

Research Seminar

Cultural Transformations (CT) and Global Studies Research Programme (GSRP)

Forms of play

Friday 3. November 11-17.30
Nobel Park, Jens Chr. Skousvej 4,
Building 1453, room 131

Organizers: Matthias Stephan, Britta Timm Knudsen, Christoffer Kølvrå, and Claus Toft-Nielsen

”If we could accept this meaninglessness of the world, then we could play with forms, appearances and our impulses, without worrying about their ultimate destination”. Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*.

According to Baudrillard’s idea of simulation, contemporary societies have all but lost any connection to what used to be considered ‘reality’. Instead, the social have become a place for the accelerated circulation, mediatization and consumption of images no longer pinned down by anything solid or external: it is a realm of play.

Postmodern theories emphasized that such a divorce from ‘the real’ as a guarantee of ‘truth’ could be potentially liberating because it allowed for a ‘play’ with new social modes and forms, and paved the way for new ways of playful resistance as seduction, excess or hyperbole. Other more materially grounded theories – Deleuzian material philosophy and new materialism – have since widened the scope of the ‘real’ to include the virtuality or fictionality of the real. This means that the imagining, and temporary creation of alternative worlds that question hierarchies and pursue futurability of new modes of community, draws centrally on playful elements in building forms of cultural and social praxis.

At our previous seminar – Playful Attitudes; Popular Culture, Politics and Participation – we focused on play and playfulness conceptually and how it appears in phenomena where you least expect it, and sometimes also in less liberating and inclusive ways. This coming seminar will focus on the ‘forms of play’ in a variety of fields of practice such as Fan Culture, Literature, Activism, Performance Arts and Game Culture. We will focus on which forms – such as rhetorical strategies, tactics, imitative plays, re- and pre-enactments, or the aesthetic uses of matter and site-specificity – the playful virtuality and fictionality of the real may take.

Programme

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| 11:00-11:15 | Welcome |
| 11:15-12:00 | Nicolle Lamerichs, Media Studies, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht
Playful Consumption: Co-creating Play, Participation and Activism in Fan Culture |
| 12:00-12:45 | Hanna Elina Wirman, Digital Design, IT University Copenhagen
Political Activism and Games: Hong Kong 2019-20 Protests |
| 12:45-13:30 | Lunch |
| 13:30-14:15 | Peter Boenisch, Dramaturgy, AU
Performing the Post-Internet Condition: Playing with Contemporary Subjectivity |
| 14:15-15:00 | Jesper Juul, Game and Production Design, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts
Play and the problem of Rational Players |
| 15:00-15:45 | Walk & Talk with Coffee - facilitated by Matthias Stephan |
| 15:45-16:30 | Noa Vaisman, Anthropology, AU
Play as refusal and the search for play after justice (Presentation over Zoom) |
| 16:30-17:15 | Matthias Stephan, English, AU
Literary Play – Imagination, Speculative Fiction, and the Climate |

Abstracts

Nicolle Lamerichs, Media Studies, HU University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht

Playful Consumption: Co-creating Play, Participation and Activism in Fan Culture

Play can spark stories, wonder and inspiration in troubled times. In this paper, Lamerichs addresses various forms of play in fan culture, such as cosplay, as a form of re-enchantment. Fans foreground stories, empathy and characters in their practices. As a multi-sited phenomenon, fandom contains different forms of participation and play, sometimes subversive or transformative. For example, through eco-cosplay fans generate awareness around sustainability and climate change. As this talk shows, playful activities can use existing story worlds and characters as a way of exploring meaningful interventions and ideas.

Hanna Wirman, Center for Digital Play, IT University Copenhagen

Political Activism and Games: Hong Kong 2019-20 Protests

This talk explores how digital games are used as means for political persuasion and tactical coordination during mass demonstrations. It introduces different forms of protesting with and through games and situates the case of Hong Kong 2019-20 protests in the context of authoritarianism.

Peter Boenisch, Dramaturgy, Aarhus University

Performing the Post-Internet Condition: Playing with Contemporary Subjectivity

The performances by the Flemish duo Jäger & Ooms consist entirely of a performative embodiment of material found on social media. In my contribution, I will reflect on their unique use of performative theatre aesthetics to play with the implications on our human (inter-) subjectivities in a “post-Internet” condition, where the formerly solid distinctions between real vs. virtual, online vs. offline, bodies vs. images (...) have melted into digital air.

Jesper Juul, Game and Production design, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts

Play and the problem of Rational Players

On one hand play and games are often seen as freeing and even liberatory, as ways to escape the pressures of work, productivity, and even rationality. On the other hand, applying game structures to the regular world – gamification – can sometimes appear freeing, and sometimes seem like a trick to sugarcoat surveillance and bureaucracy. In this talk I will cover current discussions about the role of game structures and optimization in games and examine the meaning of play and game structures inside and outside games.

Noa Vaisman, Anthropology, Aarhus University

Play as refusal and the search for play after justice (Presentation over Zoom)

This presentation is made up of two parts: in the first I describe a few key instances where play was present and used in the pursuit of justice in the long aftermath of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) in Argentina. Specifically, I explore how playful interventions in the streets and in courts in Buenos Aires have shaped the struggles for reparation and for judicial adjudication. In this context I also attend to the creativity of resistance and point to the ways play and resistance travel between different global locations. In the second part of the talk, I turn to a puzzle some people in my field are currently struggling with: how to find play when it seems to have dissipated? Specifically, through ongoing work with artists and members of human rights organizations I inquire into the sense of disorientation and discomfort that emerges when resistance has lost its target and playfulness, that was abundant in the past.

Matthias Stephan, English, Aarhus University

Literary Play – Imagination, Speculative Fiction, and the Climate

Literature (with a capital L) is often characterized as a serious form of writing, with other genres – crime fiction, romance, science fiction – considered less serious and read for pure enjoyment, framed as escapism, the same kind of recreation that is parallel to play and playfulness. At the same time, literature, in both its serious and speculative forms, allows a freedom of the imagination – the form of literature allows for revisions of the past, presentations of alternative presents, and importantly imaginations of the future. This talk will focus on how literary imaginations of the future – playing with the idea of the future - can stage and help form our reactions and planning to long-term challenges – climate change, biodiversity crisis. I will present ways in which speculative fiction has reacted to the climate crisis in particular, through climate change fiction, and try to suggest which narratives might be useful in motivating future change.