

Echoes of Leisure: Questions, Challenges, and Potentials

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Gregorian calendars, love of linear and progressive forms, Christian beliefs, and fascination with “new” beginnings all intermix to form the concept of millenium. Calendars emerging from Tibetan, Islamic, Hawaiian, Mayan, and other traditions mark no day of celebration or sorrow for January 1, 2000 (and whether this is the first day of the new millenium is still contested). Without conscious attention to the plurality of calendars, concepts of time, historical events, and holidays, it is tempting to view the millenium as an “inevitable given,” a reality, a natural occurrence. As any good leisure scholar understands, the millenium provides a wonderful excuse for celebration, contemplation, and play. However, thoughtful attention to plurality, opens new possibilities and engenders other concerns and questions. How do we, in both large and small ways, render invisible other views while celebrating one, albeit dominant, perspective? How do we become accountable for validating and giving support to a single interpretation of reality? Can leisure become focused on fulfillment and re-figuring social bodies/ minds/ souls? Can leisure become inevitably tied to notions of collaborative interpretations rather than predominant and increasingly individual, subjective conscience?

I am particularly concerned about creating ethical, meaningful leisure in a paradoxical world of plurality *and* commonality. How do we, as leisure scholars and practitioners, connected to, or reinforcing, dominant structures and processes, maintain and honor the presence, values, and critiques of alternative perspectives? What leisure praxis will enable “games of truth and power” to be practiced with minimal domination and maximal freedom? How can we transfigure our relationship to powers and knowledges that render us calculable and entangled in harm to others? Seemingly innocent millenium celebrations provide resonance with profound conflicts related to power, dominant structures, and alternative perspectives of leisure.

The definitions, parameters, and actions related to leisure are constructed and molded by invisible forces related to cultural dynamics, power relations, collective processes, and societal frameworks. It is no accident, therefore, that freedom and individual perspectives and behaviour are essential features of leisure praxis (using a standard, dominant, and historically

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traditional definition of leisure) in the United States. The metaphor of "melting pot" resonates with leisure research methodologies that render individuals without historical, cultural, racial, gender, and sexual orientation attributes. Revolving around a powerful, solitary individual, leisure education, from this perspective, may undermine or harm individuals who interact with the world as collective, multiple, and interconnected (Dieser, 1997; Fox & van Dyck, 1997; Perogoy & Dieser, 1997). We may oppose cruel and oppressive labor conditions or child labor, but willingly buy the latest recreation equipment manufactured abroad at cheaper prices. The former does not totally explain the latter, but neither are they entirely unrelated.

As leisure scholars and practitioners construct specific frameworks to interpret the world and create a leisure niche (i.e., take an action, make our way in the world), ripples of good, harm, and exclusion emanate across space and time. "Action always has effects that were never intended and which, once begun, cannot be undone (we can respond to the effects of what we have done, but not undo them altogether)" (Orlie, 1997, p. 18). The lack of control and prediction is an integral part of a complex and interconnected world where the effects and meaning of leisure depend upon the actions of others; there is simply no way to avoid creating harm in the universe. No practice, including leisure, is free of power and its effects. So, leisure is surrounded by "invisible forces" related to ontological and epistemological beliefs, commitments to specific leisure delivery systems, societal norms, and contextual forces among others. Therapeutic recreation, for example, has devoted the majority of its efforts toward the individual with the disability, rather than analyzing how society defines disabilities or how society uses power to inscribe and re-inscribe an identity of disability. Our scholarly and practical debates have fostered a thoughtlessness about leisure definitions, rules of practice, power locations, and programmatic and research values because of a lack of attention to how we, individually and collectively, participate in the constitution of leisure as political and powerful. Leisure, therefore, is less often (or rarely) constructed as a political strategy for maintaining cultural difference or as a means of resisting hegemonic cultural practices (e.g., non-heterosexual family relationships or on-line gaming communities)

The very acts of creating leisure/recreation lead us to committing, in Orlie's (1997) words, ordered evil. Ordered evil is thoughtlessly following normalized leisure behavior, accepted rules, practices of recreation, or institutional actions of leisure delivery systems as well as behaving predictably and conducting oneself reasonably. The persons, collectives, and institutions who perpetuate harms related to leisure are the "lawful citizens" or "lawful agencies" who, because well-disposed toward the law, daily become the agents of injustice. "In contexts of ordered evil, harm and wrongdoing are often inadvertent, unseen, and contrary to our good intentions; they are nonetheless the effect of our actions, often the very actions that mark us as reasonable and predictable" (Orlie, 1997, p. 141). For example, we create recreation programs for youth-at-risk that reinforce and sustain specific legal concepts

and labels and prescribe particular behaviours most favored by the dominant, power population of whites (e.g., obedience to existing laws, protection of property). Disciplines such as Native Studies, African-American Studies, Sociology, and Criminology among others have questioned the racial, power, colonialistic and imperialistic assumptions of the current legal system. Is it really logical to think recreation practice is not, somehow, embedded and tainted by its association with the dominant legal framework? Can we really absent ourselves from the normalizing power of the middle-class and the "American dream" especially in light of the plight of many non-white peoples in the U.S. and the influence of U.S. power creates through globalization? In the tradition of Arendt (1964), Butler (1990), Foucault (1984), Welch (1990), and Orlie (1997), I suggest that the leisure profession and discipline is caught in this web of replication, reproduction, subversion, and resistance. The "way out" begins with the recognition of our own imbrication in the world's evil.

How do we address responsibility when we can neither recognize the harm brought to others by our imbrication in social rules and their making in the world, nor imagine how to alleviate such harm? Initially, ethical processes must situate themselves relationally, address, recognize and engage invisible powers, and raise questions that lead to the thoughtful enactment of daily life, including leisure practices. I suggest that views from cultural studies, critical theory, feminist scholarship, and postmodernism can provide hints for initiating a process that is neverending. In this paper, I focus on a relational and political ethical process and a self-reflective strategy of critical ontology (Foucault, 1984).

Ethical includes political relationships we undertake to experiment with the relationship among body, mind and soul (in oneself and among others). Politics as a relationship is a material interaction (Welch, 1994) within pluralistic relationships that demonstrates meaningful changes within thinking as well as actions. Leisure scholars and professionals must move beyond imagining other viewpoints to creating arenas where others are present to argue and transfigure our viewpoints. Leisure thinking becomes a locatable political practice that demands the presence of people who represent the plurality of the world and who are capable of publicly assessing and critiquing the practices, beliefs, scholarships, and values of leisure from multiple locations. Ethical political action would be measured by changes in actions of leisure scholars and practitioners, visibility of marginal perspectives in research and theories, and new solutions based on collaborative thinking and interactions.

We need to find ways to bring into the open, nurture, and sustain critiques that disrupt traditional leisure praxis through incorporating "disruptive collaboration" that unsettles traditional practices, questions invisible assumptions, or challenges the present as a "given," "the only way," or "the best way." Disruptive collaboration is vital for the health of a pluralistic leisure, because *disruptive collaboration problematizes the ordinary relations that order evil and brings the assumed and comfortable in the light for critique and judgment.*

For example, incorporating critiques and political action from points of view contrary to, or far removed from leisure, results in a more diverse community of recreation scholars. Disruptive collaboration that makes good and harm visible and responds to them (a) by emphasizing ethical relations rather than normative codes and (b) by problematizing what has become normalized helps leisure/recreation praxis assuage the harm the leisure field must create as it makes its way.

Foucault (1984) suggests critical ontology as a vital ethical process for identifying the contingency in what we take to be necessary for leisure. Critical ontology echoes Dewey (Boydston, 1976-1981) and Orlie (1997) when it perpetually seeks the limits of our aspirations to encompass the limitless (i.e., all in the world and beyond) rather than renounce universal principle. The process of questioning the foundations of the existence and practice of leisure is a dizzying to and fro dance between thinking and everyday living, between addressing philosophical basis of leisure and addressing leisure needs, where *each is continually interrupting the other*. Engaging the experiential world of leisure and recreation practice always demands a degree of thoughtlessness (i.e., efficiency often results from "taking for granted" agreement on definitions, values, and rules of leisure). Thinking, from a commonsense perspective, always appears at best irrelevant, at worst disorderly. Surely this resonates with students and practitioners who ask for courses and information that is directly, if not solely, focused on employment related issues. Thinking, as articulated by Arendt (1978), withdraws us from the world and provides the frame upon which to examine our frameworks that condition and explain experience and action, question the ethics of our choices, and highlight the partiality of our knowledge and control (i.e., how leisure is framed by gender, class, race, ableism, and sexual orientation). A "transgressive thinker" is one who believes that we can be different than what we have been made to be through access to the limitless variations of the world, but only in a contingently limited sense (Orlie, 1997).

Awareness of the inevitability and ubiquity of leisure creating both harm and good calls for a tragic *and* hopeful outlook, rather than utopian. Within a complex, dynamic world, there can be no guarantees, and we can only bring a mindfulness of the complexities and ambiguities to leisure rather than a vision of a final "redemptive" solution. As we enter the millenium of one calendar system, I am searching for ways to engage these other calendars (i.e., perspectives on leisure) so I might know my own better, hear critiques, and enter into spaces that allow for creating something new with others. Under cultural and societal pressures, history indicates most people conform. But not everyone does. The meaning and significance of ethical political action lies in the capacity of each ethical political action to memorialize our human capacity to act incalculably, to interrupt social rules, to resist wrong and "harm doing," and to assuage their effects. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked so all living beings may inhabit the earth and enjoy leisure.

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