

CRITICAL EXEMPLAR

Introduction

Play phenomena worthy of further investigation are legion, and it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive catalog and account of them. Furthermore, the materials and framing perspectives in the course that we have engaged are mine, but they reflect my interests, scholarly background, and goals of creating a narrative of ideas for you to make new connections. In order to supplement the course material you will also have the opportunity to pursue your particular interests as they relate to play in small research projects identifying, documenting, theorizing, and reflecting on a self-selected play phenomenon that we have not covered. These play exemplars may be selected from esoteric traditions or marginalized cultural histories, or they can be part of emergent play culture.

Details

This assignment is about creating a mixed media object that identifies and informs us about a selected play phenomenon, and provides insightful resources and commentary for understanding its significance as an example of play. Producing your critical exemplar projects will have three phases, and three components:

Phases

1. Selection – Obviously, first you have to select a play example to focus on. The class provides some examples of what you might focus your research on: sumo wrestling, choral dancing, rasa lila, object play in cephalopods (these are off limits because we covered these in class). You want your selected phenomenon to be specific enough to organize and narrow your research process. Thus, you cannot do “ritual dancing” but you can do Greek choreia; you cannot do videogame play but you can do “domesticity simulation games.” If you have questions, talk to me.
2. Research – Next, you have to learn about and gather informational resources on your play example. This should include descriptions, depictions, etc. of the play phenomena, as well as historical and social aspects: When did the play phenomenon begin? Who/what participated in its emergence? Any important historical and cultural contexts that help us understand its generation and evolution? How has it changed, and where is it headed? Are there many forms of it? Be sure to mind the quality of your sources: academic texts / media > popular print publications > Wikipedia > random web source.
3. Writing/Creation – Finally, you have to write your texts and assemble your media to create the project. The final form of your project is open as long as it includes the components below. Everyone is welcome to organize and publish their project as a mediawiki page, similar to your reviews, though with the addition of embedded audio/visual media. Or, you can create a digital document and render it as a PDF, or make an interactive website from scratch, etc. The final form is less important than the information.

Components

A. Identify & Document – Your project must include an overview text in formal prose that identifies and describes the play phenomenon and gives us some visual aids and experiential details about it.

B. Historicize & Theorize – Your project must also include some historical context for the play phenomenon and some reflection about its significance for our theories of play (specifically Huizinga, Caillois, Sutton-Smith and the other theory texts you may have read or written about in reviews). We as readers should be given a sense of the significant history for understanding the play phenomenon you have identified, and we should be provided with your thoughts on how it relates to our understanding of play as a concept.

C. Connect & Comment – Finally, your project should include some new connections – where does this play phenomenon lead? What aspects of society and culture does it resonate with? For example, we drew connections between Sumo and MMA, or paizo and modern nightclubbing. This is your chance to get speculative and connect the idea of play embedded in your example with other phenomena.