



Video Games and Japan

JAPA 370 – Spring 2019

Tuesday and Thursday, 4:30PM – 5:45PM
Enterprise Hall 274

Why should you take a class about video games? To begin with, the medium is at the center of an enormous market for digital entertainment. The global video game industry is valued at more than ninety billion dollars. This market is larger than the global cinema industry, and it is only expanding with each passing year, and research has demonstrated that well over 80% of the populations of many countries around the world routinely play games on their smartphones, tablets, computers, and home consoles. Moreover, recent online and news media discourses surrounding gaming, gender, and violence have shown that people take the stories told by video games very seriously – and very personally. Video games have emerged as one of the dominant forms of artistic expression and social engagement in the 21st century, and it is therefore necessary to develop a critical interest in these texts and the cultures surrounding them.

This class focuses on video games originating in Japan, as well as the global fandom communities surrounding these games. We will begin with an introduction to the history of Japanese games by using Nintendo as a case study. We will then build a foundation in critical approaches to games and gaming. In the second half of the semester we will cover international markets and gaming cultures. Along the way we will explore different approaches to the study of video games as we play *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, one of the most influential and critically acclaimed games in the world. The purpose of this course is to provide students with the means of reading and understanding video games as digital works of art and literature within the context of contemporary media cultures in the United States, Japan, and around the world.

Course Texts

Eiji Aonuma, *The Wind Waker* (any version or edition is fine)
Steve Stratton and Garitt Rocha, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker Official Strategy Guide*
Masahiko Shioya, *The Legend of Zelda: Hyrule Historia*
Jeff Ryan, *Super Mario: How Nintendo Conquered America*
Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*

Instructor

Kathryn Hemmann
khemmann@gmail.com
Aquia Building Room 326
office hours by appointment

Grading and Assignments

Participation: 25%
Weekly Quizzes: 25%
Class Presentation Proposal: 5%
Final Project Proposal: 5%
Class Presentation: 15%
Final Project: 25%

Participation

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be engaged and attentive during class lectures and discussions. In addition, each student must have played through *The Wind Waker* up to the point specified on the syllabus. Although it is acceptable to play the game as a group or watch “let’s play” videos on YouTube, each student is ultimately responsible for becoming familiar with the digital text, including its gameplay elements. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower the participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor or the other students.

Weekly Quizzes

Every week on Thursday there will be a short quiz testing students on that week’s segment of *The Wind Waker*. Questions will cover both plot and gameplay elements. There will also be one longer discussion question on each quiz that will incorporate themes from the readings and discussion of the previous class period. Discussion questions with room for creative expression may also appear on the quizzes.

The first quiz will be on January 31, and there will be a total of twelve quizzes. A student’s lowest quiz grade will not be dropped. Sufficient documentation is required in order for a student to make up a quiz in the advent of an absence. A make-up quiz will take the form of a 400-word

response to that week's material and will be submitted electronically no later than the Thursday following the missed quiz. Preemptive response papers will be accepted for planned absences.

Class Presentation

In-class presentations are scheduled for **April 25, April 30, and May 2**. During these days, each student will give a seven-minute presentation on a single Japanese video game title (not a series or franchise). In this presentation, you will explain why the game you have chosen is interesting and important, as well as how it relates to the larger themes of the class.

Proposals for this presentation are due as hard copies at the beginning of class on **March 21**, the first Thursday after Spring Break. In this proposal, you will state the title of the game you wish to present on and give a brief summary of why you chose it. This proposal should be about 200 words. It is not necessary to cite any sources or list any works referenced.

I will not allow pair or group presentations, and I will also not allow duplicate presentations on a single game (although different games in the same series or franchise are acceptable). If you want to ensure that you will be able to present on your chosen game, send me your proposal in advance of the deadline. Scheduling sign-ups will also take place at the beginning of class on March 26, but I will accommodate all scheduling requests sent to me in advance.

Final Project

The final project may deal with any topic relating to video games and Japan, including but not limited to close readings of individual games, research on game series, studios, and developers, disciplinary approaches to game history, art, and music, and investigations into fan cultures. Topics not addressed in class are welcome, as are comparative approaches.

Students have two options concerning this project. The first is a six-to-eight-page research paper that draws on a minimum of three academic peer-reviewed sources (such as the course readings). The second is a creative project that incorporates the themes and methods of academic inquiry covered during the semester. Although students are encouraged to share their ideas with one another, each student is responsible for their own work, and group projects are not allowed on either the research paper option or the creative project option. The final project should be emailed to me no later than **7:15pm on Tuesday, May 14**. No deadline can be granted, but earlier submissions will be highly appreciated.

Proposals for this presentation are due as hard copies at the beginning of class on **Thursday, April 4**. The goal of this proposal is to explain the topic and questions you wish to explore in your final project. If you are writing a research paper, your proposal should contain a thesis statement, a brief outline of the structure of your argument, and a formal bibliographic list of sources. If you have opted for the creative option, your proposal should describe your artistic medium and the estimated length of your project, as well as a list of works referenced. Your proposal should be approximately one page (about 250 words) in length. You will be asked to revise and resubmit your proposal if it does not meet the guidelines stated above, or if the project you have proposed is unsuitable or unrealistic.

Course Policies

Required Games and Readings

PDFs of the books assigned for this course are available on the course site on Blackboard, as are the assigned essays. Students are required to complete all assigned readings before the appropriate class. Although it is not strictly necessary, it is requested that students come to class with a hard copy of the appropriate reading.

The Wind Waker may be “played” in any way that you find comfortable and convenient. Playing any version of the game on an emulator (with any desired patches) is acceptable, as is watching a series of “let’s play” videos or reading an illustrated walkthrough. Recommendations will be discussed in class, and links to relevant material will be provided on Blackboard.

Attendance

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies and printouts are fine) or have an appropriate party write to me on your behalf. If this documentation is not submitted within three days of your absence, it becomes forfeit. Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deducted from your final course grade. Please be aware that obligations for other classes (such as makeup exams) do not count as valid excuses, even if they are scheduled during our class time. If such a conflict arises, please notify the class’s professor to reschedule the commitment. Professional development such as job interviews and graduate campus visits are considered valid excuses.

Technology

Tablets are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **smartphones and laptop computers are absolutely not allowed** without a formal letter from the Office of Disability Services.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the Mason Honor Code. No instances of cheating, plagiarization, stealing, or lying in matters related to academic work will be tolerated.

Respect

As in any class dealing with popular media and contemporary social issues, students may find that the course material is directly pertinent to their lives, and discussion may become personal and intense. Nevertheless, each student is expected to be respectful of their peers. No speech demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, body shape, or disability will be tolerated. In addition, the uncritical reproduction of stereotypes relating to culture and nationality in written assignments and class discussions will be harshly penalized. Please consult with me outside of class if you would like me to provide trigger warnings for mention or discussion of any topic or issue.

Tuesday, January 22 – Why Study Video Games?

Course Introduction, Expectations, and Resources

Thursday, January 24 – Are Video Games Art?

How to Do Things with Videogames, pp.9-17

John Sharp, “Game Art,” from *Works of Game*, pp.19-48

UNIT ONE:

VIDEO GAME HISTORY

Tuesday, January 29 – The Rise of Nintendo

Jeff Ryan, *Super Mario*

“Mario’s Island,” pp.59-67

“Mario’s Sunshine,” pp.68-79

“Mario’s Bomb,” pp.81-88

“Mario’s Smash,” pp.89-100

“Mario’s Brothers,” pp.101-106

“Mario’s Drift,” pp.107-116

Thursday, January 31 – The Legend of the Hero

The Wind Waker, Outset Island

(up to page 69 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, February 5 – The Console Wars

Jeff Ryan, *Super Mario*

“Mario’s Clash,” pp.119-128

“Mario’s Galaxy,” pp.129-137

“Mario the Juggler,” pp.139-148

“Mario’s Advance,” pp.149-157

Thursday, February 7 – Cities of Monsters and Cities of Men

The Wind Waker, The Forbidden Fortress and Windfall Island

(up to page 86 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, February 12 – Challenging a Global Century

Jeff Ryan, *Super Mario*

“Mario’s World,” pp.175-183

“Mario’s Melee,” pp. 195-206

“Mario’s Time Machine,” 206-212

“Mario’s Revolution,” pp.229-238

“Mario’s Princess,” pp.239-249

Thursday, February 14 – Learning to Fly

The Wind Waker, Dragon Roost Island and Dragon Roost Cavern

(up to page 106 in the strategy guide)

**UNIT TWO:
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO VIDEO GAMES**

Tuesday, February 19 – Affective Labor

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*

“Empathy,” pp.18-22

“Reverence,” pp.23-29

“Transit,” pp.45-51

Tom Bissell, “Braided,” from *Extra Lives*, pp.91-103

Thursday, February 21 – Fantasy Landscapes

The Wind Waker, Forest Haven and the Forbidden Woods
(up to page 128 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, February 26 – Narrative Architecture

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*

“Kitsch,” pp.83-88

“Relaxation,” pp.89-95

“Titillation,” pp.103-109

Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture”

http://interactive.usc.edu/blog-old/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Jenkins_Narrative_Architecture.pdf

Thursday, February 28 – Violence and Villainy

The Wind Waker, Nayru’s Pearl

(up to page 151 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, March 5 – Making Players Work (or Not)

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*

“Work,” pp.117-124

“Habituation,” pp.125-133

“Disinterest,” pp.134-140

Evan Narcisse, “The Natural: The Parameters of the Afro,” from *The State of Play*, pp.53-74

Thursday, March 7 – Dungeons, Puzzles, and Boss Fights

The Wind Waker, Tower of the Gods and Hyrule Castle
(up to page 179 in the strategy guide)

* * * SPRING BREAK * * *

Monday, March 11 – Sunday, March 17

**UNIT THREE:
THE TRANSNATIONAL GAMING INDUSTRY**

Tuesday, March 19 – What Do We Mean by “Transnational”?

Koichi Iwabuchi, “How ‘Japanese’ Is Pokémon?” from *Pikachu's Global Adventure*, pp.53-79

Thursday, March 21 – The Horror of the Forgotten

The Wind Waker, Earth Temple
(up to page 211 in the strategy guide)
* Class Presentation Proposal Due *

Tuesday, March 26 – Localization

Mia Consalvo, “Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry,” from *Cinema Journal*, pp.135-141
Jason Schreier, “Nintendo’s Secret Weapon”
<https://kotaku.com/inside-the-treehouse-the-people-who-help-make-nintendo-1301809672>

Thursday, March 28 – The Beauty of Friendship

The Wind Waker, Wind Temple
(up to page 228 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, April 2 – Technical Limitations and Creative Logistics

Jason Schreier, “Dragon Age: Inquisition,” from *Blood, Sweat, and Pixels*, pp.141-168
Nintendo Dream, “*The Wind Waker* Exclusive Developer Interview” (handout)

Thursday, April 4 – An Open World

The Wind Waker, Triforce of Courage
(up to page 246 in the strategy guide)
* Final Project Proposal Due *

UNIT FOUR:

GAMING FANDOMS AND GAMER CULTURE

Tuesday, April 9 – Breaking the Game

Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, “Hundred Thousand Billion Fingers: Serial Histories of *Super Mario Bros*,” from *Metagaming*, pp.173-205
Sean C. Duncan and James Paul Gee, “The Hero of Timelines,” from *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy*, pp.85-101

Thursday, April 11 – How to Save Hyrule

The Wind Waker, Ganon’s Tower
(up to page 262 in the strategy guide)

Tuesday, April 16 – The Princess Is the Hero in This One

Stephanie Fisher, Jennifer Jenson, and Suzanne de Castell, “Dynamic (Con)Texts: Close Readings of Girls’ Video Gameplay,” from *Girls, Texts, Cultures*, pp.261-286
Shira Chess, “Playing with Emotions,” from *Ready Player Two*, pp.89-120

Thursday, April 18 – The Legends of Zelda

Kathryn Hemmann, “The Legends of Zelda: Fan Challenges to Dominant Video Game Narratives,” from *Woke Gaming*, pp.213-228
Gabrielle Trépanier-Jobin, “Video Game Parodies: Appropriating Video Games to Criticize Gender Norms,” from *Gaming Representation*, pp.90-105

Tuesday, April 23 – DIY Gaming and Embarking on Your Second Quest

Anna Anthropy, “Changing the Game,” from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, pp.69-91

Zoe Quinn, “A Game I Had to Make,” from *The State of Play*, pp.85-102

Hugh Howey, “Select Character,” from *Press Start to Play*, pp.488-502

Thursday, April 25

Student Presentations

Tuesday, April 30

Student Presentations

Thursday, May 2

Student Presentations

**FINAL PROJECT MUST BE SUBMITTED BY
7:15PM on TUESDAY, MAY 14**

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