



GAME STUDIES

SMST319

Dr Gareth Schott



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TIMETABLE:

Session	Day	Time	Location
LECTURE	MONDAY	4pm - 6pm	I.1.01
LAB 1*	TUESDAY	10am - 12pm	KB.01
LAB 2*	WEDNESDAY	3pm - 5pm	KB.01
LAB 3*	MONDAY	2pm - 4pm	KB.01
WORKSHOPS†	WEDNESDAY	11am - 1pm	A.G.30

* Labs begin on the second week of Semester B
 † See timetable for detail and schedule of workshop sessions

INTRODUCTION

For some, the mention of game titles such as *Pong*, *Space Invaders*, *Pac Man*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Super Mario* and many more, evoke a sense of nostalgia tied to the **sound** of the theme tune, the **look** of fonts or graphics and the **sensations** of playing, as players pounded buttons to stay alive and gain extra time and mileage from their coins on coin-operated arcade machines. Videogames are popularly perceived as an entertainment media that is shallow yet also harmful, dangerously addictive and time-consuming to the point that it 'triggers' the demise of social skills and brings about obesity, deviant and immoral behaviour. This paper asks if there is anything beyond the perception of videogames as a training simulation for mindless violence and out-dated attitudes to females? Indeed, is it possible to spend a whole semester celebrating the innovation of videogame technology, its aesthetics and the way in which it tells its stories? We will see ...



AIMS

The paper aims to provide an introduction to videogames from both a critical and creative perspective. It aims to:

- Provide a broad account of the wide variety of forms that digital games now take
- Actively consider how digital games draw upon and influence other representational media
- Introduce contemporary conceptual and analytic frameworks developed to discuss and understand games as objects of study
- Begin to think about utilising games and game design as a form of creative expression
- Learn how to operate a variety of vehicles, weapons and magic spells, avoid and 'cheat' death and meet, socialise and adapt to the social rituals of cyborgs and other creatures!

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the paper, your attendance at lectures plus your guided and independent study should give you:

- A sufficient knowledge of the academic frameworks being developed at the beginning of the history of 'game studies'
- Clearer understanding of the relationships between games and other visual cultures and how games might be applied in other media contexts
- Further understanding of the benefits, pleasures and motivation attached to engagement with game texts
- Insights into the skills required to develop a small interactive game and/or large scale social game

RESOURCES

A selection of **readings** has been assembled for this paper in order to get you started with the assignments. All the readings are available **electronically** and have been placed **online** at the Department's web-site. This paper does recommend one key text that is available from Bennett's Bookshop on campus (Carr, D., Buckingham, D., Burn, A. & Schott, G. (2006) *Computer Games*, London: Polity Press). To **pass** this paper, all **assignments** require evidence that you have engaged with relevant and appropriate literature. That is, all ideas and viewpoints that you develop during this paper and go on to express within the context of your assignment work should be presented in terms of its relationship to existing viewpoints and perspectives within game studies and game cultures.

In addition to the selected readings make *use* the **library** and web to find interesting and valid evidence, examples and support for your



arguments. It is vital for you to demonstrate evidence of **independent study** (going beyond the lecture content) in order to secure the higher grades in assessments. A number of interesting books have been purchased specifically for this paper, so please make use of them.

As you will find in the section on 'assessments for the paper' you will be required to engage with game-texts (**play games**) and report your findings. In order to do this we have purchased a comparatively small range of games on Xbox and Playstation 2. These games are held at the library and are restricted to students enrolled on this paper. If you do not have a games console the library has both an Xbox and Playstation 2 and a space for you to play on-site in the library. There are also games held at the department for your use as well as space and consoles for you to play them on.

ASSESSMENTS

This paper is assessed internally. These are divided into parts and are described in detail below:

Part 1 – ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING THE ACT OF PLAYING

Assessment Deadline	4:00pm, Thursday, 17 August
Percentage of the Paper	35%

Would you take a paper in Film Studies or Literature and never expect to watch a film or read a book? Likewise with videogames, how are we expected to understand these as 'texts' unless we engage with them? What makes games difficult to study is that you cannot (in theory) fast forward to the end or open the book to the last page. In addition to this, games are experienced differently depending on the style of play, strategy, level of risk-taking and exploration employed by individual players. In order to experience the full breadth of a game, YOU need to initiate the text by acting on it, in order to progress in digital space, reveal new levels, characters, environments, dilemmas etc. In order to give you an idea of the size and scope of today's games (if you haven't experienced them before), this paper asks you to select a game and play it for the duration of the paper (games are available from the library and the Department of Screen & Media Studies). Ideally, you are asked to select something from a genre that can be played over the course of the paper. If you do play games ordinarily, select something you don't know too well or wouldn't ordinarily play.

This assignment will take the form of a **1,500 - 2,000 word essay** in which you will complete an analysis (or reading) of your chosen game focusing on **two** areas of the game-playing experience. It is intended that you will utilise your game-playing experience as:

- 1) A case example to illustrate your arguments and points concerning how games operate



- 2) A point of comparison against what is being said within game studies literature.

The five areas of game-experience from which you are expected to select two to focus on are:

- **Games Narrative**

EXAMPLE READINGS:

Schut, K. (2003) Technology Tells a Tale: Digital games as narrative, in M. Copier & J. Raessens, *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference*, Utrecht: University of Utrecht Press.

Frasca, G. (2003) Ludologists Love Stories Too: Notes from the debate that never took place, in M. Copier & J. Raessens, *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference*, Utrecht: University of Utrecht Press.

Konzack, L. (2002) Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis, *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*.

- **Exploring Gamescapes**

EXAMPLE READING: King, G. & Krzywinska, T. (2003) Gamescapes: Exploration and virtual presence in game worlds, in M. Copier & J. Raessens, *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference*, Utrecht: University of Utrecht Press.

- **Character or avatar? Being/watching the hero**

EXAMPLE READINGS:

Lankoski, P. (2005) Building and Reconstructing Character. A Case Study of Silent Hill 3, *Changing Views: Worlds in play, Digital Game Research Conference Proceedings DVD*.

Løvlie, A.S. (2005) End of story? Quest, narrative and enactment in computer games, *Changing Views: Worlds in play, Digital Game Research Conference Proceedings DVD*.

- **Sense of Control and Agency**

EXAMPLE READINGS:

Klastrup, L. (2002) Interaction Forms, Agents and Tellable Events in EverQuest, *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*.

Roudavski, S. & Penz, F. (2003) Space, Agency, Meaning and Drama in Navigable Real-time Virtual Environments, in M. Copier & J. Raessens, *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference*, Utrecht: University of Utrecht Press.



Schott, G. (2005) Agency in and Around Play, in Carr, D., Buckingham, D., Burn, A. & Schott, G. *Computer Games: Narrative, text and play*, London: Polity Press.

- **Cheats, walkthrough & game-tips**

EXAMPLE READING: Consalvo, M. (2005) Gaining Advantage: How videogame players define and negotiate cheating, *Changing Views: Worlds in play*, Digital Game Research Conference Proceedings DVD.

You will be expected to use literature to frame and guide your readings of your selected game. The above references are to get you started, it is expected that your essay will contain other references that you have found yourself (in order to achieve a high grade). There are plenty of resources available, for example, all papers presented at Digital Game Research Association (DiGRA) conferences are available online at www.digra.org under 'digital library'.

Part 2 – PERVASIVE GAME DESIGN

Assessment Date	4:00pm, Thursday, 19 October
Percentage of the Paper	30%

For this assignment you will be asked to work in groups (maximum 5 members) to construct a game concept for a real-world game that is structured and mediated through the use of mobile technology called 'pervasive gaming'. For this assignment you are asked to consider how Hamilton city centre can be turned into a game space.

Here are some references to spark your enthusiasm:

- Savage, S. 'Invitation to First San Francisco Flash Mob.'
<http://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/000293.html>
- The Go Game. 'Jave One Urban Challenge'
http://www.thegogame.com/team/offering/javaone_index.asp
- 'Flash Mob Supercomputing,' <http://www.flashmobcomputing.org/>
- 'Flash Mobs of Beekeepers,' Alternate Reality Gaming Network.
http://www.argn.com/archive/this_week_in_args_flash_mobs_of_beekeepers.html

You will be required to write out a report to accompany your design. This will include:

- A synopsis of the proposed game concept
- How it intends incorporate or utilise Hamilton landmarks and people
- How people will be recruited to play the game and organised during the game



- What mobile technologies will be required and how will they be used

Grades for this assignment will be assigned from a combination of individual and group assessment. The different sections of the report can be divided up and assigned to individuals for individual assessment (15%), whilst the overall cohesiveness of the report and presentation will constitute the group grade (15%).

READING:

Olli, S. (2002) All The World's A Botfighter Stage: Notes on Location-based Multi-User Gaming, *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*.

Part 3 – CREATIVE PRACTICE

Assessment Deadline	4:00pm, Thursday, 19 October
Percentage of the Paper	35%

For this final assignment you may work individually or in groups (a different group from the second assignment) in order to produce a piece of creative practice that incorporates what you have learnt about the definition of games and game play. This assignment will be supported by your lab sessions with Sean Castle.

For this assignment you may complete any of the following:

- machinima film
- gamic
- game modification (check your idea with Gareth or Sean first before completing this kind of project)



DATE	LECTURE TOPICS	WORKSHOPS
WEEK 1 10/7/06	Introduction: What are videogames and why study them?	
WEEK 2 17/7/06	Space and Place: Navigation and spatial typologies (Dr Bevin Yeatman)	Play Session: Gamescapes
WEEK 3 24/7/06	Massively Multiplayer: Introducing online world practices (Mr Sean Castle)	Play Session: Gamescapes cont.
WEEK 4 31/7/06	Modding (Mr Bill Rogers)	Play Session: Narrative
WEEK 5 7/8/06	Game Analysis: Sound in First Person Shooters (Mr Mark Grimshaw & Dr Bevin Yeatman)	Play Session: Narrative cont.
WEEK 6 14/8/06	Application of Game Technologies (Dr Robert Isler)	
WEEK 7 21/8/06	Teaching Recess	
WEEK 8 28/8/06	Teaching Recess	
WEEK 9 4/9/06	Breaking the 'magic circle': Pervasive gaming	Pervasive Projects
WEEK 10 11/9/06	Machinima: Documenting & archiving game culture	
WEEK 11 18/9/06	Gamers: Who is playing?	Pervasive Projects
WEEK 12 25/9/06	Screen-play: The relationship between games and film	
WEEK 13 2/10/06	Alternative Games: Politics & art.	
WEEK 14 9/10/06	Adult Oriented Themes (i.e. Sex) in games	
WEEK 17 16/11/06	Study Week Commences	

