2017
Gaming Ecologies Alenda Chang, "Games as Environmental Texts"
Steven Jones, "The Halo Universe" in *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies*
Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, "Exodus: The Metaverse and the Mines" in *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*
Colin Milburn, "Green Gaming: Video Games and Environmental Risk" in *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture* (eds. Sylvia Mayer and Alexa Weik von Mossner)
Molleindustria, *Phone Story*, [phonestory.org]
Optional: Jussi Parikka, "Dust and Exhaustion: The Labor of Media Materialism" [ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=726]

Friday, 1 December 2017
Position paper 4, responding to Weeks 11-14, due by 5:00PM

Week 15: Monday, 4 December 2017
Meta-Games Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, *Metagaming: Playing, Competing, Spectating, Cheating, Trading, Making, and Breaking Videogames* [entire text]

Friday, 8 December 2016
Embedded play analysis due by 5:00PM

Finals Week NO CLASS MEETING
Research papers due by 11:59PM on Thursday, 14 December 2017

This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.