

CAMS 272: The Ludic Imagination: Histories and Theories of Games and Play

Course Number: CAMS 272-01

Term: Spring 2015

Credit: 1, graded

Date & Time: TF 2:50-4:00PM

Location: JAC 372

Instructor: Nicholas Knouf (nknouf@wellesley.edu; <http://zeitkunst.org>); Pendleton West 313, x2105

Office Hours: TF 4-5PM

Course Description

Video games have become a major cultural force, with budgets for new titles rivaling those of feature films. Yet video games are oft maligned as time wasters or contributors to deviant behavior. This course takes a different stance, and shows that games are not simply frivolous activities, but rather are emblems of societal desires. Introducing the burgeoning field of "game studies", we will examine not only contemporary video games but also their connection to earlier forms of games and play. Topics will include the relationships between industry and indie games; forms of representation in video games; artistic uses of games for cultural critique; the connections between video games and other forms of screen-based media; and the ways in which new forms of play merge the physical and the digital worlds. Important to our investigation will be hands-on encounters with new and old games in order to highlight the connections between the theories we study and the embodied experience of play.

Course Goals

At the end of the course, students will be able to

- understand the relationship between contemporary video games and earlier forms of play;
- show how games comment on forms of societal organization;
- map out the political economy of video games, from large corporate firms to small independent studios;
- articulate how games are used for persuasion and propaganda;
- discern how games do and do not address issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity;
- express how artists use video games to question received understandings of the world.

Required Texts

- Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013)
- Texts available in Sakai
- Online resources

Course Requirements

- Completion of all required reading
- Participation during class discussion
- Weekly summaries of readings
- Three short papers on specific course topics
- One game produced in Twine (<http://twinery.org/>)
- Final paper/game that addresses the concepts discussed in class

Teaching philosophy

I am of the belief that theory and practice are fundamentally intertwined. As such, we will do a lot of “hands-on” learning in this course, alongside our discussion of theoretical texts. Additionally, I am less interested in the rehearsal of the minute details of the texts under study and rather want to encourage you to think expansively about how media theory informs media practice, and vice versa. Finally, I want the classroom to be a space where challenging critique and conversation can take place; please be respectful of the opinions and comments of other students in class, and I will do the same.

How to Succeed in this Class

At the bare minimum you must complete the requirements for the course as outlined above. Beyond this you must be willing to take some risks, to challenge yourself to go further in your analysis of the works or in the production of small projects. See the grading rubric for more information.

Assignments and Requirements

This class meets twice a week: on Tuesdays and Fridays from 2:50-4:00PM. I expect you to be present at all classes. We will have optional “play sessions” at occasional points in the semester. All assignments must be submitted on time.

Participation: (10%)

The importance of the works under discussion lies not in the works themselves, but rather in their inter-relationship with our discussions and other media that you and I encounter in our lives. Thus class participation is vital to the success of this course. Simply attending class will not be enough to earn full participation credit; instead, you must be an *active* participant, someone who comes prepared and engages with all aspects of the class.

Reading summaries (20%)

Each week each student will write a summary (maximum 300 words) of the readings under consideration. These summaries are due 8AM the day of class in order to provide the other students and I enough time to read them. This summary should include relevant references from the readings, connection to the various media artifacts we have discussed in the course, and points of confusion. Each student will post their summary publicly to the week's forum on Sakai. These summaries will not be graded, per se, but rather will be marked as “check-minus” (insufficient attention to these guidelines), “check” (sufficient attention to these guidelines), and “check-plus” (outstanding commentary). Please think of these summaries as primarily for the benefit of you and the other students in the class; they enable you to pull out the threads that are most relevant for your own interests, as well as highlighting those aspects of the readings that are causing you difficulty. I am additionally interested in references to other games or media that the readings suggest to you.

Short papers (20%)

You will write three short (3–5 pages) papers on the following topics:

- A play object from your childhood, making reference to course readings and discussion, due February 20th
- A review of an independent or artistic game, also making reference to course readings and discussion, due March 13
- A report on a *dérive* around Wellesley, due May 1

More information about these assignments will come as the due dates become closer.

Twine game (20%)

Given that this is a course on games, I want to give you the opportunity to create your own. While modern, AAA video games require millions of dollars and months of work by teams of tens or hundreds, there are ways to create incredibly engaging games with few resources. One of the most recent environments for doing so is called Twine (<http://twinery.org/>), used for creating text-based games. Twine has become quite popular in the feminist and LGBTQ gaming communities; we will be exploring a few of these games in class. For this assignment, I would like you to create your own Twine game. The exact parameters will be determined later in the semester, but I would like you to think about some game ideas starting from the beginning of the course. This game will be due on April 24.

Final paper/project (30%)

You have two choices for your final paper/project. Given that this is a games course, I want to give you the opportunity to, well, write a game. My suggestion is that you use Twine; perhaps you want to expand upon the game you created for the earlier assignment. Or, if you prefer, you can write a game in any other environment you're comfortable with (Flash, Unity, etc.). In any event, the game should be of equivalent complexity and sophistication as a 10–15 page seminar-style paper. I should also be able to discern references, in some form, to texts and or discussions we have had in class. If you want to work with another student in the class, that is acceptable; we will work together to define an appropriate scope, as I will expect more from a group project than if you were making a game alone.

But perhaps you'd like to write a paper, instead. In that case, you will choose a topic related to the course and write a well-researched and referenced 15–20 page seminar-style paper. The paper should make reasonable reference to both texts from the course as well as outside research.

In both cases (game/paper) you will write a proposal (due April 3) that I will review and discuss with you. You will present on your paper/game's progress during the final two days of the course. The final paper/project will be due to me by May 19th.

We will be discussing the final project extensively in class so please be sure to ask questions if you have them.

Summary of Due Dates

- **8AM Tuesdays:** Reading summary
- **February 20:** First short paper
- **March 13:** Second short paper
- **April 16:** Final paper/project proposal
- **April 24:** Twine game due
- **May 1:** Third short paper
- **May 5 and 8:** Final presentations and outline of paper/project due
- **May 19:** Final paper/project

Grading

Grading rationale

A grade of "A" is given to students who meet with conspicuous excellence every demand which can fairly be made by the course.

A grade of "B" is given to those students who add to the minimum of satisfactory attainment excellence in not all, but some of the following: organization, accuracy, originality, understanding, insight.

A grade of "C" is given to those students who have attained a satisfactory familiarity with the content of a course and who have demonstrated ability to use this knowledge in a satisfactory manner.

A grade of "D" is a passing grade. There is no grade of D+ or D-.

This course complies with the Wellesley College policy (<http://www.wellesley.edu/registrar/grading/gradingpolicyfaq>). While that policy asks faculty to hold each 100- and 200-level course with 10 or more students to an average of no higher than 3.33, it does not require faculty to grade on a "curve." There is no arbitrary limit on the number of A's, B's, C's etc., and every student will be assigned the grade she earns and deserves according to the grading standards of the college.

Grading is non-competitive: helping your classmates will never harm your grade.

Grading breakdown

A = 4.0 = 92.5%+

A- =	3.67 =	89.5%-92.4%
B+ =	3.33 =	86.5%-89.4%
B =	3.00 =	82.5%-86.4%
B- =	2.67 =	79.5%-82.4%
C+ =	2.33 =	76.5%-79.4%
C =	2.0 =	72.5%-76.4%
C- =	1.67 =	69.5%-72.4%
D =	1.0 =	59.5%-69.4%
F =	0.0 =	<59.5%

Administrivia

Absence & Late policy

Absences are allowed in three circumstances: personal illness, family crisis, or college-sanctioned activity. In all three cases I ask to be informed as soon as possible in advance so that we can make proper arrangements for completing the missed work—knowing that in true crisis situations advance notice may not be possible. Excused absences are the only cases in which work can be turned in late without penalty. In all other cases, late work will result in a 10% decrease in your grade for each day it is late, and will be accepted up to one week after the due date. *Please do not turn in work late:* it is highly detrimental to your overall performance, makes it very easy to fall behind, is disruptive to the other students who completed the assignments on time, and adds an additional burden on me in terms of finding time to grade your assignment at a later date. It is oftentimes in your best interest to turn in on time a less-than-perfect assignment rather than a slightly-closer-to-perfect late one.

Cold Calling

If I see that you are not participating much in class, I may decide to cold call on you. It thus is important to be prepared to speak at every class session, and to participate regularly. This will produce a class environment that fosters your own learning, as well as that of your fellow students. Your opinions and comments matter.

E-mail

Any questions of a non-personal nature regarding course content, assignments, etc., should be posted to the “General Discussion” Sakai forum, as it is likely other students in the course either have a similar question or can provide you with an answer! Personal questions can be discussed over e-mail, during office hours, or by appointment. I will try to respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. I generally reply to e-mails during business hours during the week, and rarely reply to e-mails on the weekends. Please send e-mail from your Wellesley account to ensure that it does not inadvertently end up in my spam folder.

One final note regarding e-mail: please use proper salutations and grammar in writing your e-mail. (This also goes for forum posts on Sakai.) It might seem like a minor point, but it goes a long way towards producing the environment that is conducive to our joint learning!

Feedback and Comments

I will provide varying levels of feedback on your assignments during the semester. For shorter assignments, this may come in the form of a few short phrases or words. For longer assignments I will provide more extensive comments, not only on content but also on form and mechanics. This feedback might appear at times to be rather direct; know, however, that whenever I provide feedback it is in the service of making you a better writer, a better thinker, a better maker. I am of course more than willing to discuss my feedback with you in person.

Grading concerns

Please take at least 24 hours to review my comments before contacting me regarding any grading concerns. I prefer to do this during office hours or a scheduled appointment, and not before or after class.

Honor code

I want to remind you of the honor code: "As a Wellesley College student, I will act with honesty, integrity, and respect. In making this commitment, I am accountable to the community and dedicate myself to a life of honor." I expect that you will act accordingly, and you can expect I will do the same.

The College and I take plagiarism seriously. Please be sure to reference any materials you quote or paraphrase, no matter the medium. Let me know if you have any questions regarding this issue.

Pronouns

If you have a preference as to which pronoun you would like me to use with you, please let me know.

Paper formatting and guidelines

Please turn in papers and summaries with proper grammar and spelling. If either detract from my ability to understand your argument, I reserve the right to decrease your grade accordingly.

Papers should be turned in electronically to Sakai, doubled-spaced using a standard serif font (Cambria, Garamond, Georgia, Palatino, Times New Roman, etc.) at a size of 12pt with 1in margins. Please do not try to increase your page count through creative combinations of font, font size, and margins: I've seen it all, I've even tried it myself (and have often failed), and your time would be better spent working on the substance of your paper.

Please be consistent in your choice of citation format; I do not care if you use Chicago, MLA, or APA. As with spelling and grammar, if your citations detract from my ability to understand your paper, I reserve the right to decrease your grade accordingly.

Social Media

It is my policy to not add students as friends on Facebook until they have graduated. I do have a public Twitter handle (@zeitkunst) and if Twitter is your thing and if you are interested, feel free to follow me there (although of course there is no obligation to do so). I have a public website at <http://zeitkunst.org>.

Students with disabilities

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please contact Jim Wice, Director of Disability Services, in Clapp Library 314 to arrange these accommodations. See <http://www.wellesley.edu/disability> for more information.

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, but any changes will be announced in advance in class and posted to the Sakai site for the course.

Week 1: Introductions and the “Magic Circle”

January 27

No class, snow day!

January 30

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), “Introduction to Critical Play”, 1–15.

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), “Media Microecology”, 1–8.

Week 2: Typologies and the Impossibility of Typologies

February 3

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Beacon Press, 1955), “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon”, 1-27

Mia Consalvo, “There is No Magic Circle,” *Games and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2009): 408–417.

February 6

Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Free Press, 2001 [1958]), “The Definition of Play”, “The Classification of Games”, “The Social Functions of Games”, “The Corruption of Games”, “Toward a Sociology Derived from Games”, 1–67.

One of the following:

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009 [1953]), §1–20, §66–88.

Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1978 [1966]), 278–293.

Week 3: Dolls, Puppets, and Avatars

February 10

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), “Playing House”, 17–62.

Recommended:

Hans Bellmer, *The Doll* (London, UK: Atlas Press, 2005).

Jill Fell, “Sophie Täuber: The Masked Dada Dancer,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* XXXV, no. 3 (1999): 270–285.

Juliet Koss, “Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (2003): 724–745, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177367>.

Thomas F. Rugh, “Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1357892>.

February 13

Simon Penny, “Traces,” n.d. Accessed January 25, 2015, <http://simonpenny.net/works/traces.html>.

Simon Penny, “Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation,” in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2004), 73–84, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/machanimate>.

Micha Cárdenas, “Becoming Dragon: A Transversal Technology Study,” *CTheory*, April 29, 2010, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=639>.

James Ball, “Xbox Live among game services targeted by US and UK spy agencies: NSA and GCHQ collect gamers’ chats and deploy real-life agents into World of Warcraft and Second Life,” December 9, 2013, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/09/nsa-spies-online-games-world-warcraft-second-life>.

Anonymous, *(S//SI) Topic: Exploiting Terrorist Use of Games & Virtual Environments*, January 8, 2007, accessed January 25, 2015, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/889129/nsa-games-paper.pdf>.

Recommended

S. Penny, J. Smith, P. Sengers, A. Bernhardt, and J. Schulte, *Traces: Embodied immersive interaction with semi-autonomous avatars*, 2001, <http://citeseer.ist.psu.edu/penny00traces.html>.

Week 4: #Gamergate, or why games are not just for white teenage boys

February 17

Liz Ryerson, “On Right-Wing Videogame Extremism,” August 22, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://ellaguro.blogspot.com/2014/08/on-right-wing-videogame-extremism.html>.

Leight Alexander, “‘Gamers’ don’t have to be your audience. ‘Gamers’ are over.,” August 28, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/224400/Gamers_dont_have_to_be_your_audience_Gamers_are_over.php.

feministfrequency, “Women as Background Decoration: Part 2 - Tropes vs Women in Video Games,” August 25, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i_RPr9DwMA.

Recommended:

The New Inquiry, “TNI Syllabus: Gaming and Feminism,” September 2, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/tni-syllabus-gaming-and-feminism/>.

February 20

Mia Consalvo, “Crunched by Passion: Women Game Developers and Workplace Challenges,” in *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*, ed. Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2008), 177–191.

D. Fox Harrell, *Phantasmal Media: An Approach to Imagination, Computation, and Expression* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2013), “Cultural Phantasms”, 171–205; “Integrative Cultural Systems”, 207–253.

Week 5: Board Games

February 24

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), “Board Games”, 63–116.

February 27

Special Event: Visit to the Wellesley Special Collections to look at the games below. Guest lecture by Ruth Rodgers.

John Wallis, *The new game of human life*, London, 1790.

John Wallis, *Historical cards exhibiting the history of England*, London, 1818.

Takako Saito, *Buchschachspiel No. 1*, 1999.

Week 6: Language Games

March 3

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), “Language Games”, 117–148.

March 6

Alastair Brotchie, *A Book of Surrealist Games* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 17–45.

Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instruction and Drawings* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998 [1964]), selections.

Claudia Mesch, “Serious Play: Games and Early Twentieth-Century Modernism,” in *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play, and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. David J. Getsy (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 60–72.

Special Event: Visit to the Davis Museum to see selections from *Edged in Black: Selections from SMS*; guest lecture by Mike Maizels.

Edged in Black: Selections from SMS, Exhibition on view from October 1, 2014 to Spring 2015, Davis Museum, Wellesley College.

Week 7: Interactive Fiction and Twine Games**March 10**

Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), “The Pleasure of the Text Adventure”, 1–35

Phoebe Sengers, “Schizophrenia and Narrative in Artificial Agents,” in Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, 95–116.

March 13

Anna Anthropy, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Dropouts, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back an Art Form* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), “The New Videogame”, 93–115.

Grace Converse, “Hypertext and Destiny: This Twine Could be Your Life,” August 20, 2014, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/aug/20/twine-could-be-your-life/>.

Jane Friedhoff, “Untangling Twine: A Platform Study,” in *Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference: DeFragging Game Studies* (2014), <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/untangling-twine-a-platform-study/>.

Week 8: Performative Games**March 17**

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), “Performative Games and Objects”, 149–187.

March 20

No class; spring break!

Week 9: The Industry and Immaterial Labor**March 31**

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–147

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), "Immaterial Labor: A Workers' History of Videogaming", 3–33.

April 3

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), "Cognitive Capitalism: Electronic Arts", 35–68.

Lisa Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 2 (2009): 128–144.

Week 10: Critical Computer Games**April 7**

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), "Critical Computer Games", 223–249.

Special Event: Guest lecture by Claudia Pederson on critical games from Latin America

April 10

Gonzalo Frasca, "Videogames of the Oppressed," in Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, 85–94.

Recommended:

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2003 [1970]).

Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Theatre Communications Group, 1993).

Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 2nd (London, UK: Routledge, 2002).

Week 11: Wargames

April 14

James Der Derian, "Cyberspace as Battlespace: The New Virtual Alliance of the Military, the Media and the Entertainment Industry," in *Living with Cyberspace: Technology & Society in the 21st Century*, ed. John Armitage and Joanne Roberts (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 61–71.

Marcus Power, "Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence," *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007): 271–288.

April 17

Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, "Simulating the Unthinkable: Gaming Future War in the 1950s and 1960s," *Social Studies of Science* 30, no. 2 (2000): 163–223.

Igor S. Mayer, "The Gaming of Policy and the Politics of Gaming: A Review," *Simulation & Gaming* 40, no. 6 (2009): 825–862.

Felicity D. Scott, "Fluid Geographies: Politics and the Revolution by Design," in *New Views on R. Buckminster Fuller*, ed. Hsiao-yun Chu and Roberto G. Trujillo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 160–175.

Week 12: Play and Music

April 21

No class; Monday schedule.

April 24

John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), "Experimental Music", 7–12.

Karen Collins, *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interactive with Sound and Music in Video Games* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2013), "Sound at the Borders: Enacting Game Sound", 59–88; "Embodying Game Sound in Performance: The Real and the Virtual", 89–120.

Week 13: Locative Games

April 28

Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), "Artists' Locative Games", 189–222.

May 1

Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," 1955, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>.

Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," 1958, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>.

Guy Debord, "Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play," June 1958, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/play.html>.

Constant, "The Great Game to Come," July 15, 1957, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/greatgame.html>.

Anne-Marie Schleiner, "Dissolving the Magic Circle of Play: Lessons from Situationist Gaming," in Getsy, *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play, and Twentieth-Century Art*, 150–156.

Week 14: Presentations**May 5**

Final presentations.

May 8

Final presentations and thoughts.