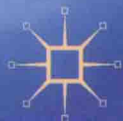


Constructing Leisure

Historical and Philosophical Debates

Karl Spracklen



Constructing Leisure

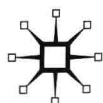
Historical and Philosophical Debates

Karl Spracklen

Leeds Metropolitan University, UK



palgrave
macmillan



© Karl Spracklen 2011

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2011 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries

ISBN: 978–0–230–28051–9

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Constructing Leisure

For Beverley (again)

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all at Palgrave Macmillan for their invaluable support, in particular Andrew James, Olivia Middleton and Philippa Grand.

Also by Karl Spracklen

HEAVY METAL FUNDAMENTALISMS (*co-edited with Rosey Hill*)

SPORT AND CHALLENGES TO RACISM (*co-edited with Jonathan Long*)

THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LEISURE

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 Philosophy of Leisure	14
3 Leisure and Human Nature	33
4 Leisure in Classical History	50
5 Leisure, Islam and Byzantium	67
6 Leisure in the Middle Ages	84
7 Leisure in Japan, China and India	102
8 Early Modern Leisure	121
9 Leisure in Modernity	140
10 Leisure in Historiography	157
11 Future Histories of Leisure	175
12 Conclusions	193
<i>References</i>	199
<i>Index</i>	223

1

Introduction

In the reign of the Emperor Justinian, the Late Roman Empire of the East had something of a rebirth (if not a renaissance in the sense of the word used by most historians today). In the capital city of the empire, Constantinople, Justinian built the *Hagia Sophia*, the church dedicated to the holy wisdom, which still stands above the Golden Horn in Istanbul. Justinian saw the church as a visible expression of his piety, and of his desire to unite the various theological factions of Eastern Christianity behind his own version of Orthodoxy. Along with the church and many other visible works of architecture, Justinian commissioned the compilation, editing and rationalization of the many strands of Roman law and created many important laws of his own (Watts, 2004). The Code of Justinian, like the *Hagia Sophia*, is one of Justinian's lasting monuments. More fleetingly, Justinian sent his ships into the Mediterranean and beyond to the lost Roman Empire of the West, where his soldiers retook the provinces of Africa, Italy and part of Spain. For a moment, with the defeat of the Italian Goths, it looked as if the Roman Empire was to be reunited and refreshed by the success of Justinian's generals.

Justinian, however, was never secure enough in his palace to be sure of a complete victory. His most famous and successful general, Belisarius, was lauded by the crowds of the capital city. But Justinian did not trust Belisarius. Through the campaign in North Africa, Justinian had been reluctant to give Belisarius reinforcements and fresh supplies. In Italy, again the emperor was slow to help his general, even when that general had taken Rome and was besieged behind its long walls. It was rumoured that Belisarius had been offered by the Goths to be crowned king of Italy. This rumour, according to the writer Procopius, had some basis in fact, but Belisarius had used the offer as a ruse to trick the Goths. Clearly, Justinian was afraid of Belisarius, and if the history of

the Roman Empire was in Justinian's mind, it could be argued that he was right to be afraid. Since the year 68, when Galba succeeded Nero, the claim to the imperial titles was something that was seen as a reasonable career goal for ambitious generals.

But there was another reason why Justinian was afraid. The mood of the city was judged in the hippodrome, where the supporters of two rival chariot teams, the Blues and the Greens, were usually found in surly competition. Like many other Romans before them, the citizens of Constantinople were enthralled by the spectacle of the hippodrome, and the supporters of the rival factions knew that being a Blue or a Green meant so much more than mere cheering when the chariots raced around the circuit. Fathers enrolled their sons into the factions; wives were found within the right colour; money was won and lost through gambling; and even theology seemed to be connected to the Blues and Greens. Justinian had cultivated his favourites in the hippodrome, which in turn meant they were favoured across the city and the empire, in other cities where the factions divided people's leisure lives. His wife Theodora, if Procopius is true in his *Secret History*, had more reason than Justinian to favour one faction over another: she had been born into one, and then abandoned by that faction when her animal-keeper father died, to be enrolled in the other faction's entertainers.

So Justinian should have been secure, if the energy of the city's citizens, their agency, was constrained by the choice of Blue or Green. In fighting each other on the nights of races, the young men were forgetting something of the servitude they lived in; meanwhile, the other citizens who were in the factions could sit in taverns, curse their rivals and pray to any number of Saints to get their divine help at the next event in the hippodrome. It was normal for the emperor to be present at the hippodrome, where he could hear the complaints of his subjects and show his wise and Christian judgement. The emperor could reach the hippodrome direct from his palace, through a private passageway. This public forum allowed the emperor to control his subjects, to be mindful of keeping the balance between the Blues and the Greens, while at the same time giving favours to those who were useful to him and the empire.

That was the theory. In practice, the hippodrome's crowd could quite easily become a mob. And so it had proved to Justinian when he had detained members of the factions and allowed them to unite against him in a riot that turned into an insurrection. The organization of the two circus factions – ordinarily directed towards self-help, profit and winning – was combined in the *Nika* uprising against Justinian. From

the hippodrome, the two united factions turned against the visible emblems of the emperor's reign, attacking his officials, then his palace. Rivals of Justinian were released from prison. The factions found leaders from families related to previous emperors. Fires started and spread across Constantinople. The supporters of the Blues and Greens – with their victory watchword for us symbolic of modern athletes and sneaker cultures – broke into the palace and pushed Justinian to a private harbour by the Bosporus. Procopius tells us that Justinian was ready to abandon the empire and flee into exile as a private citizen, but his wife refused to abandon her status as an Empress. She persuaded him to fight back – and with the help of Belisarius, who had appeared at his side, Justinian managed to hold on to his power. Belisarius and his troops entered the hippodrome and killed thousands of the Blues and the Greens.

That was why Justinian was afraid. He had seen the balance of the hippodrome overturned by the Blues and Greens fighting together. He had heard them shouting victory, seen them parading their would-be emperors through the streets. In public, of course, he showed no sign of weakness, only piety and grace. But in private, he must have shivered at the memory of the days of the riots, when he almost lost his empire – and probably his life – to the combined forces of the circus factions. Races continued in the hippodrome, and the Blues and Greens survived, albeit drained of resources and lives, but Justinian was evidently worried that a general like Belisarius might be someone whom the leisured layabouts of the hippodrome might choose to parade through the streets (Evans, 2000).

The circus factions of the Roman Empire are not new to critical studies of leisure and sport. For Crowther (1996) there is a danger in drawing too many comparisons between the circus factions and modern sports fans' violence. Drawing on the detailed account of the circus factions in Cameron (1976, 1979), Guttman (1986, 1992) provides a detailed historiography of the conflict between the Blues and the Greens. His analysis seeks to demonstrate change in spectator violence: that change being the less violent product of the civilizing process (Elias, 1978, 1982; Elias and Dunning, 1986), which means hooligans do not massacre each other in the same way as the Roman fans did. Guttman also plays with the continuity of violent spectatorship. In explaining, for instance, that 'in the Circus Maximus... the partisans of the Blues and the Greens... probably had their own sections, very much like the football fans of modern Britain' (Guttman, 1992, p. 141), he draws a neat parallel between football hooliganism in the late twentieth century

and that of the circus factions. In Coakley's student textbook *Sports in Society*, a general overview of classical sports history includes a brief discussion of games and sports in the empire that suggests (Coakley, 2003: p. 68):

Chariot races were the most popular events during the spectacles... Spectators bet heavily on the races and, when they became bored or unruly, the emperors passed around free food to keep them from getting too hostile... This tactic pacified the crowds and allowed the emperors to use the spectator events as occasions to celebrate themselves and their positions of power.

Coakley's discussion is reminiscent of the Ridley Scott's egregious film *Gladiator* (2000), in which attention to accurate details of costume and background is countered by a typically Hollywood invention of history. In this artefact of popular culture, if not in actual second-century Rome, the Emperor Commodus is slain on the sand of the arena, jeered by the mob he had tried to placate with ever more extravagant gladiatorial displays. Coakley's Rome, like Scott's Rome, where leisure is seen as the diversion of the masses, is, of course, an old one. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, wrote that the people of Rome in his day were happy to be given dole (bread) and entertainment (circuses) as diversions from engaging in political debate. There is a weakness to this replication of Juvenal's view: Juvenal was writing in a particular historical moment, for a particular audience, for a particular purpose. If we blithely repeat his vision of Roman leisure as imperial hegemony, we face the danger of endorsing a narrow view of history. Guttman is more sophisticated with his history and his sources, but his work is potentially problematic through its present-centred insistence on seeking the fairy story of figurationalism in the historical record. What Coakley and Guttman both do is fixate on a certain image of Roman games as sport, as some familiar combat watched by thousands of fans. It is a valid historical story to tell, but it is a narrow one. To understand the meaning and purpose of the circus factions, for instance, we need to look beyond simple stories of hegemony and civilizing processes, and examine wider issues of how and why societal and moral factors played a role in shaping the leisure of people in Rome and Constantinople, and how much agency and reason were involved in the construction of their leisure lives. We need also to examine the way in which those leisure lives were constrained by the social structures of the time, and the status of women, outsiders and slaves.

In other words, what is needed in any discussion of the circus factions and the games, or in any history of leisure, is an awareness of the philosophical problem of leisure: the paradox between freedom and constraint. In *The Meaning and Purpose of Leisure* (Spracklen, 2009, pp. 13–14), I outline this paradox of leisure at the end of modernity through an example drawn from teaching first-year Leisure Studies students:

The arc of debate in a first-year class about the meaning of leisure is reflected in the growth and development of leisure theory and the discipline or field of Leisure Studies. Within the student discussion there are three ontologies of leisure: leisure as free choice in a world where leisure is defined by choice against other areas of life that are structured (for example, work); leisure as structurally-constrained choice (or no choice); and leisure as a completely free choice in a world where structures are breaking down altogether. These three ontologies are directly related to three epistemologies of critical studies of leisure, associated with the history of Leisure Studies as an intellectual study: liberal theories of leisure as freedom; structuralist theories of leisure as a (re)producer of social structures and unequal power relations; and postmodern theories of leisure (along with post-structural theories of postmodern leisure).

In that book, and earlier work (Spracklen, 2006, 2007, 2009) I argue that the paradox of leisure could be resolved by viewing leisure through a Habermasian critical lens. Jurgen Habermas speaks of two ways of thinking about the world, two rationalities, that in turn create human actions. The first way of thinking is communicative, which comes from human discourse, the application of reason, free will and democratic debate. Leisure, then, seems to be a human activity where communicative rationality is at work – we make rational choices about what we do in our free time. The second way of thinking is instrumental, which is what happens when human reason is swamped by rationalization, economic logic or other structural controls. Habermas' concerns with instrumentality are at the centre of his historical project (Habermas, 1984[1981], 1987[1981]), which maps the rise of communicative rationality and its lifeworld of human discourse, and the struggle to keep communicative reason afloat under the stress of the instrumentality of late modernity. So leisure, from being something communicative, follows the inexorable logic of capitalism to become something instrumental. In the concluding paragraph of *The Meaning and Purpose of Leisure* (Spracklen, 2009, p. 159), I argue that:

Critical studies of leisure, following the pessimism of Adorno and Gramsci, can and indeed should be maintained as a means of identifying and understanding the increasing dominance of instrumental rationality in society and culture. Leisure as a meaningful, theoretical, framing concept; and critical studies of leisure are a worthwhile intellectual and pedagogical activity ... Indeed, leisure is the part of our lives where the tension between freedom and constraint – agency and structure, resistance and control – is most visible, so understanding leisure is even more essential as the world and its societies become increasingly commodified and ordered. Following Habermas, examining leisure actions can help us understand the conflicting pressures of instrumental control and individual will – and in doing this, critical studies of leisure can and should continue to play a central role in understanding society.

This book is intended to be a sequel to *The Meaning and Philosophy of Leisure*, though *Constructing Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Debates* can be read without ever reading my first book on leisure. Where that first book is focussed on leisure at the end of modernity, and the effect of globalization and postmodernity on leisure, this book looks back at the meaning and purpose of leisure in the past. It is a history and philosophy of leisure. But this is not a simple social history of a leisure form, such as Borsay's (2005) book on British leisure and class identity. It is not enough to write a history of leisure on its own – in fact, it is impossible without engaging in the debate about what counts as leisure (in the present and in the past). It is necessary to examine leisure and theories of leisure in historiography, critically, and through the lens of philosophy. This book's aims, then, are twofold: firstly, to engage with academic debates about leisure in history and philosophy, which will lead to a strong critique of the narrow focus of previous historiography and social theory; and secondly, to provide a much broader chronological and geographical scope for problematizing leisure, which allows for both a more balanced analysis of the meaning and purpose of leisure, and a comparative exposition of that meaning and purpose in context (Roberts, 2011).

This realization that you cannot do history without philosophy is accepted in academic discourses around the meaning and purpose of science. The history of science and the philosophy of science, though clearly delineated scientific disciplines with their own corpus of knowledge, are best understood as refracted elements of a meta-discourse of meaning exemplified by the sociology of knowledge, which ties the two

together: the history and philosophy of science (Golinski, 1998). For example, in 1543 Copernicus, in his defence of the heliocentric universe described in *De Revolutionibus*, wrote that 'all this is suggested by the systematic procession of events and the harmony of the whole universe, if only we face the facts, as they say, with both eyes open' (Copernicus (1947 [1543]), Book One, Chapter Nine, cited in Kuhn, 1957, p. 154). According to Copernicus, there was a physical, heliocentric system, which he put forward as a true account of the universe to replace the Aristotelian, geocentric universe. However, the mathematical system adopted by Copernicus to account for the phenomena of the movement of stars was similar to the one used by other astronomers created by Ptolemy in the late Hellenistic era. This system was used by astronomers to make predictions, but it held no metaphysical or physical reality. For the philosophers, the Aristotelian model was the 'true' model – the astronomers merely used the complex Ptolemaic model because of its usefulness in making predictions (Rose, 1975). So it comes as no surprise to see Osiander writing in the preface to Copernicus' work that the heliocentric model was not physically true, but mathematically useful (Kuhn, 1957, p. 187). Duhem has argued that Osiander was right to make this instrumentalist intervention, that there was no justification for anyone such as Galileo to make the claim that the Copernican system was really real – in Duhem's account, Galileo should have listened to Cardinal Bellarmine, who urged such an instrumentalist approach and saved himself a lot of trouble (Duhem, 1969). Constructivists argue that we should look to external influences and interests, as well as practice, to write meaningful narratives in the history of science (e.g., Barnes, 1977). Copernicus was strongly influenced by the philosophy of scholasticism, hence his commitment to perfect spheres (Debus, 1978). But he was also influenced by the rediscovery of Neo-Platonic texts in the 100 years leading up to 1543 (as witnessed by his commitment to an underlying physical reality and his Neo-Platonic reverence of the sun), a rediscovery effected by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the growth of mathematical disciplines in independent academies and the invention of the printing press (Eisenstein, 1983; Cohen, 1994). The Reformation and Counter-Reformation played a massive role in the transmission and initial suspicion of heliocentricity. Galileo could not adopt a pragmatic approach to heliocentricity that reconciled philosophy with theology because he believed in a physical reality verified by observations he had made through a telescope. To understand what was happening up to and after Copernicus, then, one needs to understand the philosophical debate about what constituted good natural philosophy, the debate

about what was real and how that reality could be discovered and justified, and how that debate was situated in wider discourses about knowledge, power and God.

Writing a history of leisure, then, entails writing a philosophy of leisure – and any history needs to be a philosophical history as well. That is the purpose of this book. It will provide an account of leisure through historical time, how leisure was constructed and understood by historical actors, how communicative reason and free will interacted with instrumentality at different times, how historians have reconstructed past leisure through historiography, and finally, how writers have perceived the meaning and purpose of leisure in alternative histories. This is, then, a more considered and *philosophical* history of leisure than that sketched out by Blackshaw (2010) in his polemic for the *uniqueness* of ‘liquid’ leisure in the twenty-first century; or the ahistorical musings on leisure and Eliasian civilizing processes found in Rojek (2010).

What is history? If we are to address historical issues within our particular field of research there has to be an understanding that, in many cases, history is indeed bunk. Or rather, there is a danger that history can be bunk if we charge blindly into the past seeking events and evidence that we find relevant. The problem is not the past *per se*, but our use of history, and our writing of it. Far too often, history is presented as a simple chain of causal events in the past, a preparation for the present that is self-evident to the researcher (Zammito, 2005). Yet, this is blatantly not the case. If we take the past as a creation of the people and culture of that relevant time, we are given a far more complex view of a past made for their time and not ours. And, if we are to take a post-modern view, the best that we as historians living in the present can do is create histories amongst ourselves, and the idea of a History (with a capital letter to signify the Grand Narrative) that is accessible becomes a lost cause. Too many events happened in the past – all we can hope to do is look to discourses situated in small parts of time and space: any judgement on the past (that is, comments that ‘this was good, that was bad’) by historians living in the present is an anachronism that must be avoided.

This book does not claim to be the history of leisure, or even the philosophical history of leisure. Such narratives are outside the scope of any research, as well as open to anachronistic criticism. Indeed, the very term ‘leisure’ is problematic if used too casually in history, as its meaning and purpose changes from the early modern period onwards (Bramham, 2006; Spracklen, 2009). What this book will approach are the areas of history that are directly relevant to understanding social

and philosophical problems about leisure's meaning and purpose, as an aid to my understanding of the field of leisure studies. At all times in this historical analysis, I will attempt to utilize an awareness of the historian's role in history making, by providing alternative explanatory frameworks to what was 'actually' happening. That said, I will also provide my own interpretations of the relevant historical events, and show how they are pertinent to my own research agenda: that of providing a critical synthesis of the communicative meaning and purpose of leisure for human societies.

However, before I look at these two aspects of my historical discourse, I have to be sure of the problems that arise with all discourses that discuss the past. In the next section of this introductory chapter, I will discuss the dangers of Whig history and the attendant problems arising from our present-centredness and the postmodern view of history being a collection of opposing discourses over what counts as 'historical truth'. I will then suggest what has to be done in any historical discourse to avoid both conservative ideologies deciding what counts as history and, for example, thinking William the Conqueror invading England in 1066 is all you need to know about anything.

Whig history: present-centred, present-directed, progressive

The first pitfall in history writing is that the past is vast. If we make a simplistic definition that goes something like 'The subject of history is all things that are located in the past, being the time before the contemporary circumstances', we are left with a huge amount of subject matter. There is no feasible means by which anyone could hope to know everything about the past. Realistically, then, history is approached by adopting themes, subjects or interests, and exploring them in the past. In my case, my interest with the past has already been stated. I have a specific interest in one small part of history, a history of leisure, done to explore the philosophy of leisure: specifically, the concept of leisure as a place of tension between Habermasian communicative rationality and instrumentality (Habermas, 1984[1981]; 1987[1981]).

One must suffer the consequences of any historical departure in research. There are problems highlighted by historiography that will now be discussed. Then I will proceed to raise the problem of the relativity of knowledge and how this creates problems for our understanding of history. These issues are the centres of intense debates in their respective disciplines, and their relevance in this paper may be