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## Book Reviews

### **Celebrating 40 Years of Play Research: Connecting Our Past, Present, and Future, Vol 13, Play & Culture Studies**

*Michael M. Patte and John A. Sutterby, eds.*  
Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books,  
2016. Foreword, acknowledgements,  
introduction, and index. 199 pp. \$22.59  
paper. ISBN: 9780761868163

If we look at recently published books, it seems that the study of play is seeing a major revival. Ian Bogost's *Play Anything* and Steven Johnson's *Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World* explain the importance of play to a broad audience, while academic articles about play abound in many different journals. It is therefore quite significant to review *Celebrating 40 Years of Play Research: Connecting Our Past, Present, and Future*, as it provides an insightful historical account of the study of play, mapping the past, present, and future of the field.

This book gives us a historical account of the study of play as understood by The Association for the Study of Play (TASP). The book is a fascinating read: it presents the study of play from a number of differ-

ent perspectives that, at a glance, might seem to be only slightly related to each other. However, after reading the book, a bigger picture emerges: the study of play provides invaluable insights in what makes us human, in how we articulate our cultures and societies, and in how we think about ourselves. And this book is an example of how broad and all-encompassing this field can be.

What makes this book an interesting contribution to the field of play studies is its modest yet deep encyclopedic nature. Thanks to careful editing, the volume succeeds in combining excellent scholarship that uses play as a lens to understand culture—with the ambition of reigniting the study of play from an anthropological perspective. The articles are relevant to the field, and as a collection the book demonstrates the depth and breadth of play as a human phenomenon.

Neatly divided into three sections, the collection plots the past, present, and future of the study of play. The first section provides a historical overview of the work done by the organization. I would particularly highlight Phillips Stevens's text, taken from the address to the TASP

fortieth-anniversary meeting, as it summarizes the spirit of the book. Stevens provides an overview of the challenges that in his opinion play scholars should address: to improve cross-disciplinary communication, research further into the cultural context of play, be less careless about research, and embrace the fact that play is fun.

Interestingly, Stevens's challenges work well with the contents of the articles that follow, especially with those selected to illustrate the present and future of the study of play. For example, Olga Jarrett's fascinating study of dolls and de-segregation is a careful examination of the role of playthings in the configurations of political and social realities. Vicky Thomas's "Playing in Northampton: Connecting Past, Present, and Future" also shows how the study of the manufacturing of toys can illustrate the complex evolution of labor and industrialization in contemporary societies. Finally, Lynn E. Cohen and Sandra Waite-Stupiansky's study of play for all ages calls for scholars to broaden the study of play beyond its manifestation in infants. These articles excel at addressing Stevens's challenges to make the study of play contemporary, relevant, and cross-disciplinary, while at the same time asserting that play is fun, but must also be placed in sociocultural contexts.

The editors close the book with an article by Thomas Henricks that explores modern and postmodern play in the context of the present and future of the study of play. This article functions as the perfect closing for the book, neatly providing a summary of the present and past of the study of play while urging future studies to embrace this duality between modern

and postmodern perspectives on play. If the first article in the book proposes a set of challenges for the study of play based on the history of TASP, then the last article raises the stakes and reframes the discussion toward the present and future of the field.

Ultimately, this ambitious book provides a snapshot of a particular history of the study of play. Thanks to the careful editing work of Michael M. Patte and John A. Sutterby and the quality of the articles selected, it is safe to say that this collection is a worthy contribution to the scholarly discussion on what the study of play is and what it should be.

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—Miguel Sicart, *IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

### **It's All a Game: The History of Board Games from Monopoly to Settlers of Catan**

*Tristan Donovan*

New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2017. Introduction, references, acknowledgments, and index. 292 pp. \$26.99 paper. ISBN: 9781250082725

In *It's All a Game*, Tristan Donovan explores the roots of board games' persistent popularity. Analyzing the influence of social, political, and economic influences on board game designers and manufacturers, Donovan maps the evolution of our modern-day relationship with board games across time, international boundaries, and cultures. He also examines the impact this leisure activity has had on popular psychology. Donovan concludes