Play as a Basic Pathway to the Self

An Interview with Thomas S. Henricks

Thomas S. Henricks is the J. Earl Danieley Professor of Sociology and Distinguished University Professor at Elon University. Since receiving his doctorate in sociology at the University of Chicago, Henricks has investigated the sociology of sports from the fandom of modern American professional wrestling to the relationship between sports and social stratification in preindustrial England. Currently his interests include social theory, modernization and change, popular culture, race and ethnic relations, and, especially, the physiological, environmental, social, cultural, and psychological relationships that shape behavior and experience in sports and play. His *Play and the Human Condition* appeared in 2015. His other books include *Disputed Pleasures: Sport and Society in Preindustrial England*; *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Pleasure*; and *Selves, Societies, and Emotions: Understanding the Pathways of Experience*. Henricks also writes a blog "The Pathways of Experience" for *Psychology Today,* focusing on the nature of human play and other main avenues of human expression: work, ritual, and the civic spirit of celebration he calls *communitas*. In this interview, Henricks discusses the study of play and notes how play gives both scholars and players a way of understanding human potential individually, in small social circles, and in larger communities. **Key words**: communitas; leisure as play; play and emotions; play scholars; play studies; ritual; social experience; sport and play; work

American Journal of Play: Please tell us about your early play experiences and what you remember most about the way you played as a child?

Thomas Henricks: Most people have a play trajectory that begins early and continues, with ebbs and flows, throughout life. My own early play experiences are not that remarkable, but they did help determine the person I became. And they remain a valued part of my identity. Growing up in the 1950s, I was one of four children in a family strongly committed to playing games of every type. Whatever the pleasures of the particular activity, it was clear

American Journal of Play, volume 7, number 3 © The Strong
Contact Thomas Henricks at henriks@elon.edu

to all of us that this was an important focus for our family. Whether the occasion was ping pong, canasta, Rook, or badminton, play was a chance to evaluate one's abilities in the context of others and, in that sense, to sort through the meanings of relationships. More importantly, it was a form of social bonding. And the sometimes not so gentle teasing that accompanied that process was a way of toughening oneself in the face of disappointment, of being allowed to provoke those who were normally one's superiors, and of recognizing that enduring relationships transcend moments of difficulty. My older brother and I are quite close in age. To some extent, we played ourselves through childhood.

Games were also opportunities to establish cross-generational connections. We played a lot of board and card games with one of our grandmothers, and I remember that as one of the most pleasant aspects of my youth. Even today, I play Scrabble with my mother when we visit, or we work the newspaper's crossword puzzle or Cryptoquote together. Like many boys (and now girls as well), school sports were an important aspect of my life. In part, this meant an opportunity (besides classroom activity) to work through what Erik Erikson describes as a life-stage tension between industry and inferiority. Once again, however, the chief pleasure of playing games was the social relationships these generated. On the field of play, our group established friendships with people we might not otherwise meet. We learned what it meant to oppose and cooperate. We practiced inclusion and exclusion and instituted collective governance. That fundamentally sociological interest has always been central to my studies of play.

AJP: Was there anything specific to your experiences that drew you to studying play?

Henricks: As I noted, school sports were an important friendship base growing up. They were also a way to establish connections with the wider community. Playing basketball in Indiana, where the gyms in many towns are like cathedrals, impressed me with the symbolic implications of those events. Pointedly, only some people were showcased as participants and celebrated (excessively) for their accomplishments. Others were consigned to supporting or merely spectator roles. Everyone there seemed to be committed to what is sometimes called the Sports Creed, the belief in partisanship, ascetic attitudes toward the body, authoritarian leadership, sacrifice for the group, technocratic efficiency, and understandings of character focused on overcoming adversity. Seen in that light, organized sports were as much

socialization vehicles as opportunities for skills development.

I returned to these themes when I pursued my graduate studies in sociology at Chicago. One of my professors there, the anthropologist Victor Turner, sponsored the view that rituals are not just static pronouncements of social and cultural order but much more dynamic, symbolic events that feature personal challenge and status transformation. Turner also emphasized that these events often contain significant portions of play and communal bonding, what he called *communitas*. With that vision in mind, I studied the symbolic implications of sports, not just as ways to display values and reaffirm group identity but also as devices to exhibit social distance between persons and groups. In my book *Disputed Pleasures: Sport and Society in Preindustrial England*, I consider this in one historically important context. My argument in the book is that sports emerged in England as key "identity ceremonies" set within an increasingly achievement-based mythology. On the field of play, (some) people get to display who they are and what they can do. Whom they play with—and perform before—are fundamental considerations as well.

An important turning point in my development was my encounter with Johan Huizinga's book *Homo Ludens*. Huizinga was concerned with play in its widest dimensions. In his view, sport is connected to art, music, poetry, religion, jurisprudence, and warfare. All are highly regulated opportunities for human expression where creativity is a commentary on public forms and forces. Much of my own writing can be seen as an extension of themes that Huizinga raises.

Other sociologists were also important sources of my thinking. These include Georg Simmel, Erving Goffman, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Thorstein Veblen. All make the similar point that play is less a pattern of personal expression than it is an involvement in a publicly recognized style of relating, one that people can anticipate, participate in confidently, and discuss later with others. That view, which includes the somewhat contrarian point that play is not a full expression of the individual but a narrower role performance, is fundamental to how sociologists think about play. And it's the theme that I develop in *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression*.

One other influence deserves mention. Another of my professors, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, studied the quality of experience that people have in play and other highly focused activities. That issue, the subjective aspects of

play, has been a theme of my later work including my just-published book *Play and the Human Condition.* In that, I try to display the different kinds of factors—psychological, social, physiological, cultural, and environmental—that contribute to the combination of behavior and experience we call play.

AJP: Why is it important to study play?

Henricks: Play has been neglected as an academic subject, and that is in part because of the continuing effects of an ascetic Protestant tradition that emphasizes work—and worship and rest—rather than expressive leisure. Even today, goal-oriented, work-like forms of play (such as sport) are publicly acclaimed. So are play forms that are creative and constructive, such as little children's building sandcastles and drawing pictures. However, the study of play also suffers from another problem: what I call the mystique of exoticism or exceptionalism. Play is often portrayed as some indefinable, special activity that is unlike anything else people do. Studying it too directly seems to contradict that precious, elusive quality. My view is that it is important to study play because play is important. It is not some special activity set apart but one of the most basic things that people (and animals) do. In much of my writing, and especially in *Play and the Human Condition,* I argue that play is one of the four fundamental forms of activity—the others are work, ritual, and communitas. Each is a pathway of its own sort, with its own pattern of meaning, construction, and sequence of emotional experience. Each pathway has its proper functions. For humans to flourish, they must practice, and comprehend the implications of, these different behaviors. All this is just a way of saying play is practiced—and studied—so that people better understand the range of their own possibilities. Play is not the only strategy for doing this, but it is a distinctive and crucial one.

AJP: Why do scholars from so many fields study play?

Henricks: Most things that people do avail themselves of study from many different perspectives. It is not inappropriate that academic disciplines develop those perspectives in sharp detail. A biologist needs to understand the intricate workings of the body; a psychologist, the mind's shifting patterns of thought and feeling. However, understanding any generally significant topic—love , war, racism, disease, and so forth—means incorporating multiple perspectives. In my writing, I tend to emphasize physiological, environmental, social, cultural, and psychological contexts or what I call "fields-of-relationships" that intersect to shape behavior and experi-

ence. Play is not different from other significant matters in this regard. It is important to appreciate many kinds of factors, not just as causes but also as coterminous contexts and as consequences. The modernist (and positivist) tradition is to be extolled; but also crucial is the postmodernist tradition with its more interpretive style of knowledge making. And it's valuable to recognize, as Brian Sutton-Smith famously developed in his *The Ambiguity of Play*, that scholars may be working under the terms of different narratives or "rhetorics." Understanding play means integrating what has been learned from these various approaches.

AJP: Which age-old questions persist unanswered among these various approaches?

Henricks: Age-old questions persist because they cannot be answered or at least cannot be answered well enough. In the sciences, scholars gather facts that support or disconfirm hypotheses, but those propositions (and the theories that organize them) are understood to be continually in revision. In the humanities, scholars focus more on processes and implications of symbolic meaning making. In this latter case, the challenge is not to settle the world definitively but to approach it—and act within it—in more considered and compassionate ways. In the field of play studies, the basic questions that people ask—who, what, when and where, how, and why—are still to be answered. We continue to contemplate the character of play in general and seek to identify its many subtypes. We do not know enough about the different kinds of players (perhaps too much attention is given to young children). Concerns about the conditions supporting play (matters of when and where) remain. So do issues related to how people play. There are many ways that people express themselves; why are some avenues rather than others chosen? The ultimate question, of course, why, will always be a matter of some speculation. Once again, these concerns are not distinctive to play. For scholars questions of why people seek one another's company or fight or worship are challenges for every generation.

AJP: From which classic thinkers about play do we still have the most to learn?

Henricks: In my view, play studies don't do a lot with the contributions of the classic thinkers. Societies like ours prize novelty, and in the academic case with what Ernest Boyer called the "scholarship of discovery." Whether through empirical findings or sheer exploit of logic, we want to make—and to receive credit for—new things. In that light, the classics exist as books for our shelves, documentation that thoughtful people in the past have

considered these issues brilliantly. However, contemporary people, with their great armory of technical and symbolic resources, imagine themselves to have moved past these writings.

Much of this is a misfortune. The classics merit that designation because they are wonderful examples of human thinking. And they are to be remembered as much for the questions they raise as for the answers they provide. Contemporary scholarship is often narrowly focused. The classics tend to be much more daring in their attempts to see the broadly human meanings of things and to speculate on the similarities between disparate activities. In my view, most of the classic writers on play—I'm thinking here of people like Karl Groos, Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lev Vygotsky, Georg Simmel, Gregory Bateson, and Erving Goffman—deserve revisiting. So do some of the scholars who will be remembered as classic contributors—like Brian Sutton-Smith, Vivian Paley, Robert Fagen, Joe Frost, Jerome Bruner, and Jerome and Dorothy Singer. Others include those in the rising tradition of postmodernism. Excellent thinking and sustained creative contribution are always scarce commodities.

AJP: Who has been the most unjustly forgotten? Who should we look at again?

Henricks: There are many excellent writers on play who deserve more prominence than they currently receive. Brian Sutton-Smith's *Ambiguity of Play* and Mihai Spariosu's *Dionysus Reborn* are avenues to many of these. If I were to single out one writer for additional recognition it would be Karl Groos. His *The Play of Animals* and, later, *The Play of Man* are landmarks of thinking. He was a philosopher of aesthetics who organized the extant knowledge about animal behavior. His theory of play, usually interpreted as a practicing of the instincts, deserves reevaluation; for he argues that play effectively liberates creatures by creating more flexible behavior arrays. His theories of the motivating or psychological factors align with some contemporary views. And he merits special recognition for his attempt to show how the most spectacular symbolic exploits (including the pursuit of beauty itself) is an extension of our basic physical commitments. The animal behavior scholar Robert Fagen is a contemporary writer who now explores these themes.

AJP: If scholars in most other disciplines tend to think of individuals when they think of play, what kinds of special insight does the discipline of sociology bring to the study of play?

Henricks: As you suggest, modern societies tend to support a mythology of individualism, which stresses how individuals can equip themselves for success in the world. Play, or at least play of a certain sort, is thought to assist with such development. Sociology, as the name implies, is concerned with the forms, processes, and development of groups and organizations, or even more broadly, with the patterning of human relationships. On the one hand, this means that sociologists are interested in how groups influence individuals. Typically, even in play, people do not act alone. They orient themselves to other people's thoughts and concerns.

Social psychologists, such as George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, and Erik Erikson, emphasize this theme. However, sociology also changes the unit of analysis for play studies. Arguably, much play occurs because of the commitments of social units; and patterns of play are shaped by collective concerns. What this means is that sociologists are interested in the organizational composition of groups, their guiding culture (of beliefs, values, and norms), and their patterns of recruitment and socialization. They are interested in patterns of interaction and communication, effectively, who does what with whom.

Other important themes include leadership, decision making, and forms of social hierarchy. Sociologists can focus on the extent to which play invokes qualities of conformity and group support, but they are also concerned with issues of deviance. An individualistic perspective misses many of these crucial elements. Education scholars consider some of these when they explore the culture of the school and informal play groups. However, for the most part, too few of these themes have been central to play studies. As Johan Huizinga emphasized, play marks the character of societies just as much as it marks individuals.

AJP: Is your first major work about sport and play more a historical study because it reached back into the cultural values and characteristic social tensions of the preindustrial era? How did that come to be your first monograph?

Henricks: My original vision for this project was to do a study of the sporting hero as this emerged in the American popular press. However, I quickly concluded that I didn't know enough about the fundamental importance of sport in society to do justice to that project. So I shifted my attention to what is arguably the key country in the development of modern sport, England, to learn what role sport played in articulating important social

and cultural themes. In *Disputed Pleasures,* I emphasized how sporting practices (again, who gets to engage in what kinds of activities with what kinds of people) was a marker of status differences and thus, group identity. I also wanted to show how and why sports changed—from their earlier centers in religious, communal, and political contexts to settings focused more on commercial possibilities and social association.

AJP: Would we recognize early sports as play today? Were early sports playful?

Henricks: All sports are playful to the extent that they feature people's contesting the physical conditions of existence. Huizinga's theme of *agon*, or social competition, is quite secondary to this. Sports also vary in the extent to which they are guided by artificial conventions, such as rules, costumes, special grounds, and material implements. That point, it may be remembered, is central to Caillois's distinction between *paidia* (play in its more spirited, improvisational guise) and *ludus* (play that is more regulated or game-like).

In my view, play has never existed in a narrow or uniform way. Rather there have been different play traditions. Established elites are more likely to sponsor highly regulated, even ritualistic play with others of their ilk. My own phrasing of this is to say that play of this type "idealizes reality." Differently, the folk tradition, although custom bound, was much more improvisational and licentious in its themes. During holidays or other free times, people explored new kinds of social relationships. That is to say, they used play to "realize ideals."

Important also was the extent to which play functioned as an examination of community rather than individual identity. That theme is elemental to Huizinga's writing and to anthropologists who have studied sport. Those terms, elite and folk, are best used in a preindustrial context. Sport, like other institutions, adapted to the rising social-class system. Working-class people, for example, have sports traditions different from those of the middle or upper class. As Bourdieu emphasized in his classic work *Distinction,* most people do not mourn the fact that they are unable to go yachting or play polo. Instead, they embrace their own play activities, body types, sexual styles, and so forth as ways to communicate with one another and negotiate their own places in their communities.

AJP: How did combat become sport?

Henricks: Sports, like other expressions of play, often have their basis in sometimes long ago practical contexts. For example, field sports were once

closely connected to the provision of meat. Fighting sports were extensions of the need to defend oneself and assert dominance over rivals. And some sports, such as gambling or ritualized ball play, could be ways to discern the favor of the gods. Social contests in valued skills inevitably have societal implications. Public performers, be these individuals or groups, signify whether they are better or worse than their adversaries. Recognition, be it only praise or acknowledgment of superiority, accompanies such accomplishment. In the case of the military sports formalized by the feudal tradition, the invention of gunpowder and firearms suddenly devalued the mounted knight and his fortified castle. Older forms of military training (such as the melee, where groups fought collectively and took prisoners) disappeared; so did archery practice for lower-status groups. Instead, the legitimizing context for these types shifted to themes of health and fitness and to displays of competence (and character) before peers. As Thorstein Veblen develops, displays of knightly prowess (such as tilting at a ring from horseback or even with lances from a boat) were essentially public affirmations of the martial ferocity that formerly was a basis of the landowning class. More than that, these activities were acknowledgments of the primacy of the event's sponsor (typically the king) and of the willingness of all participants to abide by the new ethic of the courtier. Fighting sports continued to evolve. Fencing (once connected to dueling and other forms of sword fighting) had its day. So did boxing, where gentlemen took lessons to establish their "natural" superiority. Forms of ball play emerged as differing versions of violent resolve. All this is consistent with the emergence of a more individualistic and civilian ethic.

AJP: How would you evaluate today's extreme sports like freestyle motorcross and snowboarding, parkour, or fell running?

Henricks: In some ways, sports like these are throwbacks to premodern times, but they also reflect our contemporary, perhaps postmodern, era. To recall Sutton-Smith's rhetorics, premodern forms of play emphasize themes of community identity, fate, power, and frivolity. That is, they are occasions when people confront the transcendent realms of order that give meaning to their lives. Modern play, to continue his argument, emphasizes the rhetorics of self, the imaginary, and progress. Attention is placed on the development of the individual. I would add—and this is a theme I develop in *Play Reconsidered*—that modern play also tends to have an active, manipulative quality; it focuses on order making, it is goal oriented, even bureaucratic in

its organizing principles. Modern play also tends to occur in the context of institutionalized games and it is primarily technical in its spirit (focusing on skills and effectiveness). Said differently, modern play features individuals coming together to manufacture and maintain a social reality and to negotiate their places within that artificially constructed framework.

Many forms of postmodern play move past that civilizing mentality. Instead of seeking rationally governed, isolated individuality, players try to immerse themselves in their environments (be these cultural, environmental, social, psychological, or physiological). As in fell running, the aim is to be almost out of control, running madly through vertiginous terrain. Similarly, sports like ultimate fighting, motocross, and snowboarding push participants past the edges of polite, socially constrained behavior. Expressive style—and quality of experience—are as important as the occasion's outcomes. Caillois's premodern themes of *ilinix* (vertigo) and *mimicry* (participative involvement in otherness) are restored. So understood, postmodern play is not something people do *to* environments; it is something they do *in* environments. For such reasons, postmodern theories of play tend to combine my two different pathways of play and communitas. And I would add that the postmodern theme of players' willfully entering a situation and finding themselves fascinated by their own involvement is also prominent in Scott Eberle's vortex model of play that is displayed at The Strong museum.

AJP: Is suppressing fear fundamental to play and games?

Henricks: In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Sigmund Freud addressed this very issue. In his earlier theories, he saw play essentially as a form of wish fulfillment, a quest to satisfy libidinal desires. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* he saw that play might also be a form of instinctual renunciation, a process of holding off or controlling those desires. More than that, ego control provided a certain pleasure of its own sort. Sutton-Smith has argued that play features a provocation of the so-called "basic" emotions—fear, anger, surprise, disgust, sadness, and happiness. Other important feelings, such as shame and anxiety, may also be involved. When we play, he says, we create situations that exhume these basic feelings. Our behavior is an act of reacquainting ourselves with the implications of these and of learning how to manage them.

AJP: Do you agree that play arises in these emotions?

Henricks: My own view is that play typically features a conversion of these primarily negative emotions. That is, and following Freud, players cre-

ate situations that produce versions of these feelings, but those situations usually protect players from the negative outcomes (such as death itself) that are sometimes associated with them. Moreover, play emphasizes individuals' attempts to control their own behavior and experiences, including complicated processes of emotional management. As I develop in my book *Selves, Societies, and Emotions: Understanding the Pathways of Experience,* I believe that play offers a layer of largely positive feelings that covers difficult circumstances. That emotional sequence begins with curiosity, a positively toned feeling of anticipation. Within the play event itself, there is an alternation between fun (feelings of exploration and disorder) and exhilaration (pauses that feature feelings of restoration and order). At the event's conclusion, there is a feeling of gratification, the sense that one has produced a good time by acts of daring and skill. Other kinds of behavior, such as work or ritual, produce different emotional sequences. Said most plainly, we go to haunted houses or engage in Bungee jumping because we believe that we can court emotional danger and emerge from this triumphant.

AJP: Do we know when notions of fair play arose—and from where?

Henricks: This is a difficult question, and I can only speculate on the answer. For his part, Huizinga believed that cheats (who want to win so badly that they are willing to break rules) and spoilsports (who commit the much more dangerous act of declaring the whole affair ridiculous) are inevitable dangers to play. Ideas about what kinds of play are fair reflect the values of the society under consideration. Premodern societies sometimes embraced mythologies with themes of trickery, magic, seduction, and displays of overwhelming force. For example, the myths of the Greeks are filled with accounts of gods and heroes tricking one another and exacting horrible punishments on losers. Ideas of fairness in play, or at least fairness that resembles our sense of it, may be associated with the concept that dispersed persons can be brought into situations where they will interact (and compete) under the same standards and otherwise be treated as equals. It is also presumed that participants will accept the results of those undertakings. The ancient Olympic Games, where participants were representatives of rival city-states, are examples of this. And this theme is also prominent in Norbert Elias's monumental study, *The Civilizing Process,* which emphasizes how a dispersed, rural nobility was brought into the sphere of the royal court and put under a common set of manners. Fairness, again our view of it, has much to do with the project of suspending the most dangerous forms

of hostility, equalizing conditions of interaction, and willfully supporting a common code of values. Play, temporary as it is, does this routinely. At least it does this when there is concern with the quality of every person's experience. For such reasons, Huizinga considered it crucial to societal self-awareness and cultural development.

AJP: What did Huizinga mean by his characterization of play taking place within a magic circle?

Henricks: Huizinga was very committed to the idea that societies should foster the play spirit. They can do this in part by creating socially protected circles (that is, settings free from external interference and the rule of consequence) where people can explore the meanings of their lives. Huizinga also welcomed the *agon,* or social competition. His great contribution was to see that this pattern of protected competition transcended sports and games to include displays of song and poetry, riddling contests, philosophical bombast, civic debate, ritualized warfare, and many other forms. All of these types of spirited, protected engagements are, in form and function, play activities. Or at least they are play when participants are allowed to compete with one another without worrying about the ramifications of their actions. Huizinga believed that the best societies allow people to enter these glorious, carefully bounded moments. That's why he preferred the preindustrial period to our own more self-conscious, future-oriented times.

AJP: Why is play so hard to define?

Henricks: Play is hard to define because it is a pathway of expression that touches on many aspects of what it means to be human. Play can be focused on different elements of the world (cultural, environmental, physiological, social, and psychological). It can be highly organized (*ludus*) or quite informal (*paidia*). Some play seems to be order seeking; other play revels in disorder. Sometimes players operate from positions of power or control. Just as frequently, they occupy positions that are more subordinate, marginal, or deeply engaged. Because players explore what it means to be situated in the world, it is appropriate that their activity should be difficult to describe. Having said that, I don't believe the problems inherent to defining play are so different from those related to other forms of human involvement. Attempts to define love, religion, ritual, community, aggression, and so forth quickly encounter the same kinds of complexities.

AJP: So is it possible to comfortably characterize play, and if yes, then how would you do it?

Henricks: My view, and it's one I hold strongly, is that contemporary play scholars do have a loose consensus about play characteristics. To be sure, individual theorists emphasize different aspects of play and favor different examples of it. Piaget's vision of play differs from Sutton-Smith's, Freud's differs from Vygotsky's, and so forth. However, that is because these theorists focus on specialized versions which can be placed into a more general theory. To characterize play, one must first be clear what aspect of the behavior is being considered. That is, play can be seen as a pattern of individual action, some commitment of individuals to confront the conditions of their existence. A different approach is to emphasize play as a pattern of interaction, some quality of give-and-take between the player and the play object. That more dialogical perspective is different again from seeing play as an activity, some longer stretch in space-time in which participants moves coherently through stages. Within the social sciences, psychologists tend to emphasize the first perspective; sociologists, the second; and anthropologists. the third. I should add that some theorists emphasize that play is not just behavior but experience, some awareness of circumstance that may exist as an orientation (sometimes called "playfulness"), as a quality of involvement in present-time happenings, and as a reflection on what has occurred. Finally, play can also be seen as a special pattern of meaning construction, some process by which participants make sense of what is occurring both within the event and between that event and its wider surroundings.

As I describe in *Play and the Human Condition*, contemporary scholars tend to characterize play in very similar terms. To use my own summarizing words, play is *transformative* (featuring an assertive stance toward the world) and *consummatory* (focusing on achievements and experiences within the event itself). It is *contestive* (featuring a vigorous exchange between player and play object) and largely *unpredictable* (prizing unforeseen circumstances). It is *self-regulated* (relying on participants to begin, sustain, and monitor the event) and *episodic* (centering on limited bursts and repetitions of action). The first two terms refer especially to play as an action; the second two, to play as interaction; and the last two, to play as an activity. I also believe that play has an anticipated emotional sequence—from feelings of *curiosity* to in-process feelings of *fun* and *exhilaration* to feelings of completion called *gratification*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, play features an *ascending* pattern of meaning construction, both within the event itself and between the event and its external surroundings.

What that means is that participants focus on the particularities of what is occurring and move the event forward through self-willed transformations of these. That emphasis on the momentary and impulsive differs from activities where people understand themselves to be linked to the world outside the event and accept those external standards as guidelines.

We should not expect that any single definition for play will be established. But it does seem crucial, at least to me, that scholars compare play to other, similar activities. Many of the qualities described above are shared by other patterns of behavior. What makes play different is the way these qualities combine.

AJP: What is the role of free choice in play?

Henricks: The idea of freedom is a complicated one. Indeed, it is possible to claim, as some philosophers do, that humans have very little freedom, as their thoughts and behavior exist amidst often unacknowledged contingencies that urge them in one direction or another. In general parlance, however, it is reasonable to talk of freedom as conscious, self-willed choice-making among alternative courses of action. Most people who have studied play emphasize this theme. Playing creatures are those that have some ability to pause, plan, and evaluate action—and to do this on their own terms and timing. In such ways, they expand their behavioral arrays and free themselves from narrowly biological directives. My own approach to this question is to emphasize the different kinds of choices that players can make. These include first the choice of whether to play or to pursue another type of activity. A second set of choices involves establishing the frame for the event. This means selecting a specific play activity, picking a time and place for it, determining who will be allowed to play, setting rules, and determining stakes. A third set of choices involves the administration of within-frame events. This means the ability to start and stop action sequences, to control the direction of these sequences, to administer rules, and to determine a conclusion. Finally, there is the matter of determining beyond-event connections. Smaller issues here include deciding what resources to bring into (and out of) the frame, being able to quit the play setting, and perhaps most importantly, deciding what the activity means. To be sure, in real play, nonplayers may control many of these choices. But in the ideal, activities where players themselves control these issues are rightly called "play."

AJP: If we play freely, does that mean that when we play we also play spontaneously?

Henricks: I do think that play in its most idealized form centers on the player's recognizing and responding to quickly changing, and highly particular, occurrences. Caillois's concept of *paidia* captures this sense of the improvisational, momentary, and impulsive. To that degree, play is a rebellion against fixed patterns. Although play celebrates personal control and self-direction, it's worth noting that impulsiveness is not equivalent to compulsiveness. The latter term suggests that people are trapped by enduring psychological commitments that they can't seem to shake. Impulsiveness denotes a more momentary, and situation-based, orientation. For example, we're driving somewhere and suddenly decide to take a different route. The possibility for impulsiveness is a major portion of play's charm. In play we can suddenly choose to do unusual things because that choice is largely consequence free. But impulsiveness, essentially the rule of whim, is also one of the play's dangers. People cannot live only in the moment. Quite the opposite, most of life demands careful, long-term planning. Play (and communitas) encourages short-term involvement. Ritual and work narrow action strategies, acquaint us with obligation, and prepare us for enduring relationships with externalities we cannot control.

AJP: Is freedom of choice consistent with making rules or employing referees in play and games?

Henricks: This question confronts directly an issue that was central for both Huizinga and Caillois. Huizinga found it somewhat paradoxical that play is both an exercise in order making and in order breaking. Rules are necessary elements of play, but so are creativity, competition, and irreverence. Caillois opposed the spontaneous form of play (*paidia*) with the regulated form (*ludus*). For him, *ludus* is the more advanced pattern for artificial conventions (both formalized challenges and restrictions on permissible responses) that help players move beyond what we would call their comfort zones and make them recognize the legitimacy of other people as reference points for interaction. In much the same way, Vygotsky emphasizes the role of other people in helping children become what he calls a "head taller." When we play with others, our playmates both cooperate with us and challenge us in unexpected ways. Together, we reach understandings—essentially rules—that help us move forward in these situations and, perhaps, in other life settings as well.

AJP: What is your view?

Henricks: My own inclination is to follow Bateson's and Goffman's ideas about

framing. In acts of play (alone or with others), we impose expectations on a course of behavior. Making these expectations public (as in a game) allows others to participate with us. Just because we erect what are often very elaborate rule systems, we are able to focus our attention on a quite limited range of actions (for example, putting one block on top of another or throwing a ball at a basket). That part of the situation becomes clearly contested, or put in play, while other parts are held steady. So, yes, freedom of choice can coexist with rules. Ideally, players themselves establish and administer their own rules, as I have discussed. I also believe that they should give their assent to the rule systems they will abide by. But even when they don't (as in the case of institutionalized games or when referees are present), other forms of choosing may be intensified. For example, tremendous emphasis may be given to action strategies, physical maneuvers, or team cooperation. That's what happens in highly organized sports. There is value in learning how to be focused in such ways; but it does mean that one important aspect of play—negotiating and managing rules—is removed from consideration.

AJP: Do rules make play more or less predictable?

Henricks: As I noted, I believe that one of play's defining characteristics is its relative unpredictability. Unlike work and ritual, where we want to establish (and feel comfortable with) clearly defined paths of action, play courts the unexpected and various. If throwing a ball back and forth with someone becomes too boring, we may vary the distance or experiment with styles of throwing. We like games, in large part, because we do *not* know what will happen in them or how they will turn out. On the one hand then, rules do make play more predictable because they define (and therefore narrow) choices about times and places, equipment, goals, and permissible behaviors. When we meet our friends to go shopping or play basketball, we anticipate an event of a certain kind. Indeed, we may even have rules that prohibit us from talking about work or relationship problems. We do this so we can "get down" to playing. However, rules also help people break out of their own habits and limitations. When we accept rules, we adapt ourselves to their requirements. Those requirements may be quite difficult for us to meet. Externally imposed rules create situations we have not encountered before. Repeatedly, as when we play the computer game *Tetris*, we encounter failure and must manage the emotions pertinent to this. Most coaches, I should imagine, continually raise the difficulty levels of the challenges for their players.

Rules, as systems of artificial constraint, are used in this way to make accomplishment unpredictable.

AJP: What is the relationship of play to chance?

Henricks: Caillois, you may recall, identified the exploration of chance or fate (*alea)* as one of his four fundamental types of play. He believed that the combinations of chance and competition (*agon*) are showcased in the play events of modernizing societies. And he criticized Huizinga for not giving enough attention to gambling. As you might imagine, there are different ways to think about chance. In some ancient societies, chance was connected with the unpredictable interventions of the gods and even with the concept of fate—that there is a predetermined path for our lives that is known to the supernatural but not to us. For us moderns, chance is identified more with the random concourse of materiality. In our world, so many things are going on that we cannot possibly comprehend or predict them all. The next card dealt to us may be the queen of spades; the next car crossing a busy intersection may veer and hit us. Theorists of what is called the "risk society" describe our attempts to insure ourselves against improbable occurrences. They also stress that many of our uncertainties are humanly caused.

AJP: Does play insulate us against uncertainty and the unknown?

Henricks: In my opinion, and as I have discussed, one of play's key contributions is to help people confront and manage negative circumstances and the emotions that accompany these. When we play we put a positive tone on feelings like fear and disgust; we also do this with another of the so-called basic emotions—surprise—which, in its stronger form, we call anxiety. Sometimes we worry because something has happened (perhaps a doctor has told us that our child has a serious illness), there may be quite serious ramifications. Less rationally, perhaps, we worry that such an event may happen. In extreme cases, our worry is paralyzing.

When we play—and this is especially the case in the role-playing techniques encouraged by some therapists—we intentionally create unpredictable situations and explore the implications of these by acting and talking them out. Ideally, we learn that there is a limited range of likely implications (perhaps the therapist performs some of these). We see that some of our strategies for dealing with the situation are perhaps better than others. Even more ideally, we gain some feelings of assurance about our abilities to manage what the world has in store for us.

Although gambling may seem quite different from this, I think gambling shares play's general theme of allowing people to confront the unknown, to control it in whatever limited ways one can (perhaps through special techniques or lucky charms), and, most importantly, to manage one's emotions in the face of negative outcomes. Chance offers similar opportunities in sports where the errant bounce of a ball may prove decisive. And in some cases, at least, players willfully handicap themselves so that the best player or team does not always win. Like play-fighting animals, human players may intentionally alternate positions of dominance and submission. They do this both to make activity reasonably appealing for all but also to provide a range of circumstances that includes difficulty and displeasure as well as their happy opposites.

AJP: Would you say more about your concept of disorderly play?

Henricks: Brian Sutton-Smith and Diana Kelly-Byrne have argued that play is both equilibrating and disequilibrating. That is, players try to establish stable frameworks to operate in and pursue clearly conceived end points; but they also want that process to feature elements of resistance, competition, and uncertainty. I agree with that view, but I also think that forms of play differ in the degree to which they prize order and disorder. For example, Sutton-Smith himself tends to emphasize types of play that are disorderly and rebellious. His accounts sometimes describe little children doing and saying what are to adults improper things. There are many reasons for deviant, or naughty, behavior but one surely is individuals' needs to test limits. Playing in disorderly ways means deconstructing (to use a postmodern term) the meaning systems and patterns of relationship that are normative for societies. By teasing, mocking, breaking rules, and so forth, one gains a better sense of which forms are solid and which are insubstantial. One learns what he or she can get away with. Forbidden terrain is inhabited and explored.

The opposite approach, which perhaps has been dominant in play studies, is to emphasize the themes of order making, cooperation, and rule observance. Play of this sort—such as building sandcastles, carefully painting pictures, and participating amiably in games—is consistent with most adults' ideas about socialization and civility. Furthermore, and this theme has been championed by Jerome and Dorothy Singer among others, adults have a proper role to play in children's imaginative activity and social development. Personal impulsiveness, indulgence, and excess should not

be an ideal for play, nor for any other behavior. Neither is wanton destruction. The best forms of play are those that advance people's ideas of how they can productively live together. In an article for this journal [Summer 2009], I discussed some of the possible functions of orderly and disorderly play. I won't repeat that argument here but will simply make the point that disorderly activity—even tearing things down—is as valuable as building them up and maintaining them.

AJP: Valuable in what way?

Henricks: Disorderly play teaches groups about the parameters (and punishments) of social control systems. It showcases innovation and creativity. It provides lessons in the limitations, and sometimes dangers, of resistance and competition. It encourages personal expression, even power seeking by individuals and partisan groups. All of these are valuable themes, but they need to be complemented by the lessons of order seeking. Just as the timid conformist is not to be idealized; neither is the ranting individual.

AJP: Can people "play" in quotation marks at what many consider society's serious matters?

Henricks: As I noted, disorderly play often manifests itself as a rebellion against rule systems that other people take seriously. And comedians, satirists, and cartoonists sometimes mock what some groups of people most cherish. You may recall that Caillois and Huizinga disagreed on this question. Huizinga was fascinated by the degree to which players could participate in the most sublime, even sacred concerns. Caillois argued that play and the sacred were opposites. In his view, the former is characterized by its relative inconsequence, lightness of manner, temporality, and artificiality. The latter is an abiding force that obligates and endangers those who are careless of its powers.

My own reconciliation of this issue is to reposition the quotation marks in your question. It is possible for people both to play quote "at" something and to play quote "in" it. To take the first of these, people can play at any topic, role, or form. That marginal posture is consistent with the way contemporary people are sometimes encouraged to operate. Nothing is to be taken overly seriously; much of the individual should be withheld from any interaction. At a safe distance, one can poke and tease. To play "in" something means accepting the terms of that involvement and exploring creatively the possibilities that this form presents. Play of this sort, which comes close to Huizinga's meaning, acknowledges the seriousness of the

form in question. It acknowledges also that belief systems are not closed systems but instead complicated fields of relationship. These meanings cannot be deciphered by outsiders but instead require passionate engagement. In traditional societies, people often play inside belief systems in this spirit.

AJP: Does that mean that any social experience can be turned into play?

Henricks: One of the greatest sociologists of play, George Simmel, was concerned with precisely this issue. He produced a famous essay on sociability, what he called the "play-form" of association. Simmel acknowledged that most of the time we take our social encounters quite seriously, or rather we understand that they are connected to other social activities and that how we behave there has clear implications for other portions of our lives. Said differently, we recognize the degree to which different social settings are interconnected and obligating. However, Simmel also saw that some events—such as dinner parties, galas, dances, and afternoons at a salon—are occasions intentionally cut loose from ordinary affairs. More than that, they are times when sociability itself (how people mingle with others of their ilk) becomes the focus of the event. In much detail, Simmel describes the proper orientation for guests, the responsibilities of the host or hostess, proper topics for conversation, and the emotional tone that must be sustained. No topic, personal or public, is to be taken too seriously. The challenge becomes one of conversing cleverly and affably with the effect that no one feels excluded. Although this may seem a fatuous exercise, the impact of the event is real enough. In sociability, people make plain the manners of their circle, mock these in gentle ways, and give evidence of their own ability to operate on these terms. Some are so gifted in this skill that they merit respectful watching by others. At such times play becomes art.

AJP: Does the absence of contest or challenge disqualify leisure as play?

Henricks: As your question suggests, leisure and play are two different concepts, and they are not interrelated well in the play studies literature. The idea of leisure suggests that one is free from time-consuming obligations, such as those associated with work or worship or even with the good night's sleep needed for the day to come. It might seem, then, that leisure is simply a general term for relaxation or idling; but leisure theorists have expanded that concept to include what they call "serious leisure," including the frenetic way that many people pursue their hobbies. By contrast, play is a distinctive way of relating to the world. Its characteristics, as I have discussed, include qualities like transformation, consummation, segmentation, self-regulation,

unpredictability, and most generally, an ascending pattern of meaning construction. Most things that people do—including such major activities as work, ritual, and communitas—can be approached playfully or at least touched with a playful spirit. In much the same way leisure (essentially free or discretionary time) can be approached playfully. I also believe play always includes ideas of contest or challenge. In that light, playful leisure is activist or interventionist leisure, where people try to manipulate or provoke the world into responding in particular ways. Those responses (sometimes entirely unanticipated) lead to new recognitions and responses from the player, and the dialogue continues. Pointedly, some leisure is different. Exercising on a treadmill is work-like leisure. Taking time to read a favorite book at the same time every day has a ritualistic quality. And most interesting is that leisure is the essentially satisfying immersion in otherness, or what I call communitas. In this kind of leisure, we soak in a tub, attend a concert, gaze at a panoramic scene, or sit quietly beside a loved one. These are wonderful forms of involvement and provide important lessons of their own sort. But they are not play.

AJP: Where would you place play among life's other pursuits? How important is understanding play to understanding how we live and make sense of the world?

Henricks: Like most play scholars, I believe that play is extremely important to human functioning. But I believe also other patterns of behavior are just as important. To take the one that play scholars and theorists most often contrast to play, work is the quest to accomplish defined ends and, as a result of doing this, to meet one's needs. Work follows canons of effectiveness and efficiency; it narrows action tendencies. In my view, work is the path most focused on adaptation. It teaches creatures the best ways of doing necessary things.

AJP: Is work then, properly, the opposite of play?

Henricks: In my opinion, play's true opposite—and this view is not shared by most theorists of play—is ritual. Ritual is the act of conforming to, or accepting the terms of, established frameworks of meaning. This is done not for the sheer experience of "descending meaning," as I call it, but because one wants to be readied for challenges to come. Whereas workers challenge and change the world (by acts of manipulation or control), ritualists are changed by those worldly patterns. Ritual meets our human need for pattern maintenance. We embrace rituals to learn what guiding principles we can count on.

Differently again, though also closely connected to play, is communitas. This is the act of acceptance or immersion, done not for instrumental purposes (as in the cases of ritual and work) but simply to learn about the possibilities for relatedness or integration. Communitas is usually seen as social immersion and bonding, but it can also be applied to other patterns of engagement (environmental, cultural, physiological, and psychological). To appreciate a beautiful sunset is to recognize that there are sources for living that dwarf the powers of individuals to manipulate and control. We are expanded and strengthened by our participation in these.

Play provides the fourth lesson. Like communitas, play celebrates experience and explores the possibilities of one's immediate environment. However, play stresses the abilities of creatures to assert themselves in these environments, to run out self-directed lines of action. Players impose themselves; they transform. The function of this sort of activity is what I call "goal-attainment"—the need to develop abilities related to conceiving ends of action, forming and implementing strategies, evaluating the world's reaction to these, then trying something different. Play opens up the possibilities of living through this commitment to continual improvisation; work narrows and stabilizes these possibilities. The general idea that individuals and groups have different kinds of requirements and commitments beyond adaptation or survival was developed by Talcott Parsons. I extend this through the four pathways of behavior, which you can envision as responses to these fundamental requirements of living. Play takes its place beside the other things that creatures need to do.

***AJP**:* Is play instinctual or improvisational?

Henricks: As my comments might already suggest, I think that play is distinguished from other fundamental behaviors by the extent to which it requires people to assert themselves quickly and creatively. To play means to make sudden recognitions and responses. A ball comes toward you; you must marshal your resources to meet it. And players like to do new things, to vary what they did a moment before. But improvisation does not exist in a vacuum. Somehow, creatures must find the resources to direct their play. And these resources include physiological forms of encouragement. Because so many species play, there must be established biological and psychological patterns that instigate, monitor, and reward it.

My own approach to this problem is to emphasize the role of framing in all human activities. Scholars usually think of framing as accepted sym-

bolic arrangements, patterns that are social, cultural, and psychological. Accepting the terms of these frees us to focus our creativity in more limited ways. But creatures are also framed by the natural world. We live in bodies that dictate what we can do; we are entirely dependent on an environment that transcends us; even our acts of mind depend on physically constituted brains. Frameworks of such types make possible our inspirations to paint a picture or offer a joke.

For such reasons, I admire the work of those doing animal behavior studies, affective neuroscience, and similar investigations of the physical conditions of existence. Seen in that light, play is an expression of these commitments—not just physiological but social, cultural, environmental, and psychological as well. To that extent, play can be said to be conditioned or caused. But just because play is the expression of all these different conditioning factors as they intersect, it is very difficult to predict how the play moment will proceed. A pleasant urge may move the player; but other elements—an interesting photograph, a joke offered by a friend, a burst of sunlight—may be determinative as well. The human condition is to live in extremely complicated environments. And that complexity is accentuated by the psyche's ability to pause and consider behavior. When we play, we glory in that complexity.

AJP: Is there a serious point to silliness?

Henricks: Sutton-Smith discusses that issue well in his *The Ambiguity of Play*, where "frivolity" is one of his seven rhetorics. The roles of trickster and fool are important in many traditional societies. Contemporary people continue to exalt comedians (who say funny things) and comics (who say things funny). Most of us like to tell and be told jokes. Sometimes we behave in less than adult ways. All these are examples of people ridiculing the established beliefs, mores, and social statuses of their societies. Propriety itself must be kept in its proper place. Nothing should be elevated so highly that it cannot be approached and considered by persons. This applies to the mockers themselves. When we are silly, we get off our high horses; we reveal our understanding that many aspects of public life are largely socially supported pretense. Comedy, like play, celebrates individuals' ability to separate themselves from the terms of their own existence. By objectifying, teasing, and exaggerating, we dramatize the capacities of rational consciousness to resist and control. While tragedy acknowledges the overwhelming control of otherness; comedy honors the resilient human

spirit. Silliness is important. But respect for the conditions that sponsor and sustain life is also important. The right to tease and joke is critical to every society; but should we mock the death of a small child or matters considered holy to another people? Good societies promote work and play; they also promote communitas and ritual.

AJP: Can play and its pleasures be more than momentary and fleeting?

Henricks: This is one of the most difficult questions in play studies. And it is central to the thesis that play is developmental, that acts of play build qualities in persons—and perhaps societies—that are consequential for later life moments. Many scholars work on that issue by demonstrating empirically the effects of play strategies on learning, physical health, mental and emotional well-being, moral awareness, and patterns of social relationship. I support those lines of inquiry and largely accept the thesis that playing changes people. It is hard to say *how* those changes occur. Some changes are perhaps attributable to acts of repetition. Repeated swings of a golf club or recitations of a vocabulary word may engrave commitments. At other times, a single event—let us say, your boss yells at you at work one day or you pledge your support to someone at a marriage ceremony—has enduring consequences. Moments of personal recognition, which may be affective and behavioral as well as cognitive, occur in different ways. Sometimes these recognitions are preserved only as personal commitments; others may also be social and cultural affairs that are sanctioned by other persons. Such questions are not distinctive to play but are central to the general quest to understand how personhood is created, sustained, advanced, and diminished.

AJP: If you call yourself, say, a card player or a baseball fan, and take stock of your capabilities in relation to the way you play, are you defining your true self?

Henricks: I find it interesting that people in advanced industrial societies tend to define themselves in such ways. In the earliest societies, people thought of themselves as members of tribes, communities, genders, and age groups. Work status, religion, nationality, and ethnicity later became important themes. In contemporary societies—with their tens of thousands of occupations and somewhat blurred class relations—leisure has emerged as a setting for interaction and identity management. In that associational style of relating, we are allowed to transcend our families, work groups, and neighborhoods by establishing new patterns of interest-based connection. I believe most people desire badges (publicly recognized symbols) of posi-

tive identity. That is, we want acknowledgment that we are respected by others. Such respect may be difficult to obtain in work groups, families, and churches where relationships are fraught with consequence and where competition may be fierce. Leisure provides a lighter, self-chosen environment for these processes. If we are not good at bowling or tennis, or if we're not finding congenial companions there, we can turn to other pursuits. In play, we can set aside work and family problems (our playmates don't wish to hear much about these in any case) and focus on the matters at hand. Others who share our interest recognize us as someone who can be counted on to show up Thursday nights and support them as they support us. There is no reason why leisure status of this sort may not rise to the top of valued self-themes. The idea of a core, or integrated, self is something I'm very interested in. I would only say here that the extent to which people seek this quality of stability and integration is probably variable. The idea of character as a central and guiding force in personal life was very important during the nineteenth century. The twentieth century replaced this with the idea of personality, which was more malleable and less morally charged. Now, postmodern writers speak of masks, roles, and selves that represent the various ways that people attach themselves to the world. Some people pride themselves on consistency and authenticity. Others exploit the possibilities of plural selves. Most of us live between these extremes.

AJP: So players not only lose themselves in play, they find themselves there, too?

Henricks: Positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has emphasized the quality of deep engagement that people sometimes experience in play. That commitment to the intricacies of moment can be so consuming that players may lose the sense of being private actors conducting maneuvers on environments external to them. Instead, one becomes immersed in the stream of occurrences and thinks not at all of what is occurring beyond the boundaries of the event. Is the stable or core self, as an ongoing entity that maintains relationships to many aspects of the world, different from the playing self?

Two views of this should be noted. Performance theory, consistent with the idea of plural selves that is popular today, tends to emphasize the new possibilities for self-experience that are found in play. Players can assume identities that are different from the ones they normally inhabit. Ideally, as in psychotherapy, those newly found selves (that are acted into being) serve as models for future behaviors in other settings. To answer your question,

what you find of yourself are new possibilities for living.

The other view, what I call the "presentational" view of self, is central to modernist scholars like Erving Goffman and Csikszentmihalyi himself. This view emphasizes the degree to which people bring ongoing aspects of their identities into the playground. As Goffman stresses, being a player does not mean surrendering one's more general status as a person. Another sociologist, Gary Alan Fine, emphasizes how different levels of identity intersect in play experiences. And Csikszentmihalyi acknowledges that "flow" occurs as a meeting place of one's preexisting skills and commitments with the challenges of the situation. In that light, play is not an escape; it is a cultivation, refinement, or fulfillment of who we are. Said differently, again to get back to your question, what we find in play is the reclaimed self, the qualities that need to be revisited and sharpened so that we can return strengthened to other life commitments.

AJP: Do any other activities integrate mind and body or emotions and relationships or culture and self as well as play does?

Henricks: Like most play scholars, I am a very strong proponent of play. However, and different from many play scholars, I insist that other fundamental human activities—ritual , work, and communitas—address these same issues and are just as important to human functioning. Because of that view, I believe the challenge for play studies is to understand play's *distinctive* approach to these concerns. I repeat here also that work, or labor as this is developed in the Marxian tradition, is a tremendously important life commitment that confronts the very issues you ask about. Similarly, I would not elevate play above the deep pondering of immersive relationships that I call communitas at its most idealized expression—which is love. Each of these pathways cultivates particular patterns of awareness, forms of identity, and comprehensions of relationship. Each teaches its own sorts of lessons; all are necessary.

AJP: As you survey the field of play, what do you believe is the most fertile ground for growing new ideas?

Henricks: Each play scholar moves the discipline ahead in his or her own way. Some find new ideas through testing hypotheses and reconsidering data. Others, like me, focus on the implications of idea systems and seek new ideas through comparisons and combination of these. In either case, I believe there is much to be gained by approaching the study of play in the same manner that players approach their play objects and settings. That

is, play itself prizes experimentation and novelty. This is encountered by taking on self-induced challenges and by accepting the challenge of others. The best forms of play—and the best forms of scholarship—feature individuals moving beyond what is conventional. We learn by confronting and responding to the unfamiliar, difficult, and uncertain.

At one level, play studies advances by substantiating and refining the different explanatory narratives that Sutton-Smith describes. But there also needs to be continued questioning of those narratives, with the goal of comprehending their underpinnings and their possibilities for integration. That widening of the play studies lens should not be guided by scholarly imperatives alone. Advanced industrial societies are witnessing a tremendous profusion of play opportunities. Only some of these are being recognized and addressed as proper topics of study. The computerized world is upon us. Spectator sports, shopping, hobbies of every description, dining, vacationing, and sexual expression are now fully developed cultural scenes. New patterns of social relationship, many electronically mediated, are emerging. Adults as well as children are committed to ongoing self-development. Play studies will advance by accommodating itself to these matters of everyday living. The same can be said for what is sometimes called the embodied self. Contemporary people are fascinated by their own bodies. That fascination is much more than a commitment to stay alive; it is a quest to enhance physical expression and experience. We want to know how our bodies operate and how those operations contribute to the selves we aspire to be. Contributions from the physical sciences are necessary to understanding those processes.

To be sure, many play scholars are addressing these themes. Much more needs to be done to extend and align those developing knowledge bases. The world of real play is moving ahead briskly. The challenge for play studies is to keep abreast of that movement. This should be done not only for the sake of understanding but to assist persons and groups in choosing the best possibilities for their lives.