

CT Research Seminar

Playful Attitudes; Popular Culture, Politics, Participation

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

Friday 17 March, 11-17.15
Nobel Park, Jens Chr. Skousvej 4, Building 1483, room 344

The concept of play or playfulness is once again returning to the center of many academic debates and displaying an astonishing interdisciplinary range across various fields such as pedagogy and didactics, game- and fan studies, anthropology, literary theory, cultural studies, and political science. Ideas and practices of play are now increasingly key both in innovative work in fields which have traditionally been concerned with play and in fields where play or playfulness has not earlier been part of the standard vocabulary.

Indeed, in contemporary societies play seems to be an ever more expansive cultural praxis, and 'playfulness' is an attitude increasingly identifiable also in contexts traditionally pervaded by high seriousness. Thought of as the constitution of a space of 'make believe' play can temporarily suspend the rules and roles of 'real life'. The attitude of playfulness therefore shows itself to be a powerful tool for a wider range of actors and processes and can license not just lightheartedness, but also immersive enjoyment, excess, experimentation, and a disregard for the 'real' consequences of actions. It pervades contemporary cultural, political, and social practices from mobilizing fan communities to constituting engaged audiences of participatory artforms, from political gaming and playful activism, and from immersive media-consumption to ideological excess. What this should alert us to is that play must now be examined as it appears in odd contexts, among new kinds of actors and with a much more ambiguous normative agenda than is often assumed. Play today slips easily from the leisurely to the activist, from inclusive values to aggressive bullying, from being lighthearted to going Dark, from heralding progressive experimentation to being insidiously parasitic.

Given this extraordinary richness of the concept, this seminar aims to facilitate a discussion of what might still constitute the definitional core elements of play and playfulness today, and of the various and often ambiguous contexts in which play might be identified as a core dynamic.

Programme:

Roundtable: Conceptualizing Play and Playfulness

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| 11:00-11:15 | Introduction by Britta Timm Knudsen |
| 11:15-11:45 | Line Nybro Petersen: Producing conspiracy theories through play on social media |
| 11:45-12:15 | Miguel Sicart: Playing at the end of a world |
| 12:15-12:45 | Discussion/Questions |

12:45-13:45 Lunch

Contextualizing Play and Playfulness

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| 13:45-14:00 | Introduction by Matthias Stephan |
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Playful Feelings: From Fear to Paranoia:

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| 14:00-14:15 | Mathias Clasen: Playing with Fear: Empirical Research on Recreational Horror |
| 14:15-14:30 | Stephen Joyce: Playful Paranoia: conspiracy as entertainment |
| 14:30-15:00 | Open Discussion. Moderator/discussant: Claus Toft-Nielsen |

Playing Politics: From Populism to Protest

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| 15:00-15:15 | Christoffer Kølvrå: Populism as Para-play |
| 15:15-15:30 | Alexander Ulrich Thygesen: Playful activist practices: the case of the Matapacos riot dog statue in Chile |
| 15:30-16:00 | Open Discussion. Moderator/discussant: Miguel Sicart |

16.00-16.15 Coffee break

Play as participatory Mobilization: From Fans to Art

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| 16:15-16:30 | Mathias Poulsen: Making other worlds possible: play as democratic participation |
| 16:30-16:45 | Rikke Nørgaard: Empowered Participation: Youth imagining, creating, and exchanging cultural values and heritage through game-making – The EPIC-WE project (2023-2026) |
| 16:45-17:15 | Open Discussion. Moderator/discussant: Line Nybro Petersen |