

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karl B. Raitz. *The Theater of Sport*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. xiv + 460 pp. \$56.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-4908-4; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8018-4909-1.

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As a collection of essays, *The Theater of Sport* centers on the complex relationship between a variety of sports, the sites at which they are played or enacted, the games' players and its spectators. As Raitz emphasizes in the Preface, a "central theme in this book is that sports places are really complex landscape ensembles, and the sporting experience, therefore, is not simply the playing or viewing of an athletic event but an interaction with the sports landscape so that both the game and the place contribute to the experience" (ix). Raitz and the other essayists see sporting places as integral to the material culture of which they are a part and as reflections of the cultures that produced them. Sporting places, then, are sites of drama, both in terms of what happens on the field and as symbolic manifestation of larger cultural concerns.

These concepts are clearly delineated in an introduction by Raitz which lays the definitional groundwork necessary for the collection. Drawing on a long history of work in cultural geography, Raitz outlines the ways in which sporting sites must be taken as ensembles that combine functionality for game play, spectator accommodation (in most cases), and, often, specific cultural traditions and social differentiations. Using these definitions as a starting point, each of the other essays in the book addresses a particular sport and its sites of play: baseball, cricket, soccer, tennis, basketball, football, golf, stock car racing, rodeo, thoroughbred racing, fox hunting, and climbing. Taken together, these essays represent a complex picture of the relationship between sports, sports places, and human culture.

Each of the essays traces the sport's historical development and examines the reasons that sports sites developed as they did and the ways in which those sports sites evolved as the sport changed or was transplanted to a different region. The essay on golf, for example, clearly shows how the Scottish linksland dictated the shape and organization of early courses at a time when little, if any, human alteration was done to the playing site. The essay goes on to argue that though American courses have been essentially patterned on Scottish links, courses here are wholly human constructs. Though essentially the same game as was transplanted from Scotland, golf and the places that it is played, including private country clubs, public golf courses, and real estate developments centered around golf courses, have evolved as a distinctive part of the American cultural landscape. Other essays consider regional differences within a single country, the evolution of the game, the effects of spectators, the effects of technology, and, of course, the effects of economic considerations as factors that contribute to the complex interaction between the sport, the player, the spectator, and the sporting place.

Overall, the book is a solidly researched collection that provides an excellent overview of the cultural geography of sport that will prove extremely useful and stimulating to anyone who is interested in the complex position that sports occupies within our culture and who wants to understand more clearly the cultural and historical factors that have led to that position. The essays are clear, thought-provoking, and informative.

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