

## Session 1 – PLAY

### Reading

Huizinga, Homo Ludens Ch.1: Nature & Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon.

### Concepts/Keywords

- Play / Playfulness
- Meaningful Play
- Magic Circle → Ritual
- Play as Contest
- Fun

### Goals

- Understand play as a mode to act  
Relate play to a set of activities (ritual, sports, theatre, etc.)
- get across Huizinga's concepts of:
  - Huizinga (and other readings)
    - Meaningful play
    - Magic circle
    - Play as contest
  - Play as primary formative element of human culture

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Huizinga, Dutch historian – Aesthetic approach (art & spectacle as part of culture)

### Play:

- part of human nature (& animals)
- Initially studied by anthropologists, educators, philosophers

Play = a mode that we enter; a state of mind that must be shared

### Questions:

***Q: What are some playful activities (that are not games)?***

*(e.g. make-believe, jokes, pranks, songs, parody, irony)*

***Not all play is a game but play is necessary for having a game.***

### **List of characteristics of play according to Huizinga:**

- 1) Free : Voluntary
  - i) it can be suspended at any time – **unless** it has a cultural function (e.g. a rite or ceremony)
  - ii) **Q: What is a rite or ceremony? Is play part of a rite or ceremony?**
- 2) 2 – Not ordinary / Real Life: not Serious (although Serious /non-laughable vs. fun isn't a productive comparison)
  - i) **Q: What does "Serious" mean?**
  - ii) **A: 'For real' vs. 'This is just a game'**

CMS.300 – Intro to Video Game Theory

- 3) Absorbing nonetheless
- 4) necessary break from Real Life
  - i) *Q: How is play meaningful?*
- 5) 3 – Secluded, Limited (space & time)
- 6) Magic Circle
- 7) repeatable, transmittable (meaning you can teach people how to play)
  - i) *Q: What are some examples of these spaces? (Play fields, theaters, ARGs?)*
- 8) 4 – Regulated:
- 9) Order, organized
- 10) Tension (vs. solution) → Suspense → unknown outcome (relates to 'Space Time' of 3)
- 11) Rules hold up the space of play → binding vs. broken (cheat, spoilsport)
- 12) The game has a distinct ending point
- 13) 5 – Social Grouping:
- 14) Community stays together after playfulness
- 15) Play as exclusive club (dressing up)
- 16) 6 – No material interest:
- 17) No profit can be gained
- 18) (this is contested by *Caillois: pro games, contests, & gambling*)

5 & 6 are both 'The representation of contest'

What do you play for? What's the point?

(Animals play too) → Play in itself, rather than for some purpose (training, relief)

According to Huizinga:

- **CONTEST:** competition \*without consequences
- **REPRESENTATION:** Identification, do something to make it happen \*(wishing)
- (Huizinga), flirting, make-believe, rites, Dromenon, music, dance
- **RITUAL AS SACRED PLAY**

**NEXT CLASS:** GAMES, as specific play activity, quintessentially *ludus*

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