

## **WHAT'S IN A GAME?**

**Digital Humanities 350 (Spring 2015) at UVic**

**Taught by Jentery Sayers (jentery@uvic.ca)**

**<http://jentery.github.io/dhum350/>**

## **DESCRIPTION**

*What we call a videogame is not a product. It's the creation of an author and her accomplice, the player; it is handmade by the former and personally distributed to the latter. The videogame is a zine. -- Anna Anthropy*

For many of us, games are central to our leisure time. They are objects we purchase, play, and consume. But how are they made, and how do they help us think critically? In this course, you will prototype a game of your own, starting with a paper prototype and transitioning into a videogame prototype. Throughout the semester, you will also share your prototype, read research in game studies, and study gaming cultures.

This course is ideal for undergraduates interested in new media, game design, electronic publishing, and cultural studies. No previous experience with any of these four fields is required. Students from across the disciplines are welcome.

## **OBJECTIVES**

By the conclusion of this course, you should learn to:

- Iteratively develop, revise, share, discuss, and formally present an indie game prototype,
- Prototype an indie game that makes an argument about culture,
- Combine critical thinking about power, systems, and social relations with basic technical competencies in computing and materials design,
- Approach indie games as social systems (not bundles of unrelated component parts), and
- Demonstrate an awareness of various strategies used by practitioners to prototype games with social justice issues in mind.

Student work will be evaluated based on a gaming "manual" (three marks), a presentation (one mark), and a prototype (one mark). Please note: this course is an introduction to game development and game studies. By the semester's end, students are not expected to be experts in game-making, and they are also not expected to build a complete game.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Game Manual (3 marks, each 20% of your final grade)**

Throughout the semester, you will contribute to a game manual, which will correspond with the game prototype you are iteratively developing. The manual requires weekly entries (except reading break), routinely prompting you to build the prototype instead of waiting until the last minute. While, during the first half of

the semester, it should consist of thought pieces, sketches, and other preliminary work, by the semester's end it should be an off-screen guide to how your game was made, how to play it, and how it's culturally embedded. The manual will be assessed three times, with each mark comprising 20% of your final grade. Although the final instantiation of the manual must be an off-screen guide (e.g., printed or analog), the first two instantiations can be screen-based or off-screen (print, handmade, or digital). Your choice. All prompts for the manual are included in the course schedule. Please think of the manual as a way to represent how this became that, or how to persuasively account for the process of building a game prototype. I expect the first two instantiations (especially the first) to be quite "drafty." The point is to inscribe and share your ideas and then refine them for the final mark (i.e., mark three). All that said, I do ask that you keep your contributions concise. Articulate your ideas as concretely and cogently as possible, with thorough evidence (e.g., sketches, screengrabs, observations about other indie games, and references to game studies research). You will receive the first mark for your manual during the middle of the semester, your second mark near the semester's end, and your final mark during or after the exam period.

### **Final Presentation (1 mark, 10% of your final grade)**

At the semester's end, you will present your indie game prototype to the class, using a slidedeck that draws upon your prototype as evidence for an argument about culture. At this time, you will also give others in the course (including me) an opportunity to play the prototype, meaning you will need to demo it. During the second half of the semester, I will circulate a prompt for this presentation, with more specific instructions and my rubric for assessment. In the meantime, please note that the presentation + demo comprises 10% of your final grade.

### **Final Prototype (1 mark, 30% of your final grade)**

At the semester's end, you will submit a prototype for an indie game. While your game will not be complete, the prototype must be playable. As I mark it, I will also play it. The prototype must (if only in part) be computational. In other words, it must include a videogame (or a digital game), but it can also include other media (e.g., analog, tabletop, board, or site-specific game). The prototype comprises 30% of your final grade. During the second half of the semester, I will circulate a prompt for the prototype, with more specific instructions and my rubric for assessment.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The English Department (which administers all DHUM courses at UVic) uses the following scale for grading purposes: A+ (90-100), A (85-89), A- (80-84), B+ (77-79), B (73-76), B- (70-72), C+ (65-69), C (60-64), D (50-59), and F (0-49).

I do not use plagiarism detection software when assessing student work, and final grades will be determined in accordance with the University's official grading system.

### **N Grades**

Students who have completed the following elements of the course will be considered to have completed the course and will be assigned a final grade: the final game prototype and at least one mark for the game manual. Failure to complete these elements will result in a grade of “N” regardless of the cumulative percentage on other elements of the course. An “N” is a failing grade, and it factors into a student’s GPA as 0 (the maximum percentage that can accompany an “N” on a transcript is 49).

### **Circulation of Marks and Feedback**

I will not, at any time, post grades online, outside my office door, or in any other public forum. Grades will be circulated privately.

### **Grading Rubric for the Game Manual**

**A+:** The content is persuasive, creative, reflexive, and supported by a significant amount of evidence. It not only meets the requirements of the prompt but also adds additional, interesting code, features, or design elements that were not required for the assignment. These additions augment the overall quality of the manual and demonstrate that you are learning more than what is being taught during class meetings.

**A- or A:** The content is persuasive, creative, reflexive, and supported by evidence. It not only meets the requirements of the prompt but also adds additional, interesting code, features, or design elements that were not required for the assignment. These additions augment the overall quality of the manual and demonstrate that you are learning what is being taught during class meetings.

**B- through B+:** The content is persuasive and supported by evidence. It meets the requirements of the prompt and demonstrates that you are learning what is being taught during class meetings.

**C or C+:** The content is not persuasive, and it is not supported by evidence. It meets some requirements of the prompt.

**D:** The content is not persuasive, and there is no evidence. It does not meet the requirements of the prompt.

**F:** The content is missing and/or it does not meet any requirements of the prompt.

*This rubric was adapted from a syllabus written by Mark Sample at Davidson College.*

### **Grading Rubric for the Final Presentation**

I will circulate the rubric for the Final Presentation during the second half of the semester.

### **Grading Rubric for the Final Prototype**

I will circulate the rubric for the Final Prototype during the second half of the semester.

### **How to Do Well in this Course**

- Write while you read material or play a game. For me this means annotating content as I engage it. You can annotate print and digital material.

- Come to class with ideas and questions. Be curious. Seek connections between texts, between projects, between games, and between this course and others, even in other disciplines.
- Take notes during class meetings. A significant portion of your game manual intersects with what we talk about in class.
- Let me know when you don't follow what I'm saying. I am not aware of what you do not know or do not understand, and I may assume more contextual knowledge on your part than you have. I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or know more about---so please tell me.
- Persuasive work takes time. Before you submit content, consider circulating drafts. Ask friends or peers to give your prototype or writing a gander. Come chat with me during office hours.
- During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone's work (including the materials we're discussing). Quote it. Speak to specific elements. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, be sure to affirm their ideas (e.g., "I like how you...").
- Use your game manual to share ideas and discuss material (including games) outside of class. If you have a question, then ask your classmates or me. If you hear something you want to remember, then note it for later reference. If you like the work your peer's done, then tell them so.

*"How to Do Well in this Course" was adapted from a syllabus written by Christopher Douglas, University of Victoria Department of English.*

## **POLICIES**

### **Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all classes in which they are enrolled. A department may require a student to withdraw from a course if the student is registered in another course that conflicts with it in time. An instructor may refuse a student admission to a lecture because of lateness, misconduct, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course. Students who neglect their academic work, including assignments, may be refused permission to write the final examination in a course. Students who are absent because of illness, an accident, or family affliction should report to me upon their return to classes.

Aside from attending class for the sake of attending class, I create several incentives for students to participate. Those incentives include: (1) sparking ideas and topics for your prototype, 2) asking you to speak about and share your work, 3) holding hands-on workshops as well as peer review sessions, 4) encouraging face-to-face discussions amongst students about the assigned materials, and 5) lecturing about topics that are applicable to your prototype and development practices.

### **Computers in the Classroom**

Given the applied nature of this course, I recommend bringing a laptop to class meetings. But a laptop is by no means required. You will, however, need access to a

computer outside of the classroom. If you do not own a computer, then please notify me. I will direct you to resources on campus. It is certainly possible to build a prototype for this course without spending any money on software.

### **Late and Missed Submissions**

Barring written documentation of illness, an accident, or family affliction, all assignments must be submitted on time, meaning I will not mark late submissions. All missed assignments will receive a zero.

### **Email**

With the exception of holidays and weekends, I respond to student emails within twenty-four hours.

### **Learning Climate**

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy. Students should alert me immediately if they have any questions about this policy and its application, or if they have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, students agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

### **Writing Improvement**

I may require students to seek general writing improvement and/or assignment tutoring at The Learning and Teaching Centre. If so, then they will be required to do so and to rewrite their work within three weeks of receiving notice from me.

### **Accessibility**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a special need/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. The RCSD staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

### **CONTACT ME**

Instructor: Jentery Sayers

Office Hours: Tuesday, 10:30am-12:30pm in CLE D334

Email: [jentery@uvic.ca](mailto:jentery@uvic.ca)

Office Phone (in CLE D334): 250-721-7274 (I'm more responsive by email)  
Mailing Address: Department of English | University of Victoria | P.O. Box 3070, STN  
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## SCHEDULE

### Week 1: PLAY + INDIE GAMES

*What if some games, and the more general concept of "play," not only provide outlets for entertainment but also function as means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, or as tools to help examine or work through social issues? -- Mary Flanagan, [Critical Play](#)*

- TUESDAY the 6th: Introducing Us + the Course + Zines + Indie Gaming
- WEDNESDAY the 7th: Play and Indie Games (Lecture)
- FRIDAY the 9th: No Class (Jentery at [MLA 2015 in Vancouver](#))

FOR YOUR MANUAL: This semester, you'll gradually develop a manual for your own game, which you'll prototype. (Details [here](#).) For your first contribution to that manual, mind answering two questions? First, what's an indie game? Second, what's play? For each definition, just use a sentence or two. No worries if your pithy definitions aren't that original. "Game" and "play" have been defined and redefined for centuries now. It's a mess, really. Aside from addressing these two questions, you might also consider subscribing to [Steam](#), if you don't already. Maybe install the [Unity web player](#), too? More important, please carefully review the entire course outline. You might want to play some of the games now, take notes on the topics we're covering, ask me any questions you have, and start brainstorming what sort of game you want to prototype. As the semester proceeds, I'll recommend specific readings depending on the trajectories of your work; however, it would be wonderful if you could play most, if not all (!!!), of the games in the course outline.

RELATED: merritt kopas, [forest ambassador](#); Anna Anthropy, [Rise of the Videogame Zinesters](#); Mary Flanagan, [Critical Play](#) and "[Critical Play](#)" (TED talk); Amanda Phillips, "[Gaming the System](#)"; Bingham Center Zine Collections, "[A Brief History of Zines](#)"; Johan Huizinga, [Homo Ludens](#); Zimmerman, "[Manifesto for a Ludic Century](#)"  
PLAY: Molleindustria, [Game Definitions](#)

### Week 2: AUTHORS + PLAYERS

*To take play seriously is also to take the risk in play seriously. Whether playing a video game or writing a personal essay or giving a public speech, the sense of safety, the space of safety, must be a contact zone . . . -- Edmond Y. Chang, "[Gaming as Writing](#)"*

- TUESDAY the 13th: Authors and Players (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 14th: Paper Prototyping Some Characters (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 16th: Sharing Your Characters (Peer Review)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: Using whatever medium you prefer, sketch at least three characters (i.e., entities that act) for a game you want to prototype. For at least three of those sketches, please also provide brief character descriptions (50-100 words) that account for questions such as: What do your characters do? What don't they do? Are they player characters? Non-player characters? Are they human or non-human? How are they embodied? Under what assumptions? How do they interface with norms and expectations? How are they seen and heard? How do they communicate? Through what language? With what audiences and actions in mind? Are they based on people, places, or things that you know well? Are they based on existing games or fictions? During class on Friday the 16th, you'll circulate these sketches and get some feedback from others (including me). Then you'll gradually revise your characters based on that feedback. P.S.: You might find it refreshing to sketch a bunch of characters but only describe three of them. After all, I'm only asking for three character descriptions.

RELATED: Anna Anthropy and Naomi Clark, [A Game Design Vocabulary](#); Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, [Rules of Play](#) (especially pages 28-105); Tracy Fullerton, [Game Design Workshop](#); Nick Yee, "[A Model of Player Motivations](#)"; Greg Costikyan, "[I Have No Words and I Must Design](#)"; Eric Zimmerman, "[Jerked around by the Magic Circle](#)"; Mattie Brice, "[Death of the Player](#)" and "[Moving On](#)"  
PLAY: Porpentine, [With Those We Love Alive](#); Yijala Yala Project, [Love Punks](#); Deirdra Kai, [Dominique Pamlemousse](#); Sophie Houlden, [Swift\\*Stitch](#)

### **Week 3: MECHANICS + VALUES**

*And more broadly, we need to ask whether or not games truly empower players to understand the systems they purport to describe. -- merritt kopas, "What Are Games Good For?"*

- TUESDAY the 20th: Mechanics and Values (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 21st: Writing Some Rules (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 23rd: Executing Rules, Enacting Assumptions (Peer Review)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: Create some basic relationships between the characters you sketched last week. Write executable rules for these relationships. Make sure these rules could be written in binary, with corresponding keystrokes. Consider expressing your rules as subject-verb-object or if-then. You might find this exercise liberating or frustrating. Or both. Now, in 100 or so words (drawing upon material, including games, from the course outline), write about how these rules might ultimately correspond with or enact a social/cultural issue, which you could of course change later. That is, either implicitly or explicitly, what could your game be about, and for whom are you making it? Additionally, in 100 or so more words (drawing once again from the course outline), write about what the "feel" of the game might be. Artsy? Activist? Escapist? Fantastical? Realist? Abstract? Subtle? Forward? Short? Long? Simple? Elaborate? Snobby? Poppy? To be sure, this stuff will morph down the line, but it doesn't hurt to start thinking through it all. And,

with other students in the class, you'll workshop your rules + relationships during class on Friday the 23rd.

RELATED: merritt kopas, "[What Are Games Good For?](#)"; Julian Stallabras, "[Just Gaming](#)"; Mia Consalvo, "[It's a Queer World After All](#)"; Elizabeth LaPensée, "[Why Cultural Collaboration Matters](#)"; Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett, "[Hypermasculinity and Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public](#)"; Adrienne Shaw, "[On Not Becoming Gamers: Moving Beyond the Constructed Audience](#)"; *Feminist Frequency*, including Anita Sarkeesian's "[Ms. Male Character](#)" and Jonathan McIntosh's "[25 Invisible Benefits of Gaming While Male](#)"; Elizabeth Losh, "[#GamerGate 101](#)"; Helen W. Kennedy, "[Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?](#)"

PLAY: Anna Anthropy, *dys4ia*; merritt kopas, *Lim*, *Lullaby for Heartsick Spacer*, and *HUGPUNX*; Christine Love, *Analogue*; Website for Peter Lu and Lea Schönfelder's *Perfect Woman*; Mattie Brice, *Mainichi*

#### **Week 4: PERSUASION + PROCEDURE**

*We must take seriously the vulnerability that comes with communications---not so that we simply condemn or accept all vulnerability without question but so that we might work together to create vulnerable systems with which we can live. -- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, [Control and Freedom](#)*

- TUESDAY the 27th: Play Log (Workshop; Jentery at [INKE Whistler 2015](#))
- WEDNESDAY the 28th: Executing Your Rules on Video + through Text (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 30th: Persuasion, Procedure, and Grammars of Action (Lecture)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: You've sketched some characters and written some rules. Now sketch more characters (if you wish) and/or revise existing characters through new/edited sketches (if you wish). Please also make the characters' jobs in your prototype more concrete. You could do this in a number of ways: create profiles, write short biographies, provide sample interactions, or the like. Whatever your approach, in your manual just be sure to share all your characters, together with the actions for each. This way, you have a character + rule inventory of sorts. Please also describe or label how your characters relate. For instance, are their relationships premised on deceit, opportunity, love, power, verbal communication, body language, telepathy, envy, exploitation, sharing, capital, dependency, chance, distance, intimacy . . .? This description could also be expressed in a number of ways: through an "interaction map," simple sentences, tags, symbols, or some graphical representation. Your choice. Finally, please answer each of the following questions using about 100 total words (drawing upon material, including games, from the course outline): what kind of game (e.g., puzzle, first-person, platformer) are you anticipating here? 2D or 3D? To what games would you compare it? How many players are you considering (one, two, multi)? How will those players interact with your game (e.g., through what mechanics and controllers)? And do you think you'll build your game from scratch or mod an existing one? We'll start unpacking these



questions as a class in February. For now, I'm just floating them by you. Again, I only need about 100 words total. Keep your responses to the questions brief, and get in touch with any questions or concerns.

RELATED: Paolo Pedercini, "[Designing Games to Understand Complexity](#)"; Alexander Galloway, [Gaming](#) (especially "Gamic Action, Four Moments") and "[Protocol](#)"; Ian Bogost, "[Persuasive Games: The Proceduralist Style](#)," [How to Do Things with Videogames](#), and [Persuasive Games](#); Maddy Myers, "[Bad Dads Vs. Hyper Mode](#)"

PLAY: Lucas Pope, [Papers, Please](#); Tarn Adams and Zach Adams, [Dwarf Fortress](#); Admiral Jota, [Lost Pig](#); Emily Short, [Bee](#); Mordechai Buckman and Kyler Kelly, [Gamer Mom](#); Lana Polansky, [Hey, Free Cheeseecake](#)

### **Week 5: ENGINES + INTERFACES**

*Games are activities, and activities are best understood when carried out. Playing games is therefore essential when we want to understand games and how they work in practice.*-- Kristine Jørgensen, [Gameworld Interfaces](#)

- TUESDAY the 3rd: Engines, Platforms, Interfaces, and Affordances (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 4th: Intermediating between Paper and Machines (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 6th: Prototyping Gadgets (Workshop) | **Manual's Due** (details below)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: This week, we'll start moving from game prototyping in general to videogame prototyping in particular. In preparation, please review [these game-making tools](#) to determine what might be best for you. Try a few of them, if you have the time, interest, and patience. Some involve programming; some do not. Some are free; some are not. Some are genre-specific; some are general purpose. Some are cross-platform, but many are only for Windows. Aside from these options, you could also consider authoring your game in, say, [Python](#) or [Processing](#), especially if you're modding something. Or you might look at super-handly options such as [The Open Game Art Bundle](#). I'm happy to help you here. And once you pick the best tool for prototyping your game, please write roughly 100 words about what the tool does and how, together with a rationale for why you selected it. In your rationale, please draw upon material, including games, in the course outline. In that rationale, feel free to provide sketches or screengrabs of the tool you selected. Please also keep in mind that I'm very open about how you proceed with your prototype. For instance, it does not have to be 100% digital or entirely screen-based. It simply has to involve some computational elements, which make it (if only in part) a videogame. Persuasive games don't need to be technical or flashy. P.S.: As you think about mechanics and engines, consider whether you want to collaborate with others in the class. Perhaps a shared engine or mechanic could be used for several different videogames?

RELATED: Brenda Brathwaite (aka Brenda Romero), "[How I Dumped Electricity and Learned to Love Design](#)"; James Newman, [Best Before](#); the [Platform Studies](#) series

from MIT Press; Alexander Galloway, [The Interface Effect](#); Raiford Guins, [Game After](#); Kristine Jørgensen, [Gameworld Interfaces](#); Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä, "[Player-Centred Game Design: Experiences in Using Scenario Study to Inform Mobile Game Design](#)"; Mia Consalvo and Nathan Dutton, "[Game Analysis: Developing a Methodological Toolkit for the Qualitative Study of Games](#)"

PLAY: Ian Snyder, [The Floor Is Jelly](#); Mattie Brice, [Mission](#) (play if in San Francisco); Polytron, [Fez](#); Ben Esposito, [Pale Machine](#); Website for [Lumino City](#)

SOMETHING'S DUE: Please note that I will collect your manuals on Friday the 6th (end of class). At this point, your manual should contain definitions of "indie game" and "play," some character sketches and descriptions (at least three), some rules for your game prototype, a character inventory (i.e., characters + their actions), some descriptions of how your characters relate (or an interaction map), a statement on what technology you'll be using to prototype your videogame, a play log, and---finally---some thoughts on the kind of game you're prototyping, at least one social/cultural issue it's addressing, and some words on the overall "feel" of your game. Remember: your manual should clearly (even if casually) engage some games from the course outline as well as some research in game studies (including "related" material in the outline).

### **Week 6: ELEVATOR SEQUENCE**

You're between levels. Take a break. (Jentery at the [University of South Carolina](#))

### **Week 7: MOODS + SIMULATIONS**

*I see glimmers of a medium that is capacious and broadly expressive, a medium capable of capturing both the hairbreadth movements of individual human consciousness and the colossal crosscurrents of global society. -- Janet H.*

Murray, [Hamlet on the Holodeck](#)

- TUESDAY the 17th: Moods, Simulations, and History (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 18th: Surveying Some Prototyping Gadgets (Peer Review)
- FRIDAY the 20th: Building a Scene (Workshop)

Also note that [Lisa Nakamura's Lansdowne lecture](#) is Friday at 12:30pm in David Strong C116.

FOR YOUR MANUAL: Thus far, the course has been largely about the mechanics, kinesthetics, technologies, and cultures of indie gaming. Now it's time to focus a bit on aesthetics and history. Use about 100 words (drawing upon material, including games, from the course outline) to address the following three questions about your prototype: what's its overall mood and ambiance? What (if anything) is it simulating? And how (if at all) is it drawing from history or historical materials? Together with these 100 words, compose a scene for your prototype using whatever is appropriate: paper and pencil, audio, Photoshop, photography, Python, video . . . As you do this work, think about your prototype as a fully functioning videogame:

how it will sound, how it will feel, what its palette might be, and how people might engage it (e.g., point-and-click, text fields, gesture). In many ways, you're starting to build a world. But keep the world small or simple for now. You only need one scene, and you may only need one aspect of that scene (e.g., only visuals, only sound).

RELATED: Marie-Laure Ryan, "[Immersion vs. Interactivity: Virtual Reality and Literary Theory](#)"; Matt Barton, "[How's the Weather: Simulating Weather in Virtual Environments](#)"; Zach Whalen, "[Play Along: An Approach to Videogame Music](#)"; Brenda Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*; Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*; Patrick Crogan, *Gameplay Mode*; Matthew Kirschenbaum, "[Contests for Meaning: Playing King Philip's War in the Twenty-First Century](#)"; *Play the Past*

PLAY: Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad, *The Cat and the Coup*; Robert Yang, *Intimate, Infinite*; Molleindustria, *To Build a Better Mousetrap*; Amanita Design, *Botanica* and *Machinarium*; Jonathan Kittaka, *Secrets Agent*

### **Week 8: LEVELING + PACING**

*Interactivity: it can make a story powerful in new ways, but it's not a guarantee of fun.* -- Emily Short, "[The Path and Story Pacing](#)"

- TUESDAY the 24th: Leveling and Pacing (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 25th: Building Time and Space (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 27th: General Prototype Development (Peer Review)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: At this point in the course, you should be rather confident in the prototyping technologies you are using for your game. This week, please document where you are with the videogame aspect of your prototype. Add at least three screenshots or photographs of it to your manual. Also, in 100 or so words (drawing upon material, including games, from the course outline), please address the following questions: how would you describe the relationship between time and space in your prototype (e.g., continuous, discontinuous, realistic, dependent)? How are time and space valued (e.g., through quantification, as territories, through exploration, as challenges, through chance)? Finally, how would you describe the relationships between characters and their environments, or between characters and their scenes (e.g., the environment as background, agent, character, or invisible feature)? These are big questions, but feel free to approach them descriptively through your prototype, which you'll continue to develop during class on Wednesday and Friday.

RELATED: Patrick Jagoda, "[Fabulously Procedural: Braid, Historical Processing, and the Videogame Sensorium](#)"; Emily Short, "[The Path and Story Pacing](#)"; Mark Davies, "[Examining Game Pace: How Single-Player Levels Tick](#)"

PLAY: Jonathan Blow and Number None, *Braid*; Stephen Lavelle, *Mirror Stage*

## **Week 9: NARRATIVE + VISION**

*[G]aming makes montage more and more superfluous. The montage technique, perfected by the cinema, has diminished greatly in the aesthetic shift into the medium of gaming. -- Alexander Galloway, [Gaming](#)*

- TUESDAY the 3rd: Narrative, Post-Cinematics, and Vision (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 4th: Sharing Your Prototype (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 6th: Feedback on Your Prototype (Peer Review)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: This week, all you need to do is provide at least three more screenshots or photographs of your videogame prototype. These images show how your prototype has changed during the last week or so. Although you don't need to respond to the following questions in writing, you might want to think through them: what are the narrative dimensions of your game? Is it non-linear? Abstract? Realist? Autobiographical? Does it depend on the player's geolocation? In short, what's the story? Or is there even a story? On Wednesday and Friday, you'll have a chance to circulate your prototype in its current state and get feedback from others (including me).

RELATED: Jesper Juul, "[Games Telling Stories?](#)"; Alexander Galloway, [Gaming](#) (especially "Origins of the First-Person Shooter"); Shaviro, "[What Is the Post-Cinematic?](#)" and [Post Cinematic Affect](#)

PLAY: Blendo, [Thirty Flights of Loving](#); Galatic Cafe, [The Stanley Parable](#)

## **Week 10: MODS + BENDS + CHEATS**

*As a broader practice, hardware hacking enables a creative form of gameplay that does not necessarily follow the routine interactions intended by game companies. As such, circuit bending sparks a critique of ideology and engages in gameplay at its most operational level, without any false sense of transparency or immediacy. -- Nina Belojevic, "[Circuit Bending Videogame Consoles as a Form of Applied Media Studies](#)"*

- TUESDAY the 10th: Play Log (Optional Workshop; Jentery at the [U. of Minnesota](#))
- WEDNESDAY the 11th: Mods, Bends, and Cheats (Lecture)
- FRIDAY the 13th: Modding Prototypes (Workshop + Peer Review)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: On Friday, you'll be modding someone else's videogame prototype, and they will be modding yours. In 100 or so words (drawing upon material, including games, in the course outline), please describe what you learned from how your prototype was modded. In 100 or so more words (again, drawing upon the course outline), please also describe how, under what assumptions, and to what effects you modded someone else's prototype. As you mod and respond to modding, you might return to our ongoing conversations about values, systems, power, and mechanics (among other things). Please also let me know what

questions or concerns you have before, during, or after this week of mods, bends, and cheats.

RELATED: Nina Belojevic, "[Circuit Bending Videogame Consoles as a Form of Applied Media Studies](#)"; Cory Arcangel, [Super Mario Clouds](#); [Mod DB](#); Mia Consalvo, [Cheating](#); Alex Layne and Samantha Blackmon, "[Self-Saving Princess: Feminism and Post-Play Narrative Modding](#)"; Shawn Graham, "[Rolling Your Own: On Modding Commercial Games for Educational Goals](#)"; Austin Walker, "[Real Human Beings: Shadow of Mordor, Watch Dogs and the New NPC](#)"; Rosa Menkman, [The Glitch Moment\(um\)](#)

PLAY: Dan Pinchbeck, *et al.*, [Dear Esther](#); Robert Yang, [Radiator](#)

### **Week 11: LABOUR + SURVEILLANCE**

*Gold farmers are reviled player-workers whose positions in the gamic economy resembles that of other immigrant groups who cross national borders in order to work, but unlike other types of "migrant" workers, their labors are offshore, and thus invisible---they are "virtual migrants." ---* Lisa Nakamura, "[Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game](#)"

- TUESDAY the 17th: General Prototype Development (Workshop)
- WEDNESDAY the 18th: Refining and Polishing Your Prototype (Peer Review)
- FRIDAY the 20th: Labour and Surveillance (Lecture)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: At this point in the course, you should be refining your prototype. When in doubt, focus it instead of expanding it, keeping in mind that it's really a proof of concept about what your game could (or will) ultimately be. Make what you already have convincing instead of stretching beyond the time and materials at hand. Also, in your manual, please provide at least three more screengrabs or photographs of your videogame prototype. With it, please include 100 or so words detailing how playing your game could be considered an emotional, intellectual, sensual, casual, or embodied form of labour. Please also mention how and by whom this labour could be quantified, tracked, and shared. Speaking of labour: you're almost there! I'm looking forward to seeing what you've made this semester. Thanks for your work.

RELATED: Lisa Nakamura, "[Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft](#)"; Alex Rivera, [Sleep Dealer](#); Aubrey Anable, "[Casual Games, Time Management, and the Work of Affect](#)"; Ian Bogost, "[Persuasive Games: Exploitationware](#)"; Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, [Games of Empire](#)

PLAY: Molleindustria, [Unmanned](#) and [Every Day the Same Dream](#); Nicky Case, [Nothing to Hide](#) (also see the [GitHub repo](#) for this game); Richard Hofmeier, [Cart Life](#); Vince de Vera, Jason Garner, and Klei, [Don't Starve](#)

### **Week 12: NETWORKS + DISTRIBUTION**

*As relations are central in the network, the outcome of participation depends on the nature of the relations in the process.* -- Karin Hansson, "[A Micro-Democratic Perspective on Crowd-Work](#)"

- TUESDAY the 24th: Networks, Crowd-Work, and Distribution (Lecture)
- WEDNESDAY the 25th: Preparing Your Prototype for a Demo (Workshop)
- FRIDAY the 27th: Demos (Peer Review) | **Manual's Due** (details below)

FOR YOUR MANUAL: If you haven't already thought about how you will (or could) distribute your game, then this week's the week. In 100 or so words (drawing upon material, including games, from the course outline), explain how others could find your game. Also address the following: would you allow others to mod your game? How would you license it? How would you (if at all) follow it once it's in the wild? How much (if anything) would it cost? And how would you (if at all) get feedback on it? During class on Wednesday and Friday, you'll also have opportunities to demo your prototype prior to next week's formal presentations.

RELATED: Mikael Jakobsson, "[The Achievement Machine: Understanding Xbox 360 Achievements in Gaming Practices](#)"; T.L. Taylor, [Play Between Worlds](#); Karin Hansson, [The Affect Machine](#)

PLAY/WATCH: "[Twitch Plays Pokemon](#)"

SOMETHING'S DUE: Please note that I will collect your manuals on Friday the 27th (end of class). At this point, your manual should contain all the things, or---to be more precise---your responses to every instance of "FOR YOUR MANUAL" above. Remember: your manual should clearly engage some games from the course outline as well as research in game studies (including "related" material in the outline). Prior to submission, let me know what questions or concerns you have.

### **Week 13: INDIEINDIECADE**

*Anyone can make a game if you make them try.* -- Amanda Phillips, "[Gaming the System](#)"

- TUESDAY the 31st: Demos and Presentations
- WEDNESDAY the 1st: Demos and Presentations | **Prototype's Due**

SOMETHING'S DUE: Your final prototype is due on the 1st. You will also conduct a formal (but hopefully fun) presentation on Tuesday or Wednesday. (Details [here](#).)

### **Exams Period: README**

Your final manual is due this week. Remember: it should be intended for off-screen reading. You cannot email it to me or point me to its URL. Details [here](#).

*I owe an incredible debt of gratitude to Anna Anthropy, Ed Chang, Mary Flanagan, Tracy Fullerton, Patrick Jagoda, merritt kopas, Paolo Pedercini, and Amanda Phillips, whose inspiring approaches to teaching and making games have especially influenced the construction of this syllabus.*

