

Cantelon, Hart and Hollands, Robert, eds. *Leisure, Sport and Working-Class Cultures*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988. Pp. 106. Notes. Bibliography. \$10.95. Gruneau, Richard, B., ed. *Popular Cultures and Political Practices*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988. Pp. 100. Notes. \$10.95.

Sociologically informed historians ought to be indistinguishable from historically informed sociologists, but they are not because the historians are sometimes unsophisticated in their use of social theory and sociologists are sometimes too impatient to muck about in the data, especially when the data are liable to falsify a perfectly good theory. Lamentable as the results of interdisciplinary scholarship can be, the consequences of narrow specialization are worse. Historians should take seriously these two collections of essays by British and Canadian sociologists (some of whom prove themselves to be perfectly acceptable historians).

*Popular Cultures and Political Practices* begins with an introductory essay by Richard Gruneau which admits that "Canadian and British social theorists have shared a tendency to downplay or trivialize the analysis of popular cultural forms and practices until just recently" (p. 12). Gruneau traces the evolution of attitudes and approaches from the elitist critique of mass culture on the part of Adorno and Marcuse through the various stages of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Gruneau sees a progression of influences at the Centre: Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, Louis Althusser, Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and, finally, Antonio Gramsci, whose concept of negotiated hegemony seems now to be regnant, and not just at the Centre. For the moment. If I have one criticism to make of Gruneau's informed and perceptive account of the evolution of the field of cultural studies, it is that he writes as if there really were a progression in which darkness is gradually overcome and replaced by light. My view of social theory is that the rejection of  $n - 1$  approaches and the affirmation of the  $n$ th is likely to lead, in time, to the rueful discovery of  $n + 1$ . Williams still has much to teach us; Gramsci will not have the last word.

Unfortunately for the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth contributors to *Popular*

*Cultures and Political Practices*, the second essay, by Bryan Palmer, is a disaster which might, erroneously, persuade readers to give up on the materialist approach to popular culture. With a daunting disregard for the complexities of historical process, Palmer maintains that capitalism's most important feature is commodity fetishism. Waving the magic wand of simplistic Marxism, Palmer solves most of our theoretical problems with a single flourish: "In this context [capitalism's commodity fetishism], objectification and depersonalization is also reproduced within the cultural arena of everyday life: racism, sexism, reverence for patriarchy, and the assertion of 'maleness' "(pp. 37-38). It seems not to have occurred to Palmer that capitalism's rationalization of the labor process might possibly work against patriarchy, etc. His essay is well titled, "What the Hell."

Readers who abandon hope at this point will miss some good work. Philip Corrigan's contribution, "The Politics of Feeling Good," is a much less reductionist version of contemporary Marxism. Geraldine Finn is excellent on the Harlequin Romances, which seem to extol the virtues of independent womanhood only to conclude, invariably, that subservience is bliss. In "Sport as a Site for 'Popular' Resistance" Peter Donnelly allies himself with Gruneau and with John Hargreaves, both of whom have argued that sports have an emancipatory as well as an exploitative component. Donnelly does, however, stress the latter, alleging, for instance, that national parks institutionalize middle-class values (e.g., no loud music), that pugilism's bad rep is part and parcel of its proletarian associations, that female body-builders are a subordinate group dominated by men for whom "the fit female body has become the new sex object" (p. 78). In regards to this last point, Donnelly seems to assume that male body-builders are not equally anxious to maximize their erotic appeal. Perhaps he sees them as equally dominated by the owners of the fitness industry. If he does, historians should remind him that Bernarr Macfadden and Bob Hoffman, two of the greatest entrepreneurs of the health-and-strength industry, were also fitness freaks who practiced what they preached.

The editors' introduction to *Leisure, Sport and Working-Class Culture* is rather indiscriminate in its praise of like-minded scholars and rather resolute in its lack of interest in those who opt for other approaches, but this is a widespread problem, and not just with sociologists. (It is, incidentally, to Gruneau's credit that he has never argued as if the materialist position were the only one that need be considered.) On the whole, however, Cantelon and Hollands are quite sophisticated in their Marxism. Leisure and sport, they argue, "are neither free-floating idealist entities nor mechanically determined reflections of an economic base, but rather are the active lived-out expressions of particular historical social relations . . ." (p. 13).

Historians will, in fact, be gratified to see that the four essays that follow are indeed attentive to the historical particularities. Hollands begins with a critique of Stanley Parker and Ken Roberts, whom he faults for their failure to see that leisure is socially constituted: ". . . neither of these theorists says much about the impact of class conflicts and how the actual forms of work and leisure have

been struggled over through the historical process" (p. 23). Hollands then gives a number of examples of "leisure on the shop floor," e.g., ship builders who tell stories and play card games while on the job.

Alan Metcalfe's contribution on leisure in working-class culture in Montreal and Northumberland is very well done, but the essay is largely a synopsis of his earlier work in *Canada Learns to Play* (1987) and "Organized Sport in the Mining Communities of South Northumberland, 1880-1889," which appeared in the summer 1982 issue of *Victorian Studies*. There is also a good deal of repetition of previous work in Hart Cantelon's essay on "The Leninist /Proletkul'tist Debates" in the Soviet Union, but the attempt to forge a proletarian alternative to middle-class culture *was* an important aspect of the twenties and early thirties.

My most extensive notes from the Cantelon/Hollands volume are on Alan Tomlinson's "Good Times, Bad Times and the Politics of Leisure." In regard to the small town of Colne, in northeast Lancashire, Tomlinson asks the question often addressed to the working class in general: why, even in the depths of the great depression, did working-class crowds assemble to watch soccer matches rather than to demand social justice? After some excellent ethnographical description of the town and some astute sociological analysis, Tomlinson concludes that the ties of spatially limited community, often embodied in sports participation and sports spectatorship, were stronger than the forces of class conflict. "To be from Colne and not from some other Lancashire township was what gave people a large part of their collective social identity" (p. 57). Tomlinson ends with a wry comment on the "inveterate hedonism" of the politically inactive: "The politics of working-class leisure and sport in the period considered were essentially conservative-through good times, they contributed to the reproduction of bad times" (p. 61).

When more sociologists do work as good as the best done in these two collections, and when fewer of them blither on abstractly about capitalism as the cause of every human malady, historians will pay more attention than they have.

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