INTERACTIVE DIGITAL NARRATIVES
FMS 321 (FALL 2016)

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Time: MWF 10:30-11:20am
Location: Chambers 1062
Office Hours: TR 10-11am and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In FMS 321 we will study the cultural significance of videogames from a number of critical perspectives. As products of a complicated network of social, economic, and technological forces, videogames are dense objects, deeply layered with multiple meanings and hidden histories. Whether we consider early arcade games like Pac-Man or the latest blockbusters like No Man’s Sky, we find that videogames reveal much about our cultural values, hopes and anxieties, and assumptions about the world. We will examine a range of games this semester as we strive to understand both their narrative and formal aspects. At the same time we will map connections between videogames and their broader social contexts—how games are designed and manufactured, who plays them and where, and in what ways videogames can be more than entertainment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of FMS 321, students will be able to:

- **Reconstruct** the history videogames from a global perspective
- **Connect** videogames to other forms of contemporary entertainment
- **Write** about the formal and narrative properties of contemporary videogames
- **Analyze** videogames through close playing and procedural literacy
- **Evaluate** recent controversies surrounding race, class, sex, and gender in videogames

READING

There are three required books for FMS 321:
• Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)

In addition, there will be various journal articles, book chapters, and online material to read throughout the semester. I strongly urge you either to print out the material or to use a PDF application to take notes on the digital version of the material. You are required to bring the day’s reading to class with you.

**PLAYING**

In order to critically study videogames it is necessary to play them. We will engage with games in class, and many Fridays will serve as a “game lab.” Much like a lab in the sciences, these sessions will involve experimentation and a resulting lab report.

You will also be responsible for playing games outside of class. There is a videogame station in the Connolly Media Lab, located in the south basement of Chambers. This station includes a PS4, an Xbox One, and several other consoles. The lab has a number of games as well. We will make extensive use of this videogame station throughout the semester.

You are required to purchase (or otherwise find a way to play) one game: *Portal* (available for $9.99 on Macs and PCs through Steam).

Be forewarned that several games we play contain content that may offend or disturb you, including graphic violence, explicit language, and sexual references. If you anticipate that such material may prevent you from completing the required work, I recommend that you reconsider your enrollment in FMS 321.

**WORKING**

The graded work for FMS 321 will take several forms:

(1) This class places a high premium on engagement. It is essential that everyone has carefully considered the day’s material, attends class, and participates. I also expect students to bring the day’s readings to class, well-marked up with notes and annotations. Part of your engagement grade will come from short in-class writing assignments and quizzes.

Because much of what we learn this semester will come from each other, more than three absences will lower your engagement grade by at least 10 percent. More than four absences will reduce your engagement grade by 50 percent. Engagement is worth 20% of the final grade.

(2) Throughout the semester you will keep a game log, where you record your ideas, analyses, and experiences playing video games. Like a blog, this game log will be public and you should anticipate a wider audience than just our class.

Your first game log entry will be on *Portal*. Then you will devote your game log to 3 different games, each of which you will devote 3 sessions of at least 30 minutes each playing. One of the
games will be a console game. Another of the games will be a casual game. The third game will be your choice. This adds up to 9 posts: 3 posts X 3 games. You’ll have an 11th post that synthesizes your game log. You’ll keep your game log on a blog that you set up through Davidson Domains. I’ll aggregate each student’s posts on a central blog for the class. The game log is worth 20% of the final grade.

(3) One of the books we’re reading this semester is Ian Bogost’s *How to Do Things with Videogames*, in which each chapter briefly explains one action or sentiment that videogames can foster. Bogost comes up with twenty “things” videogames can do, but surely there are more. For this project you will write a missing chapter of approximately 2,000 words, following the form and style of Bogost’s book, but venturing a single new “thing” to do with videogames. You can work individually on the book chapter or in pairs. The chapter is due on Wednesday, October 12. The book chapter is worth 20% of the final grade.

(4) The lab reports are short reports that apply the game studies research we’re reading about to games. You’ll work in groups of 3 for the labs, though each student will submit their own individual report. The lab reports are worth 15% of your final grade.

(5) The final project is your choice of either a 7-8 page research-based analytical paper or a modest game that you design yourself, using tools we encounter in class. The exact content and design of such a game is up to you, though it should be a self-aware game that incorporates, reflects upon, and even challenges the principles we’ve discussed throughout the semester. The final project is due Wednesday, December 7. The final project is worth 25% of your final grade.

**GRADING**

I’ll evaluate individual entries on your game log according to this rubric:

3 – Exceptional. The entry is readable, with clearly expressed ideas. It’s thought-provoking, going beyond what we talked about in class or what you’ve discussed in previous entries. It’s connective, making connections to material from this class, other classes, other games or texts, or historical or contemporary events and culture. Finally, it’s progressive, in the sense that it moves your thinking about this game—or other games—forward.

2 – Good. The entry is readable but lacks full development of new ideas. Instead of thought-provoking, it’s predictable. Fewer connections are made between the game and other material or phenomena.

1 – Insufficient. The entry retreads previous posts or discussions without adding anything new. It’s mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives.

0 – No Credit. The entry is missing or late.

When it comes to assigning final grades, I convert between letter grades and percentages using this formula:

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\begin{align*}
A &= 95\% / A- = 90\% \\
B+ &= 88\% / B = 85\% / B- = 80\%
\end{align*}
\]
INCLUSIVE LEARNING

I am committed to the principle of inclusive learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices, and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen and observe others carefully are crucial to inclusive learning.

Any student with particular needs should contact Nance Longworth (x2129), the Academic Access and Disability Resources Coordinator, at the start of the semester. The Dean of Students’ office will forward any necessary information to me. Then you and I can work out the details of any accommodations needed for this course.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at Davidson College abide by an Honor Code. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.

Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

CLASSROOM COURTESY

While this course embraces the digital world it also recognizes that digital tools and environments complicate personal interactions. Studies have shown that students who use laptops in class often receive lower grades than those who don’t. Even more worrisome are studies that show laptop users distract students around them. I permit laptops and tablets in class, but only when used for classroom activities, such as note-taking or class readings. Occasionally I may ask students to turn off all digital devices.

Text messaging or other cell phone use is unacceptable. Any student whose phone rings during class or who texts in class will be responsible for kicking off the next class day’s discussion.

Late arrivals or early departures from class are disruptive and should be avoided.
FMS 321 CALENDAR

This calendar shows only the major signposts of the semester. The full, up-to-date version of the calendar is at http://courses.digitaldavidson.net/fms321.

FUN, PLAY, AND GAMES

Monday, August 22 (Week 1)

- Introductions
- What is fun? What is play? What are games? What are videogames?

Wednesday, August 24

- Roger Caillois, selections from Man, Play, and Games
- Download, install, and begin playing Portal (Available on Steam for $9.99 for Macs and PCs)

Friday, August 26

- Game lab, viewing Portal through the lens of Caillois
- Introduction to Davidson Domains and game logs

Monday, August 29 (Week 2)

- Game lab 1 due

Wednesday, August 31

- Espen Aarseth, "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation," from First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan
- Introduction to the game logs
- In class: Tetric Pit (also known as Calabouço Tétrico)

Friday, September 2

- Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture"
- Game lab, on the narrative architecture of Portal

HISTORY AND FORM

Monday, September 5 (Week 3)

- Game lab 2 due
Wednesday, September 7

- Watch Rise of the Video Game: Level 1 (from 3:17 to about 20:00)
- Game log entry on Portal due

Friday, September 9

- Watch Rise of the Video Game: Level 2 (from 5:11 to about 18:00)
- Game Lab #3, thinking through Atari and Nintendo

Monday, September 12 (Week 4)

- Karen Collins, "Gameplay, Genre, and the Functions of Game Audio" from Game Sound, pp. 123-137
- Game lab 3 due

Wednesday, September 14

- Alexander Galloway, "Gamic Action, Four Moments," from Gaming, pp. 1-38

Friday, September 16

- Daniel Johnson, “‘Lingua Franca’ – Portal and the Deconstruction of the Institution,” GameSetWatch 1 June 2009

Monday, September 19 (Week 5)


Wednesday, September 21

- Galloway, “Social Realism,” from Gaming, pp. 70-84
- Jamie Madigan, “The Psychology of Immersion in Video Games”

Friday, September 23

- Jesper Juul, A Casual Revolution, chapter 2

THINGS TO DO WITH VIDEOGAMES

Monday, September 26 (Week 6)
• Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*, Introduction and chapters 1-4

**Wednesday, September 28**

• *How to Do Things with Videogames*, chapters 5-10
• Introduction to the *Missing Chapter* assignment

**Friday, September 30**

• *How to Do Things with Videogames*, chapters 11-15
• [Game Lab 4](#): Doing Things with Videogames (bring a laptop to class if possible, and make sure Flash is installed in your browser)

**Monday, October 3 (Week 7)**

• *How to Do Things with Videogames*, chapter 15-20 and Conclusion
• Game Lab 4 due

**Wednesday, October 5**

• More things to do with videogames
• Bring to class: your “thing” and a list of 5 or so games that illustrate your “thing”

**Friday, October 7**

• Workshop on things to do with videogames

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**GENDER AND RACE IN VIDEOGAMES**

**Monday, October 10 (Week 8)**

• No Class (Fall Break)

**Wednesday, October 12**

• [Damsel in Distress (Part 2)](#) from *Feminist Frequency*
• [Damsel in Distress (Part 3)](#) from *Feminist Frequency*
• [Women as Background Decoration (Part 1)](#) from *Feminist Frequency*

**Friday, October 14**

• Watch one other video from Season 1 of “Tropes vs Women in Video Games”
• Watch at least one video from Season 2 of “Tropes vs Women in Video Games”
• *Missing Chapter Due* (by midnight)

**Monday, October 17 (Week 9)**
• Elizabeth Losh, “#Gamergate 101” from *virtualpolitik*
• Elizabeth Losh, “Hiding Inside the Magic Circle: Gamergate and the End of Safe Space” from *boundary 2*

**Wednesday, October 19**

• Mark Sample, “Simulating Detroit: A City with Cars and Crime but No Races” from *Play the Past*
• Trevor Owens, “if(!isNative(){return false;}” from *Play the Past*

**Friday, October 21**

• [Game Lab 5](#)

**Monday, October 24 (Week 10)**

• Vit Sisler, “Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games” from *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*
• Game Lab 5 Due

**Wednesday, October 26**

• Galloway, "Allegories of Control" from *Gaming*, pp. 85-106
• Play *Civilization*

**Friday, October 28**

• Galloway, "Allegories of Control" (again)

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**INDIE GAMES**

**Monday, October 31 (Week 11)**

• Nick Dyer-Witheford and Grieg de Peuter, “Cognitive Surplus: Electronic Arts” from *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*
• The [Valve Handbook for New Employees](#)

**Wednesday, November 2**

• Casey O'Donnell, “World 5: Leeroy Jenkins, Autoplay, and Crunch” from *The Developer's Dilemma: The Secret World of Videogame Creators*

**Friday, November 4**

• Catch up on Game logs
Monday, November 7 (Week 12)

- Anna Anthropy, chapters 1 and 2 from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, pp. 1-42

Wednesday, November 9

- Anthropy, chapters 3 and 4 from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, pp. 43-92

Friday, November 11

- Game Lab 6

Monday, November 14 (Week 13)

- Chapter 5 from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, pp. 93-115
- Game Lab 6 due

Wednesday, November 16

- Chapters 6 and 7 from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, pp. 116-158
- In class: Sleepless by Natalia Theodoridou, Quing’s Quest VII by Squinky, Tower of the Blood Lord by Michael Lutz, The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo by Michae Lutz, With Those We Love Alive by Porpentine, Well This Is Awkward by Emma Kidwell

Friday, November 18

- Galloway, “Countergaming” from *Gaming*, pp. 107-126
- In class: Jason Nelson’s Game, Game, Game, and Again Game, Nothing You Have Done Deserves Such Praise and I made This. You Play This. We Are Enemies.

Monday, November 21 (Week 14)

- Countergames(?) in the wild: Rom Check Fail and 99 Exercises in Play

Wednesday, November 23

- No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Friday, November 25

- No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Monday, November 28 (Week 15)

- In-class workshop for Final Project

Wednesday, November 30
• In-class workshop for Final Project

Friday, December 2

• In-class workshop for Final Project

Monday, December 5 (Week 16)

Wednesday, December 7

• Final Project Due