

PL 141. Play

Instructor: Dr. David Hayes
Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu
Class times: M/W 15:45-17:15
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course is an inquiry into the origin, nature, and purpose of play. Questions to be considered will include: How do we know when something is playful? Is play the opposite of what is serious? of what is boring? of what is work? Are there important differences between animal and human play? Between the play of children and adults? What is a game? What are sports, and what value do they have? What are the connections between play and art, religion, mental health, love, and culture in general? In this course, special attention will be paid to the connection between play and education (In Greek, “paidia” = play; “paideia” = education). Would the best life be one spent “playing the finest games,” as a character in Plato’s *Laws* suggests? Or are there darker aspects to play that ought to make us cautious about it? Attention will also be given to what has happened to play in the modern world, “as more and more organizations, practices, products, and services are infused with elements from games and play to make them more engaging” (Walz and Deterding). Is this “gamification” of life a good thing? Can we distinguish such a “gamification” or “ludification” of culture from a play or “deep play” experience?

Readings will include some of the major theoretical statements about play (Plato, Schiller, Huizinga, Winnicott), articles in contemporary sociology and philosophy, as well as expressions of play in literature, film, and visual art.

Requirements

Texts

Almost all the readings for this course are assembled in the Course Reader. The exception is Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Students are required to purchase this. I recommend the SeaWolf Press edition (ISBN-10 1948132826), with the original illustrations. Be wary of poor-quality editions listed on Amazon.

Note that students must attend class with a printed copy of the relevant text for the session. Screen use is only permitted in case of a disability accommodation.

Use of Electronics

The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. The research is unequivocal that the presence of laptops hurts the academic performance of the user – and also of whoever else can see the screen. Put away and silence your smartphones during the seminar. These devices undermine the effort to create and sustain a common conversation.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct. Anything is better than turning in work that is not your own, and that is the result of your own personal engagement with the texts and artworks. If you are having difficulties with any assignment, please contact me. The use of ChatGPT or other AI tools for writing is strictly prohibited.

Attendance

As the Student Handbook specifies, more than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect the participation grade for the course. I will deduct .1 from the final grade point average for each absence over two. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence. A college rule states that course credit may not be given when a student's absences exceed 30% of total number of classes, no matter whether these absences are excused or unexcused.

Please note that film screenings and discussions are required sessions.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The Bard College Berlin Student Handbook specifies that: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Concerning extensions for papers in this course, I freely give extensions as long as the student requests one at least 24 hours **before** the essay deadline has passed. You may request an extension via email.

Grade Breakdown

Assignment #1 (500 words): 10%

Assignment #2 (500 words): 10%

Assignment #3 (1000 words): 15%

Assignment #4 (1000 words): 15%

Presentation and final paper (2000 words): 30%

In the presentation and final paper, the student reflects upon a text or object of their own choosing that concerns play. Students are required to discuss their choice with me before their presentations.

Class participation 20%

Week 1

1/26 "Aesop" (Babrius): "The Ant and the Grasshopper"; Winnicott, "The Baby as a Person"; Herodotus 1.94.1-7

1/28 The Dipylon Inscription; The Exekias Amphora; Homer, The *Iliad*, Book 23 ("The funeral games of Patroklos")

Play questionnaire due by email 2/1, 11:59 pm

Week 2

2/2 Bekoff and Pierce, "Chapter 5: Justice: Honor and Fair Play among Beasts" from *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*; Wohlleben, "Just for Fun" from *The Inner Life of Animals*; Gould and Gould, "The Role of Play" from *The Animal Mind* (pgs. 163-8)

2/4 Wilson, *The Playwork Primer*; Lady Allen of Hurtwood, "Why not use our bomb sites like this?" from *Picture Post*; *The Land* (dir. Erin Davis, 2015).

Assignment 1 on *The Playwork Primer*, due by email 2/8, 11:59pm

Week 3

2/9 Peter Gray, et. al., "Decline in Independent Activity as a Cause of Decline in Children's Mental Well-being: Summary of the Evidence"; Hobbs and Cornwell, "The Science and Politics of Play"

2/11 Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*; Don Freeman, *Corduroy*

Week 4

2/16 White, *A Book of Toys*; K. Elderkin, "Jointed Dolls in Antiquity"

Assignment 2 on *A Book of Toys*, due by email 2/17, 11:59pm

2/18 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, chapters 1-6

Week 5

2/23 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, chapters 7-17

2/25 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, chapters 18-26

Week 6

3/2 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, chapters 27-Conclusion

Thursday 3/5 (19:15-21:15) Castiglione, *The Courtier*, pp. 39-69; 86-91 Guest instructor: Jordi Wiersma (Pascal Institute)

Assignment 3 on *Tom Sawyer*, due by email 3/8, 11:59pm

Week 7

3/9 Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena"

3/11 Plato, *The Laws*, Book VII; selection from Schiller, *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*

Week 8

3/16 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, chapter 1

3/18 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, chapter 3, chapter 12

Week 9

3/23 Rize (dir. LaChapelle, 2005) [SR 11, K24 19:30-22:00]

3/25 Geertz, "Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight"

3/30 SPRING BREAK

4/1 SPRING BREAK

Week 10

4/6 FEDERAL HOLIDAY

4/8 Winnicott, "Playing: A Theoretical Statement"; "Playing: Creative Activity and the Search for the Self"; Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through"

Week 11

4/13 *Bringing Up Baby* (dir. Hawks, 1938) [SR 11, K24 19:30-22:00]

4/15 Kass and Cohen, "For the Love of the Game"; selection from Gumbrecht: *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, pgs. 17-84; Bacchylides IX "For an Athenian [Aglaos?] winner of the foot-races at the Isthmus"

Assignment 4 on sports and games, due by email 4/19, 11:59pm

Week 12

4/20 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (trans. Tolkien), parts 1-2

4/22 *Sir Gawain and the Greek Knight* (trans. Tolkien), parts 3-4

Week 12

4/27 Suits, *The Grasshopper*, chapter 3

4/29 Suits, *The Grasshopper*, chapter 6

Week 13

5/4 Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art*, chapter 1

5/6 Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art*, chapter 9; selection from McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*

Week 14

5/11 Clune, *Gamelife*, chapter 1 “Suspended”; chapter 7 “A Heart of Sky”

5/13 **Student presentations**

5/18 Completion Week

5/20 Completion Week

Final paper due by email, 5/22, 11:59pm