

which I believe will be immensely helpful to play therapists, students, and child development and play scholars for years to come.

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—David A. Crenshaw, *Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, Poughkeepsie, NY*

**Slantwise Moves: Games, Literature, and Social Invention in Nineteenth-Century America**

Douglas A. Guerra

Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Introduction, notes, index, and acknowledgments. 253pp. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780812250619

“Games are about invention itself.” Douglas A. Guerra puts this proposition to a rigorous test in *Slantwise Moves: Games, Literature, and Social Invention in Nineteenth-Century America*. By drawing from the careers of preeminent game designers such as Milton Bradley, William Simmons, and Anne W. Abbot, Guerra reconsiders several landmarks of midcentury American literature as archives of social performance—Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man* (1857), *The Autobiography of P. T. Barnum* (1855), and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance* (1852). In many ways, this is a book less about games than about how games can illuminate the social meaning of literary works. Readers expecting a detailed survey of nineteenth-century board games and parlor games will likely be frustrated; at times, the author is more engaged with

critical theory than with the relevant historiography and material culture. Yet Guerra’s approach not only enriches our understanding of the cultural history of nineteenth-century games, it yields a productive—if unwieldy—framework for extending the field of game studies beyond the material culture of formal game play.

Guerra argues that books, no less than games, provided Americans with opportunities for social experimentation. Both offered exercises in “how to arrange yourself, your friends, and various associated objects in order to produce a specifically contoured performance space” (p. 11). By shaping how people performed such “procedural orientations,” games and books alike register an otherwise overlooked history of slantwise moves: the unlikely social configurations that people create when they play—and read—together.

Guerra situates his analysis historically during the consolidation of market capitalism in cities like Boston and New York during the middle of the century. Of course, how Americans fashioned social selves during the antebellum market revolution is a deeply familiar pursuit for scholars of American culture. In five chapters, Guerra offers a new approach by pairing a popular game with a contemporary work of literature. His method is “contrapuntal.” He plays the game—its materiality, its rules of play, its “performance space”—off the text’s narrative to throw light on the social subjectivity at stake in both cultural artifacts.

In the bravura first chapter, Guerra uses Bradley’s best-selling *Checkered Game of Life* (1860) to discern in *Leaves of Grass* a “playfield” where the poet of “The Song of Myself” created an interactive

interface between himself and the reader he beckons. On levels of typography, book design, and poetics, Guerra demonstrates the parallels between game and poem as algorithmic processes.

The method is applied across the remaining chapters. In Simonds's Peter Coddle and Melville's confidence man, Guerra discovers a "state machine subjectivity" premised on Boolean logic. In tangram configuration puzzles and Barnum's memoir, he finds a self "configured" according to capital speculation. In billiards and Hawthorne, he sees the "procedural logics" of utopian thinking. Linking Abbott's *Dr. Busby* and Bradley's *The Game of Bamboozle* (1872), he locates a social modality of networked productivity.

To some degree the jargon here cannot be avoided; it is part of the point. For Guerra the genealogy of game studies—largely focused on new media studies and video games—extends back to the nineteenth century, when game designers and writers alike sought to capture the energies of social interaction under capitalism.

Drawing from new media studies, performance studies, and new materialist studies, Guerra develops a sophisticated framework that enlivens his objects with social potentialities. With attention to the wear and tear of board games as well as the nuances of literary aesthetics, Guerra reveals the intersection of games and literature to be "an archive of potential agencies" (p. 129). What makes such abstract claims convincing is how well the author grounds his analysis in historical detail. One of the delights of the book is learning about the proximity of games and literature in commercial centers of the urban Northeast, both as objects of print culture

and bourgeois amusements. The proximity more than warrants rethinking the boundaries that have kept games and literature on different tracks of scholarly inquiry.

The book's conceptual reach often exceeds its historical grasp, however. Guerra's is a very short nineteenth century; he does not range far beyond the 1850s and 1860s. And his selection of books and games—although compelling pairings in themselves—remain squarely in the canon of the American Renaissance. In other words, for all of Guerra's attention to the social potential of games, his analysis is largely limited to the white middle class and appears sanitized of any overt conflict. Guerra might have gone further by asking how African American writers, say, or working-class consumers experimented with game play. Outside a few glances, Guerra does not address problems of racial or gender difference. Nor does he engage in the historiography of slavery and capitalism, which has long been concerned with problems of speculation, contract, and agency in the shaping of American freedom. Most surprising, however, is the lack of any attention to the turn of the twentieth century, when an incorporating game industry, an emerging philosophy of pragmatism, and a vogue for social realism would seem to offer fertile terrain for Guerra's inquiry (see William Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economics of Play*, 1996). As it is, the "social invention" in *Slantwise Moves* hardly leaves the midcentury parlor.

Nevertheless, the book's core argument and case studies are worthy of critical attention in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on game studies, new

media studies, and literary history and print culture. Researchers in American culture more generally will find much of interest in Guerra's recovery and analysis of board games in the world of nineteenth-century consumer culture. Above all, Guerra offers an important advance in thinking about games in relation to the major currents of American history. More than a reflection of ideology or a product of social relations, games are sites where individuals could rehearse and transform their repertoires of social life.

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**Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games that Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday**

*Eric Klopfer, Jason Haas, Scot Osterweil, and Louisa Rosenheck*

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018. Series foreword, foreword by Colleen Macklin, references, and index. 253 pp. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780262037808

The field of educational game design and development in digital media is still young and rapidly evolving. Emerging technologies provide new possibilities for content, deployment, and means of distribution. This plethora of opportunities has unfortunately also fostered the development of many products being labeled “educational games” without any fact-based foundation for making this claim. Even the terminology for how to describe this kind of work seems constantly in flux. Games that

seek to educate players and change post-game player behavior may be called serious games, games for impact, games for change, and applied games (among other terms). This volume seeks to establish a rigorous foundation and clear guidelines for practice to enable the production of what the authors call “resonant” games—games that “create deep learning experiences inextricably connected to the educational ecosystem they exist in” (p. 3).

Using a series of examples from games that they have designed, built, and distributed, the authors lay out twenty design principles for creating high-quality, high-impact game experiences for school-aged children. Many of these are standard practice for good game design in general, but others are tailored to specific challenges faced by designers developing for the K–12 system such as working within the requirements of educators’ curricular and standards-testing goals while also improving the quality of the education: “The approach we’ve taken in *Radix* and other projects is to design a game that covers the shallower content necessary in schools but that also builds in activities that foster deeper thinking” (p. 124).

The twenty principles address critically important features of game development such as extensive use of focus groups and play testing to ensure that the content and structure of the games is appropriate for the intended audience. Step-by-step descriptions of the iterative process of game design are tied to the game examples to demonstrate exactly how these principles can be applied in practice. The section on data is especially useful. Guidance is provided on how to