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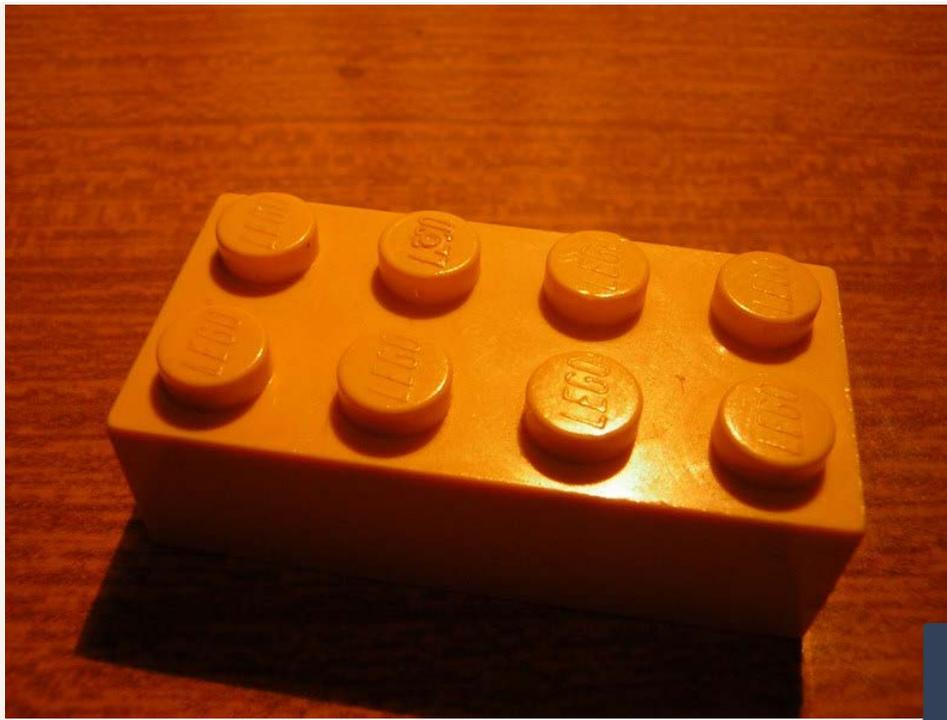
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Announcement: A Preview of the “Practices of Play” Symposium

by
Carrie Andersen

AMS :: ATX is a blog dedicated to representing the many activities and interests of the department of American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Together with the department’s Twitter feed, this blog exists to serve the AMS and Austin communities by acting as a hub for up-to-date information on events and opportunities at UT and beyond.





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This Friday, the Department will play host to what promises to be an incredible event: the “Practices of Play” symposium, an interdisciplinary series of talks and discussions, will “explore play as a mode of being in, exploring, and transforming the world of the early twenty-first century.” Details about the event can be found [here](#), and attendees (all are welcome) can RSVP at the event’s Facebook page [here](#).

We’re pleased to share with you a preview of some conversations that may emerge from the symposium. The speakers were asked to respond briefly to a question about play as method and practice – what does the concept of “play” mean to you, and how does play figure as a practice or method in your work? – and we reprint some replies below.

From **Tanya Clement (School of Information, UT Austin)**:

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New to play as a critical method, I understand play as a situated and social, world-making and world-weary, rule-aware and rule-breaking, real-time act of performing critical interpretation. This method is of interest to me in my current research around designing infrastructure for access and analysis of digital sound collections in the humanities because the spoken texts we study (oral histories, poetry performances, speeches, folk songs and storytelling) are often playful: they are art, real-time performance, social interactions and personal expressions, at once subversive and reflective of the systems of our culture. How can play help us better understand, design, and build new opportunities for critical sound spaces?

From **Eddo Stern (UCLA)**:

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Question: What does the concept of “play” mean to you, and how does play figure as a practice or method in your work?

Answer:

Play is Subversive

Play is Humanistic

Play is Chaotic

Play is irresponsible

Play is Controlling

Play is Liberating

Play is about making friends

Play is Deep

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Play is revealing
Play is Logical
Play is Obsessive
Play is Casual
Play is Mastery
Play is big business
Play is safe
Play is Decadent
Play can save the world
Play is about Killing
Play is Unstable
Play is Unforgiving
Play is Improvisation
Play is Futuristic
Play will ruin you
Play is Irrational
Play is waste
Play is Dangerous
Play is as old as a Dinosaur tail
Play is Science Fiction
Play is Fantastic
Play is Mathematical
Play is Illuminating
Play is revenge
Play is Philosophical
Play is Live
Play is Dark
Play is Childish
Play Doesn't matter at all
but it does

Eddo

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From **Randy Lewis (Department of American Studies, UT Austin):**

African Diaspora Studies

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Play is less a method or practice for me right now than a subject of inquiry whose importance almost took me by surprise. In researching a book about contemporary surveillance culture in the Age of Snowden, I didn't fully anticipate how important play, fun, entertainment and similar subjects would be to my work. Yet now, as I trudge through the dismal glitter of the security-entertainment complex, I see the pressures and temptations of “ludic surveillance” everywhere I go. As a result, my talk is focusing on two things: (1) tentatively mapping out this emerging cultural landscape and (2) exploring new paradigms that encourage us to see beyond the Panopticon to seemingly light-hearted modes of securitization.

From **Carrie Andersen (Department of American Studies, UT Austin)**:

For me, play has been an object of academic inquiry since I began my graduate work at UT. Although my initial work focused on play as a practice of engaging with contested historical narratives, my dissertation explores how both the physical and emotional experiences that videogame play evokes can be utilized for the decidedly not-so-playful practices of war and violence (and principally, combat through military drones). I wonder about the ways that play's ambiguity and unexpected complexity – I hope to excavate how play not only stimulates fun and joy, but also empowerment, anxiety, boredom, and fear

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– make it a potentially devastating practice when directed towards ethically and politically contentious ends.

And from **Patrick Jagoda (Department of English, UChicago)**, Harrington Fellow and the Symposium’s organizer:

Play can inspire curiosity, reflection, imagination, confusion, involvement, flexible optimism, paranoia, apophenia, desire, dissatisfaction, ambiguity, community — and not always, as we may expect, fun. Play isn’t merely freedom. It can never wholly exceed a capitalist system that absorbs it and converts it into surplus value. Play is no mere outside. If play can be disturbing or subversive, it is in its anti-teleological and immanent character, insofar as it has only an internal purpose — it is never a means to an end. I’ll be sharing a much fuller overview of play on Friday at 10am, as the introduction to the symposium.

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