Submission Guidelines

Media Fields Journal: Critical Explorations in Media and Space

Issue 8: Playgrounds

Submission Deadline: Dec. 1, 2013

This issue of Media Fields investigates the connections between media, space, power, and various approaches to "play" across culture and society. In this issue we seek conversations that embrace play in all its polysemy. We invite papers that investigate how mediated play spaces can become spaces to negotiate labor, power, resistance, agency, or subjectivity. To that end, what is a mediated play space? What is the history of mediated play spaces? How are non-play spaces subverted to become play spaces, and what are the political consequences of this subversion? Moreover, what is the political potential of play?

In video game studies, play is often discussed as a free activity that nonetheless is governed by structures, rules, and protocol; and driven by clear goals or win states. This understanding is largely built upon the theoretical work of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois. Although play can often be seen as non-political, frivolous, and anathema to the serious concerns of society and culture, play in fact constitutes - and itself mediates - our everyday lives, (re)shaping our material world and producing new fields of meaning and action. In Roland Barthes's discussion of the term, play designates a capacity for variation and change: to have play. Alternatively, play enables, or is activated by, expressions of individuality and agency: to play. In the first sense play is expressed as capacity; in the second sense play is agential, a co-active engagement of player, interface, and environment. However, software studies has cautioned that spaces of play, in all of their manifestations, are also bounded spaces, geographically, algorithmically, and ideologically. Indeed, Alexander Galloway has explored both the ideological power of interfaces and code as well as the agentive potential to resist or subvert these forces through various forms of play. We purposefully invite a range of submissions that continue to map these relationships between bounded structure and playful expression, especially within, but by no means limited to, virtual worlds and digital games.

We are inspired by the work of those media scholars who have explored some of these issues already. Henry Jenkins’ influential article, "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces," provides an early and enduring example of
an approach to the problem of media, space, and play through a gendered perspective. Likewise, Bernadette Flynn’s essay, “Geography of the Digital Hearth,” explores the migrating play space of the video game experience from the arcade, to the den, to its central place in the living room, offering not only a genealogy of video game play space but also a significant contribution to the continuing study of changing living room dynamics explored by Lynn Spigel, Cecila Tichi, and more recently Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine. Finally, although digital games lend themselves to the study of mediated play spaces, we are also seek scholarship interested in the ways other media, including film, television, radio, and digital culture, construct and are constructed as fields of play.

Thus, our approach is multivalent. We invite a wide range of submissions that consider this complexity, possibly addressing the following topics:

- Military Play Space: How is play deployed to reproduce or aestheticize positions of power and Empire? How can play subvert and reconstruct these spaces? These questions may extend the work of Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter into digital and cultural geography.

- Sport, Space, and Experiences: How can we understand the experience of viewing sporting events in relation to mediated play spaces, either in the living room, at the sports bar, or even at the live event itself? How does play - L.A.R.P., Parkour, or skateboarding, for example - reclaim space and reimagine space?

- The Domestic Space and Video Games: Following work by Bernadette Flynn and Ben Aslinger, how do digital games and other entertainment technologies augment the spatial, social, and family dynamics of the contemporary domestic space? How does play reshape the domestic space?

- Gender, Sexuality, Race, Class, Identity, and Online Spaces: How do people play with identity and power in virtual spaces? How can virtual space be used tactically to oppose oppressive powers?

- Queer/Feminist Gaming: representations of gendered and sexualized spaces in mainstream video games, gendered/queer geographies of video game production, gendered/queer spaces of gaming culture?

- Spaces of Surveillance: How can play be mobilized as a form of resistance to spaces of surveillance? Work here might follow in the vein of projects from the Critical Art Ensemble.

- Play and Labor; Play and Anonymity; Play and Resistance; Counter-Play
We are looking for essays of 1500-2500 words, digital art projects, and audio or video interviews exploring the relationship between media, space, power, and play. We encourage approaches to this topic from scholars in cinema and media studies, anthropology, architecture, art and art history, communication, ecology, geography, literature, musicology, sociology, and other relevant fields.

Email submissions to Alex Champlin and John Vanderhoef at submissions@mediafieldsjournal.org