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## Book Reviews

### **Play: A Basic Pathway to the Self**

*Thomas S. Henricks*

Rochester, NY: The Strong, 2020. Editors' note, foreword, introduction, afterword, references, index, images. 286 pp. \$29.00 paper. ISBN: 9780578608112

Play studies, a fairly recent field of scholarship in academe, continues to develop, and no one deserves more credit for its place on the map than does Thomas S. Henricks. If you have been a faithful reader of this journal since 2008, you are probably already quite familiar with this book's content. Its six chapters have all appeared as articles published in *AJP*, appearing from the first to sixth chapters in 2014, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2020, respectively; the book's Afterword is *AJP*'s interview with Thomas S. Henricks. Putting these essays together in a single volume is a great service to students of play and a testimony to the importance of this work—and I think also a wonderful way for The Strong to salute Henricks, recently retired, as our most treasured grandmaster of play studies.

After reading a very cogent and helpful foreword by Scott G. Eberle, the crisp and informative editors' note, and the

author's acknowledgments, I was more than ready to delve into the six essays and afterword and experience this book as a whole, not as previously published separate entities appearing in the play literature months and years apart. Each chapter, and the interview of *AJP* with Henricks in the afterword, added up for me and resulted in an even more pronounced respect for the author's gift at synthesis and conceptual innovation.

The six chapters take the reader along Henricks's quest to help us think about play and self and in relation to work, ritual, and *communitas*. The titles are: 1) "Play as Self-Realization: Toward a General Theory of Play"; 2) "Orderly and Disorderly Play: A Comparison"; 3) "Play as Experience"; 4) "Reason and Rationalization: A Theory of Modern Play"; 5) "Theme and Variation: Arranging Play's Forms, Functions, and Colors"; and 6) "Play Studies: A Brief History." All are superb expositions, building on each other and leading the reader to an evermore intensive and extensive understanding about the play experience in relation to self, society, and culture. The whole book packs a wallop that is greater than the sum of the parts, the individual

chapters when they first appeared in the journal over the past eleven years.

Chapters 1 and 2 rightly go at the beginning with the lead-off reviewing major theories of play and discussing their connections to important ideas including self-understanding and self-realization. Biology is important with humans and other species sharing some play functions, but the first chapter takes this to another level in their psychological and social experiences. Chapter 2 probes play with respect to orderly and disorderly processes, functions, and sources and discusses these themes in relation to the work of leading play authorities. Henricks suggests a variety of purposes for the copresence of both, questioning the tendency of evaluating play as “good” or “bad.”

Chapters 3 and 4 fit well in the middle with the third chapter investigating the quality of the experience play generates in the player and in terms of the different ways of viewing play—as action, interaction, activity, disposition, and within a context. Henricks covers forms of affect and mostly emotion in reviewing prominent theories of the relation of play to experience, stressing the need to integrate these to capture more deeply how play functions in an individual’s life. Chapter 4 turns from affect to reason, reviewing theorists’ contributions to a better understanding of modernity and how play theory connects with rationality. Henricks sees play as a pastime and learning support for children and rough-and-tumble activity in mammals as important in its evolution. He again shows play as rooted in biology but also as an essential social activity, giving illustrations from the worlds of sports and official festivals.

Chapter 5 and 6, the most recently appearing articles (2017 and 2020) in this journal, are appropriately placed as the final chapters. Chapter 5 presents Henricks’s more recent extensions of his theorizing about play, proposing that it is a distinctive pathway of self-realization. He discusses four basic kinds of play (exploration, construction, interpretation, and dialogue), connecting them respectively to four patterns of self-location (marginality, privilege, subordination, and engagement). Henricks stresses that play is not exceptional (countering the “exceptionalism” he feels besets play studies), but is a fundamental human experience along with work, ritual, and *communitas*; and play expression shows incredible variations and admixtures with the other three pathways to self. All play, returning to the theme of chapter 2, has copresent orderliness and disorderliness. Henricks introduces “green play” and “red play” for this opposition, respectively; and he discusses green and red play within the four categories of play, articulating their relations with self-realization.

Chapter 6 was written for this book and later appeared as an adapted article in the journal. Henricks renders an important service needed in play studies with a cogent review of a broad array of pertinent material written by philosophers, researchers from various disciplines, and educators. Tailored to belong with the preceding chapters, this essay is finely written, as we have come to expect; and the chapter will be welcomed by readers from various backgrounds and levels of prior knowledge. The exposition is superb as it covers important themes and content areas in play studies, from classical philosophi-

cal work to theories and research in child development to play studies about modernity, leisure, and games. There is focus on where the author has taken us during this chapter's and book's journey, about play as a "pathway of experience."

In the interview between *AJP* and Henricks appearing at the close of this book, many more nuances and layers of play studies, ideas, and insights are added, along with suggestions for future growth in the field. Henricks says: "The world of real play is moving ahead briskly. The challenge for play studies is to keep abreast of this movement" (p. 267). We accept the challenge as we appreciate Thomas Henricks's work and personhood very much and want to say simply, "Encore. Encore."

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—James E. Johnson, *Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

### **Play and Curriculum, Play & Culture Studies, Vol. 15**

*Myae Han and James E. Johnson, eds.*  
Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2020. List of tables and figures, preface, acknowledgments, introduction, and index. 214 pp. \$36.99 paperback. ISBN: 9780761871767

For someone like me, struggling to make sense of play from an educational perspective (in my case due to initially having been trained from a "play purist" perspective), this volume about play and curriculum opened my eyes to new ways of exploring the tension between play and learning and specifically how teachers can create spaces for play.

The three sections in this volume

about play and curriculum use the headings culture, STEM, and higher education. The first section proves less cohesive than the others, yet all three chapters have in common their discussing how teachers or care givers can facilitate children's play and what structures it needs for support. The last chapter in the section highlights one of the dilemmas that occur when writing play into a curriculum. Clearly, the quality standards provided to home carers in this study may in fact limit children's play rather than extend it.

The second section about STEM has a chapter each on math, science, and nature. I found the math chapter—and to some extent the science chapter—rigorous in terms of upholding play as a freely chosen activity controlled by children. The question that comes to the fore involves the relationship between space, materials, time, and play. The chapters are also challenging teachers to recognize that child-initiated and child-controlled play may provide the deepest learning.

The third section contains two chapters focusing on play as a content of early-childhood teacher training and one about using games with college students. Interestingly, some of the questions cross over this division. Is it, for example, possible to open up space for teenagers or adults to play in class? And if so, what enables this? Not only chapters but also sections cross over each other. The first chapter in the first section, for example, about how to facilitate play in preschool in an indigenous community, crosses over from the first section to the last by ending with a suggestion about how to develop teacher training to sensitize for local cultural ways of knowing in play.