This Might Be a Game:
Ubiquitous Play in the Every Day

Instructor: Jane McGonigal
Spring 2007 San Francisco Art Institute DT-220-02
M 7:30 – 10:15 PM
Email: jane@avantgame.com
Course blog: www.thismightbeagame.blogspot.com

Life must be played. – Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (1938)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Experimental game design is the field of interactive arts that seeks to discover new platforms and contexts for digital play. This course examines the contemporary intersection of ubiquitous computing and experimental game design. The convergence of these two fields at the turn of the twenty-first century has produced a significant body of games and performances that challenge and expand our notions of where, when, and with whom we can play. This course explores how and to what ends such projects reconfigure the technical, formal and social limits of play and performance in relation to everyday life.

Throughout the semester, we will design and test a series of playful interventions and performances that seek to turn everyday life and public spaces into a “real” little game. A primary goal of students in this course will be to develop acritical gaming literacy that can be applied to ordinary, everyday life. Together, we will work to read the “real” world as rich with playful opportunities, carefully testing everyday media, objects, sites, and social situations for the positive and negative consequences of inscribing each within the magic circle of a game. Readings will concentrate on classic design manifestos from the fields of ubiquitous computing and game design, as well as theoretical essays on collective intelligence, public space, and the performance of everyday life.

OUTCOMES
Students who successfully complete this course will have developed:
• A clear understanding of the design philosophy of ubiquitous computing, and its emerging impact on contemporary game culture
• A critical vocabulary for assessing the design and social impact of ubiquitous games
• Firsthand knowledge of major design experiments in the field of ubiquitous gaming
• A design methodology for creating playful experiences in every day life

GRADING
Your final grade will be based on the following:
25% Discussion and Participation
25% Blogging
10% First Experience/Essay
15% Second Experience/Essay
25% Third Experience/Essay
COURSE READER
All readings will be included in our course reader.

ATTENDANCE
If I don’t see you, I can’t teach you! So I will look forward to seeing you in class every Monday meeting this semester. You may miss one meeting this semester without penalty. (We meet 14 times.)

Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade each (an A becomes an A-, e.g.). If you frequently arrive late or leave early, it may count as an unexcused absence. Excused absences (medical problem, or other urgent personal obligation) should be requested at least 24 hours in advance or explained via email within 24 hours of missing class. When you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and to complete all reading and blogging assignments.

DISCUSSION & PARTICIPATION
This class requires a high level of active participation, as well as maximum curiosity, enthusiasm and creativity on your part.

Assigned readings are short and extremely important. Please come to class prepared to discuss and ask questions! If I can tell from your in-class participation that you are regularly doing your readings, your discussion grade will be high.

You are expected to make substantial contributions to our group game design project, in a role that best fits your interests and talents. Possible roles include concept design, interaction design, writing copy, location scouting, visual design, Web development, digital photography, arranging for outside playtesters, and organizing playtests. At the end of the semester, you will have the opportunity to articulate via email your particular contribution(s) to the group project.

Each month, I will arrange for at least one playtesting opportunity outside of our normal Monday meeting hours. Your full participation in these additional activities, including a short written reflection on our course blog, is worth extra credit, up to a 1/3 of a letter on your final grade for each activity (B becomes a B+, e.g.).

BLOGGING
For this class, you will need an account at www.blogger.com. You will use this account to post comments on our class blog, www.thismightbeagame.blogspot.com. Each week, I will post one or more questions about our reading on the blog. I will also be posting links to interesting games, interviews with game designers, project summaries, and other interesting phenomena.

The minimum blog requirement is to write one comment per week to any post of your choice. Comments should be roughly one paragraph in length (4-5 sentences minimum). They should refer to relevant ideas and terms from our readings and class discussions—I want to see you connecting the dots between our readings and the games we play and investigate. If you meet this minimum requirement, your blog grade will be a B for the semester. More or less active blogging will be graded accordingly.

Feel free to use an informal online writing style, as long as your comments are thoughtful.
You’re strongly encouraged to read and respond to others’ comments, and to post your own links.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**
In addition to the informal writing you are doing on our course blog, you will also have **3 short formal writing assignments**, 2 – 3 double-spaced pages each. Each assignment will explore one of our readings in relationship to an existing game that you have played, or an original game/experiment you have conducted.

You will be expected to work closely with the main concepts of the readings, and to quote and cite them as appropriate.

If you are absent the day an assignment is due, you must email the assignment by the start of our class meeting, or it will be considered late. Each week your assignment is late, you will be marked one letter grade lower (an A becomes aB, e.g.).

You can choose to rewrite any one essay for a higher grade.

**AGENDA**

January 22
An introduction to the limits of game play.

January 29
Why ubiquitous games?
Read for today: “The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown” (1905) by G.K. Chesteron
In-class: Discuss.

February 5
All the world’s a game
In-class: Discuss. Read together: “Open House” by Mark Weiser, computer scientist.
Brainstorm contexts for new games.

February 12
Why ubiquitous computing?
Read for today: “The Computer for the Twenty-First Century” (1991) and “The World is Not a Desktop” (1994) by Mark Weiser, computer scientist and
In-class: Discuss. Read together “This Is Not a Pipe” (1993) by Rich Gold, computer scientist

February 19
NO CLASS. (SFAI closed for holiday)

February 26
**Finite vs. infinite play**
Read for today: Excerpts from *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* (1986) by James Carse, philosopher
In-class: Discuss. Play: *Second Life.*

**March 5**
**DUE TODAY: Essay #1**
In-class: Game design fundamentals workshop. Use excerpts from *Rules of Play* (2004) by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, game designers

**March 12**
**NO CLASS. (SFAI closed for spring break)**

**March 19**
**Dark play and Deep play**
In-class: Discuss. Play *SF0.*

**March 26**
**DUE TODAY: Essay #2**
In-class: Playtesting and design work.

**April 2**
**All about games and learning**
Read for today: Excerpts from *A Theory of Fun* (2005) by Raph Koster, game designer
In-class: Discuss. Play *Plundr.*

**April 9**
**Games for cyborgs**

**April 16**
**Design session**
No reading for today.
In-class: Playtesting and design work.

**April 23**
**Transitional play**
Read for today: Excerpts from *Playing and Reality* (1979) by D.W. Winnicott, psychologist
In-class: Discuss. Play missions from *The Go Game.*

**April 30**
**DUE TODAY: Essay #3**
In-class: Playtesting and design work

**May 7**
**LAST CLASS.**