COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the last decade or two, video games have ascended to the heights of our cultural pantheon. No longer considered simple pastimes, they are recognized as complex media whose stellar popularity challenges traditional notions of subjectivity, spectatorship, interactivity, identity and ideology. And yet, their ubiquity aside, video games have only recently aroused the interests of communications scholars. The purpose of this class, then, is both to provide a general introduction to the field of video game studies, and to suggest a host of divergent directions such research may take in the near future. From the phenomenology of thumbs to the ethical thickets of codes and cheats, the class will address the key questions facing game researchers today; true to the field’s inherent interdisciplinary nature, methodologies considered will vary from ethnography to semiotic analysis. Relevant examples will be provided throughout, and no pre-existing knowledge of gaming is necessary.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will identify the various theoretical approaches applicable to video game research, including the socio-economic, aesthetic, ethical, and phenomenological.
- Students will outline the developments in game theory and research since the field’s inception in the 1980s.
- Students will define the medium’s unique ontological characteristics, and their potential implications on players.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008)

Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)


Mark J.P. Wolf (ed.), *The Medium of the Video Game* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).

**Please note:** I’ll be posting additional links to online materials, journal articles etc. on the course’s Blackboard site as the semester progresses.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

**First Short Paper—Video Game Analysis**
Applying one of the theories we’ve discussed in class, analyze a video game of your choice, explaining how the particular theory you’ve selected helps explain the game, its design, and its reception. This paper should be between five and eight pages in length.

**Second Short Paper—Mock Supreme Court Opinion**
Much to your surprise, you received an email the other day. From the Supreme Court of the United States. The justices, the email said, were still a bit confused about Schwarzenegger v. Entertainment Merchants Association et al. Might you, they inquired, help clear things up? Citing at least two of the theories we discussed in class, compose a four-to-six page-long brief in support of one of the sides.

**Final Paper—Individual Research Project**
Each student must submit a 10-15-page-long research paper pertaining to a topic relevant to the material covered in class. I’ll discuss the final project, and provide additional guidelines, as the semester progresses. Each paper topic must be presented in a one-page research proposal and approved by me; further instructions, deadlines, etc. will be delivered during the semester.

**EVALUATION**

Each student will be graded according to the following breakdown:

- Participation 20%
- Short Papers 40% (20%x2)
- Final Paper 40%

**EVALUATION RUBRICS**

A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized.
Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
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. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B  = 84-86
B-  = 80-83
C+  = 77-79
C  = 74-76
C-  = 70-73
D+  = 65-69
D  = 60-64
F   = 0-59

COURSE POLICIES

Absences and Lateness
More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling exams. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.
**Format**
Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing. If sending a document electronically, please name the file in the following format Yourlastname Coursenumber Assignment1.doc

**Grade Appeals**
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

**General Decorum**
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as 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 citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you
- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.
Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:
• copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
• download documents from the Internet;
• purchase documents;
• report from other’s oral work;
• paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
• copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people’s ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

STUDENT RESOURCES

- Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to 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 to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

- Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction, or a short meditation on the state of play

Week 2: Time Crisis, or a brief history of video game research

Read:
• Charles Bernstein, “Play it again, Pac-Man,” in *Postmodern Culture* 2, no. 1.
• Mark J.P. Wolf, “The Video Game as a Medium,” in *The medium of the video game*.

**Week 3: The Rules of the Game, or the ludic approach to game studies**

Read:

• Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*
• Jesper Juul, “Introduction” and “Video Games and the Classic Game Model,” in *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*.

**Week 4: Under My Thumb, or the phenomenology of video games**

Read:

• Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The ‘Sensation’ as a Unit of Experience” and “The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motility,” in *Phenomenology of Perception*.
• Selections from David Sudnow, *Pilgrim in the MicroWorld: Eye, Mind, and the Essence of Video Games*.

**Week 5: The Mind’s I, or the epistemological problems of game design**

Read:

• Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*.

**Week 6: Play Money, or the economies of games and game worlds**

Read:


**Week 7: Do the Right Thing, or morality and ethics in game culture**
Read:

- Selections from Raph Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*.
- Mia Consalvo, “Capitalizing on Paratexts: Gameplay, Ethics, and Everyday Life,” in *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Video Games*.

### Week 8: Mortal Kombat, or war games and real armies

Read:


### Week 9: Punch-Out!, or questions of violence and pain in video games

Read:


### Week 10: The Shape of Things, or video game aesthetics and video games as art

Read:

- Jane McGonigal, “*All Game Play is Performance/Game Play is All Performance*,” keynote address for Playful: The State of the Art Game Conference, 2005.

### Week 11: All Together Now, or gender, race, and identity in video games

Read:

- Jo Bryce and Jason Rutter, “Killing Like a Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl

- Dmitri Williams, Nicole Martins, Mia Consalvo, and James D. Ivory, “The Virtual Census: Representations of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games,” in New Media and Society, Vol. 11, No. 5, August 2009.

**Week 12: Subject to Change, or Heidegger, video games, and the construction of subjectivity**

Read:

- Martin Heidegger, selections from Being and Time.

**Week 13: Space Invaders, or on time and space in virtual worlds**

Read:


**Week 14: Summary, Sagacity, Revelry**