

# CTK 460.1 Computer Arts Studio: Play and Society

## Course Syllabus

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**IMPORTANT: Some parts of this syllabus have been redacted.**

### COURSE OVERVIEW

#### *Description*

Provides an historical and cultural perspective on play, playfulness, lusory attitude, games and other forms of mediated culture. Examines the present state and future directions of paper, card, and board games; physical games and sports; and video games. Imagines transformed digital playful art/ifacts as continuation of these heritage. Introduces students to current issues, experiments, and directions in the field of game design. Students develop a critical basis for analyzing game play and using play to critique.

The course will build on three themes:

- The relationship of play and games to culture and society
- Design affordances and media conventions, their histories and origins, as well as a future imagining of play and games in digital art, technology, activism, and social change
- Defining playfulness, lusory attitude, and game design as a form of cultural production

#### *Learning Objectives*

After the course, you should be able to:

- Explain and apply interpretive, cultural, and historical frameworks to analyze playful texts
- Identify, describe, and analyze a broad array of games, genres, and playful experiences and artifacts as aesthetic forms across times, cultures, and media.
- Understand the history of game design, art games, game and art criticism, and identify the origins of media conventions and traditions, including the role of games and play in various art movements and practices
- Apply social, cultural, political, and philosophical theories and perspectives, as well as their own cultural observations, to playful productions.

#### *Delivery*

The course will be taught in a combination of lecture and in-class and out-of-class assignments that demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subject through applying the concepts. Students are expected to apply concepts learnt and produce playful digital artifacts.

### GRADING POLICY

#### *Grading Table*

Item	Points
Attendance & Class Participation	20
Theory Phase: Research	35
Theory to Practice Phase: Ideation	10
Practice Phase: Production	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### Theory Phase: Research

In the first part of the class, there will be a theory phase wherein you will be required to read, write, and present about theoretical issues surrounding playfulness and societal impact, and participate in a graduate research project that is aimed at an academic project and/or publication. Participation in research projects might entail data gathering, data analysis, writing results, background research, etc. depending on your interests and skills. This semester we will have 3 research projects and you will be able to participate in only one or multiple.

- 1) **Gender and representation in virtual game worlds:** We will perform background research and collect and analyze data about NPCs in virtual game worlds pertaining gender representation.
- 2) **Cultural heritage and playful virtuality:** We will contribute to a database about virtual representations of cultural spaces and work on metadata.
- 3) **Serious games and relationships of power:** We will look at selected serious games produced by various governments, institutions, and corporations to understand how they construct power relations with the communities around the world.

The resulting academic papers/works will be submitted to national and international conferences, journals, etc. Students with successful work and submissions may be funded to travel to these venues to present the work.

### Theory to Practice Phase: Ideation

As the second part of the class, we are going to bring our work and learnings together to create ideas and projects about how playfulness, games, and ludic attitude can be mobilized for the purposes of cultural communication, art, activism, and societal impact. At the end of this phase, the whole class is expected to converge on a master theme and form groups to produce work under this theme.

### Practice Phase: Production

The third and final phase will be constructed according to the outcome of the second phase. The aim is to collaborate on planning, executing, and working together to create a (group of) work that is large and interdisciplinary enough to be presented/performed/published/exhibited in some sort of public venue.

Your final grade is calculated by summing all the acquired points and by converting them to a letter grade. You should not expect a curve to be applied.

A	–	100-90
B	–	89 -80
C	–	79-70
D	–	69-60
F	–	50 and below
I	–	Incomplete

### SCHEDULE

<b>WEEK-1</b> <b>PLAY AS CULTURE</b>	<b>In today's class:</b> - Student self-introductions - Curriculum overview and expectations from the course  <b>Play:</b> <i>Harvest</i>
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	<p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does it mean to play? “Play pre-dates culture.”</li> <li>- What is culture? Is play a form of culture?</li> <li>- What is a game? What are the boundries and requirements of a game?</li> <li>- What are the playing and gaming cultures and how do they relate to or affect us?</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><i>TO-DOs for the next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required videos:</b>  <i>Never Alone:</i> Implementing Culture into Video Games  DOCUMENTARY: Ghanaian Folk Games Parts 1 and 2</p> <p><b>Required readings:</b>  Yara Elmjouie: The Game Industry of Iran  Abdi Latif Dahir: African video game makers are breaking into the global industry with their own stories  Dean Takahashi: GDC 2018 shows the heartbreaking story of Muslims in gaming  Traditional Folk Games of Vietnamese  7 Traditional Games and Sports in Kerala</p> <p><b>Play (or Watch Play Videos):</b> <i>The Cat and the Coup; Never Alone</i></p> <p><b>Assignment:</b>  Find a game (digital or analog) that you think has “cultural values.” Be prepared to present and discuss the game in class. To avoid overlaps, announce your selected game on Slack before the class.</p>
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<p><b>WEEK-2</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS VALUES</b></p>	<p><b>In today’s class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Play:</b> <i>The Great Palermo</i></li> <li>- Overview and discussion of your selected games</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do games have values?</li> <li>- How can game mechanics create values?</li> <li>- How can games be cultural?</li> <li>- Playing personas: are they global, local, or cultural?</li> <li>- Cultures within cultures</li> </ul> <p><b>In class practice:</b> Mod a playground/folk game</p> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b>  I will briefly explain the 3 themes of the semester and the students will choose the research project that they want to be a part of.</p> <hr/> <p><i>TO-DOs for the next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required videos:</b>  Steve Gaynor: Why is <i>Gone Home</i> a game?</p>
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	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <p>Sercan Sengun, Ludic Voyeurism and Passive Spectatorship in <i>Gone Home</i> and Other “Walking Simulators”  CNN: What is eSports? A look at an explosive billion-dollar industry</p> <p><b>Play (or Watch Play Videos):</b> <i>Gone Home</i>; <i>Dear Esther</i></p> <p><b>Assignment:</b>  What are some of the pervasive “spectacles” in gaming cultures? Think broadly. Find an example and be prepared to present and discuss it in class. To avoid overlaps, announce your example on Slack before the class.</p>
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<p><b>WEEK-3</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS SPECTACLE</b></p>	<p><b>In today’s class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview and discussion of your selected spectacles</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seriously! What IS a game?</li> <li>- Games as visual and participatory spectacles; the act of playing as a visual spectacle</li> <li>- How did YouTube, Twitch, and streaming reformed playing/gaming?</li> <li>- Gladiators, sports, and e-sports</li> <li>- Pranks, Trolls, Gross, and Gore</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b>  The class will divide into 3 groups and tasks will be handed out and discussed with each group.</p>
	<p><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required videos:</b>  Feminist Frequency: Tropes vs Women in Video Games, Season 1  <i>Optional:</i> Watch Season 2, too.</p> <p><b>Required readings:</b>  Cecilia D’Anastasio: Inside the Culture of Sexism at Riot Games  UPDATE: Cecilia D’Anastasio: Current and Former Employees Sue Riot Games for Gender Discrimination</p> <p>Why do they fight? <a href="http://sercansengun.com/whydotheyfight/">http://sercansengun.com/whydotheyfight/</a></p> <p>D. Fox Harrell, Sercan Şengün, and Danielle Olson (2019, in print), Africa and the Avatar Dream: Mapping the Impacts of Videogame Representations of Africa. In: Kelly Josephs and Roopika Risam (eds.) Digital Black Atlantic, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.  <i>Optional:</i> Adrienne Shaw (2011) “Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity.” <i>New Media &amp; Society</i>, 14(1) 28-44.</p> <p><b>Play (or Watch Play Videos):</b> <i>One Night, Hot Springs</i> (Read about it here: <a href="https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/14/17965198/one-night-hot-springs-itch-io-transgender-japan">https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/14/17965198/one-night-hot-springs-itch-io-transgender-japan</a>)</p>

	<p>Also select, download, and play another game from the lists below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://itch.io/games/free/genre-simulation/tag-lgbt">https://itch.io/games/free/genre-simulation/tag-lgbt</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://itch.io/games/tag-feminism">https://itch.io/games/tag-feminism</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> There are many videos on YouTube “debunking” the popular FF series. Find and watch a few to get an idea about counterarguments. Bring those to the class and be ready to direct a discussion around the counterarguments and whether they made sense to you or not. To avoid overlaps, announce the counter-videos on Slack before the class.</p>
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<p><b>WEEK-4</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS IDENTITY</b></p>	<p><b>In today’s class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Play:</b> <i>Luxuria Superbia</i></li> <li>- <b>Play:</b> <i>Radiator 2: Anniversary Edition</i></li> <li>- Overview and discussion of your selected games and debunking videos</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who are welcome to play?</li> <li>- Gender in play, gender as play</li> <li>- Gendered game mechanics</li> <li>- Ethnic identities and gaming affordances</li> <li>- Building identity through play and games</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b> The class will divide into 3 groups and tasks will continue to work on their research projects.</p> <hr/> <p><i>TO-DOS for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required videos:</b> Chris King: History and Game Design David Ewalt: Of Dice and Men: The Story of <i>Dungeons &amp; Dragons</i></p> <p><b>Required readings:</b> The first 3 chapters of Marilyn Yalom’s <i>Birth of the Chess Queen</i>. Chris Wright: A Brief History of Mobile Games: In the beginning, there was <i>Snake</i> Logan Rivenes, “The History of Online Gaming.” <i>Optional:</i> Jana Radošinská, “Portraying Historical Landmarks and Events in the Digital Game Series <i>Assassin’s Creed</i>,” <i>Acta Ludologica</i> 1(2) 4-16.</p> <p><b>Play (or Watch Play Videos):</b> Any <i>Assassin’s Creed</i> game.</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Find a game that you have never played about a historical event, location, or person that you know nothing about. Play the game or watch a playthrough of it. Take notes about what you have learned about the event, location, or person. Then, go and find non-game sources for your subject matter. How factual were your learnings? Did the game give you a correct context, opinions, and/or judgements? To avoid overlaps, announce the game on Slack before the class.</p>
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<p><b>WEEK-5</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS A HISTORICAL ARTIFACT</b></p>	<p><b>In today's class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Play:</b> <i>Type:Rider</i></li> <li>- Overview and discussion of your experiences</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Games as history; history as games</li> <li>- Representing history in games</li> <li>- Media archaeology of playing and gaming</li> <li>- The history of games</li> <li>- Playful heritage</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b> The class will divide into 3 groups and tasks will continue to work on their research projects.</p> <hr/> <p><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b> Celia Pearce (2010) "Play's the Thing: Games as Fine Art" Marshall McLuhan (1964) "The Medium is the Message." Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936):</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Find a game that you always deemed as extremely "artistic" or "art-like." Be ready to talk about the reasons for your perception in class. To avoid overlaps, announce the game on Slack before the class.</p>
<p><b>WEEK-6</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS ART AND EXPRESSION</b></p>	<p><b>In today's class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We will play several games and look at selected art/games.</li> <li>- Overview and discussion of your selected games</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are games art? To find the answer, we will:</li> <li>(1) Discuss various frameworks to define art and decide whether games and playing can fit into these descriptions</li> <li>(2) Look at some commercial games that are considered as "art" or "expressive."</li> <li>(3) Look at some artists who work with the video games medium.</li> <li>(4) Look at some examples of art "performances" that are considered to be playful.</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b> The class will divide into 3 groups and tasks will continue to work on their research projects.</p> <hr/> <p><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required video:</b> James Paul Gee on learning and games</p>

	<p><b>Check:</b>  <a href="http://www.gameplaydesignpatterns.org/">http://www.gameplaydesignpatterns.org/</a></p> <p><b>Assignment:</b>  Find a game that has an “agenda” other than fun: education, raising awareness, commercial, recruitment, etc. Who produced the game? Who is the target audience? What are the techniques and mechanics used by the game to pass on its message?</p>
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<p><b>WEEK-7</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS SERIOUS IMPACT</b></p>	<p><b>In today’s class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview and discussion of your selected games</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Serious games from brands to consumers</li> <li>- Serious games from institutions to 1<sup>st</sup> world</li> <li>- Serious games from institutions to 3<sup>rd</sup> world</li> <li>- Serious games from governments to citizens</li> <li>- Serious games from individuals to individuals</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b>  The class will divide into 3 groups and tasks will continue to work on their research projects.</p>
	<p><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Required videos:</b>  The politics of public playfulness by Bernie DeKoven:  Mitu Khandaker-Kors on “Thinking About People: Designing Games for Social Simulation”</p>

<p><b>WEEK-8</b></p> <p><b>PLAY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT</b></p>	<p><b>In today’s class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Play/Check:</b> <i>Cruel 2B Kind</i></li> <li>- <b>Play/Check:</b> <i>Johann Sebastian Joust</i></li> <li>- <b>Play:</b> <i>Secret Hitler</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Play as social connection</li> <li>- Norms, roles, and relations</li> <li>- Social capital</li> <li>- Designing social simulations</li> </ul> <p><b>Theory Phase: Research</b>  This week we will wrap up our theory phase, thus, research, data, analysis, etc.</p>
	<p><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></p> <p><b>Assignment:</b>  <b>50 Game Ideas:</b> Create your 50 Game Ideas list based on all the discussions we have had so far. Your items do not have to be games; they can also be playful artifacts or interactions.</p>

<p><b>WEEK-9</b> <b>IDEATION 1/2</b></p>	<p><b>In today's class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present your top/bottom 5 ideas out of 50.</li> <li>- All ideas from everyone will distributed to categories</li> <li>- Students will visit each category and discuss on an emerging theme</li> <li>- At the end of this class, we will decide on the theme for the rest of the semester</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></b> Select some ideas from today and work on turning them into products alone or in a group.</p>
<p><b>WEEK-10</b> <b>IDEATION 2/2</b></p>	<p><b>In today's class:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present your product ideas</li> <li>- At the end of this class, we will form around selected products and work on a production plan</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b><i>TO-DOs for next class:</i></b> We will start the production!</p>
<p><b>WEEK-11 to 16</b> (excluding WEEK-15 which is Thanksgiving)</p>	<p>The third phase will be finalized depending on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. After settling on a theme and a list of products we will plan production over 5 weeks, ending with a presentation, performance, or exhibition at the end of the semester.</p> <p><b>Aim to finalize and submit your projects till the end of finals week!</b></p>