# GAME COMMENTARY PROJECT
## GAMES AS CRITICAL CATALYSTS

In lieu of a final exam testing your knowledge of game studies, which would not make much sense given the approach of the class, and not particularly useful given then state of the field, we are going to create projects that constitute a reflective commentary on a particular game that explores how it functions as a *catalyst for thought*. These are open projects in which the form and the game chosen will play a large role in what you will create and how it will be evaluated. Our communal goal here is to *share insights into specific games*, creating a collection of papers and media objects that attest to the value of games as objects of reflection and inquiry.

NOTE: Read the entire document, even if you know which option you are choosing!

**Project Option 1: Paper / Guiding Prompt**
Consider the following question as a point of departure for your paper project:

*What does [selected game] enable you to think or position you to experience/understand, and by what means?*

**Rules**
1. Papers must be single-author - no groups on this option.
2. Papers should be between 1700-2500 words.
3. Inclusion of visuals (such as screenshots) is highly encouraged.

This "guiding prompt" can be approached in various ways. Outside research is not required, but welcome. The first part of the prompt asks you to identify something *specific* about your selected game (an idea expressed, an experience dramatized, an ideological viewpoint provided, a perspective exemplified or critiqued, a theme or topic commented on, etc.). This is completely up to you, and this is ought to be considered a chance to engage your own interests and gaming experience critically. The second part of the prompt is designed to orient your thinking toward some consideration of media poetics (design, organization of information, techniques, structures, etc.) and away from hermeneutics (interpreting and opining on *the* meaning). This means that you not only need to identify something of interest in the game, you must also reason about how you see the game organizing and enabling further thought on it through its designs. "Design" here is *not* limited to technical aspects like game mechanics, interface design, etc. but instead refers to the broader scope of "gameplay" we have explored in class.

**Project Option 2: Mixed-Media / Guiding Prompt**
Consider the following prompt for creating your mixed-media or alternative project:

*Create a mixed-media project (in one of the formats listed below) that communicates a specific insight into the design, expressivity, or usefulness of your selected game.*

This option allows for group collaborations, and it is highly recommended that you at least pair up. Also, consider the following forms your project can take, and the corresponding guidelines:

1. Let's Play (video): These projects will be videos comprised of gameplay sequences and either scripted voice overs or text captions and imagery that orient viewers' attention and structure reflection on the game. The video should have an overall point, which can either be made explicitly (i.e. the voice over tells us directly) or it can be left to inference, though in this latter case there will be a greater burden placed on the individual reflections to explain the goals of the video.

2. <u>Game Tetrad</u> (image+key): These projects will be comprised of a digital image and short commentary based on the media analysis method called the Tetrad, developed by Marshall McLuhan in *Laws of Media*. *Consult the "Tetrad" section of the course website* under "Assignments" to get an understanding of the 4 laws of the media tetrad. In addition to a digital image there must be a group document (template provided) explaining the significance of the various elements and design of the tetrad image.

3. <u>Dialogue</u> (text+visuals): These projects will be a collaboration between two people that are part of the same quarter-long play experiment cohort (on *Eidolon* or *Terraria*). The idea is to have a searching and comparative discussion of your experiences of the game with a colleague. These discussions should be themed or have an orienting set of questions that help shape the exchange and give it a direction. *Consult the supplemental instructions on the website under "Assignments."*

4. <u>Audio Interview</u> (audio): These projects will involve someone outside the class that will be interviewed on a play experience of a game from the course. The interviewee will play the game and you will record an interview / conversation with them about the significance of the game experience and how it facilitated new thinking or insights into the world. The audio should include clips from your full interview as well as a scripted, framing comment that orients the listener. *Consult the supplemental instructions on the website under "Assignments."*

**Rules**
1. Max group size is 4.
2. In addition to the above media object work, these projects must include a 500-700+ word reflection by *each member* of the group (submitted independently). The reflection should identify your role in the work and your reflection on the result – its goals and effectiveness, as well as what new ideas emerged for you, personally.
3. Let's Play videos and Audio Interviews must be less than 45mins.
4. Audio Interviews must be conducted with someone outside the class.

**Evaluation**
<u>Both options</u>: In general, I am looking for both rigorous and creative thinking that addresses the prompt.

<u>Papers</u>: Good papers are focused, clear, and organized, and they also go beyond simple expression of what you think to *explain the reasons for why you think it*. Great papers are also grounded in details of the media/texts you engage. The best papers also make interesting connections (to the other media, culture, or scholarship), address implications, or reflect on the significance of your ideas in some way. You do *not* need to pursue a narrow argument in your paper, but you need to be actively reasoning about details, discussing examples, etc. We should come away from your paper with a sense that we gained new insight into the game and its significance, not simply unreasoned personal opinions.

<u>Projects</u>: Good projects provide a creative means for gaining insight into the game and seek to effect critical reflection in some way. Great projects are focused and reflect the rationale in the statement. The best projects are those that demonstrate the value of the approach; that is, the best kind of projects could not really function the same way as papers.