

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

Swain, Spencer ORCID logoORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2191-0041> (2022) Leisure, power and social justice in an age of uncertainty: Investigating the relationship between power, precarity and the rise of the prosumer. In: Leisure Studies Association Conference, 12th - 14th of July 2022, University of Falmouth.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/6486/>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

# RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at [ray@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:ray@yorks.ac.uk)

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

# Leisure, power and social justice in an age of uncertainty: Investigating the relationship between power, precarity and the rise of the prosumer

Dr Spencer Swain

York St John University

# Introduction

- Understandings of power and social justice
- Social justice and power in relation to leisure – three historical epochs
  - Traditional societies
  - Modernity
  - Liquid/reflexive modernity
- Conclusion – future trajectories

# Power and Social Justice

- Power - the capacity of an individual or institution to influence the actions, beliefs, or conduct of others.
- Various ideas surrounding power:
  - The first focuses on power from a personal perspective, connecting with the idea of individual agency to narrate interpersonal conflict – Lukes (2005)
  - The second - understands power as a form of authority that aligns with social structures to help legitimise, normalise and control behaviour – Castells (2016)
  - The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1986) has questioned this dichotomy between structure and agency by blending the two.
    - In his theoretical work on structuration, Giddens (1986) argues that just as social structures influence an individual's autonomy, these very same social structures are maintained and adapted through an individual's agency.
    - Exposes how modalities of power are established, challenged, and then reformed as they impact members of society who adapt and contest such structures.
    - Helps articulate how methods of exercising power are constantly in a state of flux, being created and renewed to align with changes in political thinking that influence the structure of economic and social policies.

# Social Justice and Power - Leisure

---

This understanding of power as an entity open to transformation helps us better understand sports and leisure's relationship with social justice.

---

Namely how the quest for equal rights for citizens has been challenged by oppressive power structures that have served to subvert certain social groups from the benefits that recreation can bring.

---

Here, the wrongs of the past can be connected to ongoing conflicts within the present, showing how sport and leisure represents a site in social life where inequalities are exposed, challenged and contested, repeating themselves in a cyclical manner (Fletcher, Long and Watson, 2017; Riches, Rankin-Wright, Swain and Kuppan, 2017).



# Power, Social Justice and Leisure – Traditional Societies

---

# Power in Feudal Societies – Myth, Tradition and Ritual

- Power in feudal societies maintained by myth, tradition and ritual.
  - Traditional methods of imposing power based on the divine rights of the Monarchy and the implementation of physical acts of violence to justify divine opulence (Foucault, 1977).
- In Leisure
  - The emblematic use of gladiatorial games within ancient Roman society and the role of sport in symbolically affirming the relationship between the Emperors and their Gods.
    - Here, the act of deciding who should die or who should be spared in gladiatorial contests helped to confirm the Emperor's position as a messenger to the Gods, as someone who could do their bidding and speak for them on Earth (Spracklen, 2011).
  - The role of mob football in the Middle Ages as a spiritual event constructed around the belief that the winning team would carry favour with God and bless their village with a good harvest (Giulianotti, 2015).
    - Such a system exposes how tradition, in the form of long-standing beliefs and practices, elevated specific individuals such as the Monarch or tribal chief above others in society, forging a theocracy whereby one's association with religious customs and traditions symbolised power.



Modernity: Science, the state  
and disciplinary power

---



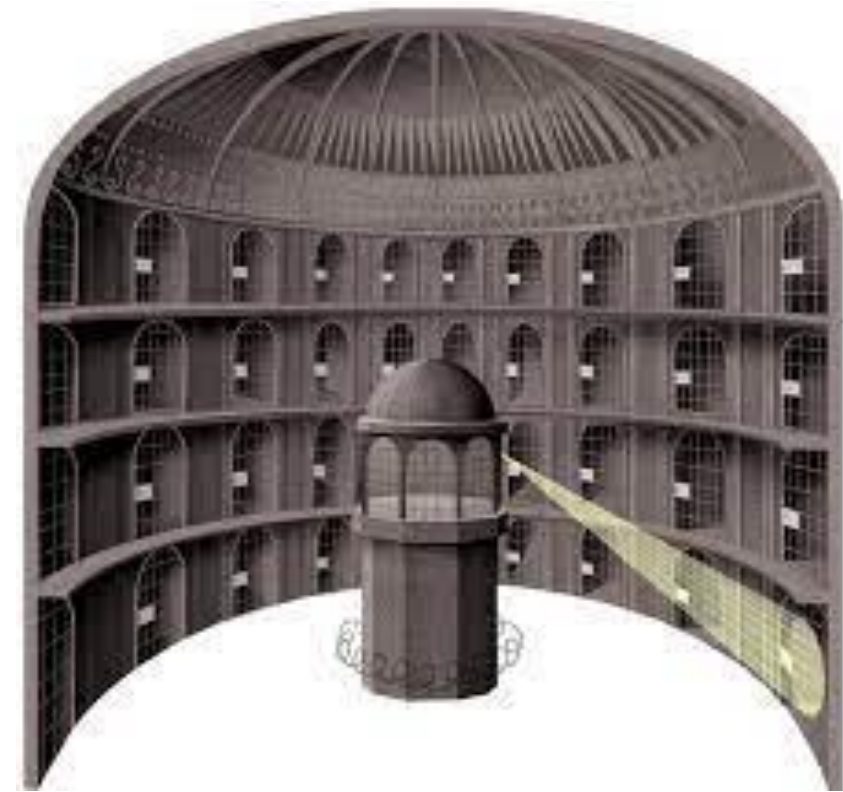
# Power, Leisure and Modernity

- The epoch of modernity commonly associated in sociological discourse with the start of industrialism emerged from an event known as the Enlightenment that occurred in Western Europe during the mid-eighteenth century.
- Values of championing the sovereignty of reason and exploring the social world through the human senses instead of spirituality and divinity.
  - Such thinking, in turn, led to the principles of science and reason supplanting religion as the dominant authority used to explain social phenomena and instigate a separation between the state and the church (Bauman, 1988).
  - Significant events – Lisbon Earthquake (1755); French Revolution (1793)
  - Emergence of social institutions that we take for granted today:
    - 1) parliamentary democracy and constitutional sovereignty
    - 2) the judicial system
    - 3) economic and financial structures such as banks.
    - 4) territorial sovereignty in the form of the nation-state (Giddens, 1991; 1998).
- In sport and leisure, these changes have been documented through concepts such as parliamentarisation and sportisation (Elias, 1978; 2000)
  - Used to explain the emergence of governing organisations within sport and the subsequent implementation of rules, leagues and codes of conduct designed to civilise games that had previously been disorganised (Cock, 2018; Mierzwinski, Cock, and Velija, 2019).



# Modernity: Panopticism, power and social control

- Foucault and the panopticon
  - Method of implementing disciplinary power through surveillance as opposed to physical discipline
  - Panopticon - a circular prison controlled through a central guard tower, blinding lights, and observable detainment cells, allowing correctional officers to view prisoners without inmates knowing.
- Linked to 'technologies of power' operated ubiquitously to control individuals from afar through a technique known as - governmentality (Foucault, 1991).
  - The few (state officials) watching the actions of the many (state citizens)
- Focus on how governments and other authoritative organisations within the state apparatus implemented power in a manner that sought to control populations psychologically by entwining citizens within a 'web of power' built around patterns of discourse.
- Use of scientific rationalities to explore the social world and order it around Eurocentric and male dominated views.
  - 'Race' and sport – the colour line in Boxing (Hylton, 2009)
  - Gender and sport – marginalisation of women in the cultural sphere of sport (Scruton, 1992)
- Use of surveillance by institutional figures to ensure societal expectations are managed.
  - Teachers gaze in physical education settings.
  - The use of surveillance or threat of surveillance in coaching environments

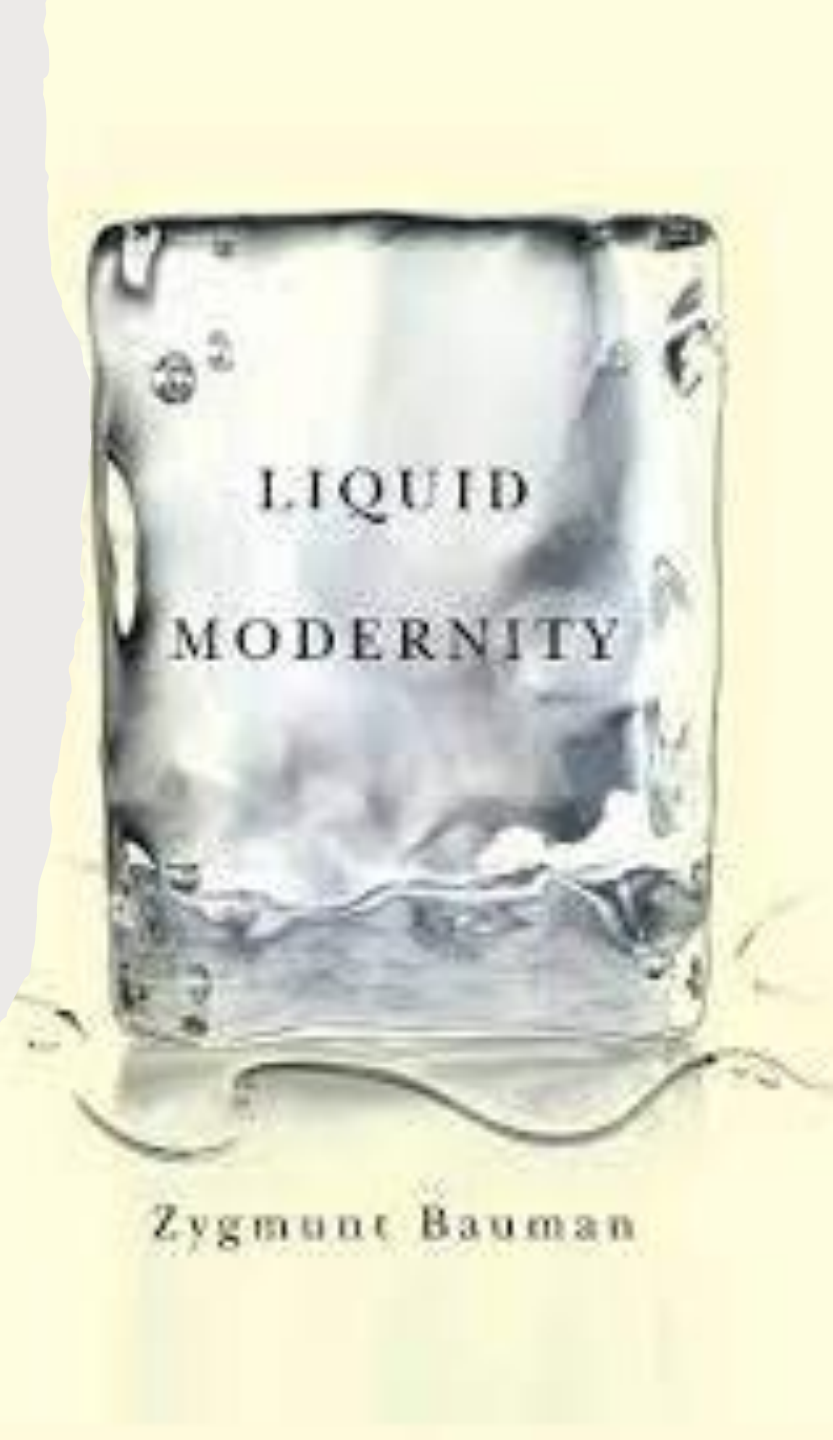




Power in Liquid Modernity:  
Leisure, Seduction and the  
Synopticon

# Liquid Modernity

- While Foucault's work on panopticism has gained significant interest, it is vital to mention that his ideas have also been critiqued.
- These critiques have emerged from developments within social theory that have sought to chart a shift in modernity's socio, cultural and economic fabric (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; and Bauman 2000 - workings of power.
- Central to such thinking is an understanding that the economic base of Western democracies have transformed from being production to consumer-based.
- Three central trends (Bauman, 2000; 2008):
  - 1) The first relates to the emergence of New Right economic policies championed by thinkers such as Milton Freidman and Freidrich Von Hayek, which led the U.S. Federal Reserve and many European governments to abandon Keynesian welfare strategies.
  - 2) Such policy changes have created a culture of excessive individualism initiated by the scaling back of the welfare state that has placed a greater emphasis on individual responsibility in both the public and private sphere. (Smith 1999; Swain, 2017b).
  - 3) Capitalism in liquid modernity has become truly global, with multinational corporations no longer being welded to the nation-state as was the case in industrial modernity.
- Here, Bauman has argued that the change to a consumer-orientated economic system has reconceptualised the relationship between the state and its citizens entirely
  - from a model centred on disciplining the population around the principles of a production-based economy grounded on social classifications of work (i.e. the working class/middle class etc.).
  - To a system characterised by excessive freedom, accenting individuals to manage their lives through the procurement of information.



Zygmunt Bauman

# Liquid Leisure: The Viewer Society and Synoptic Power

- Highlights a dichotomy in how liquid modern consumers trade security for freedom, articulated through a mentality that promotes a message that:

Security is disempowering, disabling, breeding the resented 'dependency' and altogether constraining the human agents' freedom. What this passes over in silence is that acrobatics and rope-walking without a safety net are an art few people can master and a recipe for disaster for all the rest. Take away security, and freedom is the first casualty. (Bauman and Tester, 2001, p.52)

- Move towards viewer society – synoptic control – system whereby the many (consumers) now watch the actions of the few (celebrities) (Mathiesen, 1997)
- Prominent in leisure – rise of prosumers - individuals who consume and produce value, either for self-consumption or consumption by others, and who, in turn, receive implicit or explicit incentives from corporate organisations involved in such exchanges (Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson, 2012; Bond et al, 2018).
  - Research on body image and sports celebrities – Cristiano Ronaldo - Hylton and Lawrence (2015)
  - Celebrity sports endorsement – Air Jordans – (Andrews et al., 1996)
  - Impact of YouTube influencers and apps like Tik Tok (Swain, 2017; 2019)
  - Emergence of elite sportstars in the political arena (Swain, 2021)
    - Vitali Klitschko (Ukraine); Manny Pacquiao (Philippines); George Weah (Liberia)



# Liquid Modernity, The Synopticon, and Exclusionary Power

---

- At the centre of this move to counteract calls for increasing collectivism is the concept of adiaphorization.
  - Adiaphorization - a process whereby moral questions regarding the role of social institutions in the wellbeing of citizens are ignored in favour of individual consumer action (Bauman, 2008).
- Such a method of control conforms to the neoliberal ideology –
  - centred around individualisation that ties with the act of consuming and increased personal responsibility
  - Subsequently destitution is attributed to personal shortcomings in managing individual agency, as opposed to structural disparities in resource allocation (Bauman, 2000; Collins, 2016; Swain, 2021a).
- Examples include:
  - Covid-19 pandemic (Personalised responsibility)
  - Attitudes to obesity (Personalised decisions)
  - Doping in sport (Focus of psychological over the socio-political – commodification of sport)

# Conclusion

- Insight into understandings of power and its relationship with social justice.
- The role of power and its relationship with leisure in various social epochs:
  - Feudal societies
  - Industrial societies/modernity
  - Post-industrial/liquid modernity
- Insights that might help us understand how the mechanisms of power might change again.
  - Key trajectories
    - The re-emergence of the state (de-globalization/government borrowing)
    - Excessive freedom brought about by the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution (digital transformation)

# Reference List

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bauman, Z. (2007) *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. (1992) *Risk society: towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.

Bentham, J. (2009) *Panopticon: or the inspection house (1791)*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

Bond, A., Widdop, P., Cockayne D., and Parnell, D. (2021) Prosumption, networks and value during a global pandemic: lockdown leisure and COVID-19. *Leisure Sciences*, 43(1-2), pp.70-77.

Castells, M. (2016) A sociology of power: my intellectual journey. *Annual review of sociology*. 42(1), pp. 1-19.

Cock, S (2018) Doing developmental research as a figurational sociologist: A case study on the long-term sportization of swimming. In: Malcolm, Dominic and Velija, Philippa, (eds.) *Figurational Research in Sport, Leisure and Health*. London: Routledge, pp. 87-101.

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. London: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1991) *Disciplines and sciences of the individual*. In: P. Rabinow Eds. *The Foucault reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*. London: Penguin.

Giddens, A. (1986) *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

Gilchrist, P. (2004). Local heroes and global stars. In: Allison, L. (Eds) *Global politics of sport*. London: Routledge, pp.118-139.

Giulianotti, R. (2015) *Sport: A critical sociology*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge: Polity.

Hylton, K., and Lawrence, S. (2015) 'Reading Ronaldo: Contingent whiteness in the football media. *Soccer & Society*. 16 (5-6), pp. 765-782.

Lang, M. (2010) 'Surveillance and conformity in competitive youth swimming. *Sport, Education and Society*. 15(1), pp. 19-37.



- Mierzwinski, M., Cock, S., and Velija, P. (2019) A position statement on social justice, physical education and bullying: A figurational sociological perspective. *Quest*, 71 (2). pp. 215-226.
- Ratna, A. (2015) Sport and South Asian diasporas: Playing through time and space. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50 (6), pp. 747-750.
- Scruton, S. (1992) *Shaping up to womanhood: gender and girls' physical education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Spracklen, K. (2011) *Constructing leisure: historical and philosophical debates*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Swain, S. (2021b) Voices from the margins: Khat-chewing, devotional leisure and ambivalence in the British-Somali diaspora. In: De Martini-Ugolotti, Nicola and Caudwell, Jayne, (eds.) *Leisure and forced migration: Reframing critical analysis of lives lived in the asylum system*. London, Routledge, pp. 139-154.
- Swain, S. (2017) The Khat Controversy: Dark Leisure in a Liquid Modern World. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 20 (5), pp. 610-625.
- Swain, S. (2017a). Leisure in the current interregnum: exploring the social theories of Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. In: Spracklen, K. Lashua, B. Sharpe, E. Swain, S. Eds. *The palgrave handbook of leisure theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 799-816.
- Swain, S. (2018) Grime Music and Dark Leisure: Exploring Grime, Morality and Synoptic Control. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 21 (4), pp. 480-492.
- Swain, S. (2019) Sport, power and politics: exploring sport and social control within the changing context of modernity. *International journal of the sociology of leisure*. 2(4), pp. 385-402.
- Swain, S. (2021c) Pugilism, Power, and the Cultural Politics of Celebrity: Charting Vitali Klitschko's Rise from Heavyweight Champion to Mayor of Kiev, *Journal of Global Sport Management*, DOI: 10.1080/24704067.2021.1991829
- Swain, S., Lashua, B. & Spracklen, K. (2021) Khat-chewing, Moral Spacing and Belonging: Sociological Insights into the Cultural Space of the mafrish in the Leisure Lives of Older and Middle-aged British-Somali Males. *International journal of the sociology of leisure*. 4(3), pp. 1–22.
- Toffler, A. (1980). *The third wave*. New York, NY: William Morrow.