

## PLAYER STORIES

### A Seminar about Games and Interactive Fiction

English 506 | CSPT 500/600

Fall 2022 at the University of Victoria

lək<sup>w</sup>əŋən and WSÁNEĆ Territories

Thursday, 9:30am - 12:20pm

Taught by Jentery Sayers (he / him)

Office hours: W, 12-1pm; Th, 12:30-1:30pm

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## tl;dr Version of this Syllabus

In a rush? Overwhelmed by the start of term? Need a guide to steward you through this seminar?

I made a one-page, [tl;dr version of this syllabus](#) for you. I'll print you a [PDF copy](#), too. This guide is not intended to replace the syllabus, but I hope it's convenient in a pinch.

## About the Seminar

Among the most fascinating aspects of games and interactive fiction are the stories people tell with them, and the entertainment industry is well aware of this phenomenon. Millions of Twitch and YouTube viewers now watch recorded and streaming videos of people playing games and narrating their play experiences. Unfortunately, many of these videos also contribute to a toxic culture where play becomes precarious labour for proprietary platforms as well as an instrument for trolling and harassment. Many players who want to

share their stories are thus dissuaded from participating, not only because of the technological barrier to entry but also given concerns for their own health and safety. The result online, particularly in venues such as Twitch and YouTube, is a skewed representation of the political, cultural, and aesthetic potential of games and interactive fiction.

This seminar responds to such toxic culture with four questions, which we will address through a combination of primary and secondary sources. The first considers the attention economics of recorded and streaming video: How do the stories people tell with games and interactive fiction change when they are not immediately, if ever, intended for circulation on "like and subscribe" platforms? The next question is a matter of education: How do players tell stories critically, and to what degree does writing or witnessing a story help them to unlearn toxicity? The third is one of culture: How might player stories feed back into gaming communities, including those known to be toxic? The final question regards memory work: How might stories about play be archived with universities and other public institutions to document games and interactive fiction, which are notoriously subject to planned obsolescence? Or, from another angle, how might player stories persist when games and interactive fiction do not?

## What's a Player Story?

There's no consensus on what "player story" means or implies in the context of games and interactive fiction. It functions pragmatically in [industry](#) as an alternative to "user story," and it's used salaciously on [Wattpad](#) to denote a (sub)genre of fan fiction. Although I'm certainly tempted to teach a course about the latter, we'll spin player stories in another direction, toward the horizon of game studies. How, for whom, under what assumptions, and to what effects do people document and narrate their experiences of games and interactive fiction? A Let's Play video or live stream might be a player story in that game studies paradigm. Yet Merritt K's book, *Videogames for Humans*, demonstrates why neither audio nor video is necessary for such a story.

What, then, of content and composition? What are player stories *about*? What do they say, and what do they tell us? Must they unfold in real time, and how might they be reflexive? How do players perform or present themselves in their stories? How do they navigate the personal and cultural dimensions of play, not to mention the narratives at work in games and fiction? How do they influence their communities? Such questions reveal the motivations for this seminar, and experimenting with the praxis of player stories—and what they can *do* with respect to the toxicity I address [above](#)—will be our shared line of inquiry this term. You'll make your own story by the end of it, about a game or fiction of your choice, using a methodology of your own design. This means you'll have room to experiment, develop a unique line of inquiry through the seminar, and ultimately define "player story" on your own terms through an example or "prototype."

Since your player story will be your final project, we will not dwell much on how to write journal articles or monographs in game studies. We will nevertheless read criticism in the field, and I'll ask you to engage it in various ways: during seminar discussions, in writing,

through play, and via your methodology. I will also ask you to consider the roles of documentation, accountability, accessibility, affect, and narrative in research, each of which remains deeply relevant to scholarship across the humanities, not just in game studies.

*Many thanks to Melanie Oberg (University of Alberta), who introduced me to Let's Plays as part of her graduate research and sparked my interest in player stories back in 2015-16. We'll read some of her work this term.*

## About Me

My name is Jentery Sayers (he / him). I'm a settler scholar and associate professor of English and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT). I direct the Praxis Studio for Comparative Media Studies, and I've been at UVic since 2011. I did my MA and PhD in English at the University of Washington, and I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, where I also got my BA and BS at Virginia Commonwealth University. I'm in the middle of writing a book about the sounds of "playable fiction." I teach media, games, cultural criticism, and American literature at UVic. This is my eleventh graduate seminar here, but it's my first on player stories.

## Required Materials

No experience with games or media is expected for this seminar. I will assume you are new to game studies.

You won't need access to a gaming computer or console; however, you will need access to the internet and a computer. For your final project, I will prompt you to play at least one game or interactive fiction, and to document and narrate that process in some way. More on that in a second.

I am not asking you to purchase any books for this seminar. I will instead direct you to materials in UVic Libraries and also distribute a course reader of screen-readable PDFs that you may choose to print. If a PDF in the course reader is not accessible or searchable, then please let me know. I'll fix and redistribute it.

The following fair dealing statement applies to each PDF appearing in the course reader: "This copy was made pursuant to the Fair Dealing Guidelines of the University, library database licenses, and other university licenses and policies. The copy may only be used for the purpose of research, private study, criticism, review, news reporting, education, satire or parody. If the copy is used for the purpose of review, criticism or news reporting, the source and the name of the author must be mentioned. The use of this copy for any other purpose may require the permission of the copyright owner."

To recap, then, you're not required to purchase anything for this seminar, yet you will need access to:

- The internet,

- A computer,
- UVic Libraries,
- The course reader, which I'll circulate in PDF,
- A game or interactive fiction (see the list below), and
- A way to document your experiences playing that game or fiction (also more below).

Beyond that, I invite you to visit the "[Related Materials](#)" section of this outline for lists of game studies books, journals, podcasts, and resources I suggest if you find yourself to be keen on the field.

## Pick a Game or Interactive Fiction

A player story needs a primary source, so I created a [list of roughly 150 games and interactive fictions](#) (also a [GG list](#)) to help you choose one. In fact, choosing one is an assignment for Week 6 (October 13th). I'm open to suggestions if nothing on the list interests you or you came to the seminar with a particular game or interactive fiction in mind. The game or fiction you select just needs to be something I have played and studied a bit (or I could play and study this term). Thanks for meeting me halfway.

Please don't hesitate to ask if you want me to narrow the list based on your interests, a type of game or play, your technology needs, or . . . I realize the list is pretty long, if not a little extra.

I'll encourage to you start playing early in the term. This way you can refine your research, gather plenty of documentation, replay the game or fiction where necessary, and share your work in progress. How you document your play, how you define and compose a player story, and what you ultimately say or argue will be up to you; however, I'll nudge you to try a few techniques before you select one for your project. Your player stories don't need to be high-tech. You can use audio or video, if you wish, or just text and images. I'll cover more of the player story particulars during the three workshops I've planned for the term (see Weeks 6, 12, and 13). For now, let's talk about the aims, workload, and prompts for the seminar.

## Aims, Workload, and Prompts

My primary goal for this seminar is to create an inclusive space where you've ample time and resources to design, produce, share, and refine your own research project (i.e., a player story about a game or fiction of your choice). I've thus kept the reading load to 75 pages or less per week, and I've dedicated most of November and all of December to your projects. Related goals for the seminar include enriching your familiarity with not only game studies but also the experience of research as a mutable process with personal and cultural dimensions. Your player story will function as a site where those dimensions are observable, if not palpable.

I've designed three workshops on the praxis of making your own player story, and I cooked up eight prompts to scaffold or direct your inquiry from early September to mid-December. This way, you've occasions to attend to your methodology and reflect on your axiology (the values at play in your approaches, language, perceptions, and decisions). You'll also iteratively develop your player story (week by week) instead of composing it from scratch during the last week or so of the term. I hope iteration will reduce your workload and render the seminar accessible for the sake of project-based inquiry.

Here are the eight prompts in brief. See the [schedule](#) below for the prompts in detail. Note that I encourage you to draft responses before the due date. Then, for the purposes of assessment, I collect them in batches of two or three. Most responses are meant to be short, descriptive, and focused, often only 250-500 words long.

- **Prompt 1** (draft by Sept. 22; submit by Sept. 29): Use 250-300 words to describe a type of play, or a context for play, to research this term.
- **Prompt 2** (submit by Sept. 29): Use 250-300 words to describe a type of game or interactive fiction to research this term.
- **Prompt 3** (draft by Oct. 6; submit by Nov. 3): Play a game or fiction, use three approaches to document your play experience, and then use a total of 300-500 words to describe each approach, supported by documentation.
- **Prompt 4** (draft by Oct. 13; submit by Nov. 3): Pick a game or fiction to study this term and then use 300-500 words to not only describe it but also explain why you selected it.
- **Prompt 5** (draft by Oct. 27; submit by Nov. 3): Use 500-750 words or 7-10 minutes of audio / video to critically engage any secondary source you've read in this seminar.
- **Prompt 6** (draft by Nov. 17; submit by Dec. 1): Use 500-750 words or 7-10 minutes of audio / video to outline the methodology you've in mind for your player story.
- **Prompt 7** (draft by Nov. 24; submit by Dec. 1): Use 250-300 words to write an abstract for your player story.
- **Prompt 8** (submit by Dec. 1): Present player story material during seminar.

I'll invite you to compose your player story across media: images and text, audio and text, or video, for instance. The final draft is due by December 15th, and I will circulate a detailed prompt for it on October 13th. Between December 1st and 8th, you'll also have a chance to submit a "revisions statement," where you'll outline any significant revisions you *would* make to your responses to Prompts 1-7. (You won't have to actually make those revisions.)

Your player story, revisions statement, and responses to Prompts 1-8 comprise your seminar portfolio, which I will assess like so:

- **Early work in progress** (due Sept. 29; 10% of your final mark): Your responses to Prompts 1 and 2 as well as any notes or documentation you wish to include.
- **Mid-term work in progress** (due Nov. 3; 20% of your final mark): Your responses to Prompts 3, 4, and 5 as well as any notes or documentation you wish to include.

- **Late-term work in progress** (due Dec. 1; 25% of your final mark): Your responses to Prompts 6, 7, and 8 as well as any notes or documentation you wish to include.
- **Revisions statement** (due Dec. 1-8; 10% of your final mark): 300-500 words outlining significant revisions you *would* make to your responses to Prompts 1-7.
- **Final project** (due Dec. 15; 35% of your final mark): The final draft of your player story.

I will use the Faculty of Graduate Studies' [official grading system](#) to assess your work. Please also note that I have a "no questions asked," one-week late policy for all submissions, excluding the final project. See the seminar [policies](#) for more on late submissions and related penalties.

I suggest dedicating *5 to 8 hours of study each week to this seminar, plus 3 hours for the weekly seminar meetings*. Of course, 5 to 8 hours per week is only a guideline. You may find that you need more or less time depending on the activity, your preferences, and your own familiarity with the material and work involved.

## Schedule

The seminar schedule is below. It's subject to change, and I will announce any changes 1-2 weeks in advance. I will never use schedule changes to increase your workload.

You will find nearly all assigned materials either online via UVic Libraries or in the PDF course reader. I link to assigned materials when they are *not* available in the Libraries or reader.

Most weeks in the schedule include descriptions of what to do before seminar, what we'll do during seminar, and some questions to guide our inquiry that week. You'll also find detailed prompts in Weeks 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, and 13. Please read the prompts carefully and send any questions or concerns my way. I realize any given prompt can always be better. I'll revise it.

You'll notice that, many weeks, I point to further reading. I in no way expect you to read it. We can't read all the things, and I know you've a lot to juggle in a single term. I include further reading for the sake of scholarly integrity and in case you wish to follow a particular trajectory or topic across game studies. I will likely mention aspects of the further reading during seminar discussions, too. Feel free to tell me when I fail to effectively communicate those aspects. I'll clarify.

The same goes for moments in the schedule when I write, "Optional: check out (games mentioned in the assigned reading)." If you cannot or do not wish to check them out (e.g., Google them, watch them, or play them), then no worries. I mention them only for the sake of tracking our primary sources as we go. For that reason, I might occasionally show clips of those games and fictions during seminar.

Importantly, material in this seminar frequently engages or reflects issues such as racism, sexism, colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, homophobia,



transphobia, hegemony, death, violence, toxic masculinity, fatphobia, xenophobia, mental health, anxiety, and lived experiences of harassment and oppression. We might also find many games and interactive fictions to be problematic at times. I will thus conclude each seminar meeting with a brief overview of where content warnings might apply to the following week's assigned materials, and during seminar I will never call individually on you to share your experiences of such issues or to somehow represent other people with similar experiences. If you find that I am approaching any of these issues inadequately or ignorantly, then please don't hesitate to tell me or correct me, and I will learn from my mistakes. If you'd rather not speak with me directly about or during such moments, then I recommend sharing your concerns or corrections with Stephen Ross, who is currently the graduate adviser in English.

Finally, a thing to know about me before we proceed: *I'm a planner, I always over-plan, and I'll opt for care in every instance.* If the workload becomes too much, or the seminar starts to struggle with scope creep, then we'll cut material. I've planned for the maximum in advance, under the assumption that we won't get to everything. And that's totally fine.

*Many thanks to Julie Funk for their feedback on aspects of this schedule.*

## Week 1 (September 8th): Hello World!

*Before seminar, please:*

- Read Mary Flanagan's "Games as a Medium" (8 pages; from *Debugging Game History* 2016, edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins),
- Read Anastasia Salter's "Building Interactive Stories" (10 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* 2018, edited by me), and
- Optional: check out *Pac-Man*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Monkey Island*, *BioShock*, *Gone Home*, Telltale's *The Walking Dead*, *my body — a Wunderkammer*, *With Those We Love Alive*, and/or Dave Morris's adaptation of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

What are the media of games? What are some notable tensions between play and story? Between mechanics and fiction? What are the meaningful differences between a game's narrative and a player's story?

*During our first meeting*, we'll introduce ourselves (20 minutes), review this outline as well as the plan for this term (45 minutes), and share our questions and concerns. We'll then discuss these two texts (by Flanagan and Salter; 85 minutes), which will help us to not only survey some common debates in game studies but also highlight and define several keywords in the field. We'll return to these debates and keywords throughout the seminar to ensure the language we're using is relatively clear to us all, even when our individual approaches to the material may differ.

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Ian Bogost's "Procedural Rhetoric" (64 pages; from *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* 2007),

- Elizabeth W. Bruss's "The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games" (20 pages; from *New Literary History* 9.1 1977),
- Astrid Ensslin's "Between Ludicity and Literariness" (18 pages; from *Literary Gaming* 2014),
- Alexander Galloway's "Gamic Action: Four Moments" (38 pages; from *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* 2006),
- N. Katherine Hayles's "Electronic Literature: What Is It?" (42 pages, from *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* 2008),
- Henry Jenkins's "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (16 pages; self-published in 2002; republished in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* 2004, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan),
- Nick Montfort's "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction" (34 pages; from *IF Theory Reader* 2011, edited by Kevin Jackson-Mead and J. Robinson Wheeler),
- Souvik Mukherjee's "Video Games and Storytelling" (21 pages; from *Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books* 2015),
- Janet Murray's "Harbingers of the Holodeck" (37 pages; from *Hamlet on the Holodeck* 1997),
- Emily Short's [blog](#),
- Grant Tavinor's "Fiction" (8 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* 2014, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron), and
- Noah Wardrip-Fruin's "Expressive Processing" (9 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* 2018, edited by me)

## Week 2 (September 15th): Play

Before seminar, please:

- Read Mia Consalvo's "Cheating" (6 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* 2014, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron),
- Read Tara Fickle's "West of the Magic Circle: The Orientalist Origins of Game Studies" (20 pages; from *The Race Card: From Gaming Technologies to Model Minorities* 2019),
- Read Kisha McPherson's "Are We Free to Go?: Anti-Black Racism and Its Impact on Black Play" (27 pages; in *American Journal of Play* 13.2/3 2021),
- Read Christine O'Bonsawin's "From Black Power to Indigenous Activism: The Olympic Movement and the Marginalization of Oppressed Peoples (1968-2012)" (20 pages; in *Journal of Sport History* 42.2 2015), and
- Optional: check out *Colossal Cave Adventure*, *Myst*, *DOOM*, *FarmVille*, and/or *Pokémon GO* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

How do racism, colonialism, and Orientalism shape, sustain, and preclude play? How do they not only define but also police what's fair? Does play require a sport or game?

During our second meeting, we'll discuss these four texts (145 minutes), carefully engaging them to follow their lines of inquiry. As we do, we'll consider the contexts, values, and cultural histories of play (against the assertion that play is somehow apolitical or



transcendent). I'll then take about five minutes to review not only Prompt 1, which is on the docket for next week, but also my "no questions asked" late policy for any work submitted within one week (five working days) of its due date.

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Editor Aubrey Anable's *Poetics of Play* (a special issue of *InVisible Culture* 2019),
- Brooke Belisle's "Immersion" (12 pages; from *Debugging Game History* 2016, edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins),
- Walter Benjamin's "On the Mimetic Faculty" (3 pages; 1933, republished in *Reflections* 1986),
- W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Problem of Amusement" (10 pages; in *The Southern Workman* 1897),
- Mary Flanagan's "Introduction to Critical Play" (15 pages; from *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* 2009),
- Editor TreaAndrea M. Russworm's *Blackness and Play* (a special issue of *American Journal of Play* 2021),
- Bernard Suits's "Words on Play" (15 pages; in *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 4.1 1977),
- Brian Sutton-Smith's "Play and Ambiguity" (17 pages; from *The Ambiguity of Play* 2001),
- T.L. Taylor's "The Assemblage of Play" (9 pages; in *Games and Culture* 4.4 2009),
- Aaron Trammell's "Decolonizing Play" (9 pages; in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 39.3 2022), and
- Emma Witkowski's "Cooperative Play" (8 pages; from *Debugging Game History* 2016, edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins)

### Week 3 (September 22nd): Games

Before seminar, please:

- Read "The Futures of Game Studies" (24 pages; in *The Velvet Light Trap* 81 2018), a dossier by Paul Booth, Shira Chess, Kishonna L. Gray, Carly A. Kocurek, Matthew Thomas Payne, TreaAndrea M. Russworm, and Adrienne Shaw;
- Read Alenda Y. Chang's "Digital Games" (16 pages; from *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene* 2021, edited by John Parham);
- Read Elizabeth A. LaPensée, Outi Laiti, and Maize Longboat's "Towards Sovereign Games" (16 pages; in *Games and Culture* 2021);
- Read Bo Ruberg's "No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt" (17 pages; in *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2.2 2015; revised for *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* 2019);
- Draft a response to Prompt 1; and,
- Optional: check out *Kentucky Route Zero*, *Resident Evil*, *EverQuest*, *Phone Story*, *Submerged*, *Prey*, *Queers in Love at the End of the World*, *Mario Kart*, *Depression Quest*,

*Mainichi, Super Hexagon, Terra Nova, Never Alone / Kisima Ingitchuna, Thunderbird Strike, and/or When Rivers Were Trails* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

What do we learn from cultural approaches to games and world-building? From playing beyond the fun?

*During our third meeting, we'll give last week's careful engagement another go, this time with four new texts (130 minutes). Then we'll return to games terminology to determine what requires clarification (5 minutes). I'll conclude by introducing you to Taylor's *Watch Me Play* and Gray's *Intersectional Tech* (10 minutes), which we'll discuss next week, and by reviewing Prompt 2, also for next week (5 minutes).*

*Prompt 1: Use 250-300 words (excluding references) to describe a type of play, or a context for play, you might research for this seminar. Please explain why it interests you and how it corresponds with at least one text (required or recommended) we've read thus far. Your audience is other people in this seminar, including me, and you're welcome to write informally. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section after your description. I advise spending two hours or less writing your response. No worries. None of this is written in stone, and you might change your mind as the term unfolds. (You'll submit this response on September 29th, but I suggest writing at least a rough draft for today's meeting.)*

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's "Computer Games" (15 pages; from *Remediation: Understanding New Media* 1998),
- Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux's "Breaking the Metagame: Feminist Spoilsports and Magic Circle Jerks" (16 pages; from *Metagaming: Playing, Competing, Spectating, Cheating, Trading, Making, and Breaking Videogames* 2017),
- Edmond Y. Chang's "Love Is in the Air: Queer (Im)Possibility and Straightwashing in *FrontierVille* and *World of Warcraft*" (25 pages; in *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2.2 2015),
- Mia Consalvo's "Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars" (6 pages; in *Ada: Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology* 1 2012),
- Tara Fickle and Christopher B. Patterson's "Diversity Is Not a Win-Condition" (10 pages; in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 2022),
- C.L.R. James's "'What Is Art?'" (16 pages; from *Beyond a Boundary* 1963),
- Meghna Jayanth's "Game Design in the Imperial Mode" (33 pages; keynote for Canadian Game Studies Conference May 2022),
- Soraya Murray's "Video Games and Playable Media" (6 pages; in *Feminist Media Histories* 4.2 2018),
- Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann's "A Game Genie for Game Studies" (13 pages; from *How to Play Video Games* 2019 edited by Payne and Huntemann; coming soon),

- Amanda Phillips's "Game Studies for Great Justice" (11 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* 2018, edited by me), and
- John Sharp's "Independent Games" (10 pages; from *Debugging Game History* 2016, edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins)

## Week 4 (September 29th): Broadcasting Play

Before seminar, please:

- Read Kishonna L. Gray's "#Me2, #Me4, Black Women, and Misogynoir: Transmediated Gaming Practices as Intersectional Counterpublics" (28 pages; from *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming* 2020; coming soon),
- Read T.L. Taylor's "Twitch and the Work of Play" (21 pages; in *American Journal of Play* 11.1 2018; an excerpt of *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* 2018),
- Respond to Prompt 2,
- Submit your early work in progress, and
- Optional: check out *Assassin's Creed IV: Freedom Cry* and/or *Gears of War* (both mentioned in *Intersectional Tech*).

How are player stories made and managed in unequal conditions? How do they document and comment on exclusionary politics? How and for whom are they transformative?

During our fourth meeting, we'll discuss these two texts (65 minutes) and then outline reasons why people (may want to) produce player stories that document, narrate, broadcast, analyze, contextualize, and/or reflect upon their play experiences (60 minutes). We'll conclude by compiling a list of streams, LPs, video essays, "real-time readings," and the like that may be relevant to your projects this term (20 minutes). I'll also take a second to cover Prompt 3, which is on the horizon (5 minutes).

*Prompt 2:* Use 250-300 words (excluding references) to describe a type of game or interactive fiction (e.g., a particular genre or style) you might research for this seminar. Please explain why it interests you and how it corresponds with at least one text (required or recommended) we've read thus far. Your audience is other people in this seminar, including me, and you're welcome to write informally. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section after the description. I advise spending two hours or less writing your response. Again, no worries. None of this is written in stone, and you might change your mind as the term unfolds.

**Please submit your early work in progress** (10% of your final mark). This submission should include:

- Your response to Prompt 1 (from Week 3),
- Your response to Prompt 2 (from this week), and
- Any notes or documentation you wish to include.

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Moya Bailey and Reina Gossett's "Analog Girls in Digital Worlds: Dismantling Binaries for Digital Humanists Who Research Social Media" (11 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* 2018, edited by me),
- Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw's "A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying about #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity" (13 pages; in *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 59.1 2015),
- Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger" (4 pages; in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9.3 1981),
- Christian Sandvig's "The Internet as the Anti-Television: Distribution Infrastructure as Culture and Power" (17 pages; from *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* 2015, edited by Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski), and
- T.L. Taylor's "Ethnography as Play" (25 pages; in *American Journal of Play* 14.1 2021)

## Week 5 (October 6th): Performing + Watching Play

Before seminar, please:

- Read Josef Nguyen's "[Performing as Video Game Players in Let's Plays](#)" (22 pages; in *Transformative Works and Cultures* 22 2016),
- Read Melanie Oberg's "The Video Video Game" (18 pages; in *Popular Culture Studies Journal* 9.2 2021),
- Draft a response to Prompt 3, and
- Optional: check out *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, *Amnesia: Rebirth*, *The Sims*, *Minecraft*, *Kirby's Dream Course*, and/or *Papers, Please* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

What's the relation between performance, affect, and power in a player story? How are player stories variously interpreted or decoded by audiences?

During our fifth meeting, we'll discuss these two texts (60 minutes) and then start preparing for next week's workshop (30 minutes). A visiting speaker (see below) will join us for 45 minutes, and you'll also have an opportunity to share some of your thoughts on Prompts 1 and 2 (10 minutes). I'll comment on your early work in progress prior to this meeting, and we'll review Prompt 4 before we go (5 minutes).

Visiting speaker: [Maddy Myers](#) (she / her; Deputy Editor of Games at *Polygon*; co-host of *Triple Click* and *The Mutant Ages*) will join us via Zoom.

**Prompt 3:** Play one of the [recommended games or fictions](#) for at least two hours (including replay if need be), preferably with someone else in the seminar. As you do, try experimenting across different media with three distinct ways to document your performance or experience of play. Then use a total of 300-500 words (excluding references) to describe your three approaches and, in so doing, provide an example or two of each in action. (You can attach, insert, or embed audio, images, video, or text. Any text included in your examples does not count against your allotted 250-300 words.) Since you're collaborating with someone on this one, you are welcome to co-author your response. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section after the description and documentation. Aside from time spent playing the game or fiction, I advise spending two hours or less writing your response. Your audience is other people in

this seminar, including me, and you are welcome to write informally. (You'll submit this response on November 3rd, but I suggest writing at least a draft for today's meeting.)

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Mia Consalvo's "Kaceytron and Transgressive Play on Twitch.tv" (16 pages; from *Transgression in Games and Play 2019*, edited by Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen),
- Dan Hagen's "Fair Use, Fair Play: Video Game Performances and 'Let's Plays' as Transformative Use" (30 pages; in *Washington Journal of Law, Technology, and Arts* 13.3 2018),
- Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" (11 pages; 1973, republished in *The Cultural Studies Reader 1999*, edited by Simon During),
- Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (8 pages, 1981, republished in *Cultural Resistance Reader 2002*, edited by Stephen Duncombe),
- Brenda Laurel's "The Nature of the Beast" (35 pages; from *Computers as Theatre 1991*),
- Adrienne Shaw's "Encoding and Decoding Affordances: Stuart Hall and Interactive Media Technologies" (11 pages; in *Media, Culture, and Society* 39.4 2017), and
- Ivan O. Taylor Jr.'s "Video Games, Fair Use, and The Internet: The Plight of the Let's Play" (25 pages; in *Illinois Journal of Law, Technology, and Policy* 2015)

## Week 6 (October 13th): First Player Stories Workshop

Before seminar, please:

- Play Nina Freeman's *Mangia* (Twine version, 2014),
- Read "*Mangia* by Nina Freeman, Played by Lana Polansky" (44 pages; from *Videogames for Humans 2015*, edited by merritt k),
- Read Austin Walker's "Me, on the Screen: Race in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*" (12 pages; self-published in 2013 and republished in *The New Statesman* 2013),
- Start responding to Prompt 4, and
- Optional: check out *Animal Crossing*, *Street Fighter*, *Final Fantasy*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, and/or *Mass Effect* (all mentioned in "Me, on the Screen").

What's a player story? How might you compose one? Why? And for whom?

During our sixth meeting, we'll hold a workshop on composing player stories and review the prompt for that assignment, which is due by December 15th. We'll look at examples (including Polansky's engagement with *Mangia*; 20 minutes) and then dedicate about two hours to:

- Discussing your responses to Prompts 1, 2, and 3,
- Describing the games and interactive fictions you're playing (e.g., their verbs, avatars, characters, dialogue, cameras, controls, gameplay loops, items, inventories, DKART [Terrell], ECOTAG [Hamilton], pacing, story beats, scenes, leveling, randomization, (extra)diegetic interfaces, art, audio, engines, minigames, and metagames),

- Describing how your games and fictions tell stories and involve players in that process,
- Getting permissions and attributing other people's work as part of your research,
- Making player stories with care for your audience's accessibility needs,
- Navigating attention economics, including "like and subscribe" platforms,
- Strategic uses of media, software, and narrative in player stories, including the personal, educational, and critical elements of play, and
- Axiology, reflexivity, affect, and accountability in player stories.

We'll also revisit the [related resources](#) in this outline, and I'll circulate a mechanism for your anonymous feedback on this course and its culture (10 minutes).

*Prompt 4:* It's time to pick a game or fiction for your player story! Use 300-500 words (excluding references) to identify and describe that game or fiction and then briefly explain why you selected it. Why is the game interesting or relevant today, and why might it warrant a player story? You are welcome to co-author your response, especially if you decide to produce a player story with someone else in the seminar (no more than two people per story, please). Bring the name of the game (or even the game itself) to today's meeting, where you'll have an opportunity to produce draft material for this prompt. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section. I advise spending three hours or less writing your response, which you might want to polish *after* today's workshop. Your audience is other people in this seminar, including me, but you may want to write a bit more academically for this one, as you may want to use some of the material for your player story. (You'll submit the response on November 3rd.)

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Andrea Braithwaite's "It's about Ethics in Journalism? Gamergaters and Geek Masculinity" (10 pages; in *Social Media + Society* October-December 2016),
- Naomi Clark's "Storytelling" (35 pages; from *A Game Design Vocabulary*, with Anna Anthropy, 2014),
- Amanda C. Cote's "Strategies for Play: Finding Space and Exercising Active Audience Power" (20 pages; from *Gaming Sexism: Gender and Identity in the Era of Casual Video Games* 2020),
- Anna Gibbs's "After Affect" (19 pages; from *The Affect Theory Reader* 2010),
- Darshana Jayemanne's "The Nip and the Byte: Analog and Digital Performances in Videogames" (31 pages; from *Performativity in Art, Literature, and Videogames* 2017),
- Brendan Keogh's "Across Worlds and Bodies" (32 pages; from *A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames* 2018),
- Patrick Klepek's "Call of Duty Devs Tell Us What It's Like to Make a Game in the Wake of a Mass Shooting" (8 pages; in *Waypoint: Games by Vice* 2022),
- Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett's "Actually, It's about Toxic Geek Masculinity ..." (16 pages; from *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media Sexism, Trolling, and Identity Policing* 2017), and



- Kurt Dean Squire's "Well Played as a Research Method" (10 pages; from *Well Played Retrospective 2021*, edited by Drew Davidson et al.)

## Week 7 (October 20th): The Gamic Gaze and Player Two

Before seminar, please:

- Read Shira Chess's "Playing with Identity" (20 pages; from *Reader Player Two: Women Gamers and Designed Identity 2017*),
- Read Amanda Phillips's "Gender, Power, and the Gamic Gaze" (27 pages; from *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture 2020*),
- Start working on your player story if you can: play your game or fiction, research it, document it . . . , and
- Optional: Check out *Portal*, *Tomb Raider*, *Bayonetta*, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, *Diner Dash*, *Candy Crush Saga*, and/or *Angry Birds* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

How are player stories entwined with voyeurism, co-presence, and commiseration? How do they engage and experiment with designed identities? With the values at play in a game's default settings and its assumptions about gender?

During our seventh meeting, we'll discuss these two texts (75 minutes) and start chatting about your player story methodologies (15 minutes). A visiting speaker (see below) will join us for 45 minutes, and you'll also have an opportunity to share some of your responses to Prompt 4 (10 minutes), if you wish. We'll conclude by reviewing Prompt 5 (5 minutes).

Visiting speaker: [Whitney "Strix" Beltrán](#) (Project Narrative Director at Hidden Path Entertainment) will join us via Zoom.

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Ashley M. L. Brown's "Videogames and Sex" (9 pages; from *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality 2017*, edited by Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood, and Brian McNair),
- Michel Chion's "Phantom Audio-Vision" (15 pages; from *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen 1994*),
- Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum's "Game Elements: The Language of Values" (39 pages; with Jonathan Belman; from *Values at Play in Digital Games 2014*),
- Carly A. Kocurek's "Gaming's Gold Medalists: Twin Galaxies and the Rush to Competitive Gaming" (21 pages; from *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade*),
- Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (13 pages; in *Screen 16.3 1975*),
- Anita Sarkeesian's "[Tropes vs. Women in Video Games](#)" (20 videos; 2013-17),
- Adrienne Shaw's "Does Anyone Really Identify with Lara Croft?: Unpacking Identification in Video Games" (41 pages; from *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture 2014*), and
- Nick Yee and Quantic Foundry's "Gamer Motivation Model" (9 pages; 2019)

## Week 8 (October 27th): Playbour and Gamification

Before seminar, please:

- Read Patrick Jagoda's "Society of the Game" (40 pages; from *Experimental Games: Critique, Play, and Design in the Age of Gamification* 2020),
- Read Lisa Nakamura's "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in *World of Warcraft*" (17 pages; in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26.2 2009),
- Draft a response to Prompt 5, and
- Optional: check out *Flower*, *Every Day the Same Dream*, *The Graveyard*, *Braid*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Undertale*, *Stardew Valley*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Problem Attic*, *Dys4ia*, *Civilization VI*, *God of War*, and/or *World of Warcraft* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

When do players "own" their avatars? Under what conditions do they become "workers without bodies"? Or entrepreneurs of themselves? To what effects on how stories are told?

During our eighth meeting, we'll discuss these two texts (60 minutes) and continue chatting about your player story methodologies (15 minutes). A visiting speaker (see below) will join us for 45 minutes, and you'll also have an opportunity to share some of your experiences playing games and fiction thus far this term (25 minutes). We'll wrap up by attending to what's due next week (your mid-term work in progress) (5 minutes).

Visiting speaker: [Amanda Phillips](#) (they/he/she; Associate Professor in the Department of English and Film and Media Studies at Georgetown University) will join us via Zoom.

*Prompt 5:* Use 500-750 words or 7-10 minutes of audio / video (excluding references) to critically engage any secondary source (assigned or further reading) you've read during Weeks 1-9 of this seminar. (I know it's only Week 8 right now, but you can write about next week's material if you'd like.) Your engagement should be mostly descriptive: describe the text's approach to games and/or interactive fiction, the argument it is making, under what assumptions it is making that argument, and to what effects on your understanding of play, games, and/or player stories. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section either in or attached to your work. I advise selecting a text that will inform your player story methodology (see Week 11) and spending three hours or less composing your response. Your audience consists of other students who are also taking a university game studies course, and you should write academically for them. (You'll submit this response on November 3rd, but I suggest getting started this week.)

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Aubrey Anable's "Casual Games, Time Management, and the Work of Affect" (18 pages; in *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology* 2 2013),
- Edward Castronova's "The Business of World-Making" (19 pages; from *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* 2005),

- Aleena Chia's "The Metaverse, But Not the Way You Think: Game Engines and Automation beyond Game Development" (10 pages; in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 2022),
- Christopher Douglas's "Multiculturalism in *World of Warcraft*" (19 pages; in *Electronic Book Review* 2010),
- Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter's "Cognitive Capitalism: Electronic Arts" (34 pages; from *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* 2009),
- David Golumbia's "Games without Play" (26 pages; in *New Literary History* 40.1 2009),
- Ge Jin's *Gold Farmers* documentary,
- Daniel Joseph's "Battle Pass Capitalism" (16 pages; in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 21.1 2021),
- Julian Kücklich's "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry" (14 pages; in *The Fibreculture Journal* 5 2005),
- Maurizio Lazzarato's "Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social" (25 pages; in *Theory, Culture and Society* 26.6 2009),
- Lisa Nakamura's "[Workers Without Bodies: Digital Labor, Race, and Gender](#)" (25 minutes; at Brown University 2015),
- Hector Postigo's "The Socio-technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money" (18 pages; in *New Media and Society* 18.2 2016),
- Steven Shaviro's "[Introduction to Accelerationism](#)" (from *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* 2015),
- Natasha Dow Schüll's "Engineering Experience: The Productive Economy of Player-Centric Design" (26 pages; from *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* 2012),
- [Vodeo Games](#), and
- Jennifer Whitson and Martin French's "Productive Play: The Shift from Responsible Consumption to Responsible Production" (20 pages; in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 21.1 2021)

## Week 9 (November 3rd): Global Games and Culturalization

Before seminar, please:

- Read Kate Edwards's "Culturalization" (6 pages; from *Debugging Game History* 2016),
- Read Christopher B. Patterson's "Global Game: Race Play / Intimacy" (32 pages; from *Open World Empire: Race, Erotics, and The Global Rise of Video Games* 2020),
- Submit your mid-term work in progress, and
- Optional: check out *Age of Empires II*, *Fallout 3*, *Forza Motorsports*, *Street Fighter II*, *Tekken*, *Soulcalibur II*, *League of Legends*, *Prince of Persia*, and/or *Overwatch* (all mentioned in the assigned reading).

How is race experienced as play when games are treated as global commodities for global audiences? How do player stories perform or situate themselves in the buzz of global game development?

During our ninth meeting, we'll discuss these two texts (60 minutes) and continue chatting about your player story methodologies (15 minutes). A visiting speaker (see below) will join us for 45 minutes, and you'll also have an opportunity to share some of your experiences playing games and interactive fiction thus far this term (10 minutes). We'll talk about Prompt 6 and our plan for Week 11, too, as well as the revisions statement that's due in December (20 minutes).

Visiting speaker: [Leonard J. Paul](#) (he / him; Director of the School of Video Game Audio) will join us via Zoom.

**Please submit your mid-term work in progress** (20% of your final mark). This submission should include:

- Your response to Prompt 3 (from Week 5),
- Your response to Prompt 4 (from Week 6),
- Your response to Prompt 5 (from Week 8), and
- Any notes or documentation you wish to include.

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Jodi Byrd's "[What Remains: Colonial Racial Capitalism, Videogames, and an Empire in Play](#)" (45 minutes; from *Ethics in Context* 2021) ([audio only](#)),
- Dean Chan's "Playing with Race: The Ethics of Racialized Representations in E-Games" (7 pages; in *International Review of Information Ethics* 4 2005),
- Naomi Clark and Merritt K's "Queering Human-Game Relations" (16 pages; in *First Person Scholar* 2015),
- Koichi Iwabuchi's "The 1990s--Japan's Return to Asia in the Age of Globalization" (22 pages; from *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* 2002),
- Lisa Nakamura's "Head-Hunting on the Internet: Identity Tourism, Avatars, and Racial Passing in Textual and Graphic Chat Spaces" (30 pages; from *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* 2002),
- Soraya Murray's "The World Is a Ghetto: Imagining the Global Metropolis in Playable Representation" (coming soon; 45 pages; from *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space* 2018), and
- Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" (13 pages; in the *Partisan Review* 1964)

## Week 10 (November 10th): Not Playing

We don't meet today. It's Reading Break.

## Week 11 (November 17th): Let's Play

Before seminar, please:

- Gather material from research you've conducted thus far and determine what you might like to share during seminar. This material could be documentation, commentary, or even part of a game or fiction you wish to play or demo for us.
- Draft a response to Prompt 6.

What are we learning from each other's projects? From witnessing and reading other player stories? From observing and contributing to play sessions?

*During our tenth meeting, we'll share work in progress (140 minutes). You can demo your player stories or your approaches to particular games and fictions. You'll also receive feedback on your player story methodologies. I'll return my comments on your mid-term work prior to this meeting, and we'll review what's on the table for Weeks 12 and 13 (10 minutes).*

*Prompt 6: Use 500-750 words or 7-10 minutes of audio / video (excluding references) to outline the methodology you've in mind for your player story. Your response should mention the game or interactive fiction you're studying, an issue or problem you're addressing, for whom you are addressing it, under what assumptions and in what context(s) you're engaging it, the sort of source material (primary and secondary) that's important to you, and how you plan to communicate your story, including the media (audio, image, video, and/or text) you're using to document and narrate the play experience. What exactly about the issue or problem, or what exactly about the game or fiction, lends itself to a player story? To *your* player story? As part of your methodology, please draw upon and cite at least three secondary sources (assigned or further reading) we've discussed in the first eleven weeks of this seminar. You might also speak to the personal and cultural dimensions of your methodology. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section. I advise spending four hours or less composing your response. Your audience is other people in this seminar, including me, and you're welcome to write or speak informally. (You'll submit this response on December 1st, but I suggest getting started this week.)*

## **Week 12 (November 24th): Second Player Stories Workshop**

*Before seminar, please:*

- Continue working on your player story,
- Refine your response to Prompt 6, and
- Draft a response to Prompt 7.

How do player stories function as documentation? How are or could they be archived?

*During our eleventh meeting, we'll hold a workshop in the Digital Scholarship Commons (UVic Libraries Room A308) on player stories as documentation (140 minutes). We'll look at examples and address topics such as:*

- Preserving games and player stories and also rendering them accessible,
- The status of player stories as both memory work and performance,

- The tensions between privileging either player stories or game engines as documentation,
- The question of editing and refining player stories when they also serve a documentary function, and
- Why players may *not* want to archive or circulate their stories.

We'll revisit the [resources](#) I mention in this syllabus, and we'll return to the prompt for the player story that's due by December 15th (10 minutes).

Visiting speaker: [J. Matthew Huculak](#) (he / him; Head of Advanced Research Services and Digital Scholarship Librarian at UVic Libraries) will join us in the DSC.

*Prompt 7:* Use 250-300 words (excluding references) to write an abstract for your player story. You should identify your audience at some point. Some possible audiences include scholars of games, media, literature, or narrative; game designers or developers; educators; a particular player or fan community; or memory workers invested in preserving games and/or interactive fiction. (I recommend composing with a particular audience in mind.) Your abstract should communicate to your readers the who, what, when, where, and why of your player story, including issues of cultural significance or relevance. Consider the possibility that people may read your abstract *before* engaging your player story. Please include your primary and secondary sources in a references section after the abstract. I advise spending two hours or less composing your response to this prompt. You will probably want to write formally or academically; however, the abstract's style will likely be shaped by your intended audience's expectations and knowledge. (You'll submit this response on December 1st, but I suggest getting started this week.)

Further reading (not required or expected; just more context if you'd like it):

- Pippin Barr's *The Nothings Suite* (self-published in 2020-22),
- Lindsay Grace's *Black Game Studies* (209 pages; with Latoya Peterson, Aaron Trammell, Allen Turner, and Boris Willis; published by Carnegie Mellon University and ETC Press 2019),
- Dene Grigar and Stuart Moulthrop's *Pathfinders: Documenting the Experience of Early Digital Literature* (published by Nospace Publications 2015-18),
- Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant's *The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy* (Middlebury College and the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities 2019),
- Patrick Klepek's "Video Game Guide Writers Help Keep the Lights On But Get No Respect" (in *Waypoint: Games by Vice* 2022),
- The *Let's Play Archive* (self-published and maintained by Baldurk, 2007-present),
- Maize Longboat's "*Terra Nova: Enacting Videogame Development through Indigenous-Led Creation*" (thesis, supervised by Mia Consalvo and Jason Edward Lewis, at Concordia University 2019),
- Henry Lowood's "Game Engines and Game History" (20 pages; in *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture* 2014),



- James Newman's "(Not) Playing Games: Player-Produced Walkthroughs as Archival Documents of Digital Gameplay" (19 pages; in *The International Journal of Digital Curation* 2.6 2011),
- Editors Laine Nooney, Raiford Guins, and Henry Lowood's first issue of *ROMchip* (2019),
- [Obsolete Computing and Media](#) at UVic, and
- The [Strong National Museum of Play](#)

## Week 13 (December 1st): Third Player Stories Workshop

*Before seminar, please:*

- Respond to Prompt 8,
- Draft your revisions statement, and
- Submit your late-term work in progress.

What have you cooked up thus far? What sort of feedback would be useful to you right now? What criteria do you want people to use to contextualize, interpret, and even assess your player story?

*During our final meeting, you will share your work in progress and get more feedback from your peers and me (90 minutes). We'll also hold a workshop on the transformative dimensions of player stories (40 minutes). We'll talk about:*

- How player stories might feed back into gaming communities and cultures,
- How player stories address toxicity and might help people to "unlearn" it,
- How and on what grounds you'd want people to contextualize and assess your player stories, and
- Where you want to go next with your draft material, or how you might tweak it before December 15th arrives.

You'll have time to complete course experience surveys, too (20 minutes).

*Prompt 8:* Draft and gather some of your player story material to share or demo during seminar. You can present briefly using your preferred approach. (In November, we'll determine the exact amount of time allotted to your presentation.) Feel free to use video, audio, images, or slides, if you wish. I advise spending four hours or less composing your response to this prompt. Your audience is other people in this seminar, including me, and you're welcome to present semi-formally (less formal than an academic conference but more formal than a chat among fellow students).

**Please submit your late-term work in progress** (25% of your final mark). This submission should include:

- Your response to Prompt 6 (from Week 11),
- Your response to Prompt 7 (from Week 12),

- Your response to Prompt 8 (from Week 13), including materials from your presentation, and
- Any notes or documentation you wish to include.

**Please also submit your revisions statement** (10% of your final mark): Use 300-500 words to outline significant revisions you *would* make to your responses to Prompts 1-7. Don't worry about line editing. Focus on substantive changes to your methodology and inquiry. How has your thinking changed? Your approach to games or interactive fiction? Your interests in particular issues or problems? What have you refined? Feel free to quote yourself or include samples of your work (as evidence) for the sake of specificity. (Quotes and samples don't contribute to the word count.) If you need more time for this response, then you are welcome to submit your revisions statement as late as December 8th.

## Week 15 (December 15th): Your Player Story

Roll credits! Congrats on wrapping up the term and composing your own player story.

**Please submit your final project** (35% of your final mark). This submission should include:

- The final draft of your player story and
- Any notes or documentation you wish to include.

See the prompt circulated on October 13th for more details. It includes information regarding word / minute counts, your player story format, your intended audience, documentation and references, and how your player story will be assessed.

I wish you a relaxing and rejuvenating winter break.

## Policies

Here are the policies for this seminar. If anything is unclear, ignorant, or mistaken, then please let me know. I'll correct it.

## Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this seminar, which is part of the English graduate program (MA and PhD) and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought concentration (MA and PhD). It's a special topics course (English 506, Studies in Literary Theory) within the Department of English.

## Assessment and Feedback

The final project and late-term work in progress are required to pass this course. Failure to complete these two assignments will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA).

I will use the Faculty of Graduate Studies' [official grading system](#) to assess your work. I do not post marks publicly or outside my office, and I do not use plagiarism detection software.

All assignments should be submitted via Brightspace. I will also use Brightspace to provide written feedback on each of your assignments, regardless of when you submit them: early work in progress (due Sept. 29), mid-term work in progress (due Nov. 3), late-term work in progress (due Dec. 1), revisions statement (due Dec. 1-8), and final project (due Dec. 15). If you ever want additional feedback, then feel free to ask me. I can provide it in person or via email.

Throughout the term, I'll request feedback (verbal and in writing) from you on how the seminar is going. I'll also ask you to complete Course Experience Surveys at the end of the term (during our last meeting).

### **Late Submissions and Extensions**

I have a "no questions asked" late policy for any assignments (excluding the final project, due December 15th) submitted within one week (five working days) of its due date. I simply ask that you complete an online form, which I'll circulate during seminar, to apply that policy. Your response to the online form will help me to track work that's arriving a few days late. It'll also save you an email. Of course, I recommend submitting everything on time, but I know that life happens, and for late work I will never expect any sort of documentation from you.

I will deduct three points per working day for every assignment submitted more than one week (five working days) late. Please email me if you need more than a week's extension. Again, I will comment on all assigned work I receive from you during the term, regardless of when it's submitted.

### **Communications**

The best way to communicate with me is by email ([jentery@uvic.ca](mailto:jentery@uvic.ca)) or during office hours, which are Thursday, 12:30 - 2:30pm. I respond to email between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

### **Attendance, Participation, and Recordings**

I will assume you are attending each one of our twelve meetings this term. If you are unable to attend a particular meeting, then please email me in advance. You do not need to provide me with documentation for an excused absence, but a message from you will help me to plan and adjust as necessary. There are no participation marks or the like in this seminar.

With your permission, I may record audio of our sessions and circulate it via Brightspace. You will have the option to limit personal information shared in the recording. If you have other questions or concerns regarding class recording and privacy, then please contact [privacyinfo@uvic.ca](mailto:privacyinfo@uvic.ca).

## Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. You and I are expected to adhere to [UVic's equity and human rights policies](#). You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about these policies and their application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

## Academic Integrity

You and I are expected to adhere to [UVic's academic integrity policy](#) and be aware of the policies for the evaluation of student work. Violations of the integrity policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. I do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

## Online Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting critical academic discourse while providing a respectful and supportive learning environment. All members of the university community have the right to this experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Please be advised that, by logging into UVic's learning systems and interacting with online resources, you are engaging in a university activity. All interactions within this environment are subject to the university's expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate university policy. To report concerns about online student conduct, email [onlineconduct@uvic.ca](mailto:onlineconduct@uvic.ca).

## Accessibility

If you have a disability or health consideration that may require supports, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Centre for Accessible Learning \(CAL\)](#) as soon as possible. CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate supports. I will never ask you to disclose a diagnosis to me, and I know that access needs are social, cultural, and structural issues that aren't always addressed, or adequately addressed, by institutions such as the academy.

Auto-generated transcription and captioning may be enabled in this course. Please be aware that automated transcription and captioning is at best 70-90% accurate and by nature will include errors. This depends on the subject matter, speaker, audio quality, and the like. Words prone to error include specialized terminology and proper names. I ask that you refer to the audio feed for clarification of any errors. If you find transcription or captioning that is offensive, please contact me. If you require captions as part of academic supports, please contact me and/or CAL.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I aim to create an inclusive learning environment that attends to difference and honours each of you, including your experiences as well as the intersections of race, gender, disability, sexuality, religion, power, and class. I want to be a resource for you, and I am also still learning. If something is said in class (by anyone, including me) that makes you feel uncomfortable, then don't hesitate to talk with me. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your university records, then let me know and I'll correct the documents provided to me. If your performance in the class is being impeded by your experiences outside of class, then just keep me posted and we'll make adjustments. I also welcome any suggestions to improve the quality of the seminar and/or its culture and materials, and I will make available mechanisms for anonymous feedback since you may prefer them. If you'd rather speak with someone outside the seminar, then Stephen Ross (graduate adviser in the Department of English) is an excellent resource.

The following student groups may be relevant to your life as a student here at UVic:

- [The Native Students Union](#) "is a community group for Indigenous students at UVic. Our space in the SUB is open to self-identifying Indigenous students who want to work, study, lounge, have lunch, or connect with other students. We're also located in the First Peoples House. Our weekly meetings are an opportunity for students to connect, plan events, share resources, or work on any student-led initiatives on student wellness, culture, Indigenous resurgence, and decolonization."
- [The Students of Colour Collective](#) "is a group of self-identified Black, Indigenous and/or Persons of colour operating as an advocacy group out of the University of Victoria, located on Lekwungen Homelands. We are committed to cultural awareness, mental health, anti-racism, and social justice. SOCC welcomes and encourages all students who self identify as Black, Indigenous and/or Persons of colour at UVic to become active members."
- [The Society for Students with a Disability \(SSD\)](#) "is a student advocacy group that promotes the full participation and inclusion of students identified with disabilities at the University of Victoria. The SSD provides a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment for all students identified with disabilities. The SSD advocates for individual accommodation and systemic changes to the University that will make post-secondary education more accessible and socially just."
- [The Gender Empowerment Centre \(GEM\)](#) "is a collectively run, drop-in space on campus that provides resources through an intersectional feminist framework. GEM offers free access to a large variety of safer sex supplies, menstrual supplies (including FREE menstrual cups) pregnancy tests and emergency contraceptives. They provide health resources, peer support, as well as a lounge space to hang out, study, and meet others."
- [UVic Pride](#) "is an organization for all people who are queer, queer-positive, gender-variant and/or intersex. We strive to meet the needs of people who self-identify as queer (including but not limited to people who identify as Two Spirit, bisexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, demisexual, aromantic, and pansexual, as well as people who do not identify with these labels); trans people; those who are questioning their sexuality or

gender; those who are struggling with concerns related to intersexuality; and supportive partners, friends, family members, and allies."

*Language for this policy was drawn from the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University, and from the work of Monica Linden, in particular.*

## Basic Needs

I want you to thrive in this course and everywhere else. Please let me know as early as possible if you have any concerns or if you require any supports to succeed. I'll do my best to help. If, for instance, you need to cover gaps in care, then please don't hesitate to bring your children to seminar meetings. Babies who are nursing are always welcome, as I do not want you to choose between feeding your child and continuing your education.

UVic takes student mental health very seriously, with a [website](#) full of resources. They offer services such as assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills concerns. Services for students also include crisis and emergency mental health consultation and confidential assessment, counselling services (individual and small group), and referrals. Many of these programs are connected with Health Services, which you may contact by phone.

The [Student Services website](#) lists several policies that you might want to know about and may make your life at UVic safer and easier. Only some of them are directly related to this seminar, but they're still important.

*Language for this policy was drawn from the work of Richard Pickard at UVic.*

## Related Materials

I realize this seminar may be your first experience with game studies in an academic context. The following three sections ("[Related Reading](#)," "[Related Listening](#)," and "[Related Resources](#)") point you to materials that you might find useful along the way. I know these lists are long and potentially overwhelming. If you're looking for something specific, perhaps related to your research, then let me know. I'll help you to refine the scope.

## Related Reading

I recommend purchasing merritt k's *Videogames for Humans*. It's available as a paperback and ebook (PDF, EPUB, and MOBI), and with it you get playable versions of every featured game. *Videogames for Humans* offers us a sharp sense of what player stories are and what they can do.

Elsewhere, we'll be reading chapters from several academic monographs, such as Shira Chess's *Reader Player Two*, Tara Fickle's *The Race Card*, Kishonna L. Gray's *Intersectional Tech*, Patrick Jagoda's *Experimental Games*, Christopher B. Patterson's *Open World Empire*, Amanda Phillips's *Gamer Trouble*, Bo Ruberg's *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, and T.L. Taylor's *Watch Me Play*. If you find a chapter to be especially compelling and relevant



to your interests, then I recommend acquiring the entire monograph to further your research.

If you are looking for a primer on writing games criticism, then try Ian Bogost's *How to Talk about Videogames* (available online via UVic Libraries). It's not a "how to" book; however, it's written for a broad audience and demonstrates various ways to write about games.

There are also many popular and academic publications that engage games in some way. Among them are:

- *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, "an open-access peer reviewed journal featuring scholarship on gender, new media and technology."
- *American Journal of Play*, which "features interviews, book reviews, and original peer-reviewed research for a wide readership of scholars, educators, policymakers, museum and industry professionals, healthcare workers, and those who seek to understand the importance and impact of play in our world."
- *Analog Game Studies*, "a journal dedicated to the academic and popular study of games containing a substantial analog component."
- *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (available online via UVic Libraries), "a peer-reviewed publication of the National Communication Association. CSMC publishes original scholarship in mediated and mass communication from a cultural studies and/or critical perspective."
- *First Person Scholar* (also a podcast), featuring "timely, rigorous, and accessible criticism that challenges all players to engage in what Mary Flanagan calls *critical play*."
- *Funland*, "an all-new digital games publication. Instead of merely being an exercise in nostalgia or aesthetics, it will blend elements of olde with coverage that better reflects our modern tone, scope and politics. In short: A queer GamePro."
- *Games and Culture* (available online via UVic Libraries), "an international journal that promotes innovative theoretical and empirical research about games and culture within interactive media."
- *Game Studies*, "a non-profit, open-access, crossdisciplinary journal dedicated to games research, web-published several times a year; our primary focus is aesthetic, cultural and communicative aspects of computer games, but any previously unpublished article focused on games and gaming is welcome."
- *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (available online via UVic Libraries), the mission of which "is to foster engaged debate and rigorous thinking among humanities scholars of film, television, digital media, and other audiovisual technologies."
- *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, which "explores the cultural effects of gaming and virtual worlds across platforms and genres, as their increasing popularity begins to affect culture as a whole."
- *Loading...: The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association*, "a forum for publishing original and interdisciplinary academic research on video games."
- *Patch*, "an independent news source which primarily covers video games that are created by independent developers or studios."

- *Unwinnable*, "a website and digital magazine, founded in 2010 to provide a different kind of cultural criticism. We love to read about different perspectives, so we set out to collect a diverse group of contributors, amateur and veteran alike, to tell their stories."
- *Uppercut*, "a games and media site devoted to punching up through high quality content that focuses on highlighting marginalized voices and great criticism."
- *Well Played*, "a forum for in-depth close readings of video games that parse out the various meanings to be found in the experience of playing a game."

If you're curious about the design side of games, then Anna Anthropy's *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* is an excellent intro to not only experimental games but also many issues we'll engage this term. Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman's *Rules of Play* is a canonical game design book that you'll find, for example, on UVic English's "Book and Media Studies" PhD exam list. Anthropy also wrote *A Game Design Vocabulary* with Naomi Clark; it grounds game design in "verbs" and storytelling. Brenda Romero and Ian Schreiber's *Challenges for Game Designers* is excellent, too. It's full of clever exercises, and I've used it in several of my prototyping classes.

## Related Listening

I like podcasts. You? Here are some that land somewhere in the zone of game studies:

- *The AIAS Game Maker's Notebook*, which features "in-depth, one-on-one conversations between game makers."
- *Channel F*, where "host merritt k now subjects her coworkers to twisted challenges in order to determine who lives and who dies. Also, video games!"
- *Critical Distance*, "an interview series about game research supported by Critical Distance and the Digital Games Research Association."
- *Game Studies Study Buddies*, "a podcast that makes academic games studies accessible, text by text. Rather than focusing on following or forging a 'canon' of the discipline, media scholar Cameron and literature scholar Michael instead aim to cover an eclectic body of material."
- *Gameplay*, "a narrative podcast about video games and the virtual worlds that power culture and community."
- *Not Your Mama's Gamer*, "started by Samantha Blackmon and Alex Layne in 2011, was designed as a space that would bring scholarly endeavors in line with personal passion, a space that would combine feminist interrogation of games with the games community. Over the years, NYMGamer's slate of writers has featured professors, writers, and professionals from a variety of industries, but the focus has always been the same: unpacking games from a feminist perspective, and having a good time while we're at it."
- *Spawn on Me*, "the prime video game podcast pushing gamers of color. Straight from Brookago, host Kahlief Adams brings news, previews, and reviews while probing how games affect the world."
- *Triple Click*, where "Kirk Hamilton, Maddy Myers, and Jason Schreier talk about video games and sometimes other things, too."

- [Video Game History Hour](#) by the Video Game History Foundation, which is "a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, celebrating, and teaching the history of video games."
- [Waypoint Radio](#) by Vice; "join Waypoint's Rob Zacny, Patrick Klepek, Renata Price, Natalie Watson, and Ricardo Contreras two times a week, as they break down the biggest stories in video games, talk about their favorite media, and unfairly compare everything to *Dark Souls*."
- [Woodland Secrets](#), "the personal talk show of merritt k. It's not an interview podcast in a strict sense—instead, it's a loose, casual conversation between two friends about their work, lives, and interests."

You can donate via Patreon where applicable.

## Related Resources

Perhaps you're looking for collections of games, Let's Plays, or interactive fiction? Or some software for that kind of stuff? Or maybe game studies glossaries, companions, guides, conferences, scholarly orgs, and the like? Here is a list of resources along those lines.

- Amazon's [Twitch](#), "where millions of people come together live every day to chat, interact, and make their own entertainment together."
- Susan Banks and Courtney Craven's [Can I Play That?](#), which "provides all forms of accessibility information on video games and the industry."
- The [Canadian Game Studies Association / L'Association Canadienne d'Études des Jeux \(CGSA/ACÉJ\)](#), "an organization dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of digital games."
- Leaf Corcoran's [itch.io](#), "an open marketplace for independent digital creators with a focus on independent video games."
- The [Digital Games Research Association \(DiGRA\)](#), "the premiere international association for academics and professionals who research digital games and associated phenomena."
- The Game Developers Conference's [GDC Vault](#), "a trove of in-depth design, technical and inspirational talks and slides from the influencers of the game development industry, taken from over 20 years of the worldwide Game Developers Conferences."
- [Game Quitters](#), which "exists to provide the best tools, resources, and peer support for people of all ages and backgrounds who struggle to quit playing video games."
- Lindsay Grace et al.'s [Black Game Studies](#) (Carnegie Mellon University's ETC Press 2021), which "introduces the work of game makers from the African diaspora through academic scholarship, personal narratives and an catalog of works."
- Dene Grigar et al.'s [The NEXT](#) (Electronic Literature Organization 2018-), the mission of which is "to facilitate and promote the writing, publishing, and reading of literature in electronic media. It seeks to achieve this mission by making born-digital literary works and the scholarship about them accessible to the public for years to come."

- N. Katherine Hayles et al.'s *Electronic Literature Collection* (Electronic Literature Organization 2006-), which contains four volumes, with brief descriptions of every work available therein.
- The Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation's *Interactive Fiction Database* (1992-), "an IF game catalog and recommendation engine."
- *The Internet Archive*, with collections such as "Internet Arcade," "MS-DOS Games," "Videogame Videos," and various software libraries. You'll even find archived videos of speed runs, longplays, Let's Plays, virtual worlds, and developer interviews.
- Jesper Juul's *A Dictionary of Video Game Theory* (2005); "with the dictionary, I hope to provide a resource for students, researchers, teachers, and game players looking for terminological clarifications and pointers to further reading."
- The *Let's Play Archive* (2007-), created and maintained by baldurk.
- Editors Henry Lowood and Raiford Guin's *Debugging Game History: A Critical Lexicon* (The MIT Press 2016; available online via UVic Libraries); "essays discuss the terminology, etymology, and history of key terms, offering a foundation for critical historical studies of games."
- *LudoNarraCon*, "a digital convention hosted on Steam celebrating narrative games and the people who make them!"
- Stacey Mason's *Cerebral Arcade streams*, "a place for thoughtful gamers and minds at play."
- Microsoft's *Xbox Game Pass*, a subscription service; "enjoy hundreds of high-quality games with friends on console, PC, or cloud."
- *NarraScope*, an "event that supports interactive narrative, adventure games, and interactive fiction by bringing together writers, developers, and players."
- *Obsolete Computing and Media* at UVic, "a developing collection of older computers, software, and documentation, supporting research and instruction in areas such as Media Studies, Digital Archaeology, and the Histories of Computing."
- The *Queerness and Games Conference*, "a community-oriented, internationally-recognized event dedicated to exploring the intersection of LGBTQ issues and games founded in 2013."
- Editors Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann's *How to Play Video Games* (NYU Press 2019), which "brings together forty original essays from today's leading scholars on video game culture, writing about the games they know best and what they mean in broader social and cultural contexts."
- Aaron A. Reed's *50 Years of Text Games*, "a project that traces a path through the history of digital games without graphics, by picking one game from each year between 1971 to 2021 and taking an in-depth look at how it works and why it's important."
- Anita Sarkeesian et al.'s *Feminist Frequency* (2009-), which "has been and will always be dedicated to fighting for a media landscape that treats marginalized groups with fairness and justice."
- The *Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS)*, "the leading scholarly organization in the United States dedicated to promoting a broad understanding of film, television,

and related media through research and teaching grounded in the contemporary humanities tradition."

- Richard Terrell's (KirbyKid) *The Critical-Glossary* (2007-11), "a collection of terms and definitions on game design."
- [Twine](#), "an open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories."
- Valve's [Steam](#), "with nearly 30,000 games from AAA to indie and everything in-between."
- Wikipedia's list of [video game terms](#).
- Editor Mark J. P. Wolf's *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming* (Greenwood 2021); "this three-volume encyclopedia covers all things video games, including the games themselves, the companies that make them, and the people who play them."
- Editors Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron's *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (Routledge 2016; available online via UVic Libraries), which "aims to address the ongoing theoretical and methodological development of game studies, providing students, scholars, and game designers with a definitive look at contemporary video game studies."

## Territory Acknowledgement

As a faculty member who lives and works as a guest on these lands, I acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

*This course outline for English 506, "Player Stories" (Fall 2022 at the University of Victoria), is licensed [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).*