of God as a trinity. The chapter entitled "Playing in the Dark: God and the Field of Play" looks at how the notion of play might inform our understanding of God. "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: Jesus as a Player" explores play's political, social, and religious meaning by considering Jesus' life as a model. And the chapter "The Holy Spirit at Play: Humanity, Church and Cosmos" seeks to learn from that spontaneity associated with Christian pneumatology. Could the Holy Spirit be understood as the spirit of play? The book ends with a very brief postlude considering how play might be understood as a global practice. Students of play will find this book a quick, but provocative read, taking the subject matter in new and unexpected directions with challenging results.

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Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies: Critical Approaches to Researching Video Game Play

J. Talmadge Wright, David G. Embrick, and Andras Lukacs, eds.
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.
Contents, tables, charts, references, index. 274 pp. $75.00 cloth.
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Digital games are a significant new form of play, exploding in the past thirty years from the rarified setting of the research lab to the noisy arcade and to many American homes. Game studies, the academic analysis of video games, formally emerged only as recently as 2001 with the launch of the online academic

journal, *Game Studies*. Prior to this, the most prominent academic work on video games focused on the alleged negative effects of video game play. Academics worldwide have approached the study of video games from a number of perspectives and disciplines. Like many new fields, game studies has taken the first faltering steps to establish itself in a number of respects, not least in terms of the methodological approaches to understanding the cultural, social, economic, and innovative impact and value of the digital game form. A key challenge is how best to build effective methodological tool kits and rigorous academic enquiry in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies: Critical Approaches to Researching Video Game Play joins a growing body of work establishing the core themes, issues, and approaches to more closely understanding video game play. The book offers the reader a specifically sociological approach to video game theory. There has been little published explicitly from this perspective. As games gain both wide social acceptance and significance, there is much to be gained from this type of work. Games and computational technology have been closely bound together since the mid-1940s when Alan Turing used chess as an example of what a computer could do. Computers and play have remained close companions ever since popularly expressed through the phenomenal rise of video game form. Digital games increasingly flourish. From out-of-game forum communication to massive multiplayer game experiences (MMOG) to increased investment in user-generated content around game making, the ways in which we play together online has become an

important theme for the ongoing exploration of play.

Wright, Embrick, and Lukacs's edited collection is the first of a two volumes that take a broadly sociological approach to the study of video games. This volume explores contemporary play in the context of technology, the video game business, and research methodology. The next volume "will address questions revolving around social psychology, stratification, and fandom" (p. 249).

Video games are a playable medium, and this book starts by looking at classic play theory through Thomas Henricks's reworking of Huizinga's, Caillois's and Piaget's notions of the magic circle to a space with increasingly permeable boundaries. Ken McAllister and Judd Ruggill's chapter on the importance of fun to virtual play studies urges us not to destroy "the very act of pleasure and fun inherent in game-playing by our own research methods and research models" (p. 5). This first section, framing digital play, moves forward by exploring the relationship between culture and consumption, offers a textual analyses of *Metal Gear Solid* series of games, and considers identity formation as related to digital game space. The second section looks at issues around political economy before the book finishes with a final section exploring the methodologies of research into virtual play. A core challenge of this type of edited collection is how it prioritizes a broad—and often necessarily shallow—range of work. A productive alternate approach would be to develop a single theme, for example the refiguration of play facilitated through technology or the relationship between a player and her player character from multiple cross- and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Like many collections, this volume contains some essays that are stronger than others. Those by Thomas Henricks and Alanna Miller stand out. Miller's chapter on virtual embodiment offers a nuanced social framework for the ways that players present themselves in shared online spaces. A stated goal of this book was to "…generate further interest and dialogue among social scientists interested in understanding the matrix of technology, power, representation, games, and audiences," (p. 253). For those already engaged in the field of game studies, this edited collection offers a useful sociological lens on the field to add to the range of disciplinary tools for the study of video game play. For those play scholars new to the phenomena of digital play, this book effectively frames and develops the major themes currently facing the field, as will, no doubt, its future companion volume.

The eternal connection between play and games moves forward despite academic allegiances, methods, and disciplines. The establishment of a rigorous and mature field of video game studies offers potential to the field of play studies by generating new knowledge about technologically facilitated play practice. At the same time, play studies stands as a significant academic tradition that should continue to inform and inspire this new field of scholarship. While primarily a book for an academic audience, *Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies: Critical Approaches to Researching Video Game Play* offers a useful bridge for those play theorists and educators interested in digital play practice.

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