

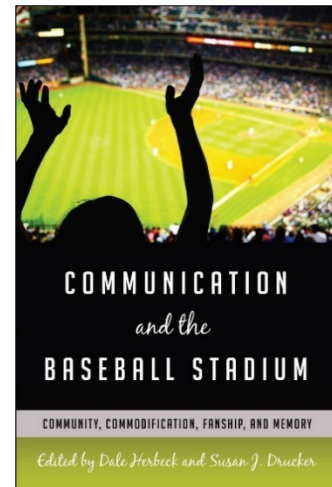
Dale Herbeck and Susan J. Drucker (Eds.), **Communication and the Baseball Stadium: Community, Commodification, Fanship, and Memory**, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2017, 286 pp., \$54.95 (paperback).

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Baseball is a major American pastime, and visiting a baseball stadium to watch a game in person is something many people have done at some point during their lives. It is because of this that baseball stadiums have become major fixtures in the lives of many, fixtures that have been described as helping shape to “the ways that people make sense of the world they live in, once lived in, or hope to build” (Borer, 2008, p. 9). Herbeck and Drucker, the editors of **Communication and the Baseball Stadium: Community, Commodification, Fanship, and Memory**, echo this train of thought in their introduction, describing the baseball stadium as a place “of memory, of identity, of athletic and architectural accomplishment,” capable of creating “a community of fans,” sustaining the community at large by giving community members a common point of identification, and helping to “revitalize cities in the fight against urban decay” (p. x). It is a desire to further understand and explore these spaces that serves as the driving force behind this text and the 13 chapters within it. Beyond this, the editors have another goal: increasing the amount of research on baseball stadiums done from a communications perspective. Herbeck and Drucker, having surveyed the literature on baseball stadiums, argue that “to date . . . almost nothing has been written about baseball stadiums as sites of communication and community” (p. xiv). This book is thus positioned as both a contribution to the literature and a specific intervention in the literature, expanding the theoretical tool kit in play within baseball-stadium-focused research and prioritizing new communications-specific issues.



The centrality of communications is obvious within the structure of the text. Not only does each chapter have a portion devoted to explaining the theory being used within it, but Herbeck and Drucker also organize the text around four themes, each of which pairs communication with another concept. “Community and Communication,” the first of these themes, showcases multiple examinations of the relationship between the baseball stadium and community (which is defined in a few different ways). Brook examines Dodger Stadium as the product of competing community interests, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of a poor, heavily Latino community. Drucker and Gumpert, drawing on the concept of collective memory, examine how Citi Field, the new home of the New York Mets, “sought to stimulate collective memory and social cohesion” (p. 31) and the reasons for what the authors deem a general failure to do so. The final chapter of this section focuses on Rickwood Field, the oldest baseball park still in use today, and its role as a “discourse community” in shaping race relations in Birmingham, Alabama. This initial section models the structure and organization for all future chapters. While the exact number of chapters will vary, each section is structured around the pairing of a specific concept (community, fandom, memory, and commodification) with communication and has different authors, all exploring specific elements of the baseball stadium while using different communications theories.

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The second section, "Fandom and Communication," deals heavily with the experience and behavior of those who attend baseball games. From a technological deterministic analysis of the media/soundscape with Yankee Stadium to the legality of heckling within a stadium to a symbolic interactionist analysis of the spectator experience within a minor league baseball stadium, the focus here is always, in some way, on the stadium. However, it should be noted that, in all but one chapter, the stadium is a space located in the United States. The one exception to this American focus comes in this section with a semantic, historical analysis of the construction of Japan's Koshien Stadium. Plugh, the author of this chapter, argues that stadiums are capable of time bending; that they prove that, even as time passes us by, "our traditions can be kept alive and in fact must be kept alive" (p. 142).

The third section, "Memory and Communication," in many ways builds off the argument made in Plugh's essay. Each chapter, in some way, deals with a destroyed stadium or a now-distant history. Chapter 8 utilizes theories of public memory to make sense of the unsuccessful fight to save Detroit's Tiger Stadium; chapter 9 has its pair of long destroyed stadiums (Forbes Field and Comiskey Park) and the notion of "phantom stadia"; and chapter 10 examines PNC Park and the representation of Pittsburgh Baseball within it. The fourth and final section, "Commodification and Communication," largely moves on from destroyed stadiums, with authors instead focusing on the forces driving and shaping contemporary stadium construction. This discussion begins with a chapter on the construction and impact of the Houston Astrodome and then shifts, in the next chapter, to the reasons behind the successful renovation of Wrigley Field (and how exactly the stadium and team owners defined success). Chapter 13, the final chapter, takes a similar tact, focusing on the construction and design of Jacob's Field, which Flynn and Carlisle argue "recreated the aura and authenticity of early ballparks" and "helped rebuild the relationship between the team and potential fans" (p. 267).

As the book contains 13 chapters by different authors with different theoretical approaches, it can be tempting to only focus on specific chapters. Yet, this is a review of the book as a whole, and with that in mind, the goal of this book, as mentioned earlier, was to act as an academic intervention, to increase the amount of baseball-stadium-focused scholarship written from a specifically communications-based perspective. This is something *Communication and the Baseball Stadium* has certainly succeeded at. One of its strengths comes from this focus: the consistent and generally well explained use of communications theory. Few texts possess this level of theoretical diversity and even fewer have a universal commitment to devoting at least a few paragraphs to explaining the body of work being used. Herbeck and Drucker might not be the most textually visible editors within the text, but the consistency of the structure and organization of the chapters in this book is a testament to very effective management.

Now, *Communication and the Baseball Stadium* is not a perfect text. It's most glaring weakness, which was previously mentioned, is its almost exclusively American focus. Baseball is "a significant international sport with rich and well-documented autonomous histories in several countries" and "organizational templates, players, techniques, strategies and spectatorships have continuously circulated" among these countries (Kelley, 2007, p. 190). In a text dedicated to baseball stadiums as a whole, it is disappointing to see only a specific portion of this world represented within the text. Another notable gap is the limited amount of fan voices. While many authors represent themselves as fans, only a small number

of authors within the text use and include quotes from fans and none make it a central part of their methodical approach. While the suitability of fan quotes or interviews obviously varies from topic to topic within the text, it is surprising to see a 13-chapter volume on a fundamentally social space lacking even a single article that really centralizes the words of people who help fill these stadiums.

On the whole, *Communication and the Baseball Stadium* is an important entry into the realm of communications-based sports scholarship. To its credit, the reason for its existence and its importance are clearly laid out by the editors in their introduction, and looking back, Herbeck and Drucker have fulfilled the goals stated in that introduction. They have compiled a text that is both timely and deeply rooted in communications theory. Despite the weakness discussed earlier, it is an entirely worthwhile pick for those interested in baseball stadiums and related issues in a primarily American context. With solid organization and consistently well explained uses of theory, *Communication and the Baseball Stadium* is a clearly academic text that knows its potential audience and does an excellent job of showing them the power and significance of the baseball stadium.

References

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