

# Urban Tourist

## An interview with the Guest Editor, Wolfram Manzenreiter

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General

Manzenreiter and  
Winkel at the Japan  
Anthropology Work-  
shop conference at  
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Photo courtesy Gavin Whitehead.

By Margarita Winkel

Wolfram Manzenreiter's interest in sports is not only academic. Among others, he loves climbing, snowboarding, and skiing. His current great passion, however, is long-distance running. One of the great attractions of running is that it is easily combined with travelling and observing. To him, long-distance running means 'a kind of urban tourism, something you can do wherever you are. You just have to bring your running shoes, and you are rewarded with unusual, magnificent views and unexpected situations.' There are downsides, too. 'Training for a marathon race is quite time consuming: basically I am always on the run.'

Born and raised in Krefeld, in Germany's Ruhr area, he initially became interested in Southeast Asia after graduating from secondary school. Between 1983 and 1988, his life was divided between travelling the region and running a small import business in Germany. During one of his trips, he met his future wife and followed her to Austria: 'In 1988, I realized that I was ready for a change. I did not want to continue doing that kind of business all my life.'

The career change from a relatively independent businessman with a life of travel and action to a full-time academic with a life dominated by writing and scholarly reflexivity may seem more drastic than it really is. His decision to enroll in Japanese Studies was guided by the possibility of continued nurturing of his general interest in Asia. Sepp Linhart, Japanologist and professor at Vienna University, encouraged him to pursue his research interests in popular culture. 'I am rather attracted by concrete problems. I am interested in why, how, when, and where people are doing the things they do in daily life. My research questions are guided by practical considerations. They originate in what I see happening around me, more than from a preconceived theoretical viewpoint.'

Theories however, play a crucial role in providing a framework for understanding these phenomena. His interpretations are strongly influenced by Marxist and Neo-Marxist thought, by the work of people like Gramsci and Bourdieu, and by scholars in the field of Cultural Studies. His MA thesis on Japanese gambling (*pachinko*) resulted in a book *Pachinko Monogatari. Socio-Cultural Explorations of Japan's Gambling Industry* (Muenchen: Iudicium verlag, 1998; published in German). He chose the topic of mountaineering for his PhD research and spent the entire second year of his assignment to Vienna University in Japan doing fieldwork. The result was another book: *The Social Construction of Japanese Alpinism. Culture, Ideology and Sports in Modern Mountaineering* (Vienna, 2000; published in German).

One of his principal aims is to generate heightened awareness of the way the sociological theory of sports is usually formed. 'For many Japanese and Chinese scholars unfamiliar with the Anglo-American language and discourse practices, it is difficult to participate in the development of sports sociology on an international level. Developments in the field of

sports sociology are dominated by US, British, and, to a lesser extent, by scholars from other European countries.' The task he has set himself for the immediate future is to expose the work of Japanese (and other East Asian) sports sociologists to a broader international audience. 'There's such a vast amount of knowledge, and hardly anybody knows these resources. The inclusion of viewpoints from local Asian sports analysts will bring about a change in perspective that will be beneficial, if not to say essential, for further theoretical developments on essential concepts and the structure of sport sociology.'

To Manzenreiter, networking is a major tool for reaching this goal. 'That's essential to foster the academic understanding of variant social and subcultural aspects of sports.' He feels that his personal involvement in research projects and study groups is important for encouraging communication and information exchange between scholars of various countries. 'Sports should be viewed in relation to global developments. Football, for example, is strongly tied to global economic developments.' In every way, football and sports in general are global and interdisciplinary, and their academic study should reflect this. The way the human body is conceptualized in different regions may serve as an example here. 'Understanding and incorporating the different ways in which the body is experienced will have important consequences for general views and theories on sports and its relation to the body, and will hopefully lead to a conceptualization of sport that is not only based on Western experience and analyses.'

Wolfram Manzenreiter is assistant professor at the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna where he lectures on modern Japanese society. He is also general secretary of the German Association for Social Science Research on Japan, and the father of two sons. – (Margarita Winkel)