IM-UH 2320
Classroom: Arts Center (C3-112)
Time: Tuesday 11:20 AM - 2:00 PM Thursday 12:45 PM - 2:00 PM
Instructor: Domna Banakou
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Office Hours: By Appointment/Zoom
Class Website: http://gamesplay.nyuadim.com/

Course Description

Games and play are deeply embedded in human culture. Play suggests a broad range of human experiences with universal qualities not easily contained by a common form. Games use their playable form to reflect contemporary culture and speak to the cultural spaces in which they reside. There is freedom in play. There is structure in games. How do they work together? This course explores how games structure play to serve their purpose, and how play inspires games to push against expectations of popular culture of what games are or are not. Informed by perspectives in game studies and theories of play, students will study a variety of analog and digital games to consider the varied structures that shape a play experience. The practical digital component of the class utilizes the Unity game engine to put students in the role of both game designer and developer. Hands-on projects allow students to experiment with building a game experience capable of conveying meaning and message and expressing aspects of humanity beyond contest and conflict. Programming experience is preferred but not required.

Learning Outcomes

- Explore conceptual and practicable relationships between play and games
- Understand the fundamental elements of game design and how to structure play experiences in the game development process
- Examine the impact of digital technology as a tool for game production and as a media platform
- Gain a critical understanding of key concepts and theories as they apply to the study of games in contemporary culture and popular discourse
- Gain exposure to historically significant analog and digital games, game studies theorists and independent designers contributing to the lexicon of games and play
- Design and develop analog and digital games that employ meaningful play toward a desired end.

Teaching & Learning Methodology

This course uses an active-learning approach that joins critical inquiry and an iterative design process to introduce students to meaningful play experiences. The iterative process encourages learning through exploration and experimentation while guiding students through the progressive stages of game design and development as a creative practice. Classes cover theoretical foundations and technical instruction, and include lectures, discussions, case studies, workshops, group work, and presentations. Outside of the class students will engage in individual and group work that examines play in a variety of social and cultural contexts. Group collaboration and investigation are fundamental components of this course. The overall intention is for students to develop the critical and practical skills necessary to create and evaluate games as a medium for communication and expression.

Grading

10% – Attendance
10% – Class Participation (includes class discussion, playtesting, and group critiques)
10% – Homework (written playtest feedback, assignments outside of class)
10% – Writing Analysis (1 short paper)
20% – Midterm Game Project (Non-Digital)
10% – Unity Weekly Progress (Digital)
30% – Final Project (Digital)

Grading Calculation

A   95+
A-   88 - 94
B+   83 - 87
B   75 - 82
B-   70 - 74
C+   65 - 69
C   60 - 64
C-   50 - 59

Attendance

- Attendance in all classes is mandatory. Be on time and ready to start work at the posted start time. Arriving more than ten minutes late to class will count as an unexcused absence.
- Unexcused absences or habitual lateness will negatively impact your final grade for the class. If you know you are going to be late or absent, please email me in advance. If you have an emergency, let me know as soon as you can.
- More than three unexcused absence will result in a 5-percentage point drop in your attendance grade per absence. After four unexcused absences, you will fail the class.

Participation

- Class participation is essential. The study of play requires hands-on experience with the object of study, as well as analysis and discussion while playing.
- Students are expected to attend ALL classes and be actively engaged. Contributing to class discussions and offering advice, input, feedback, etc. during class is a major part of your grade. Participating in class is helpful for me to get to know you as an individual and keep track of your progress. Equally importantly, it provides you and your classmates the opportunity to learn from each other through the sharing of failures, successes, and insights on the work you are doing.
- Be prepared to work in groups in class and for assigned projects, and to support classmates with playtesting and feedback outside of class. Being a thoughtful and generous critic helps you become critical in your own creative practice.
- All assignments must be turned in on time. For playable projects, be ready to present your work at the start of the class on the day the project is due. Each day an assignment is late will result in a lower assignment grade (i.e., B+ to B).
- Ask questions—in class, outside of class, or through emails. Let me know if you have any concerns about the course or if you would like extra help. You can email me, stop by my office, ask for a scheduled meeting, or speak with me before or after class.
- You are responsible for making up material missed due to an absence.

Academic Integrity

NYU Abu Dhabi expects its students to adhere to the highest possible standards of scholarship and academic conduct. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the NYUAD policy:https://students.nyuad.nyu.edu/campus-life/student-policies/community-standards-policies/academic-integrity/

In other words: Plagiarism is a serious issue. Attribute, attribute, attribute, in word and code. Plagiarism is grounds for failure.

Laptops and Phones

Laptops are permitted in class to take notes, to follow along during demonstrations or during times set aside for project work. All other devices are not to be used unless it is part of the class activity and checking social media during class is prohibited. No email or messaging in class.

Readings

Required Texts:
The required texts for the course are below. Only certain chapters from each book will be assigned and these will be provided as links to PDFs that can be downloaded. Several additional texts will be assigned that are not within the

books listed below. These will also be made available either as a PDF or through the NYU eBook Library.

Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman
Play Matters, Miguel Sicart
Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies, Mark J.P. Wolf (Editor) and Bernard Perron (Editor)
The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman
Play Anything, Ian Bogost
How To Do Things With Video Games, Ian Bogost

Guest Speakers

- Prof. Georgios N Yannakakis – Institute of Games University Malta – Games Research
- Nicolas Phipps – Senior Game Designer Ubisoft UAE
- Dr Geoffrey Gorisse – Introduction to model design, lighting, and post-processing in Unity 3D
- Dr Sicart, Miguel - Associate Professor and Head of Center IT University of Copenhagen Relational Play miguel@itu.dk
- Stefano Mirti & Spartaco Albertarelli – Game Design & Board Games

Schedule

Major Assignments & Deadlines:

Non-Digital / Digital Games Writing Analysis Assignment: *DUE Monday Feb. 20th*

Midterm Game Project: <u>Non-digital Game.</u> *DUE Wednesday March 08th (in class)*

Unity Weekly progress: *DUE Monday April 10th*

Final Game Project: <u>Digital Game.</u> *DUE Wednesday May 10th (in class)*

Part 1: Play & Game Fundamentals

Week 1: Introduction / What is Play

Tuesday 01/23

- Student Introductions
- Course Overview
  - Schedule, Logistics
  - Assignments: Homework, Readings, Writing Analyses, Projects
  - Documenting Projects
  - Playtesting, Written Feedback to Others
- Course Themes
  - Structuring Play: From Play Space to Game Space
  - Meaningful Play
  - Game Design Science and Art
  - Non-digital and Digital Spaces

- *Assignments:*
  - Homework: Pre-reading assignment for "Defining Play", *DUE before next class*
    - Before you do the reading, come up with a list of properties you feel help to define play. Think about when play takes place, where, and what's involved. How does it differ from non-play time or activities? What qualifies as play and what does not, why? Be prepared to discuss next class how your list aligned or differed with properties mentioned in the reading.
  - Readings for Next Class:
    - Chapter 1: "Defining Play", *The Aesthetic of Play*, Brian Upton (13 pages) [Link to PDF](#).

Thursday 01/25

- Discuss Reading: What Is Play?
- Brief Introduction to the Theories of Play and Related Concepts

- In-Class Game Exercise: "Everyday Play to Game"

- *Assignments:*

  - Homework: "Everyday Play", *DUE before next class:*

    Think of an everyday play experience that you have engaged in at some point. What was it? Where did it take place? What makes it "play" as opposed to some other kind of activity? Be ready to share and discuss the play experience in class.

  - Homework: Pre-reading prompt for "Play Is", *DUE in class Wednesday*:

    Before reading this chapter come up with three words that you feel reflect sensations of play; words that describe the feeling of a play experience. One of the most common words used is "fun" so don't make that one of your words. Think about the variety of games you have played (including those as a child). What kind of sensation can play bring about? Then read through and highlight anywhere where the words the author uses in similar to yours or where he describes play in a way you hadn't considered. Be ready to talk about it in the next class.

    - Readings for Next Class:
      - "Play Is", *Play Matters*, Miguel Sicart (18 pages) Link to PDF.

Week 2: Structuring Play

Tuesday 01/30

- Discuss "Play Is"
- Review "Everyday Play" Homework

- *Assignments:*
    - Homework: Pre-reading prompt for "The Definition of Play", *DUE before next class:*

        As Caillois' definition of play is framed in the context of, and as a critique of, Huizinga's definition, consider your thoughts on Caillois' descriptions of both play and game. Do you think he appropriately captures the essence of games? What might be some contemporary examples of games he mentions (i.e., games of chance)?

    - Readings for Next Class:
        - "Defining Play", *Rules of Play*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (13 pages) Link to PDF.
        - "The Definition of Play", *Game Design Reader*, Roger Callois (9 pages) Link to PDF.
        - Any of these on Cultural Artifacts
            - "Material Culture: Artifacts and the Meaning They Carry", K. Kris Hirst, on thoughtco.com (short)

- Chapter 1, History and Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture Since 1500 (first 4 pages)

Thursday 02/01

- The Relationship between Play and Games

- *Assignments:*
    - Writing Analysis Assignment: Analysis Non-digital *DUE Monday 02/20.*
    - Homework: Bring in a game, *DUE in class Monday*
        - Bring in a non-digital game to play in class. Make sure it is a game that can be played, or at least be well underway, within 15-20 minutes (i.e., not Settlers of Catan). It can be as simple as arm wrestling (but not arm wrestling).
    - Homework: Pre-reading prompt for "Defining Games":
        - Before you start the reading, have a game or play experience in mind. If it's a game, it can be non-digital or digital. As you read through the different definitions, are there any that don't fully account for the experience you

have in mind? Why? Be prepared to discuss in class.

- Readings for Next Class:
    - "Defining Games", *Rules of Play*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (14 pages) [Link to PDF](#)
    - "Defining Rules", *Rules of Play*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (6 pages) [Link to PDF](#)

Week 3: Fundamental Elements of Games

Tuesday 02/06

- Discuss Readings
- Fundamental Elements of Games
- In-Class Exercise: Identifying the Fundamental Elements of a Game

- *Assignments:*
    - Writing Analysis: make sure to set aside time to play games with friends / classmates.
    - Homework: Bring in three rules from the game you are playing for your writing analysis.
    - Readings for Next Class:
        - "The Magic Circle and The Puzzle Piece", *Conference Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games, 2008*, Jesper Juul (10 pages) [Link to PDF](#)

Thursday 02/08 – Workshop Analyzing the Formal Elements of Games

Week 4: Meaningful Play

Tuesday 02/13

- Games as Systems
- Working with Rules
- Navigating the Magic Circle
- In-Class Exercise: The Playful Around Rules (or The Rebel Within)
- Present Midterm Game Project: Non-digital Game.

- *Assignments:*
  - Writing Analysis: Continue working on paper
- Readings for Next Class:
  - "Chapter Intro: Meaningful Play", *Rules of Play*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (7 pages) Link to PDF.

Thursday 02/15

- What is Meaningful Play?
  - Objectives, Outcomes, Feedback
  - Affordances in Games
  - Meaningful Choices
- Rhetoric in Games
- In-Class Game Exercise: "Games as Cultural Rhetoric / Cultural Systems"

- *Assignments:*
  - Writing Analysis: Due Tuesday 02/20.

- Midterm Game Project: Prepare game concepts to share in class.
- Readings for Next Class:
    - none

Week 5: Game Making

Tuesday 02/20

- Midterm Game Project: Present Game Concept
- Making a Paper Prototype
- Preparing for Playtests

- *Assignments:*
    - DUE: Writing Analysis
    - Midterm Game Project: Begin working on paper prototype.
    - Readings for Next Class:
        - "A Playcentric Design Process", *Game Design Workshop*, Tracy Fullerton (10 pages) Link to PDF

Thursday 02/22

- Workshop / Info Session on Game Making Options

- *Assignments:*
    - Midterm Game Project: Work on game prototype. Be ready to share during next class.
    - Readings for Next Class:
        - none

Week 6: Creating Spaces for Play

Tuesday 02/27

- Paper prototype DUE
- In-Class Playtest Session 1

- *Assignments:*
    - Midterm Game Project: Write up feedback for each playtest session in which you participated. *DUE before next class.*
    - Midterm Game Project: Revise your game based on player feedback that you received.
    - Homework: Pre-reading prompt for "Play Is In Things, Not In You"
        - Consider the statement within this reading: "…play is a property of things, rather than an experience had with them…" What kind of play experiences have you had where you notice more the properties of the objects or space? Moreover, can you think of an example of when the expected use of the object or space of a game was subverted (unplayed)?
- Readings for Next Class:
    - "Play Is In Things, Not In You", *Play Anything*, Ian Bogost (19 pages) Link to PDF

Thursday 02/29

- Affordances of Spaces
- Appropriating / Constructing
- Spaces of Possibility (and Subversion)
- Storytelling

- *Assignments:*
  - DUE Midterm Game Project: prepare board game and presentation for next class.

Week 7: Present Midterm Game Project

Tuesday 03/05

- Present Finished Game Projects

  - *Assignments:*

    - DUE Midterm Game Project: Submit final documentation.

Thursday 03/07

- Intro to Computer Games
- Digital Play, A Brief Background

- The Computer as a Platform for Play, The Game Engine

- Storytelling

- UX in Digital Games

  - *Assignments:*

    - Video Tutorial: Introduction to Unity Fundamentals for Absolute Beginners

  - Readings for Next Class:

    - "Eyeball", *Pilgrim in the Microworld,* David Sudnow (15 pages). Link to PDF

SPRING BREAK

Week 8: The Unity Game Engine (2D Games)

Thursday 03/21

- What Rules Look Like in Digital Games
- In-Class Exercise: [Breakout](#).
- *Workshop:* Intro to Unity 3D Game Engine
  - *Structuring a project, VS Code*
  - *2D vs 3D*
  - *Prefabs*
  - *Scripting*
- Assignments:
  - Readings for Next Class:
    - Review some of the Unity tutorials and references in the Resources section.

Week 9: Making Good Games

Tue 03/26

- Digital Paper Analysis Assignment Information
- Workshop: Working with 2D Gamed in Unity (Making an Adventure Game)
  - UI Canvas in Unity
  - Button layout/Sliders
  - Game Manager
  - Audio in Unity and SFX

- *Assignments:*
  - Work on 2D adventure game workshop: *due before next class*

- Finish 2D adventure game workshop: *due before next class*

Thu 03/28

- What is Procedurality?
- Workshop - Making a 3D Racing Game:
  - Unity Terrain
  - Vehicles
  - 3D Cameras

- *Assignments:*

  - Workshop exercises on Racing Game – create your terrain and roads. Add your vehicles. Due before next class.
  - Readings for Next Class:
    - "A Portrait of the Artist as a Game Studio", *How To Talk About Videogames*, Ian Bogost (in NYU eBook library) Link to Chapter in Ebook Central
    - "Jason Rohrer and the Art of the Videogame", The New Yorker, Sarah Larson (medium length).

Week 10: Digital 3D Games

Tue 04/02

- Making Good Games

- Verbs and Objects Activity
- Workshop - Making a 3D Racing Game:

  - Unity Terrain
  - Vehicles
  - 3D Cameras

- *Assignments:*
  - Workshop exercises on Racing Game – create your terrain and roads. Add your vehicles. Due before next class.
  - Readings for Next Class:
    - "Chapter 2: Verbs and Objects" up to Character Development, *A Game Design Vocabulary: Exploring the Foundational Principles Behind Good Game Design*, Anna Anthropy and Naomi Clark (15 pages). Link to PDF.

Thu 04/04

- Prototyping for Digital Games

- *Workshop:* Designing Gameplay in Unity, Making a FPS Game
  - Character Controller
  - First Person Controller
  - NavMesh
  - AI State Machine

- *Assignments:*

  - Final Game Project: Work on game concept.
  - Work on Workshop FPS exercise.
  - Readings for Next Class:
  - "A Brief History of the Walking Simulator" Nicole Clark in Salon https://www.salon.com/2017/11/11/a-brief-

- "Is It Time to Stop Using the Term 'Walking Simulator'?" Killscreen Link to Article

Week 11: Video Games as Visual Culture

Tue 04/09

- Final Game Project: Present Concept to Class
- *Workshop:*   Gameplay in Unity - Making a 3D Platform Game

  - 3D Animation with Mecanim
  - Sound
  - Particle System
  - Lighting and Post-Processing

- *Assignments:*

  - Final Game Project. Work on Game concept.
  - Readings for Next Class:
    - "High Art / Low Life: The Art of Playing Grand Theft Auto", *Project MUSE,* Soraya Murray (pages) Link to PDF

Thu 04/11 – Eid Al-Fitr Holiday

Week 12: Work on Game Projects

Tue 04/16

- *Workshop:* Gameplay in Unity - Making a 3D Platform Game (continue)

- *Assignments:*
  - Final Game Project: Consider class feedback and update prototype.

  - Readings for Next Class:
    - "Chapter 5: Beyond Choices", *The Design of Ethical Gameplay*, Miguel Sicart (first 14 pages) Link to PDF – read up to p.98 where "Playing with Wicked Problems" starts

Thu 04/18

- Video Games as Visual Culture, Ethical Gameplay
- In-class game analysis and live play
  - Social Commentary
  - Art Games
  - Persuasive Games
  - Expressive Games

- *Assignments:*
  - Final Game Project: Prepare for playtest sessions.
- Readings for Next Class:
  - none

Week 13: Playtesting and Game Development

Tue 04/23

- Playtesting

- *Assignments:*
    - Final Game Project: Write up feedback for each playtest session in which you participated. *DUE before next class.*
    - Final Game Project: Revise game.
    - Readings for Next Class:
        - none

Thu 04/25

- Final Game Project: In-Class Playtest Session 1 and Work time.

- *Assignments:*

    - Final Game Project: Work on project.

Week 14: Playtest Sessions

Tue 04/30

- Present revisions to class
- Final Game Project: In-Class Playtest Session 2 and work time.

- *Assignments:*
    - Final Game Project: Continue working on game.
    - Readings for Next Class:
        - none

Thu 05/02

- Present Final Game Projects
- Class Review
- Course Evaluations

Week 15: Final Week - Presentations

Tue 05/07

- Final Game Project: In-Class Group Presentations
- *Assignments:*
    - Final Game Project: Submit final report.

Thu 05/09

- Class Review
- Course Evaluations