



## Call for Papers Issue 11: The Semiotics of Role-Play

This special issue examines the social and semiotic work that goes into and is performed through role-playing. As “fictional” spaces in which norms and roles are both made explicit and (often) suspended, role-plays can be potent sites of institutional and cultural maintenance, critique, and transformation. As interactional events, role-plays are distinctive in offering heightened reflexivity about the shared fiction/reality being co-produced by participants. Role-plays establish frames which delineate roles, rules, and responsibilities for participants, as well as a bounded “play” text that is distinguished from the context of “reality.” Yet, this meta-discursive frame holding the role-play apart from reality is never fixed, being both citable and contestable. We thus conceptualize role-play as being asymptotically bounded on one side by actual role relations and on the other by virtual play scenarios.

Theatrical performances and games have often been taken as metaphors and sites that allow researchers to describe and analyze how worlds are socially constructed and contested. Taking inspiration from anthropological and sociological studies of social roles, games, and play, we consider role-plays to be key sites for the study of roles, norms, and the creation (or foreclosure) of spaces in which to question them. In this issue, we call for empirical analyses of role-plays as *embodied discursive interactions*, illuminating the contingency of both role-play’s constitution and consequences. We contend that questions about the consequentiality of role-play can only be answered through empirical investigation of role-plays as unfolding interactions.

As such, we wish to elucidate not only the effects of role-plays, but also the ideological and institutional conditions and interactional mechanisms that make role-plays consequential activities. How are roles, norms, and identities taught, learned, questioned, and re-worked through role-plays? How are role-plays evaluated as texts (critiques of role-play) and how do role-plays and participants in them call into question the contexts within which they take place (role-play as critique)? These questions call for investigations of (a) ideologies regarding the relationship between performativity, play, and practice that people bring to role-plays (e.g., ideas about the (in)appropriateness or (in)effectiveness of role-plays as pedagogical, therapeutic, or recreational activities), and (b) how such ideologies are upheld or challenged through the socio-semiotic, interactional co-production of role-plays. How do role-play participants set up, maintain, adjust, and evaluate the role-play frame before, during, and after the role-play? And what happens when role-players straddle the inside and outside of the role-play frame, step out of character, “break the fourth wall,” or otherwise breach the boundary between “real” and “fictional” worlds?

We seek interactional analyses of role-plays which take place in institutional (e.g., therapy, professional training) or recreational settings (e.g., Live Action Role-Playing [LARP], children’s games), recognizing that role-play often blurs the boundary between the two (e.g., therapeutic LARPing, professional training via children’s games). The editors of *Semiotic Review*, and the guest editors Katie Gibson, Grigory Gorbun, and Lily Ye, invite essays, articles, and book reviews from contributors representing a wide range of disciplines.

Submissions should be sent to [semioticreview@gmail.com](mailto:semioticreview@gmail.com). We plan to review the initial set of papers beginning **March 18, 2024**, but the issue will remain open to essays and interventions, as we will continue publishing new contributions in an ongoing dialog. Information on submission is available here: <https://www.semioticreview.com/ojs/index.php/sr/submission>.

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