

deviance in the name of entertainment.

While many academic anthologies are simply a hodge-podge of seemingly random articles, the seventeen essays assembled in *The American Circus* are connected by several themes. The first, and by far most prominent, is an insistence upon the circus—and popular culture in general—as an important prism for studying the intersections of power, identity, and economics in U.S. history. Many of the essays also share the belief that there is something peculiarly “American” about the circus and the cultural practices that surround it. Early in the introduction, Kenneth L. Ames proclaims the circus a “major manifestation of American cultural values,” noting that “there are few significant stands of American life that the circus did not touch or reference in some way” (p. 11–12). This argument is generally persuasive, although I imagine other nations could make similar claims. In fact, it would have been surprising if the American circus did *not* reference “significant strands” of American cultural life.

Still, this is a minor concern. Both of these books represent important additions to the historical study of circuses in the United States. Combining insights from the fields of material culture, animal studies, visual culture, and disability studies (among others), *The American Circus* in particular is a model interdisciplinary study of mass culture, one that scholars of other public amusements (e.g., zoos, amusement parks, world’s fairs) would be wise to emulate.

My only concern stems from the two volumes’ format. Both are gorgeous to behold, and each has slick paper and beautiful full-color illustrations. Indeed,

at first glance, *Circus and the City* and *The American Circus* resemble “coffee-table” books—which makes it somewhat difficult to determine what to do with them. They are probably too expensive and bulky for regular classroom use (in hardcover, the edited volume weighs in at more than four pounds). However, given their top-notch scholarship, they are more than vehicles for reprinting pretty pictures. Ultimately, I would recommend both of these books (but especially *The American Circus*) for scholars’ personal collections and for all libraries collecting books on the history of American popular culture, American visual art, and the history of human-animal relations.

—John M. Kinder, *Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK*

Jane Austin, Game Theorist

Michael Suk-Young Chwe

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. Preface, references, preface, index, images. 272 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0691155760

There remains much confusion between discussions of “game theory” and “game studies,” depending on the disciplinary company you keep. Of course, they sound like similar pursuits. The emerging field of game studies, little more than a decade old, tends to build on anthropological studies of play where the focus lies on the sociological and cultural implications of games and play practices. This group is particularly interested in digital games. *Game studies* emerged quite apart from

game theory and its economic and political science models for decision making that systematized games during the last century. Game studies has in part ignored the slightly more established field, perhaps due to a need to study the game-playing experience from so many other methodological approaches and perhaps from game theory's seemingly inflexible style of conflict analysis. In general terms, game theory purposely ignores the cultural context for decision making, and game studies ignores mathematical models. The two relatively recent disciplines have stayed in their separate corners for some time—until now.

Michael Suk-Young Chwe, a professor of political science at the University of California, Los Angeles, has made a career out of the study of decision-making tipping points in communication and action. Trained as an economist, Chwe is interested in how people coordinate their actions when enough other people also do so. Chwe regularly teaches courses on game theory, and he, too, likely encountered the gap I have found between game theory and other scholarly disciplines, and even everyday life. After all, game theory breaks down, in delicious detail, reactions to, and strategies for, conflict. Conflict is a fundamental aspect of the human condition. Shouldn't game theory be a relevant tool for everyone, not just economists?

Enter Chwe with his latest book, *Jane Austen: Game Theorist*. In game theory circles, the text might cause a bit of a stir. Calling novelist Jane Austen, the English writer known for her social commentary in her innovative, protofeminist eighteenth-century novels, a *game theorist* seems a bit of a stretch. After all, the classic

story of the emergence of the discipline holds that leading Princeton mathematician John Von Neumann invented game theory at the dawn of the Cold War to create and study strategies of conflict—specifically through a proof for a zero sum, mixed-strategy equilibria in two-party situations called at the time a “game.” Game theory as a field came into its own in the 1950s and 1960s and mapped out strategic decision-making phenomenon through mathematical models. In any tale I have encountered about game theory (and I have heard a good number, from economist's lectures to visitors to my classes from fields as diverse as biology and government studies) I have yet to hear a woman's name mentioned in the development of game theory, let alone the inclusion of an eighteenth-century writer who critics occasionally pan for her narrow focus on the social goings-on of the English gentry.

To Austen fans, this may seem like yet another book taking advantage of Austen's immense popularity as do, say, the the 2009 novel by Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, or William Deresiewicz's 2012 self-help book, *A Jane Austen Education: How Six Novels Taught Me About Love, Friendship, and the Things That Really Matter*, and any number of other articles and books relating Jane Austen to this and that, not to mention recent Kiera Knightly films of the novels. Even without the contextual controversies, Austen, as a well-known novelist writing about complicated social relations in England and girls' quests for marriage, seems rather a world apart from the mathematical frame of game theory to which Chwe subscribes.

Thus far, the arts, it seems, have been of little inspiration in the development of the arts of decision making, their disciplinary second cousins in the social sciences. Chwe attempts to bring these worlds together—with relative success. Chwe secondarily brings to the book folktales from the African American tradition such as the story of Flossie the Fox, which uses humor as social critique and irony as a means of criticality. Such tales, Chwe argues, were instrumental in the development of effective tactics for the civil rights movement in the United States during the mid-twentieth century.

For the most part, Chwe's text delivers a refreshing approach to the study of decision making, and offers a delightful unpacking of what decision sciences might become if we, indeed, expanded what some consider its source thinking and literature to be. Chwe introduces, for example, Austen's notion of "cluelessness," which she offers in her writing as a way for those who are disenfranchised from power to resist by open avoidance that borders on ignorance. As a tactic, Chwe points out that such an approach can be surprisingly effective.

I have much praise for this volume and only a few baleful wishes. First, while the move the author makes to get beyond the work of Austen and explore African American folktales is a welcome and compelling addition to the original perspectives Chwe offers, I wish for the sake of balance that the folktale work didn't seem so tacked-on. Chwe could have pointed the reader to one or two more sources and balanced the title of the book to give equal attention to Austen and the narratives of African American slave narratives, or simply divided the work into a series

of books. As it stands, the folk traditions and slave strategies are subsumed into a larger focus on Austen, and the resulting analysis of this American tradition reads in some ways as a pet project, subservient to Austen. This is unfortunate.

Second, I wish Chwe had proposed ways for readers to take the analysis of the texts of Austen and truly learn to translate between and among practices in decision sciences. He fleshes out one example in chapter 2, which reads as a stand-alone article with a style that needs to be better integrated into the overall flow of the book. It seems out of place in comparison to the rest of the text, which builds arguments more slowly and does not include the kind detailed analyses of payoff matrices found in this chapter. The text would benefit from unpacking, and Chwe needs to explain more concisely how the reader can take these analytical tools to new disciplines. As it stands, the book does not quite offer readers the language they need to use game theory's analytical toolkit more broadly. It makes for a missed opportunity, one that could have been accomplished by using clearly labeled models with common paradigms such as Prisoner's Dilemma, Tragedy of the Commons, I Cut-You Choose, Snowdrift/Chicken, and Tit for Tat—in other words, situations commonly discussed in game-theory shorthand.

While I wish the author had framed these models in language that better fit the discipline, I very much appreciate an authority in game theory shedding new light on what the field could become. *Jane Austen: Game Theorist* stands as a very valuable contribution to game designers, students of play, and those curious about

decisions and tactics for change throughout the sciences and the arts.

There remains at present a rich opportunity to bring the best thinking from both disciplines to bear on today's vexing challenges and social issues. A wide mix of creative, underrepresented voices in thinking about conflict and strategy will define the fields of both game studies and game theory. Chwe's volume is a valuable first step toward a more interdisciplinary and much more inclusive field of decision sciences.

—Mary Flanagan, *Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH*

Infinite Reality: The Hidden Blueprint of Our Virtual Lives

Jim Blascovich and Jeremy Bailenson
New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011. Contents, introduction, notes, index. 298 pp. \$27.99 cloth. ISBN: 9780061809507

Early in my former life as a computer programmer, I was chastised by a boss for my interest in personal computers. "PCs are fine, if you like toys," he said, "but business will never accept them." Play, he was arguing, has no place in the business world, and despite the obvious sea-change in corporate attitudes towards the PC, this view persists in many industries.

The frivolity assigned to machines associated with play lingers in discussions about virtual reality, but the contemporary study by Jim Blascovich and Jeremy Bailenson does much to counter this narrative. Their review of our digital

planet entitled *Infinite Reality: The Hidden Blueprint of Our Virtual Lives* is readable, thorough, and compelling, and it takes seriously a virtual world that is often seen as utopic and unserious. Describing this book as wide ranging does it a disservice; the authors parlay their years of experience both in virtual reality and social and cognitive sciences into a book that sympathetically describes Ray Kurzweil's contributions to the field *and* acknowledges just how frightening the possibilities of direct programming of a human brain can be. The authors validate the importance of the idea of play in the virtual world while never sugarcoating the implications of the research that both they and a host of others have done, providing readers with a fascinating primer on the opportunities and nightmares of virtual reality.

Indeed, one of the most compelling elements of this book is its ability to negotiate the relentlessly dialectical nature of the modern world's relationship with and to technology. The authors carefully describe both the techno-utopian views held by futurists like Kurzweil and the near-dystopic possibilities of the technology industries while never claiming that either view completely explains our place in the digital world.

This style of argument does not come from some false desire for balance. Their own assumption is that "disruptive as it may seem, the shift to an ever more virtual world—of which the Internet was only one step—may be something close to inevitable, given how humans are wired neurophysiologically" (p. 8), and this sense of the need to understand why this "shift" is inevitable drives the structure of their work. The book starts as a primer of