

Laine, Leena, ed. *On the Fringes of Sport*. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 1993. 230 pp. Notes, bibliographies. photographs. \$38.

*On the Fringes of Sport* attempts to accomplish quite a bit within its slender breadth. Consisting of 21 essays taken from and inspired by the First International Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport (ISHPES) Seminar on “Sport and Cultural Minorities” held in Turku, Finland, in 1992, along with responses by several commentators, *On the Fringes of Sport* is, understandably, a bit uneven. Nonetheless, as a whole, this collection is at once a primer in feminist and postmodernist theory for sport scholars and an attempt “to make the latest work of researchers engaged in this field more accessible to the general reader—including those readers who have tended to regard literature on sport as a waste of time” (p. 5).

These aims turn out to be contradictory: the most recent applications of postmodernist and feminist theory, while rewarding to the dedicated academic attempting to “unlock” the hidden doors and agendas of cultural and social issues, will be anything but accessible to the average reader, at least as they are presented here. In addition, the attempt to speak to two completely different audiences, whose interests by definition are opposed (sport scholars vs. those who regard their work “as a waste of time”) is here inevitably self-defeating. Certainly one or the other group is bound to be alienated from page to page.

That said, *On the Fringes of Sport* does contain a good deal that will be rewarding to the serious student of sport. Although this collection at times falls short of converting its readers to the gospel of postmodernism, it does provide the student of sports with a wide-ranging introduction to a methodology too long neglected in our field. Whatever its failings in employing them itself, this collection does convincingly argue that sport scholars will have to consider the inclusion of a variety of tools and methods to their arsenals.

The first section of the book, “Who Am I?” is probably the most accessible to the non-scholar, but it is also potentially the most problematic for the serious academic. The essays in this section consist of the personal histories of academics and their ongoing involvement in sport. “Memory work,” represented here in the essays of Ulla Kosonen, Martti Silvennoinen, and John Bewaji, blurs the line between subject and observer usually so strong in academic. “scientific”

research. Their work here cuts the middleman—the compiler and interpreter of others' experiences—entirely out of the process, presenting the researcher as the subject. This could be a fruitful avenue for researchers to pursue, combining the interpretive methods of literary theory with the concerns of historians and sociologists.

On the other hand, the assumptions underlying memory work will be difficult for everyone to swallow: that there are no universals, that all research is, and can only be, subjective, and thus, that one's interpretation of one's own experiences will be as clearheaded and valuable as that of the researcher who is more removed from the material. At worst, such work lapses into self-indulgent statements like "Why should I have to shave my legs? Why should I have to be skinny? Why have I always been ashamed of my breasts?" (p. 48). More dangerous, however, are particularistic assertions such as "women themselves could best describe their own lives, their daily life and their work, their sexuality, etc ....It is impossible for the researcher to step out of his or her gender, social class, age group, and ethnic background" (p. 52). Taken to its logical conclusion, this could mean that only African-Americans should teach or write about African-American history, that only Jews should teach or write about Jewish history, or that only ancient Greeks should concern themselves with the study of Ancient Greece. For the sport scholar, this is akin to accepting a boxer's interpretation of the cultural significance of boxing, without considering the experiences of the audience, the referee, the judges, and all the other participants. Worse: it is like being the boxer yourself. The individual athlete's experience is at the heart of all sport, to be sure, but it cannot always reveal the greater unifying truths that sport scholars pursue. Comparison and analysis of the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives that make up sport must, I think, provide some insights that a single voice cannot; this is the major social contribution of historians and sociologists.

"Who Is My Body?" the second section of the book, is arguably the most successful in its use of postmodernist theory. Henning Eichberg's essay, "The Body as Identical: Towards an Historical Materialism of the Folk Question," traces the history of the application of various social theories—or their inapplicability—to issues of the body. In tracing the extent to which such thinkers as Marx, Foucault, Buber, Elias, and Freud have considered the question of "movement culture," Eichberg notes how traditional Western dichotomies between sport and non-sport, traditionalist vs. anti-traditionalist interpretation, and idealism vs. productivism "have blocked the road to recovery" of the link between modern Western society and the so-called "folk" of the past and of non-western cultures (p. 61). His argument linking sport to other expressions of physical culture such as dance, folklore, and rituals is a compelling one: they are united through their relationship to the creation and maintenance of cultural identity. The body—whatever the activity, be it competitive sport or ritual folk celebration—is "the base of social experience, and social practice... the source of creativity, of poesy, social life—and revolution" (p. 65).

While Eichberg's essay is original, persuasive, and compelling, it is not easy reading. It is clearly out of line with the editor's stated intention of making this field more accessible to the general reader. Additionally, the other contributors seem not to have read Eichberg's essay (or each other's), which answers and/or discredits many of the questions they raise or the assumptions they make regarding the nature of physical culture. Juha Heikkala's contribution on the relationship between fascism and body discipline envisions sport only as competitive, and the increasingly heightened competition of modern sport as only the subjugation of one's body to the aims of the controlling state. "The institution of sport proliferates totalitarian and fascist beliefs in unity of ideology and morally good behavior, hierarchy of regimentation, transparent self-identity and immutable foundations of the I-body" (p. 82). There is nothing liberating about sport here; Heikkala does not consider the definition of sport as physical culture that many of the other essays, including Eichberg's, work with. Pirkko Markula's essay on women and aerobics likewise falls into the trap of too much theory: she seems unsure whether women are alienated from their bodies or whether aerobics helps women to actively create meanings of and for themselves. (In fact, a number of the other essays do the same thing: introducing sport scholars to a new way of looking at their subjects, they seem less interested in making conclusions than in tossing off impressionistic suggestions.)

Markula's work here actually brings to the surface a dilemma faced by all of the contributors, which is that they are unable to situate sport studies—or physical culture, the preferred term in *On the Fringes of Sport*—in relation to other aspects of cultural studies, history and sociology. If sport is taken as merely one aspect of physical culture—if everything involving movement (aerobics, dance, children's games) is defined as physical culture, as happens here—what remains then, but to call everything else "mental" culture? And if this happens, such theorizing as *On the Fringes of Sport* contains reinforces the dualism of mind and body which has marginalized sport studies in the academy, as well as, in Markula's words, "preserv[ing] the present power relations in society by legitimizing societal preoccupation with women's appearance," fragmenting self and body, and alienating people from their bodies (p. 97).

That an essay by Juha Pentikäinen on shamanism could be included in this book on physical culture provides a perfect example of the narrowing effect of such dichotomies: if sport is seen as a ritual, then all rituals must be fair game in being considered sport, according to the logic employed here. Certainly body movements are an essential part of the shaman's "grammar" of myth, healing, and belief; however, this certainly does not qualify it as sport or as physical culture. Rather, the Arctic peoples studied by Pentikäinen integrate the physicality of shamanic tradition with spirituality, musicality, and the life of the mind. However, in this context, such interrelation is secondary to the pure physicality of the shaman's dance.

The third section of the book, "Where is Our Past?" is probably the most

traditional section, focusing (with one or two exceptions) on the social history, folklore and ethnology of sport and the body. Essays on sport and ethnic minorities in Germany, the folk games of Grecia Salentina (an area of Southern Italy heavily influenced by Greek colonization), the Qgû Bushmen of Namibia (complete with charts and classification of ludic activities based on Guttmann's paradigm of play and sport), and the relationship between sport, Gaelic nationalism, and Scottish politics are notable contributions. Probably most noteworthy in this section is Synthia Slowikowski's "On 'Primitive' Physical Culture in 'Civilized' Places." This is not a groundbreaking study; rather, as Slowikowski notes, it is an overview of work done since the nineteenth century on the issue of "how the realm of physical culture variously uses representations of primitive/civilized" (p. 181). The essay raises the question of exactly how much of our conception of physicality is related to our yearning for our past: are "back-to-nature" excursions such as horseback riding or kayaking always "primitive"? Is the body always viewed by modern Western society as our link to the "primitive"?

The book concludes with commentary by several participants in the conference, suggesting the directions in which sport studies should move. Their conclusions are rather open-ended: there are many directions in which researchers could proceed, many avenues in need of exploration. Leena Laine, the editor, thoughtfully notes that "the issue here is the place of the subject and object in research. They should constantly change place. The researcher is a subject and at once an object; role changes occur in the subject/object of study as well" (p. 224). This is certainly brought out by most of the contributors to this book, although their definition of "minorities," so integral to *On the Fringes of Sport's* stated aims, is less clear. Louis Azaria Mbughuni tries but is unable to answer the question in his essay on sport and culture among the small Hadzabe tribe and the Indian community of Tanzania: the Indian community are clearly a minority, but "they have certain degree (sic) of control and influence over the political process through their professional and economic resources. What they do not own they can buy" p. 208). Such statements emphasize the marginalization of the Hadzabe within their own country, but Mbughuni's distinctions border on hostility against Indians, and remind one of nothing so much as European anti-Semitism. Are the Indians a minority in Tanzania? Yes, but...

Ultimately, one can hardly come away from this book without mixed feelings. *On the Fringes of Sport* is a bold attempt to move the field of sport studies in a new direction. Conceived as a call for radical action, it is filled with sentences that begin, "We need to consider..." or "We need to discard..." and it certainly does motivate the reader to look at the body in motion from a new perspective. On the other hand, while attempting to carve out a new postmodernist path, it takes several wrong turns, occasionally getting lost in the underbrush. Methodology aside, footnotes are poorly recorded, for instance; typographical errors are common; paragraphs might or might not be indented.

While focusing on the big picture-the application of theory to a field that could benefit from it-it loses sight of the details, with the result being an often rewarding, but occasionally sloppy, breathless, uneven effort.

New York University

Marc P. Singer