

Session 1C: Teaching (with) Queer & Indigenous Games

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Ashlee Bird
Ph.D. Candidate
Native American Studies
UC Davis
ahbird@ucdavis.edu
@AsForTheClouds

Edmond Y. Chang, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
English Department
Ohio University
change@ohio.edu
<http://www.edmondchang.com/>
@edmondchang

In *Gaming* (2006), Alexander Galloway argues, “Video games render social realities into playable form” and “play is a symbolic action for larger issues in culture.” As gaming communities, industry, even scholars and teachers attempt to address the need for diversity and inclusion in games, how might we locate, include, theorize, and teach games of color, queer games, and games of difference? Specifically, how might we look at the representation and algorithmic underpinnings of queer and Indigenous identities, narratives, bodies, and cultures in games? This workshop will include: a definition and demonstration of close playing or critical ways of analyzing, engaging, and teaching games to address gender, sexuality, and race in digital games; how to develop a teaching with games philosophy; hands-on activities to address queerness and indigeneity in games and the classroom; and resources to develop queer and games of color syllabi.

Workshop Agenda

- Framing the Conversation: Lack of Diversity in Games; Backlash Against Feminist, Queer, & Intersectional Analysis of Games; Critical Analysis of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Digital Games (5 minutes)
- Workshop on a Sample Game: *ImmorTall*, What is Close Playing? & Sample Assignment: Plogs (10 minutes)
- Indigenous Games Exercise (15 minutes)
- Queer(ing) Mechanics Exercise (15 minutes)
- Q&A (15 minutes)

Some of the material here has been adapted from several video game courses including CHID 496 F: “Close Playing, or, Bioshock as Practicum” (Winter 2011, <http://www.timothywelsh.com/courses/496wi11/>) and materials developed for the UW Teaching & Learning Symposium 2010 & 2011, co-taught and co-presented by Edmond Y. Chang and Timothy Welsh. See also Edmond Chang’s blog post “Close Playing, a Meditation:” <http://www.edmondchang.com/2010/11/11/close-playing-a-meditation/>

Teaching (with) Games Philosophy:

Teaching with video games offers unique pedagogical opportunities and medium-specific challenges, which require particular attention to reading and playing “literacies,” to careful ludic and analytical framing, and to access. On the one hand, video games are not the promised land inhabited by digital “natives.” On the other hand, they are a worthwhile, playable, popular medium and art. In other words, video games cannot be a gimmick or dangling digital carrot, but rather video games must be the artifacts and occasions for study, investigation, discussion, and interrogation. To assume that students, even students born in the 21st Century, are ready to read and think and write critically about digital media naturalizes these technologies in problematic ways. It gives students the false impression that they have nothing to learn about their own relationship to the technology they have, use, buy, abuse, play, or ignore. Familiarity is not the same as facility; acceptance is not the same thing as acumen.

Close Playing:

Close playing, like close reading, 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. Our students were required to keep close playing play logs or “plogs,” recording what they see, hear, do, and think about as they play and paying attention to narrative, mise en scene, mechanics, and social/cultural contexts.

Queergaming:

Queergaming is a provocation, a call-to-games, a horizon of possibilities. Queergaming is a refusal of the idea that digital games and gaming communities are the sole provenance of adolescent, straight, white, cisgender, masculine, able, male, and “hardcore” bodies and desires and the articulation of and investment in alternative modes of play and ways of being. Queergaming offers much more than more menu choices and decision trees, high definition graphics and immersive sound, points and epic loots. It is a response to the failure of games to think beyond and outside the checkboxes of so-called target demographics to see that both games and players have been and will be more than a homogenous body and normative field. Ultimately, queergaming is heterogeneity of play, imagining different, even radical game narratives, interfaces, avatars, mechanics, soundscapes, programming, platforms, playerships, and communities.

Suggested Reading:

Video Game Studies (More Generally)

- Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*.
Bogost, Ian. *How to Do Things with Videogames*.
Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games*.
Castronova, Edward. *Synthetic Worlds*.
Castronova, Edward. *Exodus to the Virtual Worlds*.
Chen, Mark. *Leet Noobs: The Life and Death of an Expert Player Group in World of Warcraft*.
Dyer-Witheford, Nick, and Greig De Peuter. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*.
Galloway, Alexander. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*.
McGonigal, Jane. *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*.
Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play*.
Steinkuehler, Constance. "The Mangle of Play." *Games and Culture*. 1.3 (Jul. 2006): 199-213.
Wark, McKenzie. *Gamer Theory*.

Race

- Bird, S. Elizabeth. "Savage Desires: The Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media." *Selling the Indian*.
Deloria, Philip J. *Indians in Unexpected Place*. University Press of Kansas, 2004.
Forbes, Jack D. "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and for Native Intellectuals." *Wicazo Sa Review*. 13.1 (1998): 11-23.
Gray, Kishonna L. and David J. Leonard, Eds. *Woke Gaming*.
Higgin, Tanner. "Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games." *Games and Culture*. 4.1 (Jan. 2009): 3-26.
Kovach, Margaret. 2010. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*.
Leonard, David J. "Not a Hater, Just Keepin' It Real: The Importance of Race-and Gender-Based Game Studies." *Games and Culture*. 1.1 (2006): 83-88.
Leuthold, Steven. *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity*.
Mihesuah, Devon A. *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities*.
Nakamura, Lisa. *Cybertypes & Digitizing Race*.
Nakamura, Lisa. "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 26.2 (June 2009): 128-144.
Raheja, Michelle H. 2007. "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*." *American Quarterly*. 59.4 (December 2007): 1159-1185.
Raheja, Michelle H. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*.
Raheja, Michelle H. "Visual Sovereignty." *Native Studies Keywords*.
Sisler, Vit. "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 11.2 (2008): 203-219.
Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Twenty-five Indigenous Projects." *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.
Teves, Stephanie Nohelani. 2015. "Tradition and Performance." *Native Studies Keywords*.

Gender/Sexuality

- Chang, Edmond Y. "A Game Chooses, A Player Obeys: *BioShock*, Posthumanism, and the Limits of Queerness." *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*.
Chang, Edmond Y. "Love is in the Air: Queer (Im)possibility and Straightwashing in *FrontierVille* and *World of Warcraft*." *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking*. Eds. Charles E. Morris III and Thomas K. Nakayama. 2.2 (June 2015) 6-31.
Chang, Edmond Y. "Queergaming." *Queer Game Studies*.
Condis, Megan. *Ready Player Two*.
Kopas, Merritt. *Video Games for Humans*.
Morris, Charles and Thomas Nakayama, Eds. *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking*. 2.2 (2015). Special essay on queer games:
<http://msupress.org/journals/issue/?id=50-21D-5EF>
Nardi, Bonnie A. *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*.
Ruberg, Bonnie & Adrienne Shaw, Eds. *Queer Game Studies*.
Ruberg, Bonnie, Ed. *Queerness and Games Conference at First Person Scholar*. A number of essays:
<http://ourglasslake.com/2015/03/queerness-and-games-at-first-person-scholar/>
Ruberg, Bonnie. "No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*. 2.2 (Summer 2015): 108-124.
Sarkeesian, Anita. *Feminist Frequency*.
<https://feministfrequency.com/>
Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge*.
Sundén, Jenny and Malin Sveningsson. *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play*.
Stabile, Carol. "'I Will Own You': Accountability in Massively Multiplayer Online Games." *Television and New Media*. 15.1 (2014): 43-57.
Wysocki, Matthew and Evan W. Lauteria, Eds. *Rated M for Mature*.

Digital Games Backlash & Online Harrassment

- Collins, Sean T. "Anita Sarkeesian on GamerGate: 'We Have a Problem and We're Going to Fix This.'" 17 Oct. 2014. 5 Jan. 2016.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/anita-a-sarkeesian-gamergate-interview-20141017>.
Dewey, Caitlin. "The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read." *The Washington Post*. 14 Oct. 2014. 5 Jan. 2016.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/>.
Evans, Sarah Beth and Elyse Janish. "#INeedDiverseGames: How the Queer Backlash to GamerGate Enables Nonbinary Coalition." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*. 2.2 (Summer 2015): 125-150.
Phillips, Whitney. "A Brief History of Trolls." *The Daily Dot*.
<http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/phillips-brief-history-of-trolls/>
Phillips, Whitney. "Don't Feed the Trolls? It's Not That Simple." *The Daily Dot*.
<http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/phillips-brief-history-of-trolls/>

Documentary

- Digital Nation*. 2010.
Second Skin. 2008.

Game Play Logs, Or, “Plogs”

eng 3850 / autumn 2018 / ohio university / chang



Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* defines play as “a free activity standing quite consciously outside the ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner” (as qtd. in Bogost *Unit Operations* 115). He extends his definition of play with the metaphor of the “magic circle” – a safe space and place of play, “the arena, the card table, the magic circle...are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart” (as qtd. in Bogost 134).

Close Reading, Close Playing, Critical Playing

However, games are not perfect magic circles of play, they are not completely separate from the “real world,” and for many game studies scholars, it is where the game and the world, the game and the culture intersect, inform one another, influence one another that is important to pay close attention to. From your previous composition and literature classes you should have some experience with “close reading” a text, getting between the words and lines, getting past the symbolic or the thematic. Close playing is no different, only the text will be something you “play.” Close playing, like close reading, 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. Therefore, as you play and think and “plog” about the games this semester, tell us about what you are paying attention to, what you are noticing, and most importantly, what connections you are making between the game and the real world, between the game and class discussion, and between the game and the readings. No detail is too small or inconsequential. The whole point of close playing is to aggregate analytical and interpretative data that can be then used to make an argument about the games and the culture that made and play them. In other words, if you had to write a paper about the game, based on the kinds of analytics we will be talking about in class, how would you use the game itself and your playing of the game as evidence? That kind of detail and analysis is what close playing is all about.

Weekly Plogs

Approximately each week, for this assignment, you will play or interact with the games or texts assigned for the week. Go ahead and play them once just to get a feel of the controls and a feel for the game’s design, sounds, images, actions, goals, characters, and story (if there are these things). Then start over and play the game paying attention to things that catch your attention, that leave you asking questions, that connect to the week’s theoretical readings or class discussion. In other words, are there ways the game reveals something or critiques something about the world around us, the culture around us (intentionally or unintentionally)? Consider the following as jumping off points (not as a laundry list needing answers):

- What are the explicit goals of the game (e.g. kill all the bad guys) and more important, what are the implicit goals of the game (e.g. kill all the bad guys for the government)?
- What are the main arguments of the game (these may not be explicit), what is the game persuading you of, how are the arguments tied into game play?
- How might you close read game play and game mechanics and game design? What is open to the player? How is the player limited? How does that connect to larger concerns or politics?
- Consider the keywords as touchstones. What does the game tell us about cultural and identity formations like race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, nationality, citizenship?
- How did the game making you feel, and more importantly, how did the game make you think? How do you connect these feelings and thoughts to larger concerns?

Pick one of the games to write about (or connect games). Your plog must be more than just description, summary of plot, characters, setting, themes, and a walk-through of what you did, though of course these

things will be evidence for your analysis. Find one or two things that caught your attention or that seem to need analyzing and start that line of thinking. Outstanding plogs are one or two substantive paragraphs, focus on specific close playing details, and make direct connections between the week’s game and the week’s readings. As the plogs get filled out, feel free to reference another person’s take on game play, build off of someone else’s argument making sure to make your own, connect to or challenge another plog’s argument.

Guidelines and Due Dates

Format: on one of the week’s games, the week’s readings, a plog in the same thread, reflective but academic, 250-500 words, typed, no title page, single-spaced, block format academic writing, include bibliography or useful links if necessary posted to the class Blackboard, responding to the appropriate thread:
https://blackboard.ohio.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/forum?action=list_threads&course_id=_454527_1&forum_id=505001&nav=discussion_board&conf_id=_460837_1&mode=cpview

Due: approximately each week, Sunday, by 11:59 PM, posted to the week’s plog thread

Playing Awake, Plog Worksheet

To help you generate your plog entries, use the following brainstorming and observation-taking exercise, which will help you “play while awake.” For every week and each game, you must actively take notes while you play. These observations and initial responses should include details about:

- Narrative (the game’s story, themes, characters, dialogue)
- Mise en scene (visuals, sounds, items, setting)
- Mechanics (controls, actions, interface, rules, exploits)
- Cultural/Social context (player communities, non-gaming communities, news, laws and policies, race, gender, sexuality, class, connections to different disciplines)

For each game, try to identify and briefly describe at least **five** observations per category. In other words, what are the things you see, hear, or do. This can be a simple, four-column list in a notebook where you keep a running list and describe each thing you notice during game play. For example:

Narrative Feature (the game’s story, themes, characters, dialogue)	Mise En Scene (visuals, sounds, items, setting)	Mechanics (controls, actions, interface, rules, exploits)	Cultural/Social (communities, news, laws and policies, race, gender, sexuality, class, connections to different disciplines)
<i>Main character is a man. No name.</i>	<i>1940s-50s Art Deco architecture and interior design.</i>	<i>Conventional first person shooter perspective of hands, gun, weapons.</i>	<i>Critical acclaim from gaming industry/game fans.</i>
<i>Plane crash in open sea. You must go to the tower.</i>	<i>Spooky atmosphere, very wet.</i>	<i>Tape recorded journals for exposition.</i>	<i>Playing from the perspective of a man only.</i>

Playing with a Critical Observer, or, Peer Playing

Beyond solo play, another way to close play a game is to pair up or group up. One person plays while the other person or people observe and write down their observations and reactions. Paired playing, much like peer review for writing, allows you to get a different set of eyes and ears as you go through the close playing process. The burden of trying to pay attention to noticing and noting things while playing is lifted from the player and given to the critical observer. Play through a section of the game and then switch places: the player becomes the peer observer and the observer becomes the player. Once each person has had an opportunity to play and take notes, sit down and discuss your experiences and observations together.

Sovereignty and Decolonization in Games

NAS 005 / Spring 2019 / UC Davis / Bird

This course aims to change the way students think not only about the fields of Native American Studies and Literary Studies, but how and why they think, write, and read the ways that they do. This course encourages students to reflect on and utilize their lived experiences, and utilize these experiences to locate themselves within their writing, as well as locating their writing within the larger world. This course undertakes an intensive focus on the analysis of Native American literary texts of a variety of genres and formats, such as poetry, science fiction, manifesto, video games, music, film and more, as well as texts with a more scholarly focus. These texts are analyzed to discuss the ways in which they contribute to the larger fields of Native American Studies and Literature, as well as the ways that they work to pursue a decolonial lens in literature and the academy, while also broadening the discourse communities of said areas.

This class features blog posts, lectures, class discussion, and frequent writing and group presentation assignments to develop critical thinking and composition skills.

Weekly Blog Posts:

Throughout the quarter, students are asked to participate in a class blog that asks them to approach the same topic every week with different lenses. This ongoing blog is tailored around understandings of sovereignty in relations to that week's readings. Therefore, by the time this assignment rolls around, the students are well versed in the various discourses around sovereignty and the many shapes it can take. The purpose of this activity is to get students transcribing thoughts to have ready for class discussion, and to encourage this type of multifaceted thinking in their own writing and for class discussion and the analysis of materials as well. While I do require that students make statements and arguments within their blog posts, I also highly encourage including questions at the end if they have any. Blog posts should be 200-300 words in length. I also pick several blog posts to read and discuss in the following class periods and students simply write whether or not they wish to have their name included if their post is picked to be read aloud.

Some of the blog posts undertaken are as follows:

- What is your understanding of sovereignty, and how can it be expressed through/within Native American literature?
- How does the film *Angry Inuk* address issues of sovereignty? Is the film itself an exercise in sovereignty? Why or why not?
- In what way is representation an issue of sovereignty? How does lack of representation effect sovereignty? How can Indigenous self-representation help to forward sovereignty?
- What connections can you draw between access to land (or lack thereof) and Indigenous sovereignty? Is land as important in the fight for equal rights of other minority groups in the United States? Why or why not?
- In what manner do you see these stories challenging the genre of Science Fiction (make reference to specific texts)? Do you believe this is an act of sovereignty or decolonization? Why or why not?

Sovereignty and Decolonization in Texts

So far throughout the course, we have discussed the concepts of sovereignty and decolonization in a variety of forms. In a 1500 word paper, please select one of the games that we have worked with this quarter, and describe whether or not you think this text works as an act of sovereignty and takes a decolonial approach to the field of media studies/game design/game studies etc. You should spend a small portion of your paper explaining your chosen game briefly for the reader. Support your claims with clear definitions and understandings of the terminology (sovereignty and decolonization) and direct examples from the text you choose as well as support from AT LEAST 3 scholarly articles that we have read.

The scholarly sources we have looked at include:

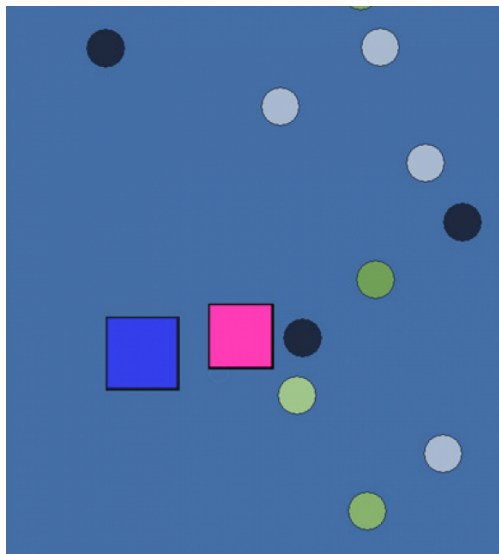
1. Alfred, Taiaiake. "It's All About the Land" in *Whose Land is it Anyway? A Manual for Decolonization* Edited by Peter McFarlane and Nicole Schabus. Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC, 2017.
2. Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Dropouts, Queers, Housewives, and People like You Are Taking Back an Art Form*. New York: Seven Stories, 2012.
3. Bird, S. Elizabeth. "Savage Desires: The Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media." *Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures*, edited by Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, The University of Arizona Press, 2001, pp. 62–91.
4. Bogost, Ian. *How to Do Things with Videogames*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
5. Deloria, Philip J. *Indians in Unexpected Place*. University Press of Kansas, 2004.
6. LaDuke, Winona. *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*. South End Press, 2005.
7. Raheja, Michelle H. "Visual Sovereignty" in *Native Studies Keywords*, edited by Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja. University of Arizona Press, 2015.
8. Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Twenty-five Indigenous Projects" In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 1999.
9. Teves, Nohelani, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja. *Native Studies Keywords*. University of Arizona Press, 2015.
10. Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education, & Society*. Volume 1, Number 1. 2012.

Closeplay: Reading Representation

NAS 005 / Spring 2019 / UC Davis / Bird

What are games telling us through play? Or, more importantly, how have we been conditioned to read games and formulate understandings through play? How do these understandings shape our future interactions in game spaces? All of these questions are crucial to students' understanding of the importance of accurate, meaningful representation within games. Originally developed for CTS/ENL/STS 172: Videogames and Culture: Metagaming, at UC Davis by Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, this activity was utilized to talk about mechanics and how games teach us their rules and how to play them. However, I have altered this activity into an exercise about expectations and how we have been conditioned to read games, as well as how relationships between characters and players get established and coded into games.

To undertake this activity, students will (as a whole for a class under 25, or in smaller groups for larger classes) play Rod Humble's 2006 game *The Marriage* http://kyrie.pe/the_marriage/. Students will be given no introduction to the game, not guide as to how to play, but simply told to play together.



As they play, students must create a player's guide. One student is assigned the role of scribe, while the others take turns playing, writing down what they see on the screen, naming the outcomes of various inputs and interactions between game objects. When students have developed a full list of the mechanics, they are then asked to describe what they think this game is about and answer the following questions:

- What is being represented by the pink square, blue square, colored circles, and interactions between the objects?
- Is there a message within this game that relates to broader societal understandings or narratives?
- What might you assume about the creator of this game and their opinions on marriage and gender?

- If so much information can be developed from colored shapes, what might be the problem with games that represent groups of people and feature much more detailed and explicit forms of representation?

For the second portion of the activity, students watch trailers for several video games featuring Indigenous characters (trailers are substituted here for lack of access/time to play these games in their entirety):

Some examples of games I have students look at include:

Mortal Kombat 9's Nightwolf and Mortal Kombat 11's Kotal Kahn: **WARNING:** These trailers features graphic images of violence

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34DMJ52k14c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3FqG2CfPk4>

Assassin's Creed 3's Connor Kenway

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjIfG04aaGQ> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcUwhFYEqro> in comparison to **Mass Effect's Commander Shepard and Assassin's Creed Black Flag's Edward Kenway:**

Shepard and Assassin's Creed Black Flag's Edward Kenway:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dXj67VXjwU> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz8e32q2sGg>

Students are then asked to answer similar questions to the first part of the activity:

- How would you describe the characters represented? What messages are being conveyed about them? What are their relationships to each other based on the interactions within the game?
- What is this game teaching you? What are some overarching themes or narratives?
- Is there a message within this game that relates to/supports/or contradicts broader societal understandings or narratives?
- What might you assume about the creator of this game and their connection to/understanding of Indigenous peoples?
- In light of this, why might games made by/for Indigenous creators/audiences be so important?

For the final section of the lesson, students then play an Indigenous made game. Some examples include:

Never Alone by Upper One Games and the Cook Inlet Tribal Council

When Rivers Were Trails developed in collaboration with the Indian Land Tenure Foundation and Michigan State University's Games for Entertainment and Learning Lab and support from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

Coyote Quest creative direction by Loretta Todd, narrative design and writing by Elizabeth LaPensée, art by Nelson Dedos Garcia, music by Mob Bounce, design and programming by Silverstring Media, and production by Agentic Digital Media.

Thunderbird Strike with design, art, and writing by Elizabeth LaPensée, programming by Adrian Cheater and Aubrey Jane Scott, and music and sound effects by NÀHGÀ a.k.a. Casey Koyczan

Students then answer the same questions:

- How would you describe the characters represented? What messages are being conveyed about them? What are their relationships to each other based on the interactions within the game?
- What is this game teaching you? What are some overarching themes or narratives?
- Is there a message within this game that relates to/supports/or contradicts broader societal understandings or narratives?
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Queering and Embodying Mechanics

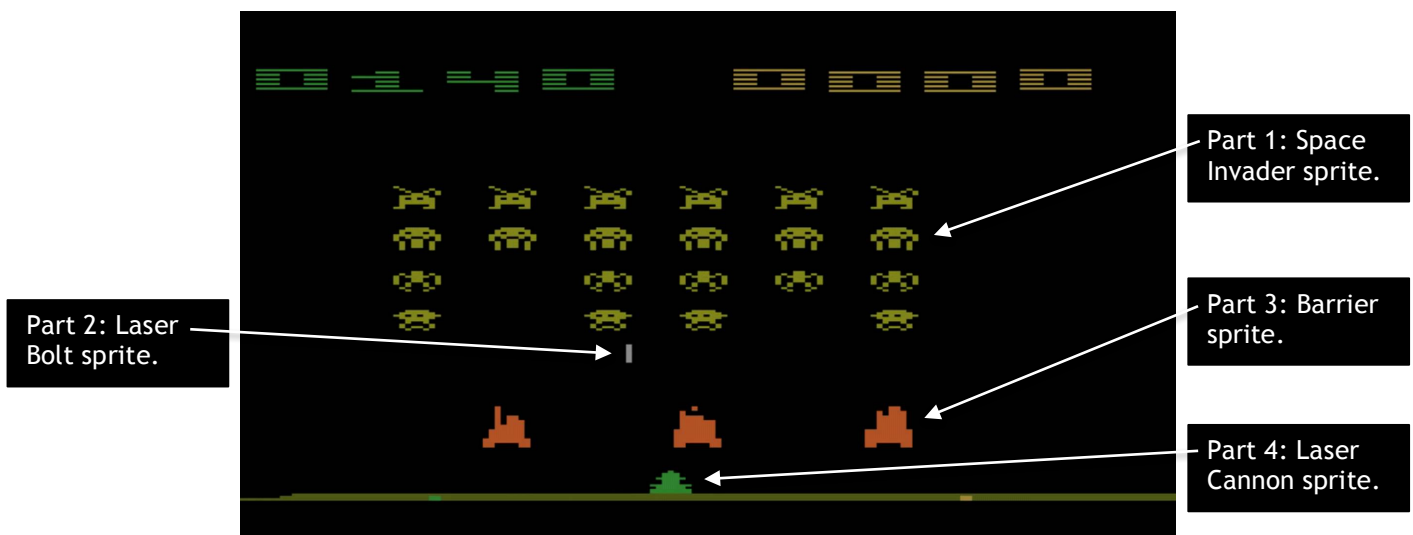
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Queergaming is a provocation, a call-to-games, a horizon of possibilities. Queergaming is a refusal of the idea that digital games and gaming communities are the sole provenance of adolescent, straight, white, cisgender, masculine, able, male, and “hardcore” bodies and desires and the articulation of and investment in alternative modes of play and ways of being. Queergaming offers much more than more menu choices and decision trees, high definition graphics and immersive sound, points and epic loots. It is a response to the failure of games to think beyond and outside the checkboxes of so-called target demographics to see that both games and players have been and will be more than a homogenous body and normative field. Queergaming is heterogeneity of play, imagining different, even radical game narratives, interfaces, avatars, mechanics, soundscapes, programming, platforms, playerships, and communities. It is a queering of Alexander Galloway’s *countergaming* or “redefining play itself and thereby realizing [gaming’s] true potential as a political and cultural avant-garde” (126). He continues, “We need an avant-garde of video gaming not just in visual form but also in actional form. We need radical gameplay, not just radical graphics.”

Game Mechani-Skits

According to the keyword “Prototype,” part of the Modern Language Association’s *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments*, prototypes are “provisional models of ideas that help us investigate, communicate, and remember specific aspects of those ideas. A prototype, like a design or a scenario, is a model of something that might exist in the future... prototypes can be used for three different purposes, which are experiment, development, and provocation... They all model ideas, but they differ in their goals, and therefore in the kinds of ideas involved.”

For this workshop exercise, you will be “bodystorming” (or “brainstorming with your body”) a video game mechanic in order to fast prototype “radical gameplay.” You will get into small groups of 3 to 5 people. As a group, pick one mechanic from a video game. The more specific and bounded the mechanic, the better. Is the mechanic normative? How? Break the mechanic down into discrete steps or pieces, assigning each to a group member. For example, take the Atari 2600 game *Space Invaders* (1978):



For the **first part** of the “mechani-skit,” you will dramatize the unmodified game mechanic as it normally runs. In the example above, the mechanic would be the Laser Cannon shooting at a Space Invader and missing it, hitting a Barrier, or hitting the Space Invader. For the **second part** of the exercise, change one piece, one part of the overall mechanic in order to “queer” it, to reconfigure or repurpose it for more alternative, inclusive, or radical game play. For example, for *Space Invaders*, what if the Laser Bolt became a Love Bolt, which made peace with the alien and welcomed them to the planet. Play with different changes, different possibilities, different rationales. Then, each group will then demonstrate their game mechanics and articulate the choices and changes made. Skits should be 3-5 minutes.