

# Towards the critique of the racing society

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Grant Jarvie, *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction*  
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Ja, renn nur nach dem Glück  
Doch renne nicht zu sehr  
Denn alle rennen nach dem Glück  
Das Glück rennt hinterher.

Yes, run after the luck  
but do not run too much!  
Because all are running after the luck  
The luck runs afterwards.

(Bertolt Brecht)

If the critique of capitalist society - as a certain philosopher once proposed - is turned from the head to the feet, the question arises: What do the feet of industrial capitalism do? They run in competition. By racing and competing, the feet of capitalism produce results. This societal practice is what modern sports express in a more than just metaphorical or symbolic way. Sport is a practical ritual of the industrial way of production: making people race for measured results. 'Quicker, higher, stronger' is the motto of both the competitive sportsman and the industrial producer. It was not by chance that the stopwatch entered into the world of Taylorist industrial production coming from racing sports.

The capitalistic competition has not only important advantages for efficient production, it has also a problematical reverse. Systematically, the sportive race produces losers, and the industrial production creates the negative image of the 'unproductive' and the 'parasite' - the one who does not meet the norms. New hierarchies are built, new rigid power relations are created - and a new type of fear is spreading, fear of being among the losers. Indeed, sport is - side by side with work and school - a main field of stress production.

But sport is more than this. It is also a part of popular culture, of laughter and festivity. Workers' sport was by far the most popular working-class cultural movement in history. Also in current society, sport has shown as a field of popular resistance and sometimes even revolt. Sport is not at least a world of movement outside the control of power and market. It thus contributes to bodily democracy.

## Between power play and popular culture

These inner contradictions make the analysis of sports important for critical social study more generally. The study of sport, culture and society is more than a sector study. It is basic research in societal bodily practice.

That is why a critical introduction into this field is highly welcome.

During the last few years, several introductions to the sociology of sport have pointed into this critical direction. Richard Giulianotti followed the way of the theorists: from Durkheim, Weber, and Marx to the Cultural Studies (CCCS), Elias and Bourdieu, passing race, gender, body, spaces, postmodernity, and globalization.<sup>1</sup> John Hughson, David Inglis and Marcus Free (2005) summarized the theoretical approaches of Marx, Tocqueville, Elias, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Putnam, Lasch, Sennett, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Maffesoli, Brohm, the Birmingham School and the Frankfurt School, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu and others under keywords as civilisation, community, public culture, popular culture, postmodernity, power and material relations, embodied experience, and ethnography.<sup>2</sup> The reconsideration and application of theorists' theories had, thus, been in the focus.

Grant Jarvie has chosen another and more structural way when composing his comprehensive guide to the humanistic - sociological, political, historical and anthropological - research in sport, culture and society. Jarvie is a sociologist, teaching sport studies at the University of Stirling, Scotland, and has previously published several volumes on sport in South Africa, on the Scottish Highland Games and on sport, ethnicity, nation-building and racism.<sup>3</sup>

The present study is structured into four parts. The first part examines the broader social-cultural context of sports, characterizing the current theories of values, of history and social change, and of politics and culture. The second part takes the world perspective from 'above' and draws sports into the light of globalisation and intercultural encounter. It touches nationalism and internationalism, the media market with its treats of exclusion and inequality, and the dimensions of international law and governance in sports. The anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements related to sports, which are often neglected in sociological studies of sports, are discussed as well as the post-colonial dimensions of sports. The appearance of 'the other' sport communities - in Africa, Asia, Latin America - change the international sports scene. The third part moves closer to the local practice of civil society, relating sports to identities, diverse body cultures and alternative lifestyles. Here one learns among other things about violence and deviance, sport and environment, sport and religion and social and ethnic recognition. The fourth part focuses on social division and social change, including aspects of social class, social capital and human rights in sports.

The examination of these fields is illustrated by living cases where the author uses his previous studies about British and Celtic sports cultures, sport in South Africa and sport in China. But he also includes illustrative narratives about native African sports, sport in Islamic countries and the history of socialist workers' sport. The reference literature is mainly in English, but there are notable influences from Scandinavian research, especially from Nordic feminism and from the Danish studies of body cultures and bodily democracy. The use of continental theory is extensive, from Karl Marx to Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Zygmunt Bauman. The discussion of sport as a main field of civil society refers to the research of Robert D. Putnam and the debate about communitarism.

Aiming at a broad public of students, Jarvie's introduction to sport, culture and society shows the diversity of theoretical approaches, with attention to details and nuance. The intention is to broaden the perspective and to encourage future research. This intellectual strategy of broadening is, however, not all. What the reader learns is the necessity of more advanced study. Sport - being both a ritual of industrial productivism and a field of popular struggles - deserves a sharp theoretical approach. This type of theory is what we are still waiting for. Jarvie points into some directions which are worth following up.

## Challenging epistemological individualism

One important feature is a sceptic view on individualism, which at present is dominating large parts of sociology and of sports studies. Sociological individualism - which may be a contradiction in itself - is widespread in two forms, either as methodological individualism or as the social-historical thesis of 'individualisation'.

The methodological solipsism is based on the epistemological separation of the human being and society: The human being is treated as if it were alone in the world; at first there is the individual, and then - secondarily - there is society. As if the individual could be thought of without sociality and without cultural interaction (and as if the human being could be thought of without gender). In the case of movement culture this means: As if the individual could be thought of without movement.

On the level of social history, the theory of individualisation claims that modernity has blurred all social relations so that 'individual choice' is dominating in current society. This claim has become fashionable by Anthony Giddens' writings about "self-identity" and by Ulrich Beck's postulate of the post-modern "gesamtkunstwerk Ego". The discourse of 'individualisation' spread in pop-sociology as well as in sports studies where sport is said to be no longer a matter of social and cultural context, but a 'free' choice among the rich offers of the sports market.

Empirical sociology has, however, disproved this. Sport participation depends to a high degree of social indicators. And sport is a matter of social interaction - also in the case of those activities which cultivate 'the lonely individual'. That is why Jarvie's study consequently discourages adherence to the thesis of individualisation, though it does not neglect the decline of social capital, as described by Putnam.

At closer examination, both the thesis of progressing 'individualisation' and the methodological individualism are variations of liberal ideology: 'Everybody is maker of his own fortune.' Jarvie confronts this with the social patterns working in sports, among these especially the triangle of state, market and civil society: sport activity follows public, commercial and popular patterns at the same time - and in conflict.

As a reverse of methodological individualism, social theory has often tended to reify terms of collective life, like nation, religion and identity. What Jarvie proposes instead, with the

authentic material of sports at hand, are terms like community and recognition, power and distribution, hegemony and popular struggle. These are relational and dialogical terms, not at least relational to power. But of course, the danger of reification will remain: Also relational and dialogical concepts can be turned into reified 'objective' terms. The historical fate of 'community' has shown this, but also the reification of 'class'.

## Towards another philosophical materialism

Analysis when done in a materialistic-philosophical way proceeds from the superstructure of ideas and institutions down to the basis of people's practice. (This understanding of materialism is not identical with the traditional economic thinking, which dominated large parts of the historical 'materialistic' theory. It postulated economical relations or technological development as the basis societal processes.) Materialistic method - regarding human practice as the basis of the societal process - is not explicitly taught and unfolded in Jarvie's book, but it is implicit in its set-up, going from global and international politics down to body culture, lifestyles and identities.

"Governments change, policies change, but the needs remain the same" - is the motto of this book of sports. It can, of course, be questioned whether the needs really remain unchanged, but anyway, this intellectual direction leads nearer to social psychology, which in past times often has been underexposed by socialist theory. Jarvie's book deals extensively with gender and violence, but the field to be covered is much broader. Future critical theory would profit from further and more decisive steps towards subjectivity, phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Sport is not only a world of learning, fun and entertainment, as the affirmative discourses of the Olympic establishment would suggest, but also a field of fear, anxiety and stress. And the political is not only to be found in the ideological superstructure, in the 'use' of sports, but also in the basic patterns of movement where indigenous practices are confronted with colonialism, and where the colonisation of life-world is met by popular struggle.

On the surface of mainstream sports, where Muhammad Ali was boxing for the African-American nation, Tommie Smith and John Carlos - at the Mexico Olympics 1968 - raised their black-gloved fists for Black Power, and Cathy Freeman was racing for the Aboriginal cause, the euphemisms of 'individualisation', 'free market' and 'global civil society' can also be questioned. Sport can only be thought of as a world of contradictions, i.e. dialectically.

Last but not least, the study of sports - being so near to bodily practice in inter-human relations - leads from knowledge to action. The narrative of sports is a living discussion of, which type of society we want, and how a friendly society of welfare and recognition would look like.<sup>4</sup> Jarvie hints at the 'public intellectual' whose task and duty is to act as a safeguard against the one-dimensional world of global sports, challenging the normalised soundlessness of unseen power, and thereby offering empowerment to the powerless - but also standing firmly against the anti-intellectualism of 'popular' sports.

In the world of sportive race, speed is what counts. In the world of democracy, processes take time, and the dialogical principle is rather connected with slowness. Also in this respect, the running feet of sport are political.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Giulianotti 2005: *Sport: A Critical Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>2</sup> John Hughson, David Inglis & Marcus Free 2005: *The Uses of Sport. A Critical Study*. London, New York: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Grant Jarvie 1985: *Class, Race and Sport in South Africa's Political Economy*. London: Routledge. - Jarvie 1991: *Highland Games. The Making of the Myth*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (Dissertation). - Jarvie 1991 (ed.): *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity*. London: Falmer. - Jarvie & Graham Walker 1994 (eds.): *Scottish Sport in the Making of the Nation. Ninety Minute Patriots?* Leicester, London, New York: Leicester University Press. - Jarvie & Joseph Maguire 1994: *Sport and Leisure in Social Thought*. London: Routledge. - Jarvie 1999 (red.): *Sport in the Making of Celtic Cultures*. London, New York: Leicester University Press. - Jarvie & John Burnett 2000 (eds.): *Sport, Scotland and the Scots*. East Lothian: Tuckwell. - Jarvie, Richard Cox & Wray Vamplew 2000: *The Encyclopedia of British Sports*. Oxford & Denver: ABC Clio. - Jarvie, Joseph Maguire, Louise Mansfield & Joseph Bradley 2002: *Sporting Worlds: A Sociological Perspective*. London: MacMillan. - Jarvie, Dong-Jhy Hwang & Mel Brennan: *Sport, Revolution and the Beijing Olympics*. Oxford/New York: Berg (in press).

<sup>4</sup> There is a certain logic to the fact that Grant Jarvie is among the initiators of the recently launched International Network for the Marxist Study of Sport: [http://www.nasss.org/newsletters/2005\\_apr.pdf](http://www.nasss.org/newsletters/2005_apr.pdf) (p.12).