

Virtual Worlds and Video Games Critical Review

engl 204-002 / autumn 2013-14 / drew university / chang



This class takes up as its central preoccupation: How do we read, analyze, and play cultural productions like literature, film, new media, and video games? And as we will see over the weeks, the answers to these questions are wide and varied, some more useful than others. How might we read a text as “complexly coded cultural artifacts?” (Lister & Wells 457). What do these texts, in our case literature, new media, and video games, reveal about our selves, our lives, our communities, our cultures, and our worlds? What makes literature and games important? What is unique to literature or video games? What kinds of imaginations, definitions, politics, ideologies, and desires are called upon (or ignored) by literature and video games?

Review of a Text

For this assignment, you must select a game or a text **outside** the course texts, one that we have **not** covered in class. The text could be a game, a short story, a novel, a poem, a film or video. Select a text that you believe fits the theme and goals of the course, a text that you must argue belongs in a class called “Virtual Worlds & Video Games.” An **outstanding** text will engage the inquiries and grinding edges of the course in multiple ways and will speak to the other texts included in the syllabus. When picking a text, avoid the obvious, the superficial, or the easy answer; a **creative risk** or **interpretative leap** might be to choose a text that engages the questions, perhaps in an against the grain way, of the class.

You must play or read or watch the text. Consider the theoretical and interpretative questions we have been asking and trying to answer all quarter. Then write a short **500 to 700 word** critical review of the text explicating and expressing why the text would make a strong addition to the course syllabus. Use the following questions as guidelines and jumping off points:

- What kind of text do you want to review? What kind of text would fit well within the scope of the course?
- Who is the text by? Is it someone already included in the syllabus? Would your text replace a current text?
- What makes the text important to a class about cultural studies? What features and qualities make it ideal for the class?
- Most importantly, what does the text tell us about our culture? About our world? What are the critical questions the text asks, complicates, and answers?

Your critical review must be more than just a descriptive ‘book report.’ Description, plot, characters, setting, themes, and summary will be a necessary portion of your review, but the majority of your writing will be **analyzing** and **articulating** why the text befits the course. For this assignment, your review would introduce the game or text, identify the critical value or potential of the game or text by drawing on close readings and details, and offer compelling reasons for including the game or text in the class, connecting it to existing readings, games, and concepts. For general inspiration, you might want to take a look at book reviews in a scholarly journal (for Cultural Studies), for a site like <http://www.seriousgames.org/>, in the *New Yorker* magazine, or in the *Washington Post* or *The New York Times*. Ultimately, an outstanding critical review demonstrates not only an analysis of the game or text but an understanding of the course goals and concepts.

Guidelines and Due Dates

Format: 500 to 700 words, typed, no title page, single-spaced, block format, proper heading
posted to the class blog, a Critical Review Turn-In thread will be available later in the semester

Due: by the end of the semester
no later than Monday, December 9