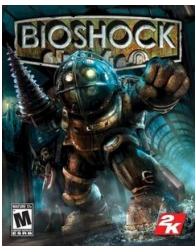




CHID 496
Section F
Thursday
1:30-3:20 PM
MGH 097
Winter 2011
Ed Chang &
Tim Welsh
University of
Washington



“Video games render social realities into playable form.”
—Alexander Galloway

“Video games are an expressive medium. They represent how real and imagined systems work. They invite players to interact with those systems and form judgments about them. As part of the ongoing process of understanding this medium...we must strive to understand how to construct and critique the representations of our world in videogame form.”
—Ian Bogost

CONSTANCE STEINKUEHLER argues that video games, particularly online role-playing games, are “a constellation of literary practices.” Our focus group will take that idea and extend it to think about ways to read, analyze, and most importantly, play video games critically and analytically much like you would close read a novel or a film. Before we can take video games as serious objects of study, we need to develop ways to study them. In other words, how do you close play a video game? How do you develop a practice of close playing?

THIS FOCUS GROUP, as part of a continuing series on video games generated by the Critical Gaming Project at UW, will discuss, develop, and do close playing. Like close reading, close playing requires careful and critical attention to how the game is played (or not played), to what kind of game it is, to what the game looks like or sounds like, to what the game world is like, to what choices are offered (or not offered) to the player, to what the goals of the game are, to how the game interacts with and addresses the player, to how the game fits into the real world, and so on. To engage all of this, we will take 2K’s critically-acclaimed first-person shooter *Bioshock* (Xbox360, PS3, PC) as our central gamic text (though other supplemental games will be included as needed).

THE COURSE will meet once a week for 2 hours to engage guided discussion, reflective writing, and in- and out-of-class game play. There will be no formal paper requirements, but students will be asked to participate in on- and offline discussion and keep a weekly play-log (plog).

Requirements & Grading

What is a focus group? Focus groups provide a unique opportunity for undergraduate students to design and lead a class. Focus groups allow students with common interests to create a space to discuss topics which may not be covered elsewhere in the UW undergraduate curricula. As with all CHID courses, all students participating in focus groups are expected to engage topics critically, respectfully, and from varying perspectives.

What are they not? Focus groups are not spaces for students to promote one particular point of view. While students can take on one idea or concept, this topic should be explored from multiple vantage points. Focus groups should not depart from CHID’s guiding philosophy that “the questions are the content.” Focus groups are about critical scrutiny, not about ideological imposition.

This class is graded on a credit/no credit basis. All assignments must be satisfactorily completed, and you may not have more than two un-excused absences in order to get credit for this class.

Play Log and Close Playing Presentation (50%)

You will be required to keep a weekly play log or “plog.” These short,

“Video games have an unmet potential to create complexity by letting people experience the world from different perspectives.”
—James Paul Gee



Required Course Texts & Materials

- CHID 496 F course readings are available via e-reserve
- *Bioshock* (Xbox360, PS3, PC)
- All other games are available online or for free download
- Web access and an active UW email account



Course Requirements

Play Logs and Close
Playing Presentation
(50%)
Class Participation
(50%)

“...that video games
could be used as
tools for better
understanding reality
and raising critical
awareness among
players”
—Gonzalo Frasca,
“Videogames of the
Oppressed”

analytical and observational writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, and analyses of the game, texts, play, and the connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These “play logs” are more than just summaries or personal reactions. They will build on the close playing “data” you gather and require clarity, coherence, critique, and an attention to analysis and argument.

By the end of the quarter, you will have practiced and performed what it means to close play, and you will be required to present on (most likely as a team) a video game of your choosing. These close playing presentations will demonstrate what you have learned from and experienced in the class. Presentations will be 10-15 minutes and require in-class game play.

Participation and Preparedness (50%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Again, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by

1. your respectful presence in class,
2. your willingness to discuss, comment, and ask questions,
3. your preparation for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class,
4. your engagement in group work and play,
5. your contribution to the CGP blog:
<https://depts.washington.edu/critgame/wordpress/>
6. and your interactions with us and other students.

Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.

Attendance

Attendance is strongly recommended. If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to play and participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class we may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and we will mark you as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your credit for the class. If you know you are going to miss class, please let us know ahead of time (via email), if you can, and we will make any necessary arrangements. And when you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes and see me in order to make up missed work in a timely manner.

Finding Help

We are available during office hours and by appointment to help you. We encourage you to come see us early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. We may ask you to meet with us when we think a conference would be useful. Our offices are located on the ground floor of Padelford Hall (northeast of the HUB). Ed's office is in B-33. Tim's office is in A-307. See map below.

Assignment Format

All assignments must be typed. If you do not have your own computer with word processing capability, computer labs are available on campus with a variety of software that is easy to learn. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format; if you do not have access to Word, then save your documents in RTF or Rich Text Format.

Treat all writing as formal, academic writing, even on the class blog. All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. All papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions. All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

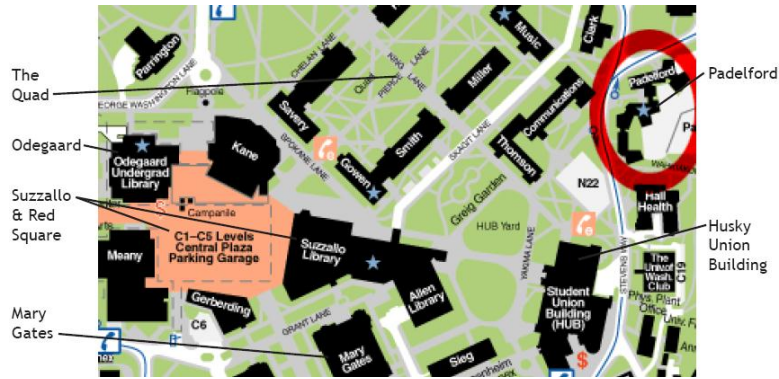


Contact Ed

Office:
B33 Padelford
Office Hours:
MW 10:30 AM- 12 PM
or by appointment
E-mail:
changed@u.washington.edu
AIM & Google Talk:
EDagogy

Contact Tim

Office:
A307 Padelford
Office Hours:
by appointment
E-mail:
twelsh@u.washington.edu
Google Talk:
tim.j.welsh



We are also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting us. We will do our best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually within twenty-four hours. If there is an emergency and you need to reach us, please contact the CHID office in B-102 Padelford.

We will also supplement our office hours with virtual hours via instant messenger. Ed uses AOL Instant Messenger and Google Talk (AIM & Gtalk nickname: **EDagogy**); Tim just uses Google Talk (Gtalk nickname: **tim.j.welsh**). If we are logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to us – be polite and respectful – and please be patient because our responses may not be immediate.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing – as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions about these matters at any time. Plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review. For further information, please refer to UW's Student Conduct Code at <http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>. **Play it smart, don't plagiarize!**

Accommodations

If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see me immediately. I will gladly do my best to provide appropriate accommodation you require. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with Disability Resources for Students in 448 Schmitz Hall, you should do so immediately. Please contact DRS at 206-543-8924 (Voice) or 206-543-8925 (V/TTY) or 206-616-8379 (FAX) or via their website at <http://www.washington.edu/admin/ada/dss.htm>.



"...it's time to take a closer look at the game culture we've built. Games have show us our own potential for happiness, change, and success. But they haven't helped us achieve that potential in our real lives. I see an increasing number of gamers who think they can only be their best selves, and do their best work, in game worlds. For them, the real world is broken."
—Jane McGonigal, "Growing Up Gamer"

"The idea that kids can play video games like *Grand Theft Auto* or any video game is amazing. The video games are one step before a whole other virtual universe."
—Vin Diesel

**syl-la-bus: n 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements
2: subject to change**

CHID 496 F / Winter 2011 / University of Washington / Chang & Welsh

Week 1: January 3-7

Thurs 1/6

Introduction to the Course, Close Reading & Close Playing

Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Road_Not_Taken

Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B"

"A Meditation on Close Playing"

<http://staff.washington.edu/changed/2010/11/close-playing-a-meditation/>

Week 2: January 10-14

Thurs 1/13

Read/Watch "Metroid: The Other M Review":

<http://g4tv.com/games/wii/61992/Metroid-Other-M/review/>

Save Point: Welcome to Rapture, Medical Pavilion

Week 3: January 17-21

Wed 1/19 Keywords Group "AVATAR"

Thurs 1/20 No Class*

Save Point: Neptune's Bounty, Smuggler's Hideout

*If you cannot make the Keywords for Video Game Studies Working Group meeting, please be sure to complete the make-up assignment.

Week 4: January 24-28

Thurs 1/27

Save Point: Arcadia, Farmer's Market

Week 5: January 31-February 4

Thurs 2/3

Save Point: Fort Frolic

Week 6: : February 7-11

Thurs 2/10

Save Point: Hephaestus, All is Revealed

Week 7: : February 14-18

Wed 2/16 Keywords Group "POWER/CONTROL"

Thurs 2/17 No Class*

Save Point: Olympus Heights, Apollo Square

*If you cannot make the Keywords for Video Game Studies Working Group meeting, please be sure to complete the make-up assignment.

Mon 1/3
First Day of Classes

January						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

There may be readings for each week. Be sure to read, make notes, and come to class prepared with comments and questions.

Keep up with the play logs for *Bioshock*.

Make sure to check the CGP blog regularly and contribute when appropriate.

February						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

Mon 2/21
Presidents' Day
Holiday

Week 8: : February 21-25

Thurs 2/24

Save Point: Point Prometheus, Proving Ground, The Endgame

Week 9: February 28-March 4

Thurs 3/3

Close Playing Presentations

March

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Week 10: March 7-11

Thurs 3/10

Close Playing Presentations

Fri 3/11
Last Day of Classes

Week 11:

Mon 3/14 - Finals Begin

Week 12:

Mon 3/21 - Grades Due