What is art's relationship to play? Those interested in this question tend to look to modern philosophy for answers, but, as this book shows, the question was already debated in antiquity by luminaries like Plato and Aristotle. Over the course of eight chapters, this book contextualizes those debates and demonstrates their significance for theoretical problems today. Topics include the ancient child psychology at the root of the ancient Greek word for “play” (paidia), the numerous toys that have survived from antiquity, and the meaning of play's conceptual opposite, the “serious” (spoudaios). What emerges is a concept of play markedly different from the one we have inherited from modernity. Play is not a certain set of activities which unleashes a certain feeling of pleasure; it is rather a certain feeling of pleasure that unleashes the activities we think of as “play”. As such, it offers a new set of theoretical challenges.

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PLAY AND AESTHETICS IN ANCIENT GREECE

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Frontmatter
More Information
To Carolyn Erkkila Kidd
For those first—and best—moments of play
Comparisons have often been made, sometimes amounting to identification, between art and play. They have never thrown much light on the nature of art, because those who have made them have not troubled to think what they meant by play.

– Collingwood, Principles of Art i.V§1

Tell me: what happens when we get this puppet drunk?

– Plato, Laws 1.645d
## Contents

*Acknowledgements*  
*List of Abbreviations*

**Introduction**  
2. Why Plato Needs Play  
3. Plato's Play and the Tragic Paradox  
4. What Do Pleasure-Objects Do? An Inquiry into Toys  
5. Aristotle’s Demotion of Play  
6. Play vs. Mimesis in Aristotle's Aesthetics  
7. Serious Play as Goal-Oriented Play  
8. The Value of Serious Things before and after Death

**Conclusions: Toward a Pleasure-Model of Play**

**Bibliography**  
**Index**
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Speaking of whom, a little apology: since I was unable to fit him into the bibliography or footnotes, I would like to acknowledge here some of the things my son Eric has taught me about play. Three moments especially stand out. At age one, we were pretending to be stuck on a purple stripe painted onto a sidewalk in Florida: “I like this game,” he said, although I had not realized it was a “game”. At age three, after watching Disney’s Robin Hood for the first time, he immediately turned to me and said, “Let’s play it.” It was the obvious next step for him, but not for me. A year or so later we were playing a real game, and, when one of us lost, he was so shocked and upset—not by the ignominy of defeat, but by the fact that a game could be so quickly and irrevocably over. A devastating, but incredibly efficient, closural device.
Abbreviations

ARV = Beazley, J. D. 1963. Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters. 2nd edn. Oxford.
List of Abbreviations

SEG = Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum. 1923–. Leiden/Amsterdam.