

HS 260 MATTERS OF PLAY

**Cornish College of the Arts
Humanities and Sciences Department**

Course: HS 260 01 LE
Semester: Fall 2017
Time: M+W 6.00p-7.20p
Location: Centennial Lab, 102
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“Play adorns life, amplifies it, and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual - as life function - and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, *its expressive value*, its spiritual and social associations, in short, as a cultural function. The expression of it satisfies all kinds of communal ideals.”

- Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Matters of Play is a seminar exploring the phenomena of play, beginning with the “play” of matter at the origins of the universe and ending with the highly organized forms of play experienced in contemporary game media and network culture. We will survey classical and contemporary theories of play and explore one possible map of natural and human history that highlights play as a quality of reality at various scales as well as a productive activity of intelligent life. This theme affords opportunities to make new connections across diverse material and disciplinary perspectives: from physicists who attempt to account for novelty in cosmology with concepts of chance to religious beliefs about the world as the ongoing result of a dice game played by the gods; work by astronomers suggesting that “Nature plays” and accounts of emergence in systems theory; psychological, biological, and philosophical views of play as an expressive and productive animal behavior, as well as arguments from game and media studies that consider games as new forms of argument and potential catalysts for social change.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) Broaden your understanding of play and play phenomena, facilitating new perceptions of and perspectives on social, physical, as well as ludic systems.
- 2) Deepen your philosophical appreciation of play theory and the ethics of play, providing a means for critical agency in the political economies of both contemporary game culture and everyday experience of society.
- 3) Provide vocabulary, historical context and conceptual resources for thinking about play and its intersection with selfhood, community, and the contemporary media ecology.
- 4) Facilitate critical thinking about ludic experiences, how play informs or may inform your personal art practices, and how specific conceptions of play impact culture.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The class sessions will be run as a seminar with an emphasis on whole-class discussion of the assigned materials. The central challenge of this class consists in the reading experience as we will be engaging difficult primary texts, historical and contemporary, written from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Although your reading will be guided by framing lectures, the individual struggle to interpret and synthesize the course readings will require serious effort (see more about reading below). We will have opportunities to collaboratively work through the course materials and key ideas through discussion and small writing/media projects designed to concretize some of the abstract ideas that we will encounter throughout the semester. The class as a whole is focused on generating the outcomes listed above, but more generally, to engage you in difficult thinking that—it is assumed—will provide an invaluable resource for theorizing and talking about your primary work in your major, and perhaps your BFA projects (even if they have no direct relation to the topic of play).

In light of all of this, the learning experience will most likely differ from other courses in a few consequential ways:

1. On Course Narrative: The course provides a narrative of ideas and perspective drawn from primary texts, historical and contemporary, representing diverse discourses in the humanities and sciences, but there is no unifying argument or settled conclusion about the topic of play. The material is designed to *position you to see* ideas and broaden your awareness rather than instruct you in how to think about or deploy a specific canonical conception of play.
2. On Reading: A premium is placed on critical reading and the formulation of questions about the texts. The material can be disorienting to read, especially if you are new to academic sources. Authors are advancing arguments, defining new concepts, and working through complex ideas that is “live thinking” (as opposed to secondary, textbook-style, pre-digested summaries). The value of these sources lies not in the provision of neat and settled conclusions, but in the thinking enacted. This means that the reading experience will be difficult and slow, and will require effortful reading practices: re-reading, note taking, personal explication of key passages, etc.
3. On Attendance and Office Hours: We will be covering a lot of difficult subjects under the theme of play, and as mentioned the diversity of sources and necessity for framing lectures to guide reading should give you a good sense of how important showing up every day will be. Your success in this kind of course is directly related to showing up having the done the readings of the day. I will be doing my best to manage and track your understanding, but you have to be active as well—if something is unclear or you find yourself getting lost, do not suffer in silence. Come to office hours!

COURSE WEBSITE & MEDIAWIKI

Although we have recently adopted Canvas CMS at Cornish I will not be using that system as a the primary hub of information during the semester apart from evaluation (attendance, grade recording). We will be using a Mediawiki-based website in order to facilitate collaboration and manage course materials. Mediawiki is the platform used for Wikipedia and all the largest wikis online, and familiarity with it may serve you later—if only to enable you to contribute to Wikipedia! We will spend some time in class working with Mediawiki and I will put everything on the course website, which will server as the central source of information about the schedule, assignments, lecture media, etc. You will need to have regular access to the Web to succeed in the class, though you do not need any technical skills beyond those used in your everyday computing.

COLLABORATIONS & REFLECTIVE EXPERIMENTS

The lectures and readings throughout the semester will provide a provocative framework (historical context, a narrative of ideas) and resources (terminology, concepts, critical perspectives) for understanding play. However, *the most important and lasting development that occurs in education is self-development*. Much of the course design is concerned with the creation of the conditions for this aspect of education. The work listed below will constitute a major part of your learning experience and will provide focused opportunities for self-development. Just as the development of scientific understanding of the natural world cannot proceed very far on received knowledge and the isolated speculative reasoning of a solitary individual, understanding human culture, and play specifically, requires, perhaps counter-intuitively, purposeful experimentation and collaboration with other people. Only so much can be achieved from information and introspection. These assignments should be understood as experiments—as mediums for understanding, designed to provide opportunity for insight and collaborative inquiry. *Detailed documents explaining these works will be given in class, but here is a quick overview:*

Course Engagement

Being engaged not only entails attending, paying attention in class and following the material, but also actively contributing to the class discussion. This means sharing insights and questions on lecture or readings in discussion and on the course website (see Q&Q below).

Office Hour Visit

Once in the semester you are required to visit office hours to talk about the course materials and your learning experience in the class. This should be done *before* week 10.

Questions & Quotations (Q&Q)

Once a week you will be responsible for identifying a key passage or idea in the assigned material of the day, and to formulate a question you have about the material. These will be posted to the course site in advance of our meeting and serve as resources in the session discussions.

Article/Chapter Review

In addition to the assigned readings you will be required to go into a small archive of materials on the topic of play and self-select an article or chapter to review for the class. These reviews will also be posted to the course site and shared with your colleagues.

Critical Exemplar Project

As we will see, play phenomena worthy of further investigation are legion, and it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive catalog and account them. Furthermore, the materials and framing perspectives in the course are mine, but they reflect my interests, scholarly background, etc. In order to counteract these limitations we 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 do not cover in the core materials. These can be drawn from esoteric traditions or marginalized cultural histories, or can be part of emergent play culture.

Ludosophia Symposium

The final weeks of the course are dedicated to a student designed and lead, course-framed symposium on key topics generated by the group and growing out of our semester-long study of games. Students will be expected to craft prepared remarks on the community chosen topics and write a short reflection of their symposium experience.

DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING & EVALUATION

Evaluation methods will vary by assignment so more detailed information will be given on specific assignment documents, but the course will follow the Humanities and Sciences grading system summarized below.

A	4.0	C+	2.3	D+	1.3
A-	3.7	C	2.0	D	1.0
B+	3.3	C-	1.7	D-	0.7
B	3.0				
B-	2.7			F	0.0

The final grade in the course reflects the following elements:

- ◆ Course Engagement 15% all semester
- ◆ Questions & Quotations 15% all semester
- ◆ Office Hour Visit 15% by appointment
- ◆ Article/Chapter Review 20% Week 5
- ◆ Critical Exemplar Project 20% Week 12
- ◆ Symposium Work 15% last week of class

Please also consider the following departmental policy on attendance for the course:

Effect of Absences on Final Grade														
Absences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Max Grade Possible	A/A-		A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F	

After 3 absences the final grade you can earn in the course is reduced with each subsequent unexcused absence. The success of this course depends on many elements, one of which is our ability as a group to create a dependable community of vigorous and searching inquiry built on the accrual of common understandings as well as cognitive diversity. In the case of the former, if you miss class you will become alienated from the common understanding; in the case of the latter, the group cannot benefit from your humanity, your insights, your unique experience and point of view. In this context, showing up to class takes on a moral quality! If you must miss class because “life happened” contact me ahead of time via email. Please note that it is your responsibility to get caught up by going to the website for lecture slides and consulting your colleagues for notes on discussion.

READING & WORK SCHEDULE

See the course website: <http://courses.bloodedbythought.org/play/>

DEPARTMENT PRACTICE AND POLICY

Academic Etiquette

- ◆ Arrive on time
- ◆ Cell phones off unless being used for purposes related to the course
- ◆ No headphone use during class time unless approved by instructor
- ◆ No checking e-mail or text messaging
- ◆ No surfing the Web during class unless for purposes related to the course
- ◆ Respectful participation and discussion is expected

Attendance: The learning experience cannot be duplicated outside of class and depends on the participation of all classroom community members. Attendance is required for all Humanities and Sciences courses. In all other Humanities and Sciences courses, students are permitted three absences before having their grade affected. In all courses, these permitted absences include absence due to personal matters or illness, and absences due to departmental commitments, such as rehearsals, performances, or show installation. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the student to alert his or her instructor of a pending absence and to make arrangements to complete all coursework in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty: The College demands a high level of artistic integrity and academic honesty on the part of students. No form of academic dishonesty (for example, cheating and plagiarism) will be tolerated. If an instructor demonstrates to the Department Chair that a student is guilty of academic dishonesty, the student will be assigned a failing grade for the entire course.

All cases of academic dishonesty are reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee. Disciplinary action may be determined by the Academic Standards Committee depending on the circumstances of the particular case. Further disciplinary actions may include warning, probation, suspension, and expulsion.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Student Affairs: Student Affairs is dedicated to enhancing and complementing students' educational experience through programs, services and opportunities that aid in their personal development. Student Affairs is committed to community building, co-curricular learning, and student support. If you are a student with a documented disability and you need accommodations, please make an appointment with the staff in Student Affairs, located in room 301 at the Main Campus Center. You can call 206-726-5098 to reach them.

Counseling: The mission of the Counseling Offices at Cornish College of the Arts is to assist students with their academic and artistic pursuits by providing supportive counseling, referrals and outreach programs that promote students' mental health and emotional well being. To schedule an appointment, call a Counselor at 206-726-5027 or 206-726-5047. If they are not available, please leave a message on their voicemail and they will return your call as soon as possible. The Counseling Offices are located in rooms 308 A & B in the Main Campus Center.

WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center, located in MCC 212 (next to the library), provides Cornish students with free and personalized writing support. Writers can visit for a consultation on assignments from courses, creative writing, professional writing such as artist statements or cover letters, or anything else that includes stringing together words. Writing Center Peer Consultants can help during any and all stages of the writing process, from brainstorming to editing. Drop by to learn more about what's happening in the Writing Center or to read our work in our lounge space.

In addition to drop-in hours Mon-Thurs, the Writing Center accepts submission of writing ONLINE 24 hours a day. Writers who use the online service can expect a screencast video response from a consultant containing suggestions addressing the writer's concerns.

Visit http://www.cornish.edu/writing_center/ for hours, contact information, or to submit your writing for feedback. We also invite our community to follow us and stay in touch on Facebook and Instagram, where we can be found as "Cornish Writing Center".