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Citation:

Spracklen, K (2023) Hegemony in postmodernity: Lifeworld colonization and the instrumentalization of leisure. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*. pp. 1-14. ISSN 2520-8683 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-023-00136-y>

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Hegemony in Postmodernity: Lifeworld Colonization and the Instrumentalization of Leisure

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Received: 26 January 2023 / Accepted: 11 May 2023
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Abstract

This paper synthesizes Gramscian and Habermasian perspectives on new conditions of life and hegemonic struggle that the postmodern initiated in the closing decades of the 20th Century (Jameson, 1984). Drawing from Habermas, it discusses the decline of the public sphere and the colonization of lifeworlds in advanced capitalism, and, focusing on leisure as a bundle of practices (Spracklen, 2009, 2015), explores the implications of these developments for the organization of bourgeois hegemony and the prospects for transformative alternatives.

Keywords Theory · Capitalism · Ontology · Leisure

1 Introduction

On this fine summer morning, free from the grind of teaching and marking and form-filling, it is easy to let one's mind wander. It is August in my country the United Kingdom and families are going on holiday, off from airports to find some sandy paradise or far-off unexplored island where they can forget about work and enjoy watching their children learn about different cultures. Many of them are travelling from the Global North, the part of the world in which we live, to places in the Global South, despite the complexities of the post-colonial relations underpinned by that beachside. Or they are travelling across country. In this country of mine, the United Kingdom, many of my fellow citizens are leaving cities for small cottages tucked away up the sides of the mountains in the Lake District, or campsites in sheep-cropped fields by brown, peat-stained streams. We think of all the things that we think make us happy, the things in which we find belonging and shelter. If we are not planning holidays,

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tours, vacations or trips, we are thinking of the other things that we believe make us free. There are the books we read and the films and television programmes we love – and the internet sites that keep us distracted. There are the places we like to spend our time and money, alone or with friends and family: shops, bars, theatres, restaurants, art galleries, museums, sports grounds and gyms. This is all leisure, every space we pass through out of choice, every activity we indulge in to give us some freedom from the terror of the workplace and the mundanity of contemporary capitalism. Leisure spaces and their social relations are what give us pleasure and intrinsic satisfaction, even if we are doing things far from any other human such as fell-running or writing poetry (Falcão et al., 2022). Leisure is positioned in opposition to work, in opposition to compulsion (Thurnell-Read et al., 2021). Leisure choices are believed to be – or performed as being – free of any compulsions. We all like to think the things we do in our leisure time, in our leisure spaces, are our own (Spracklen, 2009, 2014). But leisure as we understand it today is the product of late modernity and the state of the post-industrial, postmodern world in which we all live. As I write, England women’s football team has just won a major tournament (the UEFA Women’s Championship) that has been televised and talked about by millions of football fans. As Jonathan Liew (2022) in *The Guardian* notes, reflecting hours after the win:

As captain Leah Williamson hoisted the trophy aloft in her rainbow armband, in front of a record crowd and a television audience likely to be the highest ever for a game of women’s football in Britain, it felt simultaneously like the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The first, an undying struggle for resources and respect, for parity and a platform, is finally complete. The second is a journey with no maps, no driver and no end in sight. For more than 150 years football has been an intrinsic part of this nation’s culture and lifestyle, a form of identity, a unit of social currency. And yet for most of that time women have been excluded from this club and its perks: shouted down and shut out. The last time England’s men lifted a major trophy, the 1966 World Cup, women were banned from playing competitive football in any form. Now, against the same opponents in the same stadium, English football – all of it, not just half – has ascended to the very top step of the podium.

Football in this country, as in most countries since its rapid professionalization, globalization and commercialization, has been part of the modern sport industry, the domain that Adorno (1984) mocks as being unfree and completely in the thrall of hegemony. Modern sport has been about reproducing whiteness, masculinity, elitism and post-imperial political power relations (Lee, 2021). Its history and construction, and its specific place in post-imperial, postmodernity, does not make it seem a place for inclusion and belonging. And yet football in this country has changed – now women are encouraged to be fans and to be players, and can even make successful professional careers out of it (even if the amount of money they make is in the tens of thousands a year not tens of millions like their male counterparts – Hall & Oglesby 2016). Liew’s response to the victory suggests that he believes football can be transformed.

This paper synthesizes Gramscian and Habermasian perspectives on new conditions of life and hegemonic struggle that the postmodern initiated in the closing decades of the last century (Carroll, 2006; Jameson, 1984; Tetzlaff, 1991). Drawing from Habermas, it discusses the decline of the public sphere and the colonization of lifeworlds in advanced capitalism, and, focusing on leisure as a bundle of practices (Spracklen, 2009, 2015), explores the implications of these developments for the organization of bourgeois hegemony and the prospects for transformative alternatives. This paper explores how Gramsci can help us understand the paradox of leisure, before I turn to Habermas and my own work and attempt to make that theoretical synthesis. Before my discussion of Gramsci and leisure, however, it is necessary to discuss the ontology and ethics of leisure.

2 Ontology and Ethics of Leisure

Leisure and its relationship to work, is something that many writers have grappled with: is leisure something we do of our own volition? Is leisure the antithesis of work? And is there good leisure and bad leisure? One of the first people to problematize leisure – and contribute to the worldview of the Global North – were the authors of the Jewish texts that have passed down and known to Christians as the Old Testament. Leisure is portrayed across these texts as something that could be earned by righteous men living in the splendour of their palaces while being fed fruit by slaves. These rulers, if they prayed correctly and carried the fear of God in their hearts, were entitled to drink alcohol, listen to music, write poetry and have sex with prostitutes and concubines. For the poor men tending to their flocks around Jerusalem, there was only the comfort of spending evenings with their families or the active participation in the many festivals of Judaism culminating in the rituals at the Temple. Religion provided an enormous range of sanctions and permissions beyond the obligations surrounding formal worship. Rules about drinking and sex suggests for some of the Jewish men, these things were part of their everyday leisure lives, even if the priests and later the Prophets condemned for their sinful leisure practices. As the Christians emerged out of the tumult of the destruction of the Temple by the Roman General (later Emperor) Titus, Jewish beliefs about righteous work and righteous leisure, and their sinful counterparts, became a key ethical framework that continues to shape leisure today. Sex, drinking, eating to excess, spending money on shiny things, are all condemned by commentators in tabloids, broadsheets and social media. But being respectful to one's body by going to the gym, by educating one's mind by learning to play the piano or to speak a foreign language, is considered to be good leisure (Spracklen, 2009, 2011a).

Another important set of people thinking and writing about leisure – who have like the authors of the Old Testament influenced the worldview of the Global North – are, of course, the philosophers of Classical Greece. These elite men had built their fortunes on the work of others. They kept women locked up in their homes, lived in a world of slaves and brutal conquest. But they were literate, interested in finding out the truth about the world around them, and were strongly influential in the subsequent shaping of Roman civilization and the European empires that shaped their politics

and cultures in the shape of the Roman Empire. The Greeks had free time on their hands because they had the labour of women, slaves and workers to maintain their time to have leisure. Greek men wrote plays and built theatres to watch them in. They wrote books about music and encouraged musicians to create new kinds of performances. They wrote books about athletics and games, and developed a sophisticated sporting culture celebrating individuals who won the prizes for being the fastest, strongest and furthest. Some of these Greek writers, those that have become known to us as philosophers such as Socrates and Plato, argued specifically about what a man had to do in his work, and in his leisure. Aristotle argued that the purpose of human life was to nurture one's own life and family, but also that of others. This led to the construction of stadia, baths and theatres throughout the Roman world, as these things were all considered essential public works donated by benevolent, Stoic decurions and emperors showing off their benevolence.

The Romans, like the Jews, were essentially an agricultural society, based on the unequal ownership of land. Wealth accumulated wherever priests or kings imposed their hegemony on the peasants in the fields or tending their flocks. Extracting tithes, imposing taxes, extorting land illegally from the previous owners or merely making a profit from acting as protectors and owners of markets and bakeries, allowed elites to increase the amount of wealth they had through the period of the Roman Empire and beyond. This wealth shaped the leisure of the elites, and that of the masses, in Western Europe. Again, elite men could cultivate images of themselves as gentlemen of leisure, hunting and fishing, while selling watered-down beer to their tenants in the tavern next to the village church (Spracklen, 2011a).

In the nineteenth-century, anthropologists from the Global North started to attempt to formally analyse the hunter-gathering societies the European empires were displacing or annihilating. These anthropologists, taking their cue from the imagination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, believed these societies were remnants of all human culture (premodernity) before the invention of agriculture, money and steam engines. Thinkers on the right and left used these premodern hunter-gatherers to make their own arguments for the pristine nature of blood and nation, or the free community of equals (Kuklick, 2009). By the twentieth-century, Huizinga (1955) used these premodern cultures and evidence from archaeology to argue that humanity's pristine, free status was defined by our need for leisure, play and free social interaction. Leisure shaped *homo sapiens* into *homo ludens*. Before him, Veblen (1899) strongly critiqued leisure in modernity for being driven by the accumulation of materiality over serious involvement in active recreation or the arts. Veblen condemned the bourgeoisie for feeding high capitalism and allowing the leisure industries to emerge – selling products, holidays, concerts, fashions and vehicles that no one needed and from which no one gained any real satisfaction.

In the second half of the last century, leisure studies emerged as an academic subject field. Dumazedier (1967) recognized that leisure space and leisure activities had value for humans and shaped their identities and sense of belonging. But he also argued that some forms of leisure were bad for human health and wellbeing, and some forms of leisure could be said to forms of capitalist, hegemonic subjugation. Dumazedier was strongly influential in the development of the Research Committee Sociology of Leisure of the International Sociological Association, which shaped the

socio-cultural study of leisure until the development of the Leisure Studies Association in the United Kingdom, and equivalent learned societies in the US, Canada and Australia. In the United Kingdom, Ken Roberts (1970, 1978, 1983) and Stanley Parker (1971, 1976, 1983) separately wrote a series of monographs that stressed the importance of leisure on Aristotelian flourishing – and condemned policy-makers for allowing leisure to be the control of predatory, hegemonic neo-liberal capitalists. Both argued for more public sector funding for leisure, sport and recreation (and this happened in the United Kingdom and many other countries). Parker argued that with increasing automation in the workplace, more and more individuals would be left unemployed and with no chance of any future work. He suggested that governments had to shift funding to active recreation and lifelong learning so that true leisure society could be established as a paradise on earth.

The belief that some leisure was good because it was freely chosen and made its practitioners happy was central to the ontology of leisure established by Roberts and Parker. But others in leisure studies started to show that leisure choices were constrained by class, by gender, and by race. Clarke and Critcher (1985) showed that successive governments in the United Kingdom had restricted leisure among the working-classes and at the same time directed leisure choices to a limited range of spending opportunities. The working-classes were allowed and encouraged to spend their money on the latest car, or to go to the cinema or theatre, but they were banned from walking the hills where elites went shooting grouse. The working-classes were encouraged to become obsessed about football and to pay their way in to the ground every time their team played a home fixture, but they were discouraged from taking part in many other sports themselves by the rules of amateurism and the impossibility of gaining membership of private sports clubs. The working-classes were discouraged from spending their money on drinking alcohol or gambling by a combination of bans and social taboos.

Similar constraints were in operation to limit the leisure choices and activities for women. When modern sports were invented, women were told their bodies were too weak to play them, or they were told sports were immoral and not the kind of thing a proper lady did in full view of others. From the 1970s onwards a wave of radical feminists showed how women had been marginalized and constrained in leisure by the social structure of patriarchy (Scraton, 1994) and what Connell (1987) called the Gender Order. Critical Race Theorists then made the same point about leisure and choice and leisure and space (Hylton, 2008): how people of colour had no leisure choice because of the constraints of structural racism, and how people of colour were still denied equality in leisure spaces, from gyms to the top of mountains. In the 1990s leisure was being argued to be a thing where most people had no freedom and control, and where the masses, women and people of colour were being actively regulated to maintain them as consumers in modern, hegemonic capitalism (the masses) or as lesser humans with fewer human rights and less autonomy over their bodies (women and people of colour). For these structural theorists, there was no such thing as free leisure or freedom of choice in leisure activities. We were all fooled into thinking our leisure choices and lives were our own to make, but they were all the products of hegemony: we tuned into television, watched the adverts, bought the clothes and the

cars, listened to the pop music and spent money on drugs that made us conformists and happy workers when we returned to the office.

With the rise of postmodernity, Chris Rojek, a sociologist who started out as figurationalist following the theories of Norbert Elias, realised that leisure had to be critiqued as being postmodern (Rojek, 1995). Rojek elided postmodernity and postmodernism, arguing that in postmodernity, postmodern leisure is everything and nothing, something that has no essential meaning (in this, he was drawing on the crisis of objectivity and truth sketched out in the work of Foucault, Derrida and Latour, among others). For Rojek, postmodernity disrupted the hegemony of capitalism in late modernity, and in truth, traditional capitalist industries (such as mills, mines and factories) were collapsing at the time he was writing. He was correct that globalization and virtuality were changing the whole world and the old Global North's patterns of control and consumption were being challenged from below and from outside. In this century we can see that Rojek was right and society has changed. But he suggested that the shift to postmodern leisure would lead to a revival of freedom and agency, and power to pick and mix one's leisure activities. While there is more freedom for women to engage in leisure activities, there are still unequal power relationships around class, around gender, and around race, that constrain who can do leisure, and what leisure is deemed fit and which is deemed deviant.

After Rojek, Blackshaw (2010) has suggested that leisure today is a form of liquid leisure, something forged in the furnace of what Bauman (2000) calls liquid modernity. Liquid modernity is the condition Bauman identifies in the world around us. There are no constants in our lives because we have no jobs that provide permanency, our social ties and social capital have shrunk as we live lives on streets with neighbours with whom we do not even stop to chat. We find community online in the vacuous parade of likes and friends and angry comments. We do not have the cultural or economic capital to spend on the things we want to consume, never mind the food we need to survive. For Bauman, most of us are failed consumers in liquid modernity, forced to look enviously at the elites paraded on television with their yachts and helicopters (although filmed after his death, *Succession* is a perfect cosplay of Bauman's vision, with the servants and lower orders looking askance as the Ray family races by). Blackshaw says in this new world order, leisure has become denuded of any moral or social purpose, but it is the only place in which people can shape their identity.

What does Gramsci say about leisure, and how can he help us make sense of the paradox of leisure? I turn to him next.

3 Gramsci and Leisure

In *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971) does not engage with the meaning and purpose of leisure directly. There are no mentions of leisure, sport, tourism or even culture in the index. But Gramsci is interested in how these are used in the formation of power in modern States. He is interested in how elites in States with power use their hegemony to maintain their positions, and how others might subvert that hegemony. Gramsci does not use the phrase public sphere, he writes instead of

the spaces in which civil and political society are constructed and contested. I use public sphere as Habermas uses it, as discussed later. The public sphere is one of the key places where constraints are imposed but also where it may be possible to resist them (the other place where hegemony is imposed is in schools and education, but of course the public sphere is another form of classroom). When Gramsci was writing the Fascists and Nazis were using the new technology of radio programmes and cinemas to impose their will. Similar hegemonic forces were also shaping other States from the emergence of newspapers and other print and culture media, the power such words had to shape the views of entire nations. All this is the space for the formation of hegemony by ruling elites and the construction of class. For example, Gramsci (1971, p. 12) when discussing the formation of intellectuals argues:

The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, “mediated” by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the “functionaries”... What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural “levels”... These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of “hegemony” which the dominant group exercises through society and on the other hand to that of “direct domination” or command exercised through the State and “juridical” government.

The State, then, uses every aspect of society to maintain its position and the privilege, in the Global North, of capitalism. All culture is constructed to promote myths of nationalism, of white superiority and of heterosexual masculinity – this is all taught to the intellectuals and the working-classes through the creations of the (post)modern culture industry (Adorno, 1984): the cinema, the public restaurant, the bar owned by a multi-national corporation, the media with adverts combined with State propaganda. All this impinges on individual leisure lives and social leisure spaces. The Fascists encourage children and the working-classes to take part in parades but also sporting competitions. At the same time, older workers and the retired place bets and get their mimetic pleasures from gambling on *el calcio*. Leisure is a space and activity in which workers and intellectuals are educated in becoming the right men of the New Age. As Gramsci identifies (1971, p. 242), education is central to the project of hegemony:

Education and formative role of the State. Its aim is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization; of adapting the “civilization” and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production; hence of evolving even physically new types of humanity. But how will each single individual succeed in incorporating himself into the collective man, and how will educative pressure be applied to single individuals so as to obtain their consent and their collaboration, turning necessary and coercion into “freedom”?

The answer to that question is the complete domination of society, so that children are raised believing only that the world is as flat or as round as the State instructs them. It is complete control of the school system, and domestic spaces, and the workplace, and every kind of leisure activity. But humans are born to think for themselves, and the power of hegemony is never total (even in Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany) so there are spaces in which counter-hegemonic resistance becomes possible. And Gramsci himself is trying to show that the Fascist control of work, leisure, education and family can be replicated by those fighting for Left hegemony in the public sphere. More recently, Tetzlaff (1991) has described the way in which postmodernity is itself the product of the hegemony of global capitalism, an argument made more forcefully by Carroll (2006). Making sense of Gramscian hegemony, then, helps us understand how leisure in modernity and postmodernity is contested by the State, by capitalist, and by counter-hegemonic groups. This is the aim of the next section.

4 Habermas on Rationality, and Spracklen on Leisure

I have published extensively on Habermas and leisure, and this section uses quotes from his work I use in Spracklen (2009). I believe that Bauman and Blackshaw are correct, but Habermas offers a more precise way of defining the state of the world today that aligns with Adorno and Gramsci. The world is liquid, and postmodern, but this is not the result of fewer structures and constraints, but the near victory of capitalism, the culture industry and its hegemony over us – and this is where Gramsci can still shine a light on the role of leisure in hegemony and as a counter-hegemonic space. But it is necessary here to turn in more detail to Habermas' project: the limits of reason, and the limits of agency.

Habermas was schooled at Frankfurt and his work aligns with his tutors Adorno and Horkheimer. Like Gramsci, Adorno (1984) believed that popular culture was able to control the people who consumed it, turning them into unwitting dupes who kept demanding more and more newspapers, radios, cinemas and electrical goods. Adorno believed that in western Europe and North America, capitalist corporations were aligned with the democracies of the 1920 and 1930 s, and used the culture industry to make money while the governments were happy to let them make those profits because their citizens were less restless than they had been in previous years. Adorno, like Gramsci, argued that the culture industry reduces individual's agency and freedom to choose, offering false distractions (my football team is playing tonight, I really hate that film star who cheated in the movie last night, I want to have sex with that model selling me soda, hmm, soda). The problem with Adorno's culture industry, for Habermas and for others, is this – if it is so all distracting, and all so hegemonic, how can Adorno and other people see its secret work in action? For Habermas, there must logically be a limit to the onset of this culture industry, some place where it is possible to see the ontological and epistemological truth about capitalism.

Habermas first recognized this in the coffee shops and free press of the Enlightenment: the public sphere in which bourgeois men and women, literate and educated, were able to present and argue about what they believed to be the true metaphysical nature of society and the world (Habermas, 1989). Obviously, this idealized view of

the Enlightenment has its flaws. The lower classes and other subaltern groups were not allowed to take part in this free exchange of ideas because there were being exploited as peasants, workers and slaves. The free exchange of ideas was only permissible for white European men from bourgeois or elite families (with a few exceptions), but the Enlightenment led to challenges against the natural order of feudalism, religion and control. It became possible to describe the problems of society and recommend how nations and the world might be better ordered to ensure happiness, agency and privilege for all. With the rise of natural science, people's lives were improved through medicine and public health, and religious explanations for how the world works were shown to be fictions constructed to maintain the power of priests.

The public sphere of the Enlightenment is where Habermas shows the first rise of what he called communicative rationality. Philosophy as it was practiced in the eighteenth century underpins this form of thinking about the world, society and our social relations. Most people involved in this project believed that they could find the true nature of things by discussing problems among each other. Informally chatting about ideas and undertaking thought experiments with others in coffee shops allowed ideas to be tested for their validity and reliability. Publishing ideas and experiments in the emerging academic journals allowed one's colleagues to test your hypotheses and your methods. As Habermas (1984, p. 75) suggests:

The concept of communicative rationality points, on the one side, to different forms of discursively redeeming validity-claims... on the other side, it points to relations to the world that communicative actors take up in raising validity-claims for their expressions.

If everybody has the agency to think for themselves, the freedom to reject falsehoods and myths imposed on them, it becomes possible to reach a critical position about everything and anything: we can use the evidence to reject theories that the earth is flat. It is also possible to reach conclusions about the world where it is not possible to be absolutely sure about the truth or our course of action, even if we may have a vested interest in its resolution: whether it is better to drink tea, or coffee, for example. Communicative rationality has a symbiotic relationship with the lifeworld, the free place in which we learned from each other about how to be human. The lifeworld emerges as part of the public sphere, then, and here Habermas realizes, ironically, that the conditions that lead to the development of the lifeworld (or lifeworlds) are the same conditions that lead to capitalist modernity. A free society is not just one where men and women are treated as equals, and everyone has access to leisure time and leisure space, it is also one where science and technology are the paradigms of excellence and promote economic specialization and the removal of restrictions on trade. At some point in the nineteenth-century, communicative rationality is subordinated by what Habermas calls instrumental rationality (what Weber calls instrumentality): everything in the world becomes reduced to its economic cost and benefit to the power of the new nation-states. Habermas (1987, p. 368) tells us:

The thesis of internal colonization states that the subsystems of the economy and state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist

growth, and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld. It should be possible to test this thesis sociologically wherever the traditionalist padding of capitalist modernization has worn through and central areas of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization have been openly drawn into the vortex of economic growth and therefore of juridification. This applies not only to such issues as protection of the environment, nuclear reactor security, data protection, and the like, which have been successfully dramatized in the public sphere. The trend toward juridification of informally regulated sphere of the lifeworld is gaining ground along a broad front – the more leisure, culture, recreation and tourism recognizably come into the grip of the laws of commodity economy and the definitions of mass consumption, the more the structures of the bourgeois family manifestly become adapted to the imperatives of the employment system, the more the school palpably takes over the functions of assigning job and life prospects, and so forth.

Instrumental rationality is a false ideology, which Habermas identifies as marginalizing communicative rationality. This has become an important aspect of bourgeois hegemony in late capitalism. Allowing ourselves to reduce everything to the power of rational nation-states and transnational corporations is fatal for human development, and Habermas shows we are already trapped in many parts of our lives. We are already good neo-liberal citizens, consuming the world and allowing ourselves to be controlled by the new global capitalist elites. We are already allowing our lifeworlds to be colonized by the crude economic pricing that should never be applied (think here of the way higher education is reduced to graduate employability at present in the United Kingdom). Leisure, culture, recreation and tourism for Habermas are all sites where communicative rationality has been and is being subject to colonization by the instrumental rationality of capitalism and the modern nation-state. This has been happening since the rise of modernity, when capitalism and the rise of Empire first normalized the notion of instrumental rationality, and has extended into the hegemony of neoliberalism. At this moment in time, in late modernity, work was reconfigured from a space where people found community and belonging to one where individuals were reduced to units competing to sell their labour power for enough money to pay their bills. These were the years when factories enabled work to be de-skilled, so individuals lost the ability to be autonomous thinkers. Unions and left governments fought against this individualization, but Habermas shows that for every victory for on the side of freedom and agency – social welfare programmes, paid holidays, limited working weeks, and the end of slavery and bondage – individuals were transformed by modern nation-states into willing dupes of the capitalist economy (Bauman, 2000; Carroll, 2006; Jameson, 1984; Tetzlaff, 1991). They became conspicuous consumers, in every class, buying the latest fashions to show their economic worth. Nations-states provided rational recreation, physical education and sports for their workers, but these were routinely controlled and used as sites of control, such as the Muscular Christian movement: spectator sports, for example, were designed by their creators and early supporters to stop workers in cities from rioting; and even active recreation such as walking and cycling were believed to be ways of keeping workers happy and

tired, and governments did everything they could to limit the spaces which walkers and cyclists could use ((Spracklen, 2011a).

Habermas never uses the phrase communicative leisure or instrumental leisure, but it is clear leisure is one of the human activities that shape the lifeworld, especially now that work has been almost completely taken over by instrumental rationality. According to Habermas, lifeworlds are the spaces where we can think and act communicatively. Most importantly, the lifeworld includes the public sphere, first identified by Habermas in the coffee shops of the Enlightenment. Lifeworlds are a default stage in human civilization, one can imagine them existing at every stage of human existence. But before the rise of the public sphere such spaces were routinely the site of control, subjugation and rebellions – as the oppressed strove to break the bonds imposed on them by elites. But the public sphere was the first one of these lifeworlds that allowed the flourishing of humanity and the spread of freedom and truth. Yet capitalism soon asserted itself on the lifeworld of the public sphere. Work now is all about internalized competition between individual workers, whether it is office drones trying to be the ones getting promoted to line manager, or the delivery drivers in their panopticon of being permanently available, assessed and scored by the instruments of their smartphones. The lifeworld is what we shape as social animals, using our reason to find things to do to give us meaning and purpose – in employment and in our free time. But capitalism and instrumental rationality have already taken over our places of work and re-appropriated them for the purpose of profit and control. So leisure, what we do with our free time, has become more important. As Habermas (2006, pp. 63–64) explains:

As human beings master the forces of nature that assail them through symbols, they gain a measure of distance from the immediate pressure of nature. To be sure, the price they pay for this liberation is the self-imposed dependence on a semanticized nature, which returns in the magical power of mythical images. But the break with the first nature continues within this second, symbolically generated nature, namely, with the conceptual tendency toward the construction and categorical articulation of symbolic worlds. As civilization advances, humanity entangles itself in an ever-denser web of symbolic mediations, thereby freeing itself from the contingencies of a nature with which it enters into contact in increasingly indirect ways.

This is the paradox of life today for Habermas. We are sentient beings and are able to reflect on our own condition. We are able to look at the state of the world and work out important things: how we evolved; the size of the universe; the history of thought and the history of religion. For Habermas, human reasoning was only free once we reached the Enlightenment, and this moment led to the rise of science, of scientific realism and scientific methods. But this ability to think freely and rationally has led us to our own destruction, to a place where we have no freedom and the only reason accepted is instrumental rationality.

I have adopted Habermas' theoretical framework and applied it to leisure ((Spracklen, 2009, 2011a, b, 2013, 2015). I have argued that just as there two modes of rationality called communicative and instrumental, so there are such spaces and forms

of leisure. The more morally pure kinds of leisure are communicative because they allow people to think and act of their own agency – but everything that is sold to people or used to keep them constrained is instrumental leisure. In my own research, for example I have shown how heavy metal subculture can be a space for communicative leisure in its black metal scene, which strongly resists any attempt at commercialization and acceptability (Spracklen, 2006). But most of heavy metal subculture follows the same rules as the rest of the pop music industry, so although metal fans might resist and reject the mainstream, they are also co-opting its practices and ideologies (Spracklen, 2019). Similarly, the tourist industry serves to give workers a chance to rest and re-charge before they return to the care home or supermarket – but the tourist industry is built on myths of liminality. In my own research on whisky tourism, I have argued that while whisky fans may feel they are making free choices about which whisky they choose to drink and the distillery they choose to visit when they are in Scotland, they are imbibing a cocktail of lies about Scottishness, about purity and landscape, and a reluctance to accept that whisky is a product of factories and capitalism (Spracklen 2011b). Finally, modern sports are all about using loyalty to a team or a spot to turn fans into consumers of merchandise, as well as consumers of fast food and beer in the stadiums, and the purchase of television subscription. Some sports offer a space for the construction of communicative belonging through communicative leisure, but this is always constrained by instrumentality. In my own research I argue that rugby league offers a potential counter-hegemonic space in the UK because it is rooted in northern, working-class communities (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2022). But it still teaches men how to be men.

5 Conclusion

This paper shows that leisure is something fundamental to the human condition; yet it is a space, action and time that is increasingly controlled by the hegemonic powers of late capitalism and its post-national formations. By definition, leisure is the things and the time and space where we think for ourselves and make decisions about what we want to do. Communicative rationality in a Habermasian sense aligns with this ethical and political work in leisure, so communicative leisure is where we are still free to make choices, to educate ourselves, to train our bodies, to relax and to have a meal with our loved ones. Instrumentality, however, is inevitable in modernity and postmodernity. Capitalism and the Gramscian hegemony of the State have all led to the creation of various leisure industries that take our money, take our freedom and give us false or mimetic beliefs about our agency. So we clap and cheer the national teams at the various professional global sport-media events such as the Olympics and the football World Cup.

Gramsci identifies the way the public sphere, leisure and culture are all up for grabs by any political movements seeking to achieve their own hegemony through persuasion. Women's football is clearly a counter-hegemonic movement against hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy. But the way the tournament was constructed and celebrated in this country is simply a reaffirmation of the sport industry and the ruling elites who prefer to offer broadband and hi-definition televisions rather

than leisure for radical change. Following Habermas, this is instrumental leisure. Following Gramsci, it is propaganda and manipulation of what drives us to do leisure. In postmodernity, leisure remains entirely in the thrall of the instrumental rationality at the heart of capitalist and State hegemony. But communicative rationality expressed in the public sphere of the lifeworld as communicative leisure still offers a basis for counter-hegemonic resistance.

Declarations

Note There is no conflict of interest in any of this and the author was not funded.

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