



MECO329

Critical Games Studies

S2 Day 2015

Dept of Media, Music & Cultural Studies

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Unit Convenor

Rowan Tulloch

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Y3A 191C

Credit points

3

Prerequisites

39cp including MAS240

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This unit will introduce students to the key concepts and methodologies in the study of video gaming. Building upon new media theory and game studies' approaches students will critically engage with the cultural, political, artistic, and technological dimensions of this increasingly important media form. This unit explores the crucial theoretical issues in gaming, from rules and narrative, to gender and power. Students will learn to analyse video games through a range of conceptual approaches that recognise the specificities of this form whilst acknowledging games as part of the broader mediascape.

The unit is designed to offer those interested in designing, analysing, writing about, or even just playing video games, a deeper understanding of the role and context of video game play in contemporary culture. It will provide students with the conceptual frameworks needed to theorise the past, present, and future of this complex and crucial medium.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

Contextualise video games within a history of play practices

Critically analyse and evaluate the medium of video gaming in context of broader cultural and technological processes

Evaluate specific video games through game design methodologies

Synthesise a range of academic approaches to video gaming to produce various works

Identify and appraise key ideas and methodologies underpinning the video game studies discipline

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Due
Tutorial Participation	10%	Ongoing
Online Participation	15%	Ongoing Weeks 2-11
Game Analysis	20%	Friday 5pm Week 5
Online Quiz	20%	Week 12
Conceptual Engagement	35%	Friday 5pm Week 13

Tutorial Participation

Due: **Ongoing**

Weighting: **10%**

The purpose of tutorials is for students to discuss the weekly topics and readings to enrich their understanding. All students are required to participate in tutorial discussion. This means arriving at tutorials having completed set readings and being prepared to discuss issues arising.

You will be assessed on: in-class multiple choice exercises, individual participation in class discussions, and group work.

The assessment criteria is:

- Engagement with the readings
- Engagement with lecture material
- Ability to relate key theoretical ideas to previous readings and/or independent research
- Willingness to contribute to class discussion by asking relevant questions, answering other students' questions, treating other students with respect and behaving appropriately (e.g. not talking whilst tutor or other students talking)

Attendance is not the same as participation. Students receive no marks for simply attending tutorials.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Online Participation

Due: **Ongoing Weeks 2-11**

Weighting: **15%**

Students will need to submit three questions per week to the online repository available through iLearn. These questions are to be based on the week's readings and the lecture: one for each reading, and one for the lecture. They are to be multiple choice. The questions must be precisely written and engage with an important aspect from the reading/lecture. Four alternative answers must be given, with only one of them being correct. The correct answer must be made clear.

Questions need to be submitted by 5pm of the day before that week's tutorial. As tutorials for this unit start in week two, week two's questions will be due (along with week three's) before week three's tutorials.

The questions will be assessed on the following criteria:

- Engagement with key idea/s from reading/lecture
- Clarity of written expression of question and all answers

These questions will form the basis of the Online Quiz in Week 12, and may also be used for class gamification activities.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Game Analysis

Due: **Friday 5pm Week 5**

Weighting: **20%**

Length: 800 words Submitted Online Only through iLearn

Students should choose a concept, or set of related concepts, from one of the readings for Week 2, 3 or 4 and apply it to a video game of their choosing. You should present a detailed analysis of the concept in context of your chosen game, and put forward an argument as to how and why this concept is important for understanding this game.

For example if a student chose LeBlanc's concept of dramatic tension in relation to *Tetris*, then this paper might offer a close examination of the mechanics and dynamics of *Tetris*, and how dramatic tension is created in the game through mechanics like game speed. It might also cover how uncertainty and inevitability are used to increase tension, and examples of positive or negative feedback in this game. It should put forward a developed argument that understanding dramatic tension is key to understanding the pleasures or experience of Tetris.

You will be assessed on four criteria:

- Understanding of concept you are using
- Application of the concept to your case study
- Strength and clarity of argument
- Written expression

This paper does not need any academic research or referencing beyond the chosen article. You are however welcome to bring in other material if you think it is relevant, but this is not required. All concepts from the chosen reading however, need to be explained in full, and correctly referenced. It must be clear what concept you are using. You can only focus on the concepts from one reading.

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Online Quiz

Due: **Week 12**

Weighting: **20%**

Students will undertake a timed online multiple choice quiz. The quiz will consist of 20 questions chosen by the unit convenor from those contributed by students for the Online Participation task. To prepare for the quiz students should be familiar with all the unit readings and lecture material.

The quiz will be accessible Monday (9am) to Friday (5pm) of Week 12. Students must undertake the quiz individually. The quiz is 'open book', students are allowed to consult notes, readings, and other material during the quiz.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Conceptual Engagement

Due: **Friday 5pm Week 13**

Weighting: **35%**

Submitted through iLearn only

Students must critically engage with one (or more) of the following topics:

- Rules and Affordances
- Emergence
- The Magic Circle
- Gamification
- Spatiality
- Cyborg Subjectivity
- Power
- Narrative
- Games and Art
- Gaming Communities

They have two options as to how they engage with this topic:

Option 1: Essay

Students must write a 2000 word essay analysing their chosen topic in context of contemporary video gaming. Students must construct an argument relating to the technological, political, and cultural contexts of their chosen academic topic. They must build this argument through a critical examination of one or more video games. For example they might argue that the cyborg subjectivity is the best way to understand the techno-cultural experience of video game play in the First Person Shooter genre, or that through the growth of the indie game scene we are starting to see the true possibilities of video games as an art form.

This is a formal academic essay and requires significant independent research. The essay should have at least 5 academic references in total, including at least one of the unit readings and at least one article from the student's own research. **Option 2: Game Design**

Students must write a game design document (max 2000 words, or 8 pages including images / diagrams, whichever comes first). This game design document should detail a game of the students own creation that builds off, engages with, or critiques the academic theory from their chosen topic. For example they could choose to design a game that blurs the boundaries of the 'magic circle' and ultimately shows any concept of the separation of the play world and the 'real' world to be a false binary. Or they could design a game that embodies de Certeau's concepts of strategies and tactics, and shows how the operation of power in video games reflects broader cultural structures.

The game design document must briefly outline the mechanics, dynamics and narrative (if any) elements of the game. The gameplay experience should be briefly but clearly articulated. The

design document should not focus on the technical aspects of the game (i.e. any coding concerns, technical specifications, etc.). Most importantly the design document must articulate how the game relates to the chosen topic/theory. The game design should demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the theory, and offer an engagement with, and argument built upon, the theory. The assignment will not be judged on the strength of the game design itself, but on the strength of the engagement with theory, and articulation of the relationship between the theory and the design, i.e. it does not matter if the game sounds fun to play, it just matters whether your design document shows you understand the theory and demonstrates how and why the theory is relevant to the game you have created.

Whilst this is a game design document, it is an academically informed game design document and therefore requires significant independent research. It should situate the game design within the technological, political, and cultural contexts of the chosen academic topic. It should have at least 5 academic references in total, including at least one of the unit readings and at least one article from the student's own research.

Assessment Criteria for Both Options

This task will be assessed on four criteria:

- Understanding of the theoretical contexts of the chosen topic
- Strength and clarity of argument/design
- Depth of engagement with appropriate academic material
- Style, structure and presentation

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Delivery and Resources

Late Penalties: All assessments must be completed. If a student fails to complete an assessment they will severely compromise their ability to complete this unit. Late completions/submissions will be penalised at a rate of 10% per day. If completing/submitting an assignment late for serious reasons, medical certificates or Special Consideration documentation must be supplied.

Students must apply for Special Consideration through ask.mq.edu.au

Lectures: MECO329 does not have live lectures. The lectures for MECO329 are video-

recordings available online through iLearn. Students are expected to engage with lectures and to actively relate lecture content to tutorial discussions, online participation, and assessments.

Tutorials: Participation in tutorial activities and in-class exercises form an integral part of MECO329. Students are expected to arrive punctually and actively participate in class work. A mark is allocated for in-class participation in this unit and a roll will be taken at the beginning of each class. If students arrive over 15 minutes late for a tutorial without sufficient reason, they will be deemed absent for that class.

Students should note that they are expected to attend all tutorials over the semester. If missing a tutorial for serious and unavoidable reasons, medical certificates must be supplied, or disruption to studies granted to avoid penalty.

Tutorials begin in Week 2

Required and recommended texts and/or materials: The MECO329 Reader is required for this unit and contains weekly required readings. It will be available through the Co-Op bookshop

Technologies used: The iLearn site for MECO329 is accessible at: <http://ilearn.mq.edu.au/>. A computer and Internet access are required to complete assessments in MECO329. Basic computer skills (e.g., internet browsing) and skills in word processing are also a requirement.

Assessment Submission: All assignments for MECO329 will be completed/submitted online, via iLearn. Further details on submission will be explained in tutorials.

Return of marked work: Marked work will be returned to students through the online system.

Consultation: By appointment only

Unit Schedule

Week by week schedule and full details of unit readings available through [iLearn](#).

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

Additional information

MMCCS website https://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/faculties_and_departments/faculty_of_arts/departments_of_media_music_communication_and_cultural_studies/

MMCCS Session Re-mark Application <http://www.mq.edu.au/pubstatic/public/download/?id=167914>

Information is correct at the time of publication

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy

applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Synthesise a range of academic approaches to video gaming to produce various works

Assessment tasks

- Tutorial Participation
- Conceptual Engagement

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Contextualise video games within a history of play practices
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Assessment tasks

- Tutorial Participation
- Online Participation
- Game Analysis

- Online Quiz
- Conceptual Engagement

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Contextualise video games within a history of play practices
- Critically analyse and evaluate the medium of video gaming in context of broader cultural and technological processes
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Assessment tasks

- Tutorial Participation
- Online Participation
- Game Analysis
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- Conceptual Engagement

Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Critically analyse and evaluate the medium of video gaming in context of broader cultural and technological processes
- Synthesise a range of academic approaches to video gaming to produce various works

Assessment tasks

- Tutorial Participation
- Online Participation
- Game Analysis
- Conceptual Engagement

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Critically analyse and evaluate the medium of video gaming in context of broader cultural and technological processes
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- Identify and appraise key ideas and methodologies underpinning the video game studies discipline

Assessment tasks

- Tutorial Participation
- Online Participation
- Game Analysis
- Online Quiz
- Conceptual Engagement