Welcome to an interactive, experiential exploration of historic and contemporary uses of play as universal impulse of humans, and often a palliative to the grosser aspects of ancient and modern societies. What is there in human beings which enables them to play? Why is play considered an organic capacity of people from the beginning of recorded history? What is included within human play?

Dr. Rozilyn Wilder

What, then, is the right way of living?

Life must be lived as play.

Plato

To pray is to yield oneself to a kind of magic, to enact oneself the absolutely other, to pre-empt the future, to give the lie to the inconvenient world of fact. In “play”/prayer earthly realities become, of a sudden, things of the transient moment, presently left behind, then disposed of and buried in the past; the mind is prepared to accept the unimagined and incredible, to enter a world where different laws apply, to be relieved of all the weights that beat it down, to be free, kingly, unfettered and divine.”

Hugo Rahner
Required Reading:

Books:

*The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman

*Free Play. Improvisation for Life and Art*, Stephan Nachamanovitch

*The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman

Book Excerpts:

The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim

Homo Ludens, by J. Huizinga

Christ the Harlequin from *The Feast of Fools* by Harvey Cox, Who’s That Girl?, by Steven Dubin from *The Barbie Chronicles*

Kapchan’s *Intangible Rights*

Sondag’s *Against Interpretation.*

Benjamin’s *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

Articles:

The Thought and Language of Children by James Britton

Inanimate Selves and Other Realities in a Puppet World by Andrew Solomon
Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to the sources, concepts, theory and experience of play. The course will offer varied experiences, readings, and group process in order to provide a means of experiencing how and why play is an essential function of human existence.

Course Objectives/Learning Goals:

1. Students will develop an individual concept of play based upon developmental, political, spiritual, psychodynamic, projective, creative and improvisatory theories of play examined in the course readings and in-class experiential activities and discussions.
2. Students will experiment with and apply their emerging theory of play in a final project for class.
3. By the end of this course, students will be able to identify and express in verbal and written form how their emerging concept of play relates to their integrative educational process in Gallatin.
4. By the end of this course, students will be able to express in verbal and written form how their emerging concept of play can serve as a basis for well-being in adult life.

Syllabus:

Week 1, 9/3/15  Introductions, warm-up, activity (with toys of course), review of syllabus.

- Discussion: Plato, Aristotle, Empedocles -- an anthropological introduction to play from western literature. Review Key concepts of course: Distancing Model, paradox, ambivalence, Midrash, mimesis and diegesis, transference, transformation, personification, persona, projection, identification...

Week 2, 9/10/15  Play and Child Development
• **Assignment**: Bring in a toy to class, one that connects you warmly to your childhood, think about what age you were when you played with his toy and what the toy offered at that developmental age.

• **Read**: Article the Thought and Language of Children, start The Golden Compass

• **Class**: Review, Dramatic Developmental Stages, Activity: Share your toy through play then Group Activity: Toys, games, and stories *the art of doing and telling*. Discussion

---

**Week 3, 9/17/15 Play and Fairy Tales: Reinterpreting the symbolism of familiar children's stories**

• **Assignment**: Written Response 1

• **Read** Bettleheim: The Uses of Enchantment pp.: 1 - 156, Then pick a Fairy Tale from Part II to read about, Read The Golden Compass

• **Class**: Playing with Fairy Tales. Bring in your favorite one and be prepared to share it/tell it to the class. Group Activity.

---

**Week 4, 9/24/15 Play and Puppetry: Authenticity verses a resistance to realism in play as exemplified through relationship between puppet, puppetmaster, and audience**

• **Assignment**: Written Response 2

• **Read**: Article Inanimate Selves, Other Realities in a Puppet World, Read: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
• **Read and Finish**: The Golden Compass

• **Prepare**: Make a puppet to reflect your daemon, name the puppet

• **Class**: Present puppets in class, Activity, Discussion
Week 5, 10/1/15 Play and Spirituality

- **Assignment**: Ritual Project
- **Read** *Christ the Harlequin* from Harvey Cox *The Feast of Fools*

Rituals Project

"Ritual is the established form for a ceremony, a system of rites, a formal and customarily performed act or series of acts." (Webster's Dictionary) Through ritual the "indigenous drama of everyday life takes on symbolic form and serves specific purpose." (Landy 1994)

Rituals Continued:

Play is an elemental aspect of ritual. Through ritual everyday reality is transformed into drama through the creative/imaginative act. The "double life" or the inherent dramatic tension between the everyday and the fictional is engaged and activated and celebrated in the performance of ritual.

Assignment:

- Research a ritual and prepare a 5-minute (MAXIMUM) presentation for class.

- The presentation must include:
  - Your sense of how this ritual is connected to or rooted in some elemental cycle or rhythm of life (birth, death, coupling, seasons, etc)
  - Your sense of how the ritual uses elements of play that we have discussed in class so far (assimilation/accommodation, projection, identification, imitation, storytelling, paradox, integration, playspace, transformation, etc) and a brief discussion of why, therefore, it is playful.
• References. Please use the form below and return to Maria on 10/23
• YOU MUST HAVE FUN WITH THIS OR ELSE….

******************************************************************************

**Rituals Project - The Art of Play – model of paper to be handed in during class:**

Name of Ritual: __________________________________________________________

Resources: 1) ____________________________________________________________

2) ____________________________________________________________

3) ____________________________________________________________

**Week 6, 10/8/15 Play as free play - Play as deep play**

What are the elements of deep story or deep play? This class will focus on how music and drama can be used to explore emergent themes and issues through play.

• **Assignment: Written Response 4**

• **Read:** Operatic Play: A Drama and Music Therapy Collaboration
• **Class:** We will improvise a musical.

**Week 7, 10/15/15 Play and Music**

**Guest Speaker** Writer and jazz critic Steve Futterman of *The New Yorker* will discuss the concept of play in music. Music is a form of play utilizing the basic elements of play discussed so far this semester: tension, paradox, improvisation, transformation.

• **Assignment:** Written Response 3  
• **Read:** Huizinga Chapters

**Week 8, 10/24/15 Play and Improvisation**

• **Read:** *Free Play: Improvisations for Life and Art* More improvisational play and discussion of the reading  
• **Assignment:** Written Response 5

• **Mid Term Exam:** Pick a role that has emerged from the class so far ("Bettleheim", "Jung" "Freud", "Barbie","Steve Futterman”, “Liz Davis” a personal role, a role from popular culture or your daemon role. Come as your chosen character. Be prepared to deliver a brief monologue (in role) about your impressions of the class so far. You can will be quizzed on key concepts of play from the readings and class experiences. Your observations will be authentic but filtered, colored, exaggerated, caricatured, embellished by the role you are playing.

**Week 9, 10/29/15 Play and Politics: “…Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down.”**

**Read:** Postman’s *The Disappearance of Childhood*
The children of 17th Century England created a rhythmic and sung game about the bubonic plague called “Ring Around the Rosy.” Did it calm fears? Did it help place the trauma of the tell-tale rosy rashes and frightening and omni-present funeral pyres of the plague in a context?

Children today play the game without knowing its is about the illness and death that created it and yet in contemporary voices the trauma of children 350 years ago echoes. Children naturally “play out” their fears in order to heal trauma.

Consider the children of any war-torn or traumatized community where the children co-exist in very different but hauntingly similar parallel universes oftentimes one house or one street apart: Israeli settlers and Palestinians on the West Bank, Bosnians and Serbians at the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia, Eastern European Jews and Christian Nazis at the end of World War II, Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, Muslims and Africans in Darfur, African American and white children along the Katrina-ravaged Mississippi Delta or along the rivers edge between Riverdale and Upper Morningside Heights.

Think up a single and simple play activity, game, or creative intervention for those children that would facilitate the finding of common ground and healing for them. Bring in the activity and do it with your classmates.

This is not an assignment designed to overly simplify complex socio-political issues but in the spirt of “think global act local,” in the spirit of the power and simplicity of child’s play, how would you use play to help heal a group of traumatized children?
• Name the population you are addressing
• Take the group through the simple activity (5-minute max)
• Discussion

Week 10, 11/5/15 Play and Performance

• **Assignment:** Written Response 6
• **Read:** Whose that Girl? By Steven Dubin
• **Watch this film:**
  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rACJWPd3VnI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rACJWPd3VnI)

  Todd Haynes film Superstar, The Karen Carpenter Story. Everyone must watch this film before class as it will be the basis for our discussion.

  
  [http://youtu.be/LO1c7MEOj_4](http://youtu.be/LO1c7MEOj_4)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aH986VE47M8

• **Class:** “Food as Performance.” Assignment TBA.

Week 11, 11/12/15 Assignment: Creative Scavenger Hunt: The Objectified Self Class meets on the streets of New York

• **Read** *Duende* by Lorca
• **Read Against Interpretation** by Sondag
• **Assignment:**
Walking the street or in the parks or examining the contents of a garbage can you will follow the instructions below.

You will choose one of the prompts below and answer all four questions by finding an object to represent the answer to each of the prompts. You will locate one found object to represent the following:

This is who I am
This is who I am not
This is what stands in my way
This is who I want to be

OR

The Hero
The Villain
The Obstacle
The Journey or Destination

OR

The I
The Thou
The pain or conflict
The love

OR

This is myself.
This is my city.
This is my relationship to my government.

This is my place in the world.

Take a walk through the village with your eyes open, mediating on one group of four concepts and see what your eyes are drawn to. Don’t second-guess yourself.

Gather the four objects and write about each from Lorca’s perspective and from Sondag’s. What is each thing AND what is it not? What is the mechanism that exists between “what it is” and “what it is not” that permits the transformation between the “two worlds? What is at play within the symbolic meaning of each object? AND what would Sondag say about this? Can you aspire to Sondag’s ‘transparence’ or ‘luminosity’ in your description?

You will bring your essay and objects to class on this date or bring photographs of the objects if you are a germaphobe.

Week 12, 11/19/15 Performances and Discussion

Assignment due: Written Response 7

11/26/15 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13, 12/3/15 Performances and Discussions

Week 14, 12/10/15 Performances and Discussion. Papers Due. Closing Ritual

Requirements:
• Attendance at all classes. Absences must be excused with MD note. Any absence in excess of 2 will be reason for a reduced grade. Must call or email if you will be absent.
• Participation in group process and class discussions.
• Making puppets.
• Read all required books and articles.
• Submit 7 Written Responses on dates due. **The Written Response is one to two pages in length.** It integrates the reading done for the class with the activity done in the class. The Written Response is subjective like a journal entry. You write of your impressions and of your experience. You tie together the academic experience (reading) with the actual experience (class). Be creative. Be simple. Grading Rubric for assignment:

1. Are there at least two direct quotes from the reading?
2. Does the paper link the reading(s) to the class activity?
3. Is the paper properly formatting using MLA or APA style?
4. Is there a bibliography attached with works cited?
5. Does the paper demonstrate insight into the theory of play being discussed?

• Final Paper. Please write your manifesto on play. Discuss your understanding of play via your personal experience in the class. How and why is play an essential means of making sense of and/or finding the meaning in life? How has an analysis of play and its theories helped you to understand yourself better? To answer, analyze the roles that have emerged for you in class in terms of role type, quality, and function. Make special reference to your performance piece and daemon role. Refer to the texts used in class. Although this is a personal paper, be sure to include theoretical reflections from the reading, as a means of framing and making sense of your experience. **10 pages of actual writing plus a bibliography/references page(s).**

• Performance Art: 10 minutes in length that represents an unresolved issue, a question, a political idea, a creative impulse, a ritual, an expression of meaning for you about yourself at this time in your life. Through the play of performance you will find a means of expressing something that cannot be expressed as well in words as it can through action or art. You can use your performance to gain perspective on a life event or to make a culminating statement about your life at this moment or to form a political/social idea via performance. Try to shape an experience that you can explore without feeling overwhelmed while at the same time experiencing its emotional and aesthetic challenge. Your performance will be neither too *overdistanced* nor too *underdistanced*.

Performances can be **one-person or group** pieces (Maximum of three people). Those who choose to perform solo are encouraged to people the stage with *projective objects* i.e. puppets, dolls, masks, audio images. Through your performance, you will find a balanced way to present your unresolved piece of life experience or concept.
In your process focus upon a single role and its counterpart e.g. victim/survivor, in order to explore and discover a way to live in the role ambivalence. If possible, introduce a Guide role or daemon role as mediator between the two. Simplicity is key.

Rules for Performance Pieces:

- Keep the tech simple as there will be only brief time to set up and break down the performance space
- Performances must be planned and rehearsed but not scripted so as to leave room for the of the moment improvisation.
- You must use the classroom space itself
- This is an academic environment we will playfully maintain a level of appropriate academic decorum. No nudity, no self-mutilation, no violence, no human or animal sacrifices. Nothing gross. Things should "staged" only. If you have an idea for your performance that you believe might be of questionable propriety please run it by me first.

Grading Policy:

Grades based upon classroom participation, completion of all creative assignments, Written Responses (7 in total) (participation, and assignments worth 50%) and final paper (worth 50%), although the primary basis of the grade will be the final paper. The performance will not be graded. However, you cannot pass the course without completing this assignment.

Papers will be handed in on time on the date that they are due. If the paper is late their will be deductions ½ point per day late from the grade.

Attendance Policy:

All absences must be excused. Absences in excess of two will result in a diminished grade.

NYU Policy on plagiarism and fabrication:
This class follows NYU’s zero tolerance policy with regard to plagiarism. Taking the writing of someone else, in whole or in part and presenting it as your own will result in serious academic consequences.

You will use quotations in your papers and follow MLA or APA style book for references and bibliography. You will always make clear the difference between your thoughts or ideas and those belonging to someone else. Great scholarship is the ability to use the ideas of others to build your own unique argument on a topic.

**Statement of Academic Integrity:** As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)).

**NYU Health Policy:**

Please know that NYU’s first priority is the health and safety of all its students. We therefore strongly encourage students to act responsibly when faced with a potential health emergency and/or substance-related medical concern by getting help for themselves or friends whenever they feel that their health and/or safety is at risk. Students with questions regarding NYU’s Emergency Considerations policy may send an email, anonymously if they prefer, to wellness.exchange@nyu.edu.

**Students with Disabilities:**

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University’s policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity.

The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) determines qualified disability status and assists students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services.
Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability is required to register with the CSD for assistance.