



From Playgrounds to PlayStation: The Interaction of Technology and Play

Carroll Pursell

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In this romp through the changing landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American toys, games, hobbies, and amusements, senior historian of technology Carroll Pursell poses a simple but interesting question: What can we learn by studying the relationship between technology and play?

From Playgrounds to PlayStation explores how play reflects and drives the evolution of American culture. Pursell engagingly examines the ways in which technology affects play and play shapes people. The objects that children (and adults) play with and play on, along with their games and the hobbies they pursue, can reinforce but also challenge gender roles and cultural norms. Inventors—who often talk about "playing" at their work, as if motivated by the pure fun of invention—have used new materials and technologies to reshape sports and gameplay, sometimes even crafting new, extreme forms of recreation, but always responding to popular demand.

Drawing from a range of sources, including scholarly monographs, patent records, newspapers, and popular and technical journals, the book covers numerous modes and sites of play. Pursell touches on the safety-conscious playground reform movement, the dazzling mechanical innovations that gave rise to commercial amusement parks, and the media's colorful promotion of toys, pastimes, and sporting events. Along the way, he shows readers how technology enables the forms, equipment, and devices of play to evolve constantly, both reflecting consumer choices and driving innovators and manufacturers to promote toys that involve entirely new kinds of play—from LEGOs and skateboards to beading kits and videogames.

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