In *The Play in the System*, Anna Watkins Fisher, culture and media scholar at the University of Michigan, uses the parasite as an analogy to uncover acts of resistance in artistic and cultural practice within a contemporary neoliberal landscape. Fisher’s case studies consist largely of conceptual performances, some not fully realized, in North America and Europe. Temporally, Fisher focuses on works after the US financial crisis of 2008, and after the monetization of the anti-institutional art from the 1960s to the 1980s. In this multidisciplinary text, the parasite is examined as a more nuanced entity stemming from a range of feminist and queer models for sociopolitical resistance, such as José Esteban Muñoz’ “disidentifications” and Lauren Berlant’s “slow death.” To be a parasite in this formulation is to exist within a system that is both inescapable and indestructible.

Fisher begins by profiling the hacker collective Ubermorgen and their *Amazon Noir* project, which sought to use Amazon’s digital library’s own preview feature to capture content and expose the false façade of “openness” championed by the major corporation. Settling with Amazon outside of court, and willingly signing a nondisclosure agreement, Ubermorgen epitomizes the general logic of the parasite: to resist from within, and without the goal of emancipation.
Chapters are organized to explore the applicability of the parasite analogy at different scales through various case studies. The first part (chapters one and two) considers interventions and the possibility of redistribution within larger institutions. Chapter one focuses on the “coercive hospitality” of mega corporations, while chapter two delves deeper into the state interventions of two particular artists, Núria Güell and Kenneth Pietrobono.

Part two considers exchanges on a more intimate scale, particularly parasitism examined within feminist performativity. Chapter three examines Chris Kraus’ tumultuous publication of I Love Dick, which cheekily references media theorist Dick Hebdige, who vociferously denounced the publication. Chapter four ponders the host as a matriarch in Marina Abramović, as well as Anya Liftig and Ann Liv Young’s individual appropriations of Abramović’s The Artist is Present performance. In sum, part two encounters the parasite becoming parasitized.

Fisher introduces several lesser-known artists and works within a context that extends well beyond simple evaluations of moral righteousness. Particularly interesting is Fisher’s own interactions with some of the artists, one of whom, Roisin Byrne, appropriated Fisher’s earlier writings about their work. This timely publication reaches beyond contemporary art by drawing poignant parallels to the host economy exemplified in the exploitative tactics used by current major companies, from Uber to Airbnb, from Facebook to Walmart.

The Play in the System includes an extensive bibliography and comprehensive index, as well as over forty color and black-and-white illustrations, many of which capture rare glimpses into ephemeral and unrealized works. This title would be a challenging addition to collections that support traditional art historical methods. However, this title is highly recommended for academic libraries supporting curricula engaged with critical visual studies, culture and media studies, performance studies, gender and women’s studies, and contemporary art, especially graduate programs and specialized undergraduate programs.