

Event at the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies

International Symposium *Playing Japan: Toys, Games, Literature, and Language Education*

Wed, 23 Sept. 2020, 13:00–17:00 [via Zoom]

### Outline

Under the umbrella name of “play/playing” this symposium aims at exploring how a dialogue with Game Studies may contribute to studying Japanese language, literature and visual culture under contemporary conditions, that is, in digital environments which foreground texts as sites for an “ecology of playthings” (Sicart, *Play Matters*, 2017). The scope ranges from games in the strict sense to the role of play (Jp. *asobi*) in Japan’s literary and visual culture (with a special focus on entertaining fiction and serialized as ‘gamified’ narratives) to Japanese language education (which occupies 75% of all courses offered by the Japanese section at Stockholm University). The study of “play” in Japan has been advanced primarily within anthropological research based on methodologically traditional, retrospective and national-cultural models (cf. Linhart, 1998; Hendry and Ravieri, 2005; Dalot-Bul, 2014). In contrast, this symposium highlights media-aesthetic playfulness, understood as the capacity to afford playful behaviour as related to textual forms and their sensory experience, participatory and performative practices within whole media ecologies. Going beyond the technology-based conceptual hierarchy of old and new media (or art forms), the focus on “play/playing” is expected to conceptually interrelate traditional Japanology with recent media developments without promoting, for example, a facile equation of early modern commercial prose and contemporary graphic narratives.

### Speakers and Abstracts:

13:00–13:10 — Introduction by organizer and chair, Dr. Jaqueline Berndt (Stockholm University; Manga Studies, Media Aesthetics)

1. 13:10–14:00 Dr. **Hiroshi YOSHIDA** (The University of Tokyo; Aesthetics, Game Studies): Japanese Digital Games in the Tradition of Toys — discussant: Dr. **Martin ROTH** (Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto; Game Studies)

Abstract: This talk revisits the new Japanese popular culture of digital games from the perspective of ‘toys.’ When Atari’s home videogames started to become popular in America in the early 1980s, they were called “a marriage of television and the computer” (Howard Gardner). This didn’t just apply to the mechanic-technical aspect. It implied also a socio-cultural meaning, namely, that the role which TV had played within the household so far was replaced by videogames. But I want to add another partner to the pair, that is, toys.

Looking back at how digital games have evolved from the 1970s onwards, it is interesting to note a difference: whereas the main American and European game makers were electronics and computer companies (Magnavox, Sinclair, Commodore), in Japan games were developed by toy makers (Tomy,

Bandai, Epoch, Nintendo). And the fact that Japan's digital games took over from the tradition of 'toys' has affected them significantly, encompassing all aspects from hardware design to interfaces, game mechanics and play style. Crucial keywords in this regard are practicality (being useful in some way), corporeality (the importance of players' space) and materiality (texture). In my talk, I shall focus on Nintendo commodities prior to the emergence of the family computer and discuss, which significance the above-mentioned characteristics of toys have for the IT era of today.

2. 14:10–15:00 — Dr. **Björn-Ole KAMM** (Kyoto University; Transcultural Studies, Game/Play Studies): Gaming the Classroom: A Material-Semiotic Approach to Teaching Japanese Studies through Game Design — discussant: **Luca Paolo BRUNO** (Leipzig University; Game Studies, Japanese Studies)

Abstract Kamm: With an understanding of culture as processes of organizing difference, the study of transcultural phenomena, such as nation-branding (cf. Cool Japan), can benefit from game design and gaming simulations: Big actors, such as "the government" are split up into individual game pieces, whose powers and relations, moves and counter-moves can be played out to learn about how much work actors need to put into their networks to sustain the things we take for granted, to sustain their orderings of Japan, for example. This approach is concerned with contested, contingent modes of cultural ordering, that is, narratives about, for example, a given nation's place in the world, and their material embodiments, such as written laws, leisure policies or metropolitan redevelopment projects. Through designing gaming simulations, students learn how such orderings can be studied, made visible, and translated into a playable form so that others may gain understanding as well.

3. 15:10–16:00 — Dr. **Laura MORETTI** (Cambridge University; Early Modern Japanese Popular Literature): Play Spaces: Books and Playful Reading in Early Modern Japan — discussant: Dr. **Selen ÇALIC BEDİR** (Beykoz University, Istanbul; Narratology, Anime/Game Studies)

Abstract: In 1804 bestselling author Santō Kyōden wrote about the creative process that lies behind the conception of yellow-cover picture books. As part of the *guile* used to describe the process, *Ten Months in the Womb of the Author* (*Sakusha tainai totsuki no zu*) features a medication whose ingredients will ensure the birth of a masterpiece. Wit (*anji*), puns (*jiguchi*), and twists (*shukō*) are to be used in abundance, we are told. These ingredients speak of a literary world characterized by playfulness, with authors and illustrators appropriating the world of words and images to turn it into a space that invites reader to become comrades in play. This paper explores how early modern commercially printed books were designed as playgrounds, inviting readers to play with shapes, sounds, knowledge, and with the books themselves. Culling from a generous number of seventeenth-, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century materials, I shall investigate how engagement with Japanese early modern literature asks us to postulate "playful reading" alongside the more traditional aesthetic and efferent readings (Rosenblatt 1978). When engrossed in aesthetic reading, our primary concern is with what happens during the actual reading event, savouring the words and the immediate responses generated by them. When reading efferently we are interested in what comes after we have finished perusing a text and concentrate on the information, the concepts, the guides to action

embedded in that text. Playful reading prompts yet another interaction with the book. We momentarily leave behind the book to take pleasure in external mental activity that allows us to solve the puzzles encoded verbally and visually on the printed page. The storyline matters very little, if at all. What matters is the cognitive excitement generated by the thinking process itself. This paper also reflects upon the porous boundaries between solitary play, informal social play, and performance play (Sutton-Smith 1997).

4. 16:10–17:00 — Dr. **Mitsuyo KUWANO LIDÉN** (Stockholm University; Linguistics, Japanese Language Education) Play and Japanese Language Education in JFL setting — discussant: Jaqueline Berndt (Stockholm University; Media Aesthetics, Manga/Anime Studies)

Abstract: This talk explores how “play” has been related to Japanese Language teaching and learning practices from the 1950s to now by reviewing textbooks, teaching/learning materials (other than textbooks) and activities that take place both in- and out-of-class. Approaches and methods in Japanese language teaching have been influenced by researches on the second language acquisition (SLA) of English, and in the last seven decades have exhibited three main approaches which are reflected in textbooks, teaching/learning materials and activities of their time: (1) the traditional Grammar Translation Method (up to the 1960s), (2) the Audio-Lingual Approach (1960s – 1980s), and (3) the Communicative Approach (since the 1980s). Viewing “play” as an activity associated with enjoyment, recreation and/or frivolous behavior, I would like to discuss how much such elements are found in teaching and learning, in the past and now.

Organized by Jaqueline Berndt ([jberndt@su.se](mailto:jberndt@su.se)) as part of:

- Collaboration with The University of Tokyo in 2020, SU FV-5.1.2-0300-18 (*Playing Japan: Game Studies, Anime Research, and Language Education*; Hiroshi YOSHIDA, Jaqueline Berndt, Mitsuyo KUWANO LIDÉN, Ida Kirkegaard)
- Cambridge-Stockholm Collaborative Research (*Invitations to Playful Reading: towards a New Paradigm for the Study of Graphic Fiction from Early Modern to Contemporary Japan*; Cambridge PI: Dr. Laura Moretti; Stockholm PI: Prof. Dr. Jaqueline Berndt)
- undergraduate course *Introduction to Japanese Studies* (JKA111/DK26; held by J. Berndt)
- undergraduate course *Japanese Popular Culture* (JKA932; held by J. Berndt)

Please pre-register with the organizer at [jberndt@su.se](mailto:jberndt@su.se), and receive your Zoom invitation on Mon, 21 September 2020. [Students who are enrolled in the two courses indicated above are not required to register individually.]