

Introduction to interactive entertainment

USC School of Cinema-Television, CTIN 309

Instructors: William Huber

Units: 4

Contact Info:

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Course site: <http://sites.google.com/site/ctin309>

Course Description:

Of all the new media forms that have emerged since digital technologies have become ubiquitous in our social and cultural environment, videogames could be described as the form that is most fundamentally “native” to the computer. As a form of entertainment, they have introduced new relationships between audiences/players and the media with which they interact, and present unique challenges to producers, critics and the public at large.

There are two broad goals for this course. The first is to provide a historical overview of videogaming that goes beyond the usual clichés, and identifies the multiple origins of modern videogaming and its genres. The second is to cultivate critical sophistication in the understanding and interpretation of videogames and game-play. This course is informed by the belief that the expressive potential of videogames will be achieved when intellectually well-rounded, creatively ambitious designers are given an opportunity to produce games for critically informed and sophisticated players.

The coursework involves three primary activities: reading relevant texts from the growing field of videogame studies, writing and presenting thoughtfully about games and other digital media, and, of course, playing games.

Meeting Information:

Lecture and lab: 3 hours

Pre-requisites: N/A

Required Reading:

- Jesper Juul: *Half Real: Video Games between Real Worlds and Fictional Worlds*. MIT Press. Cambridge. 2005
- Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, (eds.): *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. MIT Press. Cambridge. 2005

Other readings will be distributed either electronically or in class.

Evaluation of student performance:

Assignments:	30
Examinations: Midterm	25 *

Final	
* Final is optional and replaces either midterm or paper grade, whichever is lower.	
Research paper, 9-12 pp	25
Presentation	10
Attendance and participation	10
Total	100

Course content (summarized by class meeting)

Wk	Lecture topic	Reading and assignments
1	<p>August 25.</p> <p>Introduction and history of videogaming.</p>	<p>Reading (complete before next class):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dot Eaters: Videogame History 101 • Maillet and de Meyer, <i>The history of videogames</i> (handout) <p>Reading for next class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesper Juul, <i>Half-Real</i>, chapter 1 and 2. • Johan Huizanga, <i>Nature and Significance of Play as a Social Phenomena</i> (in Salen and Zimmerman, <i>Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology</i>, p. 96)
2	<p>September 1.</p> <p>Film.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roger Caillois, <i>The Definition of Play: Classification of Games</i> (SZ p.122) • Brian Sutton-Smith, <i>Play and Ambiguity</i> (SZ p. 296) <p>Assignment due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete questionnaire on class site (http://sites.google.com/site/ctin309.) <p>Reading for next class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesper Juul, <i>Half-Real</i>, chapter 3.
3	<p>September 8.</p> <p>Theories of play.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, <i>The Rules of a Game</i> (SZ p.9) • Bernard Suits, <i>Construction of a Definition</i> (SZ p. 172) • Greg Costikyan, <i>I Have No Words and I Must Design</i> (SZ p. 192) • Stephen Sniderman, <i>Unwritten Rules</i> (SZ p. 410) • Linda Hughes, <i>Beyond the Rules of the Game: Why Are Rooie Rules Nice?</i> (SZ p, 504)

Reading for next class:

4 **September 15.**

Games and rules.

- Jesper Juul, *Half-Real*, chapter 4.
- Salen and Zimmerman, "Games and Narrative" (SZ, p. 33)
- Marc LeBlanc, "Tools for Creating Dramatic Game Dynamics" (SZ p. 438)
- Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, "Interaction and Narrative" (SZ p. 642)
- Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (SZ p. 670)

Assignment due:

- Short essay on assigned topic (1-3 pages)

Reading for next class:

5 **September 22.**

Games and narrative.

- Jesper Juul, "Half-real," chapter 5.
- Warren Robinett, "Adventure as a Video Game: Adventure for the Atari 2600" (SZ p. 690)
- Nick Montfort, [Gamestudies - Combat in Context](#)

Assignment due:

- Play *Facade*, submit 2 transcripts. Discuss on class site.

Reading for next class:

6 **September 29.**

Videogames and computing.

Assignment due:

- Mark Wolf, [Genre and the Video Game](#)

- Play Combat (in emulation): <http://www.turbotanks.com>
Discuss on class site.
- Play Adventure (in emulation): <http://www.simmphonic.com/programming/adventure.htm> Discuss on class site.

7 **October 6.**

Genre and and games.

Reading for next class:

- 8 **October 13.**
Midterm exam
- Richard Bartle, *Hearts Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who Suit Muds*. (SZ, p 754.)
 - Raph Koster, *Declaring the Rights of Players*. (SZ page 788)
 - Edward Castronova, *Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier*. GDR, page 814

Games:

- MMO assignment TBA

Reading for next class:

- 9 **October 20.**
Virtual worlds and MMORPGs.
- David Sudnow, *Eyeball and Cathexis* (SZ p. 558)
 - Jenova Chen, [Flow in games, and everywhere else](#)

Games:

- TBA

Reading for next class:

- 10 **October 27.**
Game aesthetics: flow, grind, and more. Games in contemporary art practice.
- Independent game design and game-authorship.. Readings
 - Ken Birdwell, *The Cabal: Valve's Design Process for Creating Half-Life* (SZ p. 212)
 - Other readings TBA.

Games:

- Everyday Shooter
- Darwinia

Readings:

- 11 **November 3.**
Game authorship, independent games, procedural generation of assets
- Jane McGonigal, "Why I love bees: a case study in collective intelligence gaming"
 - Jane McGonigal, "SuperGaming: Ubiquitous Play and Performance for Massively Scaled Community"

Game assignment: TBA

Readings:

- 12 **November 10.**
Alternate reality games, pervasive games, speculative gaming
- James Gee, *Semiotic Domains: Is Playing Video Games a Waste of Time?* (SZ p. 228)
 - Ian Bogost, selection from *Persuasive Games Review: Under Siege*: <http://www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000392.shtml>

Student presentations.

- 13 **November 17.**
Serious games, games that teach, persuasive games.
- Assignment due: play and discuss on site.**
- Under Siege (demo)
 - Darfur is Dying
 - September 12
 - Hush
- 14 **November 24.**
Presentations.
- 15 **December 1**
Presentations, review.
- Student presentations.
- Final review, presentations. Punch and pie

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes:

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or teaching assistant before final grades are due.

Note for students with disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity:

The School of Cinema-Television expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from USC students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by

anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade band be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult "SCAMPUS" and/or confer with the instructor.