

Steve Redhead, *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues*. **Routledge, London and New York, 1997. pp. 160.**

The complex relationship between fans and the subjects/objects of their fascination has been analysed by a variety of scholars from fields as diverse as literary studies, media studies, psychology, history and sports studies. Redhead's book, focussing on the nexus between sport and culture, contributes to an existing and growing body of work. Redhead examines the hyper-real world of the 1990s where sport (specifically soccer) and other forms of popular culture are mediated to a global, and largely absent from the 'real' activity, audience. His book briefly examines the moral panics that arose in the 1980s and 1990s around the apparent escalating violence at soccer matches in Europe and Britain, the nadir being the incident in May 1985 when 39 Italian soccer supporters died at Heysel (1967). The contribution of the media to these moral panics is interestingly but, all too briefly explored. The work of the cultural theorists Baudrillard and Virilio are often quoted to give weight to Redhead's hypothesis that (in keeping with Baudrillard), in contemporary times, the hyper-real has replaced the real and the referent (that which the 'real' purports to represent) is no longer relevant. So where does this leave media discourses and the postmodern fan?

The meanings that accrue around the term postmodern are never clearly addressed in this text. Throughout the book, it is unclear whether Redhead is writing about the postmodern fan as existing in a temporal/spatial (un)reality or the fan in a *condition* of postmodernity. Fundamentally, he fails to adequately distinguish between the moment, the condition and the era. Equally Redhead does not contextualise his discussion of postmodernity within wider cultural debates about the term and the differing notions of the postmodernity in all its forms.

Marshall Berman, Benedict Anderson, Frederic Jameson, to name a few, are writers whose theories are central to these arguments and yet, Redhead appears to overlook their complex ideas and assume uncritical acceptance of his employment of the term postmodern in the reader.

The meta-narrative of soccer hooliganism is also considered to support the argument that the media construct and continue the narrative of violent football supporters. In Chapter Five, for example, there is an interesting discussion of the trial of O J Simpson and the meta-narratives that surrounded his arrest and later hearings. The power of the media to both manufacture and deconstruct the subject are loosely (loosely because, it is up to the reader to do the work) linked to what is occurring in the variety of football narratives that circulate in contemporary culture. Attitudes towards fans, teams and even nations are circulated through a myriad of hyper-real forms, diminishing their significance in the 'real' world and reconstituting the image as paramount.

Redhead also discusses the legal consequences of the hyper-realisation of soccer (and popular) culture. By reinforcing the folk devil image of the soccer supporter through a number of images and prolific reporting of specific incidents, legislation is introduced to contain the disorder and violence associated with soccer. Rather than remaining contained, however, the media embraces this idea of inherent violence and disseminates the idea and the image until it is ultimately associated with the entire sport. The links that Redhead makes between the lack of containment, post-fandom, and mediated sporting engagements are, however, spurious at best. A chapter addressing these issues alone would have situated the argument within a larger debate about media and sport and perhaps provided more than the few examples the reader is given.

While Redhead offers some new perspectives on youth, hooliganism and, perhaps, most valuably, the relationship between sport and high and low culture, his arguments are often obscure and poorly constructed, Pages 58-9, for example, are symptomatic of a book that has been either hastily written or quickly pieced together from separate papers. Here, Redhead moves from a discussion of the O J Simpson trial to the Rodney King court case, gesturing towards discussions of the racialisation and mythologisation of the black body, to the official sponsors of USA '94. The move between two related subjects (and one unrelated one) occurs too quickly and without sufficient explication. The reader is left with the distinct impression of incompleteness and, perhaps, poor editing, to be

frustrated as a result.

Many of the chapters, particularly in the early parts of the book, read like introductions to a larger piece of work. They function as quick surveys of significant events with little or no theoretical or cultural context. The reader feels a little like Oliver facing Mr Bumble, begging 'Please Sir, I want some more'. The effect of reading this is like being placed on an involuntary intellectual diet.

If the early chapters provide an empty feeling, the later chapters have an abundance of cultural references both high and low — from Pavarotti, to the work of Irvine Welsh and Nick Hornby. The latter part of the book examines the transition of soccer as a sport into an identifiable (but almost indistinguishable in itself) part of the pop culture. The use of soccer in films, music and literature is explored once more, in broad sweeping, but nonetheless, quite masterful strokes. The connections function to blur the lines between high and low culture, the 'real' and hyper-real and the role of the sporting fan in the dissemination of soccer culture. The book is littered with a variety of interviews which seek to recoup the role of the 'legitimate' fan or at least problematise those who express support for the sport in a way other than, or in conjunction with, their presence at matches. These interviews are drawn from a television series that significantly features non-soccer identified popular public figures. There is a sense in which Redhead assumes too much 'insider' knowledge in his audience, specifically about the previous existence of Paul Morley and 'Frankie' as cultural icons of the 1980s, for the interviews to make too much sense to the uninitiated reader. Some of these interviews are challenging reading but could have done with contextualisation in terms of their origins, the characters involved and the text as a whole.

The last few paragraphs of the book are reserved for the role of women as spectators and contributors to soccer fandom. This was a disappointing gesture to a significant dearth in the exploration of the inclusion/exclusion binary of women in sport generally. Redhead's point that New Lad chic (and the concomitant soccer associations there) was a response to lesbian chic should have been given a chapter of its own instead of the few tantalising lines.

Finally, and this is an important point, there is a tendency in contemporary texts that seek to attract a cultural studies audience, or at least blur the lines that have been (artificially) drawn across disciplines, to employ jargon. Jargon is anathema to some and pleasure to others and

it is important that both audiences be considered when using neologisms (or old-logisms); the rule to follow is explain contextualise, re-employ. Redhead's sin, in this particular book, is to be the first past the 'post'. The term 'post' is used unproblematically, and often without satisfactory explanation, as a prefix to a variety of words: 'post-youth', 'post-fandom', 'post-sexuality', 'post-realism', 'post-culture', and 'post-postmodernism' just to name a few. If, as Redhead writes, the 'post' does not signal a moment after modernism and 'post-modernism' is not a period *after* postmodernism but an enduring moment within it (94), then he would have been better served explicating this prior to employing the word. Or, maybe if the word has to be explained in such a convoluted fashion, alternative words, less confusing and more enlightening might have been better used. The 'post-fan' could have been a 'hyper-real fan', 'virtual fan' or even 'cyber-fan' or 'mediated-fan' and 'post-postmodernism' as trans-postmodernism? Redhead's decision to 'post' his terms within particular (despite Baudrillard's protests to the contrary) postmodern Baudrillardian discourses and effectively alienates some of his readership — but perhaps this was not his intention. Unfortunately, it also serves to render his attempts to millennialise his argument futile. Debates about the millennium and the psychosocial condition of the postmodern subject abound. Redhead, however, instead of gesturing towards these discussions, dismisses his argument for recognition of the condition of post-postmodernity in one inadequate sentence.

Overall, the book both excites and disappoints, it promises so much and then because of a switch in direction or failure to take a point to a knotty beginning or end, never achieves what its publicity and marketing blurbs on the back cover for example, suggest. He attempts to chart the multi-layered inter-textual existence of various popular cultural forms and sites: media, literature, film, youth subcultures and soccer, yet ultimately, he fails. On the one hand, he provides an interesting pastiche (postiche?) of ideas and an exposition of the link between popular culture and soccer in the age of Baudrillard's simulacra but, on the other, a number of his arguments are also obfuscated by jargon and lack of cultural and theoretical context. Perhaps a sequel is required: it could be tentatively entitled, *Post-Post-Fandom and the Post-Millennial Blues*.

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