

what to design for. The latter half, however, *is* extremely important for game scholars and humanists, adeptly bringing the argument home as a universal means to examine interpretation and meaning in games, other narrative forms, and possibly life in general.

Recommended, for sure. Thank you for playing-reading. Did you skip ahead?

—Mark Chen, *Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA*

The Interrelationship of Leisure and Play: Play as Leisure, Leisure as Play

Robert A. Stebbins

London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2015.
Acknowledgments, notes, references,
and index. 183 pp. \$95.00 cloth.
ISBN: 9781137513014

The study of leisure and the study of play have followed different tracks in the past, in terms of both disciplinary involvement and intent. Robert A. Stebbins's latest work attempts to rectify this by demonstrating the overlapping of play with leisure and, more specifically, by making an argument about what he calls "augmentative play." His work begins by looking at the scope of both fields, leisure and play, and raising the question why both areas of research have followed such different paths.

Part of the difference is that we treat leisure as a noun, but play as both a noun and a verb. This has meant that the very idea of the ambiguity of play, as outlined by Brian Sutton-Smith, does not lend itself well to the structured studies found

in leisure research. While the field of play studies has been informed by the classical work of Johan Huizinga, Stebbins identifies some inconsistencies in the Dutch historian's arguments about the nature of play—chiefly the manner in which play can be disinterested and open ended as well as intensely invested in an area or topic. This is most obvious in the distinction between casual play and more structured games with set rules players have to follow. Both involve play activities. Stebbins, then, to paraphrase, divides these various types of studies of play into play as disinterested activity, play as involved in structured games that include sport and nonsport activity, and play as an activity interested in art. This division into various areas of concentrations, as he terms it, allows us to view how play moves across a wide variety of human activities, including both scientific practices and artistic creations.

With the notion of augmentative play Stebbins attempts to show how we can bridge the gap between leisure studies and play studies by looking at those instances of leisure where augmentative play operates through the different concentrations he mentions. First, he defines augmentative play simply as "the playful activity engaged in while following the recipe for it during an actual occasion of leisure." He continues: "Such play is intended to enhance or augment an ongoing leisure activity" (p. 2). For Stebbins, then, play "is both an immediate end in itself and a means to the more distant aims of the unfolding leisure activity" (p. 2). Following his earlier work, Stebbins understands play "as a type of casual leisure" (p. 12). He fills this out in his second chapter, which focuses on

the distinctions among serious pursuits, casual pursuits, and project-based leisure, or what he terms the “serious leisure perspective” (SLP). The remaining chapters, “Play as Casual Leisure,” “Play in Art and Entertainment,” “Scientific Play,” “Play in Sport,” and “Hobbyist Play” lay out an elaborate typology of the various forms of leisure and the corresponding augmentative play that would be associated with such leisure activities. The SLP helps us to see the differences between serious pursuits—divided between serious leisure and devotee work—and project-based leisure, with its breakdown into “one-shot projects” and “occasional projects.” Casual leisure is broken down further into play, relaxation, passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation, and three other categories deemed less than serious, but fun nonetheless. The reader might find helpful here the information on how play finds its way into the sciences or even into professional sports.

In his concluding chapter, “Whither the Interdisciplinary Study of Play and Leisure?” Stebbins argues that leisure studies, as a field, has not sufficiently linked creativity and self-expression with leisure activities. The reason for this has to do with scholars approaching leisure as an adjunct of consumption. To escape this bind requires a methodological retooling that addresses efficacy, agency, and play. Augmentative play as a concept then works to support an individual’s actions of self-efficacy and play activities. Clearly, to understand both leisure and play we must be attuned to the historical and social context. The root of play is in noncoercive human activity done for enjoyment, and this pursuit may be restricted by concrete

historical, political, or social factors that researchers must take into account no matter which area of leisure we are discussing.

In his closing remarks, Stebbins argues that the study of play and leisure would benefit from the integration of a positive psychology with a positive sociology. And although the academic study of happiness occurs mostly in the discipline of psychology, making the links to the sociology of consumption and leisure is critical. When Stebbins laments that a positive sociology has not had the reception it deserves from sociologists. Even though leisure studies have mostly been located within this discipline, Stebbins neglects to mention how the critical edge of sociology, grounded in social inequality and the study of injustices, demands that we not just examine leisure as consumption. We should also ask the larger question of what leisure studies means within the frame of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

This means addressing the forms of play and leisure that move beyond established commodified experiences to look at a much wider universe represented by works such as *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play* by L. M. Bogad, and *Play, Creativity, and Social Movements*, by Benjamin Shepard. In other words, this book takes a step in a direction calling for interdisciplinary studies in play and leisure. But it remains mired in a depoliticized and uncritical perspective that closes the door on much of the good work in sociology—the work that has critiqued consumption as a form of alienation and offered alternatives. To make progress from here requires moving beyond a taken-for-granted status of lei-

sure as consumption and considering the expanded possibilities of human expression, joy, and play.

—J. Talmadge Wright, *Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL*

Practically Joking

Moira Marsh

Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2015. List of figures, references, index, and index of practical joke examples. 208 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780874219838

Moira Marsh's *Practically Joking* contributes significantly to the history of play and the study of humor. The book establishes practical jokes as worthy of investigation while also suggesting the necessity for subsequent inquiry.

Contextualizing practical joking within the history of play, Marsh seeks to correct the historiographical narrative that frames practical jokes as "too unsophisticated for serious attention" (p. 2). She sets out to prove that, to the contrary, practical jokes represent a "lively expressive play tradition that includes both sophistication and intellectual satisfaction" (p. 3). By this measure, *Practically Joking* is a rousing success. Marsh convincingly argues that practical jokes are a rich subject of study that highlight, interrogate, and sometimes subvert subtle undercurrents in social life and public culture.

Practically Joking is written straightforwardly with a logical, accessible structure. Beginning by defining a practical joke as "a scripted, unilateral play performance involving two opposed parties—trickster

and target—with the goal of incorporating the target into play without his or her knowledge, permission, or both," Marsh then delineates practical joking into types (p. 12). From there, she deftly combines theoretical analysis with close readings of practical jokes compiled in her research. The middle section of the book explores practical joking's relationship with truth and morality. Her discussion of humor support and her employment of the conceptual framing of "unlaughter" are particularly rewarding. The book's final chapters examine practical jokes in the context of their specific social settings. The conclusion then ponders their meaning to the broader social order.

Marsh's analysis is at its most commanding when she burrows deep into thick descriptions of her selected practical jokes, their participants, and their settings. The sentence, "Chickens seem to be inherently funny, and the reason they are is that we care about them, but we do not care too much" (p. 77) alone makes *Practically Joking* worth reading. Also of note is the section at the end of chapter 9 on the gender dynamics of practical joking. More broadly, two chapters stand out as especially compelling. Chapter 3, "The Great Drug Bust: Morphology of an April Fools' Joke," plays to her strengths, interweaving theoretical interpretation seamlessly with an in-depth deconstruction of one practical joke. Her discussion of the distinction between effective and successful practical jokes is particularly thoughtful. Chapter 6, "All Jokes Are Bad if They Are Any Good: Humor Support and Unlaughter," effectively discusses practical joking as a form in the context of humor theory and the history of play.