
SPRINGWOOD, CHARLES FRUEHLING. *Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 217. Illustrations, bibliographical references, index. \$59.95 cb.

By now the decade of the 1980s is memorable as an era when remembering became both a newly commercialized endeavor (the boom of the business in collectibles, the boom of the video-cam industry) and a newly ubiquitous object of critical and mass-critical inquiry (in the work of Baudrillard, say, and in films like *Total Recall*). Of course, the very ubiquity of “memory,” what Andreas Huyssen terms the “mnemonic fever,” feels like a symptom of “the virus of amnesia that at times threatens to consume memory itself” (*Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* [New York, 1995], p. 7). The post-Fordist economy, the new ethos of work, and the entrenchment of high technology—these disturb the structure of temporality to the point where we live a post-contemporary condition within which the very time for considering the past or the present in the course of time hastily evaporates. Meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed repeated challenges to the authority of the “historiographical operation,” as Michel de Certeau called it, while offering the aesthetic and epistemological pleasure of historicist architecture and historicist literary criticism (among other phenomena). The more atrophied our historical consciousness, and the more challenged both historiographical act and the act of memory, the more the culture industries thrive by capitalizing on a logic of compensation. Still, as Huyssen argues, the success of the memory business ought to be understood not just as a “reaction formation” but also as a “potentially healthy sign of contestation” (p. 9). One of Charles Springwood’s signal achievements in *Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia* is his capacity to maintain such a doubled assessment, which is part and parcel of his capacity to frame two memorializing institutions within the critical institutions—anthropology, Marxian geography, cultural studies—that promise to make baseball newly visible as an object of longing. Why do “people load themselves into their cars and vans. . . and traverse miles of state country road to arrive in these bucolic locales of baseball’s celestial sights, sounds, and smells” (p. 171)? The answer is not a simple one.

A “geography of baseball nostalgia” is welcome not least because an account of American nostalgia, per se, would find that sport helps to legitimate a longing for the past. By this I mean only that it is difficult to mourn the passing of the 1970s (understood politically, socially, or economically) because it is difficult to assess and adjudicate the difference between 1973 (the year of postmodernity’s proclaimed advent) and 1993, yet it is easy to recall, with a rigorous logic and an unambivalent sense of loss, sport as it used to be: an Olympics still contested by ‘amateurs,’ a game of golf where woods were still made from wood, a world of figure skating that still included the curious and compelling exactitude of skating figures. Just as the chronicle of winning and losing seems to grant sport the kind of historical clarity that few phenomena can attain, and just as professional teams provide the affective clarity of inspiring absolute devotion or provoking absolute

antipathy, so too sport as a source of memory prompts a kind of unencumbered cathexis. While the history of sport shows clear signs of thriving as a subdiscipline within the academy, as part of the amusement/knowledge system, Springwood's account of the fans' relation to the memorialization of baseball contributes, instead, to the theory of sport sentiment-of our effective attachment to the institutions of sport (institutionality being the condition of recuperable history). As Springwood says, "people's involvement with these sites is exceedingly meaningful, often ineffable, and nearly always *emotional*" (p. 113). The very excess of the involvement might suggest how sport satisfies the nostalgia for longing itself—the longing to long, the feeling that feeling as such will enable us to feel some alternative to the numbness of the everyday. To Springwood's credit, this work of "cultural critique" (p. 171), while elaborating the (bad) politics of gender, family, and nation that baseball helps to frame and legitimate (pp. 145-170), does not stop there, but concentrates instead on exploring the excesses in the margins of the well-managed spaces.

The book is the record of Springwood's ethnographic investigation of the tourism at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown and at the "Field of Dreams" in Dyersville, Iowa (that is, the field preserved after the filming of Universal's box-office hit *Field of Dreams*). He combines "historical and ethnographic portraits" (p. 20) to assess both the logic and the practice of a "postmodern culture of the United States in which tourist sites and 'American heritages' are culturally produced and consumed" (p. 9). The book unfolds in three distinct registers: a history of how these two spaces were produced, an astute geography of the sites, and an ethnography of the "spatial practices" taking place there—spatial practice understood as a tourist's particular use of a particular place (p. 18). The tension energizing the book rises from the distinction between the discursive production of these sites and their actualization in the mode of consumption, described, following Michel de Certeau, not as passive but as active and, in itself, productive. Theoretically, then, the overarching narratives of the production of space (narrated by Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Edward Soja) are juxtaposed with, and displaced by, an emphasis on localities—an emphasis responding to George Marcus's call for "multi-locale ethnographies" (p. 10) that "specify both intended and unintended consequences in the network of complex connections within a system of places" (p. 13). Within the proliferating discourse on baseball, Springwood's book stands out as the most thoroughly conceptualized account of how individual practice disrupts ideological design, and thus as a challenge to our (historical, anthropological, sociological) understanding of how sport might be said to function within American Culture—how it attains and retains its phantasmatic use value. For Frederick Winslow Taylor, baseball allegorized the sort of organization that would eliminate waste in America's realm of work; for John Dewey, football clarified just how imposed order and individual agency might be synchronized into the experience of democracy and for more than a few presidents, sport served to produce the healthy bodies that could both emblemize and preserve a healthy nation. But in Springwood's text, sport serves instead as a mode of generating history and the

aura of history, As Michael Kammen has said, regarding our era of “heritage by compulsion,” the memory business serves emotional, business, and political interests (*Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* [New York, 1991]). But the default politics of baseball, the “patriotism” of the national game (perpetually “seized on by nationalist discourses” [p. 53]), looks, in Springwood’s account, like a place holder for more complex cathexes, if not like a screen allegory that prevents us from seeing some of the microcultural work that baseball as history accomplishes.

The Baseball Hall of Fame opened in Cooperstown in 1939, thanks foremost to town leaders who, concerned about the town more than baseball, recognized in Doubleday Field, the mythified site of the first baseball game (in 1839), a public relations opportunity that would quickly transcend the importance of the town’s most famous resident, James Fenimore Cooper. As the only sport with a fully national following in the 1900s, baseball could serve as a figurative panacea to the nation’s economic crisis. At the opening of the Hall of Fame, Ford Frick, president of the National League, explained that “Baseball helps to supply continuity in this age of chaos” (p. 38). Rather than substantially expanding the site in response to its increasing popularity, the town worked, and currently works, to preserve itself as a quaint locale, home of winding roads and dairy farms. Organized sport has been inseparable from urbanization, but it is precisely outside the city milieu where baseball returns as the medium through which to make contact with the “country,” and hence with some kind of premodernity where the human senses and emotions remain unrationalized.

The people who travel to Cooperstown describe themselves as participating in a “pilgrimage” to a “mecca,” a “sacred place,” a “shrine” (p. 63). Springwood describes the scene as “a consumption ritual, where nostalgia is commoditized and reproduced in an overwhelming reduplication of signs and images” (p. 72). But this is not to suggest that this heritage business is simply business as usual. Some visitors explain that in Cooperstown “you get in touch with the past,” a past presented, as Springwood argues, to make the history of baseball appear not as history, but as a “naturally evolving tradition” (p. 83). And in one interview, a father filming the Hall of Fame plaques with his video camera predictably explains that, from the video, he hopes his kids will learn “about the history of baseball and the country, too.” And yet, less predictably, he goes on to say that “I think you get a better sense of history-of the significance of this place-by actually coming. It’s something to remember, as a special event during one’s lifetime” (p. 78). What gets remembered, then, is not baseball, but the place and the visit itself: events in the history of baseball are supplanted by the event of traveling to Cooperstown; baseball history serves as a pretext for adding (celluloid) substance to one’s biography. The tourists in Cooperstown don’t come with the conviction that they’re venturing to the site of baseball’s origin. Rather, “its own, well-documented inauthenticity renders it an appropriate, *authentic*, object of history” (p. 79)—that is, a history of how history is constructed, of how traditions are invented, of how myths of origin originate. As one woman explained it to Springwood, “It’s interesting because it’s like authentic inauthenticity” (p. 79).

Tourism such as this certainly anticipates any critique of postmodernity: the investment in the Hall of Fame is already metahistorical, self-consciously so, and it avows only the hyperreal.

Though the “patriotic narratives that informed the Doubleday-Cooperstown myth have faded” (p. 112) even while the voice-over during the Hall of Fame’s multimedia event in the Grandstand Theater explains that “Baseball is part of the very fabric of America” (p. 76), Cooperstown remains marketable as “America” to some foreign visitors. Kunihiro Kurata, a fifty-year-old advertising executive from Osaka, after visiting “the Holy Land” of baseball, returned with his team, “The Old Kids,” to play a game on Doubleday field against the Leatherstocking Base Ball Club. As Springwood argues, the success of the endeavor depends on the consumability of “America” as premodern pastorality (pp. 68–69). But if such reports begin to intimate a correspondence between the design of Cooperstown (as ideologized space) and its occupation (as actualized space), other reports emphasize the noncorrespondence. Jose, already a Yankees fan before immigrating to Miami from Cuba in 1979, came to New York to visit family in 1993, and insisted on being taken to Cooperstown to see the plaque (and to be photographed in front of the plaque) of Reggie Jackson, newly inducted that summer (pp. 61–62). The identification with Jackson (the first black Yankees inductee) is clearly dislodged from the national (izing) frame; indeed, the visit, as the consummation of that identification, might be said to return Jose to his Cuban childhood. The accounts of such individuals cannot help but foreground agency, but there are clear limits. During the baseball collectibles boom of the 1980s, Will Art founded the Cooperstown Ballcap Company, which produced authentic replicas of caps; but such local entrepreneurial effort will soon found itself under the control of the Major League Properties office, which licenses products within the Cooperstown Collection (pp. 89–90). Baseball economy, not nationalist ideology, survives as a clear determinant.

The town of Dyersville gained national attention as the Iowan setting for the *Field of Dreams*. It became another baseball “mecca” because Dan Lansing chose not to replant a crop of corn in the spring of 1989, after the Universal crews had finished using his house and farm, but to preserve the baseball diamond and to mow the field. When people began traveling to his farm to see the field the following summer, he did not charge admission, and he began to sell souvenirs only at the end of the summer, prompted by repeated requests for some token of the pilgrimage. (Al Ameskamp, owner of the land that made up center and left fields, plowed them under to plant corn, but returned the fields to the Field when he realized how he might capitalize on the “tourist spectacle” with a rival souvenir stand). Not the entrepreneurial imagination, but a fandom that insists on multiplying the sites of heritage, was responsible for reproducing Dyersville as a tourist attraction (which drew 50,000 visitors in 1992). Don Lansing’s diamond has become the ‘site of an affective utopia’ where visitors come to materialize, to spatialize, the sentiment of the film; or, rather, “tourists of an advanced stage of mass-consumerism ‘play’ with simulacra” (p. 111), often in excess of the film’s own sentiment. Visitors experience their encounter as a kind

of personal purification wherein they are able to make contact with the simple life, the work ethic, childhood, fatherhood, marriage, the importance of family and home, the meaning of the father-son bond. The “experience of the Field of Dreams site,” Springwood argues, “may best be considered as a space for the reproduction of a structure of feeling wherein the past is rendered tangible through nostalgia” (p. 149). Because the past rendered tangible has little to do with the baseball history the film itself engages (that is, the history of the Black Sox scandal and the fate of Shoeless Joe Jackson), the field also seems to literalize the very idea of a structure feeling, to create some spatial structure within which one gains license to feel. While David Harvey argues that memories are always “memories of experienced places and spaces” so that time gives way to space “as the fundamental material of social expression” (p. 20), the curious fate of the Field in Dyersville suggests, further, that memories are free-floating and require some place where they might come to ground. The Field has been the site of sermons and weddings; more movingly, it served as a therapeutic site, the trip to Dyersville having become a mode of mourning recently lost parents or children. One family used “their visit to the movie site to actively forge a sort of poetic closure” in understanding their son’s death (pp. 113-114).

When asked about their reasons for trekking to Dyersville, the tourists replicate the mysticism of the film: “We were just driven by the spirit and the message of the field” (p. 115). Comments made in the guest book—the field looks “so realistic,” it’s “very authentic” (p. 119)—suggest not only an obvious disruption in the order of simulacra, but the degree to which Dyersville transcends the sort of logic that still informs Cooperstown. The success of Lansing’s field clarifies how sport has been transformed in the era of the cinematic world picture, wherein the “authenticity effect” results from conformity with the filmic, and where cinema maintains its status as the sensorial dominant, generating an epistemology that renders the world knowable or realizable to the degree that it is filmic. While the Field clearly occupies a kind of Disneyland prototype, where the task is to materialize (to render three dimensional) the filmic image or to resell the filmic as inhabitable space, there exists clearly some difference to be marked when the materialization results from collective will instead of corporate design.

The character of such will, and thus the nature of a possibly collective unconscious that seems to express itself in Dyersville, remains underdescribed in this book, and all but necessarily so. For if there is a limit to Springwood’s inquiry, it is certainly precipitated by his ambition to have these two sites illustrate a generalizable condition of postmodernity, while insisting on “a more provisional and personal description of the disparate practices that occur across the whole spatial landscape.” Because “this ethnography is not an attempt to describe a culture—certainly not an *American* culture—or an organically stable, homogenous national community but, instead, the disparately located signifying practices of culture” (p. 25), Springwood risks replicating the heterogeneity of the postmodern (the absence of grand narratives) while displacing the intense production of the local under review with his own intense production of the individual. (Conversely,

some of his simplest general formulations—"the prevailing argument is designed to reveal the dynamic, historical quality of hegemony in articulating a politics of culture" [p. 111]—risk flattening his fieldwork into familiar, albeit unclarifying, abstraction, just as his citational habits produce more of a collage of commentary, and less a requisite bricolage.) But only by taking such risks, I'd say, does Springwood move us clearly beyond the default generalizations about sport.

By now it looks as though professional baseball, having suffered more than a few seasons soured by economic upheaval of one sort or another, may no longer be the same institution in the future; it may be disabled from institutionalizing the fantasy that the sport (the game, the pastime) is much more than a complex set of labor negotiations. For the fan, who prototypically experiences any disturbance in the season as a crime against the fan, a flurry of baseball books, movies, and television specials will continue to compensate for the current state of the profession by recalling the great game that baseball once was—by establishing an institutional memory of great games and great players that gesturally marks but quickly manages a history (that begins in the 1880s) of complex labor negotiations, along with a history of racial apartheid. The more exciting work in the field, such as Springwood's, will concentrate on the mediation of baseball—via radio, film, television, newspapers, magazines, baseball cards, cereal boxes, underwear ads—whereby the sport seems to preserve its mesmerizing power rather than being rendered obsolete by new pleasures or new technological regimes. Though it is customary to lament the waning of sport as the site of participation, supplanted by sport as the scene for mere spectatorship, spectatorship itself, even mass-mediated spectatorship, retains an element of the participatory, if not the ritualistic, when Family or friends gather around a television set to watch the first game of the World Series, or when they pile into the car to take off for Cooperstown. Indeed, professional sport, thanks to its mass mediation, precipitates a virtual public that transcends social divisions, and that occasions daily conversations that can make a city population (however fleetingly) feel like a collectivity. . . . because people feel like they're feeling the same feeling. If "the social is expressed in material form through the production of space" (p. 172), then the actualized reproduction of space at baseball's sites of memory ought to grant us some sense of a sociality that remains as yet unfulfilled. When Springwood stopped at a service station in Bloomington, Indiana, his Field of Dreams T-shirt was spotted by a man who had just come from Dyersville, and who took the occasion to start describing his troubled relationship with his father. The exchange, as anyone might imagine, made Springwood "somewhat uncomfortable" (p. 125). But such discomfort productively marks an access point to the next stage of Springwood's sort of ethnography, where tourists' recently "enriched" biographies begin to intersect with one another.

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