

Hoberman, John M. *Sport and Political Ideology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. ix, 315 pp. Notes, index. \$24.50 (cloth), \$9.95 (paper).

Intellectuals are fascinated by ideas. They play with them as others play with balls and bats. Intellectuals are especially fascinated, quite understandably, by ideologues fixed and immobilized by unexamined ideas which they (the ideologues) take to be The Truth. Hoberman's argument is that sports have been a significant metaphor for twentieth-century ideologues of both the Right and the Left. A true intellectual, with the concomitant strengths and weaknesses, Hoberman analyzes sports and the image of the human body in the work of Fascists like Filippo Marinetti and Communists like Bertold Brecht. Although he argues that "sportive expressionism appeals to all ideological temperaments" (12), he nonetheless insists that there is "ideological differentiation" (13) which, within the world of sports, sends Fascists off in one direction and Communists in another. Although José Ortega y Gasset and Yuri Yevtushenko are both lyrical about hunting, their agreements are less typical than the differences which, for instance, allowed the Nazis to affirm boxing as a form of *Existenzkumpf* while the Communists have always been ambivalent about this "primitive" sport.

These matters are discussed in Hoberman's first chapter, "Sport in the Age of Ideology" Chapter 2 dissects the Marxist tradition, with its focus on the primacy of labor, and the Conservative tradition, with its insistence on leisure as a realm of freedom. Chapters 3-6 describe Fascist and Nazi theorists while Chapters 7-10 are devoted to Marxism and sport. Specifically, Hoberman discusses sport in the Soviet Union, in East Germany, and in Mao's China. The book concludes with a brief discussion of the Neo-Marxist critique articulated by Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and others of the Frankfurt School.

Much of what Hoberman says about Marxism and Neo-Marxism is relatively familiar, but Hoberman has his own stresses and accents. He shows more clearly than others have, for instance, that there is a utilitarian impulse in Marxism which drives Marxist theorists (at least those of the Soviet bloc) to demand that leisure be *useful*. With a touch of exaggeration, Hoberman writes that Marx "deanarchizes desire so as to harness it to the engines of production" (52). From their utilitarian position, orthodox Marxists reject as anathema the claims of Conservatives like Ortega y Gasset, Max Scheler, and Josef Pieper that sport is an autotelic realm of freedom.

The chapters on Fascism and Nazism break new ground. Since German scholars like Hajo Bernett have done fine work on sport and ideology in Hitler's

Germany, the analyses of English, French, Italian, and Japanese Fascists are especially welcome. Hoberman shows clearly how the Nietzschean tradition was extended and perverted into a cult of the body which made a supreme value of toughness, virility, and indifference to pain. What better way was there to demonstrate the rejection of rationality and the allegedly corrosive influence of mind on morals? Among the most interesting figures discussed are Oswald Mosley, who sneered at his Liberal enemies as effeminate, feeble, weak, and diseased, and Yukio Mishima, whose obsession with physical perfection led finally to suicide as the only way to halt the body's inevitable decline. "When," comments Hoberman, "has the body taken such elegant revenge upon the mind . . . ?" (108).

If Hoberman's analysis of Fascism and Nazism is, on the whole, more original and satisfying than his discussion of the Marxist tradition, the explanation can probably be found precisely in that fascination with ideas that identity Hoberman as a true intellectual. He seems much more excited by the play of thought than by the development of institutional structures. Cultural history, not social history, is his game. For that reason he is tempted to deny the Marxist tradition an authentic interest in play and to (dis)credit it with "a long-standing disdain for sport" (109). In light of the obvious importance of institutionalized sport in all Communist societies, Hoberman seems somewhat wrong-headed on this point. The flaw can be related to a failure to discriminate clearly between the cult of the body and the obsession with modern sports. The first accentuates virile masculinity and fecond femininity as ends in themselves while the second is relentlessly rationalized with an eye to quantification and the records which quantification makes possible. The first typifies Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany while the second is prevalent everywhere in the Communist world. Of course, there was an element of modernism in Fascism and there is more than a little irrationality mixed in with East Germany's love affair with sports, but Hoberman might nonetheless have conceptualized his book differently and retitled it *The Body, Sport, and Political Ideology*. Whether or not one agrees with this criticism, Hoberman should be welcomed into the front rank of sports historians.

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