

Books

CRITICAL PLAY: RADICAL GAME DESIGN

By Mary Flanagan
The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA
318 pages; \$29.95 (hardcover)

Games are fun. But what more can they be? To answer this question, Flanagan, a game designer herself, looks at games in an art-historical context, examining what it means to play critically—that is, in ways that address what it means to be alive. She charts the history of dollhouses, from the Victorian era to *The Sims*, and board games from the ancient Egyptian game of Senet to Monopoly, analyzing how these forms of play reflected their societies, and how artists adapted them. Later, she moves to games devised by artists, from the Situationists and Dadaists to present-day pranksters, urban gamers, and activist computer-game designers. Flanagan finally weaves these threads into a recipe for making critical games and a theory of avant-garde game design.

DESIGN REVOLUTION: 100 PRODUCTS THAT EMPOWER PEOPLE

By Emily Pilloton
Metropolis Books, New York
304 pages; \$34.95 (paperback)

Products that empower? It's not an oxymoron. "People love stuff," Alan Chochinov writes in an introductory manifesto, but "stuff" doesn't have to be consumerist crap. These examples play the design game by different rules. Forget the market, forget form and function, Chochinov and Pilloton say, and design to celebrate life. Buzzwords from Pilloton's design-for-social-good nonprofit Project H (humanity, habitats, health, happiness) punctuate the text, which is broken into categories like Water and Education. Products by heavy hitters, like IDEO's water-transporting Aquaduct tricycle, are balanced by innovations from non-designers, like material scientist Tony Flynn's D.I.Y. clay water filter, proving you don't have to think like a traditional designer—or rather, you shouldn't—to change the world.

FIXED: GLOBAL FIXED-GEAR BIKE CULTURE

By Andrew Edwards and Max Leonard
Laurence King, London
144 pages; \$25.00 (paperback)

For such a simple machine, the fixed-gear bike has one hell of a pedigree: from the default steeds of the late 19th century to the thoroughbreds of Japan's Keirin racing circuit to the souped-up, stripped-down rides of messengers, bike polo players, and Urban Outfitters shoppers. The names of

legendary cyclists like Merckx and Obree quickly give way to modern freestylers like Big Red and SuperTed as the book turns from a nuts-and-bolts history lesson to a flashy, skateboard-video barrage of tricks, tattoos, and collaborations with bike companies and scenesters like Keith Haring and Paul Smith. It's proof of the bike's dual status as tradition and trend.

DELETE: THE VIRTUE OF FORGETTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Viktor Mayer-Schönberger
Princeton University Press, Princeton
256 pages; \$24.95 (hardcover)

Since we increasingly depend on electronic surrogates to help us remember things—phone numbers, birthdays, lines of verse—digital technology can make us feel forgetful. But as a society, Mayer-Schönberger argues, we're far from it. "Comprehensive digital memory" has obvious benefits—in medicine, economics, and the environment—but Mayer-Schönberger's subject is its shortcomings. Perfect memory, he worries, is leading us toward the surveillance society envisioned by Bentham and Foucault, with drastic consequences for privacy, individual reputations, and personal memory. His solution is both intriguing and problematic: a built-in expiration date for digital information to mimic the fallibility of the human mind.

