

**M. Curtis Allen,
Huron University College, English and Cultural Studies**

**Submission for 2024-2025 Course Proposals
Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism**

Course Title: “Playing at the Absolute: On Games, Thought, Politics, and Time”

Rationale: This course will appeal to a wide breadth of interests in the contemporary theoretical humanities and social sciences including: contemporary continental and comparative philosophy, aesthetics, cultural and media studies, social theory and political economy, critical race theory, as well as queer theory/feminism, and the digital humanities. It brings together threads from German idealism, Marxism, and post-structuralism with ideas in computer science and ecology, Afropessimism, Indigeneity, cyberfeminism, and decolonial theory.

Course Description: This course looks at the concepts of ‘game’ and ‘play’ as essential modalities of human experience and action, ones within which ideas of freedom, contingency, agency, and art are bound by links connecting the structures of thought and language with the deep apprehension of time as well as with politics as a horizonless activity of collective self-creation. Beginning with the French surrealist sociologist Roger Caillois’ *Les jeux et les hommes* as our *locus classicus*, we approach theories of games and play in relation to themes of chance (*alea*), rules (*logos*), competition (*agon*), mimicry (*mimesis*), and vertigo (*ilinx*), intersecting everything from the ‘taming of chance’ in probability and the strategy of conflict in game theory to the resurgence of catastrophic contingencies in global finance and metaphysics, from Hegel’s so-called ‘master-slave’ dialectic to the ‘vengeance of vertigo’ in Frank B. Wilderson III. In doing so, this course aims to examine the special role of games and play in both individual experience and the free construction of communities, both real and utopian (even when under extreme unfreedom), in order to gain perspicuity on the structural (economic, colonial, racial, sexual, gender) conditions of the current regimes of control inhibiting genuinely creative orientations toward common life today.

Syllabus:

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance/Participation (20)

Presentation 1 (roughly 30min) (20)

Presentation 2 (roughly 30min) (20)

Final Essay (between 15-30 pages) (40)

OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE

* Texts are subject to change. All texts are available for presentations. Texts sub-ordered by letters (a., b., c., ...) are OPTIONAL texts.

Itinerary

Week 1. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*

- a. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (selections)

Chance (*Alea*)

Week 2. Elie Ayache, “Medium of Contingency”

AND: Susan Strange, “Casino Capitalism” in *Casino Capitalism*

- a. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (selections)
- b. Mallarmé, *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*
- c. Gilles Deleuze, “Twenty-Third Series of the Aion” in *Logic of Sense*

Week 3. Yuk Hui, “Incomputability and Algorithmic Contingency” in *Recursivity and Contingency*

- a. Cécile Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise* (selections)
- b. Shannon and Weaver: “A Mathematical Theory of Communication”
- c. Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Societies of Control”

Week 4. Elizabeth Sperry, “Relational Autonomy, Moral Luck, and Social Oppression”

- a. B. Williams and T. Nagel, “Moral Luck”
- b. Donna Haraway, “A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies.” (1994)

Extras

- c. C.S. Peirce, “Design and Chance”
- d. Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (selections)
- e. Marc G. Jensen, “John Cage, Chance Operations, and the Chaos Game: Cage and the “I Ching”.”

Rules (*Logos*)

- Week 5.** Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play”
- a. Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time”
 - b. Sigmund Freud, “Fort/Da” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

- Week 6.** Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (selections)
AND: J.-L. Lyotard, “Wittgenstein ‘After’” in *Political Writings*
- a. Sellars, “Some Reflections on Language Games”
 - b. Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”
 - c. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*
 - d. Grice, “Logic and Conversation”
 - e. Meredith Williams, *Blind Obedience* (selections)

- Week 7.** Bernard Suits, “Is Life a Game We Are Playing?”
- a. B. Suits, “What is a Game?” and “Games and Paradox”
 - b. Martin Gardner, “Mathematical Games: The Fantastic Combinations of John Conway's New Solitaire Game “Life”.”
 - c. C. Thu Nguyen, “Competition as Cooperation”

Competition (*Agon*)

- Week 8.** G.W.F. Hegel, “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*
- a. Brandon Hogan, “Reading Fanon on Hegel”
 - b. Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach”

- Week 9.** Achille Mbembe, “The Society of Enmity”
- a. Peter Galison, “The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision”
 - b. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*
 - c. Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”
 - d. Frantz Fanon, “On Violence” in *Wretched of the Earth*

Mimicry (*Mimesis*)

- Week 10.** Aristotle, *Poetics*

- a. Plato, “Book X” in *Republic*
- b. Gonzalo Frasca, “Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology”
- c. Brian Massumi, “The Zoo-ology of Play” in *What Animals Teach us About Politics*

Week 11. Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty”

- a. Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (selections)
- b. Christophe Menke, “Play: The Operation of Force” in *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*
- c. Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia”

Vertigo (*Ilinx*)

Week 12. Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents.”

- a. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (selections)
- b. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (selections)

Week 13. Thomas King, “The One about Coyote Going West”

- a. Henry Louis Gates Jr., “A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey” in *The Signifying Monkey*.
- b. Ray Brassier, “Prometheanism and its Critics”

Week 14. Gilles Deleuze, “Tenth Series of the Ideal Game” in *Logic of Sense*

- a. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (selections)
- b. Christian Kerslake, “The Vertigo of Philosophy”