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Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics ofPleasure. By David Rowe. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995. Pp. viii + 184, index, bibliography, ISBN 0-8039-7701-8 pbk.)

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book provides a feast of sumptuous material for the furniture connoisseur and, as an inventory, makes a valuable contribution to our awareness and appreciation of Canada's furniture heritage.

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Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure. By David Rowe. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995. Pp. viii + 184, index, bibliography, ISBN 0-8039-7701-8 pbk.)

Reflecting the inherent snobbishness of academics (p. 5), David Rowe attempts to discuss the dynamics of popular music and sport in a highly theoretical and ultimately complex fashion, as if to legitimize his involvement with these "lowbrow" cultural forms. Unfortunately, his attempts to make his work resonate with erudition exemplify what Edward Said claims to be plaguing most current theoretical discourse: "There is oppositional debate without real opposition. In this setting, even Marxism has often been accommodated to the wild exigencies of rhetoric while surrendering its true radical prerogatives" (Said 1989: 581). The initial excitement one feels about reading a work whose very title suggests an encounter with culture's Dionysian qualities is negated by a text scattered with adept observations that are quickly undermined by Rowe's empty theoretical posturing.

What Rowe attempts to do with *Popular Cultures* is to critically analyze the slippery concept of popular culture. After offering some less useful definitions of the term, he suggests that popular culture is "shifting sets of social and cultural relations, meanings and texts which in varying ways emerge as contemporary forms of pleasure, leisure, style and identity, and which are linked to personal and expressive politics, aesthetic address and cultural economy" (p. 8). Considering the dynamic nature of popular culture, Rowe wishes to investigate the question of whether or not "popular culture function[s] as a means by which people can hold material and ideological oppression at bay, or does it activate and reinforce that oppression?" (p. 8). Aware of the tremendous range of popular culture, Rowe decides to focus on two fundamental components — rock music and sport — to clarify this initial query. Of importance here is that this book is not an elucidation of rock music and sport, but rather rock and sport are vehicles used to acquire an understanding of popular culture. The problematic nature of *Popular Cultures* is clearly reflected in this methodological approach. The two primary aspects of the book, rock music and sport, are a means to an end, and are poorly

represented as a result. We are then left to question any subsequent observations Rowe offers given his already flawed research base.

Before considering Rowe's treatment of rock music and sport, the theoretical paradigm from which he works must be brought to light. The direction he takes in formulating an understanding of popular culture is largely dictated by his belief in the existing relationship between culture, economics and ideology. By asserting that ideology is the linking factor between culture and economics, he is able to suggest (if we keep in mind his original definition) that "the connections between these ideas, objects and practices [culture, economics and ideology] highlight the sociality of popular culture and the culture-bound nature of society" (p. 13). From this premise, he structures his approach, which entails investigating the "economic, ideological and cultural features of rock and sport" (p. 13). As a result, Rowe uses a postmodern/ Marxist approach that at times evokes some exciting perspectives, yet fails to move beyond the power of suggestion. Afraid of falling victim to "totalization" — a postmodernist's nightmare — Rowe counters most assertions with conflicting possibilities, thus neutralizing any possible conclusions. Moreover, the influence of Marxist theory is equally damaging, as Rowe ends up reducing the observations he does make to economic terms.

After revealing his theoretical stance, Rowe begins applying these concerns to rock music, questioning the subversive or compliant nature of its existence. He focuses much of his attention on the emergence of independent labels in Britain during the 1970s. He cleverly situates rock music as an inherently commercial product that in its very production complies with capitalist hegemony. In his discussion of the independent music scene, and in turn the punk movement of the 1970s, he documents a successful attempt by rock musicians to produce music in a counter-hegemonic fashion. He later acknowledges that three of the major benefactors of the punk movement — The Sex Pistols, the Clash and The Jam — signed with major record labels, therefore complying with what was once subverted through the utilisation of independent labels. What I cannot understand, however, is that in his discussion of this subversive/compliant relationship, he does not incorporate Antonio Gramsci's, and the later Raymond Williams', understanding of hegemony. When he states that in reaction to a successfully subversive movement a major record label "will ultimately regroup and utilize their superior resource base to dominate in whatever new style has been developed" (p. 27), he does not seem to realize that his initial question has basically been answered.

If we apply Raymond Williams' rethinking of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony in "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" to the problem at hand, Rowe's enigma of subversion or compliance is largely elucidated. In brief, Williams argues that hegemony is not a static entity, but rather a dialectic struggle: a process. He argues "that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually

to be renewed, recreated and defended" (Williams 1989: 382). The success of the "indie" movement testifies to a new power structure with which the existing power structure must contend. According to Williams, the existing power structure must either incorporate the emergent culture (in this case the punks via independent production) or attempt to terminate its existence (Williams 1989: 385). Incorporation is the most sought-after method for contending with emergent forces, and it is exactly this process that Rowe makes evident through the words of one independent activist: "The independents are serving like the apprenticeship makers and the majors are just coming along, waving the big cheques and, like, pinching the best, they cream off all the independent stuff" (p. 71). In this way, the independents act as stepping-stones for the major labels, and a harmonious relationship is thus established between them.

I have stressed this one aspect of Rowe's text because it represents the underlying problem that bedevils the entire book. Rowe neglects the hegemonic process because of his own theoretical determinism. Placing such an emphasis on the economic factor, he neglects the human element that initially awakens the desire for change. In discussing folk-music revival, Peter Narváez argues in "*Living Blues* Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival", that like "many other forms of sociocultural change, folk revival arises out of a restless or vehement dissatisfaction with one's own contemporary culture" (Narváez 1993: 244). If we compare this statement with Leonard and Shannon's assessment of the independent movement in *Popular Cultures* — "a backlash against the virtual monopoly of modern music by a handful of major record companies" — what has motivated the independent movement becomes clearly evident. According to Rowe, however, cultural dissatisfaction is not capable of dictating change. Instead, he reduces successful emergent patterns to "an intensified penetration of conglomerate capital into the rock production process" which "will in times of market expansion constitute a huge commercial advantage" (p. 39). What he is describing is a possible means for change, rather than the dictating force behind it.

The difficulties I have with *Popular Cultures* are evidenced through this one extended example. Once having overcome the theoretical jargon, the reader is to be further frustrated by encountering stimulating possibilities that are then reduced to an ineffective theoretical agenda. The author has his moments of perspicacity, providing insights that are useful in the study of popular culture, but these moments are intermittent, and deeply hidden within the depths of frustrating discourse.

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Intimate Relations: Family and Community in Planter Nova Scotia 1759-1800. Edited by Margaret Conrad. (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1995. Pp. vi + 298, index, $21.95, ISBN 0-919197-42-7 pbk.)

Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the Nineteenth-Century Maritimes. Edited by Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton. (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994. Pp. 253, $19.95, ISBN 0-919107-41-9 pbk.)

Sometimes I feel like a theoretical pack rat. Like other folklorists I know, I happily "borrow" any interpretative models that attract me and test their applicability to the study of traditional culture. And, despite what others more discipline-bound than folklorists may say, I don't think such borrowing is a bad thing. Our perceptual world, one that is both fluid and interdisciplinary, is not only interesting but (I hope) more closely mirrors real life. So, I have to say that I agreed to review these recent historical collections only because I hoped they would contain material relevant for folklore study.

I wasn't disappointed. *Intimate Relations* represents twenty of thirty presentations given at the third Planter Studies Conference held at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, in 1993. The Planter Studies Conference has become a significant regional meeting and the theme of these proceedings, "Family and Community in Planter Nova Scotia, 1759-1800" (growing out of the tradition established by scholars such as John Demos), is particularly relevant to folklorists. In the opening essay, "Family and Community in Early America", Philip Greven Jr. writes of the importance of historical study going beyond a reconstruction of external lives of earlier generations of human beings.