# Art Mods: Video Game Modification
## Film, Video & New Media / Art and Technology Studies 4270

Monday/Wednesday 6pm – 9pm
112 S Michigan Room 415

## Instructor

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Class Homepage: http://artgames.ning.com/main

## Course Description

Art Mods is a three-credit studio art course focused on modifying video games for the purposes of artmaking.

Art Mods explores the popular use of Video Game engines as environments for the production of New Media Art.  Modifying games by building and changing in-game elements, environments and characters presents artists with the ability to create Art Games, Media Art works, performance tools and spaces, non-narrative storytelling techniques and experimental architectures in 3D.

Students will create and design new maps, levels and characters using current Video Games and their authoring/editing tools, and have opportunities to explore their created worlds through real-time performances, documentation and play.

## Course Objectives

Students will explore and learn basic techniques of level modification for Half Life 2, a popular 3D first-person shooter game, including but not limited to basic 3D modeling and texturing and node-based programming using the game's integrated level modding tools.

Additionally, students will explore third-party software tools which allow manipulation and import of custom textures, 3D models and animations.

Students will develop a vocabulary to critically discuss video games/game mods in a contemporary art context.  Students will actively participate in dialogue surrounding their own new media artwork as well as broader examples from commercial and artistic arenas.

# Course Schedule Overview

Week 1 – 2 (February 1, 3, 8, 10): Intro to Games as Art / History of Computer Graphics

Week 3 – 4 (February 15, 17, 22, 24): Intro to Half Life 2 / Modding Tools and Concepts

Week 5 (March 1 & 3): Studio Time for Midterm Project (see Projects section for requirements)

Week 6 (March 8 & 10): Studio Time for Midterm Project (see Projects section for requirements)

Week 7 (March 15 & 17): Midterm Critique (see Projects section for requirements)

Week 8 (March 22 & 24): Individual Meetings

Week 9 – 10 (March 29, 31; April 5 & 7): Video Game Violence / Visiting Artist

Week 11 (April 12 & 14): In-Progress Critique for Final Project (see Projects section for requirements)

Week 12 – 13 (April 19, 21, 26, 28): Games Discussion / Studio Time for Final Project

Week 14 (May 3 & 5): No Class / Crit Week

Week 15 (May 10 & 12): Final Crits (see Projects section for requirements)

## Materials

There is no book for this class; instead, the bulk of technical information will be available from the Valve Developer Community online at http://developer.valvesoftware.com/wiki/Main_Page.  Additional readings will be distributed periodically via electronic and hardcopy.

Every student is required to have a decent pair of headphones to use while working/playing/modding in class.  Students will also be required to keep backup copies of all their source files and digital documentation, either on an external hard drive or using the online backup service of their choice.

Students will also be required to download many free games and utilities, and one or two paid games. The approximate cost for the paid games will be $10-$20 and requires a credit card or paypal payment.

## Media

Below are a selection of readings/listenings/playings that we will discuss in class.  Additional materials may be assigned.

Many additional links can be found at:  http://systemsapproach.net/ArtGameStudies/resource.txt

### Texts
- Rushkoff: Play, cheat, program http://www.boingboing.net/2008/09/26/play-cheat-program.html#more
- On Exactitude in Science
- Interview with Museum Meltdown creators
- Video Shootout by Noreen Herzfeld

**Audio**

- On the media: DIY gaming
  http://www.onthemedia.org/episodes/2009/04/17/segments/129077
- Jonathan Blow: Conflicts in Game Design http://artgames.ning.com/forum/topics/jonathan-blow-conflicts-in
- Morning Edition 'America's Army' Blurs Virtual War, 'Militainment'
  http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124216122

**Games**

- Oregon Trail (requires this Firefox add-on)
- Every Day the Same Dream
- lose/lose
- Windosill http://windosill.com/
- John Conway's Game of Life http://www.bitstorm.org/gameoflife/
- America's Army http://www.americasarmy.com/

**Mods**

- Code-based/software mods
  - Dear Esther http://www.thechineseroom.co.uk/esther.htm (HL2)
  - Korsakovia http://www.thechineseroom.co.uk/korsakovia.htm (HL2)
    - Download from here: http://www.moddb.com/downloads/start/18545/all
  - 9-11 Survivor http://selectparks.net/911survivor/911screenshots.html (Unreal Tournament)
  - Brody Condon KarmaPhysics<Elvis, 2004
  - Velvet Strike http://www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/
  - Museum Meltdown
    - http://www.palletorsson.com/mm.php
    - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us7wLvbVblE
  - Super Columbine Massacre RPG! http://www.columbinegame.com/download.htm
- Hardware/interface mods
  - Playing guitar hero without hands. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsofO6Q0Bz4
    - Article on futurity.org http://futurity.org/health-medicine/%E2%80%98rewired%E2%80%99-guita...
    - Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
      - http://www.darpa.mil/about.html
      - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DARPA
  - Marc Owens' wearable simulator http://tv.boingboing.net/2008/04/11/avatar-machine-marc.html
  - Biofeedback/Competitive Relaxation
    - Wild Devine http://www.wilddivine.com/
    - Brain Ball http://smart.tii.se/smart/projects/brainball/index_en.html
  - Eddo Stern; Fort Paladin: America's Army (2003) http://eddostern.com/fort_paladin.html
- Mods that produce objects
  - The White Room - John Paul Bichard
  - ioq3apint http://julianoliver.com/ioq3apaint (Quake 3 Arena)
- Specific Techniques for Code Modding (Besides Half Life 2)
  - Love http://love2d.org/screenshots

- ◦ Pygame http://www.pygame.org/news.html
- ◦ Unity http://unity3d.com/
- ◦ Quake4 http://quake4.filefront.com/file/HighRes_Textures_Q4;88981
- ◦ Unreal Tournament 3 http://www.unrealtournament.com/us/main.html?month=October&day=...

# Projects

Classwork will consist of two major projects: one due at midterm, the other due at the end to the semester.  Additional reading assignments, discussions and in-class exercises will be assigned on a week-by-week basis throughout the semester.

The **midterm project** must follow one of the following two formats:

- Reconstruct an Existing Physical Space.  Find a space that you'd like to recreate as a game level.  This can be any space: a house, your apartment, a public space, an outdoor space, etc.  Use maps/floorplans/physical measurements to accurately re-create the dimensions of this space using the level-editing tools for Half Life 2.  Use reference images/video and/or sketches to plan for what your in-game space will look like.  Use reference images and/or stock photos to recreate textures present in the space.  Finally, set up interactive entities in the map to facilitate some sort of action on the part of the user/player.

  Include these things in your presentation at the time of critique:

  1) Title of the artwork, explanation of what/where the chosen space is and its significance (1 page double-spaced hardcopy & digital copy .pdf).
  2) Maps/floorplans/physical measurements of the space.
     (3-4 digital .jpg images shown on projector)
  3) Reference images/videos and/or sketches of the space
     (5-10 digital .jpg images/.mov videos shown on projector)
  4) Video screenshots of level interaction (approx.  5 minutes, Quicktime .mov format).
  5) CD or DVD containing digital copies of items 1-4.
  6) Real-time demonstration of the level.

- Construct a Non-Linear Narrative Map Structure.  Use the structural layout (ie, walls/boundaries/portals) of your map to compel the user/player to navigate a non-linear narrative where each major decision regarding where to travel affects all future decisions. The decision points can be made explicit or left hidden to the user/player.

  Include these things in your presentation at the time of critique:

  1) Title of the artwork, background of the non-linear narrative and decisions presented to the user.  (1 page double-spaced hardcopy & digital copy).
  2) Reference images and/or sketches of the level map
     (3-4 digital images shown on projector)
  3) Video screenshots of level interaction (approx.  5 minutes, Quicktime .mov format).
  4) CD or DVD containing digital copies of items 1-3.
  5) Real-time demonstration of the level.

The **final project** must follow one of two formats:

- Complete the project that you **did not** present for the midterm critique.
- Propose an individual project **in writing** at the post-midterm individual meeting. Requirements will be assigned on a case-by-case basis.

## Backups

Most of the work you'll do in this class is based on digital source files.  At all times during the semester, you are responsible for maintaining at least one full backup of all your digital files.   How you go about backing up files is your choice; I'd recommend an external hard drive or a network-based solution such as Dropbox.  There are no extensions/exceptions granted for work that is incomplete/late due to lost files.

## Attendance

Attendance is taken at the beginning of class.  Those arriving after attendance is taken are marked late.  You are responsible for signing in at the end of class if you are late.  If you forget to sign in, you will be marked as absent for the class.  These absences cannot be revised if you discover your mistake after leaving class on the day in question.

Two late arrivals are equal to one unexcused absence.  More than four unexcused absences will cause you to lose class credit.

If you must miss class, do not contact me to ask if you missed anything important; the answer is always yes.  Instead, email a fellow student for any relevant notes (On the first day of class, ask your neighbor to exchange emails in the event that you must borrow their notes).

> **Excused absences** must be supported by documentation (such as a doctor's note, jury summons, public transit failure notice, etc).  Submit a photocopy of this document to me before the last day of class, and be sure to write your name and the date to be excused at the top of the sheet.  Emailed excuses will not be accepted.

## Critiques & Discussion

The in-class discussions that take place throughout the semester are critical to the development of ideas and vocabulary required to work successfully with video games as an art medium.  Critiques in which midterm and final projects are presented are of particular importance.  You must prepare yourself for participation in each class session by reading/playing the assigned homework, taking notes in class, and thinking about previous discussions/presentations.  Additionally, you must be present and participate in your critiques/presentations as well as those of all your classmates.

## Late work

Work is due at the beginning of class/critique.  **Late work is not accepted** (unless the student has an excused absence).  Work that's late due to an excused absence may still receive full credit.
No work is accepted after the last class meeting.  There are no incompletes in this class.

## Email

I do my best to respond to all emails, but sometimes a message will go unanswered.  If you email with a question about an assignment, and I do not reply, you are still responsible for completing the work by the assigned date.  Additionally, I recommend posting questions on the homepage for the whole class to see.

> **Email Etiquette:** Take the time to write clear and cogent messages when communicating with me.  This is especially important when you are asking for something.  I do not respond to emails featuring poor grammar and/or an unprofessional tone; instead I forward these emails to other teachers and laugh about them.

## Misc.  Etiquette

Sleeping in class is not permitted.  If you catch yourself nodding off, stand in the back of the room or talk a walk.  Please refrain from phoning, texting, IMing, emailing, social networking etc.  in class.

As an Art Mods student, you will have 24-hour access to the classroom.  When working outside of class hours, it is **your** responsibility to monitor the lab space for cleanliness and equipment safety.  If the lab is left messy, or if equipment is stolen or damaged, 24-hour access will be revoked for **everyone**.  Please do your part to make sure the lab stays clean and safe.