Computer Games
Design, Production & Critique

Professor Tom Ellman
Lecture 1
Goals of this Course

• Learn to design, produce & critique games.
• Enriched view of games as media artifacts.
• More perceptive and reflective player/critic.
• Appreciate role of games in culture and life.
• Appreciate computational issues in context.
• “The Liberal Art of Game Design”.
• (Sorry: Not training for jobs in game industry.)
Web Resources

• Wiki:
  – Lecture notes.
  – Reading assignments and links to articles.
  – Project descriptions and deadlines.

• Moodle:
  – Drop box for project submissions.
  – Forums for required postings on readings.
Communication

• I sometimes send email messages to the entire class.
• My messages typically contain hints or clarifications of homework assignments.
• Our Moodle site will hold an archive of these messages.
Course Work

• Game making:
  – Physical prototypes.
  – Digital implementation

• Game critique:
  – Commercial, indie or non-profit games.
  – Presentation to class.

• Reading:
  – Textbooks and articles.
  – Posting to forum on Moodle.

• Game play:
  – Evening play sessions.
  – Semester long game.
Game Making

• Four projects: Schedule on class Wiki.
• Software:
  – Galatea @ The Game Commons
  – Unity3D (Free and Pro Versions)
• Work in pairs: (1 CMPU & 1 MEDS ?).
  – Different partners for each project.
  – Find a partner by next class.
The Game Commons

• **URL:** [http://thegamecommons.org](http://thegamecommons.org)

• I created accounts for pre-registered students.
  – User Name: Matthew Vassar
  – Password: mavassar999999001
Game Projects
(Subject to Change)

• Aesthetic Play.
• Narrative Play.
• Critical Play.
• Final Project.
Supplies

• You should get and bring to next class:
  – Journal / notebook with large blank pages.
  – Colored pencils or markers.
  – Piecepack: http://www.piecepack.org/Printable.html

• I will provide:
  – Index cards, dice, poker chips.
  – Giant newsprint roll and scissors.
Reading

• Textbooks (Available at Bookstore):
  – Bogost: *How to do things with Video Games*
  – Menard: *Game Development with Unity*
  – Fullerton: *Game Design Workshop*
  – Schell: *The Art of Game Design*

• Articles (Posted on class wiki).
• Reading schedule posted on class wiki.
HTDTWVG Forum

• Read two chapters of Bogost each week.
• Post one paragraph on the Moodle forum:
  – Critique of Bogost’s views.
  – Discuss relevance to new/existing games.
  – Other things to do with video games.
  – Anything thoughtful.
• Do it by the end of each week.
Critique

• Work in groups of two.
• Choose a game and get my approval.
• Not a game you have already played.
• Playtest it.
• Present your critique to class.
• Sometime after October break.
Game Play

• Regular evening play sessions.
• In the Science Visualization Lab.
• Vassar Game Lab:
  – PC, XBOX360 Connect, PS3, Wii.
  – Your games and mine.
• Will Thursday evenings work?
Exquisite Corpse

• Semester long game.
• Playing/working in Galatea.
• Work in groups of size two.
• Groups work in succession.
• One week for each group.
• Try to build on work of prior groups.
• The first group is: ...?...
Class Duration

• Normal class: End at 4:25pm.
• In class workshop: End at 5:10pm.
• Screening games class: End at 5:10pm.
Diversity in this Class

• Students from many majors.
  – Critics and non-critics.
  – Programmers and non-programmers.
  – Gamers and non-gamers.
• Everyone brings something important.
• Need to respect our peers.
Exercise

• Log in to Moodle.
• Find the site for this class.
• Open: *Good Games and Bad Games*.
• Follow the instructions.
Exquisite Corpse (Again)

• Take a sheet of lined paper.
• Write a sentence at the top.
• Fold it over at top to hide your sentence.
• Pass it to the person next to you.
• Repeat.
Questions for Fullerton & Schell

• Are they *preachers*, telling us what values we should try to realize in our game designs?

• Or are they *engineers*, saying to us: “Tell me your values and I tell you how to make a game that realizes them!”?
Engaging Immersive Addictive Entertaining

TTDWVG_1  TTDWVG_2  ...  TTDWVG_N

Sticky

Entertaining  Engaging  Fun  Immersive  ...  Addictive
Recurring Issues

• What are, can-be or should-be the goals of game design?
• What can we do with video games?
• How can we do them?
• Do games communicate meaning? How?
• What kinds of meanings do games communicate?
• What should we mean by the term “game literacy”?
• How can design, production and critique make us literate?
• How can they help us understand:
  – the nature (specificity) of game as media?
  – the (actual/potential) role of gaming in society and culture?
To Do List

• Think about games for Game Nights.
• Transcribe & upload E.C. game story.
• Find a partner for the first project.
• Get supplies.
• Do the assigned reading.
• Post comments on Bogost.