

Blanchard, Kendall, ed. *The Many Faces of Play*. Champaign, Ill., Human Kinetics Publishers, 1986, Pp. 288, \$25.

I must confess that anthologies and proceedings are not my favorite readings. These works often strike me (in a somewhat inverted Gestaltian sense) as wholes that are not always more than the sum of their individual components. Even Kendall Blanchard, the editor of this book, admits that in this kind of research the central issues are often "muddled by a plethora of theoretical conceptualizations and models." (p. 266) Yet we must also acquiesce to the fact that proceedings are part of academic life and that The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play (recently changed its name to The Association for the Study of Play-TASP) has traditionally provided a good selection of articles with some common thread and denominator connecting them into a coherent array of good scholarship. The present collection is a good example. While *The Many Faces of Play* belongs to the genre of "proceedings," it presents us—thanks to the meticulous selection, editing (and editorializing) work of Kendall Blanchard and his coeditors—with well organized and relatively unified sub-themes.

All this should not come as a complete surprise. A tradition of scholarly excellence has become TASP's hallmark. It is an organization that dared through the years to incorporate within itself a broad range of academic disciplines with an enviable harmony. The seven chapters of this book (a selected group of presentations from the 1983 TAASP Conference in Baton

Rouge) reflect this harmonious diversity. The presentations provide a crosscultural and crossdisciplinary interpretation of play, games, and sport. The introductory and concluding chapters provide a philosophical framework, and remaining chapters deal with play, games, and sport, in a descending order, from psychological, folklore, literature, anthropological, and sociological perspectives. This is only a rough classification because there are some overlapping approaches within the individual articles as well. Each chapter, in turn, is introduced by a coeditor that lends the book both structural uniformity as well as a necessary editorial analysis for the topic to be discussed.

True to its title, the book presents play from every available angle that the social sciences can provide. Among the twenty-two papers, the first two (Chapter One) are undoubtedly the highlights of this collection and also provide appropriate thematic introduction to this book. The slightly edited versions of two major addresses given by Sir Edmund Leach (an eminent social anthropologist from Cambridge) and Professor Roger D. Abrahams (Kenan Professor of Humanities and Anthropology at Scripps College), provide insight into human behavior through the medium of play. Both papers emphasize human playfulness by comparing the British investiture ceremony with a headhunting ritual in Borneo and the playfulness affecting the celebration of death in a West Indian agrarian community. And both papers are good examples of exquisite scholarship and good writing. In academia where scientific “jargon” and “lingo” is almost mandatory, Leach’s paper is essentially notable—it is crisp, comprehensible and witty.

Like all collections, this volume is inevitably a mixed bag; thematically, methodologically, and qualitatively. Without giving away the content of these studies, among the most striking articles are papers dealing with the relationship between play and literature (Chapter Four). They reflect the growing interest in, and the potential of, semiotics and literature for the study of play and sport. Other strings of pearls can be found in Chapters Five and Six which address play, games, and sport as ritual. In spite of the customary homage (endorsing or refuting) paid to Huizinga—the Karl Marx of play theory—these studies are perhaps the most refreshing components of this selection. Ranging from the anthropological, sociological and historical, they dare to break new grounds, open new issues, and propose new solutions. They deal with such generic ideas as ritual and symbolism and the linkage of play, games, and sport as the mitigating media through which these behavioral manifestations are expressed. One of the best articles even explores the possibility that the game of Capture the Flag can be a metaphor for border wars. While the author does not go as far as argue that games can exemplify, as it was demonstrated by ethologists for animal species, an instinct of territoriality among humans, he comes quite close to admitting that this kind of possibility might exist.

The concluding chapter by Klaus V. Meier is an excellent and fitting choice for summarizing the key conceptual issues of modern play research. He is candid, bordering on controversial, in his assertion about the dangers of play theoreticians who have “talked about each other”—i.e., constantly borrowing

from each other. Meier also suggests that in order to understand the phenomenon of play we need to step back periodically to reexamine and rethink our scholarship which created a chaos in the “anthropology-of-play brickyard” (p. 282).

Ranging from the head hunters of Borneo to women’s field hockey, this book is not simply a selection that presents something for every interested social scientist. Indeed, there is a distinct possibility that some of the papers included in this book will never be heard from again. But by cross-pollination of knowledge this selection as a whole goes beyond that point-it provides the opportunity for each discipline to reach across traditional boundaries and borrow new data, ideas, and insights from fellow scholars who might travel in the same directions but by different means.

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