

**Garry Whannel, *Fields In Vision; Television Sport and Cultural Transformation*. Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 243. \$35.95, distributed by The Law Book Company.**

Television has become a central force in our everyday lives including our encounters and experiences with sport. In light of this fact it is striking that there are so few serious scholarly analyses that address the historical, cultural and political-economic relations between sport, the media and the audience.<sup>1</sup> Garry Whannel's *Fields In Vision* offers a valuable contribution to an important, yet largely ignored, area of cultural inquiry.

Structurally the book is divided into three major parts which follow a thirteen page introduction on 'Sport, television, and culture'. Part I, 'Institutions, practices and economic relations', consists of four chapters and provides an historical context within which to understand the sport and television relationship within Britain. Whannel begins with an interesting historical look at the power and authority of the BBC and the articulation of 'national' ceremonial occasions, national identity, sport and the monarchy. This is followed by an analysis of production practices and professional ideologies associated with televised sport as well as a discussion which traces the competition that emerged between the BBC and ITV from the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Part II, 'Sport on Television', focuses on the actual production process of televised sport including the actual assemblage, framing and formatting of programs. It provides an examination of how the production team attempts to identify with the audience while simultaneously maintaining and asserting its privileged position. It includes a cursory overview of how televised sport, through its narrative, incorporates such factors as class, gender, race, and national identity.

Part III, 'Cultural Transformations', provides a look at a diverse set of issues including: 'globalisation', and 'fields of representation' with specific reference to amateurism, professionalism, gender, race, and national identity. The last formal section of Part III addresses audiences and pleasures. While I certainly concur with Whannel that much more ethnographic and other forms of study are needed in order to

understand the complexity and contradictions of pleasures within audiences of televised sport, the space he devotes to a discussion of Morse's psychoanalytic analysis of the representation of sport seemed somewhat out of place.<sup>2</sup>

One strength of Whannel's work lies in its very attempt to contextualise the relationship between sport and television by accounting for the historical, cultural, political, and economic forces which act upon it. His use of BBC archival material in conjunction with his personal involvement with those directly involved in the production process provide a unique, almost insider's, view of televised sport in Britain. Another strength of Whannel's analysis is that he attempts to provide concrete examples and case studies in order to highlight and illustrate the negotiated and contested nature of televised sport.

Notwithstanding the previously noted strong points, *Fields In Visions* does have its shortcomings. First, Whannel's work is caught in the depth versus breadth dilemma. On the one hand the scope of his analysis is very appealing because it covers such a broad range of issues and tries to account for the intersecting inequities associated with gender, race, class, and national identity. However, one consequence of trying to address so much material is that the depth of analysis suffers. Hence, in my opinion Part I and sections of Part II are quite well done whereas Part III has some limitations. A similar problem emerges in relation to the balance of conceptual and theoretical analysis. Certainly a difficult challenge for anyone but there are several areas where the balance between levels of analysis are uneven. The introduction for example, would suggest that the reader requires to be quite versed in cultural studies literature whereas other parts are much more accessible. Second, while Whannel has certainly tried to update his book with current research there are omissions, for example, in the section on globalisation, and this contributes to a somewhat 'dated' feel. Admittedly, much of what is presented has been previously published elsewhere, although he candidly acknowledges this fact. Third, although the book

describes itself as offering ‘a comprehensive and analytical study of the international phenomenon of television sports coverage’ it may be somewhat overstating its case. Whannel’s analysis as well as his examples are predominantly based on the UK. Moreover, in some cases far too much detail is provided about specific individual athletes and incidents whereas in other instances, names are used without enough explanation as to their identity or significance.

In summary, it is likely that anyone interested in sport and media studies will find at least parts of *Fields In Vision* both interesting and useful. The book and its author should be commended for taking on an extremely difficult challenge and providing an outline of the types of questions that need to be addressed as well as the intellectual rigour that will be required to answer them.

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#### NOTES:

- 1 See J Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps: Sport, the Media and Society*, Longman, Melbourne, 1987; and L Wenner, ed., *Media, Sports and Society*, Sage, London, 1989.
- 2 M Morse, ‘Sport on Television: Replay and Display’, in E A Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television*, AFI, 1983.