

2019-2020

Harold J. Plous Award Lecture

UC SANTA BARBARA

Alenda Chang

“Playing for the Planet”

Monday, May 2, 2022 | 4pm | Alumni Hall, Mosher Alumni House



What if playing a game could offer us as meaningful a natural experience as going outdoors? Games offer unique and playfully persuasive opportunities to engage with environmental issues. They can even foster moments of empathy, loss, care, experimentation, and optimism—ways of understanding and confronting phenomena ranging from extinction to disaster capitalism. At the same time, game industries are complicit in a variety of unsustainable practices, whether of resource extraction, labor, planned obsolescence, or the self-fulfilling prophecy of Moore's Law. What can players, designers, and game companies do to acknowledge the ecological crises at

hand, and how can they construct more environmentally intelligent game worlds and more equitable human and nonhuman futures?

Alenda Y. Chang is an Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at UC Santa Barbara, whose research and teaching encompass environmental media, histories and theories of the digital, game studies, science and technology studies, and sound studies. Her first book, *Playing Nature: Ecology in Video Games*, develops environmentally informed frameworks for understanding and designing digital games (University of Minnesota Press, 2019). At UC Santa Barbara, Chang directs the Creative Computing Initiative and co-directs *Wireframe*, a studio promoting collaborative theoretical and creative media practice with investments in global social and environmental justice. She is also a founding co-editor of the UC Press open-access journal, *Media+Environment*.

The Harold J. Plous Memorial Award was established in 1957 to honor Harold J. Plous, Assistant Professor of Economics. The award is given annually to a faculty member of the rank of Assistant Professor or Instructor who has demonstrated outstanding performance by creative action or contribution to the intellectual life of the college community.