

EVIDENCE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IN TEACHING
Arianna B. Gass, University of Chicago

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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Everyone can make theater, and theater is for everyone. This is the conviction that grounds my pedagogy, whether I'm teaching studio courses on directing or devised theater, seminars in performance studies, or interdisciplinary courses on gaming theater. My classroom approach is grounded in collaborative learning and hands-on experimentation. Theatermaking is an inherently collaborative endeavor, and not every staged experiment will succeed. Accordingly, I encourage students to aim for curiosity and bravery over performances of mastery: my classrooms are spaces for exciting interpretations as well as provisional ideas and productive failures. By creating a welcoming classroom environment that rewards intellectual risk-taking, students leave my classroom ready to enter back into their communities with an enhanced set of skills to interpret and appreciate performance across media, as well as the practical skills and animating questions to fuel their own creations.

Students often enter my classes with a set of preconceptions about theater that reflect the popular American theatrical landscape, familiar with musicals like *Hamilton* and Shakespeare's comedies. One of my greatest joys in the classroom is introducing students to performance methodologies and traditions that aren't frequently found on the regional or Broadway stage. In "Genre Fundamentals: Drama," I aim to expand student's horizons both as consumers and creators of theatrical experiences. We read *Hamlet*, but we also read *Hamletmachine*. We read classics like *Three Sisters* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* and later talk with one of the creators of *Underground Railroad Game*, a thematically and aesthetically challenging contemporary play. Students sometimes describe feeling "disoriented" by theatrical works that depart from the mimetic, representational norm. To counteract this disorientation, I utilize in-class exercises and discussions that scaffold and support students in the various parts of formulating analyses of challenging performances and performance texts. For example, I ask students to read *Cloud 9*, a play that can feel aesthetically unfamiliar because its casting is non-representational. At the start of class, students are given a model thesis statement and asked to work backwards to find textual evidence that supports the claim. We brainstorm how casting choices and staging might support or undermine this claim, mapping out how Churchill's casting choices are themselves arguments about how colonialism and patriarchy are perpetuated by the nuclear family structure. This scaffolded approach to analysis helps students to notice and trust that "disorientation" can be an invitation for scholarly critique and the source material for our own creative experiments.

Whether I am teaching a practicum or a course on theater history and theory, my courses always incorporate hands-on experimentation and critical making; I ask students not just to engage in scholarly critique but to engage their theoretical concerns through their creative practice. For example, in my "Gaming Theater" class, students first encounter the therapeutic improvisatory games of Neva Boyd and Viola Spolin and the utopian games of the New Games movement (most known for "Earthball" and the giant parachute games common to primary school gym classes) by playing them together in class. Students are then asked to design their own game, to be collected in a volume like the ones we read. Not only does this assignment ask students to learn a new theater modality by literally playing along, they also have the opportunity synthesize what they've learned by making their own games. I foreground the experimental process by incorporating playtesting sessions into our class over the subsequent weeks. This approach means that students have multiple, low-stakes opportunities to experiment with their own hybrid theater games and it also builds an affirming environment that reframes failure as a necessary step in the creative process.

As a theater arts instructor, I believe the single most important skill I can teach my students is how to be generous collaborators, something that will serve students in whatever creative work they pursue in and beyond college. My laboratory courses model peer critique as space for collaborative learning. In my "Devised Theaters" class, students are required to complete weekly performance

assignments and to respond to each other's work. For example, after a unit on Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, students develop and perform their own performance score that focuses on performing the everyday. Students must respond to each other's scores and performances but are explicitly asked to withhold evaluative or comparative language. Instead, I guide them to observe voraciously: "What did you see, or hear? What stood out to you? What felt meaningful to you?" One student, in response to the documentation of a performance score of a student waiting for birds to eat seed left outside for them, zeroed in on how the camera framing and fast-forwarding contributed to her sense of anticipation and created tension. I find that this non-evaluative method of critique teaches students to engage rigorously with each other's creative work and really see it while also helping them honor the courage and effort of their peers.

Collaboration and experimentation necessarily require us to negotiate our zones of comfort and our boundaries. When possible, I employ labor-based contract grading, an approach to assessment that is transparent, accountable, and has the ability to redress the potential harms of classroom power dynamics. As part of this model, I ask students to evaluate how well they are holding up their end of the contract as learners: What strengths are they bringing into the classroom? What are the areas in which they hope to improve or require support? These reflections are a two-way street and are also an opportunity for students to evaluate how well I, as the steward of our contract, am holding up my end of the bargain. Teaching during the pandemic, several students noted that labor-based grading emphasized timely completion of assignments, which felt like a barrier to their learning. Because I implemented these reflections, I was able to work individually with these students to break down assignments into smaller parts and develop milestones for completing the assignments on time. In a final reflection, one described a tactic we discussed to overcoming procrastination: "jotting down everything in my head messily with lots of arrows pointing every which way [...] was very helpful to get all of my thoughts out regardless of how messy they were before I had to write something structured/tailored." This helped her meet her goal of handing in her work on time, even while coping with unexpected life responsibilities and tumultuous circumstances.

Theater is for everyone, and everyone can make theater. I manifest this belief through my commitment to diversifying what students think of when they think about theater, and bear this out through building a collaborative classroom, taking a hands-on, experimental approach to learning, and asking students to see failure not as a stumbling block, but an integral part of the creative process.

SAMPLE SYLLABI

*Below is a sample syllabus for an intermediate-level interdisciplinary course. The primary goal of this course is to explore genealogies of interactive live performance using both game and performance studies methods, emphasizing close reading of games, theatrical plays, and live performances. My secondary focus in this class is on critical making – asking students to prototype their own (utopian) games. I was awarded the **Stuart Tave Teaching Fellowship** for this course design, which provides “exceptional graduate students with the opportunity to teach a course of their own design related to their research and appealing to undergraduates across the College.” I will offer this course Spring Quarter, 2022 at the University of Chicago.*

Instructor: Arianna Gass (she/they)

Email: ariannagass@uchicago.edu

Class: Time/Place

Office Hours: Time/Place

Gaming Theater

Spring 2022



Viola Spolin (bottom left) runs an improvisation workshop for children at Chicago's Hull House. Image courtesy of the Estate of Viola Spolin, www.ViolaSpolin.org

Course Overview:

Uniting methodologies and readings from media and performance studies, this interdisciplinary course explores the historical and contemporary proximities between games and theater as interactive media. Each unit of this course interrogates the generic boundary of

“games,” seeing games as the content of, source of, medium for, and engine behind compelling performances. Our course will make a study of “immersive” and game-like theatrical works that provoke meaningful questions about audience agency, interactivity, and the role of technology in our contemporary understanding of what it means to attend or take part in “play.” Students in this course can expect to read theatrical scripts, attend and participate in performances, and perform game exercises in class. Part of taking this class is “being game” – open to participating in the various forms of play we will explore together. Students will watch contemporary works of gaming theater and participate in a hands-on gaming theater workshop, in addition to attending live improv comedy and an escape room. In the midterm assignment students will compose a performance game of their own, designing and testing the piece over three weeks. The final assignment emphasizes the process of producing scholarly writing and asks students to apply performance and game studies approaches to texts from our class.

Learning Objectives:

Students in this course will:

- Interpret the interactive elements of games and performances using methodologies from media studies and performance studies
- Collaboratively develop their own works of gaming theater using rapid prototyping techniques
- Compare and contrast theatrical and ludic adaptations of narratives
- Synthesize first-person experiences of gaming theater into academic writing, alongside primary and secondary scholarly resources

Assignments and Evaluation:

This course uses labor-based contract grading, which means that your grade is assigned based entirely on the amount of work you complete, not on the basis of “how good” I think your writing (or performance) is. I have chosen to grade in this manner in recognition of the following:

- 1) I want grades to reflect what I value most in student’s work, which is the process of thinking and articulating your thoughts. I believe that as students it is your job to engage in the in the work of thinking and the harder work of communicating your thoughts. As your teacher, I want to value the work and time you put into communicating your thoughts (in written, gamic, or performance formats) over any particular outcome.
- 2) I want to give you the privilege of trying something new without being penalized for it. The assignments in this class will ask you to try on new genres of writing and will ask you to creatively engage in performance and play. I want you to spend your time trying to say what you want to say or do what you want to do rather than trying to write what you think will earn you an A.

Accordingly, grades will be based on the timely completion of assignments in the spirit in which you are being asked to complete them. I will ask you to choose what grade you would like in the class – if you complete all the work necessary to achieve that grade, then you will get that grade. All assignments will include a rubric detailing the labor I expect the assignment will include. I will always provide process-oriented written comments on your work and there will also be

opportunities built into the class to receive feedback from peers on your written and performance work. If you want an A in the class, you can simply follow the guidelines for the labor required to earn an A, which you can find below. Half-grades, like A-, B+, etc will be offered when the work you completed falls between two categories on the chart. We will discuss all of this in more detail on the second day of class.

	# of Non-Participation Days	# of Late/Incomplete Assignments	# of Missed Assignments	# of Ignored Assignments	# of Learning Reflections	# of Discussion Posts
A	0	1	0	0	3	8+
B	2	1	1	0	3	7
C	4	2	2	0	2	6
D	5	3	3	1	1	4
F	6	4	4	2	0	< 4

The preparatory work for this class includes:

Completing assigned reading, viewing, or playing on time

Completing written learning reflections

Participating via in-class writing assignments, discussions, and activities (on Canvas)

Required Assignments:

- **Weekly Discussion Posts:** Each week, students are expected to write a 250 -300 word discussion post, **due at the beginning of the second class of each week**. Posts are usually focused on a particular aspect of the text and are an opportunity for students to practice academic writing and share their ideas. Students are expected to write 8 posts over the 10-week course.
- **Midterm Assignment:** Students will work in small groups to design a game/performance based on the examples we will read about and play in class. Over the course of three weeks students will develop a pitch, a game design document and prototype, and finally share full documentation of the game in action alongside a personal reflection.
- **Final Portfolio** – This final paper asks students to explore a text or keyword discussed in class at greater length. This 1250 word essay should integrate performance and media studies approaches to the object(s) at hand. This is a process-oriented assignment – expect to share writing in various stages of completion throughout the second half of this course. The final portfolio consists of a “final” draft of the essay, as well as a brief, 200-word writer’s memo that reflects on the writing and editing process.

Required Texts:

All texts will be made available digitally via Canvas or the University Library’s digital collection.

Students may opt to purchase the following games for convenience, though all games will be available for play via the Weston Game Lab.

- Golden Glitch Studios. *Elsinore* (2019)

- Stern, Andrew and Michael Mateas. *Façade*. (2005).

We will be attending three performances in this class. I will do my best to secure subsidized tickets, but you can expect to pay a small fee (< \$10) for each of these performances, as well as for transportation.

Accessibility and Accommodations:

I am committed to creating an inclusive and accessible classroom environment for all students. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, please let me know. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If you need accommodations due to a disability, you must contact Student Disability Services at 773-702-6000, or disabilities@uchicago.edu and return to me with a formal letter and arrangement from that office. For more information, please visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

Content Notes:

I do my best to include content notes in advance of readings or screenings, but also acknowledge that theater and games are intended to challenge, provoke, and transform us and that no two people's experience of a performance or game will be the same. Some of the texts we will interact with may contain scenes or descriptions that evoke strong emotions or recall personal or collective trauma. You will be asked to read/watch/play texts that may represent political, religious, or moral views that challenge your own. If there is course content that is landing in a sensitive space, please reach out to me. Please contact me if you feel someone in the class is disrespecting your ideas, body, or learning process. I want to work with you to find a way for you to engage with course content wholeheartedly, even when it is challenging.

Office Hours:

Office hours will be held [Time/Place]. You can sign up for a slot via Canvas. Come to office hours to talk through assignments before they are due or about feedback you've received. Come to office hours to talk about time management or things in the course that you are finding challenging. Come to office hours if you want to talk about your learning goals for the class. If you cannot make my scheduled office hours, I will do my best to accommodate you outside of them.

Schedule:

Unit 1 – Theater on One Hand, Games on the Other

This unit offers an introduction to media studies and performance studies approaches to interactive media. We will compare and contrast games and theatrical plays, developing models of interactivity and agency in both domains.

Week 1 – Cyberdrama and Reading Games

1A – Syllabus Review , Understanding Video Games

Read: Bogost, Ian. "Procedural Rhetoric." *Persuasive Games*. Pp. 1-64

1B – Cyberdrama and the Promise of the Holodeck, Review Grading Contract

Play: Golden Glitch Studios. *Elsinore* (2019). (1.5 hrs)

Read: Murray, Janet Horowitz. "Agency" and "Hamlet on the Holodeck?". *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998. Pp. 122-147, 254-261.

Week 2 – Reading Games Through Theater

2A – Early Modern Theatricality and the Gaming Spectator

Read: Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Acts 1-3

Read: "EF's Visit to a Small Planet"

2B – Theater and Games are Interactive Media

Read: Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Acts 4 & 5

Read: Bloom, Gina. "Chess: Performative History and Dynastic Marriage." *Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater*. Pp. 143-76.

Week 3 – Reading Theater Through Games

3A – Mind Games in Albee's Living Room Drama

Read: Albee, Edward. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

3B – Albee as Cyberdrama

Play: Stern, Andrew and Michael Mateas. *Façade*. (2005). (Play 1.5 hrs)

Unit 2 – The Cybernetic Theater

This unit thinks about the contemporaneity of cybernetic and systems theories and improvisatory theatrical forms like Viola Spolin's therapeutic theater games and Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed. We will consider what it would mean for theater to be "cybernetic." We will participate in these theatrical methods and design our own theater games.

Week 4 – Theater Games and the Mid-Century Avant-Garde

4A – Cybernetics and Performance Art: Fluxus and Gordon Pask's Cybernetic Theater

Read: Selections from *Grapefruit* by Yoko Ono

Read: Ilfeld, Etan J. "Contemporary Art and Cybernetics: Waves of Cybernetic Discourse within Conceptual, Video and New Media Art." *Leonardo* 45, no. 1 (2012): 57-63.

4B – Games as Training: Neva Boyd, Viola Spolin, and The Second City

Read: excerpt from Boyd, Neva. *Handbook of Recreational Games*. (1945)

Read: Selections from Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*. 3rd ed.

Attend: IO or Second City Performance!

Midterm Pt 1: Game Pitch Due Sunday Midnight

Week 5 – Revolutionary Games

5A – Play and Utopia

Play: Choose one game from the *New Games Book* and play it with your friends to the best of your ability

Read: Selection from Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*.

5B – Augusto Boal - Invisible Theater and Pervasive Games

Read: Boal, Augusto. "Invisible Theater" from *Re:Directions*.

Read: Selections from Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

Midterm Pt 2: Game Design Document and Paper Prototype Due Sunday Midnight

Unit 3: Mediatized Performance

This unit carries over our interest in intermedial performance and looks at games and computer systems as incitements to play, if not to perform. We'll refine our understanding of the boundaries between games and performance while also thinking about how contemporary game forms integrate aspects of live performance, as well as how live performances are integrating video game technologies.

Week 6 –Playing Along and Performing As

6A – Playing Along with CJ

Play: Rockstar. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004). (1.5 hours)

Watch: Grayson Earle, [“Why don't the cops fight each other?”](#)

6B – Performing As CJ

Read: Miller, Kiri. “Straight Outta Ganton: Virtual Tourism, Fieldwork and Performance.” *Playing Along: Digital Games, Youtube, and Virtual Performance*. Pp. 23-53.

Midterm Pt 3: Final Game Documentation Due Sunday Midnight

Week 7 – Pervasive Games: City as Stage

7A – Games All Around You!

Watch: Excerpt from Blast Theory. *Uncle Roy All Around You*.

Read: “Case Study A: Killer” and “Games and Pervasive Games,” from *Pervasive Games*. Eds. Stenros, Jaako and Markus Montola, Annika Waern. Pp. 1-24.

7B - Gotta Catch ‘em All

Play: Niantic. *Pokémon Go!* (1 hr)

Read: Debord, Guy. [“Theory of the Dérive”](#)

Unit 4 – Contemporary Gaming Theater

Our final unit explore three genres of contemporary “immersive” performance. Each of these works negotiates issues of audience, agency, participation, and interaction in radically different ways, demonstrating the spectrum of interactive live performance. During this unit, students will work towards writing their final assignment. We will use time in class to share and workshop in-progress writing.

Week 8 – Chaos Theory: Online!

8A – Chaos Theory

Play: IKantKoan. *Chaos Theory*. 2019-21.

8B – In-class (online) performance workshop with Jessica Creane (IKantKoan)

Final Pt 1: Final Paper abstract due Sunday Midnight

Week 9 – “Immersive,” Site Specific, and Promenade Theater

9A – Applied Mechanics

Watch: *This is On Record*, Applied Mechanics

9B – In-class Peer editing

Final Part 2: Rough Draft Due in Class (with Teacher Feedback)

Week 10 – Puzzle Theater

10A – Full Class Escape Room

Attend: Escape Room

10B – In-class Office Hours

Final Portfolio Due + Writers Statement at the conclusion of Finals Week

Below is a sample syllabus for an introductory survey course on critical videogame studies. The primary goal of the course is to engage students in the analysis of videogames, exploring the processual, representational, and performatic dimensions of games. Students in this class explore argumentation through multiple venues; short informal game reviews appropriate for popular audiences, academic research papers, and, for the final, students work in groups to produce analytical video commentaries on a game played in class. I have included short assignment descriptions that demonstrate the trajectory of this writing-intensive course.

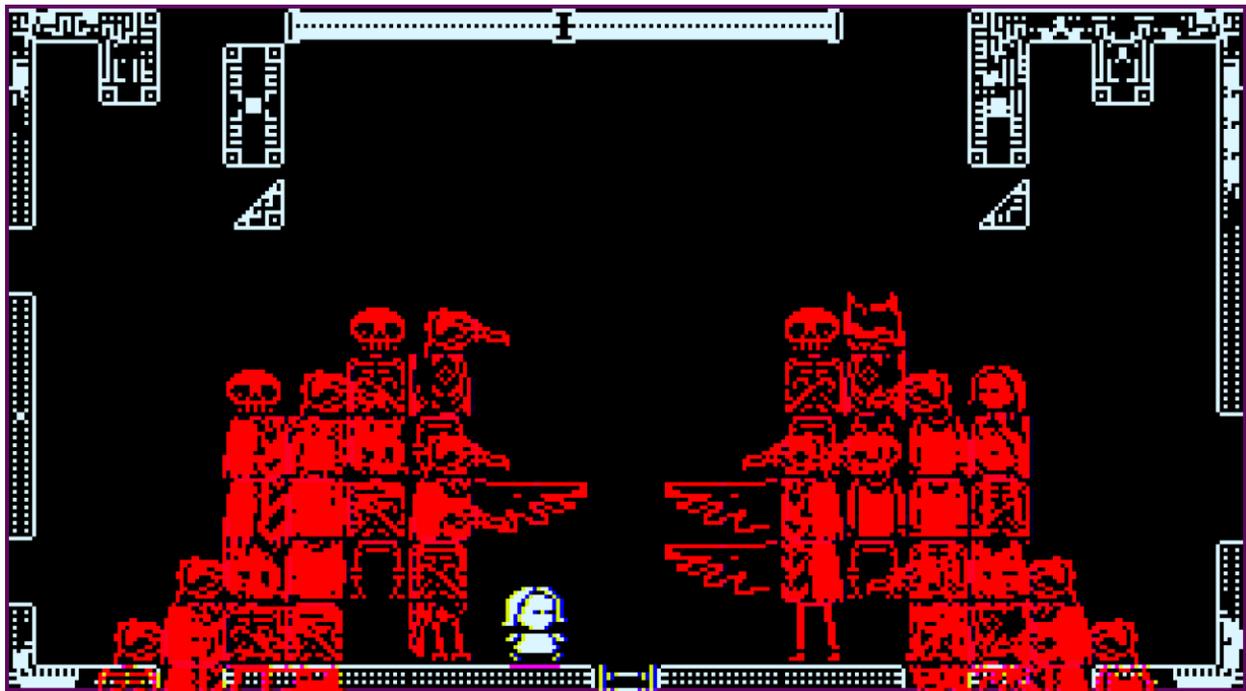
Instructor: Arianna Gass

Email: ariannagass@uchicago.edu

Location, Rm. ###

Office / Office Hours: Time, Day, Place

Introduction to Videogame Studies



Course Overview:

Introduction to Videogame Studies takes works from the largest growing sector of the entertainment economy - video games - and focuses serious critical attention to them as meaningful cultural objects. In this writing-intensive course, students will encounter analytic trends in the humanities, including feminist theory, queer theory, and affect theory, introducing a set of approaches applicable to the study of media more broadly. Students in this class will play arcade games, independent games like *Papers, Please* (Lucas Pope), and familiar AAA titles like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Short and long-form written assignments emphasize writing for both popular and academic audiences. Combining individual written work with a final group

project, students will experiment with new ways of thinking about games, and learn how to talk about games in various medial registers. No previous experience of video games is required – students are encouraged to develop game playing skills during the course, but group play and Let’s Play/walkthroughs are excellent helpers, though not perfect substitutes for first-hand experience.

Learning Objectives:

By the conclusion of this course:

- Students will be able to offer close readings and analysis of video games in both written and visual modalities.
- Students will be able to summarize scholarly arguments in writing and mobilize the arguments in the service of their own readings.
- Students will collaboratively compose their own videogame reviews drawing on these skills culminating in a 3-5 minute video for a general, but informed, gaming audience that supports their arguments with examples from work by other scholars and the games themselves.

Unit 1: Foundations of Game Studies

Week 1 – What is a Game?: Foundations of Game Studies

Session 1:

- Tracy Fullerton, “The Structure of Games,” *Game Design Workshop*.
- Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, “Defining Games,” *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*.

In-class activity: Build a class definition of game.

Session 2:

- Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play” and “The Classification of Games” *Man, Play and Games*.
- Johan Huizinga, “Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon,” *Homo Ludens*. (In class – intro to concept of the magic circle)

Optional: Bernard Suits, *Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*

Week 2 – Games Structuralism: “Procedural Rhetoric” and “MDA”

Session 1:

- Ian Bogost, “Procedural Rhetoric,” *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games*.
- Play: *Papers, Please*, Lucas Pope (3 hours – try to get to 31 days in story mode!)

Assignment 1 Due

Optional:

- Ian Bogost, "Unit Operations," *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*.
- Alexander Galloway, "Gamic Action, Four Moments," *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*.
- Miguel Sicart, "Against Procedurality," *Game Studies* (December 2011).

Session 2:

- Robin Hunicke, et al. "[MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research](#)," from *Game Designers Conference*
- Richard Bartle, "[HEARTS, CLUBS, DIAMONDS, SPADES: PLAYERS WHO SUIT MUDS](#)"

Unit 2: Media-Centric Approaches to Game Studies

Week 3 – Platform Studies

Session 1:

- Aubrey Anable, "Platform Studies," *Feminist Media Histories* (2018).
- Caetlin Benson-Abbot, "Platform," from *Debugging Game History: A Critical Lexicon* (2016).

Play: *PacMan* (on Atari VCS) (30 min)

Assignment 2 Due

Session 2:

- Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, "Pac Man", *Racing the Beam: The Atari Videogame System*.
- Carly Kocurek, "The Microcosmic Arcade," *Coin Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade*.

Optional:

- Dominic Arsenault, *Super Power, Spooky Bards, and Silverware: The Super Nintendo Entertainment System*.

Class trip to the Galloping Ghost to play arcade games.

Week 4 – Feminist Approaches to Game Studies

Session 1:

- Laine Nooney, "A Pedestal, A Table, A Love Letter: Archaeologies of Gender in Videogame History" *Game Studies* (December 2013)
- Play: *Mystery House*, Sierra Online (via Internet Archive) (1 hour)

Assignment 3

Session 2:

- Anita Sarkeesian, “Damsel in Distress Pt 1-3” Feminist Frequency Videos (~1.25hr)

[In-class workshop on game capture software.]

Week 5 – Critical Code Studies

Session 1:

- Noah Wardrip Fruin, “Digital Media Archaeology: Interpreting Computational Processes” from *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, eds. Parikka and Hutamo.
- Play: *Strawberry Cubes*, Loren Schmidt (1 hour)

Assignment 4

Session 2:

- Robert Yang, “Feminist Whore Purna,” *Queer Game Studies*, eds. Ruberg and Shaw

Unit 3: Humanistic Approaches to Technological Objects

Week 6 – Marxist Theory and Games

Session 1:

- Jordan Pruett, “On Feeling Productive: Videogames and Superfluous Labor” from *Theory and Event*, 2019.
- Play: *Candycrush Saga* (30 min)

Optional:

- Mia Consalvo, “ClashRoyale and Gaming Capital” in *How To Play Videogames*, eds. Huntemann and Payne.

Session 2:

- Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, “The Turn of the Tide: E-Sports and the Undercurrency in Dota 2,” *Metagaming*.

Optional:

- Nicholas Taylor, et al. “Alienated Playbour: Relations of Production in EVE Online.” From *Games and Culture* (2015).

Midterm Assignment Due

Week 7 – Critical Race Theory and Games

Session 1:

- David Leonard and Kishonna L. Gray, "Introduction," *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice*.
- Lisa Nakamura, "Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital." In *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*. (2012).
- Play: *Hair Nah*, Momo Pixel. (10 min)

Optional:

- Kishonna L. Gray, "Racing and Gendering the Game," *Race, Gender and Deviance in Xbox Live: Theoretical Perspectives from the Virtual Margins*.
- Jennifer Malkowski and TreaAndrea M. Russworm, "Identity, Representation, and Video Game Studies Beyond the Politics of the Image," *Gaming Representation Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*.

Session 2:

- Kiri Miller, "Straight Outta Ganton," *Playing Along: Digital Games, Youtube, and Virtual Performance*.
- Play: *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, Rockstar Games (4 hours)

Optional:

- Rachael Hutchinson, "Representing Race and Disability: Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas as a Whole Text"
- Tara McPherson, "U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century: The Intertwining of Race and UNIX," in *Race after the Internet*, ed. Lisa Nakamura.

Week 8 – Queer Theory and Games

Session 1:

- Bo Ruberg, "Introduction," from *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*.
- Whit Pow. "Reaching Toward Home: Software Interface as Queer Orientation in the Video Game Curtain." *The Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 81, 2018, p. 43-56.
<https://doi.org/10.7560/VLT8105>
- Play: *The Longest Couch*, Sean Wejbe (you need to play with someone, about 30 min)

Final Project Stage 1 Due

Session 2:

- Bo Ruberg, "'Loving Father, Caring Husband, Secret Octopus': Queer Embodiment and Passing in *Octodad*," *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*
- Amanda Phillips, "Dicks Dicks Dicks: Hardness and Flaccidity in (Virtual) Masculinity" *Flow*, (2017).
- Play: *Hard Lads* (Robert Yang, 2020) – 30 min

Week 9 – Affect Theory and Games

Session 1:

- Patrick Jagoda, “On Difficulty in Video Games: Mechanics, Interpretation, Affect” *Critical Inquiry*, (Autumn 2018)
- Play: *Problem Attic*, Liz Ryerson (1 hr)

Session 2:

Play One:

- o *Celeste* (Matt Makes Games, 2018) – At least 5 hours
- o *Dwarf Fortress* (Bay 12 Games, 2006) – At least 5 hours
- o *Monster Hunter: Rise* (Capcom, 2021) – At least 5 hours

Week 10 – Storyboard Presentations and Skillshare

Session 1:

- Group work time in video editing lab. Expert help available.

Final Project Stage 2 Due at the end of class session.

Session 2:

- Group work time in video editing lab. Expert help available.

Final Project Stage 3 Due at the end of the finals period.

Assignments:

Short Writing Assignments

Students will be expected to complete a series of short written assignments, due in the first half of the quarter. These short assignments (between 300 and 500 words) are to be posted to Canvas by 10:00pm on Tuesday night and will be discussed in class.

- 1) Choose a video game you have played (or choose a game listed on this syllabus) and find a review in a popular online magazine. Websites like *Kotaku*, *Polygon*, and *Rocks, Paper, Shotgun* are good places to start. Questions you might answer in your reflection include:
 - a. How does the writer orient themselves to the material? Is this a paid review, or an independent one?
 - b. Who is the author’s intended audience? How can you tell?
 - c. What argumentative strategies can you locate in this article?
 - i. Is their argument comparative?
 - ii. Do they offer close readings?
 - iii. Do they use evaluative language (“I like it,” “I didn’t like it”)?
 - d. Identify a strength of this article. What is a component of this article that you find compelling? Why?
 - e. Identify a weakness of this article. What aspects of their argument could be made stronger? Put differently, how would you strengthen or alter the argument the author is making?

- 2) Find a review of the same video game on YouTube. How does this video differ from the written reviews of the same game? How does the creator employ visuals to support their argument?
- 3) Choose a scholarly reading from any previous week and summarize the author's argument. Questions you might answer include:
 - a. Who is this author's audience? Other scholars, game developers, game players?
 - b. Who is this author in conversation with? What is their contribution to that conversation? How is their argument different from the others they identify in their work?
 - c. What are the stakes of this argument? Why might this argument matter to the author's intended audience?
- 4) Write a short review of a game we've played for class. The review should be appropriate for publication in a popular online gaming journal.

Midterm

Write a five-page analysis of a single game of your choice (note: this is a good opportunity to expand your argument from Assignment 4). This review should be in a style appropriate to academic writing and should engage the work of at least two scholars. Your analysis should have an organizing argument (thesis) and that argument should be supported with concise examples from gameplay or your research. Please use either Chicago or MLA style for citations and include a bibliography and ludography.

Final Project

In groups, students will work together to develop a short (3-5 minute) video review of a video game, subject to instructor approval. The video should be aimed at a general, but informed audience, and should integrate approaches to games studies covered in the class. The video should forward a clear (and concise) argument about the game.

Stage 1: Storyboard and Outline – This collaboratively authored document should identify the major points in your argument, and how you will illustrate those points using key gameplay moments. Templates will be handed out the week prior to this class.

Stage 2: Video Production – Share a first draft of some video footage and commentary. I expect that this will include some video capture and some recorded voice over. If you submit a commentary script, I will offer comments.

Stage 3: Final Video – Students will be required to hand in a two-page reflection on the process of developing the video, what they felt were their most significant contributions to the project (project management, video editing, voice over, video capture, etc), and what they would do differently next time. The videos and the reflections are due on Canvas at 5pm on Thursday of finals week.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Below please find a selection of quantitative and qualitative comments from students for selected courses I have taught at the University of Chicago. Complete reviews are available upon request.

COURSE: Genre Fundamentals: Drama, Winter 2021 (ENGL 10606, TAPS 16606)

ROLE: Instructor of Record

RESPONSIBILITIES: Syllabus and evaluation design; teaching twice-weekly sessions; one-on-one curricular support in office hours; commenting and evaluation of all assignments

RESPONSE RATE: 18/25

Quantitative Evaluation Summary

The Instructor(s) . . .

	Mean	Median	N/A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses
Provided a syllabus that allowed you to plan your learning and study time effectively.	4.83	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	5.56%	88.89%	18
Explained clearly the course objectives and expectations.	4.83	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	5.56%	88.89%	18
Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the course.	4.44	5.00	0.00%	5.56%	0.00%	5.56%	22.22%	66.67%	18
Was available and helpful outside of class.	4.81	5.00	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	5.56%	77.78%	18
Overall, the instructor made a significant contribution to your learning.	4.44	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	5.56%	11.11%	72.22%	18

Narrative Evaluation Summary

Generative and Access-Oriented Classroom

- “Making sure there was space where everyone felt comfortable and had time to talk”
- “The implementation of a labor-based grading system was fantastically helpful in that it decreased stress and allowed me to focus on material over scores, write daringly, and consider material I’d not otherwise for lack of familiarity.”
- “Really generous approach to discussion, open to various interpretations and engaging students as peers”
- “Providing a clear agenda for the overview of the class with a time breakdown was helpful. The class felt more organized and purposeful, which can be difficult in an hour and a half online discussion course.”
- “The warm-ups and cool-downs really helped me pay attention. The variety in this class made remote learning much better for me, since it’s harder to pay attention on Zoom.”

Creative Assignments and Rigorous Feedback

- “Arianna was really great at using critical theory and outside sources to help explain more of the play, and engaged with the texts beyond just context/close reading. They

were awesome at providing feedback, and their questions about the plays were always provocative and pushed me to think more about what I could do with text.”

- “Arianna was super quick in giving feedback on assignments and helping us to improve. Her feedback was always really thoughtful and made me think deeply. She also gave very meaning [sic] assignments that contributed to better learning than busy work. She was very forthcoming about grades, assignments, and expectations so it was easy to stay on track and plan/achieve goals.”
- “They used a labor based grading system so our work was graded based on whether we turned stuff in, not on the quality. We still received feedback and it motivated me to put more effort into my work without it becoming a burden.”

Adaptability to Student Concerns, Needs, and Interests

- “Prof. Gass clearly cared so much about our wellbeing and the course structure reflects that. I never felt stressed, but I felt compelled to learn (even in a pandemic setting) and supported in my course-specific interests. Prof. Gass also provided thorough and regular feedback on even the smallest writing assignments, which served to make the atmosphere yet more fruitful.”
- “Gass was very understanding of the different learning circumstances everyone was in and made sure there were opportunities to communicate any struggles or concerns one might have while in the course. She also led discussions very well and offered very insightful information about the things classmates said and the works we studied.”
- “They were very flexible and willing to help at any point. They made the learning environment a comfortable one which I appreciated very much.”

COURSE: Shrews! Unladylike Conduct on Stage and Page in Early Modern England, Spring 2021 (ENGL 203601, TAPS 203601)

ROLE: Course Assistant

RESPONSIBILITIES: Attendance to two weekly class sessions; one-on-one curricular support in office hours; evaluation of majority of weekly writing assignments; coordination of remote instruction; designed and evaluated extra credit assignment; course website maintenance.

RESPONSE RATE: 7/22

Quantitative Evaluation Summary

How well did the course assistant...

	N/A	Poorly	Adequately	Quite Well	Excellent
Explain the course material.	12.5%	0%	0%	12.5%	75%
Conduct Discussions	25%	0%	0%	12.5%	62.5%
Respond to student's questions and comments	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
Respond to student's written work	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%

Generative and Access-Oriented Classroom

- “Out of my 36 classes at The College, Arianna Gass was perhaps my most competent, diligent, patient, and impassioned Teacher's Assistant. From smoothly facilitating all remote operations to providing a real-time translation of Professor MacKay's complex vocabulary to returning fully-realized / complimentary critiques on all our written assignments, Arianna paired her composed professionalism with her approachable personality to truly create an intellectually productive environment.”
- “Arianna is simply wonderful. Starting from the very first day, she'd always pop little notes into the chat (defining words/concepts, giving us ways to remember things, other tips/advice/funny things) that made the class feel really welcoming. She made me excited to learn about the materials. She also gave incredibly detailed feedback on each and every one of our assignments. Seriously, I have never seen such detailed feedback from a TA probably in my life. I know it was a ton of work for her, but it truly meant so much to see all her thoughts and suggestions. I felt like she was really interested in all of our work and wanted us to succeed a lot, and that made me want to be a better and more engaged student. I have nothing but great things to say about Arianna; she is a fantastic teacher, and I appreciate her so much! The class would not have been nearly the same without her.”

Creative Assignments and Rigorous Feedback

- “Arianna Gass was our CA! Arianna is a truly wonderful human being who also happens to be a fantastic educator. They are candid and direct but also super encouraging in office hours, and their support helped me push my analysis further. Going to their office hours was really fun because they would help me walk through my ideas but also encourage me to think past the obvious. Arianna is so dedicated to their students and worked really hard to provide some of the most in–depth feedback I have ever seen on a paper. Ultimately, Arianna helped me grow as a student and as a learner, and I think they are a truly incredible teacher. In terms of what Arianna could modify, I honestly can't think of anything. They were great. 100% recommend taking a class with them!”
- “Arianna was great! She always gave timely and thorough feedback on our assignments. Sometimes I felt as though her comments on my assignment did not completely align with the requirements of the assignment (what it was asking me to answer) but nonetheless her feedback was always useful and helped me improve on my subsequent assignment.”

COURSE: Acting Fundamentals, Summer 2020 (TAPS 1020092)

ROLE: Course Assistant

RESPONSIBILITIES: Attended all classes; worked one-on-one with students on assigned monologues and scenes; led class warm up acting exercises and unit on theater games.

RESPONSE RATE: 3/7

What aspects of the TA's teaching contributed most to your learning?

- “She was awesome, available outside of class, provided great feedback, prompted me in amazing ways, etc. To us, people with no experience in this acting area, she really managed to walk the line of prompting us intellectually and helpfully and challenging us in new ways. She never overdid it and get too advanced on us (neither did Shade), which was so awesome. She was also just super fun to get to know and I really appreciated her!”
- “Arianna enriched my learning with her thoughtful comments and suggestions throughout the course. She actively engaged in every class session, which I appreciated very much because her insights were valuable to class. She also made sure to involve everyone in class exercises so that no one is or feels left out. Arianna was a great TA.”

COURSE: Introduction to Theater and Performance Studies, Spring 2020 (TAPS 229001)

ROLE: Course Assistant

RESPONSIBILITIES: Overall syllabus design alongside other co-teachers; led two weeks of class discussion, assignments, and evaluation; technical support for remote teaching.

RESPONSE RATE: 9/19

What aspects of the TA's teaching contributed most to your learning?

- “She was very effective at leading discussions for her week, answering questions, and doing much of the technical work for the class to accommodate those learning asynchronously. She also provided detailed feedback on assignments and chipped in based on her background when Tiffany led the class.”
- “Arianna provided very detailed feedback. This was extremely helpful. I appreciated how the feedback rarely came in the form of “go team”, i.e. unhelpful platitudes about how interesting my work was, and instead involved substantial constructive criticism. Additionally, Arianna did a good job facilitating synchronous discussion. Some of the instructors had trouble navigating the technology at times, and Arianna did a good job as a moderator of sorts. Finally, I thought Arianna did well to add an element of humor to the course.”
- “They're [sic] approachability and skill working with undergrads and explaining more abstract things to them in normal words. Relatable and personable.”
- “Arianna is knowledgeable, fun, and eloquent, particularly about performance theory ranging from the mainstream to the obscure.”

Additional feedback:

- “Arianna is a really cool artist as well as a caring, generous person. It really felt like she cared for us as people in addition to students, and made it feel like a very safe environment.”