



Call for Papers for an *ephemera* Special Issue on:

Work, Play and Boredom

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In recent years, play has become an abiding concern in the popular business literature and a crucial aspect of organizational culture. While managerial interest in play has certainly been with us for some time, there is a sense that organizations are becoming ever-more receptive to incorporating fun and frivolity into everyday working life. Team-building exercises, simulation games, puzzle-solving activities, office parties, themed dress-down days, and colourful, aesthetically-stimulating workplaces are notable examples of this trend. Through play, employees are encouraged to express themselves and their capabilities, thus enhancing job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment. Play also serves to unleash an untapped creative potential in management thinking that will supposedly result in innovative product design, imaginative marketing strategies and, ultimately, superior organizational performance. Play, it seems, is a very serious business indeed.

But this has not always been the case. Until very recently, play was seen as the antithesis of work. Classical industrial theory, for example, hinges on a fundamental distinction between waged labour and recreation. Play at work is thought to pose a threat not only to labour discipline, but also to the very basis of the wage bargain: in exchange for a day's pay, workers are expected to leave their pleasures at home. Given this context, we can well understand Adorno's (1978: 228) comment that the purposeless play of children – completely detached from selling one's labour to earn a living – unconsciously rehearses the 'right life'. But play no longer holds the promise of life after capitalism, as it once did for Adorno; today, the 'unreality of games' is fully incorporated within the reality of organizations. When employees are urged to reach out to their 'inner child' (Miller, 1997: 255), it becomes clear that the traditional boundary between work and play is in the process of being demolished.

A certain utopianism underpins contemporary debates about play at work, evoking the pre-Lapsarian ideal of a happy life without hard work. In this respect, organizations seem to have taken notice of Burke's (1971: 47) compelling vision of paradise: 'My formula for utopia is simple: it is a community in which everyone plays at work and works at play. Anything less would fail to satisfy me for long'. But such idealism is not necessarily desirable. For while play promises to relieve the monotony and boredom of work, it is intimately connected to new forms of management control: it is part of the panoply of techniques that seek to align the personal desires of workers with bottom-line corporate objectives. We should not be surprised, then, when an overbearing emphasis on fun in the workplace leads to cynicism, alienation, and resentment from employees (Fleming, 2005).

While play at work has been extensively discussed in the popular and academic literature, the role of boredom in organisations has been somewhat neglected. It seems that boredom is destined to share the fate of other 'negative emotions', such as anger and contempt, which have generally been silenced in organization studies (Pelzer 2005). But boredom remains an important part of organisational life. As Walter Benjamin (1999: 105) observes, 'we are bored when we don't know what we are waiting for'. Boredom thus contains a sense of anticipation, even promise: 'Boredom is the threshold to great deeds' (*ibid.*). Since

capitalism is preoccupied with fun and games, perhaps it is boredom rather than play that now serves unconsciously to rehearse the 'right life' in contemporary times.

This *ephemera* special issue explores the interrelated themes of work, play, and boredom alongside an exploration of the cultural and political context out of which they have emerged. Possible topics include:

- The politics of play
- Play and reality
- Anthropology of play
- Play and utopia
- The boredom of play
- Boredom as resistance
- Identity and authenticity when played
- The blurring of work and play
- Playfulness at work
- Creativity and play
- Experience economy
- Management games
- Cultures of fun
- Play and pedagogy
- Seriousness and indifference
- Foolishness and fooling around
- Tedium and repetition
- Humour, jokes, and cynicism
- Childishness and management
- Invention and innovation through play
- Organizing spontaneity

Deadline for submissions: 18 June 2010

Deadline for submission is 18 June 2010. All contributions should be submitted to Lena Olaison (lo.lpf@cbs.dk). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited in this call: articles, notes, and reviews. Information about these different types of contributions can be found at: <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/call.htm>. Contributions will undergo a double blind review process. All submissions should follow *ephemera's* submissions guideline, available at: <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/submit.htm>. For further information contact one of the special issue editors: Nick Butler (nick.butler@st-andrews.ac.uk), Lena Olaison (lo.lpf@cbs.dk), Martyna Sliwa (martyna.sliwa@ncl.ac.uk), Sverre Spoelstra (sverre.spoelstra@fek.lu.se) or Bent Meier Sørensen (bem.lpf@cbs.dk).

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