

ON ISSUE

"... THE OBLIVION OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT ..."

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(S^{aint}) Paul gave sport a key role in both personal achievement and control:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

For Paul, a business matter—winning prizes—was also a sign of self-mastery, especially for those wont to breach what they preach. The combination of finance with ethics remains crucial: The sporting body is simultaneously a source of success, a site of reward, and a subject of rule. You might have thought this combination of social power and individual denial would have gone on to capture the high terrain of theology or philosophy, especially when we contemplate Gerald Early's suggestion that contemporary sport is principally dedicated to the interplay of four qualities: merit, justice, desire, will. For something exciting has been added since Paul's time: Justice now has a dialectical relationship with merit, and will with desire. These are central precepts of modernity, but more precisely, of its individualistic, accumulationist side, in which the state adjudicates between citizens who are competing for the material benefits of life. Nevertheless, the more collective, disciplinary side of the modern is equally on display, with the desiring subject's wishes subordinated to the engine of industrial production: teamwork and discipline (Early, Solomon, & Wacquant, 1996, pp. 5, 7).

The structural homology between sport and capitalism is obvious to proponents and critics alike. Romantic conservatives from left or right yearn

Journal of Sport & Social Issues, Volume 21, No. 2, May 1997, pp. 115-119
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for a lost world of autotelic sporting competition, of truth and beauty. Critiques also come from groups traditionally excluded from public sporting space: women, First Peoples, and minorities. In his provocative comparison of rock music's progressive cultural capital vis-à-vis that of sport, Rowe (1995) suggests the latter has been "severely compromised by its fraternization with 'straight' society" (p. 10). An association with the disciplinary complexes of school curriculum and nationalist ideology has hampered its capacity to engage resistive politics (Rowe, 1995). The Pauline and commercial qualities to sport overdetermine the collaborative and modern aspects; its acquisitiveness and self-denial come to represent the worst of religion and the work ethic. On the other hand, the somatic transcendence that sport offers the body of the exultant spectator or athlete may offend aesthetes and academic hardheads (did you know the plural of *egghead* is *eggmass*?). When a character in DeLillo's (1985) postmodern pastiche *White Noise* remarks, "I understand the music, I understand the movies, I even see how comic books can tell us things. But there are full professors in this place who read nothing but cereal boxes" (p. 10), I for one am interpellated. In scholarly terms, this can produce intellectual marginality, an experience many readers of this journal will know about. The bodily and the ephemeral often join one another in the eye of the critic.

Consider Wacquant's research into boxing (Early et al., 1996). What began as the study of "a subproletarian bodily craft" informed by the "sociology of poverty" and African American culture nearly turned into the abandonment of academia for full-time pugilism (p. 22). Disembodied explanations of boxing as the product "of material constraint, of external imposition," had become overdetermined by the experience of the thing (p. 22). (Why can no amount of musicology or political economy account for what you feel the first time you hear New Order's "True Faith," Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" or anything by Lucinda Williams?) Wacquant's years in training made him feel "a complex mix of 'sinful desire' and public suffering . . . *passion*" for a sport born from social inequality and hypermasculinity, but exceeding their banalities (p. 22). He connects this disarticulation to the fact that, for all its popularity, "*sport is a lowly object in social life*" (p. 23). Wacquant even says he might never have written about it without the existing cachet of a coauthored book with Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), "which protects me from disappearing into the oblivion of the sociology of sport" (Early et al., 1996, p. 24). Lest that seem a rash description, consider Franklin's (1996) stimulating advocacy of posthumanist feminism that appeared as the Human Kinetics Lecture in a recent issue of the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*. On one hand, it is good to see a technocratic journal publishing this kind of work. On the other, the essay is couched as introducing such theory to the sociology of sport, paying no attention to the vast amount of cognate work already done by feminists and others in our own domain.

Franklin's (1996) article is symptomatic of institutional and academic demarcation lines. Wacquant (Early et al., 1996), conversely, demonstrates

a cosmic personal ambivalence. At one point, he transcends social theory and careerism for a "proper" understanding of sport based on allegedly pretheoretical experiential narration; at another, these very categories (themselves, of course, sociological and theoretical) are reinscribed as legitimating forms of argument. He settles, I think very sensibly, on a nonrepresentational analysis. Here, sport does not necessarily refer to the fissures of the social, although it is assuredly informed by and informing of them. Rather, sport is a mode of presentation in which sportspeople are stars of the everyday, their performances conditioned by publicly available rules and dynamic intersubjective space (unlike in film) that can be imitated but never quite repeated.

Clearly, Wacquant (Early et al., 1996) sees himself caught between sociology and sport, between discourses of knowledge and physique—the Cartesian subject at work and play. He got that way through ethnography. This issue's FOCUS showcases different methods of participant observation, illustrating how complex it can be to blend the macro- and micro-sociology of power with the corporeality of spectators, players, and researchers. Randy Martin's account of Irvine aerobics is a performative multicultural ethnography of a sport that sees fascinating possibilities for gender and racial cross-identification. Somewhere further down the track of conventional social science, Alan Tomlinson and Ilkay Yorganci use questionnaires and structured interviews to look at male dominance in the coaching of women's athletics. This is not to suggest *politics* has been displaced by *sampling*, however. The authors are aware that their topic is intrinsically about power; more than that, they address the research ethics of engaging in participant observation without the knowledgeable consent of one's sporting colleagues. Further along the spectrum toward positive science, Susan Tyler Eastman and Arthur M. Land's study of sports-bar clientele puts us onto social-psychological terrain, as students interview and watch habitués. Here, the aim is knowledge in a falsifiable/replicable mode.

All three articles rely on being somewhere to understand something. The first two are straightforwardly on political subjects, and all three contribute to our understanding of a major phenomenon of popular culture. The question for me is how commensurate these forms of knowledge are: not to denounce one or the other, but to see where they are useful, and when they do and do not mesh. As McHoul (1996) argues, "putting questions to the semiohistorical world . . . will always be an event in the world, altering it in some way." A supposedly diachronic analysis will, ironically, be a synchronic occasion of its own and "will always take part in the field it would ideally describe," and for its part, a slice of time always bears the traces of its origin and textualization (pp. 10-11). To be at a site, observing, helps to make it a site. Analyzing and publishing findings generates another site. Knowing a thing and changing it become indissoluble. Ethical questions must inform method and vice versa: hence the disarticulations and rearticulations in Wacquant's research (Early et al., 1996). It would be good for us

to pick up from his dilemma and ambivalence to deal with our own marginality and also look to postdisciplinary methods.

I think we need a pragmatics of sporting culture, of meaning-in-use. Toward that end, I have found Hartley's (1996) thought-provoking version of television studies extremely stimulating over many years. His latest book works "upwards" from texts of the everyday into "the relevant textmaker/medium/readership/observer relationships," rather than "downwards from a fixed methodology or interpretative framework toward the 'scientific' meaning" of the practice represented in the text (p. 5). Shropshire's (1996) *In Black and White* offers something similar in its application of critical race theory to American sports. In place of the old liberal paradigm, in which the desired telos was color-blindness, critical race theory foregrounds the matter: Inequalities will not be ended by erasing race. This may mean engaging uncomfortable prejudices of one's own, but not stopping there: African American legal scholars have shown a way forward that blends confrontation of self and other with academic rigor. And there is an interpretive payoff.

Consider the recent movie *Jerry Maguire* (Crowe, 1996). Here, stereotypes of Black and White American masculinity crisscross in fascinating ways. The White sports agent (Tom Cruise) is publicly stricken with guilt at the exploitative operation of his business: not the principle of it, but the hypocrisy of preaching care and attention to athletes when one has too many on the roster. And he feels the need to "share" this with colleagues. But that is not the main lesson of the film. Following Cruise's blinding conversion to the confessional, he gets the sack. The one client who remains with him is a Black football player (Cuba Gooding, Jr.). Now, Gooding's problem is that he has attitude: to his teammates, coaches, and the media. He is an overt utilitarian who wants material recognition for his efforts as a professional and refuses to look as though he cares about his sport or his club. At home, by comparison, he is a caring, loving husband and father whose passions help to drive a functioning and happy family.

This is not a depiction of the African American sportsman or parent that gets much currency in the White bourgeois media. Appreciating the domestic harmony on view, Cruise marries but cannot bring his brand-new discourse of feelings to bear on this new situation. The two men meet and address their dilemmas by confronting one another. In a great moment of rearticulation, the Black man is told to put more of his love and passion into public display, to blend the private with the public, whereas the White man is told to transfer the "I love you" side of his profession to home. Quite a reversal of the homilies normally read to African Americans by policymakers! But the film does not overtly account for these transferences and counter-transferences in racial terms. Instead, we are diminished by its return to narratives of interiority and psychic completeness, in classical Hollywood fashion. Now, I read Shropshire's (1996) book, by chance, just prior to watching the film. His political economy of sporting agency, together with critical race theory, gave me a way of seeing *Jerry Maguire*. Here, legal studies assists film analysis.

How (and how much) can we join methods in this way to break down disciplinary boundaries? And to close on my earlier theme, what might explain the continuing marginality of sport to cultural studies, anthropology, and social theory, even as it is central to popular, folk, and commodified life? Are we in an "oblivion," as Wacquant (Early et al., 1996) maintains? And what should we do about it? I invite further comment.

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