



---

## CAPITALISM AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

---

The Industrial Revolution brought with it a new culture— new pleasures and identities, but also new kinds of brutality. One of the key preconditions for the development of popular culture in its contemporary form is the economic system of capitalism, which, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was dramatically altered and intensified by a series of events that came to be described as the Industrial Revolution. We will look at football (a.k.a. soccer) as one illustration of the effects of industrialism on the organization of physical space and social relations.

### **Redefining Cultural Spaces**

The 1835 ban against football in the streets was one minor event in a succession of restrictions of communal space by state or private interests happening in conjunction with changes associated with the developing capitalist economy. Among the most far-reaching of these changes were the series of **Enclosure Acts** that converted common grazing land to much smaller, private holdings in order to make the land more economically productive. This practice, which as its name suggests involved enclosing formerly open spaces with fences, affected popular culture in very direct ways, by placing physical constraints on certain kinds of activity. It also influenced popular culture more generally, changing the relationship between work and play and reconfiguring people's sense of community.

First and most obviously, enclosure placed an obvious restriction on the kinds of recreation that could take place. No longer was it possible, for example, to engage in the vast games of football that used to take place with unlimited players (and few rules) between villages located up to five kilometres apart. Even more modest recreations, for example the dances and wrestling matches that tended to be organized around particular times of the agricultural year such as mowing or harvesting, were gradually discontinued as the fields they were once performed or played on were dosed off to the public. Beyond the significance of the loss of these specific activities was the severing of a vital link between agricultural work and recreation. By fencing off property with the aim of increasing its economic productivity a vital connection was lost between the creative realms of work and play. More generally, the reorganization of space that resulted from enclosure changed the way people related to one another. Not only did it accentuate divisions between the landholding and labouring classes, but it also made it harder in general for people to connect with one another, resulting in the fragmentation of traditional forms of community.

### **Urbanization**

In addition to the privatization of rural land by enclosure, the process of urbanization contributed significantly to the reduction of open spaces available for recreation as land was expropriated for the building of industrial infrastructure. As fields disappeared with no new playgrounds to replace them, it became harder to find places to hold outdoor sports, festivals, and other forms of public gathering. Urbanization also affected the production of popular culture in more indirect ways. One of the most obvious changes people experienced as they moved from the country to the city was a change in their living spaces. For poor working people in particular, life in the city meant coping with crowded and unsanitary conditions. An 1844 newspaper report describes a typical slum in which:

there are whole streets . . . which are neither flagged, paved, sewered, nor drained; where garbage and filth of every description are left on the surface to ferment and rot; where pools of stagnant water are almost constant; where the dwellings adjoining are thus necessarily caused to be of an inferior and even filthy description; thus where disease is engendered, and the health of the whole town perilled. (qtd. in Engels 49– 50)

The huge influx of workers to the city meant that housing had to be built quickly and cheaply. At the same time, wealthy industrialists wanted to be spared the sights and smells of crowded working-class slums; thus, factory workers— in their small identical houses, crammed together on tiny lots— lived in more or less segregated neighbourhoods interspersed with upper- and middle-class enclaves.

But the marginalization of the poor wasn't only physical. In the complex middle-class values of the day physical dirt corresponded symbolically to spiritual impurity and immorality. As convictions about the inherent character deficiencies of the poor became institutionalized, backed up by new sciences of hygiene and public health, the poor suffered from simultaneous moves to banish them from sight and to subject their behaviour to increasingly vigorous policing. These social constraints, combined with actual space constraints, powerfully reduced people's freedom and mobility.

However, the crowded conditions of working-class slums also fostered new forms of social and political solidarity. Courtyards, which functioned as sort of communal backyards, became gathering places in which people could find some respite from the isolation and loneliness that are the paradoxical by products of life in a crowded city. For some, allotments (rented gardens) provided space to grow flowers or food and recall, in however modest a way, the pleasure of outdoor life. As cities grew, however, and the demand for space increased, most of these allotments were swallowed up by development. The one other obvious location for outdoor recreation was the street, which had the advantage of more space and light than the courtyards but the disadvantage of the presence of the police, who were charged with putting a stop to recreational activities that threatened to disrupt more legitimate commercial activities.

### The Pub as Community Space

The lack of public space, combined with the excess of official surveillance in what little space there was, contributed to the growth of what became the centre of urban community– the pub. In addition to camaraderie and beer (which, besides being cheap and satisfying, was generally safer than the drinking water), the pub supplied comforts such as heat, light, and toilets that were frequently superior to what people had at home. Indeed, the density of pubs was greatest in the poorest areas (Best 220). Pubs were often associated with particular professions, as shown in names such as The Weaver's Arms or The Sailor's Dickey. In general, however, they can be seen as part of the trend in urbanization toward the separation of places of work and places of recreation.

Along with the class segregation and crowding that characterized urban life, this fragmentation of a formerly more **organic existence** undermined familiar forms of identity; community and popular recreation. At the same time, it fostered new forms of sociality; as well as new forms of social freedom. The positive flipside of the anonymity that went along with life in the big city was increasing privacy from the prying eyes of the community. Moreover, the layout of the city, in which people's homes tended to be some distance from their places of work, helped to create a new kind of mobility; both literal and symbolic. In general, however, the process of urbanization contributed to the trend of expanding individual freedom that was to shape social life over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### Industrialism

The term Industrial Revolution, refers to the period in British history from approximately the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century; it describes the transition from an agricultural/small-scale commercial society to one based on organized mechanical production. It was typified by the increasing capitalization, organization, and mechanization of virtually all kinds of work, even that which was formerly thought of as non-industrial, such as farming for example, or nowadays even culture. In contrast to the relative stability of earlier methods of production, industrial enterprises require major investments of capital in order to generate growth. They also require a large and disciplined workforce, trained in the performance of **repetitive specialized tasks**. The Industrial Revolution thus marked a significant change not only in the mode of production– the physical process used to generate the necessities of life– but also in the relations of production, or division of labour.

In the pre-industrial economy, work was not only closely integrated with other aspects of life; workers also had a strong sense of connectedness to their labour and its products. In pre-industrial agriculture, for example, workers are involved in every stage of production, from planting to harvest, and, crucially, they have at least some degree of ownership of the process, including small holdings of land. The same is true of crafts- people, who own and/or have direct control over their workshops, as well as every aspect of the production of their finished crafts. The critical difference for workers in industrial society is that their labour is detached (or, in Karl Marx's terms, alienated) from the larger process of production: rather than having any direct economic stake in the products of their labour, they receive only a small hourly wage and their activity is focused on one single fragment of the final product.

**New Modes of Production** This style of work was a key part of the new production process known as Fordism (after Henry Ford, who pioneered it), a form of assembly-line labour that proved to be extremely efficient at churning out products, from cars to household furnishings. The factors that contributed to the high quantity and uniform quality of products, however, had a much more negative effect on the human participants in the process. Fordism worked on the principle of mechanization, a process that aimed to turn every facet of the economy, including human society itself; into the equivalent of an efficiently run machine. The consequences of this restructuring of labour reverberated far beyond the factory walls. Fordism is now widely understood to refer not just to a particular mode of production but also to a form of social organization based on discipline, uniformity, and atomization (atomization refers, basically, to a social structure defined by separate individuals rather than by a vision of the community as a whole).

The mechanization of society was accompanied by what we might term the **mathematization** of human life. As historian Eric Hobsbawm puts it, **Arithmetic** was the fundamental tool of the Industrial Revolution. Its makers saw it as a series of sums of addition and subtraction: the difference in cost between buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, between cost of production and sale price, between investment and return (Industry 61). As with the mechanical innovations of Fordism, the

mathematic precision of the new economy extended to social relations as a whole, with relationships between employer and employee, individual and community increasingly determined less by custom or the incalculable interactions of character and circumstance than by relations of money, or what is often called the cash nexus.

The ideal of an economy in which human labour is enmeshed obediently and productively with machines is not so easily accomplished in reality. In order to ensure a compliant workforce, employers and legislators collaborated in the drafting of a series of new regulations and other disciplinary innovations, both in and outside the workplace, to ensure worker obedience. Perhaps the most effective form of regulation was the extremely low wages workers were paid, which meant that they had to work long hours just to earn enough to feed themselves. Workplace discipline was reinforced by such technological innovations as the punch clock, which secured the cooperation of workers in policing their own attendance at work. In instituting such forms of on-the-job discipline, employers were motivated by the (reasonable) belief that, given a choice, most people would prefer to spend their time at play rather than work. A raft of social measures sought to correct this attitude, including *master and servant* laws, which prescribed jail time for workers who violated the terms of their contracts, and *poor laws*, which took care of the unemployed by incarcerating them in workhouses. Poverty once seen as a consequence of unfortunate circumstances to be remedied by the assistance of the community came to be read as a sign of personal failure or moral weakness.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Production of the Working Class**

A more abstract but farther-reaching goal of the new laws was the radical alteration of culture, with the aim of creating a society devoted not to the goal of working hard enough to live, to put food on the table, but of feeding itself in order to work harder, to produce profits. One of the dominant mythologies in contemporary society is the idea that individual effort is always ultimately rewarded with economic and social success. (For a discussion of mythology see Chapter Three.) This mythology developed in conjunction with the industrial economy. However, it was hard to sustain during the early days of the Industrial Revolution, when the fundamental inequality on which capitalism depends was so starkly evident: by definition, an economic system designed to produce a surplus requires that the majority of labourers are paid less than what their labour is actually worth, and in the early stages of industrialism this amounted to less than the barest living wage for many workers. While pre-industrial society had also been characterized by inequality, bonds of custom connected the rich and the poor— sometimes through patronage and sometimes through force, but the two groups were always in close relation with one another. Industrial society effectively broke these bonds, producing a new kind of class consciousness.

According to E. P. Thompson, one of the foremost historians of English working-class history, class comes about when a group of people

as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against [others] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born— or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. (10)

It's worth pausing on this definition in order to grasp elements of class that are often overlooked in contemporary uses of the word that either equate class simply with wealth— low class equals poor— or link it to a quality of morality or style, as in that lady may be rich, but she's got no class. Thompson's definition is important in emphasizing that: 1) class describes a material relationship to the wealth-generating structures of society; specifically, it distinguishes capital's owners from its labourers, and 2) one's class position has a determining influence on one's identity and social orientation. To be class-conscious is to recognize the role of class in determining those aspects of one's existence— a recognition that goes against the dominant ideology (see Close-Up 2.1).

### **Working-Class Consciousness**

The Industrial Revolution coincided with the expansion of working-class consciousness, which expressed itself, among other ways, in distinct cultural forms. These consist of songs, sketches, and poetry— some that were preserved in written form and many that weren't— as well as a richly interwoven set of practices (well documented in Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*) including...

### **Hegemony**

Developed by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s, the concept of hegemony refers to the ability of dominant groups in society to exercise control over weaker groups not by means of force or domination but by gaining their consent, so that the unequal distribution of power appears to be both legitimate and natural. In other words, hegemony operates not by forcing people against their better judgment to submit to more powerful interests, but rather by actively seeking the spontaneous cooperation of subordinate classes to maintaining social relationships that continue their subordination. Hegemony, significantly,

is never total, but operates in constant struggle with newly emerging forms of oppositional consciousness. It works not by crushing those forces, but by a constant process of negotiation.

So how is popular media culture hegemonic? First, it operates in conjunction (and sometimes in tension) with institutions like the state, the law, education, and the family to legitimate the values of capitalist society – individualism, consumerism, the priority of private versus public interests, and so on. But unlike these other institutions, which sometimes resort to force, commercial culture works almost entirely through the promise if not the fulfilment, of pleasure. That the pleasures of commercial culture are often opposed by more official institutions the church, education, and so on - makes them that much more seductive.

... growth of mass media involved the intensification of commercialization and concentration of corporate control. This movement was neither steady nor uniform, however: moves toward consolidation of corporate power were routinely challenged by competition and the flourishing of independent operators, as well as by the unionization of performers, technicians, and other employers (these tensions are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). They were also challenged by those outside the industry– audiences and consumers whose willingness to be passively entertained existed in tension with a powerful impulse to make and do things for themselves. These tensions continue to inform the terrain of popular culture today.

### **The Organization and Commercialization of Sports**

We began our history of popular culture by looking at street football as an apparent casualty to the movement to privatize space, and with it popular recreation. In many ways football offers a perfect example of the operation of forces of corporatization. Proceeding in tandem with the moves to ban football from the public streets were efforts to organize it into a successful commercial venture. The sponsorship of soccer clubs led to the establishment of organized leagues, and the eventual founding of the Football Association in 1863. Considerable effort went into the task of regularizing the rules of the game, though this was not totally successful, as demonstrated by the evolution of two games: rugby, and Association football, or soccer. (The two games differ widely both in rules of play and in culture, with the former maintaining a fairly elitist flavour in keeping with its roots in the British public school system, and the latter enjoying a strong working-class following– at least until recently, when commercial success has arguably all but severed the sport from its roots.) Professionalism– that is, the introduction of salaries for players– was legalized in 1855, and dubs began charging admission in 1870, gradually incorporating other commercial enticements such as food, drink, and other entertainment for spectators. As with music hall, a sports media industry soon developed, with Routledge's 1867 Handbook of Football helping to foster fan solidarity around a sport that was rapidly becoming institutionalized

The commercialization of sport followed a similar pattern in the colonies. In Canada, as in England, industrialization (which occurred more than fifty years later in Canada) played a large role in the transformation of sport from a casual, spontaneous, and relatively inclusive activity into a regulated, formalized, and, eventually, commercial enterprise. Most obviously, urbanization placed restrictions on space as it had in England, moving sport out of fields and other open spaces into specialized athletic facilities. The introduction of fixed spatial boundaries served to transform, and eventually to formalize, rules of play. Industrialization also influenced the temporal organization of sport in at least two ways: first, the institution of long and regular working days made it necessary to establish rules limiting the duration of play (a significant development in sports such as lacrosse, in which games might once have lasted anywhere from a few minutes to several hours). Second, the marking of time into distinct periods of work and leisure made it possible to establish formal schedules of play, based on the assumption that players and spectators had regularly scheduled time off (Metcalf 50).

The Evolution of Sport Historian Alan Metcalfe also identifies another indirect consequence of the importance of time as part of a general emphasis on quantification: the meaning of sport shifted from the process, the contest itself, to the product, the record (51). As a consequence, the nature of competition changed, with less emphasis on its social aspects and a greater and greater focus on winning. As in other areas of the industrial economy, sport was increasingly shaped by specialization: from a chaotic, collective endeavour in which the different tasks of the game were shared by everyone, players gradually assumed positions in accordance with their specific talents– offence, defence, goal-keeping, and so on (Guttman qtd. in Ann Hall et al. 50).

Metcalf identifies a number of other changes associated with industrialization that contributed to the organization of sport in Canada, including the development of transportation and communications technology– the train, the telegraph, and radio and print media– that made it possible not only to arrange contests between far-flung teams, but also to broadcast schedules and results, creating a national audience for sport (52). (From the expansion of national and, eventually, international leagues, we arrive at the contemporary situation in which virtually none of the players on local professional teams come from the city– or even the country– in which the team is based. This development, a logical outgrowth of the forces of global capital, changes not only the organization of players, but also the relationship between players and fans, whose relationship to their team is an oddly contrived one, connected only arbitrarily to place.)

The evolution of fans is another major development in the organization and commercialization of sport. By the late 1900s, football—played according to a still unfixed set of Canadian rules that drew something from British rugby and something from the American game—had become a spectator sport. Ice hockey—a game that, according to at least one account, was established by Montreal football players as a form of winter training (Wise and Fisher 44)—quickly followed. Commercialization and professionalization went hand in hand, as the involvement of highly skilled, salaried players made games more exciting to watch. With ice hockey in particular, the expense involved—equipment, rink rental and maintenance—gave the game a strongly middle-class flavour, in terms of ownership if not participation or interest. Again, as with the geographical expansion of sport, its commercial intensification has even more dramatic consequences today, among them the pricing of tickets far out of the range of the average fan.

Commercialization alone was not responsible for the wresting of sports like hockey and football from the people to the elites; in fact, much in the same way as commercial media were challenged by the rational recreationists, professional sport faced strong challenges from amateur associations, connected in particular with private schools and universities. The leagues that were established, by the universities especially maintained a strong policy against professionalism, a policy motivated as much by an elitist desire to maintain class privilege as it was by a concern for the purity of the sport. Some clubs defined their codes of amateurism according to the exclusion of particular professions and even ethnic groups (see Table 2.1). An 1873 regulation, for example, banned labourers and Indians from membership in the Montreal Pedestrian Club on the same grounds that mechanics and labourers had once been barred from rowing clubs:

they were seen to enjoy a physical advantage over their more refined middle-class counterparts (Ann Hall et al. 59). In general, nineteenth-century football and hockey amateurs (as distinct from contemporary promoters of amateur sport) were, if anything, more bound up with economic status than professionals since a strict ban on professionals meant that participation was restricted to those with plenty of time and money. Between them, however, both middle-class amateur associations and corporate owners of professional teams contributed to the creation of a culture of organized sport, a culture of spectatorship rather than participation. Indirectly, but most significantly, the propertied interests represented by both the professionals and the gentleman amateurs contributed to the decline of public space available for community athletic activity—a development that foreshadows the conflict over street hockey today.

As the above discussion suggests, we can read into the histories of football and ice hockey a fairly straightforward movement from the loss of public recreation space and the banning of street games to the creation of professional sport, and the conversion of players into fans. More recently, the intensification of the commercial imperative in sport has begun to wrest enjoyment of the game away from players and fans alike, as players (in exchange for hugely lucrative salaries, depending on the sport) are subject to being traded (or dropped) at the whim of owners, and attendance at games is (economically) restricted to corporate executives entertaining clients. The only real winners in professional sport today, arguably, are commercial sponsors, who depend on a still-enthusiastic TV audience. And yet ... when we look back to the original English battle over street football, and then forward to the road hockey case in Hamilton, the answer to the question of who controls popular culture is more complicated, and more encouraging.