GCIN2012 Introduction to Video Games Studies: How to Design Popular Culture
(2nd Term, 2017-2018)

Instructor: Dr. Sonia Wong
Lecture: Friday 15:30 to 17:20
Venue: CPD 2.58
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Course Content
The course looks at how elements in video games are drawn from existing popular culture and other cultural products, and focuses in particular on the socio-cultural relations linking gaming with culture, social value, beliefs, art and literature, politics, race, class, gender, and money. It is taught primarily by lectures and class work, and is attentive to both commercial and independent video games, comparing what we find there with elements found in other established forms of culture, modern or traditional, commercialized or independent. It thus looks at how video games are embedded in a larger and deeper context of cultural organization and practices that brings together different worlds, and tries to explain why they took a certain form, and why they are so popular and successful.

The course is intended as an elective for students who wish to major or minor in Creative Industries, and/or who have already taken the Introduction to Creative Industries (GCIN 1001), as well as for students from the Arts, Business, and Social Science disciplines at HKU.

Learning Objectives
The aim of this course is to remind students of the conceptual roots, the context of production and consumption of video games, and to examine and analyse how they are designed, how they are understood and played. By the end of the course students should have gained an understanding of the social processes surrounding the production, circulation and usage of video games, as both a commodity and cultural product.

Teaching Methods
Lectures, case studies, presentations, guest lectures, and class discussion.
Assessment

1. **In-class group presentation (30%)**: You will be asked to form creative teams of no more than 10 persons. The group will be assigned course readings and a case study, and will be asked to give an in-class presentation (30-40 mins). The group will be marked on how well you present the main arguments therein, and individual performance will also be graded. Students will be provided a reading list on each topic in the class so that they can do the readings in preparation for the presentations.

2. **Class Participation (10%)**: You are expected to attend lectures regularly, and attendance will be taken throughout the course through the submission of weekly reflections on the readings. You are required to write a one-page reflection / summary / comment on the readings for 10 weeks (starting from Week 2) and submit in class to mark your attendance. Failure to comply fully with these expectations will result in a percentage being deducted from your final assessment mark.

3. **Term paper (60%)**: You will be asked to conduct a small-scale research project on a particular game / franchise / company / game genre. Each student should take on a specialised case. In other words, you are asked to analyse the chosen game / franchise / company/ game genre, and its origin and development, its design principles and features, and its cultural, economic, political and social significance. A proposal of your topic of choice should be submitted for approval. At the end of the course, you will submit a written paper of around 3,000 words on your research. The paper will constitute 60% of your final mark.

**Note on plagiarism:**

* PLAGIARISM: A writer who presents the ideas or words of another as if they were the writer's own commits plagiarism. You may not reproduce someone else’s sentences, paragraphs, or pages without quoting them. This includes the lecture notes for this course. Consult the websites: http://ec.hku.hk/plagiarism and http://www.hku.hk/plagiarism for further information. You should avoid making quotes or drawing on figures from nowhere - you must provide sources of reference for quotation and/or citations you use in the paper. This applies to images and media clips as well. Failure to observe this would risk being charged of plagiarism. In this University, plagiarism is a disciplinary offence. Any student who commits the offence is liable to disciplinary action and may include legal action.
Indicative Literature


Course Structure

**Week 1 (19 Jan): Why study video games: A non-gamer’s guide to video games**


**Week 2 (26 Jan): What is a game: Game and Meaningful Play**


**Week 3 (2 Feb): The lasting charm of Super Mario – understanding the principle of “fun” and the prototype of adventure narrative**


Week 4 (9 Feb): Immersion, simulation and simulacra: "Realness" in gaming


- Article: “Understanding the Art of Video Games”


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- Baudrillard. “Simulacra and Simulations” (Optional)

Week 5 (16 Feb): NO CLASS – Chinese New Year

Week 6 (23 Feb): The message is in the designing principle: Serious games, ethics, social awareness, Grand Theft Auto, Darkest Dungeon and Brenda Romero's Train


- http://depts.washington.edu/critgame/project/games-beyond-entertainment-some-
Week 7 (2 Mar): Can games do better? Combat mechanism, Lego and Minecraft  
[Submit one page term paper proposal]

- Garrelts, Nate. 2014. Understanding Minecraft essays on play, community and possibilities. “Chapter 3: Teaching Tools: Progressive Pedagogy and the History of Construction Play” and “Chapter 4: Mining Constructivism in the University: The Case of Creative Mode”

Week 8 (9 Mar): NO CLASS – Reading Week

Week 9 (16 Mar): NO CLASS – University Holiday

Week 10 (23 Mar): It’s a men’s world? – Lara Croft, American McGee's Alice, Bayonetta, Female-oriented games and Female Gamers

- “Killing Like a Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl Gamers’ Visibility”
Week 11 (30 Mar): NO CLASS – Easter Holiday

Week 12 (6 Apr): The gamification of life choices – the case of H games

[Guest Lecture: Mr. Kris Li]


Week 13 (13 Apr): Overwatch, Heroes of the Storm: Esports, marketing, competition-oriented, national identity, and political correctness


Week 14 (20 Apr): Game is not enough: The building and success of game franchises, universe, and communities - World of Warcraft, Assassin's Creed, and more

- Sotamaa, Olli. (2010) "When the Game is Not Enough". Games and Culture. 5-3: 239-255/
• “A history of World of Warcraft’s gold economy”
• Castronova, Ed. “On Virtual Economies.” *Game Studies* 3.2 (December 003).
  www.gamestudies.org/0302/castronova/
• Article: “Warcraft: The Most Influential Game Franchise of All Time”
• Wikipedia: “List of Multimedia Franchises”.
• Wikipedia: “List of films based on video games”.
• Wikipedia: “List of video games based on films”.

**Week 15 (27 Apr): From *Pokemon, Pocket-Morty* to *Pokemon Go*: How to design a game for everyone (and making them free)**
• (Video) Vox: “How free games are designed to make money”
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKK9nVLvhGM
• Daniel Kaszor. “Download Code: How exactly do companies make money off 'free to play' games?” *Financial Post.*