and embodied awareness, which establishes the conditions for metaphor, play, imagination, and inspiration. These four conditions are the subjects of the final four chapters.

Particularly interesting is the emphasis on play, which in this context extends far beyond the more traditional notions of play therapy, rough-and-tumble play, or even imaginative play. Play here is discussed in a very specific way as an intersubjective and intercontextual play between two people that focuses more on improvisation than structured play of any kind. Play holds an important place in this book because it is one of its ultimate goals and is discussed in the context of the often subtle and complex empathic interplay between two human beings in a particular space and time. This kind of play is intimately linked with intuition, imagination, creativity, and the ability to learn and gain insight from new ideas and feelings.

This book offers a significant contribution to the evolving discipline of play studies through its focus on play as both an outcome and a critical aspect of intuitive empathic responsiveness and understanding. According to Marks-Tarlow, the purpose of play in this context is that it "entrains, improvises, paces, synchronizes coordinates, and teaches turn-taking and syncopation to participants; is intrinsically rewarding; makes therapy fun, inspiring, emotionally rich, if not spiritually elevating; grants us the safety to take emotional risks; offers transference-countertransference communications that express social connection (or lack thereof); encourages creativity, discovery and innovation" (p. 142).

Clearly written and accessible, the book makes an invaluable tool for not only developing and honing clinical intuition as a skill that enhances therapeutic effectiveness in the actual moment-to-moment work of psychotherapy but also for the continued self-care and personal growth of clinicians and care givers themselves. By paying careful attention to the internal "gardens" of intuition, clinicians will maximize their ability to be fully present for and with their patients, to increase their ability to know when and how to use historical and theoretical information to facilitate their patients' growth and development, and to play creatively in the intimate relating that is the essence of psychotherapeutic work. As Marks-Tarlow states in the epilogue, "The more of each clinical day we spend immersed in these intuitive right-brain modes of perceiving and responding, the easier it is to attain prolonged states of *flow*. Here is where we dance in intersubjective space with our patients. Here is where we move spontaneously to the music of a co-created song" (p. 195). This is play as the heart of creative transformative healing.

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Avant-Garde Videogames: Playing with Technoculture

Brian Schrank

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014. Notes, references, index, images. 232 pp. $32.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780262027144

In his 1991 book *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*, Paul Mann declares, "The avant-garde, we know, is dead; nothing

could appear more exhausted than its theory, its history, its works." This provocative claim warrants reevaluation in the early twenty-first century, which has brought with it numerous experimental art movements, many enabled by the increased centrality of digital media. Brian Schrank's *Avant-Garde Videogames*, declares that the avant-garde is alive and well, especially in what are often called art, serious, and "DIY" games. An avant-garde game, for Schrank, is one that "opens up the experience of playing a game or expands the ways in which games shape culture" (p. 3). He argues that unlike mainstream games that strive for universal literacy, avant-garde games seek to foreground their medium, defamiliarize conventional mechanics, and disrupt play flow. They also interrogate the ideologies, technologies, and systems that are central to contemporary culture.

Schrank's core taxonomic argument is that we can only think of experimental video games as belonging to multiple avant-gardes. He organizes these games into two broad categories: the formal (as understood by art critics such as Clement Greenberg) and the political (as elaborated by literary critic Peter Bürger). The formal avant-garde focuses on medium specificity, while the political avant-garde privileges collective play and social change.

Schrank's art historical method departs notably from more common starting points of game studies that include narrative (Marie-Laure Ryan), rhetoric (Ian Bogost), and design (Mary Flanagan). To link historical avant-garde movements in painting, performance, film, and mixed media, the book reviews the work of figures such as Édouard Manet, Filippo Marinetti, Bertolt Brecht, and Augusto

Boal. The video game avant-garde, then, appears in the context of a broader history that includes movements such as Dada, futurism, Fluxus, the Situationist International, performance art, video art, and net art.

Rather than offering an absolute definition of avant-garde games, the book presents a menu of artworks that explore the formal and political possibilities of play. One of the book's greatest virtues is as an introduction to a broad range of experimental games. Schrank begins with works that have been more frequently discussed in art historical contexts since the late 1990s— such as Jodi's *Untitled Game* (1996 – 2001) and Brody Condon's *Adam Killer* (1999). Schrank then explores games that he places in the categories of radical formal (*Arcadia,* 2003), radical political (*Toywar,*1999), complicit formal (*Cockfight Arena,* 2001), complicit political (*World without Oil,* 2007), narrative formal (*Game, Game, Game, and again Game* (2007), and narrative political (*Darfur is Dying,* 2006). This catalog of games should prove a useful resource for game studies scholars.

Schrank's text offers another noteworthy feature in its use of the lens of a comparative media studies approach to avant-garde video games. Though the play, mechanics, and interaction are important, Schrank departs from media theorists such as Alexander Galloway to argue that video games can also have experimental value through their visual, audio, and narrative dimensions. For example, in discussing Tracy Fullerton and Bill Viola's game collaboration *The Night Journey* (2007), Schrank reads it as more of an "explorable video" (p. 10). The same is true in his

discussion of alternate reality games such as *The Beast* (2001) and *World without Oil* that draw from myriad media.

Considerable energy and space in *Avant-Garde Videogames* presents taxonomy and canon formation. Schrank chooses not to dwell on the imprecise question that became ubiquitous in popular discussions of video games in the early twenty-first century: "Are video games art?" Instead, he seeks to imbue this contemporary avant-garde with value and to articulate its currency for the humanities. Although this task contributes to the important work of game and play studies, it sometimes comes at the expense of sustained critical reflections on the overarching category of the avant-garde in a digital media moment. As Mann notes in his book on the avant-garde, "Art is always already bound up in discursive contexts." If avant-garde practices are indeed inextricable from language—including manifestos, definitions, appraisals, reviews, speculations, and framings by artists and art markets—it would be useful to track the historical emergence of the various video game avant-gardes that Schrank maps. The formalist question of what video game avant-gardes are and might become represents a fine starting point. At the same time, additional historical research might also productively explore how such a category became possible within the economic and cultural parameters of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such research might also benefit from a deeper dive into technical questions about what effect changing forms of distribution (e.g., the Steam online platform) and proliferation of networked and mobile games had on avant-garde video games.

Additionally, social and demographic questions will prove important in the continued study of the games that Schrank introduces. In his closing pages, he accurately flags the "unbelievable amount of work to be done regarding women in game culture" (p. 187). Along with the importance of how avant-garde games are gendered, we might also ask: How does the production, consumption, and ideological orientation of these games relate to categories such as class (considering how the European avant-garde was closely related to nineteenth-century bourgeois culture)? And how do radical political games, for example, not only oppose but also sustain early twenty-first century capitalism? How does experimentation, for instance, relate to the commercial imperative toward innovation? Similarly, what does the recuperation of avant-garde art look like in an art landscape that increasingly includes video games? Other questions about race and sexuality, which Schrank mentions but does not interrogate in detail, might be important to help establish the precise forms of sociopolitical efficacy that the video game avant-garde might claim.

Schrank's book cannot be expected to answer all of these questions, but it does open space for future research across disciplines. Key questions about race, gender, class, and sexuality, for instance, would help establish the precise context within which avant-garde games appear and help determine whether they can intersect generatively with other aesthetic, social, and political movements. Such inquiries would also help play scholars further explore the

crucial problem of the purposes (or non-purposes) of play in our time.

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Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life*
Robert M. Geraci
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014. Appendix, notes, references, index, and images. 348 pp. $35.00 cloth.
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Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life is in many ways a natural follow-up to Robert W. Geraci's 2011 book *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality*. His latest work is erudite, lucid, and a poignant and significant contribution to the flourishing multidisciplinary study of games and virtual worlds. It also adds to the recent body of scholarship examining the nexus of virtual worlds, sacred traditions, meaning making, and myth, including sociologist William Sims Bainbridge's *eGods: Faith Versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming* and psychologist Nick Yee's *Proteus Paradox: How Online Games and Virtual Worlds Change Us—and How They Don't*. *Virtually Sacred* stands firmly alongside such works, offering a theoretical premise derived from the social sciences in general and the sociology of religion in particular.

Beyond Geraci's ambitious theoretical premises, he also spent extensive time in and out of virtual game worlds conducting ethnographic research replete with interviews and surveys within guilds of *World of Warcraft* (2004) and communities of *Second Life* (2003). Geraci balances quantitative and qualitative findings and observations with insightful anecdotes highlighting everyday occurrences of virtual-world residents. At times he openly acknowledges when the two approaches conflict or need not express religious impulses exclusively. All this teeming with an approachable style of writing and prose makes Geraci's case equitable. He has also supplied ample endnotes and an invaluable appendix on his own methodologies and sources. Any scholar pursuing similar work will want to consult this generous supplementary material.

Chapters 1 through 3 lay out Geraci's experiences in *World of Warcraft* and his own efforts to acknowledge its strength as a prefabricated mythos and lore-driven domain. As such, the first few chapters reveal Geraci's suggestive insights into the discourse of myth and meaning as a cohesive story and game world. He further develops a brief account of key progenitors of *World of Warcraft* and games with similar thematic and aesthetic tendencies toward myth making. Naturally, the mythopoeia of Tolkien and the genre of high fantasy stand out as canonical, along with science fiction in general as a model for "modern mythology" (pp. 28–31). These, alongside the highly influential table-top role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons, readily demonstrate content culturally transmitted with an appeal for myth and magic. However, the operative and more deeply entrenched mythos, as Geraci suggests, may very well