

kinetic, team-based experience found in *America's Army*, *A Force More Powerful* offers a 2D, turn-based, methodical-strategy approach to gameplay.

Bogost's critique of *A Force More Powerful* is that, even more so than *America's Army*, it tries to steer a geopolitical experience away from the larger influences of time, culture, and location that drive these movements, which are often tied to Western ideals of democracy and capitalism that do not always apply to a target society. He writes, "Just as *America's Army* mounts a procedural rhetoric of commutativity for armed conflict, *A Force More Powerful* mounts one for unarmed conflict. *A Force More Powerful* underscores the fact that regime change is not a disinterested process. Rather regime change comes about through external forces, and it always implies that the external forces perceive the existing regime to be an illegitimate one" (p. 80).

*Antiwargame* is an independent persuasive game made by a single artist, Josh On. The player is assigned the role of the U.S. President with resources of blue people (civilian) and green personnel (military). A player controls his or her budget by balancing spending on the military and business, on one hand, and social programs and foreign aid on the other. Military personnel, used as National Guardsmen in the states, are sent abroad to an unnamed, oil-producing country. Players are rated by big business and the media, and they can be assassinated if they spend too much on social programs, or they can be overrun by protesters if they spend too little. Troops sent abroad are quickly demotivated and returned to their blue color.

"Together, the game's rules create a

systemic claim about the logic of the war on terrorism, namely that the purported reasons for war—security and freedom—are false. Unlike other pacifist arguments, the *Antiwargame's* opposition to war is not based on anti-violence; rather it opposes war by claiming that a broken logic drives post-9/11 conflicts" (p. 84).

Bogost's book provides a new lens—procedural rhetoric—to use in the analysis of games and an excellent survey of the history of games of this ilk, many of which are currently available. It is an excellent introduction and reference for the corner of the playground marked for video games.

—Steve Jacobs, *Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY*

### **Give and Go: Basketball as a Cultural Practice**

*Thomas Mc Laughlin*

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008. Bibliography, index. viii, 250 pp. \$21.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780791473931

Every couple of months, it seems, I have a colleague, graduate student, or journalist approach me for advice on writing up something ethnographic or sociological about their weekly pickup basketball game. An avid, if physically challenged, Thursday-night player myself, I find this desire to help others (if not oneself) understand why running up and down a court with nine other people trying to throw a leather ball through a steel hoop is so compelling and full of meaning rather heartwarming. Yet I am typically cautious to the point of discouraging in dealing with such in-

quiries. It is, after all, far more difficult than most imagine to say something of interest or import in this well-worn terrain. Thomas Mc Laughlin's contribution to the genre rises above all this. Unparalleled in scope, coverage, quality of writing, and depth of thought, *Give and Go* sets a standard for others to learn from and aspire to.

Mc Laughlin's first and most basic contribution is to provide a rich, theoretically informed explication of the pleasures and communal requirements of actually playing pickup basketball. With passion for the game and a firm grasp on the scholarly literature pertaining to cultural practice and practices, Mc Laughlin, an English professor at Appalachian State University, gives voice to the embodied understandings and commitments that make pickup basketball meaningful and enjoyable. Numerous writers in the human sciences—in venues ranging from boxing to stock-floor trading to Muslim prayer rituals—have been grappling with Bourdieu's notions of habitus, embodied knowledge, virtue, and tacit understanding in recent years, and Mc Laughlin's treatment is, in my view, exemplary among them.

And *Give and Go* is far more than a description of the experiential aspects of basketball. In the middle chapters of the book, Mc Laughlin draws upon basketball dynamics to develop a whole range of insights on contemporary social life and culture. Decision making and coordination on the court illustrate the cultural requirements of postindustrial culture. The community forms and ethical processes of the playground reflect and reveal the challenges of social organization in a democratic (and individualistic) culture. And, most obviously perhaps, the social

dynamics played out in basketball reveal both what is problematic and potentially transformative about race and gender in contemporary America. Basketball, in each of these chapters, emerges not just as an object of study but also as a springboard for analysis that extends well beyond the confines of the court. Readers will not agree with all of the commentary and conclusions, but if they share Mc Laughlin's passion for the game, they will find it hard to resist being drawn into his intellectual orbit.

Mc Laughlin's unique ability to both get inside the game and weave connections to broader societal matters allows him to see beyond the orthodoxies and limitations of much sport scholarship and cultural criticism. I found his reflections on interpersonal race relations to be particularly thought provoking, for example, and his insistence on ethics and morality is virtually unparalleled in the sport literature. That said, Mc Laughlin is surprisingly conventional in his assessment of elite, mass-mediated forms of basketball.

The criticisms of what he calls "spectacle sport" offered by Mc Laughlin are not necessarily wrong. However, they are fundamentally tone deaf to the distinctive pleasures and functions of high performance sport, especially as experienced by spectators and fans. And what is revealed here, I think, is Mc Laughlin's own familiarity with and preference for informal, participatory forms of basketball practice. This orientation is more problematic than may first meet the eye. The problem with Mc Laughlin's participatory grounding is not only that it underestimates the potential benefits and satisfactions of big-time, organized basketball, or that it may overgeneralize from his own,

mostly positive personal experience with the pickup game. The deeper problem is that it often conflates normative commitments and claims with more descriptive, dispassionate analyses of mere cultural practices. It seems to me, in other words, that the relationship between basketball as an ethical style and basketball as a cultural practice is a more complicated and multifaceted than it otherwise may appear in much of this volume.

This latter set of observations and comments is not intended to dismiss this book, nor to minimize Mc Laughlin's accomplishment. Quite the contrary, it is precisely because of the scope of the claims in *Give and Go*, the clarity and erudition of its formulations, and the originality of many of its observations and interpretations that I am pushing and probing. Like a great basketball run, this book has gotten my competitive and analytical juices flowing—and that, for me, is the highest order of praise a fellow researcher, writer, and player can offer.

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—Douglas Hartmann, *University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN*

### **Boxing: A Cultural History**

*Kasia Boddy*

London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008.

References, illustrations, index. 478 pp.  
\$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781861893697

In *Boxing: A Cultural History*, Kasia Boddy, a lecturer in the Department of English at University College in London, gives us an encyclopedic survey of the ring in art and literature. This is a big, beauti-

ful book. Reaktion Publishers printed it on high-quality, oversized paper to accommodate 150 illustrations, and these images are an integral part of the book's purpose.

Boddy surveys the manly art's long history, from its origins in ancient Mediterranean cultures through its golden moments in the twentieth century. Along the way she cites (in over sixty pages of double-column footnotes) a wide range of materials and quotes from every conceivable literary source that mentions "the sweet science," as pugilism has been known. Beyond the literati, Boddy takes us not only through boxing paintings, photographs, films, and sculptures, but also through the backgrounds and thoughts of the artists who created these works.

Readers interested in play will be especially interested in Boddy's discussion of boxing and youth culture. She gives us a strong few pages on the entrance of boxing and rough sports into the Victorian middle class through both the public schools and such popular boys' novels as *Tom Brown's School Days*. She returns briefly to the theme of amateur and youth boxing in her discussion of the twentieth century.

Boddy is especially good in uncovering the genealogy of boxing literature and art. With deep knowledge of her sources, she discusses artistic depictions of the ring across the centuries. For example, George Bellows was one of the earliest painters of boxing scenes in America, and he took considerable risk in depicting such a disreputable subject at the beginning of the twentieth century. Boddy contrasts Bellows with the late-eighteenth-century English painter William Hogarth, setting