

GAME3899: EXPERIMENTAL GAME DESIGN

Spring 2016

COURSE SYLLABUS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Location: Richards Hall 231

Time: MW 2:50pm-4:20pm

Office Hours: Wed 1:00-3:30pm/Thu 1:30-3:00pm

Professor: Celia Pearce

Office: Meserve Hall 121

E-mail Address: celia@neu.edu

Please sign up in advance for Office Hours.

Course Blog: <http://www.northeastern.edu/experimentalgamedesign/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

An experiential learning course which focuses on the experimental uses of games in fine arts and activist practice, exploring how games created in such contexts interrogate traditional assumptions about both art and games to produce cultural, aesthetic and technical innovation. The course will look at the historical subversive, activist, experimental and avant-garde uses of both analog and digital games. Twentieth Century practices of games as fine art and activist media will be explored, and their connection to other related practices, such as scores, proceduralism, performances, tactical media and public interventions, as well as art movements that explicitly included games as part of their oeuvre, such as Dada, Surrealism and Fluxus. The course will include readings on the history of games in these alternative contexts, as well as a series of art-based studio assignments where students will engage practices of game-making in both analog, digital and hybrid forms. The course itself is experimental, and will include field trips, and innovative indoor and outdoor alternative play and game design exercises. Students will produce four completed art projects suitable for portfolios or public exhibition, and will be encouraged to submit their projects to festival and exhibition calls.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

Conceptualize and Create Expressive, Innovative Games and Playful Experiences and Artifacts

- Develop a large portfolio of creative works representing a broad range of innovative game and playful experiences across media and contexts.
- Conceptualize and design work that reflects advanced levels of analysis, insight, and artistic and design methods and techniques
- Evaluate and appraise the affordances of different media in order to execute technical, aesthetic, and conceptual decisions
- Apply and integrate methods of arts and design practice and research to the creation of game-based and playful artworks
- Experiment, Innovate, invent and solve creative problems within the field of games and playful experiences through research & synthesis

Explain and Apply Interpretive, Cultural, and Historical Frameworks to Analyze Texts, Visuals, Performance, and New Media

- Identify, describe and analyze a broad array of games, genres and playful experiences and artifacts as aesthetic forms across times, cultures, and media
- Understand the history of game design, artgames, game and art criticism, and identify the origins of media conventions and traditions, including the role of games in various art movements and practices

Develop Professional Collaboration and Communication Skills

- Produce professional level presentations and generate clear and concise design documents
- Develop and employ professional skills (e.g., courtesy, honesty, integrity, adaptability, reliability, work ethic, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

| Week # | Monday | Wednesday | Read [Due Wednesday] |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| Week 1 1/11,13 | Introduction to Class Artgames/Surrealist Games | Lecture/Discussion: Introduction to Games as Art | Pearce, Games as Art; Friedman, Exquisite Events; Ono, <i>Grapefruit</i> |
| Week 2 1/18,20 | Martin Luther King Day No Class | Play/Design Exercise: Stage a Happening | Beavin on Kaprow Kaprow – <i>Blurring Life and Art</i> , 81-89 <i>Register for Class Blog</i> |
| Week 3 1/25,27 | Artwork #1 – Score Iteration 1 | Lecture/Discussion: Scores | <i>Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life</i> : Ch. 4 (1 Discussion Leader) |
| Week 4 2/1,3 | Artwork #1 – Score Final Iteration | Lecture/Discussion: Appropriation - Fluxus | <i>Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life</i> : Chs.1 & 5 (1 Discussion Leader) |
| Week 5 2/8,10 | Discussion: Contemporary Examples Of Appropriation | Lecture/Discussion Appropriation - Dada | DADA: Zurich, Berlin (2 Discussion leaders) |
| Week 6 2/15,17 | President's Day No Class | Artwork #2 - Appropriate Iteration 1 - Playtest | DADA: Hannover, Cologne (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 7 2/22,24 | Artwork #2 - Appropriate Final Iteration | Lecture/Discussion: Pervasive & Tactical Media | DADA: New York, Paris (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 8 2/29,3/2 | Play Activity: New Games | Lecture/Discussion: New Games/Performance | Brand, Spacewar; Ludica, Sustainable Play (1 Discussion Leader) |
| Week 9 3/7,3/9 | SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS | SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS | |
| Week 10 3/14,16 | Artwork #3: Intervene Iteration 1 | Lecture/Discussion: Performance/Conceptual Art | C. Carr, <i>On Edge</i> p.3-9, 16-24, p. 159-161,223-225 (1 Discussion Leader) |
| Week 11 3/21,23 | Artwork #3 Intervene Final | Lecture/Discussion: Artgames + Final Project Pitch | Schrank, Chs. 1-2, Poremba (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 12 3/28,30 | Artwork #4 – Experience Iteration 1 | Lecture/Discussion Artgames + Playtesting | Schrank, Chs. 3-4 (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 13 4/4,6 | Artwork #4 – Express/Experience Iteration 2 | Lecture/Discussion Artgames + Playtesting | Schrank, Chs. 5-6 (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 14 4/11,13 | Artwork #4 – Express/Experience Iteration 3 | Lecture/Discussion Artgames + Playtesting | Schrank, Chs. 7-8 (2 Discussion Leaders) |
| Week 15 4/18, 20 | Patriots Day No Class | Artwork #4 – Express/Experience Final Iteration | |

COURSE MATERIAL

Note: Some of these assignments require purchasing physical or digital of books. Where possible I have provided links to free digital versions. Any books that cannot be obtained for free online can be purchased at: Amazon or <http://www.alibris.com/>. Please acquire books as soon as possible avoid falling behind on reading assignments.

Books

Baas, Jacquelynn. (Ed.). (2011) *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. The article "Fluxus: A Laboratory of Ideas" can be found here: http://www.academia.edu/2508994/Fluxus_A_Laboratory_of_Ideas

Carr, C. On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century. (1993/2008). Wesleyan University Press. (Note: Entire book can be found on Google Books: <http://tinyurl.com/Carr-On-Edge>)

Leah Dickerman, Brigid Doherty (Eds.) (2005). *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, New York, Paris*. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art.

Ono, Yoko. (1964). *Grapefruit*.

http://monoskop.org/images/2/2a/Ono_Yoko_Grapefruit_A_Book_of_Instructions_and_Drawings_by_Yoko_Ono_S_and_S_edition_excerpt.pdf

Schrank, B. (2014). *Avant-garde Video Games: Playing with Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Papers

Beavin, Kirstie. (2012). "Performance Art 101: The Happening, Allan Kaprow." Tate Museum of Modern Art Blog. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/performance-art-101-happening-allan-kaprow>

Brand, Stewart. "SPACEWAR: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums," Rolling Stone, December 7, 2001. http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html

Friedman, Ken. (2009). "Exquisite Corpse and Events," in *The Exquisite Corpse: Change and Collaboration in Surrealist's Parlor Game*. University of Nebraska Press. <https://crazystupidcrap.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/friedman-e-2009-events-exquisite-ch-3.pdf>

Kaprow, Allan. (1990). *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. http://monoskop.org/images/3/36/Kaprow_Allan_Essays_on_the_Blurring_of_Art_and_Life_with_Impurity_Experimental_Art_The_Meaning_of_Life_missing.pdf (Loads slowly; please be patient.)

Ludica: Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. & Pearce, C. (2005). "Sustainable Play: Towards A New Games Movement for the Digital Age." Digital Arts & Culture Conference Proceedings, Copenhagen, December 2005. Download here: <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/DACSustainablePlay.pdf>

Pearce, Celia. "Games as Art: The Aesthetics of Interactivity." Visible Language: Special Issue on Fluxus. January 2006. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/fluxus-pearce.pdf>

Poremba, Cindy. (2010) "Discourse Engines for Art Mods." *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture*. 2010; 4 (1), p. 41-56 <http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol4no1-4/155>

Web Sites/Archives/Exhibits

Select Parks <http://ljudmila.org/~selectparks/>

Cracking the Maze (1999 – First online game art exhibit) <http://switch.sjsu.edu/CrackingtheMaze/index.html>

SHIFT_CTRL (2001) <http://www.leonardo.info/gallery/gallery351/lafargeintro.html>

Game Show (2001) http://www.massmoca.org/event_details.php?id=55

Trigger (2002) <http://www.artabase.net/exhibition/128-trigger-game-art>

ALT+CTRL (2003) <http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu/virtualbeall/altctrl>

Bang the Machine (2004) <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=22325>

Super Tetricide (2012) <http://homeroom101.org/exhibitions/super-tetricide>

Joue le Jeu (2012) <http://gaite-lyrique.net/en/exposition/joue-le-jeu-play-along>

XYZ (2013) <http://www.xyzgameexhibition.com/>

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING CRITERIA

Reading/ Discussions/Participation (25 points)

Throughout the class, you will be expected to do the readings assigned for each week. During the course of the semester, each of you will be asked to lead the discussion for that week's readings. This may be done individually or in pairs, as specified in the syllabus. You will receive 10 points for leading the discussion on the chapter you were assigned, and an additional 15 points for your participation in discussion and critique of other students' work.

Artworks

The main assignments for this class will consist of a series of four art projects, the first two of which must be solo projects, and the remainder of which can be solo or collaborative. For each artwork you will be asked to:

- Create the work and present 2-4 iterations in class during the scheduled presentation time as specified for the assignment; first iteration will be a concept presentation, second (if applicable) will be a prototype, final will be the final work.
- Create documentation of the work and your process and post on the class blog. You may post using your real name or an artist persona alias created for the class.
- Write a short (500 words or less) artist's statement about the work's intention and influence. What are you trying to do with the work? How does the work pertain to works, readings and themes of the class?
- Submit final project with documentation of implementation/gameplay on the class blog. Documentation may be in the form of video or photographs, notated with descriptions.

Artworks will be graded on the following criteria

- Originality and creativity
- Craftsmanship/execution
- Relationship of the work to the art, readings and themes of the class

Artwork 1: Score (10 points)

Create an artwork that takes the form of a short set of instructions. The score should be an artwork in its own right as well as in the form instantiated by participants. (Examples: Grapefruit, Water Yam) Provide documentation.

Artwork 2: Appropriate (15 points)

In the spirit of the Dada and Fluxus movements, create a game, either digital or analog, that is comprised entirely of found objects or appropriated material. Use the transformation of these objects into the materials of a game to critique, subvert or call our attention to their original meaning. (Examples: La Fontaine, White Chess, Takako Saito's chess series, Mario Clouds, Flatlands)

Artwork 3: Intervene (20 points)

Create an art or activist game that intervenes in some way in an existing process, location or site. The game should operate on a tactical level to critique the existing process, and to subvert or otherwise question assumptions about agency embodied in the original process. This can be a pervasive game that takes place in the physical world, or can intervene in a digital process. This game may be a performance in the physical world or a digital space, such as a game or virtual world, or can entail intervening in or utilizing social media or other modes of digital communication in an innovative way. (Examples: Open Source, Re:Activism, Velvet Strike)

Artwork 4 (Final Project): Express/Experience (30 points)

Create an entirely original artgame that expresses a particular type of experience that is underrepresented in digital games. This game can be short, and can capture a personal experience, such as spiritual awakening, falling in love, grieving, or the experience of being enmeshed in a larger system, such as a game about poverty or discrimination. The game can operate at varying levels of abstraction so thinking about the way in which you want to abstract your idea is important. For this project, you may use an existing digital game technology, including Unity, Flash, Processing, or game authoring tools such as Gamemaker or Twine. The game may also be a pervasive game provided it has some digital component. Importantly, the game must use the platform to best capture the experience, so be sure that your platform is a good fit for the game you are trying to create. Examples of existing games that fall into this genre: The Marriage, Passage, Gravitation, dys4ia, Mainichi, Escape from Woomera, Aiti: The Cost of Life, Hush, The Path, The Night Journey, Akrasia, Dys4ia, Papers Please, Gone Home.

GRADING SCALE & DEPLOYMENT

Grades will be distributed via Blackboard using the following grade scale.

| Score | Grade |
|--------|-------|
| 93-100 | A |
| 90-92 | A- |
| 87-89 | B+ |
| 83-86 | B |
| 80-82 | B- |
| 77-79 | C+ |
| 75-77 | C |
| 72-74 | C- |
| 70-71 | D+ |
| 66-69 | D |
| 64-65 | D- |
| 0-63 | F |

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. Three or more unexcused absences will result in an overall reduction of one half grade point. An **excused** absence is one in which permission is requested in advance and you have a legitimate reason to skip class, such as an illness. Unacceptable reasons include doing homework for another class, and your girlfriend's birthday (yes, there are real excuses people have given for missing class.) You are expected to make up what you missed by checking with other students and reviewing lecture materials on the web site. Chronic tardiness during the semester will also result in a half point grade reduction.

INCLUSIVENESS/SAFE SPACE

This course seeks to be inclusive and create a safe space and open space in terms of gender, orientation ethnicity & ability. Please contact me directly if you have any concerns or issues.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please notify the instructor if you have any disabilities with which you need special assistance or consideration. For more on disability services at Northeastern visit <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/> or speak with your academic advisor.

EMOTIONAL ISSUES

If you are having emotional issues of any kind, such as depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety or substance abuse, please do not hesitate to schedule a one-on-one meeting with me. You can also contact We Care at www.northeastern.edu/wecare or 617-373-4384 to seek counselling or other assistance.

HONOR CODE/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to adhere to Northeastern Code of Conduct, which can be found here: <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/code-of-student-conduct/> Acts of plagiarism will result in an immediate fail.