

# Introduction to interactive entertainment

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN 309

**Instructor:** William Huber

**Units:** 4

**Contact Info:**

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Office hours: Wednesday 1 pm - 3 pm, SCA 210 (use [appointment calendar](#))

**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 a diverse group of intellectually well-rounded, creatively ambitious designers are given an opportunities to produce games for 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 texts:**

- *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction, Second Edition*, by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, Susana Pajares Tosca. Routledge, London 2012 - ISBN 978-0-415-89697-9
- *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, by Anna Anthropy. Seven Stories Press, New York 2012 - ISBN 978-1609803728
- *The Game Design Theory Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2005 - ISBN 978-0262195362

**Recommended texts:**

- *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, by Jesper Juul. MIT Press 2011 (reprint) - ISBN 9780262516518

Other readings will be distributed electronically.

### Evaluation of student performance:

Assignments and quizzes	30
Examinations <sup>1</sup>	30
Presentations	20
Attendance and participation	20
Total:	100

### Course content (summarized by class meeting)

Wk	Lecture	Assignments and reading [Reading is <i>due</i> on the posted week.]
1 Aug 28	Introduction, scope and expectations	<b>Assignment:</b> Join Google group
2 Sept 4	On play, game and rules	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Video Games, Introduction, Chapter 1, "Studying Video Games", and Chapter 2, "The Game Industry"</i></li> <li>• Jesper Juul, "The Game, The Player, The Rules: Looking for a Heart of Gameness" [<a href="http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/gameplayerworld/">http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/gameplayerworld/</a>]</li> </ul>
3 Sept 11	Videogame history	<b>Required reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Video Games, Chapter 3, "What is a game?"</i></li> <li>• Johan Huizinga, "Nature and Significance of Play as a Social Phenomena" (in <i>Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology</i>, p. 96)</li> <li>• Roger Caillois, "The Definition of Play: Classification of Games" (GDR p.122)</li> <li>• Linda Hughes, "Beyond the Rules of the Game: Why Are Rooie Rules Nice?" (GDR p504)</li> </ul> <b>Suggested reading:</b>

<sup>1</sup>Final is optional and replaces the grade of either the midterm exam or the final paper, whichever is lower. If the final exam is graded lower than the other two items, then there is no effect on the student grade.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bernard Suits, "Construction of a Definition" (GDR p. 172)</li> <li>• Brian Sutton-Smith, "Play and Ambiguity," (GDR p. 296)</li> <li>• Greg Costikyan, "I Have No Words and I Must Design" (GDR p. 192)</li> <li>• Stephen Sniderman, "Unwritten Rules" (GDR p. 410)</li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 1</b></p> <p><b>Assignment 1:</b> Game analysis 1 (<i>due week 4</i>)</p>
4 Sept 18	Games as software	<p><b>Required reading and playing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nick Montfort, "Combat in Context" [<a href="http://www.gamestudies.org/0601/articles/montfort">http://www.gamestudies.org/0601/articles/montfort</a>]</li> <li>• Warren Robinett, "Adventure as a Video Game: Adventure for the Atari 2600" (GDR p. 690)</li> <li>• Combat (variant for web): [<a href="http://www.turbotanks.com/">http://www.turbotanks.com/</a>]</li> <li>• Adventure (web-based emulation): [<a href="http://www.simmphonic.com/programming/adventure.htm">http://www.simmphonic.com/programming/adventure.htm</a>]</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ken Birdwell, "The Cabal: Valve's Design Process for Creating Half-Life" (GDR p. 212)</li> <li>• Richard Rouse III, "Game Analysis: Centipede" (GDR, p 460)</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment 1 due.</b></p>
5 Sept 25	Aesthetics in games	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Video Games, Chapter 5, "Video Game Aesthetics"</li> <li>• Simon Niedenthal, "What we talk about when we talk about game aesthetics," [download from class site]</li> <li>• David Sudnow, "Eyeball" and "Cathexis" from Pilgrim in the Microworld (GDR p. 558)</li> <li>• Jenova Chen, "Flow in games, and everywhere else" [<a href="http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1232743.1232769">http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1232743.1232769</a>]</li> </ul>
6 Oct 2	Games and art	<p><b>Required reading and listening:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview with Brenda Brathwaite. [<a href="http://www.brainygamer.com/the_brainy_gamer/2009/11/brainy-gamer-podcast-episode-26.html">http://www.brainygamer.com/the_brainy_gamer/2009/11/brainy-gamer-podcast-episode-26.html</a>]</li> <li>• Ian Bogost, "Persuasive Games: The Proceduralist Style" [<a href="http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3909/persuasive_games_the_php">http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3909/persuasive_games_the_php</a>]</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Recommended:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wikipedia contributors, "Ludic Interfaces." [<a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludic_Interfaces">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludic_Interfaces</a>]</li> <li>• selectparks: art defining games (dormant, but worth visiting) [<a href="http://www.selectparks.net">http://www.selectparks.net</a>]</li> <li>• Play this Thing. [<a href="http://playthisthing.com/">http://playthisthing.com/</a>]</li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 2</b></p>
7 Oct 9	Indie Games	<p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rise of the Videogame Zinesters</li> </ul>
8 Oct 16	<b>Midterm</b>	
9 Oct 23	MMOs	<p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Richard Bartle, "Hearts Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who Suit Muds." (GDR p. 754) Edward Castronova, "Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier." (GDR p. 814)</p> <p><b>Assignment 2:</b> MMO assignment part I (due week 11)</p>
10 Oct 30	Game culture and community; online games	<p><b>Required reading:</b> Understanding Video Games, Chapter 6, "Game Culture" and Chapter 7, "Player Culture"</p> <p><b>Assignment 3:</b> MMO assignment part II (due week 11)</p>
10 Nov 6	Narrative, meaning and games	<p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Video Games</i>, Chapter 8, "Narrative"</li> <li>• Salen and Zimmerman, "Games and Narrative" (GDR, p. 33)</li> <li>• Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (GDR p. 670)</li> <li>• Jesper Juul, "Games Telling Stories?" [<a href="http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/">http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/</a>]</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment 4:</b> MMO Assignment part III (due week 11)</p>
11 Nov 13	Game rhetorics, serious games,	<p><b>Required reading:</b></p>

	persuasive games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Video Games</i>, Chapter 9, "Serious Games"</li> <li>• James Gee, "Semiotic Domains: Is Playing Video Games a 'Waste of Time?'" (GDR p. 228)</li> </ul> <p><b>Required playing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Darfur is Dying [<a href="http://www.darfurisdying.com">http://www.darfurisdying.com</a>]</li> <li>• The McDonalds Game [<a href="http://www.mcvideogame.com/">http://www.mcvideogame.com/</a>]</li> <li>• Food Force [<a href="http://www.wfp.org/how-to-help/individuals/food-force">http://www.wfp.org/how-to-help/individuals/food-force</a>]</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gonzalo Frasca, "Review: Under Siege," <a href="http://www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000392.shtml">http://www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000392.shtml</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Quiz 3</b></p>
12 Nov 20	Videogames and effects: violence, addiction, cognition	<p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Understanding Video Games</i>, Chapter 10, "Video Games and Risks"</li> <li>• Walter Boot et, al., "Do action video games improve perception and cognition?" <a href="http://www.frontiersin.org/cognition/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00226/abstract">http://www.frontiersin.org/cognition/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00226/abstract</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Required playing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://MissionRed.com">MissionRed.com</a></li> </ul>
14 Nov 27	Presentations and discussion	<p><b>Presentations</b></p> <p><b>Quiz 4</b></p>
15 Dec 4	Presentations and discussion	<p><b>Presentations</b></p>

**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. Incompletes may only be assigned after the 12th week of classes.

**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 Cinematic Arts 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 and 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. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>