USC School of Cinematic Arts
CTIN-499: Special Topics
Documentary and Activist Games

Spring 2015—W—1:00-3:50
Location: SCI L114
Units: 2

Instructor: Jeff Watson
Office: SCI 201J
Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: jeff.watson@cinema.usc.edu
Twitter: @remotedevice

Prerequisite(s): none
Co-Requisite (s): none
Concurrent Enrollment: none
Recommended Preparation: none

Programming experience is welcome, but not necessary.

Course Description
Filmmaker John Grierson famously described documentary cinema as "the creative treatment of actuality." Documentary films can illuminate unseen processes, broaden our awareness of the past and present, and challenge us to make a better future. How might games achieve similar ends? What can interactive media do in the realms of non-fiction, documentary, and activism that other kinds of media cannot? How can we use games and interaction design to not only document the Real, but also to intervene on it, and to shape the world to come?

Learning Objectives
This course explores the past, present, and future of documentary and activist interactive media and games. Students will approach the topic from a variety of perspectives, drawing on contemporary art practice, cultural studies, game studies, cinema studies, and more. Informed by these historical and theoretical contexts, students will workshop documentary and activist games of their own.

Readings and Reference Materials
All readings listed in the schedule below will be provided electronically. Additionally, students are required to acquire their own copy of the following text:

Flanagan, M. (2009). Critical Play: Radical Game Design. The MIT Press.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Students will be assessed based on six prior art reviews, two documented design projects, and in-class participation.

Prior Art Reviews respond to the readings and themes of the course with examples of relevant games and other artworks. Prior art reviews should be around 150 words, shared with the class via a class blog approximately once every two weeks.

Projects are fully-realized documentary/activist games, produced at a level of polish suitable for public release. Students will complete and document two projects working alone or in small groups over the course of the semester.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Prior Art Reviews (6)	30
Project 1	30
Project 2	30
Participation	10
Total	**100**

Additional constraints for each assignment will be provided in class.

Course Schedule
Documentary and Activist Games

Jeff Watson
USC School of Cinematic Arts

Week 1 - January 14

Introduction to the Course: From Simulation to Action
A Documentary Cinema Primer

Read

Bazin, A., & Gray, H. (1960). The Ontology of the Photographic Image. Film Quarterly, 13(4), 4–9. doi:10.2307/1210183

Grierson, J. (1933). The Documentary Producer. Cinema Quarterly, 2(1), 7–9.

Vertov, D., & Michelson, A. (1985). We: Variant of a Manifesto, and Kinoks: A Revolution. In Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov (pp. 5—21). Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press.

Watch

- Bowling for Columbine, Michael Moore, 2002.
- Fallout: New Vegas, Bethesda Softworks, 2010.
- Leviathan, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 2012.
- Nanook of the North, Robert Flaherty, 1922.
- Stories We Tell, Sarah Polley, 2012.
- The Man with a Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov, 1929.
- Titticut Follies, Frederick Wiseman, 1967.

Week 2 - January 21

Interactive Documentary
Documentary Games

Read

Fullerton, T. (2008). Documentary Games: Putting the Player in the Path of History. In Z. Whalen & L. N. Taylor (Eds.), Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Galloway, D., McAlpine, K. B., & Harris, P. (2007). From Michael Moore to JFK Reloaded: Towards a working model of interactive documentary. Journal of Media Practice, 8(3), 325–339. doi:10.1386/jmpr.8.3.325_1

Play

- Fort McMoney, David Dufresne, 2013.
- JFK Reloaded, Traffic Games, 2004.
- Project Syria, Nonny de la Pena, 2014.
- Super Columbine Massacre RPG, Danny Ledonne, 2005.
- The Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake, Perry Bard, 2009.
- The Whale Hunt, Jonathan Harris, 2007.

Due

Prior Art Review 1: Documentary Game or Interactive Documentary.

Week 3 - January 28

Project 1 Pitches
Special Guest: Peter Brinson

Read

Consalvo, M. (2009). There is No Magic Circle. Games and Culture, 4(4), 408–417. doi: 10.1177/1555412009343575

Flanagan, M. & Nissenbaum (2011). Design Heuristics for Activist Games. In Kafai, Y. B., Heeter, C., Denner, J., & Sun, J. Y. (Eds.). Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

Play

- The Cat and the Coup, Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad, 2011.
- Waco Resurrection, Michael Wilson, Eddo Stern, Jessica Hutchins, Brody Condon, Peter Brinson, & Mark Allen, 2004.

Due

Project 1 Pitch.

Week 4 - February 4

Rhetoric
Special guest: Emma Westecott
Persuasion

Read

Bitzer, L. F. (1992). The Rhetorical Situation. Philosophy & Rhetoric, 25, 1–14.

Bogost, I. (2007). Persuasive Games. In Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames (pp. 1–64). The MIT Press.

Vatz, R. E. (1973). The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation. Philosophy and Rhetoric, 6(3), 154–161.

Play

* Cow Clicker, Ian Bogost, 2010.
* Darfur is Dying, Susana Ruiz, 2006.
* Game the News, various, 2008-2013.
* Grow-a-Game, Mary Flanagan, 2006.
* The Landlord's Game [later adapted into the Parker Brothers game, Monopoly], Elizabeth Magie, 1904.
* The McDonalds Game, Molleindustria, 2006.

Due

Prior Art Review 2: Persuasive Videogame.

Week 5 - February 11

Studio Week

Week 6 - February 18

Critical Play
Special Guest: Tracy Fullerton

Read

Flanagan, M. (2009). Introduction to Critical Play. In Critical Play: Radical Game Design (Chapter 1). The MIT Press.

Crecente, B. (2014). Turning Walden into a game and how narrative can lead to "sublime" gaming. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://www.polygon.com/2014/3/19/5523502/walden-the-game-usc

Due

Prior Art Review 3: The Radical and the Sublime.

Play

• Prior Art Reviews 1-3.

Week 7 - February 25

Playtesting and Presentations

Due

Project 1.

Week 8 - March 4

GDC week (no class)

Week 9 - March 11

A Brief History of (Play and) Activism
Special Guest: Mary Flanagan

Read

Boal, A. (2002). Games for Actors and Non-Actors, 2nd Edition. (A. Jackson, Trans.) (2nd edition.). New York: Routledge.

Boal, A. (2008). Theatre of the Oppressed (pp. 120–135). Pluto Press (UK).

Geertz, C. (1972). Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. Daedalus, 101(1), 1–37.

New Games Foundation. (1976). New Games Book. Main Street Books. [excerpt]

Play

- Buffalo, Tiltfactor, 2013.
- Pox, Tiltfactor, 2012.
- Something from Games for Actors and Non-Actors
- Something from the New Games Book

Due

Prior Art Review 4: Deep Play.

Spring Break

Week 10 - March 25

Project 2 Pitches
Games and the Political Imagination

Read

Duncombe, S. (2007). Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy. New York: New Press.

Stenros, J., & Montola, M. (2010). Nordic Larp. Fëa Livia. Retrieved from http://tampub.uta.fi/handle/10024/95123

Play/Explore

• AdBusters, magazine.
• The Yes Men, tactical media activists.
• Superstruct, Institute for the Future, 2008.
• System Denmarc, 2005.
• World Without Oil, ITVS, 2007.

Due

Project 2 Pitch.

Week 11 - April 1

Participation
Special Guest: Colleen Macklin

Read

Bogost, I. (n.d.). Persuasive Games: Process Intensity and Social Experimentation. Retrieved January 7, 2015, from http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/170806/persuasive_games_process_.php

Halprin, L. (1970). The RSVP Cycles : Creative Processes in the Human Environment [excerpt]. New York: George Braziller.

Hirsch, A. B. (2012). Facilitation and/or Manipulation?: Lawrence Halprin and "Taking Part." Landscape Journal: Design, Planning, and Management of the Land, 31(1), 117–134.

Play/Explore

• Budgetball, PETLab, 2010.
• Learning to Love you More, Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, 2002-2009.
• RE: Activism, PETLab, 2008.

Due

Prior Art Review 5: Participatory Artwork.

Week 12 - April 8

Space and Place
Special Guests: Susana Ruiz & Benjamin Stokes

Read

Harvey, D. (2008). The Right to the City. New Left Review, (53). Retrieved from http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2740

Nieuwenhuys, C. (1959). A Different City for a Different Life. Internationale Situationniste, 3, 37–40.

Stokes, B., & Watson, J. (2012). Games for Direct Action: Local Scale and Social Impact. Retrieved from http://gamesandimpact.org/manuscripts/stokes-watson-games-for-direct-action-local-scale-and-social-impact/

Play

• Ingress, Niantic Labs, 2012.
• Macon Money, Area/Code, 2010.
• Reality Ends Here, Jeff Watson, Simon Wiscombe, and Tracy Fullerton, 2011-.
• Situationist App, Benrik, 2011.
• explore the games list at http://civictripod.com/

Due

Prior Art Review 6: Mobile and Locative Play.

Week 13 - April 15

Project 2 Progress Reports
Studio Time

Due

Project 2 Progress Report.

Week 14 - April 22

Community and DIY
Conclusions

Read

Anthropy, A. (2012). Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Drop-outs, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back an Art Form. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Play

- Dys4ia, Anna Anthropy, 2012.
- Howling Dogs, Porpentine, 2012.
- Prior Art Reviews 4-6.

Week 15 - April 29

Final Playtesting and Presentations

Due

Project 2.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.