

## Book Reviews

Gruneau, Richard. *Class, Sports, and Social Development*. foreword by Charles H. Page. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983. Pp. x, 213. Notes, references, index. \$18.50 (cloth), \$9.50 (paper).

Within the last ten years, discussions of the origins of modern sport have entered a new phase that can be characterized as a debate between historians influenced primarily by Marx and historians influenced primarily by Weber. A modicum of oversimplification allows us to define the two camps as materialists versus idealists, but only in the sense that "idealism." in this context, means the insistence that ideas sometimes play an independent role in history. Among Marxist scholars writing in English on the history of sport, Richard Gruneau is unquestionably, despite his youth, a master. While Gruneau's former student, Rob Beamish, has criticized Alan Ingham's applications of Weber to sport sociology, Gruneau's new book includes critiques of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* and Michael Novak's *The Joy of Sports* (both instances of "idealist" history), Jean-Marie Brohm's *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time* (an example of Neo-Marxism), and my own *From Ritual to Record* (an attempt to apply Weber's insights to the development of modern sport).

In his introduction, Gruneau abjures the reliance "on abstract typologies whose foundations rest on a seriously limited 'general theory' of industrial society" (p. 11), a criticism aimed at reductionist and simple-minded use of Marx (as well as Weber or Parsons). Indeed, Gruneau admits the tendency among Marxists "to treat Marxist theory as a set of incontrovertible statements about the nature of class relationships in capitalist societies rather than as a method for studying the changing character of class dynamics" (p. 13). Turning to Huizinga, Gruneau correctly faults him for his excessive celebrations of sacred order, for his sentimental view of medieval society, and for his distorted perception of play as the primary cause of culture. Novak's extension *ad absurdum* of Huizinga's insights are criticized mildly when Gruneau notes that *The Joy of Sports* is a book "virtually innocent of sociology, political economy, or social history" (p. 31). Although Brohm claims to be a Marxist, Gruneau shows clearly the febrile dogmatism of Brohm's Neo-Marxist argument that sport is wholly repressive and inhumane. (It is a pity that Gruneau did not take on Bero Rigauer's *Sport and Work*, a more persuasive example of European Neo-Marxism.)

I am credited by Gruneau with recognizing "the subordination of sporting performances to instrumental reason and technocratic rationality" (p. 39) and with writing a "ground-breaking and extremely thoughtful introduction to the social development of sport and to the problem of sport's relationship to hu-

man agency and freedom" (p. 42), but the praise is mixed with numerous acute and by no means unwelcome criticisms. I am said not to escape from "idealism and metaphysics" (p. 43) and to reveal traces of "post-classical liberal ideology" (p. 46), a hard knock for one who has always thought of himself as a social democrat. Gruneau is right to point out that Weber, whose name I invoke, was more pessimistic about the "iron cage" of bureaucratic society than I am, but I fail to see why using Weber's insights commits a scholar to sharing Weber's pessimism, a pessimism which may be at least partially explained by Weber's shattered psychological state. I object further to the allegation that I claim that "freedom is a universal condition of sport" (p. 44) or that the "social limits on spontaneous expression always . . . expand human choices and possibilities" (p. 45). Obviously they do not. Perhaps my exasperation with theorists like Brohm led me to overstate the degree of liberation possible through social organization.

Gruneau feels that I misunderstand Marx when I refer to the mode of production rather than to the relationships of production, but Marx himself referred to the *Arbeitsprozess* as well as to *Arbeitsverhaeltnisse*. More importantly, Gruneau indicates that my criticisms of Marxism are invalid because the soi-disant Marxists I quarrel with are really "Leninists and Stalinists." Gruneau thinks I should have taken E.P. Thompson's pages on games (in *The Making of the English Working Class*) as a sample of sophisticated Marxist interpretation of sport. I accept the criticism, but I must point out that it was the Marxists of the Soviet Union and its allies who had written, when I completed my own research, almost all that had been published on sport and society from an avowedly Marxist perspective. Had Gruneau's book been available when I wrote mine, I should have phrased differently my criticisms of Marxism and acknowledged that the differences between Marxists and non-Marxists can become insignificant if both adopt a sophisticated interpretation of the role of material factors in history.

For the moment, one last disagreement. Gruneau argues that I fail to recognize "how the concept of alienation relates to the *totality* of social relations in a society, and not just to a given class" (p. 47). But to say that the totality of social relations are alienated is simply to say that society is not as one wants it to be. If we are to avoid reification, if the term alienation is to be used analytically and not as a magic wand, there must be specific references; *someone must be alienated from something*. Furthermore, I question the usefulness of allegations of an alienation that is not felt as such but is imputed objectively to exist despite the "false consciousness" of the alienated. I can be persuaded that person X, for example, is somehow alienated from Y (e.g., his own body); I am even ready to believe that person X does not in this instance understand his own alienation, but I am reluctant to combine the already problematical concepts of alienation and false consciousness in order to make assertions about the totality of social relations in an entire society.

After his critique of Huizinga et al., Gruneau explains how play, games, and sports can be free and at the same time the product of social interaction,

how “each production of a new playful act is, paradoxically, the reproduced outcome of socially constituted significative schemes that have enabled the accomplishment of the act. . .” (p. 57). One key concept of Gruneau’s explanation is John Searle’s distinction between constitutive and regulative rules. Constitutive, argues Gruneau, does not mean determinate. There is an element of freedom within the domain of regulation. Granting this, Gruneau turns to the equally important concept of social class. Unfortunately, he points out, the element of freedom is unequally distributed: “. . . the resources individual or collective agents (e.g., a social class) can bring to bear on the production and reproduction of rules, procedures, legitimated interpretations, and even on the abilities needed to play effectively within certain structured conditions, are never distributed randomly in society” (p. 63). Enter Anthony Giddens, Raymond Williams, and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Gruneau shares with Raymond Williams and many other sophisticated Marxists a questionable tendency to rely upon Gramsci’s concept of hegemony although Gramsci actually adulterates Marx’s own concept of *Herrschaft* to the point where the interaction of social factors begins to resemble that alleged in theories of liberal pluralism. In fact, the fashionable word “hegemony” has become a kind of lexical figleaf disguising the fact that Marxism has been seriously modified in ways liable to have horrified Marx and Engels. If acceptance of Gramsci’s concept makes one a Marxist, sign me up.

Enough of theory. Gruneau’s strictures against non-Marxists and his explanation of those Marxist theorists whom he most admires are followed by a model of Marxist historical analysis. Much of what he says about Canadian sport history is familiar from the work of Alan Metcalf, Gerald Redmond, and others (including Gruneau himself). While the emphasis on class relationships is not wholly new, even in non-Marxist scholarship. Gruneau argues persuasively that “the whole issue of opportunities for *participation* is much less important than the question of opportunities for *control*. . .” (p. 129). Using his own empirical research as well as Beamish’s, he shows that “the dominant moment in modern Canadian sport is composed primarily of a rather *limited set of class practices and beliefs*” (p. 144). The bourgeoisie has made its definitions seem “natural.” True enough. What Gruneau has *not* done is to show how sport might be defined differently in a socialist society. His “failure” here is, of course, like that of Marx himself, who said notoriously little about achieved socialism. Gruneau ends by insisting that progress in the sociology of sport “depends primarily upon our capacities to make the critique of sport a part of the much broader attempt to discern the alternatives within which human reason and freedom can make history” (p. 153). Well said.

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