The goal of this graduate seminar is to develop a critical approach to the medium of the video game. We will examine the concept of "play" using methods from literary criticism, cultural anthropology, poststructuralism, and cinema studies, then look at approaches to the philosophy of action, ludology, and theories of machinic and gamic visuality. Themes will include simulation, social realism, and war games. The seminar will include screenings and require game play.

SYLLABUS

January 24 — Course Introduction

February 7 — Nonlinearity, Ludology

February 14 — Formal Criticism

(February 21 — Holiday, no class)

**February 28 — Poststructuralism: Narrative, Authorship**
Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*.
Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 113-138.

Games: *Ico*, *Shenmue*, *Myst*

**March 7 — Poststructuralism: Play**
Alexander Galloway, "Gamic Action, Four Moments."

Game: *The Sims*


(March 14 — Spring break, no class)

**March 21 — Counter-Gaming: The Politics of Play**
Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*.

Games: *Pencil Whipped*, *Sissyfight*, *Team Up*, *Orisinal*.

**March 28 — Counter-Gaming: Artist Game Mods**
Anne-Marie Schleiner, "2 Reviews--Untitled Game and Ego Image Shooter."
Josephine Bosma, "Jodi and the Cargo Cult," *INSTALL.EXE - JODI*, pp. 91-94.
Eddo Stern, "A Touch of Medieval."
Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter-Cinema," *Readings and Writings*, pp. 79-91.
Alexander Galloway, "Counter-Gaming."

Games: *Adam Killer*, *untitled game*, *r/c*. 
April 4 — Interpretation: Ideology and War
Julian Stallabrass, "Just Gaming: Allegory and Economy in Computer Games."
Anne-Marie Schleiner, "Velvet-Strike: War Times and Reality Games."
James Der Derian, "War as Game."

Games: America's Army, Kuma\War, SOCOM.

April 11 — Interpretation: Realism
Alexander Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming."

Screening: Bicycle Thief.

April 18 — Informatic Coding
Michael Hardt, "Withering of Civil Society."

Game: Civilization III.

April 25 — Learning the Algorithm: Civilization III
Ted Friedman, Civilization and Its Discontents: Simulation, Subjectivity, and Space.
Alexander Galloway, Allegories of Control in Civilization.

Games: Civilization III, Dance Dance Revolution.

May 2 — Gamic Vision
Alexander Galloway, "Gamic Vision."
Screening: *Strange Days*.


**Friday, May 6th — All papers due**

**REQUIREMENTS**

**Readings and Screenings:** Thorough coverage of the week's required reading in advance of class is of utmost importance. Readings should be brought to class for discussion. Special screenings will be scheduled for viewing the films.

**Games:** All students are required 1) to play and win the game *Civilization III* prior to April 18, and 2) to select one additional game from the syllabus and critique the game in class. A number of game titles and gaming consoles are available for use in the departmental media lab.

**Discussion:** Each week, two students will be responsible for discussion questions. The week's discussion leaders will email me questions (one page maximum) on or before the Friday prior to class, and I will redistribute them to all students. Each student will lead discussion twice during the semester.

**Writing:** Each student should write a total of 16-20 pages for the semester, preferably split into two shorter papers of 8-10 pages each. Suggested paper topics will be provided, but students are also encouraged to create their own topics. All papers should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials (texts, games, films) and exhibit a method of critical analysis.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS**

Course Reader.
Atari/Firaxis Games, *Civilization III*.
Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*.
Aristotle/Horace/Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*.
Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*.
Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*. 