COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
LT: Kompiuterinių žaidimų studijos ir filosofija **EN: Videogame Studies and Philosophy**	

Academic staff	Core academic unit(s)
Coordinating: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Atėnė Mendelytė **Other**: N/A	Faculty of Philology Institute for the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic, Centre for Scandinavian Studies

Study cycle	Type of the course unit
First	Optional

Mode of delivery	Semester or period when it is delivered	Language of instruction
Face-to-face	Spring semester	English

Requisites	
Prerequisites: English (B2)	**Co-requisites (if relevant):** None

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5	150	48	102

Purpose of the course unit

The course introduces students to the philosophical study of video games by examining how ontological, metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical, and experiential questions emerge within digital play. It develops the ability to analyze video games as complex cultural, technological, and artistic objects, and to understand how medium-specific features shape philosophical inquiry. Through seminar discussion and guided case studies, students learn to connect philosophical concepts with concrete game examples and to critically evaluate how games construct meaning, agency, worldhood, and ethical situations. The course ultimately aims to cultivate a rigorous, reflective, and conceptually grounded approach to thinking philosophically with and through video games.

Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
The student shall be able to correctly apply relevant philosophical concepts and video game studies terminology.	• Targeted readings introducing core concepts • Concept-focused seminars • Terminology exercises during discussions	• Seminar discussions evaluating correct use of terminology • Short analytical reflections

	• Guided clarification of key terms	demonstrating conceptual accuracy
The student shall be able to identify and analytically employ appropriate terminology in the discussion of specific video game cases.	• Case-study seminars (e.g., Simulacra, Bloodborne) • Comparative discussions of terminology across genres • Instructor-guided analysis of sample game descriptions	• Seminar contributions demonstrating precise terminology use • Reflections applying terminology to chosen game example
The student shall be able to apply philosophical analysis (including conceptualizing empirical observations) to new video game examples.	• Seminars on conceptualization and philosophical method • Close-reading of gameplay sequences • Structured reflection writing sessions • Discussions of analytical approaches	• Written reflections assessing ability to conceptualize observations • Evaluation of analytical depth and philosophical grounding during discussions
The student shall be able to connect medium-specific, historical, narrative, and experiential aspects of video games to philosophical questions and concepts.	• Seminars on medium specificity, narrative theory, and game history • Group analysis of case studies (e.g., Dwarf Fortress, retrogaming) • Instructor-guided mapping of game features to philosophical issues	• Seminar discussions demonstrating interlinking of aspects • Reflections evaluating how chosen games embody philosophical questions
The student shall be able to demonstrate critical, academic thinking when analyzing video games from a philosophical perspective.	• Critical-thinking seminars • Reflection writing with structured instructions • Guided methodological sessions on argumentation • Instructor and peer feedback discussions	• Seminar contributions demonstrating critical reasoning • Written reflections assessing argument clarity, depth, and theoretical grounding

Content	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Workshops	Laboratory work	Internship	**Contact hours, total**	**Individual work**	**Tasks for individual work**
1. Studying video games: Introduction to key approaches and methods.	4						**4**	**2**	Reading, Discussions
2. How do games come about? An overview of the video game industry vs indie games. Case study: *Dwarf Fortress*.	2						**2**	**2**	Reading, Discussions
3. Games and gaming through the ages: A brief history of video games. Case study: retrogaming.	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions
4. What is a game? Ontology, genre, and transmediality in video games. Case study: *Simulacra*. *NB! Reflection (written or playthrough) on media-historical or ontological aspects in a chosen game (assignment 1).*	4		2				**6**	**18**	Reading, Discussions Reflection
5. Video game aesthetics. Representation, emotion, transcendence, and the sublime. Case study: *The Witcher 3*.	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions
6. Video games and narrative: Ludology, narratology, and the problem of agency. Case study: *Bloodborne*.	2		2				**4**	**8**	Reading, Discussions
7. Video games and (virtual) ethics. Computer games as designed ethical systems. Players as moral beings. Case study: *BioShock*.	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions
8. Unethical game content, amoralism, and video game violence. Case study: *Call of Duty*. *NB! Reflection (written or playthrough) on videogame aesthetics, narrative or ethics in a chosen game (assignment 2).*	2		2				**4**	**18**	Reading, Discussions Reflection
9. Fictionalism, gameworlds, and meta-fictional games. Case study: *Roy: A Life Well Lived*.	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions
10. What is a philosophical game? The nature of "serious" games and gamification. Case study: ARGs (e.g. *World Without Oil*)	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions
11. Posthumanism and gaming: The question of identity and (player) subjectivity. Case study: *World of Warcraft*.	2		2				**4**	**6**	Reading, Discussions

12. A life well played: Video games and the meaning of life. Final discussion. *NB! Reflection (written or playthrough) on player subjectivity or gamification in a chosen game or other object (assignment 3).*	4						**4**	**18**	Presentation, Discussions Reflection
Total	**30**		**18**				**48**	**102**	

Assessment strategy	**Weight %**	**Deadline**	**Assessment criteria**
Seminar discussions and seminar activities Students with approved individual study plans or accommodation arrangements will be provided with equivalent assessment options designed to support the achievement of the course learning outcomes.	40	Semester	Ongoing evaluation of the student's analytical contribution during seminars, including preparation, conceptual engagement, and the ability to connect philosophical ideas with video game case studies. Assessment Criteria (10 points total): • Depth of analysis and insight (3 points): Ability to articulate nuanced interpretations of philosophical issues arising in video games; capacity to extend discussion beyond descriptive commentary. • Clear formulation of ideas or theses (2 points): Ability to present arguments coherently and precisely during seminar discussions. • Ability to connect medium-specific, historical, narrative, and experiential aspects to philosophical concepts (3 points): Demonstrates understanding of how game mechanics, narrative structures, industry contexts, and player experience relate to philosophical inquiry. • Correct use of terminology (2 points): Accurate and context-appropriate use of philosophical and video game studies terminology. Attendance is not mandatory. However, this assessment component evaluates active participation in seminar discussions and activities. Students who do not participate in seminars cannot receive points for this component but remain eligible to complete the remaining course assessments.
3 written reflections or audiovisual recordings of playthroughs with commentary (take-home)	60	Semester	Three take-home assignments in which students analyze a chosen game (or game segment) through a philosophical lens. Reflections may be written or recorded as audiovisual commentary. Assessment Criteria (10 points per reflection): • Depth and quality of analysis (4 points): Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the chosen philosophical topic and its relevance to the selected game as evidenced in

			the ability to provide a detailed, accurate, and well-supported analysis of game elements (mechanics, narrative, aesthetics, ethics, etc.). • Clear formulation of a thesis (2 points): Presents a focused, well-defined central argument guiding the reflection. • Theoretical, methodological, and analytical grounding (3 points): Uses appropriate philosophical frameworks, concepts, and methods; demonstrates the ability to conceptualize empirical observations and apply theory rigorously. • Correct use of terminology (1 point): Employs philosophical and game studies terminology accurately and consistently.
AI use			GenAI may be used to generate ideas, search for scholarly literature, edit a prepared text (GenAI acts as a language editor), organise the reference list, translate short texts and edit translations, create visualisations (schemes, diagrams, illustrations, etc.), and systematise research data. GenAI may also be used to search for definitions of concepts and clarify complex concepts; to help prepare certain parts of a project or written assignment, for example a literature review; to organise the structure of the work and format it (including style, font, text layout, etc.); and to obtain feedback (GenAI acts as a reviewer). Students must critically evaluate and modify GenAI-generated outputs, thereby demonstrating subject-specific knowledge and skills, as well as the ability to argue, analyse and justify the decisions made. They may be required to submit the prompts used (a transcript of the conversation with GenAI), a GenAI-use declaration (which GenAI tools were used and for what purpose), and a reflection (what content generated by GenAI they used, changed, supplemented or rejected and why; how and in which sources they checked the accuracy of the information; etc.).

Author (-s)	**Publishing year**	**Title**	**Issue of a periodical or volume of a publication**	**Publishing house or web link**
Required reading				
Bartel, Christopher	2022	*Video Games, Violence, and the Ethics of Fantasy*		Bloomsbury Publishing
Cogburn, Jon, and Silcox, Mark	2008	*Philosophy through Videogames*		Routledge
Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Heide Smith, Jonas, and Pajares Tosca, Susana, eds	2013	*Understanding Video Games – The Essential Introduction*		Routledge

Galloway, Alexander R.	2006	*Gaming – Essays on Algorithmic Culture*		University of Minnesota Press
Gualeni, Stefano, and Fassone, Riccardo	2022	*Fictional Games – A Philosophy of Worldbuilding and Imaginary Play*		Bloomsbury Publishing
Sageng, John Richard, Fossheim, Hallvard, and Mandt Larsen, Tarjei, eds	2012	*The Philosophy of Computer Games*		Springer
Sicart, Miguel	2009	*The Ethics of Videogames*		MIT Press
Wolf, Mark J. P., and Perron, Bernard, eds	2023	*The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies, 2nd Ed.*		Routledge
Recommended reading				
Blahuta, Jason P., and Beaulieu, Michel S., eds	2009	*Final Fantasy and Philosophy*		John Wiley & Sons
Bogost, Ian	2006	*Unit Operations – An Approach to Videogame Criticism*		MIT Press
Boulter, Jonathan	2015	*Parables of the Posthuman – Digital Realities Gaming, and the Player Experience*		Wayne State University Press
Bódi, Bettina	2022	*Videogames and Agency*		Routledge
Cogburn, Jon, and Silcox, Mark, eds	2012	*Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy*		Open Court Publishing
Cuddy, Luke, ed.	2008	*The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy*		Open Court Publishing
Cuddy, Luke, ed.	2011	*Halo and Philosophy*		Open Court Publishing
Cuddy, Luke, ed.	2015	*BioShock and Philosophy*		John Wiley & Sons
Cuddy, Luke, and Nordlinger, John, eds	2009	*World of Warcraft and Philosophy*		Open Court Publishing
Juul, Jesper	2013	*The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*		MIT Press
Mendelytė, Atėnė	2023	"Thought Experiments in Video Games: Exploring the (Un)Ethics of Motherhood in Frictional Games' *Amnesia: Rebirth*"	*Games and Culture 19(1)*	https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231153715
Mendelytė, Atėnė	2024	"Play, Therefore I Think: Procedural Philosophy in Remedy Entertainment's *Alan Wake 2* (2023)"	*Games and Culture OnlineFirst*	https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120241265775
Robson, Jon, and Tavinor, Grant, eds	2018	*The Aesthetics of Videogames*		Routledge
Spokes, Matthew	2020	*Gaming and the Virtual Sublime*		Emerald Publishing

Tavinor, Grant	2009	*The Art of Videogames*		John Wiley & Sons
Wilde, Poppy	2023	*Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities*		Taylor & Francis

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