

# Dr Joyce Goggin

## Everything is Awesome: The LEGO Movie and the Affective Potential of Cuteness

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Dr Joyce Goggin delivered her talk – Everything is Awesome: The LEGO Movie and the Affective Potential of Cuteness – as part of Liverpool John Moores University’s Liverpool Screen School Research Seminar.

Dr Joyce Goggin (University of Amsterdam)

### **Everything is Awesome: The LEGO Movie and the Affective Potential of Cuteness**

In this talk I will address the affective potential of cuteness and how it works through The LEGO Movie to promote the industrial goals of LEGO, while seeming to perform a sustained critique of the same. As I will argue, the film engages in an odd self-conscious form of irony, which ridicules the business models on which LEGO is founded while promoting them. Hence, whereas LEGO has increasingly marketed their bricks in systems or playsets that feature specific scenarios and instructions for play, and while fans continue to complain about the difficulty of buying loose bricks, the film's protagonists undertake an action-packed quest in order to subvert the film's villain, President Business, and his plan to glue the minifigures permanently in place. So although the film's feel-good message is a plea to return to the supposed halcyon days when minifigures were free to "travel between worlds and create and mingle and build whatever they wanted", the movie ultimately promotes LEGO's practice of guiding, if not restricting, free play.

Importantly moreover, part of this strategy involves cuteness as an aesthetic and as an affective means of promoting the LEGO product, while in-film affective management practices such as 'Taco Tuesdays', on which minifigure workers are treated to free tacos and President Business' love, appear to both ironise and critique typical LEGO modes of marketing and instructing consumers. Therefore, although this is obviously a movie about a population of toys, I will discuss how it presents an allegory of the current regime of affective capitalism wherein ludicity, gamification and cuteness fuel "creative industries" and compel both consumption and neo-liberal self-actualization culture.

## Biography:

Joyce Goggin is a senior lecturer in literature at the University of Amsterdam, where she also conducts research on film and media studies. She has published widely on gambling and finance in literature, painting, film, TV, and computer games. Her most recent published work includes 'Everything is Awesome: The LEGO Movie and the Affective Politics of Security' in *Finance and Society*, 'Crise et comédie: Le système de John Law au théâtre néerlandais,' in *La réception du Système de Law* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), 'Trading and Trick Taking in the Dutch Republic: Pasquin's Wind Cards and the South Sea Bubble', in *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, Word Games, Mind Games* (Western Michigan University, 2017), and a co-edited volume entitled *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* (Routledge 2017).

