

Book Reviews

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Celebrity Society

Robert van Krieken

London and New York: Routledge, 2012, £26.99 pbk, ISBN: 9780415581509, 188 pp.

Reviewed by: Chris Rojek, Brunel University, England

This book is the first full-length analysis in figurational sociology of celebrity. Van Krieken maintains that celebrity is now inescapable. It encompasses every walk of life, from music to the Academy, television to sport, charity to diplomacy, and business to politics. Where has it come from? Its rise is rooted in the emergence and evolution of Court Society, the development of printing as a means of mass communication, and the growth of individualism. The book's principal thesis is that celebrity society is a modern form of Court Society mediated through global mass communications and a public sphere colonised by secular, democratic values.

This approach has decisive consequences for the thrust taken by the analysis. The emphasis upon Court Society as the secret of the contemporary fascination with, and power of, celebrity, privileges the role of status over class and elevates cultural relativism over ultimate meaning in understanding celebrity relations. The name of the game in Court Society and Celebrity Society is acquiring status increments over forcing class advantage or truth seeking. Somewhat grandly (because the proposition is not sufficiently supported), he dismisses the field of celebrity studies for mostly having a thin historical perspective and privileging culture over society. The book aims to redress the balance. To this end it presents a good deal of historical data about celebrity since the eighteenth century (especially, the role of technologies of mass communication in promoting celebrity in everyday life). The range of secondary sources marshalled is impressive. The author is an able bibliophile who delves into unusual resources in the library to build his case. Van Krieken does not wear his erudition lightly.

This results in a somewhat bloodless quality to the exposition. Figurational sociology is directly concerned with the relationships between psychogenesis and sociogenesis. The treatment of personal psychology as an integral aspect of social processes is one of the beautiful gifts that Elias gave us. Yet nowhere in this book do you get a sense of what it is like to be George Clooney, Angelina Jolie, Jay Z, Ronaldo or Paris Hilton, or indeed to be one of their fans. The book argues convincingly that we consciously and subconsciously imitate stars today. Yet it leaves the questions of what exactly we are imitating, and what the stars think they are bestowing upon us, relatively open. At the level of meaning, the subject of what celebrity imparts, for celebrities and fans alike, is un-capped vapour in this book.

Throughout, van Krieken makes a virtue of going to the wicket batting for Sociology. I must say that I find this deployment rather grating and old-fashioned. Because of its dependence upon mass communications networks, with all of the attendant issues of coding, representation and invisible (predatory) government entailed, the question of celebrity lends itself urgently and irresistibly to inter-disciplinary, mixed methods

research strategies. The contributions from writers in Media and Communication Studies and Cultural Studies, such as Graeme Turner, Su Holmes and David Marshall, are insightful and deserve more serious treatment than they get here.

In addition, assigning priority to Sociology over-eggs the proposition that the book is really making a decisive break with the rest of the field. It is all very well to apply Elias's treatment of Court Society and couple it with Wright Mills' work on the relationship between celebrity, prestige and power in the fourth chapter of *The Power Elite*. (Although personally I could have done without being told twice in the first two chapters that most readers – including the youthful van Krieken – skip over chapter 4 in Wright Mills' book because they instinctively feel that the subject of celebrity is trivial.) However, for my money, the concept of *mediation* is more relevant and valuable for understanding how celebrity works than pitching the issue around the influence of Court Society or Wright Mills' café society in New York and LA. Mediation makes acute use of the digital economy, and the global corporate and statist interests behind it, in the construction of subjective status. It helps us shed light on how celebrities advance and bolster what the political theorist, Sheldon Wolin, calls 'inverted totalitarianism' in contemporary so-called 'democracies'. Additionally, it turns the complex question of what is an authentic feeling over a preferred reading among audiences (and celebrities) into a matter of perpetual, nagging import.

Granted, the author alights upon this matter in the passage devoted to para-social interaction. However, it is done in the manner of a mechanic showing the ropes of how a car works, while begging the more insistent questions of why anyone should want to drive, and what hidden interests benefit from the appetite to get behind the wheel. It is not accidental that our obsession with celebrity has coincided with the age of political quiescence. In the urban-industrial democratic setting, resistance is now primarily conducted through representation. The occupation, the badge, the blog site and above all, the body, are the missiles through which discontent and dissent are registered.

Celebrities are masters of representation. That is why we pay them the big bucks and grant them so much latitude. They play out the fantasies of frontier life – infinite wealth, inexhaustible sexual and romantic possibilities, perpetual creativity, a hotline to Presidents, Prime Ministers (and gangsters) – that permeate and, in some cases, dominate the fantasy lives of others. Imagine if you will, what it is to wake up every day richer than you were when you went to sleep, to be asked (as Bono is asked) to advise on aid to Africa by world leaders and to make a fist, at the same time, of being just an ordinary Joe, a man of the people. Next, ask yourself how useful it is for vested, predatory interests to cook public life with these distracting flames. Celebrities provide a placebo for real action in the lives of the many, which are cross-cut with the routine experience of powerlessness, helplessness and incredulity in the face of the ills facing the world. Through the windows of the traps in which we find ourselves, celebrities offer endlessly renewable images of escapism and transcendence. Van Krieken's book does a good job in taking us to the brink of these matters. It will be left to others to go the whole hog, and demonstrate the subtle ways in which celebrity society contributes to moral regulation and social control.

Response to Chris Rojek's review of *Celebrity Society*

Robert van Krieken, University of Sydney, Australia

My first thought when I read Chris Rojek's review of *Celebrity Society* was, 'Oh dear, this person got out of the wrong side of the bed the morning they wrote this'. The editors of *Human Figurations* have kindly allowed me a right of reply for which I'm very grateful. The review says more about its author than it does about the book, but there are some aspects of how the book's been portrayed that I'd like to say a little about.

There is an extensive body of literature on celebrity to which I'm aiming to add what I hope is a distinctive perspective that draws on Elias, but also on a broad range of historical and sociological writing that currently doesn't get sufficient recognition, if any at all, in the field of celebrity studies. This is not the same as 'dismissing' that literature, as Rojek claims. I make a point of acknowledging the important analytical work that's been done by the writers Rojek mentions, including himself, but if one is examining what can be said using a completely different body of literature, then one simply moves off in different directions.

Professor Rojek complains that I don't examine what it's like to be a celebrity. That's because there are more than enough people doing that already, apart from which I don't find it especially interesting, in the same way that Elias didn't spend much time talking about what it's like to be king. Of more interest to scholars inspired by Elias are the social forms surrounding 'kingship', and that's essentially what the book is grappling with in relation to celebrity, identifying the ways in which social relations are organising around celebrity, rather than seeing our orientation towards celebrities as a mere 'obsession'.

In his haste to dismiss the book, Rojek ignores most of it. Just a few examples: one body of literature that's important to include in the analysis, again not currently referred to in the media and communications discussions, is the work on the economics of attention, the concept of 'attention capital', and the notion of celebrities as entrepreneurs of that particular kind of capital, difficult as it is to pinpoint. There's an account of how and why political movements and activities of all sorts end up getting organised around celebrity figures, and the role of celebrity in politics more broadly, as well as in business and management. I also look at how it's useful to reflect on how celebrity tells us different things about the operation of power, and discuss Thomas Mathieson's argument that the Foucauldian account of panopticism – the few watching the many – needs to be supplemented with an understanding of synopticism – the many watching the few. This is a key element of what Rojek ends deciding is most important – the role of celebrity in moral regulation and social control – so it would have been helpful if he had actually noticed that part of the book. The book's frontpiece contains John Adams' observations on the centrality of the regulation of the 'passion for esteem' in all forms of government, but that also seems to have escaped Rojek's attention.

Hopefully at least some readers will find the 'impressive' range of secondary sources more useful and less burdensome than Rojek did, and the sociologists among them may find it less 'grating and old-fashioned' that a specifically sociological approach to celebrity is examined alongside the kinds of analysis one currently finds in media, communications and cultural studies. It was only ever my intention to bring readers to the brink of an interesting mobilisation of Elias's works to the study of celebrity, opening up that field of analysis rather than claiming to have exhaustively covered it, so on that point at least the review has got it right.

Seeing Cities Change: Local Culture and Class

Jerome Krase

Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012, £60 hbk, ISBN: 9781409428787, 300 pp.

Reviewed by: John Lever, Cardiff University, Wales

When we visit urban spaces for the first time, Krase argues we behave like tourists, scanning our environment for the clues and cues that give us insight into our new surroundings. For Krase, this process is not merely an aesthetic exercise, as what we 'see' makes a difference to how we respond to the people and places we encounter. It is in this sense that Krase's new book provides a timely reminder of the value of visual methods for exploring wider processes of social and economic change in Cities.

The book starts off with a discussion of the value of visual theory and method which, Krase argues, can help to illuminate the work of old and new urban theorists alike by allowing us to see conflict, dominance and competition in new and unusual ways. His approach is multidisciplinary and comparative, crossing national boundaries to highlight the competing spatial practices evident in urban vernacular landscapes. Each chapter offers a discussion of how global forces and competition between residents in diverse built environments have changed the face of ordinary streetscapes within cities. Krase blends scholarly and media sources to overcome what he calls the *je nes said quoi* – or impossibility – of describing issues of migration, ethnicity, diversity, community, identity, class and culture by verbal means alone. Through a study of change on both sides of the Atlantic – in places called ‘Chinatown’, through processes of gentrification, by comparing Polish and Italian neighbourhoods, and through studies of ethnic spectacles – Krase illustrates how cultural landscapes are influenced by the symbolic and cultural practices of successive generations of migrants thrown together by global forces.

In Chapter 5 – Polish and Italian Landscapes – Krase discusses the ways in which Italian and Polish national *habitus* (though he doesn’t use the term) are represented in the spatial representation of neighbourhoods through social and physical patterns of settlement inherited from the old country. Whilst recognising his own generalisations, Krase offers an intriguing comparison of Italian-American and Polish-American neighbourhoods, the composition of which he relates directly to the cultural values and ethnic histories of villages in southern Italy and Poland. Italians thus have a greater tolerance, he argues, for high-density neighbourhoods similar to the high walled, densely populated towns and villages of southern Italy, while Poles have a greater preference for physical separation and space, in turn related to the spatial layout of the more open, individually set houses of rural Poland. While both communities are socially closed, Italian-American neighbourhoods are more physically restricted and focused on locality and ‘congeries of families’ than Polish-American neighbourhoods, Krase argues, which often revolve around the Catholic Church and large-scale Polish institutions. Italians endorse and enforce the private over the public in both family and neighbourhood, he argues, by replacing neighbourhood items (trees and public fences, for example) to reinforce a sense of territory, while Poles are more obviously concerned with what other people think, as evidenced by their freshly scrubbed doorsteps. If Poles are especially concerned about being accepted by others, Italian neighbourhoods display the historically evolved ethos of stressing family ties over and above any attempt to bond for the common good.

The arguments and images presented in the book illustrate the symbolic struggles created by the competing social practices of ordinary people, thus reflecting change as well as continuity. Even when they are subsumed under the weight of political pressure, Krase shows that vernacular landscapes remain important aspects of community life; as he notes when discussing Bourdieu’s work, a focus on the visual can help us to see the hidden regularities produced by the practices of the powerful. Throughout the book Krase draws on a range of sources – from Urban Sociology, Geography, Planning, Geography and Cultural Anthropology, with a special focus on Visual Ethnography and Visual Sociology – to illustrate the strength of visual theory and method. If it sometimes appears that Krase is trying too hard to explain what the book is trying to do, he quickly returns to the task at hand, providing insightful and illuminating examples of how to examine and understand change. In my view, Krase is correct in his assertion that a visual approach has much to contribute to debates about cultural diversity in urban neighbourhoods. A stimulating read for anyone interested in urban studies.

Distant Tyranny: Markets, Power and Backwardness in Spain, 1630–1800

Regina Grafe

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, \$39.50 hbk, ISBN: 9780691144849, 291 pp.

Reviewed by: Jesus Cruz, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA

Distant Tyranny: Markets, Power and Backwardness in Spain, 1630–1800 is a comprehensive study of the historical interaction between market integration, political economy, and consumer culture in the early modern Spanish imperial space. The book possesses numerous merits and makes important contributions to our evolving conception of pre-1800 Spanish economy, the history of the European nation-state, and market-making under the Old Regime.

The first merit of Regina Grafe's book is the amount of new information it reveals about the evolution of trade, consumer patterns, and market dynamics in the early modern Iberian trans-Atlantic space. Making use of evidence extracted from an impressive array of archival materials, her work sheds fresh light on the impact on the southern European markets of the introduction of a new consumer product: *bacalao* (dried cod). While there exists extensive historiography on the cod trade as one of the first trans-Atlantic commodities, less is known about its repercussion in Spain, and next to nothing about how this trans-Atlantic trade interacted with markets within the Iberian Peninsula. Grafe's contribution helps to fill this gap. A second merit of *Distant Tyranny* is its innovative methodology and broad scope. This is not a narrowly focused analysis of econometric history that deliberately diminishes the role of politics, society, and culture within the study of economics. To the contrary, Grafe lucidly takes into account the function of political economy and historical sociology, combining the methods and approaches of these fields with the perspectives of new economic history to present a vivid picture of early modern Spanish and European history. Yet another strength of Grafe's book is the consistency of its argumentation, which is always presented with coherence and well supported by convincing scholarly evidence.

Distant Tyranny: Markets, Power and Backwardness in Spain makes three major contributions to the history of Spanish economy and state formation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as to the economic and political history of early modern Europe. First, it presents a case study – the trade and consumption of *bacalao* – that places Spain in the history of the debates about the origins of modern consumption in the West. Grafe's book adds to recent books that also offer case studies illustrating Spain's role in this phenomenon: Marcy Norton's study of the role played by the Spanish and Portuguese in the origins of chocolate and tobacco consumption and Marta Vicente's work on the consumption of Catalan calicoes in the eighteenth century. Next, Grafe's study provides evidence to debunk the established but erroneous assumption that the main impediment for market integration in early modern Spain was the persistence of an expensive and inefficient transportation system, and that this persistence was caused by the unmanageable size of empire and its abrupt geography. Taking the case of the *bacalao* trade, Grafe shows that, while transport was still slow, it exhibited a trend toward moderate but steady improvement. Grafe argues with erudition and convincing evidence that the main reason for the insufficient integration of markets was not transportation costs but rather the effect of jurisdictional fragmentation – and this constitutes the book's third major contribution. Her analysis of the particular nature of the Spanish absolutist state and its role in delaying the integration of Spanish markets is brilliant, illuminating, and of transcendence for the debates on the making of the nation-state in early modern Europe.

Regina Grafe belongs to a generation of young scholars specialising in the history of the economic, political, and socio-cultural dynamics of the early modern Spanish imperial space. By the means of the use of new sources and, above all, innovative approaches, these historians are revising two prevalent conceptions of Spain's imperial rise and subsequent long-lasting decline. The first erroneous conception is the notion that

Spain's imperial expansion was founded on the consolidation of a strong authoritarian, interventionist, and predatory state; the second is the assumption that this development set the ground for Spanish decline because it provoked cultural isolation, economic backwardness, and ended separating Spain from the European mainstream. In essence, this revisionist school in Spanish history can be considered part of a broader current within European historiography that focuses on the emergence of the early modern European nation-state. What is new in this recent innovative scholarship is the perception that the making of the European early modern nation-state was quite diverse; consequently the quasi monolithic classic interpretative models provided by political economy and historical sociology are put in question. Grafe's book, with its comparative approach and thorough documentation on Spain's economic and political fluctuations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries constitutes a major contribution to this reinterpretation of early modern Europe and Spain's role in its economic history.

Civiliserende Institutioner: Om Idealer og Distinktioner i Opdragelse

Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv (with contributions by Karen Fog Olwig and Dil Bach)

Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2012, kr. 299.95, ISBN: 9788779347021, 305 pp.

Reviewed by: Hans Dorf and Søren Nagbøl, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark

It is not a daily event in Denmark that an empirical analysis of educational ideals and practices of institutions of intentional socialisation of children and youth is published with the concept of civilisation as its pivotal theoretical category and Norbert Elias' theory of civilisation as its central (though not only) inspiration.

Civiliserende Institutioner – edited and written by Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv with single contributions by Karen Fog Olwig and Dil Bach – is the result of the first thoroughly elaborated research project in Denmark directly relating itself to Norbert Elias's widely published work on civilisation theory. This is remarkable, since his sociology of figurational processes has long ago proved its potential elsewhere in Europe. Thus *Civiliserende Institutioner* is a pioneering work in Danish educational research.

The book sets out to examine, by means of ethnographic methods, the cultural values, beliefs and practices involved in the processes of civilising the immature for social life – mediating between individuality and community – as well as the responses which the civilising efforts are met with by those undergoing them. And even if it is actually an anthology it appears more like a monograph thanks to the prevailing interest of its chapters in examining in detail how the processes of civilisation are connected to ideas held by society, institutional educators and parents, how they are related to the distribution of dominance, positions, discourses, distinctions and actual behaviour, and how they are interpreted and negotiated among their participants.

Chapter 1 presents Elias's concept of civilisation and explains how it will be used in the subsequent analyses, and in chapter 2, the comprehensive institutionalisation of childhood and the development of ideals of socialisation in Denmark, mainly since World War Two, is sketched and discussed from the perspective of civilisation. It is pointed out that while manners have become to some extent more informal, the civilisation pressure has not abated.

In chapter 3, Eva Gulløv analyses early childhood civilisation in kindergartens highlighting important dimensions (nature, animals, the body, (non)violence and language) inherent in the process of becoming

social and respectable. It is shown that the civilisational ideal is ambiguous not only in terms of being balanced between the wild and the disciplined and between individual autonomy and responsibility towards the group or community, but also in terms of being obscure or subject to necessary interpretation and in terms of producing inclusion as well as exclusion, compliance as well as opposition. In chapter 4, Karen Fog Olwig uses retrospective interviews in focusing on how the still *uncivilised* children use their very position as such to make the spaces of civilisation (and thus, in a manner, civilisation itself) their own.

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, Laura Gilliam examines the civilisational ideals, beliefs and practices within the school institution at three age levels and in schools with different social and cultural dimensions. She shows that it is the prevalent ideal across schools and school levels that civilisation should entail a *balance* between responsibility towards the community and room for oneself, guided by the central concept of personal and social *limits*. It is shown that pupils, like kindergarten children, are active participants in their own civilisation processes. The ideal of individual autonomy is seen both as a reflection of professional ideals rooted in anti-authoritarian (reform) pedagogy and as being in line with alleged demands of the 'knowledge' economy. She thus argues, in line with Gulløv, that civilisational standards cannot simply be seen as functional necessities but are rooted in socially held beliefs, in the constraints and affordances of the institutions themselves as well as in the educators' values, and that – with the predominant position of educational institutions in the civilising processes, and with parents being drawn extensively into the orbit of school civilisation – these standards are eventually shaping the civilisational characteristics of society.

However, civilisation does not only produce inclusion or integration, but also exclusion (sometimes for special treatment) and resistance to civilisation due to its subtle distinctions and situationally variable codes, which not all children are equally experienced in reading, as Gulløv points out. And particularly in chapter 6 Gilliam concerns herself with the *impossible class* in an ethnically mixed environment in which teachers, against their own codes of civility, must resort to authoritarian measures, and in which a process of active ascription of role positions along gender, ethnic and religious lines among all participants eventually produces *distinguished* and uncivilised individuals and cultures in mutual opposition reminiscent of Willis's *lads* and *ear'oles*.

Chapter 7 rounds off the school section by showing how school civilisation of youths from a privileged environment seems to assist them in embedding their personal identity in the higher end of a social hierarchy comprising social classes and systems, nations and epochs. This chapter is 'accompanied' by chapter 8, in which Dil Bach examines the ideas of good upbringing in privileged families setting themselves off against the culture of boastful wealth and trying to practice a balance between individual freedom and social control, autonomy and responsibility. Children are seen as an investment demanding the development of these qualities, and the success of this project is reflected in the (self) perceived success of the parents. The nexus of the two chapters underlines the assumption which is made more or less explicitly in the preceding chapters that the standards of civilisation and respectability are distributed in a socially uneven manner, which makes it an unequal task for different children to cover the unequal distances of difference in order to meet the dominant standards of distinction and to de-code their ambiguity and make the most of them.

Chapter 9 sums up the conclusions of the preceding examinations. It is noticeable that, despite the complex origin of civilisational values, a predominant set of values can be discerned in the material across institutions and roles. One reason for this, it is argued, is the post World War Two social and political aim of democratic integration, of overcoming social inequality and segmentation through the vehicles of welfare state institutions. Another reason is the fact that in the process of institutionalisation, the children of welfare state civilisation have gradually become the vanguards of civilisational standardisation. However, the existence of a widely acknowledged, predominant set of civilised standards of social conduct does not preclude the fact that not all children become equally civilised. As it is shown, they rather come to define themselves and others in terms of their degree of concordance with distinguished standards and with reference to social, ethnic or

sexual indicators. Thus, not only respectability but also inferiority or alternative hierarchies of counter culture are produced. The chapter reflects whether the value of equality may have the side effect of reducing the social intercourse of different social groups because of the embarrassment (shame) involved in being superior or inferior in a welfare project which has equality as its aim but has been only partially successful. It is emphasised, however, that civilised respectability is not identical with social success. And at the end of the chapter it is briefly discussed whether the discourses of global competition may bring changes in the prevalent order of civilisation. It seems the authors think not so easily.

Civiliserende Institutioner is a well written and entertaining book. Despite an occasional tendency to sum up important insights more than once, the fact that the analysis is accompanied by extensive empirical substantiation conveying a vivid impression of the values, idioms, habits and strategies governing the civilisation practices (and the opposition to it) makes it a persuasive and convincing account. As it is pointed out by the editors, the methods applied cannot promise full representativeness. One can never be sure that another selection of institutions and respondents would not have provided different results. This limitation is handled meticulously in various ways: Through the authors' explicit sensitivity to individual differences, ambiguities and nuances in the material, through their carefulness in finding patterns across different institutions, through their theoretical openness and reflexivity, and through their linguistic precision.

From the point of view of educational sociology, it would have been an added strength in terms of enabling readers to assess the varying degrees of correspondence between family and institutionalised civilisation and the selective effects of pedagogical communication, if the book had included additional chapters with analyses of civilisational norms and practices in other socio-cultural family categories than the one examined by Bach. Such analyses might provide a broader basis for assessing the civilisation aspect of socio-cultural backgrounds of different children which teachers must take care of in order to overcome the inequalities of educational opportunity, which are unfortunately rather stable in Denmark. This would appear to be a promising research project. Just as it would seem a promising project to delve further into the role of educational content in creating images of civilisation, which Gilliam touches on. However, it is the indisputable quality of this book to have clinically revealed the values, codes and practices of a predominant pattern of civilisation processes oriented towards social equality but also producing its opposite.

Understanding Immigration in Ireland: State, Capital and Labour in a Global Age

Steven Loyal

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, £14.99 pbk, ISBN: 9780719078316, 320 pp.

Reviewed by: Mary Gilmartin, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Ireland

There is a growing body of literature on recent immigration to Ireland: edited books, book chapters, journal articles and reports. Steven Loyal's book, the latest addition to this literature, joins a small number of monographs on the topic. While Bryan Fanning's recent work focuses on social cohesion and on racism, Loyal pays more attention to the asylum and labour immigration. Thus, while his work overlaps to some extent with Fanning's, it also offers some new insights into recent immigration to Ireland. In particular, the book provides important observations about the relationship between asylum and labour immigration in the context of Ireland, and its implications for how immigration is understood and experienced.

The introduction – the first of 12 chapters – outlines a number of goals for the book. It aims to be a theoretically informed empirical analysis of migration, where the theoretical framing is cultural materialist, focused on four interlinked processes – capitalism, the nation-state, international law, and labour/migrant mobilisation – and with an ontology of human beings as social (pp. 11-14). The work this book hopes to do is thus broad-ranging and multi-scalar. The 11 chapters that follow attempt to address these goals. Chapter 2 provides a general overview of migration theory and history, while the remaining chapters focus on the state (Chapters 3 and 4), asylum (Chapters 5 and 6), law (Chapter 7), citizenship (Chapter 8), labour (Chapters 9 and 10), racism and integration (Chapter 11), with Chapter 12 as a conclusion. The rationale for this division of material and for this order of chapters is not clear. Some chapters overlap, while others provide information that is not apparently relevant. Chapter 4, which focuses on state borders and boundaries, is a case in point. Beyond highlighting that borders and boundaries are both socially and spatially constructed and maintained – an observation that does not require a separate chapter – it is difficult to see what it contributes to the overall book. Similarly, there is no clear justification for the separation of Chapters 7 and 8, given the importance of legal judgements to the (re)construction of citizenship in Ireland. These overlaps undermine the overall message and effect of the book.

This book provides a strong and compelling account of labour and migration in contemporary Ireland. Chapters 9 and 10, which focus respectively on occupational segmentation and on the migrant as worker, clearly show the role of migration in reconfiguring the labour market in Ireland. Trends that affect all workers include flexibilisation, the decline in union membership, limited state enforcement of labour laws and regulations, and the ‘bi-polar development of work vacancies’ (p. 164). Issues of specific relevance to migrant workers include sectoral concentration. Loyal discusses this with reference to agriculture, construction and care work, paying particular attention to 3D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) employment. While he is careful to acknowledge that ‘not all migrants experience exploitation’ (p. 228), it is clear that his main interest is in the ways in which state and capital collude to enable exploitation. In railing against the categorisation of human beings ‘according to their relative use for capital’ (p. 176), Loyal makes an important intervention into broader discussions of immigration in contemporary Ireland.

The book displays a keen awareness of the complexity of migration as a process. It is less successful, however, in displaying this complexity through its use of theoretical and empirical material. There are a number of unresolved tensions that resurface throughout the book. The first is a tension between theory and empirics. While displaying a nuanced theoretical perspective, the book is less successful in putting this to work in the discussion of immigration in Ireland. As a result, generalisations that are theoretically critiqued are then reiterated when discussing Ireland: immigrants are described as coming to Ireland primarily to work (p. 154), rather than as working in Ireland; the discussion of migrants at work focuses on 3D work and on exploitation; the account of sectoral concentration highlights the areas of concentration but not the areas of employment where immigrants are under-represented. As a consequence, the complexity of immigrant experiences is not fully represented. The second is a scalar tension: the book invokes a variety of scales, from the individual to the structural, but its characterisation and operationalisation of the relationship between these scales is uncertain. Often, the book resorts to a form of methodological nationalism in its repeated focus on the Irish State, despite an early rejection of this approach (pp. 32–3). The reified Irish State thus provides a safe target for critique throughout the book, granted little of the complexity identified in more abstract discussions of ‘States’ in general in Chapter 3.

There is much to admire in this book. It is ambitious and wide-ranging, and attempts to marshal a range of sources to further its broader argument. That ambition, though, is tested: the book struggles to bring diverse theoretical and empirical evidence into a meaningful conversation. More care in the melding together of theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence would have strengthened the book, as would more attention

to detail – there are small errors throughout that undermine the overall effect. Primarily, though, I read this as a forceful moral argument about the place and treatment of immigrants in contemporary Ireland. Making this explicit, in a shorter and more focused book, would have made a more powerful contribution to literature on immigration to Ireland.

Surfing Life: Surface, Substructure and the Commodification of the Sublime

Mark Stranger

Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011, £60.00 hbk, ISBN: 9780754674436, 288 pp.

Reviewed by: Gary Sinclair, University of Stirling, Scotland

Stranger declines the invitation to join the growing number of researchers who have not only completely dismissed the theoretical value of the early Birmingham School's subcultural theoretical underpinnings, but also sought to alleviate the usage of the term 'subculture' itself, at the expense of postmodern concepts (e.g. tribes) that better represent increasingly fluid, complex and transient social groupings. Whilst Stranger acknowledges the flaws of the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (CCCS) framework, he argues that such critiques provide the scope for modifying this approach, rather than ignoring it, and that it remains useful as an umbrella term for explaining the plethora of emerging social formations. Hence, Stranger stresses the stable, committed and resistant features of surfing subculture that resonate with more traditional subcultural explanations, and seem to indicate, as Stranger argues, the presence of a more 'grounded neo-tribalism' (p. 46) than Maffesoli maintains is indicative of contemporary social groups. This represents a welcome bridge between the subculture/post-subculture dichotomies that have blighted recent subcultural accounts, particularly in the form of the somewhat questionable application of Maffesoli's 'tribalism' to the arena of postmodern consumer research and its worshipping of the 'consumer tribe'.

However, Stranger's ethnography of surfing culture is still very much grounded in postmodern theoretical structures (e.g. Bauman, Maffesoli). This study places great emphasis on the aestheticisation of contemporary society and the social groupings that emerge from shared experiences. In this case it is the shared sense of flow, the foundational transcendence that surfers experience from engaging with the 'sublime' aesthetic of the surf. Stranger argues that this founding experience generates a collective consciousness and the development of strong bands and tribes of surfing subculture. He privileges the embodied experience of the leisure pursuit here as the aesthetic glue that bonds the subculture. At the heart of this embodied experience is the 'flow' and emotional catharsis that is encountered through the thrill of risk-taking that inherently symbolises surfing culture. 'Only a surfer knows the feeling' (p. 197) is both the commercial message of the major surfing brand Billabong, and also serves as the underlying message of this book, demonstrating how the experience of 'the surf' creates an ecstatic sociability.

A potential drawback is the analysis of the concepts of risk-taking and fear. Whilst the reasoning for discussing such concepts is fairly self-evident, Stranger seems to lose his grip here somewhat, taking on far too many theories from different disciplines as potential explanatory tools, resulting in at least one chapter (Chapter 4) that is overly long, difficult to follow and to an extent ill-fitting with the flow of the rest of the book. However, this is a minor concern and Stranger should be commended for incorporating a multi-disciplinary approach, through his use of philosophy, psychiatry and psychology, which does share some similarities with the figurational approach as he claims. However, his management of multiple disciplines in

certain contexts only serves (ironically) to reinforce the argument that postmodernism at times resembles ‘an unintelligible mess of contradictions’ (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994) – a figurational statement that Stranger himself cites as a means of challenging it.

Those of the figurational persuasion, particularly with research interests in the study of sport and leisure, will be drawn to the insightful historical documentation of surfing that Stranger provides, charting its emergence from Ancient Hawaiian surfing rituals to its contemporary form as one of the most popular leisure activities in the world. The use of words such as ‘leisure’ or ‘sport’ to describe surfing is of great significance here as Stranger wrestles with the consequences of surfing’s increasing popularity and what he portrays as the postmodern commodification of the surfing aesthetic. Stranger draws on Elias and Dunning’s ‘sportisation’ process to articulate the conflict between aestheticisation and rationalisation that has characterised the history of surfing subculture and its recent relationship with the mainstream and its competitive sphere. However, Stranger applies a slightly alternative focus to sportisation in that he uses it to describe ‘the ordering processes that competition brings to the playful, untrammelled act of surfing, rather than the “controlled decontrolling” of emotions, violence or danger, of Elias and Dunning’s (1986) original work’ (p. 215). Unlike most ‘ball games’ or other sports (e.g. boxing) where sportisation processes are seen to organise chaos and hence maximise the emotional experience of engaging in or watching such mimetic activities, Stranger provides evidence which indicates that structured competitions actually contribute to lessening the emotional thrill of surfing and more than likely other similar leisure pursuits (e.g. snowboarding and rock climbing). Stranger is particularly critical of the advent of controlled wave pools which have been incorporated by the mainstream in order to legitimise surfing as an Olympic sport and deconstruct the boundaries between the subculture and the mainstream.

However, Stranger, despite his deep attachment with the subculture, does not waste his time wallowing in idealist conjecture concerning the impact of commercialisation on the soul of surfing. He still acknowledges the emotional benefits of such forms of surfing and uses his insider status to present a detailed portrait of how the surfing industry contributes to the successful management of the mythology, symbolism and emotional aesthetic of the subculture. For example, he provides an intriguing analysis of how the ‘big three’ surfing brands (Billabong, Rip Curl and Quiksilver) have developed a trust with the surfing subculture and influential participants through communicating their long-term position and insider status within the subculture and connecting with the foundational experience that is so crucial to the surfing aesthetic. Consequently, despite the large size of these companies and their engagement with corporate methods (e.g. sponsorship, floating on the stock market), which would seemingly contradict the counterculture ethic, they have succeeded in consolidating barriers between the subculture and the mainstream, protecting it from the threat of capitalistic colonisation. In addition to creating a high level of subcultural capital and recognition for the brands themselves, they have also helped reinforce the identity projects of the surfing subculture participants and fed into what Stranger describes as an ‘oppositional postmodern form’.

It is the depth of Stranger’s involvement and knowledge of every aspect of the subculture from its amateur and professional surfers, its portrayal in the media, to his understanding of the history of surfing and the significance of its mythology and symbols that is the real strength of this book, and makes this an important contribution to subcultural research and sport and leisure studies. However, Stranger’s contribution is extended further through his ability to chart contemporary social change via the lens of the fascinating surfing subculture, whilst at the same time challenging the prevailing theoretical constraints of postmodern research concerning social formations.

