

Continued. Sport

get the Olympic Games and in their organization. His idea was that the Games would highlight Norwegian society as a sports society where the masses took active part by viewing the skiing competitions as they took place out in nature. Hofmo was a national strategist. Slagstad views him as an “organic intellectual”, as Antonio Gramsci defines the term. He saw in sport (*idrett*) a means of strengthening the working class and making it the vital core of Norwegian society. However, when the Games took place, Hofmo, who had struggled against what he regarded as “the sport idiocy”, was pushed to the side-lines and the competition atmosphere prevailed. This happened in 1952, at the zenith of the welfare policy project, and Slagstad argues that the staging of the Oslo Games heralded a new era: “This certainly signified that ‘the sport idiocy’, contrary to Hofmo’s beliefs, would not gradually disappear during social democratic modernity and its utilitarian sport. Sport without any sense has become the dominating culture in the post-modern society, where social democracy has lost its leading position.” (p. 292)

Slagstad’s book is very Norwegian. It is, however, also a global history of Western civilization as mirrored and embodied in different kinds of sport. The author of (*Sporten*) argues that the rise of sport has been intimately connected with modernist aesthetics. In the early 20th century, painting and philosophy transgressed the boundaries between art and life, and at the end of the century, post-modernism transgressed the boundary between high culture and mass entertainment. The beginning of the process is expressed in Edvard Munch’s portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche (1906, after the death of the philosopher). The painting, which is strikingly reminiscent of Munch’s famous “The Scream”, is expressive and embarrassing. The viewer knows that the subject of the painting is considered to have been insane: for Slagstad it bears witness to the fact that, at the end to the 20th century, Nietzsche’s philosophy had become the order of the day: “sport without sense is post-nihilistic illusionism.”

FOR SLAGSTAD, SPORT IS A CENTRAL societal phenomenon in secularized Western society – as it is in the westernized rest of the world, one may add. If we read

the bracketing of the word “sport” as indicating that it is a provisional title that may be deleted, we get the key to understanding what the book is all about. It is about the gradual return of enchantment to Western society. Like many before him, Slagstad notes the pseudo-religious arguments behind the Olympic idea of Baron de Coubertin and the outright religious *mis-en-scène* of the Olympic Games in Berlin 1936, with Leni Riefenstahl as the director.

However, the author goes far beyond merely recording the obvious. Analyzing the spread of professionalism, from its beginnings in British soccer football in the late 19th century to its encompassing of every sport imaginable one century later, he is able to demonstrate that, as was the case in Antiquity, from the courses in Delphi and Athens to the Coliseum in Rome, the Olympic Games once again mark the time. Today the Games unite all mankind in the same manner as they united the Greeks and the Romans two millennia earlier.

SLAGSTAD’S HISTORY of the modern world as seen through a Norwegian lens does tell us a lot about sport in the proper sense of the word. An understanding of sport as a model for society gives one an understanding of the modern project as a fusion of rationality and emotion, of analysis and expressiveness. Post-modernism is characterized by sport without sense in a culture saturated with kitsch.

As a book, (*Sporten*) is a collection of essays, each of which offers a new angle on the theme. After the introductory chapter on the birth of modernity as a fusion between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the following chapters treat the northern playground/English sport; Nordmarka (north of Oslo) as a Norwegian realm of memory centered around sport; utilitarian notions of sport (*idrett*); the corporal aesthetics in the art of Edvard Munch; the stadium as a device for making sport a sacrum (a lengthy analysis of Riefenstahl and the Olympia Stadium in Berlin is included); sport as a spectacle (television broadcasts the Tour de France and the Olympic torch relays night and day), sport without sense (kitsch and emotions); and the maturing of contemporary event society with sport taking center stage.

Precisely because Slagstad’s book is not a history of sport, it is a very good read on the significance of sport in the making of Norway and in the shaping of the contemporary world.

kristian gerner

1 Gerd von der Lippe, “Om menn og baller. Sport for litteraturidioter” [About Men and Balls: Sport for Literature Idiots], *idrottsforum.org/feature*, 2009-09-02.

Dissertation review. Making culture governable

Egle Rindzeviciute
Constructing Soviet Cultural Policy: Cybernetics and Governance in Lithuania after World War II

Linköping 2008
(Linköping Studies in Arts and Science 437. Theme Q, Culture Studies, Linköping University, Department for Studies of Social Change and Culture) 277 pages.



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LIFE BEHIND THE IRON Curtain is known mostly through stories of individual suffering and macro pictures of politics and economy. Management practices in the centralized systems are rarely the focus of research. Egle Rindzeviciute’s dissertation helps fill this gap, while confirming an observation made by Hungarian-Swedish economic historian György Péteri: the curtain was made not of iron but of nylon – impenetrable but transparent. Similar processes occurred on both sides of the curtain, a result not of “convergence”, but of local translations of translocal trends.

RINDZEVICIUTE CHOSE a fascinating subject: central management of the cultural sector in Lithuania after World War II. A pilot study, inspired by her personal experience as an art historian and curator in post-1989 Lithuania, moved her onto the path of historical investigation, and on the traces of a “cultural policy” that was allegedly a cornerstone of management practices in the field of culture. Her investigation went back in time until it reached the event that was to become the beginning of the story: the 1948 publication of *Cybernetics* by Norbert Wiener, a U.S. scientist of Russian-Jewish origin.

WHAT POSSIBLE IMPORTANCE could a book published in the U.S. have had for Lithuanian cultural policies? The chain of associations is complicated. The first connection is that between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. As this connection tightened (a euphemism for annexation), Lithuanian cultural policy came to adhere more and more closely to the Soviet model. The second, more surprising, connection is between the Soviet model and cybernetics. As a capitalist product, cybernetics was banned in the Soviet Union immediately after its creation. After Stalin’s death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev’s official repudiation of Stalinism at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, however, cybernetics was rehabilitated. Indeed, it was promoted to the status of being the science of control, much as the creators of cybernetics themselves, and especially the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1950), had claimed it to be. In 1961, Wiener’s article “Science and Society” was published in the most influential Soviet journal, *Voprosy Filosofii*. It was accompanied by an ap-

propriate Marxist commentary, but it was there.

To give a rough summary of the idea behind cybernetics: If one is to gain control of anything – from machines to spheres of collective life – one needs to design a control system that imitates those already designed by nature in plants and animals. “Cultural policy” is then one part of such a control system, the part that covers the domain of culture – the system’s “brain”, so to speak.

Applying Foucauldian “archeology”, Rindzeviciute attempted a reconstruction of the cultural policies in the years 1960–1990 from traces discernible in various inscribed discourses from the period and in interviews with living witnesses. She begins with a three-part sketch of the wider historical background. First comes an account of independent Lithuania’s brief history (1918–1940) and cultural policies, insofar as it had any such policies. This is followed by a description of the war years, which ends with Lithuania’s annexation by the Soviet Union. The second part is a history of cultural policies in the Soviet Union; the third is a historical account of how cybernetics was translated first into a Soviet and second into a Lithuanian context. These parts of the dissertation in themselves constitute a significant contribution to knowledge, as they bring to light little-known developments.

How can a general theory of control be applied to the domain of culture? By translating culture into a part of the economy, and more specifically, by defining it as part of the service sector. The projection of a materialist ideology onto cybernetics made it possible first to interpret “culture” as a response to certain “needs of the people”; second, to calculate both the needs and the costs of satisfying them; and third, to program these values into a planning and control system (rather than leaving them open to such dangerous phenomena as “supply” and “demand”).

What follows is an analysis of cultural policies in Lithuania as reflected in the public (not merely official) discourse over three decades. First, 1960–1970, when the “scientific-technical revolution” was gathering impetus in the entire Soviet Union; then 1970–1980, when this “revolution” ruled and, paradoxically, revealed its weaknesses; and, finally, 1980–1990, when doubts about “calculable culture” grew in strength.

In conclusion, Rindzeviciute stated that

cybernetics and systems theory “made culture governable” in the Lithuanian SSR by providing the conceptual tools to envision the cultural sector as complex and relational (connected to the economic as well as to the natural environment). Rooted in Einstein’s relativity theory, the system-cybernetic approach made it possible to formalize the development of culture, which was otherwise perceived as intrinsically uncertain. In the age of cybernetic control, one could govern culture by means of predictive calculations: predictions of the cultural sector’s future development could be made, based on statistical information about its past behavior. (p. 248)

RINDZEVICIUTE DISSERTATION offers far more food for thought than would a mere history of a selected time-period of a small European country. It tells the story of cybernetics’ rise and fall as a tool for controlling culture. This story has not yet come to an end, however. It continues, although some of the protagonists have changed. While the “calculability of culture” was repudiated and almost ridiculed in Lithuania, the idea seems to have survived very well elsewhere. Also, the sacred divisions between “nature” and “culture” and between “culture”, “economy”, and “politics”, which the Soviet ideologues tried to abolish (justly, in my opinion), live on and thrive. Furthermore, the assumption that everything is calculable (Power, 1997) has returned in full force under the label “transparency through accountability” – currently a scourge of the universities. Perhaps the dream of a universal control system is global and eternal, and the only thing that varies is the means by which it is to be achieved?

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An essay by Slava Gerovitch was published in *BW II*:1, “The cybernetics scare and the origins of the Internet”.

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Peasants in a socialist society. A tribute to Viktor Danilov

Lennart Samuelson
(ed.)
Bönder och bolsjevik: Den ryska landsbygdens historia 1902–1939

[Peasants and Bolsheviks: The History of the Russian Countryside 1902–1939] The Economic Research Institute, Stockholm School of Economics (EFI) 2007. 271 pages.



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MOST OF US PROBABLY associate the social and economic aftermath of the great October Revolution primarily with the drive to industrialize and modernize Soviet society. But the majority of the Soviet population, both before and for some time after World War II, lived in the countryside and made its living in agriculture. For the socialist party machine and state administration, this part of the population proved very problematic. How might the peasants, who had, to be sure, suffered greatly under the old regime, be persuaded to accept the city-oriented social vision that the revolution represented; how could they be induced to feel solidarity with, or even become part of, the working class? At the same time, it was vital that the rural sector become a central concern if the pieces of the modernization puzzle were to fall into place. Without an agricultural sector to feed the working class, industry could not be developed, while intolerable conditions within the sector might lead to spontaneous urbanization and migration and thus threaten the whole project.

THIS DILEMMA PROVIDES the backbone of the anthology edited by Lennart Samuelson. The anthology’s thirteen academic essays, for the most part written by contemporary Russian researchers, discuss such themes as the Russian peasant revolts that predated the October Revolution, the preconditions for the long-term economic planning of the 1920s, the collectivization of agriculture and the elimination of the kulaks, the 1932-1933 famines in the Russian and Ukrainian countryside, and everyday life in southern Ural. Thus, there is space for approaches ranging from the organizational macro-perspective, a theme that often recurs in contemporary Russian research on the Stalin era, to descriptions of everyday life conditions. The anthology uses the series of archival sources on early Soviet history that have been released and published after the *glasnost* era. These include rich material on agrarian society at the time of collectivization. Russian research in this field is rarely noticed outside the country’s borders, however – except when it becomes the subject of political controversies. This book is a welcome resource for those who speak one of the Scandinavian languages but who have