USCSchool
of Cinematic Arts

CTCS 505: Survey of Interactive Media

Fall 2014, Thursdays 2:00pm-5:45pm in SCB 104

Instructor: Robert Buerkle

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Course Description: This class offers an overview of interactive media that is rooted in the history and theory of digital gaming (both popular and experimental), while also delving into mobile media, online networks, virtual spaces, and even analogue works such as board games and roleplaying games. We will discuss questions of form and aesthetics, from the narrative implications of games and nonlinearity to the expressive and discursive potential of rule-based systems and algorithmic art. We'll look at gameworlds and virtual spaces, exploring their temporal and spatial dynamics, issues of immersion and agency, and the functional role of the avatar. We'll discuss media convergence and the role of games in transmedial franchises, the phenomenon of Alternate Reality Games, and the influence that games have had on movies, television, and other "old" media (and vice versa). And we'll cover other varied topics, from the culture and communities of gamers to the ontology of animation and the digital image.

In most weeks, the class will be comprised of two parts: the first half of the class will be a combination of lecture and seminar discussion of the readings. The latter half will be a gamelab in which we demo an assortment of games, interactive narratives, and other new media works; discuss the games you are required to play at home; or have a screening to complement the course material.

Required Reading:

- All readings will be provided online via Blackboard

Required Games:

- *Braid* (2009)
- *Civilization V* (2010)
- *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009)
- *Minecraft* (2011)
- TBA (allow for up to $20 in additional game purchases)

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADED WORK:

• Reading Responses	25%	varying dates
• Creative Project	30%	due October 29
• Term Paper	45%	due December 7

Reading Responses: Each week's reading will be comprised of three articles. On the first day, students will be divided into three groups, and each week you will be required to write a brief response to your group's assigned reading. Please note: *you are still responsible for reading all three articles!*

Your response should be at least 500 words, however I'm more concerned with content than length. You may choose to pursue one idea in great detail, or you may pursue two or three different ideas. You may discuss the reading in relation to a previous week's reading, or with one of the other essays assigned for that same topic (so long as the emphasis is on the reading you are assigned), or discuss it in relation to an interactive work that seems applicable. Students should be prepared to discuss these ideas in class, as this is the whole point of the assignment.

Responses are required to be posted to Blackboard <u>by 6:00pm the night before class</u>. After this time, responses will be accepted until class begins for half-credit. Late responses will not be accepted after class (since the responses are meant to prepare you for class discussion, it would be pointless to do them after that discussion has ended).

You will have twelve opportunities to write reading responses during the semester; you are required to complete <u>ten</u> of them. If you wish to complete the other two responses as well, you may do so for extra credit.

Since they will be posted on the Blackboard forums, the reading responses will be available for everyone to read. Though not required, students are encouraged to read and consider their classmates' responses when possible.

Due every week   Worth: 25% of Final Grade (2.5% x 10)
with potential for additional 5% extra credit (2.5% X 2)

Creative Project: All students will be required to make a creative work of interactive media on their own. If you have no experience with interactive media, the default assignment will be to write a branching hypertext story in Twine, a user-friendly, free-to-download application for designing hypertext works and exporting them as HTML files. However, those students who wish to do something different for their creative project—design a website, create a flash game, shoot an interactive video, etc.—are free to do so with approval from the professor. All creative projects must be accompanied by an artist's statement of at least 600 words explaining the intentions of the project in relation to the class. All projects will be due by October 29 so that they can be viewed by the class during our gamelab on October 30.

Due October 29   Worth: 30% of Final Grade

Term Paper: Each student is required to write a 2500-3000 word research paper on a topic of their choosing by the end of the semester. This paper should engage with the topics of the course and provide you with an opportunity to expand on issues relevant to the class. Students must approve their term paper topic with the professor by November 7.

Due December 7   Worth: 45% of Final Grade

Alternative Grading:
If anyone wishes to put more effort into their creative project rather than their term paper, they may swap the grade values of the two assignments. Doing so will entail a more ambitious creative project, accompanied by a longer artist's statement (at least 1000 words), accounting for 45% of their grade, while the term paper will be shortened to 1500-2000 words, accounting for only 25%. Students must propose their creative project to the professor before getting approval to take this option.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES:

Required Games:
All required games are available for both Windows and OSX computers, and some are further available on Xbox and Playstation consoles. Students are free to play these games on whatever platforms they prefer. *Minecraft* is available at minecraft.net, while the other required games are available for download via Steam, Amazon, or many other sources (with the exception of *Dragon Age* for Mac, which is not available via Steam but can be purchased via Amazon).

Please allow for up to $20 in additional game purchases, to be announced later. Online services like Steam and Humble Bundle often offer games at ridiculously low prices, and if something goes on sale that I think would be useful for us to look at, I may ask you to spend a few dollars to buy it.

Steam Accounts:
All students must create a Steam account, even if you choose to acquire your games elsewhere. Several of the games that we will be playing in our gamelab will be demos and free-to-play games that are available via Steam, and it will help us to quickly download and install the games if everyone already has an account that they can log into. Further, multiplayer games such as *Team Fortress 2* require a Steam account so that we can play with one another in class.

Attendance:
You are allowed one unexcused absence over the course of the semester; each absence after that will result in a 1/3 letter deduction from your final grade (i.e., an "A" would drop to an "A-," then a "B+," and so on). Missing more than five class meetings will result in an automatic F in the class.

Consistently arriving late to class will also be counted toward your absences. Arriving late twice will be excused, however your third late arrival, and every other late arrival following, will be counted as an absence. Please note that if you arrive late, it is your responsibility to speak with the professor after class to ensure that you are marked in attendance. Also note that leaving early will be penalized as an absence.

Blackboard and Turn-it-in:
This course utilizes USC's blackboard system. Course information, readings, and announcements will be made available here. Further, students will be required to upload papers and projects to Blackboard rather than provide hard copies. It is your responsibility to make sure that assignments are uploaded by midnight of the date on which they are due. If you experience any problems in uploading an assignment, it is your responsibility to contact the professor or TA *before* the assignment's deadline in order to avoid late penalties, as well as to ensure that the paper is eventually uploaded. No assignments will be graded without being submitted online.

All papers will be submitted for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will then be included as source documents in Turnitin.com's reference database for the purpose of detecting future plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin is subject to the Usage Policy and Privacy Pledge posted on the Turnitin.com site

Late Assignment Policy: All assignments will be penalized *one full letter grade* for each week that it is

late. This means that:

> One minute to one week late = one letter grade penalty (an A drops to a B)
> Two weeks late = two letter grade penalty (an A drops to a C)
> Three weeks late = three letter grade penalty (an A drops to a D)
> More than three weeks late = automatic F for the assignment

Please note that if the assignment is not uploaded to Blackboard by midnight on the day that it is due, it is automatically one week late (and penalized as such). There is no intermediate penalty for being "only a little late."

All papers must be submitted by December 8. Failure to submit both papers by this time will result in automatic failure of the course.

Academic Integrity: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of

academic honesty include respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless an instructor allows otherwise, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus* contains a Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions for violating this code are located in Appendix A, which is located at: www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/.

Should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty, students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for review. The Review process can be found at: www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

Keep in mind that all plagiarism—whether intentional or not—will be reported, will result in failure of the course, and could lead to dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about academic integrity, plagiarism, or how to properly cite a source, consult your Teaching Assistant, the Writing Center (Taper Hall 310), or the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards Guide (www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tig.pdf).

Contacting Dr. Buerkle: I hold office hours every week (right after class) and encourage anyone with

questions or concerns to stop by. Keep in mind that I cannot retroactively help you once your work has been submitted, so if you are having troubles, come see me sooner rather than later. Don't wait until the last day of the semester to tell me you're having trouble—I can't do anything to help by then.

Please also keep in mind that while I do try to check my email regularly and am always happy to answer quick questions online, email is not a substitute for face-to-face discussion. If your problem requires more than a sentence or two in response, you need to come speak to me in person, as I will not engage in long-winded back-and-forth correspondence that would be better resolved by a few minutes of actual conversation.

Disability Services: 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 the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am - 5:00pm, Monday through Friday, phone number (213) 740-0776.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to the Course   August 28

Week 2: Games and Play   September 4

- Reading:
  - **Group 1:** Johann Huizinga, "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon"
  - **Group 2:** Roger Caillois, "The Definition of Play: The Classification of Games"
  - **Group 3:** Bernard Suits, "Construction of a Definition"

Week 3: New and Old Media   September 11

- Reading:
  - **Group 3:** Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation" (from *Remediation: Understanding New Media*)
  - **Group 1:** Alexander Galloway, "Origins of the First Person Shooter"
  - **Group 2:** Kristen Daly, "Cinema 3.0: The Interactive-Image"

Week 4: Interactive Film and Fiction   September 18

- Reading:
  - **Group 2:** Nick Montfort, "Riddle Machines: The History and Nature of Interactive Fiction"
  - **Group 3:** Espen Aaseth, "Introduction: Ergodic Literature" (from *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*)
  - **Group 1:** Bernard Perron, "From Gamers to Players and Gameplayers: The Case of Interactive Movies"

Week 5: Interactive Aesthetics   September 25

- Reading:
  - **Group 1:** Lev Manovich, "The Database" (from *The Language of New Media*)
  - **Group 2:** Steven Johnson, "The Desktop" (from *Interface Culture*)
  - **Group 3:** Steven Johnson, "The Myth of the Ant Queen" (from *Emergence*)

Week 6: ***Special Session on Tabletop RPGs***   October 2

- In-class *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign with two guest Dungeon Masters

Week 7: Role-Playing   October 9

- Reading:
  - **Group 3:** Gary Alan Fine, "Frames and Games" (from *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*)
  - **Group 1:** Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Justin Parsler, "Role-play vs. Gameplay: The Difficulties of Playing a Role in *World of Warcraft*"
  - **Group 2:** Sherry Turkle, "Aspects of the Self" (from *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*)
- Play at home:
  - *Dragon Age: Origins*

Week 8: Simulation and Abstraction   October 16

- Reading:
  - **Group 2:** Mark J.P. Wolf, "Abstraction in the Video Game"
  - **Group 3:** Scott McCloud, "The Vocabulary of Comics" (from *Understanding Comics*)
  - **Group 1:** Gonzolo Frasca, "Simulation vs. Narrative: An Introduction to Ludology"
- Play at home:
  - *Civilization V*
  - *Minecraft*

Week 9: Narrative   October 23

- Reading:
  - **Group 1:** Marie-Laure Ryan, "From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative"
  - **Group 2:** Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture"
  - **Group 3:** Jordan Mechner, "*The Sands of Time*: Crafting a Video Game Story"
- Play at home:
  - *Dragon Age: Origins*

CREATIVE PROJECTS DUE OCTOBER 29

- Projects must be uploaded to Blackboard by the end of the day

Week 10: Immersion, Flow, and Difficulty   October 30

- Reading:
  - **Group 3:** Janet Murray, "Immersion" (from *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*"
  - **Group 1:** Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "The Conditions of Flow" (from *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*)
  - **Group 2:** Mia Consalvo, "Gaining Advantage: How Videogame Players Define and Negotiate Cheating" (from *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*)
- Play at home:
  - *Civilization V*
  - *Braid*

Week 11: Virtual Worlds and Communities   November 6

- Reading:
  - **Group 2:** Richard Bartle, "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs"
  - **Group 3:** T.L. Taylor, "Gaming Lifeworlds: Social Play in Persistent Environments" (from *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*)
  - **Group 1:** Celia Pearce, "Communities of Play: The Social Construction of Identity in Persistent Online Game Worlds"
- Play at home:
  - *Minecraft*

Week 12: Serious Games   November 13

- Reading:
    - **Group 1:** Gonzolo Frasca, "Videogames of the Oppressed"
    - **Group 2:** Ian Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric" (from *Persuasive Games*)
    - **Group 3:** James Paul Gee, "Semiotic Domains: Is Playing Video Games a 'Waste of Time'?" (from *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*)
- Play at home:
    - *Braid*

Week 13: Case Study in Representation: Gender in Games   November 20

- Reading:
    - **Group 3:** Henry Jenkins, "Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces"
    - **Group 1:** Fullerton, Morie, and Pearce, "A Game of One's Own: Toward a New Gendered Poetics of Digital Space"
    - **Group 2:** Jullian Dibble, "A Rape in Cyberspace"

Week 14: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15: Transmedia, Mobile Media, and ARGs   December 4

- Reading:
    - **Group 2:** Scott Ruston, "Storyworlds on the Move: Mobile Media and Their Implications for Narrative"
    - **Group 3:** Jane McGonigal, "The Puppet Master Problem: Design for Real World, Mission-Based Gaming"
    - **Group 1:** Henry Jenkins, "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedial Storytelling"

Final Exams Week: TERM PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 7

- All papers must be uploaded to Blackboard by the end of the day

PLEASE NOTE: Details of the weekly schedule are subject to change; students are responsible for any changes announced in class by the professor.