

tend to focus rather minutely on individual words and pictures in the games themselves without offering wider insights into their production, reception, or place within the broader market economy of the trans-Atlantic world. These close textual analyses often left me wanting some of the structural investigations of publishing, business, and readership that have so energized the history of the book for the last three decades. How were these games made? What sort of businesses purveyed them? What did players think of them?

Playing Games in Nineteenth-Century Britain and America also seems oddly disconnected from the boom in game studies over the last twenty years. At times these lacunae seemed especially strange. The book's introduction, for example, offers a lengthy list of museums and libraries who are collecting and exhibiting board games—citing the Grand Rapids Public Museum's 2020 LaughFest and the ability to play historic games at Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer in Grand Island, Nebraska—but for some reason it does not mention the Strong National Museum of Play's collection of board games, likely the most comprehensive in the world (and whose holdings one contributor cited as being vital for her research).

The articles also lacked engagement with important game scholarship of recent years. An article on the history of war games, for example, didn't mention Jon Peterson's *Playing at the World* or Pat Harrigan and Matthew Kirschenbaum's edited collection *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*. And there was little or no reference to scholars exploring games not just as texts but also as ludic objects. Here the insights of authors such as Paul

Booth, Mia Consalvo, and Mary Flanagan might have been helpful. A game, after all, while containing elements of literature and art, is fundamentally a play device, and it needs to be read in ways that foreground the play.

In the end, scholars seeking information on particular nineteenth-century games and play forms will find individual articles quite valuable, but the book as a whole could have entered into deeper conversation with the latest scholarship on play and games.

—Jon-Paul C. Dyson, *The Strong, Rochester, NY*

The Hidden Politics of Children's Online Spaces, Virtual Worlds, and Connected Games

Sara M. Grimes

Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, and index. 358 pp. \$44.95 paper. ISBN: 9781442615564

In *The Hidden Politics of Children's Online Spaces, Virtual Worlds, and Connected Games*, Sara M. Grimes explores virtual worlds, online spaces, and connected games in a new light. In the author's own words, "The objective of this book is to provide such a vantage point through an in-depth critical exploration of the present and history of children's connected (online, networked, or otherwise web-enabled) games—what they look like, how they operate, who makes them, who regulates them, and what they are used for

and why” (pp.14–15). She aims to establish a new and more holistic view of children’s technologies that can be used as a framework for future work in this space.

Focusing on the specific areas of privacy, commercialization, censorship, and ownership, Grimes takes the reader through a history of connected games to highlight how these issues have been addressed in the past. She wants the discussions to “lay the groundwork for a critical consideration of how existing approaches might be used in the development of new regulation and best practices for the industries involved in making children’s digital play spaces” (p.12). Grimes concludes by identifying major problems within digital playgrounds and issues a call to action to improve them going forward.

In chapter 1, “The Importance of Digital Play,” Grimes introduces readers to the current landscape of children’s online play to orient them toward the major issues she addresses throughout the book. Chapter 2, “Small Worlds and Walled Gardens,” begins by introducing data about how often and how many children have played digital games (including those not online) over the past twenty-plus years. Grimes then walks readers through a history of trends and influences on online games developed for children, noting four distinct categories: arcade, portal, themed-game environment, and MMOG (massively multiplayer online game).

In chapter 3, “Commercializing Play(grounds),” Grimes digs into the first of four major issues she tackles in this book, commercialization. By putting scholars of technology and science in conversation with children’s media theorists, Grimes emphasizes the staunch difference

between the level of branded and commercial content in children’s online spaces. Chapter 4, “From Rules of Play to Censorship,” focuses on an exploration of the different ways in which children’s online spaces are governed through design, game affordances, moderation, and policy. She makes the point that, “Conversely, the level and depth of top-down control available to the makers of digital playgrounds are unparalleled, only minimally regulated, and largely unchallenged” (p. 134). In chapter 5, “Safety First, Privacy Later,” Grimes digs into the complicated interplay between privacy laws meant to protect children and common business practices that infringe on children’s privacy. Chapter 6 pivots to focusing on creator rights for children and how the balance of privacy and ownership is currently being negotiated. Grimes discusses games like *Minecraft* and *Roblox* as hubs for children to create art, games within the game, and other content with ambiguous final ownership rights. In the final chapter, Grimes ties together previous arguments from throughout the work and concludes with four challenges for the future.

The strengths of this text lie in Grimes’s comprehensive approach to examining digital playgrounds from as many relevant angles of scholarship as possible. All-in-all, Grimes has done work in this book that is sure to inform and impact generations of online play spaces. The immediate audiences for this book would be anyone interested in online connected play spaces, policy in games, children’s media scholars, or designers. Parents, educators, child development specialists, and psychologists would also benefit from reading this work. Grimes

presents a comprehensive and situated start to understanding online play spaces; and that makes this work much more approachable than many other academic texts.

—Jes Klass, *DePaul University, Chicago, IL*

Achievement Relocked: Loss Aversion and Game Design

Geoffrey Engelstein

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. On Thinking playfully, preface, introduction, notes, and index. 135 pp. \$30.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780262043533

In *Achievement Relocked*, Geoffrey Engelstein does a wonderful job presenting the science behind loss aversion and how to use it as a lens for understanding player psychology and designing better games. Engelstein compellingly illustrates the ways games present rewards and punishment to influence players. The author shows that even small changes like starting people toward a goal can encourage them to complete it, or how—depending on the size—numbers can carry different meaning to different people in different situations and in turn can change how they make choices. This opens a different way to think about how players will navigate a game environment and gives designers another tool to craft an enjoyable experience for their players. Through Engelstein's thought experiments, he demonstrates how game mechanics tuned to elicit specific reactions can lead players to different and perhaps more desirable play experiences.

Throughout *Achievement Relocked*,

Engelstein illuminates principles that help inform our understanding of how players navigate game environments. Each of these principles presents opportunities for designers to create better games. The author presents loss aversion as the different reactions that people have when they gain something as a reward compared to when they lose something as punishment. Specifically, even when the amounts are the same, loss is more impactful than reward, showing that people are inclined to avoid loss. Using this insight, game designers can better think about how players will react to mechanics that are designed to give or take away player resources. Similarly, the author presents the endowment effect as different reactions the feeling of ownership elicits over loss. When individuals gain a sense of ownership or closeness to an item, the threat of loss connected to that item changes, and game designers can create more player investment in the environments and characters in their games.

Engelstein points out that the framing of a scenario can change how an individual reacts to potential loss or gain. If players focus on loss, he notes, they will be more likely to avoid it, and game designers who understand this can frame game events to create more tension or soften losses. Utility theory, which says that the value you put on something influences your perception of its loss (and increases your sense of reward in not losing it), offers designers support for how they control player reactions. This lens helps teach them how to create value around currency, resources, or characters to control how players feel reward and loss.

The author also discusses endowment progress—or the change in reactions to