In *Transformative Leisure: A Philosophy of Communication*, Annette Holba continues the attention she gave in *Philosophical Leisure: Recuperative Praxis for Human Communication* (Marquette University Press, 2007) to the role of leisure in human flourishing. Holba grounds her approach to leisure in philosophy of communication, exploring theory-informed action, or *praxis*, on two fronts of human experience: engagement with something larger than the self, through the discipline of play, and a sense of inwardness that nurtures outward human communicative connections. This book compels my interest as a reviewer because it claims an important scholarly domain for the field of communication as it demonstrates the applied value of philosophy of communication.

The book's four thematic chapters treat leisure in contexts of discourse, action, community, and transcendence. Within each context, a new facet of transformative leisure makes a contribution to personal and communal creativity and wholeness. Each chapter offers a way to conceptualize or frame transformative leisure. For example, the first chapter, “Transformative Leisure in Discourse,” begins with narrative and historicity. Narrative provides us with meaning frameworks to understand ourselves and others. Historicity suggests that each historical moment brings questions for response before the human condition.

With leisure’s atrophy into the routine of recreation, it is no longer responsive to questions of this historical moment. Holba examines the public discourse of leisure and highlights how transformative leisure differs from recreation (p. 14). She then articulates leisure as a philosophy of communication in order to promote an understanding of leisure as separate from recreation and to explore leisure from multiple perspectives, so that we can understand this aspect of human experience as a philosophical act and how it affects and shapes our “communicative being” (p. 16). We must tend to the “communicative spirit” (p. 17) in order to nourish meaning through philosophical leisure, which leads to outreach to others. Leisure, as a philosophy of communication, implicates the communicative cultivation of oneself and one’s community in order to engage in “authentic communicative engagement with the Other” (p. 17).
Holba distinguishes recreation from transformative leisure through a continuum of metaphors. Artfulness of approach is captured in the craftsman/technician opposition; in relation to action, we see spectators/participants, and in terms of intentionality and outcome, we see game/play. The love of the craft distinguishes the craftsman from the technician and transformative leisure from recreation. The participant offers a fitting, attentive response, whereas the spectator lives in a space separate from action. The creative making or poesis of play is a mindful shaping rooted in contemplation, springing forth from the craftsman’s “metaphorical hand” (p. 32). A game, however, is scripted, driving toward an outcome, usually within a competitive framework. Winning, not the experience of the game, is the game's goal. Play attends to the thing itself, not to an aimed-for outcome.

Holba situates her treatment within the larger ontological, epistemological, and axiological framework of modernity and postmodernity; the eclipse of leisure is tied to a scientific, instrumental view of the world. Leisure has a philosophical origin and is removed from an intentionality tied to rational choice and goal-seeking. Leisure is about interiority, not about the external action of the body. Leisure begins as an activity of the mind tied to wonder and to the need to play. Leisure is “engaged in the aesthetic experience for the sake of the action itself” (p. 16), not for a predetermined end. Leisure opens us to unknown possibilities rather than predefined goals, which makes it transformative.

The connection between transformative leisure and communication rests in the potential for transformative experiences to enrich and deepen one’s communicative potentialities with others, moving away from gossip and negative communication toward deep, constructive, enriching discourse. Transformative leisure opens up the world to broaden one’s experiential and communicative horizons in new, creative ways. Transformative leisure habituates us to turn toward healthy communication patterns. Enriched and expanded sensibilities open our communicative horizons with others. Finally, Holba offers the hopeful possibility that recreation and transformative leisure are not totalities, and what begins as one may end as the other.

Transformative leisure involves contemplation that elevates our interiority or soul and opens the possibility for transformation, but does not hold such transformation as an instrumental goal. This lack of instrumental focus is key for the ontology of leisure. However, contemplative leisure is linked to practical wisdom—but in such a way that potential is invited, not demanded or planned. Transformative leisure prepares us for wise action expressed most humanly in substantive conversation with others that expresses a deep and authentic humanity.

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