

natural beauty of rural America in her sweeping photos. In many instances, the landscape serves to highlight the unique and seemingly otherworldly quality of these structures. Biondo's photos of the 1960s and 1970s depict the movement away from traditional playground designs. During this period, play equipment often mirrored the popular culture at that time, whether it was the United States' obsession with space exploration or characters portrayed on television or in the movies. Especially striking are colorful animal-shaped elements. The photos display the artistry inherent in each element. Biondo also augments her photos with advertisements from original play catalogs, which provide additional insight into the time period when the piece of equipment was marketed.

The limited geographical scope of this chronology of American classical playgrounds appears to be its only shortcoming. For the most part, Biondo photographed playgrounds from the American Midwest and Plains states. A follow-up presentation that replicates Biondo's format but expands to other regions of the United States would greatly illuminate the diversity of playgrounds throughout this country. A longitudinal examination of the same playgrounds would offer an additional insight into the evolution of playgrounds in the United States.

Biondo contributes a visually engaging overview of the development of playgrounds over time in the United States. Her photos capture the essence of both the form and function of these play elements, providing a unique archival perspective. As society moves on into a highly technical world, it becomes extremely important

that Americans remember and appreciate the role that playgrounds had and still have in our culture.

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### **The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications**

*Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding,*  
*eds.*

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2014.  
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According to the remarkably concise definition provided by Sebastian Deterding and his coauthors in a 2011 article, *gamification* is “the use of game design elements in nongame contexts.” Assigning points, badges, and rewards to loyal customers, monitoring one's performance while jogging and comparing it with that of other joggers, and dividing one's process of learning math or a foreign language into challenges are all classic applications of the precepts of gamification. Now that the pervasiveness of gamification as a ubiquitous buzzword—Gamify your business! Gamification for learning!—has started waning, it is possible to reconsider its applications and consequences with the due critical distance. *The Gameful World*, a hefty anthology edited by Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding, aims at discussing the process of the ludification of everyday life, culture, and work, of which gamification represents a notable epiphenomenon in the context of a scholarly debate that eschews

hyperboles and sales pitches. Divided into three sections—approaches, issues, and applications—the book proposes a series of articles that explore specific themes and juxtaposes them with concise, often provocative, position statements that act as counterpoints.

Three main themes seem to emerge from the plurality and heterogeneity of opinions voiced in *The Gameful World*. First, gamification is divisive. For some authors, games are the perfect tool for engineering one's confidence, self-esteem, and physical fitness: a game is a goal-oriented, competitive, engaging activity that may bear results in real life. This thesis famously informs Jane McGonigal's 2011 book, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, one of the theoretical cornerstones of gamification. You can also find this thesis at the core of many utopian arguments regarding games and play. On the other hand, several authors describe gamification as a form of coarse behaviorism: slap a game on top of any activity, and people will want to participate. Ian Bogost's chapter, "Gamification Is Bullshit," describes gamification as a self-replicating marketing scheme, while McKenzie Wark's position piece "Losing Is Fun" portrays players of gamified apps as pawns in the larger meta-game of accumulating personal metrics played by Google, Amazon, and Facebook.

Second, the world has always been gameful. While gamification, serious games, and applied games are relatively new concepts, using games and game mechanics outside of free, autotelic, creative play—a concept that may be utopian—is something humans have been

doing for a long time. In his classic 1959 study, *The Kissing Games of Adolescents in Ohio*, Brian Sutton-Smith shows how teenagers *gamify* their social relations through the use of playful interactions. In the same manner, in *The Gameful World* several chapters tie the diffusion of game-like practices in "serious" spaces to wider historical processes. PJ Rey, for example, sees the roots of gamification in the peculiar modes of production and labor of post-Fordist capitalism, while Nicolas Nova describes how the history of computation may provide a useful perspective to analyze the emergence of the gameful world.

Third, games and play do not always coincide. Games are every formalist's dream: they are ruled, teleological, highly structured, designed artifacts. Play, on the other hand, can only be defined loosely, by analogy or contrast with other human activities, and seems to escape categorizations. This tension between two apparently interconnected phenomena—we play games, games are the things that we play—is at the heart of many of the chapters of the book. Throughout *The Gameful World*, gamefulness and playfulness engage in a fascinating dance: at times they coincide, but more often than not, they are at odds with each other. Games may not always inspire play, and play may be found outside of games. In Jennifer R. Whitson's chapter gamified activities are described as Foucauldian technologies of the self, instruments of self-regulation, and normalization within the larger project of governance of modern liberal states. Bernard DeKoven's polemic, "Monkey Brains and Fraction Bingo: In Defense of Fun," describes the playful and unruly behavior of a group of children as an antidote to gamification.

*The Gameful World* is an essential collection for researchers investigating the social and political shifts implied by the emergence of pervasive game-like practices and the potential applications and issues connected with these phenomena. While different chapters present radically contradicting versions of what the gameful world is, the introductory sections—both the editors' introduction and Deterding's "The Ambiguity of Games," inspired by Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play*—help frame the debate around games and everyday life as one where rhetorics and applications, as well as politics and economics, are in constant negotiation. Just as a well-played game may reframe our understanding of what play is for us, this book may not provide final answers to important questions, but it certainly helps readers embrace a different perspective on the ever-evolving map of the gameful world.

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**The Video Game Debate:  
Unravelling the Physical,  
Social, and Psychological  
Effects of Digital Games**

*Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt, eds.*  
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During U.S. Senate hearings in 1954, legislators warned the public of the sado-masochism being taught to our children

in colorful comic book pages by Wonder Woman, the dangers inherent in Superman, and the homoerotic perils posed by Batman. Thirty years later, Senate hearings focused on the hazards of Cyndi Lauper's "She Bop" and Madonna's "Dress You Up." Politicians and lawmakers have now shifted their focus from paper comics and pop music to video games. In the past twenty years, dozens of laws have been passed, federal hearings have been held, presidents have expressed their fears, and cases have been presented before the U.S. Supreme Court in an effort to protect our society from the digital menace. In many ways, *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games* presents a rebuttal to the rising moral panic surrounding video games. Editors Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt have gathered a group of top scientists in order to create a book with ten chapters addressing a diverse selection of related video game topics. Written primarily for an academic audience, this book is packed with references, theory, research, and statistics.

*The Video Game Debate* starts off strong with a discussion about the history of video games. This is no ordinary history lesson; instead, the author of this chapter presents a very compelling and original discussion about the evolution and intermixing of video games and other forms of media that have occurred over the last forty years. The remaining chapters maintain this level of insight and focus on issues that are often of concern to the public, such as gaming addiction, online game play, education, cognitive skills, physical health, and violence.

It is worth noting that none of