

analysis provides insight into the different forms of adult play, which needs greater study in play and game theory. Those who study Japanese culture will find the theories of play so broadly conceived and specifically applied useful in understanding some of the more carnivalesque trends in Japan. And while the extremes work well for analysis, I would have liked evidence and examples of quotidian play in both historical and contemporary contexts. Initially, I resisted the interchangeable use of play and games; however, upon reflection, I find the arguments in this book provide compelling evidence that our information age makes play game-like in its use of replicating rules, mastery, and style. Ultimately, I am struck by the intense paradoxes of play that occur when normative institutions and play culture struggle over the consumer powers and identities that have emerged in twenty-first century Japan.

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Varieties of the Gaming Experience

Robert Perinbanayagam
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Following in the tradition of Symbolic Interaction, Perinbanayagam's new book, *Varieties of Gaming Experience*, blends an analysis of the historical nature of games with their significance for reli-

gious mythology as well as secular identities. Divided into chapters titled, "The Pragmatics of Games," "Champions and Renouncers," "The Play of Emotions," "Dramas of Identity," "A Logos in the Text," and "The Endgame," this book works to expand our definition of gaming from one focused on a simple textual reading to one incorporating a historical understanding of religious tradition and its impact on players' game experiences.

Borrowing from Jans Joas's concept of a pragmatist theory of action, the work maintains that, following G. H. Mead, the "willful meaning" we bring to game playing helps break the tension between habitual acts and creativity. Games are, in short, "pragmatic machines" that break up the rhythm of everyday mundane activities. Perinbanayagam demonstrates this by examining gaming encounters in boxing and dancing. Following the notion that games are inherently social, the book advocates a pragmatic existentialism in which human agents do not seek meaning through belief but rather through activity and practice: "They systematically undertake various tasks, minor or major ones, understand their problematic dynamics and systematics, and seek to overcome them as well as they may" (p. 13).

In the second chapter, the author contrasts sports games in Ancient Greece with those in Mesoamerican culture and Indian religious cultures. He compares Hindu mythology, in which Siva plays dice competitively, to Protestant renunciation of worldly games as sins before the emergence—embodied in rugged sports—of a muscular Christianity during the Victorian period. The question still remains: what do games mean for the players? This

leads to chapter 3, “The Play of Emotions.”

Taking a cue from William Faulkner’s choice between pain and nothing, the author asserts that we prefer pain. We desire engagement through games if only to escape from everyday boredom. Since games are understood as dialogic activities, the process of this engagement varies from game to game. Perinbanayagam discusses the social nature of engagement, covering particularly how we become engaged spatially, in the playing of such games as tennis and football. He describes various forms of engagement dialectically by comparing these field games with card games like bridge, whose deceptive engagement remains one of the emotional draws for players (think of the “poker face”). Tackling duels and competition, he also discusses boxing, cricket, golfing, and other aspects of competition in gaming that lead both to the concept of catharsis and to sublimation within games.

In “Dramas of Identity,” Perinbanayagam explores secondary identities and the whole realm of game identity by looking at the role of star players and how the actual playing of a game encourages a separation between game players and others. He discusses these gamer identities in soccer and boxing (drawing for the latter from the study of boxing by Loic Waquant). Exploring manifestations of these identities in dramas about affiliation, he notes that team affiliations may take multiple forms and produce different player behaviors. He claims that exploration becomes an essential element of game play. The key is that games offer possibilities of engagement with different identities, however fabricated, and these

identities allow exploration and affiliation with new groups, new people, and new reward systems.

In “A Logos in the Text,” Perinbanayagam moves from the more typical physical games to those of text and board, specifically to chess, looking at the structure of chess as a satire directed at monarchical courts and bureaucrats, its moves and countermoves echoing court intrigues. He follows this analysis with a look at fictional depictions of sports in which games serve not only as plot devices but also as activities that fend off alienation.

Finally, Perinbanayagam explores the question of what it means to play a game. Invoking the language of G. H. Mead, the author sees games as social acts that structure both competition and cooperation through rules for proper action and reaction that all players understand. The set duration of a game and its fixed location allow us to go out and come back, to be in a special place, bounded by space and time, for a while before returning to the mundane aspects of everyday life. While Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* introduced many of these themes of play—that games are marked off from everyday life or that play must be a voluntary activity for example—Perinbanayagam’s book fleshes them out for our time. Those engaged in research on the sociology of religion, symbolic interaction, and game studies will find this book useful. It makes an important contribution to play studies by helping us better understand the religious context within which many games have been constructed.

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