



Play & Toy cultures

ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



LECTURE NOTES ©Katriina Heljakka, 2021

During this lecture, You will learn about PLAY through six perspectives:

1. Why is PLAY worth studying?
 2. How can we define PLAY?
 3. What is the meaning of PLAY in the 21st Century?
 4. Is PLAY for ADULTS and different GENERATIONS?
 5. Let's talk about TOYS
 6. *Serious* approaches to PLAY
- PLAY EXERCISE: #Comicubes – Let's hear about YOUR ideas!

Why is PLAY worth studying?

We study play because life is crap. Life is crap, and it's full of pain and suffering, and the only thing that makes it worth living — the only thing that makes it possible to get up in the morning and go on living — is play. Art and play.

Brian Sutton-Smith

PLAY, PLAYFULNESS and their meanings
How can we define PLAY?

The *many* definitions of PLAY

Play is easy to recognize, but often challenging to define or measure.

"The best we can do is to indicate or illustrate play" (Johnson, 2015, p. xii).

Johnson, J. E., Eberle, S. G., Henricks, T. S., & Kushner, D. (2015). (Eds.),
The Handbook of the Study of Play. Rowman & Littlefield

This lecture begins by indicating that contemporary play may take many forms: it can be solitary or social, embedded in the physical, digital or imaginative, and engaged in by players of different ages, even between individuals of different generations.

The *many* definitions of PLAY ...continued

Gordon (2014) presents what she describes as the adaptive advantages of play: its necessity in the development of metacommunication, finding meaning in experience, emotional stability, flexibility in identity, creative expression, symbolic representation, the ability to form and communicate narratives, social bonding and collaboration. These skills are extremely impactful on an individual's well-being and begin to develop at a very early stage (Gordon, 2014).

Gordon, G. (2014). Well Played: The Origins and Future of Playfulness. *American Journal of Play*, 6(2), 234–266

In this way, play is not only useful for human development, it is *meaningful* as well.

But, in essence, *WHAT* is playing about?

Where playfulness manifests itself as an intrinsic attitude toward the world, and is sometimes considered a personality trait (Shen et al., 2014), play is something even more: Play is behavior (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015)—it is a voluntary, pleasure-driven, and creative interaction with different instruments, people, spaces, and environments—either interactive with others or interactive with the activity itself (Ibid.).

Johan Huizinga (1938/1971), historian and philosopher of play, states that culture itself arises from play.

Van Vleet, M. & Feeney, B. C. (2015). Play behavior and playfulness in adulthood. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(11), 630–643.

***WHAT* is playing? ...continued**

Playing is thought to include both entertaining and pleasurable elements and it is also seen to have meaning for the development of personality and self-expression. In this way, play is active, functional, and productive, not just a state of mind (Smith & Vollstedt, 1985).

Smith, P. K. & Vollstedt, R. (1985). On defining play: An empirical study of the relationship between play and various play criteria. *Child Development*, 56, 1042–1052

PLAY as an ACTIVITY

Play is defined as an activity that is

- (1) self-chosen and self-directed,
- (2) intrinsically motivated
- (3) guided by rules
- (4) imaginative; and
- (5) conducted in an active, alert, but relatively nonstressed frame of mind

(Gray, 2015, p. 125).

Gray, P. (2015). Studying play without calling it that. In J. Johnson, & S. Eberle, & T. Henricks & D. Kushner (Eds.), *The Handbook of the Study of Play* (pp. 121–138). Rowman & Littlefield.

Play is voluntary, and usually, a leisure activity

Play exists in and is conditioned by contexts that are psychological, biological, environmental, social and cultural (Henricks, 2015, p. 390).

Traditionally, play is understood as a particular type of leisure activity (Giddens, 1964, p. 81)

Henricks, T. S. (2015). Where Are We Now. Challenges for the Study of Play. In J. Johnson, & S. Eberle, & T. Henricks & D. Kuschner (Eds.), *The Handbook of the Study of Play* (pp. 381–391). Rowman & Littlefield.

Giddens, A. (1964). Notes on the concepts of play and leisure. *The Sociological Review*, 12(1), 73–89.

Animals are known to play

It is ubiquitous in all mammalian orders and other classes of animals (Burghardt, 2005).

Burghardt, G. (2005). *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the limits*. MIT Press.

Prototypical qualities of free play

Play is beneficial in many ways: It is simultaneously useless and fun as it is crucial for our mental well-being and self-expression.

- Intrinsically motivated
- Voluntary
- Open-ended structure
- Imaginative
- Stimulating
- Social
- Emotional resonance
- Diversity of forms

"A Panorama of Play-A Literature Review", Digital Futures Commission, 2020

Homo ludens-the playing human being

Homo ludens, the playing human-being (Huizinga, 1938) engages both in games and open-ended play activities during the lifespan. Unstructured "free play" and structured game play can also merge together—around free-form play, the "game-like" regularities and goals characteristic of social activities develop through interplay between players.

Huizinga, J. (1938/1971) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Beacon Press.

Caillois' (1958/61) categorization of play

Following Roger Caillois' categorization of play types—open-ended *paidic* play dominated by free improvisation, and *ludic*, more structured play, which requires a greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity (1961)—play may manifest as less regulated or rule-bound, depending on the activity. Caillois further conceptualizes play as a phenomenon embedded in actions related to *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx* depending on how the roles of competition, chance, or simulation present themselves in the playing.

For example, one may play a game like chess (*agôn*); engage in games of chance, like roulette or a lottery (*alea*); take on the role of a character in play, such as a hero or villain (*mimicry*); or play in ways that bring the player into a state of dizziness and disorder (*ilinx*, or *vertigo*).

Caillois, R. (1961). *Man, Play and Games*. University of Illinois Press.

What is the meaning of PLAY in the 21st Century?

...the time of the *ludic turn*

...the ludic turn in Western culture, the shift in sensibility that makes it possible to see contemporary living through the lens of play. (Henricks, 2017, p. 7)

Brian Sutton-Smith (2017). *Play for Life. Play Theory and Play as Emotional Survival*. (Toim.) Charles Lamar Phillips and the editors of the American Journal of Play, The Strong.

The mindset of our society has changed drastically. Puritanism with its anti-play attitude has virtually become a laughing matter. We now have a culture of play that overshadows all previous cultural achievements.

Ernst Lurker (2014)

https://www.playart.org/essay_introtoplayculture.php

“Playing is what people do when they create culture.”

(Sutton-Smith in Smith & Vollstedt, 1985)

We play...

...to find out more about what we do not know yet (Henricks, 2017, 11)

(This is from Henricks' foreword in the volume listed below:)

Brian Sutton-Smith (2017) *Play for Life. Play Theory and Play as Emotional Survival*. Compiled and edited by Charles Lamar Phillips and the editors of the American Journal of Play, The Strong.

The Relationship between Games and Play

During different times play may receive diverse forms and the human expresses himself in play in different ways...Play seems to be both play and playing of games, and we can discuss either play theory or game theory depending on which area is emphasized. (Karkama, 1981, 15)

[Pelit ja leikit. Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 61. Toim. Pekka Laaksonen. SKS, Helsinki, 1981.](#)

→ contemporary play as an *oculocentric, phygital* and *connected* practice

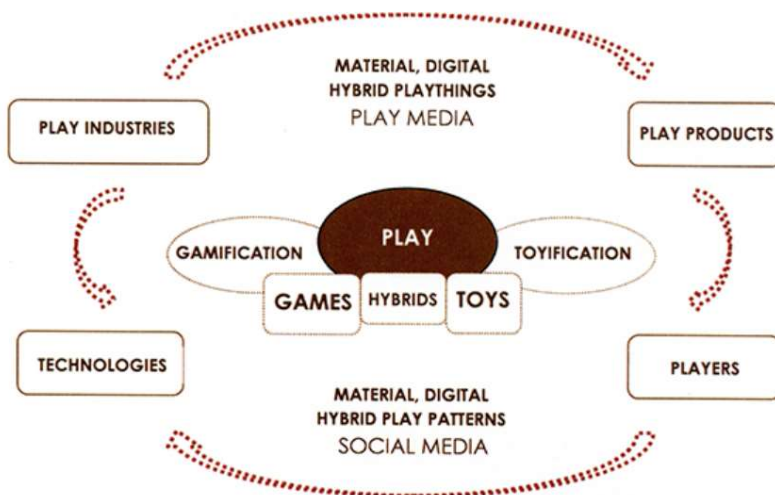


Figure 1. The ecosystem of contemporary play: A visualization of linked players and platforms (Heljakka, 2016).

Heljakka, K. (2016) *Strategies of Social Screen Play(ers) across the Ecosystem of Play: Toys, games and hybrid social play in technologically mediated playscapes*, Wider Screen 1–2/2016.

Is PLAY for **ADULTS** and different **GENERATIONS**?

Playful adults are...

- guided by internal motivation and are oriented toward process
- attribute their own meanings to objects or behaviors and are not bound by what they see
- focus on pretend and seek freedom from externally imposed rules
- are actively involved

Rubin, K. H., Fein, G., G. & Vandenberg, B. (1983). "Play" from Museen, Paul H. and Hetherington, E. Mavis, *Handbook of child psychology: formerly Carmichael's manual of child psychology 4*, 693–774. Wiley.

What is a **KIDULT**? An attempt to define the **KIDULT**

According to the Urban Dictionary, "A kidult is an adult that prefers items that society deems are for a younger person. An adult who plays with toys or games." (O'Keefe, 2005). This figure, writes Bernardini, "is the archetype of an encouraged regression to facilitate the promotion of goods which are only apparently addressed to young people and children" (Bernardini, 2014, p. 41).

Bernardini, J. (2014). The Infantilization of the Postmodern Adult and the Figure of Kidult. *Postmodern Openings*, 2(5), June, 39–55.

Adult toy collectors

"Collectors are a pimple on the elephants ass".
Larry Bernstein, Hasbro, in G. Wayne Miller *Toy Wars* (1998).

How does **CONTEMPORARY TOY RESEARCH** define the (toy) playing adult?

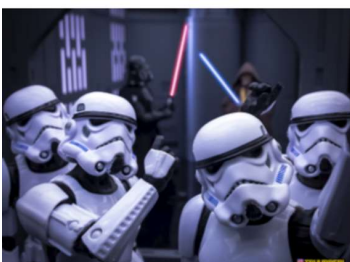
PROFILES OF ADULT TOY PLAYERS

In earlier studies, I have profiled adult toy players in four subgroups: toy collectors, toying artists, toy designers, and 'everyday players' (Heljakka, 2013). Play doesn't require industrially produced toys, but especially for adults, toys as designed and aesthetic, collectable, displayable and customizable entities, such as character toys, seem to act as objects inviting and pushing into play—like keys in opening the gate to imaginary worlds and creative activities.

Heljakka, K. (2013) *Principles of Adult Play(fulness) in Contemporary Toy Cultures. From Wow to Flow to Glow*. Doctoral dissertation. Aalto university.

Let's talk (more) about **TOY PLAY**

Themes in contemporary (adult) toy play



Heljakka, K. (2018). Replaying the Legends' Worlds: Toying with Star Wars 'Expanded Universe' in Adult Play. *Kinephanos* June 2018.

Current phenomena inspiring (adult toy) play

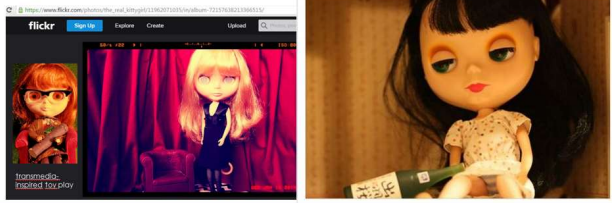
Identity play, world-building (world-play),
toy activism!



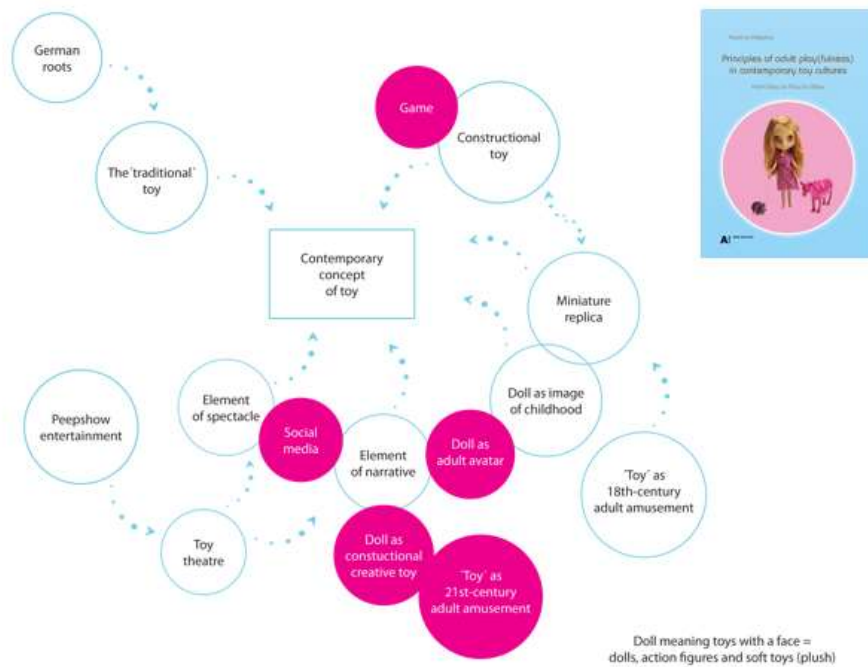
Heljakka, K. (2015). Lelulaatikon rajoja rikkomassa: Tapaus Ken ja samanarvoistuvat nykyleikit. *Wider Screen*, 3.



Re-playing, media play and doll-dramas



Heljakka, K. and Harviainen, J.T. (2019). From Displays and Dioramas to Doll Dramas: Adult World Building and World Playing with Toys, *American Journal of Play*, Vol. 11, Issue 3.



Re-development of Fleming's thinking by Heljakka, 2011.

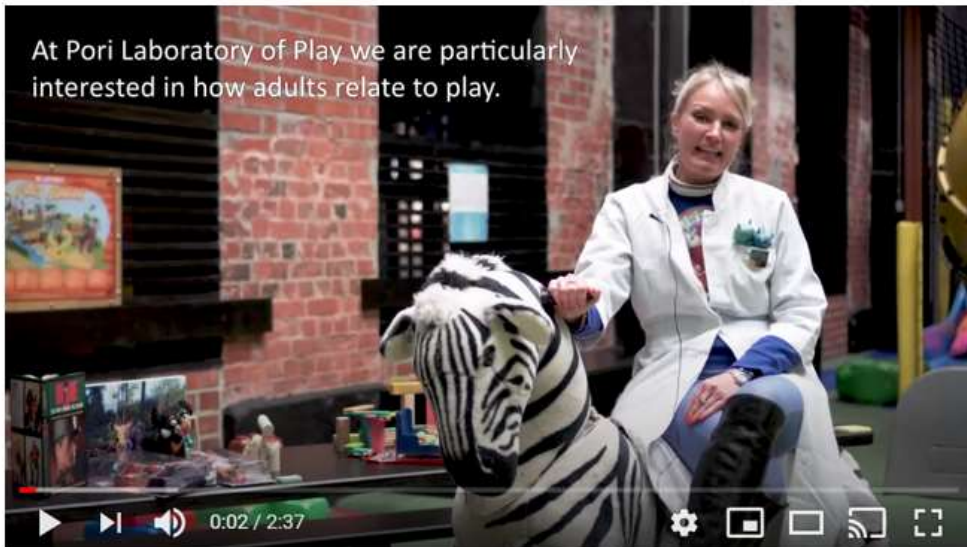
Serious applications of PLAY, some examples

Play (and toy activism) with the world's most popular character toy?

Pandemic toy play against social distancing: Teddy bears, window-screens and playing for the common good in times of self-isolation, WiderScreen ,11.5.2020

We are living in an increasingly playifying world

Play has entered the public sphere, even current working life. For example, world's leading organizations are incorporating playful elements in their physical space and cultures. Gamification affects how workers are motivated and playification aims to make things more enjoyable by adding playful elements to work and education. In the playifying world interaction, participatory practices and collective experiences are of interest. Toys, games, apps and playful spaces aim to cater their users with experiences and well-being.



To access this video with subtitles in english, please use the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neq0LaH-Ld0>

Defining *playification*

According to Scott, “playification is using engaging play based interaction in situation and non-play contexts to make a product, service, activity, or application more engaging, enjoyable, and motivational” (Scott, 2012, n.p.).

Scott, A. (2012). *Meaningful Play: How Play is Changing the Future of Our Health*. In Industrial Design Society of America. IDSA Educational Symposium, 2012.

Example: Playification (& Gamification) of urban space



TOYIFICATION – A CONCEPTUAL STATEMENT

Toyification, as defined (Thibault & Heljakka, 2018), refers to the use of aesthetics and functionality familiar from toys to the use of other aspects of culture, such as sex toys, games, fashion, the furniture industry, kitchen utensils and household appliances—even the toyification of technology as toyified devices like robots.

Thibault, M. & Heljakka, K. (2018) *Toyification. A Conceptual Statement*. 8th International Toy Research Association World Conference, International Toy Research Association (ITRA), Jul 2018, Paris, France. hal-02083004

PLAYFUL LEARNING: some examples

Playful learning for preschoolers with the IoT

Playful learning for preschoolers with the IoT



Tutkimuksessamme käsiteltävien verkottuneiden Lelujen Internet -hahmojen ryhmä. Vasemmalta oikealle: Fisher-Price'n Smart Toy Bear, Cogni-Toysin Dino, Spin Masterin Hatchimals ja Wonder Workshopin Dash. Kuva: Katrina Heijakka, 2017.

Heijakka, K., & Ihämäki, P. (2019) Persuasive Toy Friends and Preschoolers: Playtesting IoT Toys. Teoksessa Giovanna Mascheroni & Donell Green (toim.) *The Internet of Toys: Practices, Affordances and the Political Economy of Children's Play*. Palgrave.



Animal and robot-assisted study on playful learning



Playing with the opposite of uncanny: Empathic Responses to Learning with a Companion-Technology Robot Dog vs. Real Dog

Katrina Heijakka
University of Turku
Por, Finland
katrina.heijakka@utu.fi

Piira Ihämäki
University of Turku
Por, Finland
piira.ihamaki@utu.fi

Alex Lennstrom
University of Turku
Rauma, Finland
alexander.lennstrom@utu.fi

Playfied and gamified university education

- 80+ students of marketing at TSE
- Case: "Gamify the Airport Security Check"



Ihämäki P., Heijakka K. (2020) Out of the Box, Into the Cubes: Envisioning User Experiences Through a Tool for Gamification, Toyification and Playification. In: Brooks A., Brooks E. (eds) *Interactivity, Game Creation, Design, Learning, and Innovation*. ARTIST 2019. DLI 2019. Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering, vol 328. Springer, Cham. http://doi-org-443.webvpn.fjmu.edu.cn/10.1007/978-3-030-53294-9_5

Playful learning as part of university teaching

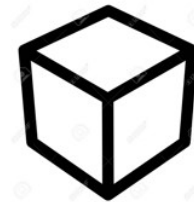


Franzén, R., Heijakka, K. & Nieminen, L. (2020) Playful Approaches to Entrepreneurial Competencies in University Teaching—Introducing the 4Cs Model. Proceedings of Applied Human Factors and Ergonomics Conference affiliated Conference on Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, July 16–20, San Diego, California. Springer, Cham.

#Comicubes assignment for this lecture

By using the playful Comicubes prototyping tool (pdf attached)—either in physical or digital format, and employing—cutting, pasting and otherwise illustrating images or text on the Comicubes (Up to You!)—please consider the topic of PLAY and answer the six questions below:

1. What is Your most prominent experience of childhood play?
2. Your favorite toy/game/play activity when You were growing up?
3. What is Your favorite toy/game/play activity now, as (young) adult?
4. Give an example of play, which You think helps to foster creativity?
5. Which technology do You think has most influenced 21st century play?
6. What could be an example of intergenerational play (i.e. play between generations)?



Meet the creator

Toy & play researcher, visual artist and designer of playful interventions, Katriina Heljakka, leads the Pori Laboratory of Play research group at University of Turku (digital culture studies).

Heljakka currently studies connected toys, playful environments, tools and techniques in the workspace, and the visual, material, digital and social cultures of play. Heljakka is integrating insights in creativity and playful learning in her academic practice.
katriina.heljakka@utu.fi



#porilaboratoryofplay #PLOP #playfulinterventions ©katriinaheljakka2021

PLEASE NOTE:

The lecture notes material is intended for the participants of this course only.
Do NOT share the lecture notes compendium without permission of the creator. Thanks!

©KatriinaHeljakka, 2021