10 Michel Foucault and the critique of sport

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Introduction

Michel Foucault is an emblem of post-structuralism and postmodernism, theoretical and artistic movements that are often seen as reactions, *inter alia*, to a supposedly mechanistic Marxism. It is easy to see why. Foucault did not write a great deal about class, class struggle or imperialism; he did not refer to technology and value as motors of economic and hence social transformations; and he was not a historical determinist measuring change via successive modes of production. And where Marxism locates power in the ruling class and the state, Foucault looks for power on the periphery as well as at the centre. Renowned for criticizing Western Marxism's investment in ideology critique, which presupposes an idealist subject imbued with a consciousness ready to be worked on, he substitutes discourse for ideology, extending the concept of relative autonomy beyond what most political economists can endure. His concern with discourse is seen as opposed to the notion of material interests, while his account of power as a productive force is at odds with both *u*topic and *dy*stopic aspects of Marxism. Foucault hauls us away from the conventional split between base and superstructure in Marxist accounts of the person 'under' a given mode of production and the romantic or liberal-humanist aesthetic of the creative soul. He argues that the raw stuff of human beings is not individuals: people *become* individuals through discourses and institutions of culture, via a 'mode of subjection [*mode d'assujettissement*], that is, the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations' (Foucault, 1983: 66–7). This constitutes a simultaneous internalization and externalization, individuation and collectivization.

Foucault's non-*a priori* account of the person does not deny the significance of the category, or its utility. Rather, he interrogates the discourse of the human and the conditions of its emergence. It may well be that subjection derives from forces connected to production, class conflict, or ideology. But Foucault maintains that the *loci* and logic of governance over the past five hundred years are not merely to be found among the interests or persuasions of the class that controls it, because government operates at a micro level as well as through and because of general economic forces. This micro level relies on the formation of public

subjects. The determining logics of those subjects do not necessarily provide intelligible accounts of action if they are always led back to the economic. In short, Foucault's account of the social redisposes dialectical reasoning away from the grand stage of history and towards an analysis of conjunctures.

Despite these differences, it will be my contention that an opposition between Foucault and Marxism is misplaced; that these formations can be fruitfully combined. Support for this position can be found both in Foucault's writings and their uptake at the intersection of Cultural Studies and sport, where he has latterly joined the pantheon of approved parents of social and cultural theory in the canon of Anglo writings. The chapter takes us successively through his relations to Marxism and to sport, including the uptake of his work by Cultural Studies and Sociology.[1]

. . . And Marx

Foucault's principal quibble with Marx and his true believers lay in their focus on class, to the comparative exclusion of struggle.[2] He complained that the second half of the grand dialectical couplet received less than equal treatment, specifically the precise materialities of power that were not simply about accreting *bourgeois* dominance or state authority – hence his close archival readings and engaged political actions, re prisons, hospitals and asylums. These revealed and battled the micropolitics of forming and controlling subjects in ways that cannot be read off from macroeconomic blocs, and are as much to do with dispensing power as accumulating or exercising it (Foucault, 1982: 782 and 1980: 58). But Foucault drew extensively on Marx to construct homologies between civil and military training via 'docile bodies', comparing the division of labour to the organization of infantry. *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979a) has many Marxist features in its model of the development of disciplinary power inside capitalism, demonstrating how élites addressed the interrelated problems of sustaining a productive and compliant labour force and social order.

Foucault's studies and public-intellectual contributions have been important examples and inspirations to leftists living under authoritarian regimes, such as the Argentine *junta* (Abraham *et al.*, 2004). And he was forever engaging Marxism as embodied in two particularly influential French intellectual formations of his era – the humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the structuralism of Louis Althusser (who taught Foucault). The many political actions and interviews Foucault participated in were either shared with Sartre or inspired by his example, for all that the reasoning subject at the heart of existentialism was as foreign to Foucault's projects as its equivalent in bourgeois Anglo-Yanqui liberalism. It is worth recalling Foucault's recommendation to 'open Althusser's books', and the latter's contention that 'something from my writings has passed into his' (Foucault, 1989: 14 and Althusser, 1969: 256). As Foucault (1991b: 55) said of their relationship, 'I followed'. There is a significant link between the two men's views on the relations between subjects, objects, representation and interpretation. The accusation of functionalist Marxism sometimes levelled at Althusser,

because of his totalizing view of ideological apparatuses, is similar to certain critics' lament for the absence of an outside to power in Foucault's account of discipline. Of course, there are major methodological differences as well as similarities. Althusser investigates problematics and their underpinning ideology in the context of the real. Conversely, Foucault looks at statements, their preconditions, and their settings in discursive formations, then moves on to research a related archive. Only Althusser privileges science, however veiled it may be by class (Miller, 1994).

Perhaps the most subtle and complex engagement between Foucault and Marxism emerged over the state. Roland Barthes (1973: 130) coined the term 'governmentality' during the high point of his own Marxism to describe market variations and the state's attempt to claim responsibility for them (when the outcome was positive). It was an ironic neologism, one that Foucault (1991b: 4) developed to account for 'the way in which the modern state began to worry about individuals' by asking: 'How to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor.' These issues arose as twin processes: the displacement of feudalism by the sovereign state, and the similarly conflictual Reformation and its counters. Daily economic and spiritual government came up for redefinition. While the state emerged as a centralizing tendency that sought to normalize itself and others, a devolved religious authority was producing a void, via ecclesiastical conflicts and debates about divine right. The doctrine of transcendence fell into crisis, with royalty now representing managerial rather than immanent rule (Foucault, 1991a: 87–90).

With the upheavals of the seventeenth century, such as the Thirty Years War and rural and urban revolt, the conditions for implementing new modes of social organization arose. In eighteenth-century Europe, the government of territory became secondary to the government of things and social relations. Government was conceived and actualized in terms of climate, disease, industry, finance, custom and disaster – literally, a concern with life and death, and what could be calculated and managed between them. Wealth and health became goals to be attained through the disposition of capacities across the population once 'biological existence was reflected in political existence' through 'bio-power'. Bio-power brought 'life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations' and made 'knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life'. Bodies were identified with politics, because managing them was part of running the country, with 'the life of the species . . . wagered on its own political strategies' (Foucault, 1991a: 97, 92–5 and 1984: 143).

The arts of government were freed from the strictures imposed by sovereign and household *motifs*. Not only did the population displace the prince as a site for accumulating power, but the home was displaced by the economy as a newly anthropomorphized and international dynamic of social intervention and achievement. The populace became the province of statistics, bounded not by the direct exertion of juridical influence or domestic authority, but by forms of knowledge that granted 'the people' a life that could not be divined from the

model of the family. City, country and empire substituted for home, with all the hierarchical dislocation that implies. The epidemic and the map displaced the kitchen and the church (Foucault, 1991a: 98–9).

Governing people came to mean, most centrally and critically, obeying the 'imperative of health: at once the duty of each and the objective of all'. So even as revolutionary France was embarking on a regime of slaughter, public-health campaigns were under way. The state constructed an ongoing Janus-faced 'game between death and life' (Foucault, 1991b: 277, 4). Clearly, the emergence of modern capitalism connected to the rise of the state, which was concerned to deliver a docile and healthy labour force to business; but not only to business, and not merely in a way that showed the lineage of that desire. Cholera, sanitation and prostitution were figured as problems for governments to address in the modern era, through 'the emergence of the health and physical well-being of the population in general as one of the essential objectives of political power'. The entire 'social body' was assayed and treated for its insufficiencies. In shifting its tasks from naked, controlling power to generative, productive power, government in general increasingly aimed to '"make live and 'let' die", as well as "take life or let live"' (Foucault, 2003: 241).

The critical shift here was away from an accumulation of power by the sovereign, and towards the dispersal of power into the population. The centre invested people with the capacity to produce and consume things, insisting on freedom in some compartments of life, and obedience in others (Foucault, 1994: 125). Out of that came the following prospect: 'Maybe what is really important for our modernity – that is, for our present – is not so much the étatisation of society, as the governmentalization of the state' (Foucault, 1991a: 103). The 'problem of the central soul' of the state was immanent in 'multiple peripheral bodies' and the messy labour of controlling them. Such a move allowed for 'transformation not at the level of political theory, but rather at the level of the mechanisms, techniques, and technologies of power' (Foucault, 2003: 37, 29, 241). So Foucault sought to uncover the history of how mental conditions were identified as problems in need of treatment, with the aim of explaining how these forms of demographic problematization functioned as techniques, economies, social relations and knowledges, such that 'some real existent in the world' became 'the target of social regulation at a given moment' (1994: 123 and 2001: 171). He was careful to avoid arguing that madness did not exist, or was a product of medicine: 'people are suffering . . . people make trouble in society or in their families, that is a reality'. But he contended that when psychiatry intervened in the legal field of Western societies, it established the right to define individuals as sane or otherwise, and claimed a role in justice and punishment – two key forms of demographic management (Foucault, 2000: pp. 176–200).

Foucault proposed a threefold concept of governmentality to explain life today. The first utilizes economics to mould the population into efficient and effective producers. The second is an array of apparatuses designed to create conditions for this productivity, via bodily interventions and the promotion of fealty and individuality (bio-power). And the third is the translation of methods between

education and penology that modifies justice into human 'improvement'. Put another way, we might understand this as the indoctrination of the state by the social – and the infestation of sovereignty with demography (Foucault, 1991a: 102–3). Governmentality centres the population as desiring, producing and committed subjects with manifest contradictions. But this does not imply an ever-increasing state sector. In Foucault's words, the market has latterly become 'a "test", a locus of privileged experience where one . . . [can] identify the effects of excessive governmentality' (Foucault, 1997: 76). This is a way of resituating management of the social squarely within civil society – a transformation in governmentality. As he argued, 'civil society is the concrete ensemble within which these abstract points, economic men, need to be positioned in order to be made adequately manageable' (Foucault, 1979b). For Foucault, technologies of governance organize the public by having it organize itself, through the material inscription of discourse into policies and programmes of the state and capital. He defines a technology as 'a matrix of popular reason'. It has four categories: 'technologies of production' make for the physical transformation of material objects; 'technologies of sign systems' are semiotic; 'technologies of power' form subjects as a means of dominating individuals and encouraging them to define themselves in particular ways; and 'technologies of the self' are applied by individuals to make themselves autotelically happy (Foucault, 1988b: 18). Is this so far from Marxism?

. . . And sport

The articulations between Foucault and sport start with his own direct address of the topic, in the context of an ethics of the self and advertisements for fitness to rule others. He undertook this analysis by examining Western philosophy's origins. In ancient Greece and Rome, the body was the *locus* for an ethics of the self, a combat with pleasure and pain that enabled people to find the truth about themselves and master their drives (Foucault, 1986: 66–9). Austerity and hedonism could be combined through training:

> The metaphor of the match, of athletic competition and battle, did not serve merely to designate the nature of the relationship one had with desires and pleasures, with their force that was always liable to turn seditious or rebellious; it also related to the preparation that enabled one to withstand such a confrontation.

> (*Ibid.*: 72)

Xenophon, Socrates and Diogenes held that sexual excess and decadence came from the equivalent of sporting success. In sex and sport, triumph could lead to failure, unless accompanied by regular examination of the conscience, and physical training. Carefully modulated desire in both spheres became a sign of the ability to govern. Aristotle and Plato favoured regular, ongoing flirtations with excess, as tests as well as pleasures. This ethos was distinctly gendered: the

capacity of young men to move into positions of social responsibility was judged by charioteering and man-management. Their ability to win 'the little sports drama' was akin to dealing with sexually predatory older males (Foucault, 1986: 72–7, 104, 120, 197–8, 212).

Five hundred years later, Roman sexual ethics attached anxieties to the body and sport. Spirituality had emerged to complicate exercises of the self as a means of training for governance:

> The increased medical involvement in the cultivation of the self appears to have been expressed through a particular and intense form of attention to the body. This attention is very different from that manifested by the positive valuation of physical vigour during an epoch when gymnastics and athletic and military training were an integral part of the education of a free man. Moreover, it has something paradoxical about it since it is inscribed, at least in part, within an ethics that posits that death, disease, or even physical suffering do not constitute true ills and that it is better to take pains over one's soul than to devote one's care to the maintenance of the body. But in fact the focus of attention in these practices of the self is the point where the ills of the body and those of the soul can communicate with one another and exchange their distresses; where the bad habits of the soul can entail physical miseries, while the excesses of the body manifest and maintain the failings of the soul . . . The body the adult has to care for, when he is concerned about himself, is no longer the young body that needed shaping by gymnastics; it is a fragile, threatened body, undermined by petty miseries.
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> (Foucault, 1988b: 56–7)

In place of personal excesses, which had preoccupied fourth-century BC Athens, first-century AD Rome was principally concerned with frailty – the finitude of fitness and life itself. Arguments were imbued with 'nature and reason', and exercises of the self joined this more elevated search for truth (Foucault, 1988b: 238–9). Foucault's studies indicate how sex has been central to social control, in two senses. On the one hand, it is subject to individual control methods for managing desire. On the other, it is subject to collective methods for managing procreation (Foucault, 2003: 251).

So what has the Cultural Studies of Sport done with this example, and other directions suggested by his contributions?[3] It is still possible to publish a (very good) progressive sociology-of-sport textbook without mentioning Foucault and his legacy (Horne *et al.*, 1999) but even here there is some discussion of discipline, so encrusted in contemporary social theory is this Foucauldian contribution (*ibid.*: 10–11). Other fine texts are more overt in their debt (Rowe, 1999: 33). In addition to proposals to write a genealogy of sport (de la Vega, 1999), there have been some excellent meta-introductions for the normal scientists of functionalism and kinesiology (Andrews, 1993 and Cole *et al.*, 2004, for instance). Dave Andrews and C.L. Cole, both collectively and individually, have shown that Foucault's work can be providential for political economy, feminism and critical

race theory as applied to sport, through their investigations of topics from basketball to advertising, celebrity feminism to journal gatekeeping. They manage to maintain the non-humanist base to Foucault, and his commitment to discourse and power, without losing the significance of social movements and the political economy, unlike many celebrants and critics.

But numerous sports scholars are ambivalent about Foucault's legacy, or condemnatory of it. Some of this concern comes from structural-functionalists, who once owned the field and are stuck on the margins with sociobiologists; some from their fellow travellers in kinesiology who want to measure the angle at which feet come down to strike balls; and some from the left – the ones that concern me, since the others are unlikely to read what I have to say in a forum such as this.

Feminist critiques and Gramscian-inflected ideas of hegemony have provided vital means of attacking the prior dominance of reactionary celebrations and instrumentalizations of sport. Gramsci offers a model of power located in specific agents. A frustration for many of his followers is that Foucault is seen as endowing power with an agency of its own, at the same time as subjects of history are eviscerated (see Gruneau, 1993, 1999). Ruing his own marginality in French academic life, the Trotskyite Jean-Marie Brohm scorns any eclecticism that assumes Foucault can be mixed and matched with Marxist methods, because of the primacy that 'must' be given to means and modes of production and class struggle (Brohm and Bui-Xuan, 2005). Before his latter-day descent into lapsed leftism, John Hargreaves (1986: 135) alerted readers to 'the danger of a Foucaultian analysis of consumer culture', which apparently lies in 'the implication that control programmes actually achieve their desired effects'. Ian Henry (2001: 3) bizarrely argues that there has been virtually no Foucauldian influence on studies of leisure policy. Garry Robson's attempted recuperation of Millwall Football Club fans from the dustbin of racist proletarian masculinism (Robson, 2000: 71–2, 77) is critical of the supposed 'passivity' inscribed on people by Foucault. And Valda Burstyn (1999: 33) thinks that gendered sporting power is solidly tied to the expression of interests, rather than being multifaceted, as per Foucauldian feminism.

I think these critiques are wrong. Subjects are very present in Foucault – the mad, the ill, the deviant, the incarcerated – and ever present in his political actions with those same groups, as are immigrants, with race and nation key categories in his work that are often ignored by critics (Foucault, 2003). So when a rather unfortunate metaphor is chosen to argue against 'swallowing Foucault whole' (Gruneau, 1993: 103) because of a supposed denial of agency, this is as inaccurate as it is unfortunate. As we have seen, the subject is neither a point of origin in Foucault nor a destination, because subjects vary with time and space. This is an affront to conceptions of consciousness that posit the reasoning person at the heart of social activity. But it does not in any way preclude politics, choice, or social-movement activism. If there were no room for agency, why have so many feminists, queers, medical professionals, prison activists and post-colonial critics found things of value here for their political practice?

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We are also sometimes told, by both protagonists and antagonists, that Foucault's legacy stands opposed to grand narratives. As a consequence his influence is deemed either baleful or useful, based on the analyst's views of power and discourse (Wiggins and Mason, 2005: 48; Markula and Denison, 2005: 166; Morgan, 1995). Sometimes Foucault is valorized for decentring traditional norms of writing and agents of history. At others, he is derided for encouraging sectarian social movements and irrationality. This idealist version of Foucault says he discounts the real in favour of a focus on language, licensing a kind of Barthesian or Derridoidal free play of the signifier. Again, it seems misleading, given what I have outlined. Foucault was attracted by philosophy at the limit, but he was equally concerned with the manufacture and governance of rules – and their inevitability.

It is clear to most critical scholars that industrialized and post-industrialized societies subject people to bodily and ethical regimes that equate body and mind: a visual economy of public and private sites. With the body a 'site of condensation for a whole range of social anxieties' in the neo-liberal era of self-responsibility, moral panics and calculations of risk became diurnal forms of social control and calculation, rendering the disciplined body a key analytic tool (King, 2005: 25–6). This Foucauldian insight has proven especially fruitful in engaging the impact of masculinity on sport, and sporting masculinity on society (Mangan, 1999: 12 and Pringle, 2005). A trend towards ruling-class control of male sport is structurally homologous with, and historically connected to, state monopolies on legitimate violence. The work of governments in normalizing sport has been crucial: policing holidays to standardize vacations and regularize recreation as play and spectatorship, securing the conditions of existence for a partial commodification that makes sport governed rather than classically competitive, and allocating resources to sport as a diplomatic symbol and domestic training mechanism. The state is also concerned about sport as a route to improved urban public health, military fitness, and the diversion of rebellious politics. From Chancellor Hitler and Marshal Pétain to President Carter, modern heads of state have initiated physical-fitness tests to invigorate and ideologize the young.

Scholars have found much of value in Foucault's work to help analyse these developments. Numerous investigations have been made of school sports, marching, military drills, gymnastics and physical education (PE). David Kirk (1998) has demonstrated how gendered regimes of corporeal regulation, individualization and differentiation underpinned PE in colonial and post-colonial Australia, intersecting with eugenics, racism and national efficiency and fitness. Beyond white-settler histories, Foucault's work has also stimulated enquiry into the South Asian body disciplined through sport (Mills and Dimeo, 2003). Despite misgivings, John Hargreaves (1986) argues that the cardinal values of contemporary school sport and PE programmes are disciplinary, and Burstyn (1999: 78–9, 99) uses Foucault's history of the body. Jean Harvey and Robert Sparks (1991) show how PE and gymnastics in the late nineteenth century dovetailed with biopower, Susan Brownell (2000) looks at China disciplining its citizenry through sport, and Helena Wulff (2003) examines the nationalist rhetoric of Irish dance as social control.

Beyond PE, consider these sites of Foucauldian influence: investigations of football[4] 'hooligans' that reject both their romantic annunciation as working-class scions and their criminalization via moral panics (Armstrong and Young, 1997 and Armstrong, 1998); evaluations of the panoptic design of contemporary football stadiums (Giulianotti, 1999: 80–2); studies of masculinist domination and feminist resistance and critique (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1994; Duncan, 1994; Montez de Oca, 2005; Rahilly, 2005; Pringle, 2005; Chisholm, 1999, 2002); interrogations of women's football and cultural citizenship (Giardina and Metz, 2005); and analyses of racism (Ismond, 2003; King and Springwood, 2001; Gardiner and Welch, 2001).

Cole (1998) notes that sporting bodies are powerful symbols because they appear to embody free will, self-control, health, productivity and transcendence (also see MacNeill, 1998). Patricia Vertinsky (1998) highlights the medicalization of women's bodies in the Victorian era, which still permeates health-and-fitness-promotion campaigns. Since the Second World War, additional factors have made bio-power crucial. The contest for international sporting supremacy between the former protagonists in the Cold War, developments in pharmaceutical research, increasing commodification, and the dominance of instrumental rationality have seen biomedical science applied to enhance performance and identify deviance. Shari Lee Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs (2000) make effective use of Foucault to investigate HIV panics and athletes (also see Pronger, 1998). Samantha King (2001) questions the corporate social responsibility ethos of companies that use fitness to elevate their public standing. Why should these accounts be regarded as incommensurate with studies of the labour process or ideology (Giulianotti, 1999: 108–9)?

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And me? I'm a wee bit tentative writing about my own formation in these matters, but we've been asked to address this topic by the editors. 'Worried' not because I am concerned about self-disclosure – who cares? – but because I inhabit the *land* of self-disclosure. The first country in world history with the majority of its population living in suburbia, the United States compensates for this low-density retreat into sameness by fetishizing the self in a way that I find rather banal. And it has a corollary in US culturalist academics' fascination with revealing their really rather dull selves and psyches in public. That said, I've blended Marxism and Foucault throughout my work on sport over the last two decades, both collaboratively and alone. The most recent examples are *Globalization and Sport* and *SportSex* (Miller *et al.*, 2001 and Miller, 2001). They had earlier lives in conference papers, journal articles and book chapters from the late 1980s. And I frequently sit astounded as I confront oppositions drawn by many scholars between Marxism and Foucault. For me, it is the most obvious thing in the world to look at the materiality of discourse, to grant it the status of social relations, to consider it in terms of institutions and power, to disavow the notion of a superstructure that reflects a substructure, to think of Foucault as a post-industrial

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Marx, to look at them in a way that says 'and' rather than 'or' – and not to worry about the bad readings of Foucault that license anti-Marxism or ludic silliness. While Foucault does not outline how to undertake a political economy of institutions based on ownership, he does encourage and guide analysis of their control; while he does not address class issues in great detail or as the motor of history, he looks at the implications of power as expressed over the bodies of the weak, the impoverished and the disenfranchised; and while he is not arguing for the economy as the centre of research and action, he is mindful of it.

Sport is a key site of pleasure and domination, via a complex dialectic that does not always produce a clear synthesis from the clash of opposing camps. It involves both the imposition of authority from above and the joy of autonomy from below. It exemplifies the exploitation of the labour process, even as it delivers autotelic pleasures. And these dualities, the tensions they embody, are nowhere better analysed than with the tools provided by Marx and Foucault. What does this mean in political terms? It means being strategic and tactical – allowing for the temper of the times, while taking certain precepts as non-negotiable. Market socialism is fine with me, as is a notion of power as polyvalent and polymorphous. Sectarianism that practises exploitative and domineering politics, such as nationalism or hierarchical control of the labour process, is not. Ideas of freedom and choice that operate from the notion of a pre-existent, ratiocinative subject are naïve. The elevation of sport as a transcendent form of life, beyond the social or embodying its best aspects, is ridiculous. Conversely, the notion of sport as a technique of the self that is equally a technique of domination makes sense. It suggests a search for the political technology *and* the political economy of popular subjectivity. That looks like a good agenda for the Cultural Studies of Sport.

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Notes

1 Thanks to the editors for their work on an earlier draft. I have sought to incorporate as many of their changes as I could without becoming as polite as they are, and while acknowledging that I am, as they say in sport, too old, too fat and too slow to enter on 'a crazed bibliographic gallop' (Downing and Husband, 2005: 25). This chapter does not refer to every usage of Foucault and/versus Marxism within Sport Studies.

2 For a useful primer on Marxism within the social sciences, in which several essays take various positions on Foucault, see Gamble *et al.* (1999).

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3 Not all the scholars used here would identify themselves as Marxist, or as working within Cultural Studies, but they generally adopt a critical rather than celebratory or neutral outlook on professional sport, and address questions of power and inequality.

4 I refer here to real football, not the sixty-minute stroll sixteen times a year that laugh-ably claims the name in the Yanqui lexicon.