

This paper is a tentative exploration of 'the play element in photography', to reword a key phrase from Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938). The context for this exploration is the melancholic paradigm that still dominates much of contemporary writing and thinking about vernacular or popular photography, a paradigm that dwells exclusively on memory, death and mourning, even if so many contemporary and historical photographic practices suggest other, non-melancholic photographic traditions, that are, in the words of the Photomedia call for papers, 'vibrant, transitory and overcharged by affects.'

Contemporary instances of the non-serious or playful in photography include, for example, Snapchat's admission that over half of images sent through the app are of people making funny faces; the gamification of photography; and the viral play of memes strikingly documented in 'For the LOL of Cats: Felines. Photography and the Web' (Photographers' Gallery, 2012). But it would be wrong to assume that this is a purely contemporary phenomenon brought about by the internet and digital technologies, or that these practices can all be conveniently subsumed under some category such as comic or humorous photography. Ludic photography extends beyond such generic limits and may in fact constitute a counter-narrative to the melancholic consensus. To demonstrate the extent and variety of ludic photography, the paper will outline Roger Caillois' four key modes of play from *Man, Play and Games* (1958) - agon, alea, mimicry andilinx – and show how they help us to see afresh familiar photographic practices, old and new.