
Book Reviews

Attitudes of Play

Gabor Csepregi

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Gabor Csepregi's *Attitudes of Play* pulls off the rare feat of being an academic work both engaging and uplifting. It has two principal goals. The first is to explain “the play attitude” in its various manifestations as something distinct from play itself. The second is to argue that the play attitude is too frequently absent from—and should be encouraged and accepted widely in—our lives outside play. The book treats its subject persuasively with thoughtfulness and erudition—and it is admirably succinct. I look forward to going back to it, in part because many of the scholarly works discussed are by untranslated European authors, and so it is a resource for their works and ideas. Csepregi also makes use of both translated European and English-language sources that are not well known in Anglo American play scholarship. A virtue of *Attitudes of Play* is that it is likely

to introduce many English-language readers to unfamiliar discourses on play.

The first three chapters present a philosophical and psychological account of the attitude of play. Csepregi begins by outlining the concept of an attitude he argues is not simply a disposition or something that exists “in a state of isolation” but resides in or is expressed in action (pp. 25). He goes on to note the distinction often drawn in works about play between play and playfulness, with the latter marking the attitude of play. He says we learn playfulness or the attitude of play from playing; then we recognize that aspects of play can be added via the attitude of play in a transient manner to activities outside play, for example, in work or scientific investigation or artistic activity or athletics or politics or indeed “any kind of human experience” (pp. 4, 31–35). This, in turn, reinforces the play attitude that can also sharpen our perception and understanding of the everyday. Csepregi also addresses critics (there are some) of extending the play attitude outside the sphere of play (pp. 34–36).

A key to the play attitude is adopting a “pathic attitude,” a term drawn from

F. J. J. Buytendijk's untranslated work on play that Csepregi has now introduced to Anglo-American play scholarship, which he tells us is "the best analysis of play we have" (p. 10). Following Buytendijk, Csepregi argues that a pathic attitude recognizes the dynamic possibilities in things around us through an "affective, sensual, and personal relation with the world" that is characteristically a "youthful way of perceiving and acting" (p. 45).

The ensuing chapters clarify ways of expressing the play attitude, with chapters devoted to ease, risk, humor, and *gratuité*, ending with a chapter on the play attitude and the art of life. Some of the ways of expressing a play attitude will seem evident enough, for example, using humor (jokes and joking around) and taking risks (putting oneself in situations that have uncertain outcomes, such as in games or taking gambles).

The topics of ease and *gratuité* may seem less familiar initially, but they refer to well-known play phenomena. The discussion of ease notes that play often involves little effort or a retreat from effort that is familiar in play. *Gratuité* refers to play's separation from useful everyday activity (and I would add its often apparent irreverence toward it), which is also something familiar. After an introduction to *gratuité*, Csepregi spends the chapter on drinking wine and taking aimless strolls or walks, which is a fun way to conclude the substantive applications of the attitude of play. While I was reading this chapter, I imagined *flâneurs* with no particular place to go strolling the streets of Paris with bottles of good wine, baguettes, and a suitable variety of cheeses. Csepregi is right that the play attitude has many things to commend

it, which he outlines in the final chapter and epilogue. He concludes that "the transient adoption of play attitude [...] offers one of the best ways to enjoy life" (p.124).

Despite Csepregi's insightfulness and good humor, his lack of engagement with recent Anglo American scholarly work on play shows up particularly in these final chapters. There has been recent discussion in this journal on idleness as play that covers ground similar to Csepregi's discussion of ease and *gratuité* (the French word for stroller, *flâneur*, that I have just used is also a synonym for idleness). The gratuitousness of play, including its often irreverent and subversive qualities (which also include humor and risk), has been emphasized extensively in the works of the seminal play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith and others. More generally, Robert A. Stebbins' introduction of "casual leisure" into leisure and play theory twenty-five years ago to encompass play activities also recognizes ease in play and attitudes of play that are expressed beyond traditional boundaries of play.

Nevertheless, Csepregi's emphasis on the attitude of play and its related elements seem useful and undoubtedly complementary. A good scholarly probe would discover how these projects might learn from each other. This is one way, I am sure, readers already savvy to the study of play will benefit from Csepregi's excellent book.

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Research through Play: Participatory Methods in Early Childhood