

decisions and tactics for change throughout the sciences and the arts.

There remains at present a rich opportunity to bring the best thinking from both disciplines to bear on today's vexing challenges and social issues. A wide mix of creative, underrepresented voices in thinking about conflict and strategy will define the fields of both game studies and game theory. Chwe's volume is a valuable first step toward a more interdisciplinary and much more inclusive field of decision sciences.

—Mary Flanagan, *Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH*

Infinite Reality: The Hidden Blueprint of Our Virtual Lives

Jim Blascovich and Jeremy Bailenson
New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011. Contents, introduction, notes, index. 298 pp. \$27.99 cloth. ISBN: 9780061809507

Early in my former life as a computer programmer, I was chastised by a boss for my interest in personal computers. "PCs are fine, if you like toys," he said, "but business will never accept them." Play, he was arguing, has no place in the business world, and despite the obvious sea-change in corporate attitudes towards the PC, this view persists in many industries.

The frivolity assigned to machines associated with play lingers in discussions about virtual reality, but the contemporary study by Jim Blascovich and Jeremy Bailenson does much to counter this narrative. Their review of our digital

planet entitled *Infinite Reality: The Hidden Blueprint of Our Virtual Lives* is readable, thorough, and compelling, and it takes seriously a virtual world that is often seen as utopic and unserious. Describing this book as wide ranging does it a disservice; the authors parlay their years of experience both in virtual reality and social and cognitive sciences into a book that sympathetically describes Ray Kurzweil's contributions to the field *and* acknowledges just how frightening the possibilities of direct programming of a human brain can be. The authors validate the importance of the idea of play in the virtual world while never sugarcoating the implications of the research that both they and a host of others have done, providing readers with a fascinating primer on the opportunities and nightmares of virtual reality.

Indeed, one of the most compelling elements of this book is its ability to negotiate the relentlessly dialectical nature of the modern world's relationship with and to technology. The authors carefully describe both the techno-utopian views held by futurists like Kurzweil and the near-dystopic possibilities of the technology industries while never claiming that either view completely explains our place in the digital world.

This style of argument does not come from some false desire for balance. Their own assumption is that "disruptive as it may seem, the shift to an ever more virtual world—of which the Internet was only one step—may be something close to inevitable, given how humans are wired neurophysiologically" (p. 8), and this sense of the need to understand why this "shift" is inevitable drives the structure of their work. The book starts as a primer of

sorts, as it seeks to help readers understand the socially constructed nature of much of what we often perceive as real or natural and then moves to a standard style that enables the authors to ground their ideas in research. Since the authors are both scientists, each section of the book follows a specific, carefully delineated format: it begins by identifying a key component of our cognitive lives, looks at a seminal study of that component outside the virtual world, and then examines research of this subject in virtual reality. Some of these studies have been conducted by the authors—after all, both founded high-powered and well-funded virtual research centers, and both have been investigating virtual reality since its advent. Other studies cited by the authors have been conducted by the virtual community's leading lights—both those known by casual observers (Lanier, Yee, Turkle, and Kurzweil) and those familiar only to readers more immersed in the conversation about virtual reality (Jack Loomis and Fred Brooks). They cite an enormous number of studies—ranging from those conducted for outside corporations and the military, software companies and academic centers—and they even cite philosophical treatises in which noted thinkers like Robert Nozick and Neil Postman consider the implications of the immersion in technology that virtual reality represents. This variety provides as powerful grounding for their approach.

Blascovich and Bailenson also offer a grounding of sorts in their use of popular culture, focusing most intensively on science fiction. They convincingly invoke William Gibson, the Wachowski Brothers, and Neal Stephenson, among others,

and they return to these texts throughout their own work. These close readings of artists who have wrestled with the place of human beings in the virtual world provide an unlooked-for depth to the authors' study. It also creates a different sort of grounding than that offered by their fairly rigorous methodology, because the prescience of these canonical figures in contemporary science fiction lends Blascovich and Bailenson's work a link to contemporary culture that highlights the resonance of the ideas present in virtual reality in material culture.

My one worry is a small one, and expressly academic. The use of one study to serve as a bellwether or hallmark of an entire component of virtual reality left me wanting something more. My guess is that the authors took this approach in the interest of brevity, but at first the constant citing of one study—no matter how powerful—and then the immediate jump to an explication of the identified phenomenon in virtual reality left me craving more research and a more in-depth look at the issue in question.

Nonetheless, Blascovich and Bailenson have written the sort of review that can better help us understand just why our immersion in virtual reality feels inevitable. Whether their text helps us better plan this inevitable move is another question.

—Ron Scott, *Walsh University, Cuyahoga Falls, OH*