

child, and educational psychologists, and teachers and administrators in day care through highschool. It should be read by members of school boards and politicians who formulate educational policies, especially the ones who bloviate about “common sense solutions” to educational problems. “Common sense” is culture bound; it generally isn’t very common and usually doesn’t make much sense, particularly when considered in comparative context. With respect to parents, *New York Times* writer Michael Erard titled his 2015 review, “The Only Baby Book You’ll Ever Need.” Although I wholeheartedly agree, I think that it is equally good for childhood and adolescence.

—Garry Chick, *The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Play, Performance, and Identity: How Institutions Structure Ludic Spaces

Matt Omasta and Drew Chappell, Eds.
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Contributors, references, index, images.
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A recent addition to the Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies Series, *Play, Performance, and Identity: How Institutions Structure Ludic Spaces*, brings play and performance studies together in an edited collection of thirteen essays that explore the boundaries of playful performances ranging from the massive multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* to shark diving. As the title sug-

gests, the editors’ objective is to investigate the often elusive question of who is responsible for structuring the experiences of play. A central tenant among the anthology’s authors is that institutions such as corporations, governments, and religious organizations are increasingly involved in defining the possibilities for play and that the player’s experience is thus shaped in significant ways by institutional ideologies that are worth examining.

In their introductory chapter, editors Matt Omasta and Drew Chappell provide an overview of the various ways in which play has been theorized, which offers a useful context for interdisciplinary readers who may not be familiar with the literature on play. What their brief introduction to play studies demonstrates is that while there is no overall consensus about the function and meaning of play, it is commonly treated as if it were outside of or separate from everyday life. Omasta and Chappell assert that contrary to what has been said about play, it is not a mere diversion from real life but has “an active role in structuring that very ‘reality’” (p. 1). That important distinction enables the collection to examine play as an activity that both shapes and is shaped by outside forces. The editors, then, approach play not as an abstract or utopian ideal, which can often be the case in play scholarship, but rather as an activity that is subject to many of the same practical and ideological constraints as nonplay experiences.

Through a number of qualitative analyses of case studies, the essays in the collection aim to demonstrate how play seeps into everyday life, drawing on a range of phenomena that might not immediately appear to the reader as play such

as commercial BDSM (or bondage, dominance, submission, and sadomasochism), fan fiction, and shopping. For example, in Chappell's essay on immersive, role-specific dinner theaters, he demonstrates how boundaries between play and work become quite permeable in the performances of dinner theatre employees. These employee performances illustrate the problem with manufacturing a play experience that relies on distinguishing itself from real life. There are moments where the dinner theatre draws attention to itself as a constructed space, which invites the players to question particular choices in performance; for example, what does a performance say about issues such as cultural belonging, and what it might mean for audiences and players involved?

In addition to discussing the challenges presented by play's structures, many of the essays in the collection maintain that play is a positive and enabling activity. The authors must carefully negotiate between the transformative possibilities of play and the institutional structures that may constrain it. For instance, Kane Anderson's chapter on costume play at Comic-Con recognizes that what began as a safe environment for fans to gather, has been co-opted by the mainstream for its marketing potential, revealing the "ongoing battle for social equality between fandom and the mainstream that exists outside of the con" (p. 106). Terry Dean similarly demonstrates that stunt running, where participants dress in costume and perform a stunt (like juggling) while competing in a road race, has the potential to create its own anti-institutional practices while simultaneously being subject to institutional agendas. For example, race

organizers have begun to cultivate the audience appeal that stunt runners bring to a race by offering some runners perks such as free registration. There is also the reality that for most types of play discussed throughout the collection, there are some institutionally set rules that cannot be broken, or the play will no longer be possible. While there are no obvious or easy ways of resolving the tensions between play's structures and player autonomy, the collection does a fine job exploring the consequences of both.

By recognizing that play has real consequences, the collection situates play as an experience that matters beyond the play itself. Performance studies is a productive approach to both connecting play with the outcomes of everyday performances and for pushing the boundaries of what we consider play. As Omasta and Chappell phrase it in the volume's afterwords, "A lens of performance recognizes play never truly ends. We are always performing in daily life, even when we think we are beyond the boundaries of a played-through experience or performing as another" (p. 158). The collection will be useful to both play scholars and performance studies scholars, especially those who are interested in questions such as who governs play, under what conditions are playful performances permitted and encouraged, or conversely discouraged and restricted, and ultimately toward what end?

—Jennesia Pedri, *Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC*

From Playgrounds to PlayStation: The Interaction of Technology and Play