

HSTR 491: Games, Play and History
Spring 2015
Thursday 15:10-18:00
Wilson 2274

Play is a uniquely adaptive act, not subordinate to some other adaptive act, but with a special function of its own in human experience. Johan Huizinga

Professor Maggie Greene
margaret.greenel@montana.edu
Wilson Hall 2-162, (406) 994-5203
Office hours: Thursdays, 1-3 & by appointment
Website: www.mcgreene.org
Twitter: @mcgreenesd
Course website: www.sintellectual.org/hstr491

Course Description

Welcome to HSTR 491: Games, Play and History, a special topics seminar. This semester, we will be exploring games and play in many periods of history and in many cultures.



There is no culture or society on this earth – present or past – that has not played games. They may be serious or frivolous; they may be played by professionals or amateurs; they may be raucous or contemplative; they may be played in large groups or alone. The study of games and play has largely been limited to historians and anthropologists, and even then, it has been a rather marginal topic of study. The past thirty years has seen a swift uptick in the number of scholars working on topics related to games and play, and game studies today is a vibrant interdisciplinary field – one where historians are often sorely underrepresented.

In this seminar, we are going to engage with a tiny slice of this very big topic, and look at games in historical perspective (from European chess to Asian games like *go*, from videogames to sports). You will have the opportunity to write and reflect on related topics of your own choosing, under a very broadly defined umbrella of “games” and “play.” Although we will focus our reading on games and play, we will also be thinking critically about interdisciplinary approaches to historical inquiry at large: what does history offer other fields? What do those other fields offer us?

Required Texts

Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*
Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*
Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*
David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900*
Marc L. Moskowitz, *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China*
Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*
T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*
Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History*

Other readings are uploaded to the course website.

Grading

Seminar Participation	25%
Long-form essay	15%
Weekly responses	10%
Selected Assignments	50%

Course Objectives

- I. To gain a better understanding of the role of games and play in society across time & space
- II. To attain a better grasp on interdisciplinary approaches to historical study
- III. To further hone the ability to read, discuss and write about cultural objects in a thoughtful, critical manner.



Expectations and Policies

Participation

This course is a seminar: the success of our weekly meetings will largely depend on everyone being engaged members of the course. It is imperative that everyone arrive at course meetings having completed the reading for the week and ready to have a lively discussion that delves deeply into our materials.

Everyone will lead seminar at least *twice* throughout the semester. Leaders should not “teach” the text: the intent is to help facilitate the conversation, not dominate it. Discussion leaders should (like everyone!) take notes as they read, with special attention to key details

and questions that arise during reading. What topics or themes are particularly problematic or interesting? What connections can we draw to other works in the course, or beyond the course? What connections do we see with history more broadly, and in contemporary life?

Attendance

As this is a course that depends on participation (and also meets only once a week), attendance is mandatory. You may miss one meeting without penalty; missing more than three courses will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have a personal, family, or medical emergency, please speak with me as soon as possible so we can discuss solutions for continuing in or passing the course.



Reading Responses

Each week, you will be expected to post a short (approximately 400-500 words) reading response to the course blog by Wednesday evening. The point is not to rehash the main argument of the piece(s), but to raise questions for discussion, explore areas you found particularly enlightening or problematic, etc. Before seminar, you should take a look at your classmates' responses – the ideas will hopefully help stimulate discussion.

Electronics

Please turn **ALL** electronic devices (cell phones, iPads, laptops, etc.) **OFF** in class and put them away. If you are concerned about this and/or have dispensation for special use, please come speak

with me.

Communication with me

I am available during my posted office hours (or by appointment). I am also available by email. Please allow 24-48 hours for a response (excluding weekends), although I will generally get back to you much sooner than that. Please use my email address listed at the top of this syllabus; **do not use D2L to email me**, as I don't check D2L regularly for messages. If you have emailed me and have *not* received a response in a timely manner, **please speak with me and let me know**. Emails do get lost in the ether with an alarming frequency! Please check your listed preferred university email and the course site regularly.

Plagiarism and other conduct issues

You are expected to abide by the [MSU Student Conduct Code](#). Any plagiarism, cheating or other academic dishonesty will be met with an F for the course and will be reported to the Provost's Office. Please don't test me on this.

Students With Disabilities

If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodation(s), please contact me and Disability Services as soon as possible.

How to address me

You are welcome to call me Maggie or Professor (or Dr.) Greene, whichever you are most comfortable with. Please do not refer to me as Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Ma'am. In email communication, please refrain from treating your missive like a text message to a friend: it's professional communication and should be approached as such.



The Course Site & Assignments

The course site may be found at <http://www.sintellectual.org/hstr491/>. I will email everyone an invitation so you can take control of your user profile, which you will be using to post your weekly responses, as well as most of your other assignments. Everyone will have "Author" access, which means you may make and publish your own posts. If you have *any* issues, please email me as soon as possible (I am both professor and tech support for

purposes of this class!) and I will help you troubleshoot or walk you through issues. I've prepared a basic guide to posting on WP for those who may not be familiar with platform, as well as emphasize some of the nitpicky things (like categories and tags) that will make general course housekeeping easier for all of us!

PDFs of the course readings (other than the assigned monographs) & supplementary readings (PDFs & links) can be found under the "Readings" tab. Some pages are password protected (see the WP guide for the password). Some PDFs are hosted on other sites (e.g., Dropbox). Please let me know **right away** if you have **any** trouble accessing any of the readings.

The D2L shell is operational, and you can find a copy of the syllabus hosted there, as well as a link to the course site. Other than that, all activity should be happening on the blog.

Opt-out: While you can't opt out of posting on the blog entirely, you are welcome to have a pseudonym as your display name (your username will remain the same no matter what, but you can select how you'd like your name to be displayed). I'd really encourage us to keep this as "outward facing" as possible, but understand concerns about having your writing up for anyone to stumble across: so please come speak to me if you have other concerns about privacy, and we can work something out (e.g., password protected posts).

Choose Your Own (Grading) Adventure

50% of your final grade will be determined by **seminar participation** (25%), **weekly reading responses** (10%) and your **final long-form essay** of between 1800 and 2500 words (15%).

The other 50% will be **determined by you**, within a few parameters. A large part of this course is improving your ability to write about and discuss cultural products in a thoughtful, considered way. My goal in giving you options is to get us **writing more**, **discussing more**, and **reading more** according to your personal interests. You can pick options that make sense to you, your interests, and your performance in the course. The 50% will be made up of a total of 1000 points. If you garner 1000 points over the course of the semester, for instance, you will receive the full 50%. Completing 500 points would garner you 25%.

Just because you do something doesn't mean you will get full points: these assignments will still be graded (so writing a long-form essay, for instance, that isn't very good will *not* garner you 100 points). You will notice that each category has a maximum number of points that can be garnered in a week, as well as overall. This means that you cannot write 10 long-form essays in the last week of class to make up your 1000 points. But in general, *you* get to decide when and how you will earn your points, to a point. This also means *you* are responsible for keeping track of when and how you will garner these points. When you complete an assignment, I will send you an updated list of your performance thus far, so you can track your progress and map out your plan of attack for the remainder of the course.

While this requires a lot more housekeeping for you *and* me than the average syllabus, I hope this will allow everyone to engage with the seminar topics in ways that make sense to them, give us more materials to discuss, and let you pursue your own interests.

I am always happy to talk ideas or answer questions or concerns, so please feel free to drop by my office hours or send me an email. This is an experiment for me, so I'd love to hear your feedback.

A week counts from Thursday immediately following seminar to Wednesday, 11:59 PM. The first week *does not* count: that is, I *do not* want you trying to complete assignments before we meet on Thursday, 1/22.

Disclaimer: It is theoretically possible to game the system by doing a lot of shoddy work (obviously, the point here is to do quality work that's of interest to you – not to become an academic spam bot!). Should I notice this happening, we will be having a chat. **I reserve the right to adjust the overall point total to reflect the amount of effort put in.** Don't game the games seminar!

❖ Long-form essay ❖

100 points

Max of 1 submission a week, 5 submissions total

Total potential points: 500

You should craft an essay of at least 1200 words on a topic related to games and play. This could be on a favorite game; game or sport culture; a historical game; the relationship of games or play to certain aspects of history, society, or culture, etc. I have posted examples of my own long-form essays (both ones I wrote while I was writing for Kotaku & ones posted to my personal blog), as well as other games-related writing I admire, to give you examples of what these *could* look like. I am not holding my own writing or personal taste up as a paragon of semi-academic writing on games! But to show how you can approach a variety of issues of interest to you. They should *not* be rants, rambles, or introductory essays, but thoughtful pieces reflecting on your chosen subject. They may be broad, but should provide specific examples and support. These should be appropriately cited and be more than opinion pieces (i.e., you need to be pulling in materials related to your subject). They don't need to be "formal" academic pieces, but they should be thoughtful, well written and proofread. There is a certain amount of latitude in terms of coherence (I often use my blog entries to work through and connect disparate ideas), but they should *always* be *cogent*.

You will need to post your essay to the course site, and be prepared to give a brief 5-10 minute presentation to the seminar the week you post your essay.

❖ Book reviews ❖

150 points

Max of 1 submission a week, 3 submissions total

Total potential points: 450

A book review should be a substantive essay of no more than 1000 words on an academic monograph or group of academic articles of your choosing (please **clear these with me** before you start reading & writing!). I've provided examples of academic book reviews on our course site for you to look at. You should cover the contents of the book, the primary arguments, the strength of the book as a whole, any issues you have with the argument or presentation, and the overall value of the work. If writing about a group of articles, you should also tie them together: how do they relate to each other, and broader themes we're discussing in class?

You will be expected to post your essay to the course site, and be prepared to give a brief 5-10 minute presentation to the seminar the week you post your review.

❖ Blogs of the Round Table Prompt ❖

75 points

Max of 1 submission per BoRT theme, 4 submissions total

Total potential points: 300

Blogs of the Round Table is a monthly prompt put out by the editors of Critical Distance, a site that rounds up high-quality writing on games. You should write a piece of no more than 1500 words relating to the prompt for the month; you *do not* have to submit it to the BoRT site (but may if you so desire!). Although BoRT is targeted towards videogame writing, you *do not* have to write about videogames (most themes are very broad and can be applied to all sorts of games and playful activity!).

You will be expected to post your essay to the course site, and be prepared to give a brief 5-10 minute presentation to the seminar the week you post your essay.

❖ Short takes ❖

50 points

Max of 1 submission a week, 6 submissions total

Total potential points: 300

Short takes should be short (no more than 500 words) explorations of articles or current events related to the themes of the course *or* videos from the GDC Vault (please clear your selected video with me *first*). For instance, if you read an interesting article on Gamasutra or in the newspaper, you can provide a short **summary** of the article, as well as your own opinion on the contents, and how the news item relates to the themes of the course. If you read an interesting essay (it does not need to be academic or journalistic in nature; the weekly Critical Distance roundup is a great place to hunt for interesting pieces), you should discuss your take on it & how it relates to course themes. The source material should not be the "look at this awesome preview of a game coming out soon!" kind of news, but news or other writings that engage with questions of society, culture, history, industry, etc. If you have questions about whether or not an item would be appropriate for a short take, please ask me!

You will be expected to post your short take to the website, and be prepared to give a brief presentation to the seminar on your selected short take.

❖ Glossary ❖

10 points

Max of 3 submissions a week, 30 submissions total

Total potential points: 300

We have a glossary on the course site; to earn these points, you will be expected to make a short post to the blog defining terms in the reading you have found confusing (these should be things you would not reasonably be expected to know; “defining” basic terms won’t net you many – if any! - points). You will be expected to research the term: what is it, how does it relate to the reading, and how do we use it appropriately? We’ll discuss these terms in class before diving into the discussion for the week. I will move items to the glossary page as they come up.

You snooze, you lose: Once a term is in the glossary, it can’t be repeated. It is worth doing your glossary entries while you’re completing your reading – i.e., *don’t* put it off until Wednesday night (or, god forbid, Thursday morning or afternoon).

❖ Discussion ❖

10 points

Max of 3 (graded) submissions a week, 20 (graded) submissions total

Total potential points: 200

Since we’ll be posting our weekly responses + a variety of materials to the course site, there is ample opportunity for discussion in a digital format. Responding to your classmates’ postings online is *optional*, but if you so choose, can make up a portion of your grade. Comments will be evaluated on their thoughtfulness & engagement with the post you are replying to (and hopefully, other comments on the post!). Consider this a bit of seminar warm-up: you can familiarize yourself with what your classmates are thinking about, finding interesting, problematic, etc.

Discussion+

50 points

Max of 1 submission a week, 5 submissions total

Total potential points: 250 points

Has someone posted a response or other writing that has set your synapses afire? Responding with a full individual post can earn you points. These should be significantly more engaged with the source material *and* the post than your average comment. Consider it a digital version of continuing a conversation: these should not be attacks or simply criticisms, but engage thoroughly with your classmates’ writing and the source material.

❖ Other things ❖

??? points

Max of ??? submissions, ??? submissions total

Total potential points: 300

Have another idea for ways to engage with the course material creatively? Podcasts, Let's Plays, or something else entirely? Come talk to me! We'll figure out how many points such engagements will be worth – up to a total of 300 points.

Reading Guides

At first glance, it would appear that some weeks we have a positively insane amount of reading to do. And indeed, this seminar *will* have a lot of reading, but it should be generally interesting, fun, and diverse (I do realize that fun work is still work, however). I have high expectations for this course (which includes all of you *and* myself), but I also want it to be fun and productive for all of us. Each week, I will post reading guides to help you understand how and why I've organized the readings in the manner I have, give you things to be on the lookout for, suggested order to read essays in, etc. You may not need it, which is absolutely fine! But should you find yourself flummoxed or overwhelmed, please take a look at my thoughts (and feel free to email me or drop by office hours – whether you're struggling, confused, or just want to talk shop or *Final Fantasy*). You should not use the reading guide as a laundry list of questions to answer for your reading response, but instead, use it as a springboard for your own analysis, discussion, and questions.

Another thing to keep in mind is that many of the essays (I use the term loosely) – particularly early in the course, when we will be looking at a variety of board games - are very short readings, or collections of images. Those PDFs are much more about looking at images (including photographs of physical games and plates of manuscript illustrations, paintings, calligraphy, etc.). So don't panic if you see 7 articles listed – they are *not* seven seriously academic, wordy, no-pictures-included kind of articles! While I expect you to thoughtfully consider the image-intensive pieces, it is a different kind of “reading” than plowing through dense, theory-heavy articles and monographs.

I have also included information about the supplementary readings, though they are *optional* (I do encourage you to take a look at them when you have time). Often, they are included to help provide background or other kinds of useful information; the blog posts in particular may serve as a quick and dirty introduction, written in what I *hope* is an accessible manner.

****THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE****

NB: Some weeks include “supplementary readings of note” (these are available on the course website under the Readings tab). These are *optional* readings, but may prove useful to you in understanding other readings, your writing assignments, or just to provide other views on a topic; I encourage you to check them out when you have time. They are fair game for discussion, reading responses, use in your final paper, and your other writing assignments.

Readings should be completed by the class meeting they are listed under

Week 1 (1/15)

Class agenda: ♪♪Getting to know you, getting to know all about you (and the seminar)...♪♪

Things to do this week:

- Get set up to use the course website (<http://www.sintellectual.org/hstr491/>) & familiarize yourself with WordPress.
- Write & post a short post introducing yourself to all of us. If you have experience with games (digital or analog) or sports, let us know about them! Do you have a favorite piece of writing (academic or otherwise) about games or play? Let us know about it, too (provide a link if possible).
- By Wednesday night (1/21), post a short reading response for the readings (don't forget to raise some questions for discussion!). Has someone posted something particularly interesting? Remember that thoughtful comments on entries count towards your point total.
- **NB:** Many weeks, we have several different readings: you don't need to cover *all* of them in your reading response, though you do need to show general engagement with the major themes across the readings (they were not selected randomly!).

Week 2 (1/22): Introductions

Class agenda:; Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* ("Play Is"); Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Play as Cultural Phenomenon; Language; Poetry; Contemporary Civilization); *Art of Contest* (Preface); Jesper Juul, "The Game, the Player, the World"

Supplementary readings of note: Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (full book)

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (1/28), post a short reading response for the Caillois.

Week 3 (1/29): Homo Ludens

Class agenda: Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (2/4), post a short reading response; please select *at least* one game from *The Games We Played* or *Art of Contest* to talk about in your response: you may discuss themes, mechanics, artwork, etc., in addition to the rest of your response.

Week 4 (2/5): Games & Society

Class Agenda: Margaret K. Hofer, *The Games We Played* (excerpts); Freitag, "Playing the American Dream"; Adams & Edmonds, "Making Your Move"; *Art of Contest* (Pachisi, Persian Playing Cards); Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' is Pokémon?"

Supplementary readings of note: Jensen, "American Board & Table Games"; *Art of Contest* (Backgammon)

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (2/11), post a short reading response.

Week 5 (2/12): Games & Gender

Class Agenda: Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History*; *The Art of Contest* (Chess)

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (2/18), post a short reading response. Please select *at least one* image from the *Art of Contest* essays to discuss, in addition to the rest of your response.

Week 6 (2/19): Games in Art & Culture

Class Agenda: *Art of Contest* (Liubo & Weiqi); Chen Zu-yan "The Art of Black & White" & "Shao Yong's 'Great Chant on Observing Weiqi'"; Lien, "Wei Yao's Disquisition on *boyi*"; Lo, "The Game of Leaves"

Supplementary readings of note: "From Shanghai to Kunming & weiqi to *Warcraft*"; Chen – "Shao Yong's 'Great Chant on Observing 'Weiqi'"

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (2/25), post a short reading response.

Week 7 (2/26): Games in Contemporary Society

Class Agenda: Marc L. Moskowitz, *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China*; *Art of Contest* (Go)

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (3/4), post a short reading response.

Week 8 (3/5): Sports & Games in Historical Perspective

Class Agenda: Brownell, *Training the Body for China* (Ch 1 & 2); Fedman, "Mounting Modernization"; Morris, *Marrow of the Nation* (excerpt); *Art of Contest* (Polo)

Supplementary readings of note: Walton & Birrell, "Enduring Heroes"

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- Enjoy your break! Don't forget to post a short reading response on the Edgerton by Wednesday the week following break (3/18).

Week 9 (3/12): SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

Week 10 (3/19): Sports & Modernity

Class Agenda: Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic of China* (remaining chapters)

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (3/25), post a short reading response.

Week 11 (3/26): Technology & Society

Class Agenda: David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900*

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (4/1), post a short reading response.

Week 12 (4/2): What's So Special About Videogames?

Class Agenda: Bogost, *Unit Operations* ("Comparative Videogame Criticism," "An Alternative to Fun"); Jesper Juul, *The Art of Failure* ("Intro," "Paradox of Failure," "Art of Failure"); Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext* ("Introduction")

Supplementary readings of note: Bogost, "Winning Isn't Everything"

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (4/8), post a short reading response.

Week 13 (4/9): Pop Culture & Globalization

Class Agenda: Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters*

Supplementary readings of note: Tobin, "The Rise & Fall of the Pokémon Empire"

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (4/15), post a short reading response.

Week 14 (4/16): Living Online

Class Agenda: Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*

Supplementary readings of note: Nardi & Kow, "Digital Imaginaries: How We Know What We (Think We) Know about Chinese Gold Farming"; Jin Ge's work on gold farming

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (4/22), post a short reading response.

Week 15 (4/23): (Video)games and Contemporary Society

Class Agenda: Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* ("Introduction," "Art," "Music," "Texture," "Throwaways," "Disinterest," "The End of Gamers"); Aarseth, *Cybertext*; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, *Games of Empire*; Robinson, "Orientalism and Abstraction in Eurogames"

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- By Wednesday night (4/29), post a short reading response.

Week 16 (4/30): Sports, Games, and Serious Business

Class Agenda: T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*

Discussion leader(s):

Things to do this week:

- Longform essays will be due finals week, date TBA.

Week 17 (??): Final essay presentations