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**JOCKS PLAYING GENDER GAMES: SPORT, MASCULINITY AND THE
SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY**

by

Mario Verrelli, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
March 1, 2002.
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acceptance of the thesis

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and the Subversion of Identity**

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Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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March 22, 2002

Abstract: Because sport has been and continues to be a potent and highly visible site for the social production of masculinity in (post)modernity, it is necessary for any thorough analysis of its genealogy to mount a study of sport that includes not simply those phenomena that reinforce masculinity's hegemonic character but that also permits a vista into its disruptions and discontinuities. Within a broad theoretical context of critiquing masculinity as a source of violence and danger in contemporary culture, a pronounced body of recent scholarship has sought to destabilize and unpack masculinity with a resulting, intended or otherwise, development of alternative conceptions and practices. In my reading of this swelling field of inquiry, too few efforts have been made to apply a poststructural analysis of men in the athletic arena despite its irrefutable contribution to our current appreciation of masculinity's historicity. I have chosen to consider three distinct sporting disciplines that, as we will see, can be understood as performing and promoting differential degrees and versions of masculinity. Despite some of the inter-athletic distinctions that emerge in this study (parallels are also evident in demonstrating how sport culture can function more monolithically and consequently intensely on the male psyche), ultimately a generalizable vulnerability to discursive interventions of even the seemingly most virile of masculine formations is evident, suggesting the fluidity and mutability of all gender, and by extension identity, tropes.

CONTENTS

Introduction: A Genealogy of Sport and Masculinity	1
Chapter 1: ‘The Manly Art’: Masculinity in Boxing and its Economy of Desire	8
Chapter 2: ‘The Beautiful Game’: European Football, its Sporting Derivatives and Spatial Assertions of Masculinity	34
Chapter 3: ‘Pumping Iron(y)’: Constructing Masculinity in the Gym?	75
Conclusion: Contemporary Sport’s Inexorable Flight From its Foundational Warrior Ethos	106

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2.1

52

Introduction: A GENEALOGY OF SPORT AND MASCULINITY

Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body.

- Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings

As a graduate student, one is infernally subjected to the daunting question, ‘What is your thesis on?’, ad nauseum. In my feeble attempt to combat the tyranny of the question with wit and irony, my contrived, patented response has been ‘A subject I know very little about: masculinity and sport’. While, agreeably, the wit component falls woefully short, the irrefutable irony stems from the ostensibly blatant reality of my (I’d like to imagine) obvious maleness, as well as my other identity as an athlete (at least as one who been active in various athletic endeavours - I accept that this does not in itself guarantee the accuracy of the designation). However, on some other level., my pre-fab and by now tedious graduate mantra addresses (if only cryptically) my theoretical agenda to un-learn that which is taken for granted in regards to the variables of my research question. In asking, ‘How does the interrogation of all identity forms that is endemic to the postmodern condition impinge upon the historical continuity of sport and masculinity?’, I am attempting to problematize the often unambiguously symbiotic invocations of the terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘sport’ for the purposes of locating and contributing to the discursive rupturing of their prima facie inviolability.

In the customary linguistic mischievousness of post-structural thought, a significant portion of this thesis will preoccupy itself with de-stabilizing these concepts in order to critique the apparatuses that support them and to create conditions for new and more fluid possibilities of identity. But, specific to this sphere of theoretical inquiry is the very elevated sense of conceptual impenetrability that accompanies such beacons of intransigence and solidity as masculinity and sport. In a strategy that owes much of its

epistemological disruptiveness to Michel Foucault's archeological/genealogical studies, my attempt to penetrate the surface unity of these linguistic tropes necessarily demands a level of intellectual violence that is commensurate with the very obdurateness of the terms in question.

A point of departure for this study is my intimate familiarity with the resounding reciprocity of masculinity and sport in our culture, historically thrust together to form a dense and occasionally oppressive union. While there is much consensus over the traditional neglect of sport within the annals of sociology (Parker 1996: 128), studies of sport presently appear to be enjoying a burgeoning interest (see Messner and Sabo 1990, Hargreaves 1994, Burstyn 1999, etc.) However, a preponderance of this recent wealth of scholarly treatments of sport has merely served to reiterate the a priori affinity of sport and masculinity without considering the actual and potential deficiencies in their discursive technologies. In so doing, these recent scholars of sport (without intending to cast a wide net, we, nonetheless, find many of whom have simultaneously, and perhaps not uncoincidentally, found niches for themselves in the equally burgeoning field of 'Men's Studies') unwittingly support and strengthen the sport-masculinity nexus. I argue that in order to truly mount a critique of masculinity as many of these writers purport, it is, while useful, not sufficient to simply locate the historical emergence of particular masculinizing practices, such as sport, as for example Messner (1990: 416) has done:

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modernization and women's continued movement into public life created widespread 'fears of social feminization', especially among middle class men. One result of these fears was the creation of organized sport as a homosocial sphere in which competition and (often violent) physicality was valued, while the 'feminine' was devalued. As a result, organized sport has served to bolster a sagging ideology of male superiority, and has helped to reconstitute masculine hegemony.

It is, therefore, vital to supplement this most incipient and by now familiar tenet of sport history in order to venture into the political quagmire of gender studies with evidence of masculinity's frailties, apertures and vicissitudes.

Foucault's archeological/genealogical method provides precedence and inspiration to resist the limiting paradigm of the sport-masculinity vinculum. As Foucault's critiques of prominent institutions in our culture such as the penal system, medicine and sexuality were not satisfied to merely provide historical accounts of significant occurrences within their particular ambits, but to historiographically trace the adjoining discourses that produce a naturalizing effect of inevitability, I intend to equally pursue the multiple trails of sporting discourses that wield their power over the male body and soul. Within this different contextual terrain, then, Foucault's archaeological/genealogical method serves to disrupt the easy relationship between sport and masculinities to provide discursive space for re-imagining sporting identities. "If we were to characterize it in two terms, then 'archaeology' would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and 'genealogy' would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play" (Foucault 1980a: 85).

While the very *raison d'être* of a sociology of sport, if one can be said to exist, has arguably been to collectively evince the notion that sport is more than mere play, Foucault's concluding remarks above evoke and support, albeit obliquely, Huizinga's hypothetical claim in the seminal *Homo Ludens* (1951), reversing the original axiom, that play is all there is by suggesting that all culture is play. Regardless of where the emphasis falls, the point is that sport, as a form of play or as a cultural artifact, matters. Particularly within the domain of men's identities and therefore Men's Studies, sport matters greatly. A man may fall anywhere along the continuum of sporting success, but he inevitably, and often (not insignificantly) involuntarily, positions himself vis a vis

sport to incur the full wrath of its masculinizing effects. So that even those 'conscientious objectors' of the sport-masculinity complex, must forge a masculinity for themselves that somehow addresses the implicit question of how you hold up on the proverbial field, court, track, etc..

Men's Studies' greatest, if not its only, insight is that masculine identity exists in a multiplicity rather than a monolith. Moving even beyond the preliminary, but significant, principle of the cultural and historical relativity of masculinity, the most poignant of masculinity studies consider the variations of masculinities within a particular historical/cultural milieu. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne's (1995) work explores the continuities and discontinuities of masculinities along various ethnic, socio-economic and sub-cultural lines. I intend to apply this fracturing notion to the all too frequently homogenized world of sport to consider if certain masculinities emerge within particular athletic milieus. Does one's unrepachable success in sport, as is surely found in the case of the professional athlete, guarantee its holder eminent masculine stature and thereby ensconcing his hegemony, or does the athlete's embodiment of the male ideal vary according to his field of play? As we delve into the distinct yet overlapping fields of sport that organize the chapters of this thesis, we will attempt to answer this vexing question in all its complexities and ambiguities. And while the result will surely generate more questions than answers, as perhaps should be the case, we can be rest assured of discovering two critical dimensions of all masculinities, their immanence and their incompleteness.

We begin in Chapter 1 with the Holy Grail of masculinity : boxing. In deconstructing boxing, I hope to simultaneously espouse and undermine its historical reign as supreme masculine agon. Boxing, in many ways, provides a microcosm of the repulsively beautiful and increasingly declining world of exclusively male athletics. It provides us with the genesis of a modern, commodified sporting contest acting as a lightning rod for

many of its societies most pressing, but often sublimated, issues - race, class and gender. My theoretical contention that sport can be seen to present a myriad of opportunities and phenomena that undermine the masculinizing process finds its greatest test as well as its most dramatic results in the fistic trade. In arguing the compromised masculinity of the boxer, the counter-intuitiveness of Foucault's methodology immediately surfaces. The boxer embodies with tragic poignancy the dualities of regularly summoning up unrivaled courage and determination for one's livelihood, while literally and figuratively exposing oneself to an onslaught of social, professional and psychic penetrations. In this sense, boxing magnificently encapsulates the sociological conundrum of structure versus agency by depicting the sanguine aftermath of their enduring entanglement. My hope and intent in both scaling the heights and plummeting the depths of masculinity through boxing is to immediately vindicate my theoretical agenda by demonstrating that if the boxer's masculinity can convincingly be raised in doubt, than surely all other male athletes can only ever hope to approach this ever elusive trope. Ultimately, boxing's brutally ironic performance of hegemonic masculinity provides a tragically nihilistic denouement that sets the stage for modern sporting spectacles that are arguably less successful in and intent on the disavowal of the feminine.

Although we North Americans might not be quite so conscious of it, the world's most successful sport is indubitably soccer. Descending as it does from an historical lineage of ball games that have contemporarily splintered into a multiplicity of ball game variations such as Rugby and American Football, to name the two examples used in Chapter two for comparative purposes, soccer hinges upon the spatial circulation and penetration of a playing field with a ball in order to achieve the desired scoring result. as its athletic kindred do. However, I argue that soccer's profound difference from its aforementioned sporting affiliates is its inherently greater reliance on athletic artistry and its consequently heightened aestheticism in order to achieve the pursued spatial

penetration, to which one can safely attribute its global sporting dominance. Taking into account certain national/cultural variations, soccer's nearly universal ingratiation into the global sporting landscape fundamentally problematizes the athletic arena as an unequivocal masculinizing terrain, that establishes its allure on the male psyche through its wholesale eschewal of the feminine. A semiological reading of soccer - its players, fans, discourses and dynamics - will hopefully demonstrate that soccer's nuanced recuperation of the feminine into its ontology contributes to, on the one hand, unrivaled success in the male dominated world of athletic fandom, and on the other, to an equally unmatched incidence of spectatorial violence. The epiphenomenon of 'soccer hooliganism' as it relates to soccer's intrinsic athletic beauty and Eros, starkly diametrical to boxing's nihilism, is considered further. In positing soccer as an ambivalently masculine sporting practice that ineffably celebrates the sensual appeal of sport, I am not only once again attempting to disrupt the unilinearity of sport and masculinity, I would also like to evoke Guttman's invaluable insights in *Eros and Sport* (1990:151):

I am absolutely convinced that the joys of sports, for both the spectator and the participant, has as much to do with Eros - in some form - as with the disinterested aesthetic contemplation of physical skills or the sense of achievement obtained by a good play. In our time, the erotic element in sports has once again become visible - as it was in the pagan cultures of classical antiquity.

Finally, bodybuilding presents the greatest threat to the edifice of masculinity by evidentializing, as no other sport (?) can, its ontological nullity. Through the feverish pursuit of muscle, male bodybuilders do not simply embrace the feminizing forces of corporeal scrutiny and vanity traditionally the preserve of females in Western culture, they embody the futility of the primordial masculine sign of muscle. Once again contesting the boundaries of sport as boxing does, but for entirely different reasons, the value of muscle in bodybuilding stops at the level of image and never gets to be deployed in a contained battle of males as in other sporting contests. Yet the irony of bodybuilding

seems to rest on its inferred machismo. In this way, it echoes the betrayal of other sports by deluding the practitioner into its masculinizing effects. But at root, bodybuilding takes the male further away than other sports from the possibility of male referentiality by the exclusive pursuit of the liquidated sign of muscle. In addition, the technology of bodybuilding permits the fluid circulation of muscle's sign value across the gender chasm. Consequently, bodybuilding's appeal of corporeal malleability with a suggested corollary of sporting iconography extends its practice well beyond the arena of sport. In fact, as you will see in my concluding remarks, while bodybuilding may only ever approximate (or mock) the surface trappings of sport, its influence on contemporary sport in the form of other simulated athletic contests such as Pro Wrestling or the recently launched XFL is not to be underestimated. The representations of masculinity that we see emerging in contemporary simulations of sport render it indelibly transparent and ultimately untenable.

Chapter 1: 'THE MANLY ART': MASCULINITY IN BOXING AND ITS ECONOMY OF DESIRE

One plays football, one doesn't play boxing

Boxers are there to establish an absolute experience, a public accounting of the outermost limits of their beings: they will know, as few of us can know of ourselves, what physical and psychic power they possess - of how much, or how little, they are capable.

- Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing*

I don't know whether to fight him or fuck him.

- Robert De Niro as Jake La Motta
in *Raging Bull*

The Enigmatic Allure of Boxing

In the world of sport, boxing must surely be regarded as the height of masculine pursuits. Sport in all its variations has, in the period known as modernity, been a significant domain for the construction, negotiation and execution of a masculine identity severely loosened from its traditional ontological moorings. And boxing has been there all along undergoing many of the same kinds of transformation occurring in other fields of play yet maintaining a status all its own in many key ways. The purpose of this essay is to consider that ongoing trajectory in the development of the boxing world as it relates to practices of masculine embodiment within a wider social context of gender fluidity.

Since the first recorded prizefight of the modern era between a white British, Thomas Cribb and a black American, Tom Molineaux, in 1801 (Piper 1995: 71), pugilism, not unlike other sporting endeavours, has been an intense repository for the myriad of social anxieties inflicting particular places across historical moments. Dramas of race, nation,

class and masculinity (which has perhaps now ceded to the more general gender) have been vividly enacted in the sporting venue, but perhaps never so powerfully and convincingly as in the 'squared circle', that most basic and fundamental¹ of competition sites that gives license to unparalleled levels of sporting violence. In fact, the very severity of the risk of serious bodily harm incumbent upon the boxing confrontation ultimately problematizes its actual consideration as a legitimate sport. It is therefore bordering on the ironic and perhaps even the ridiculous that there should even be any question as to the authenticity of masculine achievement among the pugilistic corps. Yet the point of departure for this inquiry was in fact a contemplation of how both a discursive and practiced undermining of hegemonic masculine forms have afflicted that traditionally most robust of manly incarnations - the boxer/pugilist/fighter. Specifically, despite an almost intuitive awareness to the contrary, are there elements and components of boxing that directly or indirectly subvert, decenter or expose masculinity and render it unstable and perhaps even untenable as an identity trope?

The topic of boxing, although not quite constituting a library of literary and scholarly treatments, has enjoyed a fair dose of intellectual attention, and perhaps never quite so vigilantly as recently. This development alone should raise concern over its continued survival. Scholars and writers never seem so interested in something as when the rest of the world is ready to move on. Nevertheless, despite the relative spate of boxing writings, some even of a most accomplished stature², few if any have attempted a

¹George Foreman, former heavyweight champion, has astutely and famously assessed boxing as 'the sport to which all others aspire'.

²See for example Joyce Carol Oates' *On Boxing* (1994) and Gerald Early's *The Culture of Bruising* (1994).

thoroughgoing analysis of its masculine subverting potential and its gender performative dimensions. The burgeoning field of men's studies has generally troubled a unitary notion of masculinity with some success, including various excursions into the realm of athletics (e.g. Pronger 1990, Messner 1995 and Burstyn 1999). However, this body of writing has been relatively and conspicuously silent on the sporting discipline of boxing. Is it that boxing and its practitioners are somehow immune to a deconstructionist strategy of gender interrogation? Are boxers beyond reproach when it comes to proving one's manhood? The relative dearth of such ruminations even within the field of men's studies, which has ostensibly targeted all men and their practices as artifices of identity, would seem to suggest the affirmative. Yet such intellectual reluctance would appear to give credibility to a system of hegemonic masculine thought that privileges the destructive over other forms of embodied masculinity. If in fact gender formations are the unfinished, immanent projects purported to be since the advent of a feminist scholarship, then we must look to the extreme forms of gender embodiment allegedly impermeable to these philosophical assaults in order to convincingly establish the viability of such an epistemology and politics. Can and does a critical study of the hyper-masculine world of pugilism reveal gender ruptures, continuities and discontinuities that create discursive spaces for more fluid and unbounded configurations of gender to emerge?

Boxing for Redemption

If, as Joyce Carol Oates observes, 'one doesn't *play* boxing' (1994: 19) [*italics mine*], where does the impulse to lace up the gloves and go *mano a mano* stem from? Are the pleasures of physical combat so illusory that they cannot possibly form the motivation behind the pugilistic enterprise? Perhaps J. Glenn Gray is correct in arguing that the human capacity for renewal and construction is inextricably linked to our propensity for violence and destruction, and that the guilt-laden pleasures that ensue from the latter

should nonetheless remain implicated in a thorough understanding of the human condition:

How deeply is the impulse to destroy rooted and persistent in human nature? Are the imaginative visions of Empedocles and Freud true in conceiving that the destructive element in man and nature is as strong and recurrent as the conserving, erotic element? Or can our delight in destruction be channeled into other activities than the traditional one of warfare? We are not far advanced on the way to these answers. We do not know whether a peaceful society can be made attractive enough to wean men away from the appeals of battle (Gray 1992: 40).

Despite Gray's essentializing tendencies, his recognition that the experience of warfare can be a disturbing blend of pleasure and pain seems to hold some validity for the more contained confrontation between two men 'going to war' on each other.

Boxing folklore is riddled with tales of prospective fighters, emerging from the seamy underbellies of our urban landscapes, overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles to climb the ranks of the pugilistic profession so as to leave their mark upon the world. In another context³, Oates has stated that if there were no poverty there would probably be no boxing. Certainly the genealogy of boxing as deeply embedded within a social context of class and race subordination is without serious detractors⁴. Even Loic Wacquant's (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1998a, 1998b) extensive forays into the pugilistic subculture has only yielded a minor modification upon this thesis of a boxing underclass. Despite

³from a CBC radio documentary in the *Ideas* series

⁴It may be important to differentiate between boxing and prizefighting here. Although I tend to use the more generic 'boxing', this point is probably more applicable to professional prizefighting. Historically there has been some acceptance of and participation in boxing by the more affluent classes, but at a purely recreational, leisure level, as for example most recently in the UK public school system. Seen partially as an effective vehicle for the building of masculine character, the upper classes have had an ambivalent relationship towards boxing. For a thoughtful treatment of the subject, see Elliot J. Gorn's *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America* (1986).

his caveat that the most successful boxers come from the more stable and discipline-instilled working classes than from the more erratic, sub-proletariat pools of bodily resources (1992:226), the more fundamental claim of its concomitance with lower social stratification is demonstrably maintained. In other words, rarely does one find anyone from the higher socio-economic echelons frequenting the dark, dank bowels of the boxing gymnasium for vocational purposes.

War has always served as an apt metaphor for all manners of sport and certainly boxing is no exception. It is in fact its prime example. And while war serves boxing well as a metaphor for all its vernacular of 'throwing bombs' and missions of 'search and destroy', its inherent strategies of assault and even its all too frequent fatalities, unlike other sports, the conditions of warfare do not merely have a metaphorical affinity with the boxing world. The question is often asked, or at least implied, in boxing analyses, what kinds of conditions are necessary in order for the boxing identity to take shape. And just as the soldier is ultimately formed in conditions of battle, the ring warrior can only know his true mettle in similar circumstances of heightened aggression. Such conditions of course tend to extend well beyond the confines of the boxing ring. As Glenn Ligon has opined in response to Oates' provocative statements, 'I believe she is correct in suggesting that boxing is where battles are fought far larger than the immediate spectacle of two fighters in the ring' (1996:59). While a concerted effort should be made to refrain from painting all boxers with the same broad brush, the boxing world had seen its share of notorious participants in the 'sweet science' carrying their share of war wounds into pugilistic field of battle. Ignominious heavyweight champions such as Mike Tyson, Leon Spinks and Sonny Liston serve as constant reminders of the indelible impressions forged by conditions of socio-economic harshness upon the bodies of countless other aspiring champions in the formation of the boxing habitus.

Boxing, arguably more than any other sport, begins with a sense of lack. The conditions of socio-economic impoverishment that can be seen to propel the young combatant into the boxing arena should not only be viewed as a straight economic explanation for social transcendence. All too often, the knee-jerk rationale is offered that certain males box because it is one of the only available means to rise above present meager economic circumstances. And while this may in fact lie somewhere in the boxer's consciousness as he submerges into the quasi-ascetic lifestyle that is required of the serious practitioner, I doubt that it is a sufficient and adequate paradigm to capture all that impinges upon such a quest. As in most other sporting endeavours, the actual statistical chances of forging a viable vocational opportunity out of the pugilistic undertaking are infinitesimally slight. And most boxing practitioners, despite the inevitable occasional flight of fantasy to the contrary, are probably more keenly aware of this stark reality than the casual outside observer (even those who may write about the subject). Wacquant makes this point emphatically:

The fact is that there is a *romance of pugilism* that cannot be elucidated on the basis of ecological antecedents and putative benefits of prizefighting. Given how little money most fighters earn and the multifold privations they must endure in the monastic day-to-day preparation for fleeting moments of glory or agony in the squared circle, economic payoffs fall woefully short of accounting for the seduction of boxing (1995a:492) (*italics his*).

And while Wacquant goes on to extol the other fundamental motivating factors of the pugilistic enterprise of a more sensual and expressive nature, which assuredly do play a role and will be further elaborated upon later, he tends to bypass or minimize an important dimension which is typically neglected in boxing discourses, perhaps due to its rather contentious nature in this context, but one which forms the cornerstone of this particular boxing analysis. If one of the primary avenues of masculine development in our culture is contingent upon a level of economic and socio- political attainment, then it

can safely be argued that the vast majority of boxers, that as has been already thoroughly established emerge from the urban underclasses, and at that mostly comprising of ethnic and racial minorities, enter the pugilistic field with an embattled sense of their own masculinity. Boxing may provide a salient opportunity to redeem whatever sense of enfeebled masculinity that may afflict the typical inner city/ghetto dweller that is for all intents and purposes economically, socially and politically excluded from more socially sanctioned avenues of masculine embodiment that primarily consist of class supremacy. Anne McClintock (1995) reminds us that the British colonial project in black Africa did not merely instill its political hegemony through the exclusive wielding of the trope of race to create a sense of inferiority in the African consciousness, but it also provocatively intersected with discourses of gender to produce a feminized sense of African male identity.

Boxing for redemption is a theme that has been appropriated and explored by a plethora of narratives that have cut across genres and mediums, but perhaps none so thoroughly as in the Hollywood film. And despite some of its more unfortunate renditions (e.g. *Rocky 2* through to... what number are we at now?), it has maintained a level of dramatic appeal and resonance that renders one hardpressed to find a rival. Two recent noteworthy contributions to this oeuvre are *The Hurricane* and the somewhat anomalous (due to its documentary status), but Hollywood- recognized in light of its recent Oscar nod, *On the Ropes*. Both films feature protagonists of color, unlike some of the formerly more heralded predecessors of the genre such as *Raging Bull* and *Somebody Up There Likes Me* which tell the tales of white boxers (or to be more exact Italian-American - often regarded in popular and racist discourse as the missing link between the Negroid and Caucasian races⁵) also struggling for different but similar

⁵As an Italian-Canadian who grew up in fairly heavily populated Italian enclaves of

personal and social redemptions, who experience varying levels of success in the ring while their outer worlds are riddled by daily trials and tribulations that threaten to send the precarious lives they have etched out for themselves cascading perilously down upon them.

In *The Hurricane*, the protagonist Ruben Carter, played rivetingly by Denzel Washington, undergoes the all too familiar journey of the poor, urban black youth driven to a life of almost exclusive incarceration in the juvenile halls of his personal hell only to emerge as a well-tuned fighting machine. The preceding sets the backdrop to an eventual rise in the ranks of world professional middleweight boxing. His ultimate ranking as the number one contender in the world with the likely, if not inevitable, title shot that is to ensue is suddenly and almost arbitrarily yanked out from under him in the erroneous murder charges that befall him and eventually return him to the life of incarceration that is deemed to have been instrumental in his evolution as a merciless ring warrior. The intermittent court battles to 'set the record straight' that pepper his some twenty odd years of wrongful conviction always invite and expose the stigma of the boxer as 'killing machine' in a context designed to judge the merits of the murderer label imposed upon him. Time and time again, despite weak prosecutorial evidence, the original verdict of guilty is maintained. It is only when an older, more pacified Ruben Carter has all but abandoned his legal battles for personal vindication and has rather embraced a life of inner peace and solitude through his spiritual delvings into Buddhism and meditation, that circumstances conspire to afford him one final and successful stab at freedom. The film's

Montreal, my first exposure to the possibility that Italians may not be considered entirely white by other Canadians occurred as a recent University graduate who moved to Sault Ste. Marie, On. (also consisting of a sizable Italian-Canadian population) for employment purposes in the young offender services field when one particular client said while exchanging stories of boyhood street hockey games, 'On my street, we would usually play the *whites* versus the Italians'.

theme is succinctly articulated by a resolute Carter awaiting the jury's verdict in the crucial and final trial when speaking to a young African American boy aptly named Lezra (short for Lazerus, he who rises from the dead in Christian mythology) who serves as Carter's kindred spirit, confidant and eventual catalyst in the final bid for juridical emancipation: 'Hate put me in here and love is gonna bust me out!'

The film has enjoyed a substantial amount of both critical and box office attention. The critical attention has focused on the reliability of the film's adaptation of the off-screen Carter's rendition of the facts of his story and the case involved. The film has undergone a kind of civil trial of its own in terms of its accused liberality with 'the truth', which many observers have interpreted the recent Oscar snub as evidence of a guilty verdict. All the controversy surrounding the film has deflected much of the attention away from an engagement with its artistic merits as a cinematic work. Aside from the near-unanimous kudos that Denzel Washington has won for his stalwart performance, very little of worth has been said about the film as a body of work that clearly speaks to the issue of a negotiated masculinity in the formation of the boxing habitus.

An early scene in the film, and one easily overlooked for its significance, shows a pre-adolescent Carter playing with his childhood buddies in some isolated, litter-strewn lot when a middle-aged, white male in full business suit regalia luridly approaching the all black children makes sexual overtures towards one of the more naive boys. When the young Carter sees that his peer's efforts to free himself from the clutches of the sexual predator are in vain, he resorts to breaking an empty beer bottle over the man's head in aid of his friend. This scenario is portrayed as leading to Carter's initial introduction into a draconian criminal justice system, symbolized by one particular 'bad cop' (almost predictably of the Italian-American persuasion) in the film, that is from that point on loathe to release Carter from its own menacing clutches of 'justice'. From the outset, the sexual advances of the embodiment of white oppression set up a challenge to Carter's

sense of his own masculinity by being a source of desire and experiencing weakness at the hands of another male. He responds in valiant masculine terms, however, by proving competence in the arena of violence, only to subject himself to a deeper form of establishment oppression and custodianship that leaves him with only his capacity for violence as a psychic salve against the overwhelming burden of powerlessness in his life. In rather didactic terms, the film's ultimate resolution suggests that the form of masculinity pursued by Carter in his development as a boxer tends to erect its own pillars of detainment that leave one vulnerable to the social condemnations of 'legitimate' society. Boxing may allay some of the anxieties and insecurities around masculinity that pervade the psyches of those reserve armies of disenfranchised males all but precluded from more palatable avenues of achieving masculine embodiment, but not without exposing one to other more pernicious forms of gender volatility.

On the Ropes is a feature length documentary centered around a Bedford-Stuyvestant community center, in the inner-city of New York, in which an ex-con, former fighter runs a boxing gym, training and mentoring young hopefuls in the ways of boxing and life. In somewhat atypical, yet equally dramatic, fashion the documentary traces the turbulent lives of three young boxing apprentices as they try to navigate the treacherous waters of their lives in and out of the ring. The most captivating and endearing of the three narratives is about a female boxer attempting to capture the New York Golden Gloves amateur championships as a precursor to her entry into the ranks of women's prizefighting while simultaneously facing charges of drug possession. In a similar vein to the Carter story, her involvement in the courts is portrayed rather sympathetically in her favour despite some ambiguities in her story around alleged attempts to dispose of the crack cocaine belonging to her uncle found in the apartment they share. Her saga of pugilistic promise amid personal circumstances of deprivation and despair conjures all of

the familiar themes of boxing for redemption that have persisted in the boxing mystique since time immemorial. However, her female identity raises interesting and evocative contradictions and tensions in light of the observation of boxing as serving masculine redemption.

Female boxing, despite its surprisingly long history⁶, is only now beginning to gain some status as a legitimate female sport, if not as an outright legitimate sport. What does this do to the seemingly intransigent relationship between masculinity and boxing? We see through the female boxer in *On the Ropes* that despite her ostensible heterosexuality (this is maintained in the film by demonstrating her fecundity - she has two teenage daughters - and the non-platonic relationship that develops with a fellow male boxer in the gym, also featured in the film, when they develop a letter correspondence after she is sentenced to a prison term for her drug charges), she is able to summon the same kinds of physical grit, determination, discipline and, most importantly, capacities to inflict punishment and violence upon her ring adversaries that have traditionally been regarded as a male preserve (Dunning 1986a). By placing a woman in the unfamiliar role of boxing protagonist, the film seriously undermines the sanctimonious relationship between boxing and masculinity in several ways:

⁶"Few people are aware that women's boxing - or more correctly, prizefighting - can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The early bareknuckles contests were crude and bloody - fights to the finish in a harsh world in which the bodies of working women were imbued with strength and aggression, similar to the physical capital of working men. In London from the 1720's onwards, bouts were staged between women from the labouring trades in search of money and status. Some of them became well-known and their feats are recorded - for example, we read about The Famous Boxing Woman of Billingsgate, The Fighting Ass-Driver from Stoke Newington, A Female Boxing Blacksmith, The Vendor of Sprats, The Market Woman, The City Championess, The Hiberian Heroine and Bruising Peg" (Hargreaves 1996: 125).

1. If women are capable of mobilizing and instrumentally deploying components of the masculine trope not just in boxing, nor just sport, but in other social arenas as well, then what does this reveal about the unitary and fixed notion of masculinity?
2. If gender markers are mobile and circulating currencies of exchange in the gendering economy of desire, are there feminizing components that pervade the construction of the boxing habitus?
3. Specifically, are there dimensions of the boxing vocation, what Wacquant has referred to as 'an endless ascesis' (1992:237), that can be interpreted as verging on the feminine or at least as serving to illuminate and elucidate the ineffable gender ambiguity of the male boxing practitioner?

Corpus Pugilistica

For all intents and purposes, a boxer is his body. Like other athletes, a boxer's success is deeply contingent upon the transformation of the raw materials of one's corporeal endowments into a polished and primed athletic capital suitable for sporting transaction. But rather exceptionally, the sheer minimalism and lack of equipment mediation inherent to the boxing contest elevates the very centrality of the boxer's body in his/her quest for victory. Few other modern sporting disciplines do entirely or virtually without other equipment involvement as in sticks, balls or nets in the execution of the structured, codified regulations of the contest at hand. Other sports that share boxing's minimalism to a certain extent tend to veer towards the ancient contests of running and jumping that can be loosely categorized under the rubric of Track and Field, surviving primarily through the contemporary revival of the Greek Olympic tradition. Despite some of the apparent affinities between track and field events and boxing on the level of simplicity and minimalism, significant departures tend to emerge upon closer scrutiny. While both disciplines' elision of extensive equipment mediation necessitates elevated levels of

bodily discipline and competence, the deployment of the body in the respective fields differs dramatically. In a sense, while the ostensible elision of equipment in the boxing enterprise, other than the requisite pair of gloves, is maintained, a more accurate description of the mechanics of boxing would suggest that the boxer's body becomes equipment. And not just the kind of equipment that the runner's legs can be said to constitute. But rather, as a combat sport in which the main objective is to incapacitate one's opponent, temporarily or permanently if need be, to terminate the continued threat of assault by one's opponent, the fists become one's weapons and the body one's armour. As Wacquant's (1998a:332) research demonstrates, the weapon/armour analogy seems to be particularly resonant among the very members of the pugilistic profession themselves:

It's my tool, my *weapon* (italics his). My weapon, and I have to keep my weapon oiled. When I work out, I'm oilin' my weapon. When I live clean, I'm keepin' my weapon clean. (his eyes lightening with glee) When I fight, I'm using' my weapon. (black heavyweight, 27, supported by manager)

I look at my body as a shield, as a *armoured shield* (all italics his): it has to be *hard*. uh, I want to be *shiny* where, that it *glows* and shows that, you

know, when this other fighter looks at me, that I'm a well-tuned conditioned athlete, you know, that, uh, you're gonna have to really have somethin to *go through me* - I mean, this is my *barrier* and you're just not gonna get in and run me over, and so forth. (black middleweight, 29, stockman)

The centrality of the boxer's body in the overall constitution of his self- worth becomes immediately apparent in many other key aspects of his demeanour. Contrary to commonly held beliefs about the lack of aesthetic concern in the boxer's corporeal presentation, much like the bodybuilder (who will be further discussed in this thesis), the boxer's management of his physical capital of an ornamental⁷ variety can be seen to play

⁷This term is partially borrowed from Susan Faludi's most recent work *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Male* (1999) where she coins the term 'ornamental masculinity' to describe what she sees as a pervasively developing and disturbing form of masculinity that is as preoccupied with personal aestheticizing practices as women have traditionally

a not insignificant role in both the level of a boxer's self-gratification and in his actual professional achievements. "Boxers are exceedingly conscious of their outward appearance and want to look trim, taut and 'hard'. All the more since theirs is a performance craft that, by definition, submits them to the live visual appreciation of the consuming public" (Wacquant 1998a:334).

In another of Wacquant's multiple studies of the boxing world, his depiction of the matchmaker as ultimate arbiter of which fights materialize and, consequently, which fighters can hope to see a paycheck, reveals that the physical appearance of the boxer plays an almost equally important role in being selected for a boxing card as sheer ability does (1998b). As a live and/or televised spectacle of scantily clad combatants in a stage-like venue, the visual and aesthetic appeal of the boxing contest and its protagonists should not be overlooked, and can also be seen to share intrinsically some of the theatricalities of its bastard cousin - professional wrestling .

The boxer's mind, by contrast, is relegated to the nether regions of significance in his bid for combative supremacy. Firstly, the very nature of modern prizefighting as a 'headhunting' sport subjects the mind/brain of the boxer to unimaginable levels of risk of deterioration and annihilation. Sheard (1997) argues that despite undergoing a 'sportization process' in which reforms such as the introduction of padded gloves, a maximum of twelve three-minute rounds and a point-scoring system among others are ostensibly consistent with a general Eliasian scheme of increased social civilization, the practical results of such developments in the sport are to focus increased attention on the head of one's opponent to maximize the potential damage one can wreak in the restricted allotment of time and facilitated by the hand-protecting gloves. thus producing a much

been.

more neurologically risky enterprise. The ‘punch drunk’ syndrome (or pugilistica dementia), an all too common condition among seasoned boxers where the prolonged rattling of the brain inside the cranium from sustained blows to the head produces Parkinson’s-like symptoms of slurred speech and foot-dragging, among other debilitating conditions, can be seen as a direct confirmation of the mental abuse and neglect inherent to the boxing enterprise. Of course, the irony of such an observation is that, on some levels, boxing can be seen as that most cerebral of sporting pursuits. Often referred to as the ‘sweet science’, boxing has drawn many parallels with chess in requiring significant doses of strategic and contemplative injections in order to competently dispose of one’s opponent in the ring, challenging the popular characterization of the sport as a mindless release of unbridled aggression. Perhaps no boxer personifies more convincingly the image of the ring artist/genius/architect than Muhammad Ali. His once pugilistic mastery in the ring coupled with his inimitable verbal and charismatic prowess outside the ring render his present battle with the ultimate boxing demon, pugilistica dementia, all the more tragic.

And though the mind is unquestionably and necessarily implicated in the boxing encounter, there is simultaneously a dimension of non or pre-cognition that can be seen to imbue the successful boxing transmogrification. If we consider the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu, we will see that it has particular relevance to an understanding of the formation of the boxing identity. As Bourdieu argues that agents or subjects in a given environmental context, to which he refers as ‘the field’, engage in a process of corporeal internalization of the rules or structures that govern the effective functioning of that given field, a level of social competence is formed in the body of the agent that he has termed the ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1990). The complete and thorough immersion into the boxing field requires the same kind of bodily competence and agency to occur. A boxer’s regime is so physically demanding and exhaustive, that it can be seen to instill a kind of bodily

intelligence that is assuredly present in other sporting domains, just simply in less tangible form. There is an expression that is common in basketball parlance known as 'being in the zone', equally applicable to most sporting disciplines, that somewhat captures that state of mindless execution in which one's athletic proficiency seems to be at its most heightened, where one doesn't actively think about one's next move, almost as though an 'automatic pilot' switch has been activated. The daily ritual of running, skipping, punching, sparring and calisthenics, along with the other more masochistic dimensions of the typical fight preparation regimen such as dropping a medicine ball on one's stomach to help absorb body blows, or the dietary and sexual privations (the latter despite sound medical evidence suggesting its futility), or even soaking one's head in brine to toughen the skin so as to prevent cutting during a bout⁸, tends to produce a mind - body split (or convergence, depending on one's philosophical orientation), more intense than most other sporting disciplines. The following anecdote told by Gene Tunney, former world heavyweight champion, lends dramatic credence to a characterization of boxing as necessitating a corporeal agency unprecedented in other social arenas:

I went into a clinch with my head down and my partner's head came up and butted me over the left eye, cutting and dazing me badly. Then he stepped back and swung his right against my jaw with every bit of his power. It landed flush and stiffened me where I stood. Without going down or staggering, I lost all consciousness, but instinctively proceeded to knock him out. Another sparring partner entered the ring. We boxed three rounds, I have no recollection of this (quoted in Wacquant 1992:247).

The extreme intensity and blazing rapidity of the punching flurries that erupt during the boxing standoff obviate a mechanical mastery of one's bodily repertoire in order to

⁸See Jeffrey T. Sammons' interesting historical treatment of boxing in *Beyond the Ring* (1988), where he provides a colourful depiction of Joe Frazier's (a notorious bleeder) resortment to this technique in preparation for the inevitable slugfests that his boxing style tended to engender.

survive and vanquish the oncoming barrage that an overly cerebral response in such moments of unyielding mercilessness would surely prove counter-productive. As Wacquant's comments suggest, in a manner reminiscent of Jane Gallop's treatise in *Thinking Through the Body* (1988), a boxer's body must take on all of the agentic qualities of adaptation that have traditionally been endowed to the mind of the Western, rational subject:

What we may call *body work* (italics his) - by analogy with Arlie Hochschild's notion of 'emotion work' - thus consists of a highly intensive and finely regulated manipulation of the organism whose aim is to imprint into the bodily schema of the fighter postural sets, patterns of movement, and subjective emotional-cognitive states that make him into a conversant practitioner of the Sweet science of bruising. It is a form of 'practical labor' in that it involves the exercise of an intelligence that comes into its own in communication with the concrete and actual realities of its natural setting and object. And it practically reorganizes the entire corporeal field of the fighter, bringing to prominence certain organs and abilities and making others recede, transforming not only the physique of the boxer but also his 'body-sense', the consciousness he has of his organism and, through this changed body, of the world about him (1995b:73).

Customary to invocations of Bourdieuan schemes to transcend the sterile structure/agency deadlock that permeates much of contemporary social theory, the attempt to grasp the mechanics of the development of agentic competence in a structured field leaves one struggling to find the adequate terms for such elucidation and typically resorting to familiar, yet perhaps deficient, tropes such as 'consciousness' and 'intelligence'. Manifestly, Bourdieu's own coinage of the expression 'a feel for the game' more resolutely captures the truncated involvement of the mental capacities in the formation of the social habitus, of which boxing is pre-eminently qualified. The boxer's competence and mastery of his veritable arsenal of techniques, movements and punches tend to defy any rational, articulate awareness or attempts to render amenable to verbal

disclosure, as most post-fight interviews prompting the winner to explain his performance tend to reveal in frustrating fashion. The passionate boxing observer, Norman Mailer, has commented, 'There are languages of the body. And prizefighting is one of them.

There is no attempting to comprehend a prizefighter unless we are willing to recognize that he speaks with a command of the body which is as detached, subtle and comprehensive in its intelligence as any exercise of mind...' (1971:17). Perhaps the following passage from Bourdieu himself most eloquently elaborates the pre-cognitive nature of the boxing habitus: "Practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be sensible, that is informed by a common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (1990:69).

As we can see, the tenuous relationship that the mind holds in the boxing cosmology raises important ruptures in Western Cartesian conceptions of sexual dimorphism equating male subjectivity more closely with the mind and female subjectivity with the body. The male boxer, in his near total bodily identification, offers palpably transgressive material to the sustained maintenance of such a bifurcation. In what is about to follow, we will consider other important facets of the pugilistic undertaking that seriously raise the impermeable masculinity of the boxing subject into a questionable light.

Regulating Boxing Desire

To begin with, in many key ways, a boxer's body and desires are not his own. As previously alluded to, the role of the boxing promoter or matchmaker is paramount in the general economy of the boxing industry. He determines who fights whom, when and what the remuneration details will consist of. The amount of power and influence he commands in this milieu is without rival. The most readily adopted analogy to connote

the unmitigated control that the promoter exercises in the boxing economy is that of pimp. As Wacquant's research into this area has vividly demonstrated, the matchmaker's presence evokes visceral responses of rage and scorn among the preponderance of the prizefighting corps composed of middle rung journeymen (as opposed to the top rung contenders, comers and champions or bottom rung 'bums' and 'has-beens') that essentially supply a steady pool of competent but disposable combatants for the sustaining of public interest in the boxing spectacle (1998a). The steady stream of pejoratives and accusations that are directed at the matchmaker by reams of boxers, to the effect of withholding adequate financial compensation on a regular basis to enlisted fighters and setting up two unequally skilled practitioners for the purposes of inflating an up-and-comer's professional record at the risk of exposing the patsy to serious and permanent physical harm among many others, suggests a less than conciliatory relationship. In fact, the level of economic and professional coercion exerted by the typical promoter, according to fighters, places the boxer in an unusually feminizing and self-professed position of whore to the promoter's pimp. "It's all the same: you lose you're gone. That's how it is. *Just like a whore* (italics his): you put money in their pocket and that's it, they move on to see the next one you know. That's why I say I never let my kid box" (Wilfredo, Puerto-Rican lightweight, 24, six-year pro) (Wacquant 1998b:28).

Other than the paternal and proprietary position that the boxing promoter holds over the boxer's own body by typically tossing nominal sums of money his way in exchange for intense bodily sacrifice and carnage put on public display for leering audiences, the boxer becomes alienated from his own body and desires in other paradoxically masculine ways. As previously mentioned, the boxing dictum that sexual contact with a woman (the fact that the contact could be with a man is probably never even broached) anywhere

from two months or less leading up to a fight can seriously sap a fighter of significant levels of strength and stamina is still widely accepted and at least ostensibly adhered to. The near total eschewal of the feminine in the boxer's life not only brings into materiality psychoanalytic understandings of masculine formation through the necessary sublimation of all that is feminine in the male psychic constitution, but also tends to generate a highly male dominated and homosocial boxing culture. The kind of relationship that tends to emerge between boxer and trainer/manager can be seen to form a kind of pseudo-marriage where the extreme involvement and supervision of the trainer in the boxer's life raises obvious affinities with that of the traditional maternalistic wife role. Not only do trainers typically query fighters on a regular basis with regard to the heavily prohibited sexual indulgences prior to a fight, they also maintain an intense surveillance over dietary restrictions, training diligence, sleeping patterns and virtually every other minute aspect of the boxer's life that can be seen to play the slightest role in a boxer's success (Wacquant 1998a: 343).

The extreme intimacy and social proximity that such intense scrutiny and surveillance of a boxer's daily regimen necessitates may even, in some cases, generate co-habitational living arrangements between boxer and manager to logistically simplify the process, bringing into even greater visibility the pseudo-marriage bond that is said to form. Under such living arrangements, a manager can more successfully ensure proper dietary proscriptions by, for example, preparing the low-fat, high protein meals himself for his protege and directly observe the 'required' sexual abstinence on the part of the fighter. The following passage illustrates quite clearly the not uncommonly intimate nature of the boxer-manager relationship:

Trainers will go to extremes to monitor the 'cleanliness' of their fighters on this count, questioning them (and their partner) point blank about their nocturnal intercourse, checking on their extramarital entanglements, and sleeping in the same bedroom as their charge

when they take to the road ('old timers' have been known to sleep in the *same bed* (italics his) as their fighter to make sure they do not elope in the middle of the night) (Wacquant 1998a:343).

While the scientific evidence around the efficacy of sexual abstinence for boxing proficiency is fairly unequivocal in its disavowal, boxers and particularly their managers/trainers are still so solidly convinced of its value that it begs further analysis. Another reading of the strict, suppressive conditions of boxing preparation may offer not simply a physiologico-biological rationale for the continued practice of such privations, but may alternatively look to the psychologico-emotional productiveness of such rituals. The exhaustive and intense regimen of daily privations combined with immensely exasperating training that make up the boxer's lived reality may serve to channel and redirect all the required emotional and psychic energy that can be mustered up to be ultimately administered, if only antagonistically, towards one's fellow combatant, thus completing the nearly exclusive circle of homosocial interaction. In a trainer's informal knowledge of the boxer's bodily mechanics, he may be more implicitly and explicitly aware of the untold value of keeping a boxer 'lean and mean' through these daily rituals of desire suppression, of which dietary restrictions, although certainly scientifically validated for other reasons, are equally effective. Many a boxing trainer and expert has complained of a boxer displaying all of the technical skills and proficiency of a world champion but lacking in those less tangible qualities that go into the making of a true 'ring warrior' - 'heart' and 'killer instinct'. In a percussive sport that requires an athlete to pummel an opponent into physical incapacitation by finding and exploiting any possible source of weakness that is available, it would appear that being able to access a

callous and vicious emotional state during a boxing contest is an attribute that a pugilist can hardly do without⁹.

Within the context of the boxing exhibition itself, the sublimated and redirected libidinal energy, or what Wacquant refers to as '*libido pugilistica*' (1998a:345), is given the opportunity to be released and unleashed upon the body of the other. And although its conversion into a destructive and annihilatory force should clearly not be underestimated, as has been amply shown, its reduction to mere thanatos to the exclusion of the erotic and sensual dimensions of the boxing submersion would be equally erroneous. From its inception, the entry into the cradle of the boxing civilization, the gym, is an experience filled with sensual and affirming satisfactions of the panoply of sights, smells and sounds that permeate the environment. From the pungent odours of the perspiring bodies, to the rhythmic sounds of the punching, skipping and breathing to the graceful elegance of dancing warriors in full view, the boxing regimen provides ineluctable corporeal pleasure. From the moment of the dual bodily clash, the physical proximity of the well-honed, muscular, active ring gladiators engaged in a spectacle of supreme bodily competence and control, consisting typically of grabbing, clutching and embracing (embraces so close that as the last Tyson-Holyfield bout demonstrates one can literally bite the other's ear off) can elicit unanticipated sexual energy and attention whose trajectory is polysemous. The physical attractiveness that is sometimes achieved in the spartan and disciplined lifestyle of the boxer, despite the frequent facial

⁹A famous example of such emotional detachment for the physical welfare of a boxer's adversary occurred during Sugar Ray Robinson's reign as middleweight champion of the world after he killed an opponent, as sporadically happens in the sport, and was asked during some commission struck to consider the safety of modern prizefighting if he was aware of his opponent's state of physical jeopardy, to which he responded rather caustically, but ultimately incisively, that it was his job to place ring opponents in a state of physical jeopardy.

disfigurements that develop, and ostentatiously displayed in the boxing arena before large and adoring crowds, exemplified by such contemporary poster boys as Lennox Lewis and Oscar de la Hoya, places the male boxer in a discrepant, sexually passive position. The constant and vociferous self-aggrandizements that Muhammad Ali is famous for, one of which is his mantra 'I am sooo pretty!', is given particularly resplendent validation by one male boxing aficionado: "Ali was also stunningly handsome. One sportswriter wrote, that he 'glowed, sort of a strange colour'. His physical beauty penetrated to a region of my mind just beginning to be aware of my desire for the bodies of other men and seeing his image on TV or in the print media invariably caused me to skip a breath" (Ligon, 1994:59).

The Performativity of Masculinity in Boxing

As women's boxing begins to occupy greater prominence in the sporting cultural landscape¹⁰, we are simultaneously seeing the rising popularity of other sports such as Ultimate Fighting or the many forms of Extreme sports that can be seen to attempt to procure the status of supreme masculine embodiment that professional boxing may have once held. Such reactionary responses to greater female encroachment into the male dominated arena of athletics suggests as others have already observed, that hegemonic masculine formations seem deeply imbricated with social practices that attempt to construct unambiguous masculinity at the expense of feminine subjugation. The preceding chapter was meant to demonstrate how such attempts to erect complete and impregnable monuments to masculinity, of which boxing here is touted as pre-eminent example, are always necessarily riddled with cracks and apertures that

¹⁰Muhammad Ali's daughter's recent entry into women's prizefighting has invited more media attention to this burgeoning sport industry than was ever previously achieved.

threaten to expose and collapse the precariousness of the project. Not only are women amply displaying through boxing as well as other sporting disciplines the myth that only the male body can achieve the kinds of physical extremes previously thought antithetical to a female corporeality, but are also confirming in visceral form that the trope of masculinity, rather than a static, stable entity embedded solely in the bodies of sexually identified males is a circulating discursive energy that can be procured and deployed in a myriad of social practices. And by extension, that even the seemingly most virile of social agents can and do display moments and aspects of feminine embodiment despite the extreme forms of denial that such psychic anxieties may engender, of which the male boxer can be seen to represent.

It is as Judith Butler's work convincingly reveals. gender performativity is the most palpable indictment of the fragmentary and unstable nature of a fixed gender identity if only through its translucent efforts to render natural what is manifestly seen to be culturally inscribed. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), she attempts to extend Foucault's claim that stable and fixed gender categories that emerged in modernity through a general 'will to knowledge' and that saw the proliferation of the 'psy' sciences as its main adherents, work to constrain the possibilities of existence on the gendered lives of modern subjects. For Foucault (1980b), the appropriate political strategy against such an overdetermined condition of gender identity is to seek and create social spaces and opportunities for asexual subjectivities to emerge, where the power of 'maleness', 'femaleness', 'homosexuality', etc. is severely undermined. Butler looks to *Herculine Barbin* (1980c), the journals of an hermaphrodite edited and published by Foucault, to consider the political tenability of what she clearly deduces as perhaps one of Foucault's few moments of romantic and idealistic indulgences with regard to the subject of the book. In suggesting as he does in *The History of Sexuality* (1980b:31) the possibility of 'innocent' and 'bucolic' pleasures that pre-exist the onset of a normalizing sexuality in which the

hermaphroditic Herculine, discursively suspended somewhere free of the gender binary, embodies for Foucault, he is effectively contradicting his own fundamental claim that all subjects, including sexual ones, are always situated historically within matrices of power. Butler, ever leery of even the occasional lapse into a pre-discursive, foundational paradigm, seeks to probe the only material corroboration of gender ontology at our disposal - the performativity itself. Hence the invocation to various forms of camp and drag which rather than futilely searching for alternatives to the present limitation on sexual possibilities, alternatives that as Butler astutely identifies in her critique of Monique Wittig's advocacy of lesbianism can conceivably generate its own hierarchies (p.128), appropriates familiar gender tropes and iconographies and subverts their hegemony by rendering visible their constitutive elements and thus ultimately their irony.

The extreme irony of boxing lies in its very convincing display of a hegemonic masculinity. It's simply harder to laugh at boxers than it is at female impersonators because the bleeding and bruising tend to distract us from the gender playing that is occurring. Perhaps the intensity of the boxing drama is coextensive with the need on the part of its practitioners to enact a socially sanctioned masculinity, producing a more violent and thus, it is hoped, a more convincing display of gender authenticity than other athletes ostensibly require. Its compellingness, however seductive it may be, cannot entirely obfuscate the performativity of the boxing spectacle, as we have seen throughout this chapter. Just as the female impersonator transforms his/her physical appearance to conform to social expectations of a mythical femininity, the male boxer undergoes a similar process of corporeal acquisition and privation in order to project this image of transcendent masculinity. The comedy that is all gender performances, however, is tinged with a profound blackness in boxing for it inevitably destroys what it sows. Joyce Carol Oates' rather definitive remarks regarding the troublesome status of boxing as sport only lends confirmation to its annihilatory cosmology: 'If boxing is a sport it is the most tragic

of all sports because more than any human activity it consumes the very excellence it displays - its drama is this very consumption. To expend oneself in fighting the greatest fight of one's life is to begin by necessity the downward turn that next time may be a plunge, an abrupt fall into the abyss' (1994:16). In this regard, it is perhaps Foucault who prevails in requiring historically discontinuous spaces for subjective reconstructions as opposed to Butler's ironic subversions of what already exists, as boxing's integral nihilism paves the way for new forms of masculinity to emerge in sports and beyond through the liquidation of an ossified hegemonic masculinity that desperately clings to a compelling, but fading, boxing incarnation.

In the succeeding chapters, we will consider two other sports where the feminine is not nearly as successfully disavowed, even if only parodically, navigating us more steadfastly towards immanent ports of masculinity along this ceaseless excursion into gender topography.

**Chapter 2: 'THE BEAUTIFUL GAME': EUROPEAN FOOTBALL, ITS
SPORTING DERIVATIVES AND SPATIAL ASSERTIONS
OF MASCULINITY**

*Football is all very well as a game for rough girls, but it is hardly
suitable for delicate boys.*

- Oscar Wilde

The game of soccer¹ has, in the twentieth century, been crowned the 'the world's game', signifying its unparalleled international popularity within the burgeoning global sports industry. The triumph of soccer over other sports in capturing the world's imagination presents certain analytical and epistemological concerns in terms of a hypothetical context in which sport is postulated as a material and discursive forum for the social production and consumption of masculinity. While conceding that soccer, like most other sports, incorporates a spectrum of styles, strategies and readings ranging from at one end, soft/feminine to the other, hard/masculine, it has, particularly within the North American context, been located further removed from the masculine extreme than for example hockey, boxing and even its historical brethren rugby and football. Therefore, an understanding of the already impressive yet ever increasing allure of sport in this Olympic year as a ritualized remnant of an eroding bounded and essential masculinity in the new, post-industrial order is sorely hard-pressed to convincingly account for soccer's global embrace (despite North America's fickle ambivalence).

Of course, no account of soccer's (or anything else's for that matter) popularity can ever be entirely definitive, as such matters are always at best speculative and finally beyond any rational schema of explanation. It is perhaps precisely the irrational which is

¹Because I will also be referring to American Football and Rugby Football in this chapter, I will use 'soccer' to distinguish it from its sports namesakes.

most sought after in sport - the opportunity to cheer wildly, to temporarily surrender oneself to unbridled emotion and to transcend, albeit briefly, the mundane and engage in quasi-religious worship². Certainly, soccer is not lacking in the spectatorial intensity described here. In fact, soccer fans, rightly or wrongly, have been tarnished by the extreme actions and sentiments of certain among its aggregate inviting a significant body of attention, not the least of which academic, to a social topic of interest loosely falling under the rubric of 'hooliganism'. Fan behaviour in soccer has become so notorious, sometimes overshadowing the very events on the field itself, that a not insignificant portion of this study will be devoted to the role of the spectator in the soccer universe and what this may reveal with regards to masculinity.

Though much has been written and said about the soccer fan(atic), particularly of the hooligan variety, I should like to devote more attention to the dynamics transpiring among the males, and increasingly the females, scattered (or perhaps more accurately positioned) about the soccer pitch. Sports in general have drawn perennial analogy with the mechanics of warfare, and soccer is no exception. However, in contrast to boxing (war's greatest athletic metaphor), in which the confrontational aspect is drawn out in bloodied form, soccer's affinity with warfare is restricted to the territorial and spatial dimensions of the game. As a game predicated upon the advancement of a soccer ball across an expansive playing surface with the ultimate objective of penetrating the opposing team's goal area, territorial acquisition and spatial dominance become crucially, but as we will see when compared to sports like football and rugby, not singularly important.

² See Dunning and Elias (1986).

The fact that mere territorial incursion is not sufficient to insure victory in soccer invites inquiry into a component of its composition (particularly at the elite level) that is suggested here as being integral to the (mis)representation of soccer as a 'soft' sport, but that can also at least partially account for its unrivaled popularity - what for lack of a better term I shall refer to as 'flare'. By flare I am referring to creativity, skill, spontaneity, artistry, brilliance and finesse among other superlatives. What separates soccer from most other games, in which I can only see basketball as approaching its jazz-like improvisations of athleticism, is precisely what may invite the play of masculinity to its most salient sporting drama.

Historical Thrusts of Ball Games:

Soccer's popular characterization as a democratic sport finds historical confirmation in its descent from the 'folk games' of late medieval/early modern Europe (Dunning 1999: 50). Unlike the other categories of sport widely practiced in that era - hunting and archery - 'folk games' such as 'camp ball' or 'hurling' in Britain, 'la soule' in France and 'gioco del pugno' (game of the fist) in Italy were not restricted to certain elite segments of the population. Despite regional variations, these 'folk games' shared the basic objective of moving something resembling a ball across some spatially designated zone consisting of anything from town streets to open country. While the movement of the ball in these games entailed a diversity of strategies ranging from carrying to throwing to hitting with sticks in addition to kicking, the fundamental conceptual and physical character of contemporary soccer, inviting as it does mass interest and participation³, can nonetheless be traced back to these early antecedents.

³ Eric Dunning (1999:50) claims that participants in these 'folk games' were sometimes numbered in excess of a thousand.

Competing national claims to sporting invention seems like an inevitable chapter in every sport's narrative. Soccer's origins are no less contentious or hotly debated. While evidence for the existence of games resembling present-day soccer have been associated with cultures as ancient as the Greeks and the Chinese, the British claim to modern soccer's genesis represents the most coherent and convincing account of the evolution of a seemingly pervasive form of leisure activity into a formalized, rule-bound contest of athletic prowess. And though Italy's 'calcio' (still the Italian name for soccer), may actually predate Britain's formalization of soccer into an exclusively kicking game, it cannot claim to have had its rules and regulations unequivocally inscribed and formalized as promptly as historical records suggest is the case with British soccer. This development within the previously more homogenous world of British 'ball' games marks a significant moment in the ensuing bifurcation of soccer and rugby (Dunning 1999: 93).

The competitive spirit which lies at the heart of the clashing accounts of soccer's birthplace can also be found intra-nationally within the British delineation of its two forms of football. Even today, vestiges of class cleavage attendant upon rugby and soccer can still be found to be in circulation within British society, despite recent developments in the marketing of the English Premiere division that can be seen as a bourgeoisification of the game (e.g. increases in ticket prices which act as a deterrent to working class access, transformations of terraces into all-seater stadia, etc.) . How did rugby and soccer come to be codified as middle class and working class games respectively given the greater degree of contact and violence inherent in the former?⁴ This is an issue of curious befuddlement given the historical association of soccer with the more prestigious Eton

⁴It should be noted that even within Rugby there is a class delineation between Rugby League which is considered more proletarian and Rugby Union which is considered more middle class.

School while Rugby (clearly leaving its mark on its preferred brand of football) Public School's 'pupils tended to come from lower ranks in the upper and middle classes than those at, say, at Eton and Harrow' (Dunning 1999:94). In fact, restrictions on the use of hands in soccer can be read as an effort on the part of the higher class Eton school to inscribe its perceived greater civility directly into its game of choice by attempting to suppress what was seen to be a natural urge to 'handle' the ball in this territorial struggle⁵. Dunning goes further in characterizing soccer as more developed on the plane of civilizing processes by alluding to the greater eschewal of violence that is achieved through the complete eschewal of the use of the hands for such things as clutching and shirt-grabbing (things that as any spectator of the game today can testify are if anything on the rise- perhaps an example of what Elias refers to as a counter-civilizing process?).

This notion of soccer as a more 'civilized' game raises interesting and complex questions regarding its adherence to masculine norms of sporting subjectivity. On the one hand, elevated levels of civility in Western culture can easily be reconciled with the masculine end of the gender binary by discursively eliding the baser, more animalistic aspects of human conduct of which those less physically restrained and balletic of sporting endeavours such as rugby and football clearly belong. On the other hand, as one of the most salient and entrenched features of masculine identity has historically rested upon a propensity for and competence in the imposition of physical force upon

⁵The challenge of resisting such a temptation in that period may not be fully appreciated today due to the proliferation of sports media rendering such an image and idea fairly commonplace. Dunning describes it thusly:

However, when it [restriction on the use of the hands] was first introduced, it must have been equivalent to being required to balance peas on the back of one's fork. Indeed, we hear that, when Etonians and others first tried to introduce the non-handling game to members of the working class, the latter were required to play holding a shilling and were allowed to keep it if they succeeded in not using their hands (1999:96)

others towards a dominative end, soccer's easy, but hardly unproblematic, commensurability with the rather versatile moniker of 'a gentleman's game' exposes certain potential inadequacies with regards to its virility. Suffice it to say for the time being that if nothing else, soccer's questionable 'hard' status in the sports pantheon demonstrates a broad cross-cultural quest for more than an unequivocal disavowal of the feminine within the male-dominated sporting culture.

If we consider for a moment the subsequent evolutions of the principal players of the aforementioned soccer/rugby bifurcation, we will see quite distinct patterns of cultural exportation and dissemination that may in fact be informative with regards to their inherent gender representations. As has already been established, rugby cannot claim to have gone on to capture nearly the level of participatory, spectatorial nor financial (increasingly the supreme measure of sporting success in a post-Fordist global economy) interest that soccer indubitably commands today⁶. However, rugby is not without its own particular history of development and evolution that is useful for the purposes of this analysis. Though the game has survived, enjoying its own, comparatively mediocre, share of international enthusiasm as witnessed by the presence of amateur and professional rugby leagues throughout the UK, most of western Europe as well as establishing new hotbeds of rugby domination in such removed locations from its birthplace as South Africa, New Zealand and, of course, Australia (the current world champions), it is really in what I have termed the sporting derivatives of the European

⁶Not surprisingly, the seemingly uncontrollable growth of international professional soccer has not been unanimously greeted by all soccer pundits and aficionados in the spending spree that is the aftermath of the predictably unprecedented success of the Euro 2000 campaign, producing record transfer fees that are raising concerns regarding the potential for such elevated financial injections to 'spoil' the integrity and consequently the beauty (that always elusive definition) of the game, in a line of reasoning that clearly evokes the anti-commodification rhetoric invariably associated with the Olympics.

football legacy that I wish to spend some time considering as a contrast to soccer's patina of sporting finesse.

Arguably, rugby's greatest legacy in the sports canon is not its own emergence as international sport, as perhaps most recently exemplified by the installation of a rugby world cup competition (that may be demonstrating signs of following in soccer's footsteps by having produced a general increase in its television ratings and by its successful introduction into fledgling rugby nations such as Italy and Argentina), but its North American offspring - football. Clearly my contention that American football can lay claim to a higher level of popular success than rugby is sure to trouble those who would be prone to cite the relatively narrow geographical area to which football's success can presently be restricted. My response to such a not entirely unjustified observation is that geographical dispersion is but one means of determining the level of success, and perhaps more importantly - influence, of any sporting discipline, and given the rapid and pervasive marketization/commodification of a prospering global sports industry, not the most telling of means. As a partial aside here, one could convincingly make the argument that another good, if unorthodox, measure of the contemporary cultural prominence of a sport is the appropriation of its recognizable iconography into the increasingly homogenous global youth fashion zeitgeist. The influence of hip hop on youth culture around the world cannot be overstated, nor should it be relegated to the fashion front. Nonetheless, as a popular cultural movement which unabashedly parades its symbols of identification, it has been instrumental in not just elevating the role of sports culture, which has figured prominently in the restricted legitimate opportunities for social mobility afforded to the African American community, but also and not insignificantly in raising the team jersey to fashion accessory. Hip hop culture and its

loyal armies of fashion followers are replete with team jerseys of virtually every stripe, including those of the more culturally distant hockey⁷, yet have conspicuously kept their distance as a whole from the rugby jersey (the rugby-style shirt is common to such popular fashion retail outlets as The Gap and Roots, but it tends to attract a British, prep-school fashion sensibility which can be seen as the cultural antithesis of a Black, urban sensibility). Although individuality plays a no less important role in the fashion dictates of hip hop than in any other fashion movement, and though my fairly general observations on the relative invisibility of the rugby jersey among the influential ranks of fashion 'hip hoppers' should not be interpreted as a permanent state of affairs (one of the trademarks of hip hop culture is its anarchic sense of hybridization and willingness to appropriate icons from every segment of society, no matter how seemingly anathema), it does suggest a certain crisis of 'coolness' for the marketing of the sport.

American football in the form of the NFL, on the other hand, has in the post WW II era grown into one of the most commercially successful sport ventures in the US. Like its predecessors, rugby and soccer, football descends from a tradition of games contingent upon the advancement of a ball over a designated field of play in order to ultimately penetrate a goal area. Unlike soccer, though, where the installation of a net, not to mention the crucial restriction of the use of the hands, necessitates a certain proficiency of skill with the feet and the head in the pursuit of scoring, football and rugby

⁷Even though the team jerseys common to hip hop culture tend to be of the North American sport type, hockey jerseys, despite their affiliation with a foreign culture, Canada, and the lack of black professional hockey players, are making a marked surge as fashion statement in street/hip hop circles. The soccer jersey on the other hand, has not yet been very evident on the backs of hip hop performers but is extremely popular among youth, who participate in very high numbers in North American minor soccer competition, combining the soccer jersey with other hip hop fashion trends such as the oversized jeans and the baseball caps.

can be seen to more greatly emphasize the sheer territorial component of the game where points are primarily rewarded for the sheer penetration of the opposing team's much broader goal area. My suggestion is not that rugby and football are entirely lacking in any inclusion of ball skill and proficiency, simply that the mechanics of both games necessitates a very different sporting competence from soccer which can most materially manifest itself directly onto the bodies of the respective athletes themselves and that can ultimately be seen to reflect competing, but not mutually exclusive, versions of masculinity itself.

I suppose one of the most obvious reasons for the questionable virility of soccer in the North American context is the body of the soccer player himself. Generally lithe and slim as a result of the speed and cardiovascular exigencies of the game, the soccer player is hardly the picture of massive, muscle-bound masculinity that the football player usually conjures up in the imagination. The corporeal non-specificity of the soccer player is also related to the popular, and in some ways accurate, characterization of the game as supremely democratic, as previously identified. Ironically, though, the very reason that football occupies such revered status within culturally specific annals of masculine determination is what in some ways serves to destabilize such an untroubled paradigm of gender embodiment. Because football not only includes but actively encourages and reveres its corporeal cataclysms, the football player must build his body up, with positional variations of course, in order to withstand and dispense the kind of regular physical punishment that insidiously renders the possibility of an extended career a remote possibility. Such extreme physical requirements often leads to nearly as much time in the football player's all too often curtailed career spent in the weight room (or the emergency room) as on the playing field. The bodily intensive industry of football parallels bodybuilding in instilling similar, if less extreme, forms of corporeal narcissism among its practitioners and boxing by emphasizing a body instrumentality that stems

from its shared percussiveness, relegating the athlete's rational-mental proclivities to the background of appreciation (only the quarterback in football partially salvages the stereotype of the dumb, brawny football player - the perception of the quarterback as requiring greater intelligence than other football positions has, incidentally, been used historically to justify the relative dearth of Black quarterbacks).

Surpassing baseball's popularity⁸ in post-WW II America, football delivers an athletic drama that pushes the spatial struggle for supremacy endemic to soccer and rugby to new heights both tangibly and semiotically and as such, appears to confirm Elias' ideas of American exceptionalism. As Elias himself queries, 'Why did the USA, without abandoning the English varieties completely, develop its own variety of football?' (Dunning and Elias 1986: 40). Although all three sports spatially demarcate their playing surfaces with boundaries and mathematical units of measurements (i.e. centrefield, sidelines, eighteen yard box, etc.), football is the only one to do so quite so rigidly and minutely. Because literally 'a game of inches', football demands that its players contest every conceivable unit of space on the field to prevent their opponents from maintaining a virtual monopoly on the possession of the ball. Spatial advancement in soccer and rugby increases the likelihood of scoring and winning by bringing the designated goal areas into greater accessibility but is not in and of itself rewarded as is the case of football. In the American version⁹ of football, a team is given four attempts to at the very least advance ten yards with the ball before possession is lost, allowing a team to continue in its ultimate quest to penetrate one of two scoring zones. The yard by yard breakdown of the

⁸The slogan 'America's national pastime' has become more quaint than accurate to describe baseball with the insurgent rise in interest in other sports such as football, basketball and even the Canadian game - hockey - to fracture the American sports audience.

⁹Canada's version has slight variations such as three downs per possession and a larger field.

football field allows one to maintain constant awareness of distance won or lost on every play. When the instrument of measurement that is the football field itself fails to be sensitive enough to determine whether the needed ten yards have been obtained, officials will resort to a modified tape-measure to determine the swing of possession. While in rugby and soccer the only objective measure of a player's offensive contribution is in points or goals scored or, in the case of the newly but not universally adopted 'assist' in soccer, contributed to, certain offensive players' standard of success in football is measured arguably more critically in yards gained. Football's intense battle over space produces bodies that are designed to both produce and prohibit penetration. And where the carnal body may fail, the football uniform with all its adamant density is there to augment the inevitable and desirable clash of male bodies.

Hooligans and 'Hard' Men: Locating the Masculine in Soccer

As one fellow 'soccer dad' confided to me not too long ago, "When we played soccer in high school, the football players laughed at us and called us 'pussies'. But you have to be in great shape *and tough* to play soccer." Though there was no football team in my high school to contend with, I could appreciate the feelings of inadequacy that being a soccer player could elicit in the North American male adolescent of yesteryear. Soccer's acceptance in the North American landscape may have come along somewhat since then, especially if the level of minor soccer participation is any indication, but it is still tainted with the notions of 'otherness' and 'softness'. Soccer has become a more palatable sporting alternative to many a concerned parent precisely because of its perceived mildness and safety, particularly in comparison to 'violent' sports such as hockey and football¹⁰, and may explain what some soccer observers have referred to as the

¹⁰In general, participation in football and hockey is not permitted at as young an age as

'infantilization' of the sport. Yet its relative inability to make significant inroads into the professional North American sports market may precisely stem from such a perceived 'softness' of the sport in addition to the air of 'foreignness' and 'exoticness' that it may continue to exude to the North American sporting spectator¹¹. The vast majority of my fellow soccer players in the Montreal of twenty years ago came from an ethnic background as I did. Although more 'wasp' children of both genders may be playing the game in North America than ever before, it may be safe to presume that this only confirms its 'non-masculine' status to the predominately male North American sports audience. Analysts of colonial discourse (e.g. McClintock 1995) have shown how the twin tropes of racialization and infantilization have served to render the native male populations as less than complete men within their own lands. Perhaps this may explain the development of indigenous forms of football in the formerly 'white settler' colonies of America, Canada and Australia, where the residual psychic effects of colonial status may have prompted the male colonial cultures of these respective territories to forge out their own brands of the motherland's game that enacts in some theatrically unambiguous way their own vision of appropriate masculinity without the compromising qualities that a finesse game such as soccer presents. If, as has been observed, America gets the Presidents it deserves, then perhaps the case of American football demonstrates that the same may be said of its sports.

While the 'new world's' edicts of exploration, expansion and conquest may have required fiercer forms of sporting ritual, the 'old world's' institutionalization of the 'beautiful game' did not transpire without its own erected hierarchies of masculine

in soccer.

¹¹Theories abound as to the relative lack of popularity of soccer in North America, including the theory that Americans can't appreciate what they don't excel in. The tautology of this reasoning lies in the counter-argument that Americans can't excel in that which they do not play, at least not at an elite, professional level.

embodiment. From its inception, soccer was used as a means of establishing differentiated levels of masculinity among the ranks of school-age children that were its early participants. The prefect-fagging system that pervaded English public schools of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century whereby older boys were granted authority over younger boys primarily in the realm of extra-curricular activities (often this resulted in the performing of sexual favours) managed to find its way onto the soccer pitch as well:

The prefect-fagging system was central to the early development of football. At each public school the game was one means by which older boys asserted dominance over juniors. One of the customary duties which developed for fags was that of 'fagging out' at football. This meant they were compelled to play and restricted for the most part to the role of 'keeping goal', that is they were ranged *en masse* along the baselines. Thus it is suggested that, at Westminster in the early nineteenth century, 'the small boys, the duffers and the funk-sticks were the goalkeepers, twelve or fifteen at each end'. 'Douling', the name given to football at Shrewsbury, was the same as they used for 'fagging'. It is reputedly derived from the Greek for 'slave'. At Winchester in the early nineteenth century, fags, one at either end, were even used instead of goalposts, the ball having to pass between their outstretched legs to score. Fags were also used as a means of boundary demarcation. (Dunning 1999:92 all italics and quotation marks in original).

We can see in this passage how the use of space was crucial in establishing different orders of power among schoolboys. Those junior fags that were permitted/obligated to participate were restricted to only the most passive and marginal roles in the game. Clearly the privilege of being on the playing field as an active mover of the ball was only extended to the most senior and therefore dominant of the boys. The fags that did actually participate in the games in roles other than the entirely static goalposts and sidelines were exclusively designated the task of preventing the ultimate spatial penetration to occur in the form of a goal. That the goalkeepers were generally placed 'en masse' in goal suggests that even this purely defensive posture that they were mandated

to maintain was seen to be beyond the ability of any single fag. The other permissible positions for the fags in the game also represent important demarcations of space, though in less involved manners. Those performing the role of sideline occupied the extreme periphery of playing surface, beyond which only those unable or unwilling to compete roamed. As such, their degraded status could be seen to occupy a similar position of masculine purgatory in which their relative powerlessness did not permit them the same luxury as older boys to abstain from the exhibition of bravado, nor were they deemed capable of participating fully as active agents. And perhaps most revealing of all were those boys performing the role of goal with their outstretched legs, entirely helpless to prevent the penetration of the ball through them, as Dunning suggests they were equally helpless to do anything about other forms of penetration that the public school prefect-fagging system produced at the hands of the more powerful senior students (1999:92).

Therefore the differentiations in masculinity that have been engendered through the performativity of soccer have not merely rested upon simple dichotomies of involvement or non-involvement, but more specifically upon positional distributions that have emerged through a standardization and professionalization of the game, cultural variations notwithstanding. The (post)modern professional game of soccer has produced, in its pursuit of excellence, player specializations which can be mapped unto a cartography of masculinity in compelling and revealing ways. One of the most distinguishing features of the modern game, though rapidly changing, is its relative paucity of goals. The most often heard criticism of soccer, in which the North American sports aficionado is often the main proponent, is the inordinate length of time required to obtain the much anticipated highlight of a goal being scored during a typical soccer game. It would appear that the defensive nature of soccer may be one of the main criteria for the indifference shown to it by and large by the North American sports market. Though

recent steps have been taken to 'speed up' and 'open' the game considerably, interpreted angrily by purists as a shameful attempt to cater to that obdurate yet ever lucrative American market (Redhead 1997), it still remains disproportionately a defensive battle in which single goals can seem like insurmountable leads. The soccer aphorism 'Offenses may win games, but defenses win championships' demonstrates the priority placed upon the prevention of goals as opposed to their production.

Soccer may lack the obvious referents of virility found in other sports like football and rugby such as the athletes' bodies themselves (large, thick and imposing) or the mechanics of the games themselves (contact-oriented, violent and aggressive), but it does provide the opportunity for players, particularly defensive, to create auras of masculine solidity and impenetrability rivaling any football or rugby athlete. The term usually reserved for such soccer pillars of strength is 'hard men'. Every soccer nation of the world seems to have its own slew of players to which the moniker can satisfactorily apply. Rugby and football don't seem compelled to make the designation as their participants can almost unanimously lay claim to it, therefore precluding the necessity to draw attention to that unmistakable aspect of the game. Among soccer players, however, certain athletes are clearly highlighted, positively and negatively, for the exceptional level of ferocity, mercilessness and brute aggression in their styles of play¹².

England seems to have more than its share of memorable 'hard men'. Recent notables in this regard are players such as Vinnie Jones, Tony Adams and Paul Ince. England's seemingly disproportionate contribution to the soccer legacy of 'hard men' is derivative of the very fabric of a traditionally Northern European style of soccer that places greater

¹² Other sports also make this designation, as in the case of hockey where the 'enforcer' is almost exclusively responsible for 'protecting' a team's star player while on the ice and providing the fans with their mandatory dose of brawling. Thus the familiar joke: 'I went to see a fight and a hockey game broke out.'

emphasis on toughness and solidity than it does on those previously mentioned aspects of soccer such as finesse and creativity that are more endemic to a Southern European style of play. A specific term has even emerged within the annals of British soccer to describe the type of player or style which distinguishes itself from the typical 'kick and run' brand of soccer dominant in the UK -- 'continental'. The term perfectly captures the rather ambivalent relationship that the British soccer consuming public has towards this particular style of play and player by mirroring the geo-political dynamics that can additionally be seen to be operative between the UK and 'the continent' within the newly formed European community. The groundswell of opposition and reluctance which emerged during the formative period of European harmonization into a single trading zone under a nationalistic Thatcher government was perhaps most visibly seen in the discourses that permeate around that European (and British) obsession - soccer. Positioning itself both within and yet distinct from the European mainland, British soccer culture occupies a rather schizophrenic position vis a vis its continental counterpart by in some respects maintaining a shameful fascination with the brilliant virtuosity of the soccer artist. Despite the growing abundance of international players in the English Premiere Division, among other elite European soccer leagues such as Serie A in Italy and La Liga in Spain, where regular exposure to continental style soccer is mitigated by the recognition of foreign participation in the English game, inspiring only minor opposition amid a preponderance of appreciation for soccer excellence (if only for its carnivalesque qualities), the most virulent tirades against continental soccer can be found directed at the native practitioners of this entertaining yet subversive brand of soccer diversion.

Players such as George Best, Paul Gascoigne and most recently David Beckham are constant reminders to British soccer aficionados of the insidious presence of the 'other' within their altering soccer landscape. Continental-style players of British heritage, they

curiously inflame and ignite some of the most intense vitriol ever directed at any athlete by representing the profane and the perverted not emanating from the 'other', as a foreign player would unproblematically, but spring forth from among one's own, thereby undermining the very sanctity and stability of one's own fragile identity. One would intuitively imagine that having proven themselves exemplary on an international stage as these players have done consistently and unequivocally, they would elicit only the proudest admiration and celebration among soccer fans for achieving some, albeit partial, vindication for increasingly elusive British international soccer success. And though some of their accomplishments have assuredly garnered such affirming sentiments, if only sporadically and temporarily, they have simultaneously been greeted with perplexing and at times unrelenting criticism generally only reserved for those violators of the most serious social norms. And yet how can a professional male athlete, and an accomplished one at that, whose very livelihood depends upon distinguishing oneself from among other males in a domain that epitomizes masculine achievements, be even considered to somehow transgress that most sanctified of male strictures - the disavowal of the feminine?

Despite ostensible references to other faux-pas on the part of these three soccer rebels, arguably the great sin of British continental-style players is their desire and ability to incorporate an exotic soccer style into their repertoire, thereby conceding the unpalatable and irrefutable recognition of a softer, more fluid approach to the game as ultimately more efficacious. It would not require a great leap of faith to envisage the possibility that the rather trivial matters that these three players have typically been condemned for are only at the surface of a profoundly felt inadequacy after decades of soccer failure by all the British national teams. Their collaboration with the conqueror's weapons, as it were, may only serve to pour salt into the wounds of a British psyche whose more successful disavowal of the feminine on the soccer pitch has not proven generally advantageous in

international soccer confrontations, thereby decentring strongly held convictions regarding the commensurability of masculinity and soccer proficiency.

Despite many indications that English soccer is generally in a period of fundamental transition towards greater incorporation of a more 'continental' style of play ¹³, residual vestiges of cultural partisanship towards soccer players of a more unambiguously masculine and 'hard' style continue to resurface and play out in telling and compelling ways. Perhaps the most notorious, celebrated and heuristically-valid of all such episodes occurred between two of the previously mentioned English players, Paul Gascoigne and Vinny Jones, each in their own way embodying this classic duality between soft artistry (the former) and hard impermeability (the latter) in the soccer cosmology. In a typical soccer scenario and confrontation between striker (Gascoigne, a.k.a. 'Gazza') and defender (Jones), something atypical and spectacular occurs (see figure 2.1) as described by Mark Simpson (1994: 69-70): 'Vinny Jones standing in front of Paul Gascoigne, facing away, his left hand reaching behind him clutching Gascoigne's groin; their bodies and faces are rigid and contorted: Jones' with hate, Gascoigne's with pain'. As the 'victim' in this exchange, Gascoigne, rather than evoke public sympathy for his assault and humiliation, only consolidated his stature as feminized 'continental' prone and even deserving of the public castration befallen to him. Jones' stature, on the other hand, only

¹³England's recent appointment of Sven Goran Ericsson, manager of last year's Serie A champions Lazio in Italy, to national team manager is not simply an affront to nationalistic sentiment among English soccer observers vehemently opposed to the first ever such appointment of a foreigner, but is an unmistakable admission of a tactical shift towards a more 'continental' style in light of England's dismal performance at the Euro 2000 Championships. Interestingly, Ericsson's Scandinavian heritage may serve as a spatial buffer between the diametrically opposed brands of soccer presently experiencing conflict in England since the soccer of his birthplace tends to be more compatible with a traditionally British 'kick and run' style despite his managerial respect and accomplishment primarily emerging from his experienced success in the most 'continental' and competitive of soccer leagues, Italy's Serie A.

figure 2.1

gains in eminence for the symbolic, if only fleeting, slaying of the 'foreign' soccer beast dressed up in the familiarly and falsely comforting guise of fellow countryman in the ultimate defense of national virility.

Aside from 'Gazza's' stylistic 'collaboration' with the invading soccer hordes of the world, his masculine transgressions are multiple and condemnatory, particularly juxtaposed against a pillar of masculine ineffability such as a necessarily cruel Vinny Jones. However, as we shall see, the seamless construction of masculine heterodoxy can always be counted on to provide significant ruptures and epistemological discontinuities to trouble overly unitary paradigms of masculine vindication, upon closer scrutiny.

Even the adopted appellation of 'Gazza' suggests an imputed femininity that has seemingly plagued Gascoigne's public persona in spite of, or perhaps because of, his established soccer prowess. The vowel-ending 'Gazza' not only evokes typically feminine names such as 'Olivia', 'Gloria', 'Maria', etc., but also suggests the foreignness that is also central to his enigmatic, if sporadic, vilification within the British soccer zeitgeist in drawing unmistakable and perhaps unconsciously unavoidable parallels to distant locales like the similarly named Gaza strip territory in the Middle East. His physical composition has undergone comparable feminine deconstructions by having emphasized the unusual 'zaftiness' of his torso which has prompted Simpson to observe 'an awkwardness and a hint of ambiguity about his slightly pubescent Geordie body', particularly perched as it is upon his 'comparatively frail looking breakable legs' (quoted in Simpson 1994:87). Jones, on the other hand, typically svelte, lean and wiry has not had to endure the kind of corporeal scrutiny and inquisition we have just seen practiced upon the contentious figure of Gascoigne. In fact, as his recent forays into the world of media and entertainment (of a less directly soccer-related nature since we can hardly cleanly sever media and entertainment from contemporary soccer, or most other sports for

that matter¹⁴) suggest, the Vinny Jones persona, exemplar of potent masculinity, is a desirable commodity receiving ample validation from the only universal standard of value left in the post-Fordist economy - the marketplace. His recent video, *Soccer's Hard Men* where Jones enlightens us on how 'real men' should conduct themselves generally, 'They're not just aggressive on the field, they're aggressive in all walks of life, whether it is an argument with the baker or an argument with the manager' (Whannel 1999:256-257), and his film cameo in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrells* as a (what else?) supremely tough, (rather Schwarzenegerian in his mono-syllabic, cyborgian lack of affectation) gangster 'soldier' sent in to inflict pain as a coping strategy for plans gone awry, apparently not unlike his role on the soccer field, confirms that Jones's 'hard man' soccer status is a transferable good worthy of celebrity recognition. Ironically, however, his submersion into the shallow and superficial waters of celebrity stardom only anchors him ever more firmly to a process of corporeal display and visual colonization that I argue throughout this thesis is unappreciatively endemic to a mass sport consumption and whose masculine subverting potential is further exacerbated by the kind of celebrity fusing that is increasingly characterizing sporting representations undertaken by a faded competitor like Jones and many other of his peers. While Jones attempts to make that much precedented transition from athlete to actor/celebrity, with all of the necessarily vain and narcissistic maneuvers that it entails, an aging and declining Paul Gascoigne persists with the physically demanding task of competing in one of the top soccer leagues in the world despite noticeable setbacks in ability, success and media attention. Such a dramatic contrast between the present occupational ambitions of these two soccer nemeses may in fact require the radical

¹⁴For an interesting postulation of how (post)modern sports no longer significantly occur on the playing field any longer but in the simulated universe of televisual communication, read the Baudrillard-inspired *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues* (Redhead 1997).

reevaluation of both their much analyzed adherence to a seemingly unattainable level of masculine embodiment.

A picture may speak a thousand words, but it may omit thousands of others. The provided image of a humiliatingly assaulted Paul Gascoigne at the hands (literally) of a venerably 'hard' Vinny Jones, cannot contain within its visual frame of reference all the events preceding and possibly contributing to that memorable moment. What has commonly been referred to as a public castration of a talented but tarnished soccer performer, may in fact represent, upon closer scrutiny and further consideration, the additional saga of a penetrated and perhaps more than slightly frustrated defensive soccer stalwart. Intended surreptitious retaliatory acts such as Jones' (which in this case was apparently only surreptitious to the referee) are not uncommon in a game which, at least theoretically, may conform to Dunning's characterization of civilized. The unwritten law of 'an eye for eye' reigns in soccer as in other sports but must be enforced ever more subtly in a context where contact and aggression are more restricted. The typical antecedent for such a gesture on the part of Gascoigne - rough play or a cheap shot - may have precipitated Jones' carefully targeted vendetta, but his chosen corporeal zone of attack suggests a dynamic between these two opposing forces of soccer and masculinity which must have made Gascoigne's genital area particularly irresistible to Jones in his bid for retribution. Given the fact that at the time of 'the incident' Gascoigne would have been near or at the top of his game, a likely scenario is that the gifted English-continental was ostentatiously parading his charismatic 'ball skills' as was his wont, much to the chagrin of his virtually polar opposite opponent who by professional soccer standards is noticeably deficient in the dribbling (ignore any thoughts of affinity to the infant activity of 'dribbling') and offensive aspects of the game. Though 'hard men' of Jones' stature are often held up as emblems of unwavering masculinity, it is the players such as

Gascoigne, possessed of great technical virtuosity and creative flare, that embody the phallic power to penetrate the contested territoriality that is fundamental to a soccer contest, thus placing players of Jones' ilk in a particularly vulnerable and unsettling position of continuously fending off the dizzying advances of those ball wizards.

Given this photographic context, then, the notorious assault by Jones on Gascoigne can be reinterpreted not so much as the inevitable results of a confrontation between a more virile masculinity versus a more ambiguous one but perhaps more tellingly as the desperate actions of a limited athletic force besieged by a barrage of soccer brilliance struggling to curtail the psychically compromising effects of being spatially penetrated. While popular constructions of the Jones-Gascoigne clash have emphasized their duality and tension, the axis of penetration in regards to long-standing semiotics of masculinity can actually re-position the two soccer icons much more cohesively. For as Foucault's studies of the ancient Greeks reveals, masculinity was and still is very much primarily defined through successful campaigns of sexual penetration while fending off any such incursions on one's own orifices. As MacInnes delicately puts it, in a fictional context,

What you must do, son, is become a fucker and not a fucked. It's as simple as that. Boys or girls, up the pussy or up the arse, whichever you prefer, but you've got to remember there's a cock between your legs and you're a man (quoted in Simpson 1994: 69).

Therefore taken apart, the fancy, fluid artistry of a Gascoigne and the hard, impermeable stature of a Jones can only represent an incomplete picture of masculine performativity. Taken together, however, the happy couple can coalesce such dichotomous visions of soccer around a unified trope of masculinity which finds the ultimate, if impossible, representative in a strange, and perhaps monstrous, Jones-Gascoigne hybrid.

My semiotic and metaphorical speculations regarding the memorable contact between Jones and Gascoigne are not meant in any literal way to suggest that what transpired

should be seen as anything other than an aggressive physical assault. However, it is my contention that Jones' chosen corporeal zone of attack is more than incidental despite the relative silence around it in popular analyses of the event. For all of the deconstructive attention heaped upon this anomalous soccer incident, hardly a mention can be found regarding the surprising and, perhaps significantly, disconcerting bodily location of the blow. Whether one buys my theory that the incident can be read as a subconscious attempt on the part of Jones to, if not appropriate then at least, stifle the phallic power of a virtuoso soccer talent like Paul Gascoigne, it is hardly debatable that even for a notorious soccer sadist like Jones, a literally crushing blow to the genital area is unusual to say the least in a soccer contest and more importantly transgresses unwritten rules regarding allowable bodily zones of contact between men, in and out of combative situations. The fact that the assault is used to confirm and reinforce Jones' stature as 'hard man' par excellence in the popular imagination without the slightest consideration as to the possible cowardliness of a surprise attack of this nature, but also as to the taboo of one man touching another man's genitals however intended, demonstrates a concerted effort even in the face of mounting evidence on the part of soccer aficionados to disavow any and all phenomena that can subvert the stability of masculine constructions. In most circumstances, the soccer player who is willing and able to receive and deliver clean, hard tackles in the normal flow of the game without resorting to 'cheap', retaliatory and seriously injurious shots is most celebrated for the embodiment of a respectable athletic virility (e.g. Bobby and Jackie Charlton). Despite Jones' clear breach of this sporting masculine code of ethics, his iconic reputation as tower of masculinity rather perplexingly seems to become even further ensconced in soccer mythology. It's as though Vinnie Jones' level of brutality can almost single-handedly salvage soccer's hard status in the universe of sports by rivaling that of the most violent and necessarily sadistic of athletic competitions such as football and boxing.

Several years ago, FIFA, the international governing body of soccer, attempted to implement a rule disallowing overt demonstrations of celebration and affection in the form of physical embraces between players on the soccer pitch that typically follow a goal. Physical embraces celebrating athletic victory or other successful moments during sporting contests are not specific to soccer, yet FIFA can claim the unprecedented dubious honour of any sport governing body to attempt to formally eradicate the spontaneous rituals of bodily taps, caresses, hugs and even kisses that sports observers unflinchingly witness emerging among male athletes. Is it that the level and intensity of celebrational physical contact between soccer players exceeds that witnessed among most other athletes, requiring FIFA to do what it can to salvage the already compromised virility of the sport and by association its practitioners? Certainly while other sports also customarily feature spontaneous bursts of physical rejoicing between players, I have witnessed some of the most emphatic, visceral expressions of pure ecstasy by men in our culture, at times approaching a level of tenderness and sensuousness implausible outside of homosexual contexts, among jubilant soccer players. If, as has been often claimed, an athletic contest invites a sexual metaphor whereby the achievement of a goal or other score draws obvious affinity to a sexual climax, soccer's generally pronounced period of foreplay leading up to the desirable but elusive goal of a goal may produce a more intense climactic expression of joy, particularly than those sports that feature more frequent scoring. So while FIFA's unusual course of action may not have entirely been foundationless in attempting to rectify soccer's feminizing proclivities, the ridicule and scorn on the part of fans and non-fans of soccer alike that followed FIFA's blatantly homophobic policy initiative, and that ultimately contributed to its demise, demonstrates a much more sophisticated and successful strategy to deal with the inevitable tensions and contractions that arise when attempting to preserve the unity of the trope of masculinity. Just as Vinny Jones' egregious conduct towards his soccer nemesis Paul Gascoigne

was disavowed through the simple yet effective strategy of avoiding to bring into any discourse at all what may have been otherwise regarded as a less than manly act, FIFA's unforgivable error to the soccer world was that by attempting to masculinize the world's beloved game, it was in essence admitting to a deficiency that could no longer be so conveniently kept buried. Foucault's thesis in *The History of Sexuality* (1980b) that modernity's increasing discursive attentiveness to the subject of human sexuality exposed it to ever greater forms of power can be seen to be operating in the oppositional response to FIFA's unwitting power to sexualize actions between men.

FIFA's aborted attempt to curtail the level of passion exhibited between men on the soccer pitch skims the surface of an issue that is fundamental to any study of men and sports - the role of emotion. As Nick Hornsby's celebrated and loosely autobiographical novel, *Fever Pitch* (1992), about a man's enduring soccer obsession eloquently reveals, sport for men often provides the range and depth of emotional life that is typically absent or impoverished in the mundane affairs of everyday life. The limited range of affective experience which is traditionally available to most Western males aspiring to some ideal of masculinity that usually includes anger, pride, determination, etc. with only muted forms of joy, love, and other intense emotions, receives generous amplification in the world of sports. It is the one arena available to men which can provide the panoply of emotional intensity, inviting such otherwise forbidden feelings as joy, ecstasy, devotion and crushing disappointment for both participant and observer alike, with the added irony of permeating within an almost exclusively male domain. The conscious recognition of the emotional plenitude provided by sport for many a male, to the detriment of other potentially rewarding emotional experiences such as those springing from relationships with women, lies at the heart of the paradox of sports buffs' unwavering devotion to professional games and their heroes, a theme comically but insightfully pursued by Hornby. As the FIFA case dramatically reveals, the continued normalization of

emotional intensity among men in the world of sports maintains its precarious stability through the careful elision of all overt references to its masculine transgressiveness. The effects of FIFA's embarrassing parochialism not only includes the tacit revelation that all that hugging, kissing and butt tapping between soccer players may not be entirely becoming of 'real men', but, as we will see further, also myopically interferes with the very source of attraction for fans to their beloved sports and by association their beloved athletes.

Norbert Elias's contributions to social theory are numerous and significant, not the least of which being his precocious scholarly attentiveness to the domain of sports. In keeping with his grand theory of the civilizing process (1978), sport is posited as precisely providing an emotional outlet for citizens of modernity increasingly incited to demonstrate affective restraint amid growing chains of social interdependency. The full expression and range of emotional responsivity that persisted relatively unhindered in pre-modern life gets redirected towards a rather simulated and therefore sanitized version of human warfare in the guise of sports, thereby providing the emotional release and satisfaction that would previously have resulted in elevated risks of actual human confrontation and harm. This is precisely why the most entertaining and therefore satisfying displays of athletic battle consist of evenly matched opponents where the struggle for supremacy is not a foregone conclusion, producing elevated levels of adrenaline-producing tension.

Although not directly suggested by Elias himself, his depiction of modern sport as an emotional production plant of sorts is useful to a further understanding of male sports consumption behaviour. If, as previously suggested, male emotional life, through a complex of phenomena, is discouraged from achieving the depth and wealth generally afforded to Western females, it is not difficult to imagine the allure that an emotional cauldron such as sports, with the added entrapment of ostensibly occupying supreme

masculine territory, holds over the imaginations of men. With ever increasing media attention towards athletes and fans engaged in extra-curricular violence on and off the playing fields, the question emerges as to whether sport, as either producer or channeller of intense male emotion, truly adheres to Elias's postulations of civilizing processes. By considering the case of soccer hooliganism, we may shed some light (and hopefully not only heat) on this vexing question.

From a North American perspective, one of the great paradoxes of soccer is despite its image as a gentler game, it is simultaneously and seemingly indelibly associated with the stereotype of engendering the crazed, anarchic fan regularly partaking in a range of excessive behaviours collectively referred to as hooliganism. As David Kamp laments in regards to the North American infantilization of the game, 'I don't quite understand how the meaning of soccer changed as it crossed the Atlantic, how we ended up with soccer moms whereas the Europeans got soccer hooligans' (2001:104). Though the male love of sports appears to be a universal trait encompassing cultures and games of various sorts, the European and even South American male soccer fan's level of intensity, bordering on zealotry, appears to be without rival. While excessive forms of fanaticism can be found among male spectators of North American sporting events such as face painting in the colours of one's beloved hockey team or standing shirtless in freezing cold temperatures bearing any number of bodily inscriptions meant to proudly exhibit one's undying football loyalty, the image of the battle-crazed spectator willing to carry the on-field battle into the stands seems to be a uniquely soccer-related phenomenon. Despite Eric Dunning's impressive body of work on soccer hooliganism (e.g. 1984;1988; 1998, etc.) which attempts, among other things, to dispel the idea that crowd violence is particularly problematic in a British soccer context, his work cannot really effectively challenge the particular form that sports-related violence adheres to among certain soccer devotees.

North American smugness over its claimed superior civility in light of soccer hooliganism is certainly undermined by the apparent regularity of celebratory riots in a host of North American cities of late. This recent rash of post-victory mayhem such as Montreal 1986, Hamilton 1986, Detroit 1990, Chicago 1992, Dallas 1993, Montreal 1993, and again Chicago 1993 does in fact suggest a North American predicament around social manifestations of aggression, however it does little to actually normalize, as it were, the unique brand of soccer upheaval which has rivaling factions of soccer supporters seeking to establish some transported form of athletic domination onto the terraces.

In reliably Western, rational, scientific mode, in hopes of perhaps eradicating or at least stemming the scourge of soccer hooliganism, the responsible question of 'What is the cause?' inevitably emerges. Once again the work of Eric Dunning, protege of Norbert Elias and exemplary purveyor of figurational sociology, is integral to any concerted attempt to formulate a persuasive response to this intriguing yet ultimately elusive question. Beginning with his collaboration with Elias on *Quest for Excitement* (1986), Dunning's contributions to a further understanding of the role of sports in culture are worthy of attention, yet fundamentally lacking in important areas. While *Quest for Excitement* admirably introduces the pivotal role of emotion in the world of sports, it does so by claiming an inherent locus within the human psyche to which sport acts as its more civilizing conduit. Absent from this analysis is the perennial dilemma over the constructivist nature of human emotion¹⁵, whose inclusion would complicate Elias's teleological model of civilizing trajectories by allowing for the possibility of sport as catalyst of emotion and therefore initiator of violence. Dunning's independent pursuit of

¹⁵See Burkitt (1997) for a thorough discussion of the nature vs. nurture positions in the sociology of emotion.

the vexing hooliganism question does begin to accommodate more semiotic nuances to the role sport plays in the meaning-seeking hoards of its loyal followers. In *The Roots of Football Hooliganism* (1988), Dunning's most significant finding confirms the expressive attempts of working class males to enact and embody an exaggerated form of masculinity in light of their relative isolation from mainstream British society. His research suggests that soccer crowd violence (or at least its reporting in media) reaches epidemic proportions during periods of heightened 'unincorporation' for the British working class, i.e. at those historical junctures when the working class is particularly vulnerable to ideological and political marginalization. Dunning explains:

In the present study we have used the term 'incorporation' to describe the constellation of developments which have served over the past century to integrate increasing sections of the working class into the mainstream of British society. However, despite the long-term spread of 'civilizing' pressures which have served to produce and are a product of increasing incorporation, we have also argued that, since at least the late nineteenth century, large sections of the British working class - although their standards and behaviour, too, have on balance, been transformed in a 'civilizing' direction - have remained less incorporated. In that connection they have had to contend with the regular irruption of specific forms of violence in their lives....Growing affluence and increasing 'incorporation' may have had 'civilizing' effects on the majority of working-class people but what is today the less incorporated and relatively impoverished 'rougher' working-class minority, the social segment from which the football hooligans are principally recruited... (1988:227).

One should find striking parallels with Wacquant's research (e.g. 1992; 1998) on boxing subculture in the Chicago area, featured in the previous chapter, that similarly finds the issue of class (but in his case interwoven with race) a crucial component of the motivation to engage in grandiose expressions of masculinity. Other studies have also considered how ethnic marginalization contribute to the emergence of what Dunning refers to an 'aggressive masculinity' (1988:184-216). Hughson's research on the 'Bad Blue Boys' (BBB), a group of young, male, Australian/Croatian soccer fans who reside in

the western suburbs of Sydney' (2000:8)', in particular, demonstrates how attempts on the part of Australia's ruling soccer body, Soccer Australia, to 'de-ethnicize' the sport, i.e. disallow any expression of ethnic identity or solidarity on the part of teams and fans alike through the display of flags and/or insignia, only further instills a sense of ethnic suppression and therefore elicits ever pronounced expressions of aggressive masculinity, even if only rhetorically. In all these examples, we find that aggressive and inflated expressions of masculinity that are primarily pervasive among male subclasses of varying groups operate as a compensatory response to the perceived or actual enfeeblement of their collective masculinity by their respective dominant cultures.

Soccer fanship, therefore, taken within a more expansive masculine-sporting nexus, can similarly be considered to occupy a position of relative impotence given the established ostensible truncated masculinity of the soccer dynamic. As such, despite Dunning's valiant efforts to the contrary, we must seriously consider the possibility that soccer hooliganism, in all its complex diversity, is predicated to some extent on certain soccer fans' attempt to instill an appreciable level of aggressive masculinity on a sport that has to a great extent achieved much of its success and international popularity on the basis of its fluid, artistic sensibility and aestheticism.

As an arena in which polarized groups of males jostle over athletic supremacy, sport has frequently provided ripe opportunities for the bubbling of emotions that are its primary yield to spill over into the realm of real, unsimulated violence. Many histories of modern sport have noted such common occurrences whether in boxing (e.g. Evensen 1996) or soccer (e.g. Wahl 1990). In fact, much of the moral panic and subsequent regulation and/or illegalization that has surrounded modern sport has rested upon a not unreasonable fear of rioting and violence emerging from such public displays of aggression inherent in the sporting contest. However, a general intolerance and ultimate curtailment of overt and ostentatious displays of violence and aggression that has,

according to seminal thinkers such as Foucault (1977) and Elias (1978), marked the modern era cannot so easily accommodate this general cultural shift in sport, particularly if we buy into Elias' claim that 'Like other varieties of leisure sport, as one may see, soccer is precariously poised between two fatal dangers, between boredom and violence' (1986:51). Though modernizing trends have served to limit the possibility of severe and fatal injury incumbent upon many sporting enterprises, we can quite easily see that injury, pain, bodily mutilation and deterioration are still rampant among professional athletes as compared to the general population. Joyce Carol Oates' (1994: 17) observation that 'all athletes age rapidly but none so rapidly and so visible as the boxer' speaks to the foreshortened career longevity of the professional athlete due to the stress and abuse placed on his/her instrument of performance. The disciplinary practices that extend to the remotest corners of modernity, according to Foucault (1977), find temporary, if partial, solace in the less temperate world of sport where, harkening back to the gladiatorial clashes of ancient Rome, athletes are fed to our lionous appetites for battle and violence, with relative impunity from our civilized edicts.

Has the civilizing imperative in soccer swung too far? If sport, manifestly or otherwise, is meant to constructively manage the human propensity for violence, does soccer abdicate this basic role by essentially preemptively barring the possibility of sufficient sporting violence to appease the masses' hunger for it? And does this in any way figure prominently in the particular form of sport spectator violence known as hooliganism? Difficult questions to be sure, but what we do know conclusively about soccer spectator violence that departs from other forms of spectator violence can possibly provide a point of departure for such an inquiry.

The most striking distinguishing feature of soccer hooliganism is its premeditatedness. As with most labels of this sort, problems of definition and specification arise. Hooliganism is a term loosely applied to a whole spectrum of

behaviours centered around the event of a soccer game which may or may not ever actually culminate in acts of violence or destruction. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in exploring arguably the most extreme and probably least common form of hooliganism, that which consists of organized gangs of soccer spectators intending to inflict physical pain on actual or perceived rival soccer fans. My basic hypothesis here is that unlike other sports, soccer seems to have the only sustained incidence of this kind of spectatorial violence. While violence emerges all too commonly among other sports fans, as previously established with the recent list of North American championship riots, not in the least due to the presence of alcohol at the sports venues themselves, and some North American cities may even have their own groups of 'hooligans' who use the frenzy of sport as an excuse to behave disorderly, only soccer can claim a multinational incidence of groups of young males concerted and consistently seeking to establish a supra-athletic level of male domination.

In Dunning's multiple attempts to come to grips with the 'reality' of British soccer hooliganism, he has conclusively found that it is not uniquely nor disproportionately a 'British problem', 'that soccer hooliganism is not and never has been a solely English or British phenomenon but is found to varying degrees and in different forms in virtually every country where the game of Association football is played' (1999:143). While soccer as a sport may fall short of hegemonic masculine norms of performativity, its global fanship, perhaps aware at some level of this comparative deficiency, has, at least apparently, constructed an image and reputation of unparalleled fanaticism, devotion, intensity and unflinching ferocity in the name of sports spectatorship. So while Dunning and Elias' explanations of 'unincorporation' and 'the quest for excitement' contribute significantly to an understanding of sports spectator violence, they are woefully inadequate in addressing the particular dangers and characteristics of soccer spectator unruliness.

As Dunning's research clearly attests, soccer hooliganism is uniquely marked by, among other things, the presence of closely team-affiliated 'fighting crews' (1988:157-183). The unmitigated design and objective of these 'fighting crews' is to establish and celebrate the physical superiority of one over the other in real, unsimulated combative situations. It is clear from many of the attitudes and ideologies espoused by some of the members of these crews themselves that they envisage themselves as extensions of the teams they do battle for and contribute significantly to the overall aura of intimidation that is integral to any sporting confrontation. Dunning's following remarks echo this sentiment and unwittingly introduces an important component of the extreme hooligan's agenda that is subsequently left undeveloped, yet of paramount relevance to my analysis:

Like many 'hard cases' since at least the early 1970's, the ICF [Inner City Firm - West Ham United football club's notorious fighting crew] eschew the forms of dress and the club emblems that are worn by many non-hooligan supporters and which still tend to be widely thought of as characteristic features of 'the hooligan style'. The ICF travel in this manner because one of their main objectives in attending matches is to fight and intimidate opposing fans, to 'take their ends', and establish territorial dominance over their 'turf' (1988:179).

Aside from revealing the quasi-military structure of these organizations which has them ironically foregoing any overt signs of team support in order to effectively carry out designed battle plans of ultimate loyalty, Dunning addresses the crucial and unique territoriality of soccer spectator violence which reveals important dimensions of soccer's complex, ambiguous and ultimately decentering relationship with hegemonic norms of masculinity. As in the sporting trilogy of soccer, rugby and football, the off-field competition between rival bands of soccer supporters is inextricably linked with a mission of spatial expansion and territorial conquest, exemplified by the well-worn expression of the 'taking of their ends'. This territorial/localistic dynamic can also be

seen in the practice of supporters attending 'away matches', uncommon in North American sports. Soccer, however, contingent as it is upon more athletic finesse than its sporting brethren (and most other sports for that matter) for its successful execution, is without precedent in inspiring the kind of systematic, international, and sustained brand of sports spectator violence that currently typifies soccer hooliganism. Where soccer's dynamic stops at full, unhindered, cataclysmic bodily collisions, even provoking beautiful but feminizing displays of athletic poetry, soccer's ready crews of bloodthirsty soldiers are prepared to take the sporting battle to new heights of manliness. The soccer hooligans' mission of transgressing their stadium-allocated zone of spectatorship into opposing supporters' terraces for the purposes of physically trouncing and banishing them brings complete vindication for the victorious footballing side forced into athletic androgyny, or conversely brings partial redemption to an athletically remiss squad unable to secure regional pride within soccer's terms, but not without simultaneously threatening to transgress modern boundaries of masculinity in the process.

Although soccer hooligans' successful exploits of taking opposing fans' ends mimetically re-enacts the symbolically ideal masculine position of penetrator discursively underlying many a sports composition, it necessarily places other like-minded men in the debasing role of penetratee, which ultimately locks both parties, regardless of relative power, into a semiotically homoerotic alliance. The pseudo-sexual dynamic of hooligan spatial penetration is apparently not entirely lost on at least one unabashedly passionate participant of this genre of extremism who admits 'I get so much pleasure when I'm having aggro [violence], I nearly wet my pants - it's true' (Harrison 1974:604). But even beyond this, following Anthony King (1997a), soccer hooliganism can be seen to submit such ostensible expressions of hegemonic masculinity to the postmodernizing interrogations of liminality and boundary transgression.

In Anthony King's fascinating and original analysis of soccer hooliganism, he provocatively suggests that the soccer hooligan occupies a position of liminality vis a vis traditional standards of masculinity by behaving in a manner which propels the integral components of hegemonic masculinity, such as aggression and dominance, to their extreme limits such that the risk and occurrence for masculine transgression is elevated and often achieved. King's research eloquently affirms the central hypothetical foundation of this work with regards to the ultimate instability of the masculine trope by suggesting that the imperative to assert one's manhood at the continual expense of those inferiorized beings (including of course other men) that litter the path of the alpha male ultimately escorts him into a zone of abjection and perversity. To use King's more explicit formulation, 'The hooligan became a figure who had descended into the beyond and the abnormal; the hooligan came an animal, a madman, or a barbarian' (1997a:583).

In the end, though, King concurs with the guardians of modern masculinity that the extreme actions of soccer hooligans preserves the boundaries dividing the universality of masculine norms from the excessiveness, and therefore subversiveness, of the liminal soccer hooligan, stabilizing and perhaps re-invigorating the hegemony of a more 'civilized' masculinity. Disappointingly, his analysis elides the heuristic qualities of soccer spectator violence which uncoincidentally finds the striking juxtaposition of the most 'barbaric' form of sports spectator violence against the most 'civilized' of games. If Elias' oeuvre has taught us nothing else it is that standards of civility and decorum are not absolute achievements, but figuratively enmeshed in complex webs of social relations such that what constitutes propriety in one social context may not in another. Soccer spectator violence may be seen as extreme within the purview of soccer's standards of aggression and combat, but less so when juxtaposed against the less graceful but more brutal standards of sporting violence we see prevailing in sports such as hockey, boxing and football which incorporate more seamlessly the otherwise 'liminal' activities of

carnal destructiveness. Therefore, measures to alleviate the dangers of soccer spectator violence such as those taken by England's Premiere League through the installation of 'all-seater stadia' in place of standing room terraces in hopes of physically placating the traditional assertiveness of the erect fan or what has been called the 'bourgeoisifying' marketing campaigns to radically alter the demographic composition of soccer fans from the typically male, working class variety to the more affluent, family-inclusive variety (King 1997b) may ultimately prove counter-productive and even perhaps pointless. If soccer hooliganism is a measure of soccer's intrinsic de-masculinization in the larger context of sport, the further de-masculinizing transition to all-seater stadiums may only exacerbate the crisis of masculinity which I am claiming fuels soccer hooliganism in the first place. And secondarily, as we will see further, the traditional male preserve of sports can be seen to be relenting on the discursive disavowal of the feminine in ways which might, hopefully, help to render the debate over soccer hooliganism moribund.

Postscript: Italia 2000, Flirting With Success:

Vic Rauter (holding up a vibrant blue Italia soccer shirt before the cameras): "Well the Italian squad has made as much of a splash with their new uniforms as with their play here at these European Soccer Championships."

Graham Leggat: "Yes, they certainly are a departure from the other teams' jerseys and from those I wore back in my day."

Craig Forrest: "I think I'll stick to those traditional uniforms myself."

Vic Rauter: "You'd better, Craig, because you need one of those Italian bodies to pull off wearing one of these shirts anyway."

(an exchange between TSN broadcasters during the television coverage of the 2000 European Soccer Championships)

At the Euro 2000 Soccer Championships, co-hosted by Holland and Belgium, amid an elite class of soccer talent second only to the World Cup, the single greatest agent of attention, excitement and change arguably emerged not from a player or a team, but a shirt. Despite Italy's rather unexpected and debatably overachieving second place finish to the current World Cup Champions and favorites of the tournament, France, Italy's Euro 2000 squad will probably be best remembered for unveiling the newly developed, body-clinging and perspiration-repellent soccer jersey and consequently contributing to an ostensible and generalizable disinternment of the feminine, specifically in soccer and more broadly in all sport.

In many ways, soccer has had a rather delayed reaction to many of the visual transitions that have been occurring within a broader culture of the body, in which sport plays a crucially central and catalytic role. Where the contemporary cult of fitness, muscle and bodily display has blossomed and gained much of its impetus and inspiration from the stage of sports and its cast of beautified athletes, soccer, until now, has remained curiously modest and corporeally subtle; one might even say unfashionably 'civilized'. Whether Italy's Euro 2000 squad of hirsute, swarthy handsome, provocatively clad athletes has single-handedly managed to transform the visual/stylistic dimension of the game to conform with more ostentatious bodily displays prevalent today in the wider domain of sports is as yet unknown and probably doubtful, but a consideration of this 'new look' in conjunction with Italy's style of play at these most recent European championships will minimally reveal the engaging play of the masculine and the feminine that is most successfully represented in the sport of soccer, helping to explain the unprecedented international success and appeal of the 'beautiful game'.

Perhaps the appointment of Dino Zoff, former and most celebrated national Italian goalkeeper, who captained the 1982 Italy squad to their last World Cup title, should have foreshadowed to those of us interested just what kind of team Italy's Euro 2000 squad

would be. In 1982, as in 2000, the Italian squad relied on a strong defensive and counter-attacking brand of soccer to deal with allegedly superior opponents. Only then, Zoff had to perform the role of last bastion of defense against often considerable offensive threat, but now he was attempting to implement that winning formula on a national soccer program which had more recently toyed with other tactical systems. Why changes to a system which had produced an always elusive World Cup title? The answer may lie in the visual image of vulnerability and constant penetrative pressure that a team playing this defensive style of soccer must endure. Certainly that was the case with the 1982 World cup winning team, especially against such soccer powers as Brazil and Argentina, where they never really looked overpowering or dominant but managed nonetheless to snatch victory even after a less than auspicious beginning.

The already passive style of play that not only copes with opposing teams relentless offensive pressure but actually thrives on it by exposing and exploiting the *rear vulnerability* that inevitably emerges from the offensive-oriented team, is further feminized, one might say, by the Italia 2000's revealing, attractive and essentially seductive uniform of choice. As blasphemous as this may sound, the often sublimated sexual energy that abounds in sport, particularly in the lineage of 'ball games' discussed in this chapter, finds splendiferous magnification and incontestable manifestation during one of Italy 2000's more heated soccer confrontations. The image of the attractive Azzurri¹⁶ side donning these provocative body-hugging shirts and strategically allowing the spatial advancement of powerful teams such as Holland and France (the two tournament favorites) as much as possible without finally conceding the ultimate

¹⁶This is the nickname of Italy's soccer team which means blue in Italian and refers to the primary colour of the team jersey. The most recent shade of blue used on the famous shirt under consideration here is appropriately closer to a more feminine purple shade and evokes the peacock quality of the Euro 2000 team that I am arguing played, at least visually, to the overall seductive strategy of Zoff's campaign.

penetration in the form of a goal, in order to eventually launch a quick offensive counter-attack of their own with the hope of finding the relentlessly advancing side with 'their pants down', in a manner of speaking, cannot but suggest the image of a flirting feminine presence dangling the promise of sexual penetration without ever actually acquiescing, only to exploit the temporary lapse of masculine invincibility and, in this case, impermeability.

In both soccer and masculine terms, this strategy is dangerous. For soccer, as in all sports, a strategy is only as good as the players executing it. Fortunately for Italy fans, and to the great accomplishment of the unseasoned coach Dino Zoff, the strategy proved all but infallible and to no short measure due to the overachieving and perhaps unexpected play, to possibly all but Zoff, of the Italian defense, but principally to the performance of the steady but certainly underappreciated talents of the initially third-string Italian goalkeeper Francesco Toldo. His unanticipated rise to near goaltending perfection during Euro 2000 certainly fueled Italy's march toward the final and provided the last crucial link in the orchestration of a soccer squad whose evocative appearance and performance are not simply relevant to soccer analyses, but to an understanding of the current negotiation of the feminine in all sport. The danger in a strategy in which the opposing team is permitted and subtly coaxed into a state of spatial advancement with a concomitant ball possession advantage lies in the ultimate inability of the defending team to obdurately withstand the penetrative onslaught of offending forces and the subsequent failure to instantaneously mount one's own counter-offensive, making the seemingly incommensurable transition from penetrated to penetrator under the most emasculating of circumstances.

In many ways, Italy's appearance in Euro 2000, with their unusually sultry attire and volatile style of play, contributes significantly to a radical break in the hegemony of masculinity in both soccer and all sports for that matter, and manages to raise to salient,

incontrovertible expression the dormant, but ineffable presence of the feminine that, as is argued in this chapter, more successfully ingratiates itself into a soccer zeitgeist. As such, we have seen that the multifarious elements of soccer's composition and dynamics manages to permit a gender convergence that ultimately, through soccer's visual beauty and global success, undermines the viability and desirability of hegemonic masculine sporting forms, permitting a pluralization of the masculine in sport that we find occurring in other social arenas.

Chapter 3: 'PUMPING IRON(Y): CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY IN THE GYM?

In this sense, the masculine has always been but a residual, secondary and fragile formation, one that must be defended by retrenchments, institutions, and artifices. The phallic fortress offers all the signs of a fortress, that is to say, of weakness.

- Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*

Introduction:

This chapter is about bodybuilding and masculinity. Seems plausible enough. After all, what is more masculine than muscle? So from a preliminary perspective, one may presume a chapter which espouses the complementarity of bodybuilding and the masculine identity. That would be too predictable, not to mention facile. Although the association between bodybuilding and traditional masculinity shall constitute a vital component of this chapter, it shall not exhaust its scope of inquiry. In keeping with the overarching hypothetical claim of this thesis, I also want to consider if and how bodybuilding interrupts and actively contravenes projects of masculine embodiment, thereby further illuminating the fragility of masculine identity.

Before we can give thought to the relationship between bodybuilding and masculinity, we must attempt to clarify what we are referring to when we speak of 'masculinity'. 'Masculinity' may be one of those concepts like 'happiness' or 'Canadian-ness' that defies clear and consensual definition. This may apply to just about any idea or word, but masculinity in particular is a potent discursive trope that exerts enormous psychic force over the male identity while simultaneously remaining elusive and amorphous. The recent burgeoning of social theory on Masculinities (e.g. Brod and Kaufman 1994; Connell 1995; Mac An Ghail 1996) suggests a recognition (at least among scholars) of a plurality of masculine identities that are undergoing intense interrogation. In the course of this chapter, I shall continue to explore this contemporary condition of an ephemeral

masculinity through the questionably athletic domain of bodybuilding, despite all of its surface trappings of sporting virility.

For reasons entirely different from the previously elucidated boxing, bodybuilding's shared problematic status as sport shall hopefully become more evident through the course of this chapter. In order to proceed then, 'bodybuilding', though arguably less ambiguous than masculinity, also requires some parameters of reference. Most immediately, bodybuilding evokes images of enormously muscle-bound weightlifters like Arnold Schwarzeneger, massively built and obsessively preoccupied with one's physique.¹ Though this version of bodybuilding does occupy one extreme end of a spectrum of practices and activities that are readily identifiable as bodybuilding per se, I want to expand the borders of my conceptual topography to include a broader range of individuals who interface perhaps more ambivalently and sporadically with bodybuilding regimes, but who are nonetheless engaged in a process of working on their bodies. Therefore, while weightlifting may be the pre-eminent form of building one's body today and particularly relevant to the discursive formation of masculine identity, I shall consider any form of physical activity which has as its explicit purpose the modification of the body to achieve some desired corporeal result as a form of body-building. In expanding the more restricted usage of the term bodybuilding, I want to include the vast numbers of males in contemporary Western culture who cannot begin to approach the standards of a Schwarzeneger, but who nonetheless aspire to a level of corporeal aesthetic that provides varying degrees of cultural capital.

Unfortunately, I would have to include myself in the latter category. As someone who engages in weightlifting, I also want to provide a phenomenological account of the relationship between bodybuilding and masculinity. In the manner of Jane Gallop in

¹See the documentary film *Pumping Iron*, starring the irrepressible 'Austrian Oak'.

Thinking Through the Body (1988), I shall endeavour to collapse the Cartesian mind/body dualism that predominates in the modern intellectual tradition by processing the theoretical framework of this chapter through the entirety of my bodily experiences and insights. As the author of a work on the male body, I want to write it from the unity of my own body rather than from the detached distance of my head.

Inscribing Masculinity:

In situating the exploration of masculine identity(ies) in the proverbial gym, I am invoking the muscled male body as a material manifestation of that /those identity(ies). In this way, I am following in the tradition of those recent social theorists such as Bryan Turner (1984), Chris Schilling (1993) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994) who, enormously indebted to the pioneering work of Michel Foucault, have posited the body as an inscriptive surface on which one can read discursive dimensions of the social environment in which we live. The male body, then, can provide an hermeneutics of masculine identity and 'nature'.

But is it about nature? The current of social thought at the moment has decentred any and all 'natures', advancing an alternative paradigm of social 'reality' as premised upon social construction whose technology par excellence is discourse. Appeals to primordial, essential sexual identity (or any other identity for that matter) are disparaged as the atavistic thought of biological determinism whose contemporary advocate is the belittled sociobiology. But in forming a social theory of the body, it is difficult and perhaps imprudent to neglect the very materiality of one's subject matter. As Turner reminds us repeatedly, 'we are bodies and we have bodies' (1984: 37). Contemporary social theory has rightfully challenged the reductionistic scientific renderings of bodies and their sexual distinctness. Yet the ideological apparatuses of biologically-based sex differences are

very much intact and thriving in the non-academic world, and even in some spheres of the academic world like the human sciences.

The 'naturalness' of male characteristics is a highly seductive organizing principle obfuscating the historical processes of masculine arrangements. Positivist versions of masculine identity propose universal, unambiguous and uninterrupted accounts of verifiable maleness. But as the vast opus of anthropological literature on the multiplicity of masculine forms and their appropriate cultural conduct across time and space suggests, masculinity is not a unilineal exteriorization of inner biological truths. Connell (1995:47) explains:

There is little evidence even of weak biological determination of group differences in simple individual behaviours. And the evidence of cross-cultural and historical diversity in gender is overwhelming. For instance, there are cultures and historical situations where rape is absent, or extremely rare; where homosexual behaviour is majority practice (at a given point in the life cycle); where mothers do not predominate in child care (e.g. this work is done by old people, other children or servants); and where men are not normally aggressive.

And while primary and secondary sex characteristics such as genitalia or facial hair may suffice in matters of simple sexual assignation, their semiotic relevance to who the operating sexual labels fundamentally are and to what they are ultimately capable or incapable of is matter of social/discursive context.²

Whether it is perceived as essential or relative, the discursive overlay of a legitimate masculinity is an ongoing process of negotiation that hardly a male can avoid. In gender studies parlance, the term 'hegemonic masculinity' attempts to encapsulate those aspects of a vast repertoire of possible male characteristics that exert greatest power over the uniformity of male identity. Of course, whenever we invoke the ubiquitous concept of 'power', we must consider the indispensable discernments of Michel Foucault (1980a),

²More on the role of the signifier, empty and otherwise, later.

who reminds us that power's efficaciousness rests not merely on its proclivity for interdiction, but simultaneously on its sweet enticements and productivity. In that sense, the significance of the qualifier 'hegemonic' is twofold. First, the particular kind of masculinity in question is a dominative one, exerting power and control over the people and objects in its surroundings. Therefore the hegemony of masculinity is partially derived from a collective sense of a recognized authority that receives the implicit consent of those subject to it. And secondly, those aspects of the male identity which allow men to dominate their surroundings wield inordinate force over their and society's perception of what it means to be male. Aggression, adventurousness, strength, leadership, rationality, a propensity for violence and a general sense of embodying power are all integral components of hegemonic masculinity. However, as Connell demonstrates, constructions of 'hegemonic masculinity' are subject to a fluidity of socio-historical processes which, while retaining 'the dominance of a particular masculinity', can displace the axis on which that dominant masculinity rests to shed previously included characteristics or newly incorporate prior masculine antinomies; 'New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony' (1995:77).

The claim that masculinity is in a state of crisis is one frequently chanted these days (Bly 1990; Gillet and White 1992). While the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is still a highly potent and pervasive ideological apparatus governing male socialization practices, it is one which is increasingly being unpacked and problematized as implicated in a general critique of modernity. Perhaps unlike other interrogations of identity that accompanies the postmodern condition, masculinity seems particularly susceptible to a disorienting vacillation of the male role. At risk of massive oversimplification, hegemonic masculinity has been denounced as a bad thing. Prisons are filled with 'hegemonic men'. The global environment is suffocating under a hegemonic male industrial culture. Colonialism and its discursive by-product of 'other-ness' is the result

of hegemonic masculinity's 'will to power'. You guys might be tempted to hang on to your privileged positions of power that is your birthright, but you not only run the risk of being labeled gauche and outdated (a heinous indictment if there ever was one), you are also choosing to remain complicit in the greatest crimes against humanity.

The critique of hegemonic masculinity is an incisive and persuasive one. The journey towards reconstruction of adequate masculinities, however, is riddled with sensitive landmines. The void created by the relentless assault on hegemonic masculinity is not one easily filled nor readily reparable. The enlightened male may be incited to forego his hegemonic legacy, yet finds little satiation in the menu of masculine entrees available to him. A 'hard man'³ is a Neanderthal, but a 'soft man' is less than a man, a questionable man, a hideous man. It is an arduous and precarious balancing act to embody and enact the hard-soft hybridized masculinity that is required for broad social approval in contemporary cultural conditions.

Ultimately, a man stands to lose more than what stands to be gained by a renunciation of hardness and strength. I can think of no greater transgression for a male than to be seen as adopting codes of femininity. The worst expletive that can be unleashed on a male is 'faggot'. That is the closest a man can come to being a woman. It has been observed that the most offensive aspect of male homosexuality is the apparent eschewal of male power.

As Anne McClintock (1995) reveals, the colonialist enterprise is not merely an enactment of racial hegemony, but a curious interweaving of race, class and gender discourses projected onto the colonized by the colonizer. African males were not merely racialized in colonial discourses, they were also feminized⁴. A less than complete male

³A term equally useful off the soccer pitch as on (see chapter 2).

⁴Perhaps in part as a psychic response to the equally harmful myth of the hyper-virile, over-sexed black man which seemed to be particularly resonant in the immediate

could more easily justify and permit being conquered and dominated. Even when the powerful trope of race is invested in other males, their domination is facilitated by their castrated masculinity.

It is, of course, not men alone who experience this paradoxical relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Many women as well seem to be inextricably ensnared in a love/hate bond to hegemonic masculinity, loathing and fearing its violent ramifications, yet to varying degrees complying with the desirability and eroticization of the powerful male. Such may be a case of a mind-body bifurcation. White and Gillett's (1994) critical decoding of semiotic content in a bodybuilding magazine's (*Flex*) advertisements addresses the heavy emphasis on the sexual attractiveness inherent in the muscled male body;

The encoding of this advertisement incorporates the muscular body, built through discipline and consumption, as a sign of embodied masculine power and as a form of physical capital convertible into social power and sexual mastery in interaction outside the gym. The muscular body is depicted both as an object of enviable sexual desire and as an object of identificatory desire to the reader who connects the product, bodywork and sexual gratification (p.32).

And while the additionally desirable idea of discipline and self-control that the muscled male body may evoke to a male readership may at first glance seem relatively unrelated to the larger claim of male objectification, further consideration might illuminate the contiguity between male bodily self-control and female (or male) sexual pleasure. Male sexual desirability, and therefore objectifiability, can only be enhanced by the vivid promise of willful male muscle flexing - all of the male muscles, that is. It is therefore argued that the increasing eroticization of the male body occurring in consumer

post-Reconstruction American era where the rash of Black lynchings was often accompanied by castration

culture is a major contributing factor to (or possibly symptom of) the unfolding fragmentation of a uniform masculinity.

If contemporary masculinities are to find ways of introducing softness into their assemblies, even if in subtle ways while still retaining an indispensable nucleus of density, the body is no place to do so. As a man, you might let your feminine side show through now and again (still risky though), so long as it doesn't appear on your hip. One intransigent way of asserting masculinity is to wear it on one's body. In an age of troubled masculinity, the meteoric rise in the popularity of bodybuilding can work to salvage some of the besieged and floundering significations of masculinity. Or does it? Certainly the commanding presence of the well-sculpted male body is beyond the reproach of a determined masculinity. Perhaps not.

The noteworthy popularity of bodybuilding among males may appear to signal a re-emergence of hegemonic masculinity in popular culture as some observers have speculated (Gillett and White 1992; Bordo 1997). The rise of 'post-sensitive' men, like those in Stallone and Schwarzeneger films, as a clear departure from the Woody Allen/ Alan Alda ideals of the evolved masculinity of the 1970's may represent a regressive backlash to some. Susan Bordo (1997:166) describes how such a process may be materializing in popular culture: "In a 1994 issue of *Esquire* devoted to the topic 'How to be a Man', men are urged to abandon the feminized 'faux male' ideal - 'Mr. Sensitive' - foisted on them by women (as the article theorizes) and demand 'the freedom to be guys again'". An unequivocal reading of the muscled male body as symbolic of male power in patriarchy ignores the nuanced and more diverse meanings that the male body adopts within the heterogeneous discourses circulating in a heightened consumer culture.

A common and popular interpretation has theorized the role of women's increasing equality in the cultural arenas of work, relationship and even sport. As women continue to make strides and narrow the gender gap in a plethora of persistent but waning

male-dominated spheres, the male psyche is threatened and seeks social practices that can reinforce male supremacy and assuage mounting anxieties of weakness. Messner (1988:202) has commented on the sustained psycho-cultural salience of the empowered male body in light of its actual deteriorated social use value;

[the] declining relevance of physical strength in work and warfare was not accompanied by a declining psychological need for ideology of gender difference. Symbolic representations of the male body as symbol of strength, virility and power have become increasingly important in popular culture.

The relationship between masculinity and power is an intimate one and bodybuilding can intervene into this dynamic in reassuring and mutually reinforcing ways. I first gravitated towards bodybuilding shortly after I began working in a secure custody facility for young offenders. That environment was an unstable and threatening one for more reasons than it simply being the nature of such facilities. This was a newly established program staffed by predominantly young, inexperienced counsellors such as myself. Supervised by two young women, the program was designed to create a therapeutic setting that would facilitate the rehabilitation of the youth in our custody as opposed to serving as a mere facility of incarceration (this, as you can well imagine, was before the Harris administration's initiatives to more punitive forms of young offender programs in Ontario). In those first few months of attempting to establish a 'therapeutic milieu', as typically referred to in 'psy' circles, the lived reality in the facility was anything but harmonious, stable and ultimately therapeutic. The highly perceptive young offenders we were contending with could clearly sense the collective insecurities and trepidations felt among us staff members, much like animals in the wild who have honed their survival skills of intuition to perfection in order to sniff out fear and weakness in any potential adversary to gain that competitive advantage. The result was more an environment that we only quasi-comically referred to as 'Beirut', a seemingly war-ravaged setting with

strewn broken glass, mutilated doors, perforated walls and other signs of the daily stand-offs that were occurring. My subsequent initiation into the world of bodybuilding was significantly spurred on by the feelings of helplessness and lack of control that arose from working in such a hostile and unsafe environment⁵.

Another half-joke commonly echoed in regards to that facility from within and without was that it was seriously testosterone impaired. Rather unconventionally, the counsellors included of as many females as males. And the males we did have were noticeably less physically imposing figures than many of the male counsellors working in other young offender facilities. The female-led program design of fostering therapeutic/healing conditions for the youth in our care made for a highly feminized environment, in which the overt exercise of power and control was severely curtailed. My partial response to such conditions was to build myself up physically to cope with the unintended requirements of working in what I perceived to be a harsh and threatening milieu. The building of muscle on my body, rationalized as contributing to a strength requirement for my job, served as both a physical and psychic sheath against the invading onslaught of fears I was experiencing, simultaneously assuaging the personal sense of emasculation emerging from a feminized environment en-gendering my response to vulnerability. But as the memorable scene from Jean-Claude Lauzon's classic Quebecois film *Leolo* suggests, in which the older brother of the title character, after years of being subjected to bullying and public humiliation in the mean streets of Montreal's east-end, rough, working-class enclaves at the hands of a particularly merciless street-punk, and finally transformed into an impressive mound of stolid muscle, when re-confronted with his

⁵For an extensive autobiographical depiction of another fear-induced immersion into the extreme world of competitive bodybuilding, see Sam Fussell's *Muscle: Confessions of An Unlikely Bodybuilder* (1991).

arch-nemesis, is once again helplessly and anti-climactically 'bitch-slapped' by the scrawny street-punk before the eyes of the crushed Leolo, muscle's actual use-value may not exceed far beyond the realm of simulacra, and may only expose the aspiring behemoth to ever greater forms of corporeal colonization.

If masculinity is about the embodiment of power, it is also about its exercise. Power may be exercised in a variety of ways which can be located along a continuum running from overt to covert forms. Michel Foucault (1977) has traced the historical development of modern forms of power that have radically departed from the overt and extravagant exercises of sovereign power, distinguishing it from its feudal antecedent. In modernity, the individual is decreasingly coerced into actions and subjectivities that are entirely divorced from his/her own agency. Modern technologies of power are much more refined in that they operate to produce desires and aspirations in subjects. The imperative for coercive forms of power in modernity is rendered obsolete by the interiorization of discipline. Nikolas Rose (1990:10) has investigated Foucault's seminal concept of modern productive power in the following context:

Technologies of subjectivity thus exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship with what one might term 'technologies of the self': the ways in which we are enabled, by means of the languages, criteria, and techniques offered to us, to *act upon our bodies* (italics added), souls, thought, and conduct in order to achieve happiness, wisdom, health and fulfillment.

Bodybuilding as a strategy of self-improvement introduces the possibility of power being wielded over the male body and soul.

The masculine/feminine dichotomy rests upon a highly demarcated gender role division. Females have been subjected to scopophilic manifestations of male power in modernity. The male gaze has placed women under a mechanism of surveillance which has greatly impinged upon their own self-perceptions, constraining the possibilities of their being. The binary gender roles of male as active subject of the gaze and females as

passive object has been significantly disrupted in these postmodern times given that males are additionally being subjected to the visual scrutiny of an inundating corporeal imagery and aestheticization.

Uneven and contradictory trajectories are being forged by the mass circulation of ideal male body images in the high consumer culture of late capitalism (Featherstone 1991). On the one hand, the seemingly besieged and uncertain masculinity of our present time can achieve some relief from the 'butch' practice of 'pumping iron'. On the other, the objectification of the male body in commercial and popular culture further injects feminizing subjectifications into a masculinity contingent upon rigid binaries of identification. Sean Nixon's (1992:155) examination of male imagery in fashion, for example, finds codes of hegemonic masculinity as persisting yet undergoing some discursive resistance:

I would want to argue that the positioning of the masculine as bearer of the look (across a range of social practices) is deeply predicated on, and in part sustained by, the possibility of discursive positions through which the masculine can escape scrutiny and definition in terms of passivity and sexualization. Specific representational regimes do break with this hegemonic coding - for example, within the iconography of gay representation, certain codings of black masculinities and some framings of working class masculinities. Turning to the popular style magazines, and taking stock of the representations of masculinities they've carried in recent years, we see a limited but significant shift in the visual languages of maleness.

The male image in advertising does predominately exude encoded representations of strength, virility, agency, etc. For example, the power of the gaze is somewhat deflected even in advertising images of the exposed male body by the often direct and challenging return glare from the male model (Bordo 1997:155). The male model may be watched, he may be semi-clad, he may even be pretty, but he ain't looking away. The 'ballsy' return gazes of male imagery in advertising seems to be a compensatory response to the

awkward juxtapositioning of abject displays of male beauty amid ideological residues of hegemonic masculinity.

Staring back at one's surveyor is a bold, assertive gesture intended against an effort of minimization. The stare-down forms an almost integral part of the pre-fight ritual of boxing. The two warriors typically stand in the middle of the ring exchanging burning glares as the referee provides instructions before the imminent battle. He who wavers under the searing intensity of the glare even momentarily, by the slightest look away, or who refuses to engage at all in the preliminary exhibition of power, displays the first sign of weakness in what is often perceived as the ultimate contest of unadulterated masculinity. Boxing as a dramatic spectacle of masculinity will be discussed more extensively later in direct contrast to the more visual and passive bodybuilding.

Despite attempts to recuperate remnants of hegemonic masculinity in advertising imagery of the male figure, the growing number of images and products directly targeting the male consumer inexorably subjects him to ever greater processes of surveillance, the effects of which work to destabilize societal and personal conceptions of masculinity as impenetrable. Foucault (1985) has expounded on the predicament of maintaining a masculine identity in Greek antiquity between male lovers, not because desire for another man was itself feminizing but because of the inherent receptivity of one of the partners in such a relationship. As the previous chapter considered the feminizing potential of spatial penetration within a sporting context, this chapter shall elucidate on the problematic for masculine subjectivity in the narcissistic male arena of bodybuilding under a regime of visual penetration.

No matter how macho the posturing, there is something unavoidably emasculating about a guy in his underwear available for display. He is open, vulnerable and subject to similar processes of scrutiny and visual probing that female imagery and female subjects have traditionally been exposed to. The standards by which the male model is presently

judged is not markedly different from the beauty standards of female models. Bordo (1993) has pointed out that the ideal female body has undergone an important semiotic transformation recently. She argues in convincing fashion that while compulsory thinness persists as a beauty ideal for women, the added requirement of corporeal tonality and firmness has emerged. So that even the thin female is not assured of beauty status if it simultaneously harbors soft, flabby and unmanageable fleshiness. "The ideal here is of a body that is absolutely tight, contained, 'bolted down', firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control. Areas that are soft, loose or 'wiggly' are unacceptable, even on extremely thin bodies (Bordo 1993:190-191).

The male body beautiful is equally held up to ever elusive standards of corporeal perfection. Glassner's (1988) portrait of men and their bodies sheds light on the ordinary guy's dirty little secret of bodily self-consciousness and vanity regarding his own appearance. The implication is that men have always been concerned about that paunch of theirs, that receding hairline, that saggy chest, but have simply not been universally permitted the social spaces and opportunities to openly acknowledge it through the mortality-defying practices of obsessional 'workouts' that has become the new male norm. A recent article in *Gentleman's Quarterly* magazine (May 2001), 'The Adonis Complex', argues that while traditional anorexia nervosa is on the rise among men, what is more relevant to a majority of American men is a kind of anorexia in reverse, or 'muscle dysmorphia', in which men are increasingly dissatisfied with their lack of muscular development, prompting the author of the article, John Sedgwick, to provocatively claim 'American men are increasingly thinking and acting like teenage girls' (p.220). The fact that younger generations of men are now not only less inhibited to openly discuss their vanity, but more actively and publicly striving for higher than ever standards of male beauty is indicative of a profound shift in representations of

masculinity. That is not to say that such a shift is a harbinger for a declining gender hierarchy. Men clearly maintain hegemony over women in the world by virtually all empirical indices available on the matter. My point is rather that the incorporation of male vanity into a consumer cultural edict does have implications for obdurate and bounded invocations of masculinity. As Tony Jefferson (1998) has queried, does not the increasing investment of identity in the male body render men closer to a narcissistic femininity than ever before?

Rarely, if ever, can a man, like a woman, achieve that taut muscled body so desired and desirable without the effort of long and intense hours of training in a gym, surrounded by mirrors that enable/facilitate the vain self-surveillance inherent therein. There necessarily requires a (dys)functional dose of narcissism to achieve the idealized, muscled male body that is ironically naturalized as symbolic of biological sex difference. The paradox of the naturally muscular male body as 'truth' that is released through work directed onto oneself is an ongoing source of psychic tension for the male bodybuilder.

Sporting Masculinities:

Is a 'real man' a rock hard physical specimen willing to tackle any challenge that comes his way? If male identity has traditionally resided in the body as Connell (1995:45) suggests, then what in masculinity is fundamentally different from the construction of femaleness immanent in nature? Jefferson's exploration of 'Iron' Mike Tyson as contemporary icon of masculinity points to an affirmative response to the first question. Masculine-feminine dichotomies have not simply revolved around a male-as-mind and female-as-body duality, but on the more crucial component of masculinity as the embodiment of utilitarian action. Sport has therefore been a prominent feature of masculine identity dating back to the ancient Greeks (Jefferson 1998), though having experienced a protracted period of dormancy perhaps. How does bodybuilding

intersect with the notion of sport as a cultural arena for the execution of masculine competence and agency?

I bodybuild, but I'm not necessarily proud of it. That is I don't wish to be defined by it. I prefer to consider my bodybuilding as an occasional activity that can hypothetically augment my performance in more 'authentic' sporting domains than to be rigidly assigned the label of 'bodybuilder' and risk susceptibility to all of its attendant derogations of 'mindless Neanderthal', 'dimwitted musclehead' and 'self-absorbed prima donna' ('donna' being the operative word). Ideally, of course, I would prefer to mislead people into believing that I was totally indifferent to my appearance and came by whatever physical attributes I may possess entirely 'naturally', without the slightest self-conscious effort. Hence the advantage of a home gym (despite, or perhaps because of, its curtailed opportunities for display).

As a former elite, competitive athlete, the 'sport' of bodybuilding has always occupied the lowest rung on the ladder of valorized athletic feats, if one can even refer to it at all as such. Even so-called competitive bodybuilders, whose required dedication and work ethic in the pursuit of competition-ready muscularity is unquestioned, engage in a kind of pseudo-sport that rewards presentation and performance rather than objective victory in a structured and empirically determinable contest of specific physical feats. In a sense, bodybuilding can be seen as the reign of the sign of sport. The hard, lean muscular body is suggestive of physical prowess. Yet in competitive bodybuilding, the muscled body isn't actually used in the act of sport as an enhancement for the achievement of physical tests of superiority. In fact, as Loic Wacquant's review of Sam Fussell's intimate autobiography *Muscle* poignantly reveals, the blind pursuit of muscledom not only begins to diverge from athleticism at some crucial juncture, but actually begins to subvert and annihilate the very substance of athletic possibility. "He has finally become one of those bronzed, muscle-bound, manful statues that grace the pages of his glossy bodybuilding

magazines. Yet, when handed the first-place trophy, Sam cannot but be jarred by the discrepancy between the elated bodily facade of radiant might he presents and the crushing reality behind it:

Thanks to the rigors of my training, my hands were more ragged, callused and cut than any longshoreman's. Thanks to the drugs and my diet, I couldn't run 20 yards without pulling up and grasping for air. My ass cheeks ached from innumerable steroid injections, my stomach whined for sustenance, my whole body throbbed from gym activities and enforced weight loss. Thanks to my competitive tan, my skin was breaking out everywhere. Vinnie and Nimrod [Fussell's training partners] explained that all this was perfectly normal . . . 'Big Man, this is about *looking* good, not feeling good'" (1995:169).

Of course, the ideal of competitive sport I am invoking is not without its share of controversies and ambiguities over who the meritorious victor is in any given contest. Questions of legitimacy, fair play and chance always figure prominently in any sporting context. However in judicial sports like bodybuilding, gymnastics and figure skating, where the ultimate determination of superiority rests in the hands of sidelined adjudicators, eyeing and evaluating the essentially aesthetic excellence of their objects of scrutiny (not unlike a beauty pageant), the potential for ambiguity and controversy seems inherently greater (a point dramatically revealed by the 'Sale/Pelletier Affair' at the recent Salt Lake City Winter Olympics).

For these reasons, at the height of my competitive days, I scorned and denigrated bodybuilding and bodybuilders (but never to their faces). I was an athlete; they showpieces. I did things; they looked as though they did. My body allowed me to run fast, jump high, hit the target; the enormity and bulk of theirs was an obvious inhibitor to even the most mundane of physical feats like tying one's shoes. Even the one admirable physical feat bodybuilders do engage in - lifting weights - is not done as a physical test of strength but as a means of achieving the desired bodily surface. Power lifters, on the other hand, though less visually appealing with their occasional protruding bellies and

surprisingly lax muscle tone, can lift significantly more weight than the ordinary muscle-bound bodybuilder. Lifting weights in the pursuit of greater athleticism is a respectable endeavor compared to posing in bikini trunks before leering crowds. Football players, sprinters, Olympic wrestlers (to be clearly differentiated from pro wrestlers of the WWF variety for reasons that if not already clear will become apparent later) all typically lift weights to enhance the performances in their respective athletic disciplines.

Bodybuilding is but spectacle. The hyper-muscularity of the bodybuilder is suggestive of athleticism, power, even violence but is never deployed in their realization. The muscle of the bodybuilder is never active signifier, but a passive, liquidated signified.

Bodybuilding is perhaps what Baudrillard would call the simulacra of sport, where the possibility of meaning is jettisoned in the frenzied pursuit of the pure sign of muscle, emptied as it were of any referentiality to fathomable markers of identity. 'So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference' (Baudrillard 1988:170). Seen in this light, the male desire for muscle inexorably leads to a simulational and nugatory masculinity.

The boxer serves as an intriguing parallel and contrast to the bodybuilder⁶. His contest, like the bodybuilder's, unless previously determined by the sensational incapacitation of one's opponent in the form of a knockout, is deliberated on by an onlooking panel of judges. The boxer, in his significantly more generous trunks than the bodybuilder's, is also displayed before an audience in the tangential determination of masculine embodiment. The humbling and possibly humiliating experience of fighting

⁶See also chapter 1.

for one's livelihood that is the task of the boxer resonates with the most extreme overtones of disempowerment. Muhammad Ali has articulated the deep contradictions of his own subjectivity to his profession of boxing. Following his glorious recapturing of the world heavyweight title from the fierce and seemingly invincible George Foreman in the memorable 'Rumble in the Jungle' bout in Zaire, (whose primitivistic innuendos were soundly played up in pre-fight promotions), Ali commented:

Then there was this nightmarish image I always had of two slaves in the ring. Like in the old slave days on the plantations, with two of us big black slaves fighting, almost on the verge of annihilating each other while the masters are smoking bit cigars, screaming and urging us on, looking for the blood (Ali and Durham 1975:247).

The boxing match, however, is no posing exhibition. It is temporary warfare between highly individualized⁷ combatants deploying their bodies as armory. The material bodies of boxers and bodybuilders are qualitatively different from one another, designed for different purposes. The boxer's body, though arguably less aesthetic than the bodybuilder's, is built for the most dramatic and solemn of athletic activity - combat. Sheer size and definition are not in and of themselves advantageous in this respect. The sadomasochism of both inflicting and enduring great punishment (pleasure?⁸) that is boxing is not merely inscribed onto the surface of the body, but seared into the soul of the boxer. The inevitable visual summing up of boxers in the pre-fight ceremonies according to physical stature only, i.e. chest size, arm definition, trimness, etc. as they step into the

⁷The 'fight teams' in the respective boxers' corners may be instrumental to the pre-fight preparations, may offer crucial counseling and moral support to a fighter during the bout, may even provide some strategic advantage to the fighter, but the battle is a solitary one, often extending well beyond the ring (see chapter 1 and/or the documentary *On the Ropes*).

⁸For as Joyce Carol Oates says, 'Boxing is about being hit rather more than it is about hitting, just as it is about feeling pain...' (1994:25).

ring and dis-robe (unless like 'Iron' Mike Tyson requiring no such comfort enters the ring robe-less), is a wholly superficial and incidental test of boxing prowess.

If the expression 'the heart of a champion' was not originally coined in reference to the boxer, it has certainly come to be synonymous with boxing mythology. Consider Wacquant's assessment of the boxing spectacle:

Boxing is a true 'blood sport' in ways that few if any other athletic activities are, as reflected in the hypermasculine ethos that underpins it. The fistic trade puts a high premium on physical toughness and the ability to withstand - as well as dish out - pain and bodily harm. The specific *honour* of the pugilist, like that of the ancient gladiator, consists in refusing to concede and kneel down. One of the visible outward signs of that much-revered quality 'heart' said to epitomize the authentic boxer is the capacity to not bow under pressure, to 'suck it up' and keep on fighting, no matter what the physical toll (1995a: 496).

Boxing lore is rife with narratives of individuals beating the odds to achieve the pinnacle of their sporting profession. Jack Dempsey, first modern superstar of the boxing world, was a man of relatively diminutive stature who readily dispensed with opponents regardless of their size. Rocky Marciano, the only undefeated heavyweight champion and equally unimpressive physically by heavyweight standards, notorious for using his face as his main line of defense, could endure more punishment than his adversaries could deliver. And even the inimitable Muhammad Ali only entered the annals of boxing greatness after experiencing defeat following his prime, when his youthful genius was reduced to the level of boxing mortality, yet relentlessly re-emerged twice more as world champion. Such drama is the very fabric of boxing legend celebrated (even if caricaturistically) in such films as *Rocky*, easily recognizable as a composite of all of the aforementioned boxers (and perhaps a few more), that champions the arrant determination and agency of its heroes.

If, as Connell (1995:54) has observed, sport is one of our most salient cultural signifiers of masculinity, it is precisely the confluence and integration of various skills

and competencies in the athlete that most ostensibly mark his superiority relative to other male competitors. This version of masculinity forms a foundational premise on which the discursive sustainability of hegemonic masculinity rests and works to justify and permit men's power over women as well as other men. Bodybuilding, as a spectacle without the exhibition of skill and transcendent agency, reduces the male participant to fetishized object.

Bodybuilding Anxieties:

In a fascinating study by Alan Klein (1989) on the southern Californian subculture of bodybuilding, the practice of 'hustling' is presented as a vivid enactment of the anxieties surrounding the serious bodybuilder and the self-perceptions of his masculinity.

'Hustling' is a practice that an estimated 50-80% of the male bodybuilders in the gym featured in this study engage in for the acquisition of monetary compensation in exchange for services rendered to a gay, male clientele. According to Klein, "hustling can cover a range of behaviours from popping out of a cake nude at gay parties, to nude photography or pornography, to explicit sex with another man" (1989:17). As Klein explains, the level of commitment and brute number of hours required to develop competition-level bodies leaves little additional time or opportunity in the bodybuilder's life to pursue much of anything else. The all-consuming lifestyle of the competitive bodybuilder's regime tends to preclude the possibility of achieving the higher levels of education necessary for the kind of career that would permit the flexibility of long hours in the gym with a sufficiently lucrative income. Consequently, it is reasoned, a significant number of bodybuilders engage in hustling to supplement the paltry incomes typically derived from such jobs as bouncer or security guard whose unorthodox hours permit them virtually unimpeded access to the open hours of the gym. Fantastic efforts are expended in the

rationalization of bodybuilders' hustling behaviour with their heterosexual/homophobic and hypermasculine self-identities.

Beyond the pure economic motivation behind the hustling phenomenon among male bodybuilders, Klein suggests several other psycho-social variables impinging upon its fruition. He offers the intriguing observation that contrary to the recruiting characteristics of most other sports, bodybuilding in particular tends to appeal to the prospective bodybuilder's sense of lack.⁹ The classic example of the old - or to use a more current term, 'vintage' - Charles Atlas ads promising a big, strong body, and by extension, rather ironically, getting the girl, that will make every bully on the beach quiver at the thought of kicking sand in your face again is representative of the typical marketing psychology behind bodybuilding. Klein has posited a noteworthy correlation between the bodybuilder's low self-esteem and the high incidence of hustling. Feelings of low self-worth combined with the rather isolating lifestyle of competitive bodybuilding providing little opportunity for formal recognition of their hard work except to a small coterie of peers, leaves the typical vocational bodybuilder vulnerable to any expression of physical adoration and appreciation. The homosexual male fan is the primary candidate to satisfy the bodybuilder's intrinsic desire for corporeal validation. The comments of one hustling bodybuilder in the study unequivocally reveal the inner turmoil that results:

It's kinda sad. We put ourselves in a bad social position. I know people who hire us for posing, but there's more expected than that. It puts bodybuilding in a shitty position - to be laughed at. Who's gonna help bodybuilders? A bunch of homosexuals, that's who. We're everything the US is supposed to stand for - strength,

⁹Interestingly, contra the hypothesis of this study which attempts to argue that to some extent all male sporting behaviour is driven by the imperative to embody the masculine fantasy.

determination, everything to be admired. But it's not the girls that like us, it's the fags! (Klein 1989:21).

As can be well imagined, the psychological anguish produced by the hustling behaviour can achieve Dionysian ramifications. The homophobic sentiments residing in many a bodybuilder can be projected violently towards sexually predatory gay male clients, often portrayed as parasitic by several of the respondents in the Klein study, envisaging the clients as exploiting the often tenuous economic and emotional states of the bodybuilders. At other times, the violence can turn inwards as reports of suicidal behaviour by hustling bodybuilders is not without precedent.

The problematic of maintaining a 'straight' self-identity despite the homosexual deviances and dalliances by the hustling bodybuilder is psychologically appeased by a rigid discursive demarcation of what the bodybuilder does (homosexual acts) and who he is (a heterosexual). Several of the bodybuilders in the study maintained girlfriends while engaging in homosexual hustling behaviour. The hustling behaviour was commonly justified as a survival strategy in the cutthroat world of competitive bodybuilding and as unindicative of the bodybuilder's true sexual identity. A sense of truth regarding one's identity is precariously balanced in the hustling/bodybuilding dimorphism that erupts. Such a discursive formation invites contemplation of Foucault's (1980b) historical pronouncement that, in modernity, homosexuality became a source of fundamental identity as opposed to what had previously been viewed rather atomistically as an act (i.e. sodomy) or set of acts, placing the bodybuilder at odds with the broader discursive climate that seeks cohesion of the sexual behaviour with the sexual persona.

Sexual capacity in the identity of the heterosexual bodybuilder can also be a source of anxiety and contradiction. Hustling behaviour can unsurprisingly place great strains on the heterosexual relationships of bodybuilders. Klein reports that in such relationships,

girlfriends will question the sexual orientations of their male partners upon discovering the truth of the hustling behaviour and occasionally resort to hurling the dreaded 'fag' epithet during moments of conflict. Sexual frustrations on the part of the girlfriends resulting from the abated sexual drives of steroid-enhanced bodybuilders can also raise questions of sexual interest and capacity. One known gay male bodybuilder in the study who is friendly with two 'straight' male bodybuilders and their girlfriends reports that despite the regular sexual boasting by the two 'straight' bodybuilders, their girlfriends have complained of 'being horny' to the gay bodybuilder because of the inability of the 'straight' bodybuilders to 'get it up' (Klein 1989:23). So just as the bodybuilders' embodied signs of muscle produce a simulacra effect with regard to athletic capacity, they also anticlimactically (in multiple senses of the word) fail to deliver on their implicit promise of male sexual potency.

Bodybuilding is then a paradoxical practice with regards to gender embodiment. More than merely naturalizing hyperbolic dimensions of hegemonic masculinity, it creates a matrix of gender implosions. The lower but rising popularity of female bodybuilding also provides some interesting insights into the transgender potentialities of radical bodybuilding.

Bodybuilding and Gender:

Gendered dichotomies indubitably exist and prevail in the dominant bodybuilding culture. The social spatialization of most gyms are expressive of such tropes. Free weights tend to be situated at the polar opposite end from cardiovascular equipment. This kind of topographical setting can be seen as a material manifestation of a hard-soft encoding of masculine-feminine activity. The hard and 'buffed' men dominate the free weights section of most gyms while the cardiovascular end, though more inclusive of both genders, is designed for the more feminine pursuits of slimming and trimming.

Depending on the gym, there is the occasional territorial transgression by the bodybuilding female into the male-dominated free weights area, inviting various forms of barely masked derision and hostility like staring, snickering and other acts aimed at minimization.

Though female bodybuilding is steadily gaining wider social acceptance, many men and women tend to be repulsed and ‘turned off’ by the excessively muscular female body. However, what is considered excessive has varied historically. Bordo’s (1993:187-188) observation that a type of female body that she considered attractive twenty years ago seems overly flaccid by today’s standards points to the ephemerality of appropriate female corporeality over time. In addition, she claims that the arduous demands of extreme toneness required for the ideal body today (now nearly as applicable to males as to females) places a greater demand on bodybuilding as a viable strategy to its attainment in place of the more precarious practice of slimming down to the bone that anorexics engage in (Bordo 1993:191).

Popular films like *Terminator II* and *Thelma and Louise* can be seen to have traced the evolving standard of appropriate femininity and its concomitant corporeality in the broader cultural zeitgeist. The female lead in the first of the *Terminator* films, Linda Hamilton, reappeared in the sequel as a somewhat transformed individual. Her new muscular, taut body received even more attention than that of the male lead, Arnold Schwarzeneger, possessor of one of the most famous, though by then fading, bodies in the world and the single most influential figure in the emergence of the bodybuilding phenomenon. The spectacular commercial success of that film along with the more modest commercial success but critical acclaim of *Thelma and Louise*, in which two women embark on a road trip replete with the typically macho escapades of car crashes, armed robberies, sexual dalliances and an occasional shooting or two, helped to usher a new era of ‘girl power’. The idea that women can be agents of force and even violence is

one that has been slowly penetrating the social construct of femaleness as passivity incarnate.

Even as standards of femininity shift to include greater iconographies of masculinity like muscle and a 'kick ass' attitude, women continue to be expected to preserve and even augment the imagined markers of a naturalized femininity¹⁰. Hence, the sometimes seemingly incongruous and ludicrous juxtaposition of large, 'ripped' female bodybuilders with long, flowing hair, layers of make-up (often to conceal the growth of facial hair that results from steroid use) and two unnaturally globular, firm, riveted breasts. In this we find once again a gender irony that springs not from the seamless transformation of the female impersonator much revered by Judith Butler (1990), as discussed in chapter 1, but the hilarity, improbability and ultimate transparency of gender hybridization in the form of the monstrous female bodybuilder. The sport of female bodybuilding has always, it seems, been extremely vigilant about keeping the potential for gender transgressiveness of their sport(?) at bay. Marcia Ian (1995) reports that a major obstacle in the sport of bodybuilding had been crossed with the 1987 victory of the World Pro Bodybuilding title by former power lifter Bev Francis¹¹. In a lingering controversy in the sport, Bev Francis was denied the highest accolade in the sport of female bodybuilding, the Ms. Olympia title, in 1983 though she clearly displayed the most developed body of all the competitors. Her one impediment was her assessed lack of femininity (Ian 1995:78).

¹⁰ Within the context of weight training, for example, women can rarely be seen to be grimacing or grunting.

¹¹ Her transgressive success in female bodybuilding is twofold by first procuring a major championship in the sport despite her unapologetic masculinity and second by successfully making the unprecedented transition from the ostensibly complimentary but actually contradictory disciplines of power lifting to bodybuilding.

Reading the Muscled Body:

At the extreme, cutting edge of both female and male bodybuilding, the gender polarities that maintain greater poignancy in the larger culture seem to dissipate substantially. Sport as a predominantly male bastion has always brought the stigma of masculinization onto its female participants. But to see the gender convergence in bodybuilding as occurring in a unilineal direction towards hypermasculinity is to ignore some important and discrepant gender developments that bodybuilding elicits.

The pronounced x-shape that the bodybuilder seeks, with the expansive shoulders tapering down to a tightly packaged waist and once again flaring outward at the tree-trunk thighs, can be seen to be closer to the sexualized hour-glass figure of vampish femininity than to the standard, nondescript, asexuality of the classic 'straight' male body. Steroids, consisting of male growth hormones like testosterone, commonly used by elite bodybuilders of both sexes, conflates and disrupts normative biological sexual functioning and identity by inhibiting sexual desire and performance in men, among other side-effects, and eliciting secondary male sexual characteristics like facial hair and a deeper voice in women. The near elimination of body fat required for competitive bodybuilding typically inhibits menstruation in females. Even the enormous chest of the male bodybuilder in its fleshy, firm rotundity that juts noticeably outward from the torso uncannily resembles female breasts. The equally protuberant and generous but rock-hard buttocks of the bodybuilder is also evocative of a racialized blatant sexuality. The eroticized posterior has quintessentially represented a primitive African sexuality that a cultural icon such as Josephine Baker was seen to embody. In many of the photos in which she appeared and the dances she performed, prominent, generous and available buttocks would often be featured as symbolic of an untamed primitive sexuality. The unmistakable buttocks of both male and female bodybuilder not only comes to encode a female sexuality, but a stunted, culturally designated form of female sexuality. However,

the penetrability of the jutting, generous buttocks, that operates differentially onto the genders in terms of their reinforcingability, receives a modicum of tempering through the addendum of hardness and its corollary of imperviousness. Finally, the smooth, slick hairlessness of the competitive bodybuilder can be seen to move him once again closer to the feminine ideal of a silky, sensuous tactility.

The actual physiological process of bodybuilding permits a discursive investment of identity transformation. Muscle growth depends upon the literal tearing of extant muscle fibers. Before the process of muscle construction can occur, destruction must precede. Ian (1995:72) has drawn parallels between this anatomical process and Bataille's description of the orgy in which one's personality is brought to the brink of annihilation. Bodybuilding approaches this eschatological process in which the near religious fervour required of intense bodybuilding can produce an experience of rebirth.

The vascularity that results from quasi-fanatical bodybuilding can be read as metaphorical surfacing of one's interiority. The parchment-thin skin of the bodybuilder that has nearly been excised of all fat and stretched almost to the point of rupture acts as a visual conduit into the inner chambers of the body. Veins, blood vessels and striated muscle tissue rise to surface giving the impression of a flayed body, exposing one's true inner self to the world. In Glassner's somewhat piecemeal article on the postmodernity of contemporary fitness regimes, he effectively maintains that self body- work blurs the inner-outer dichotomies of identity:

Over the past hundred or so years, 'within consumer culture, the inner and the outer body become conjoined: the primary purpose of the maintenance of the inner body [became] the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body'. And vice versa: enhancement of the outer body is undertaken in the service of the inner body, witness magazine articles on fitness that equate an 'outer glow' with mental and physical health (1990: 223).

Conclusion:

The postmodern condition of decentred subjectivities creates ample opportunities for consumer cultural interventions into the pluralistic project of identity formation. Elements of hegemonic masculinity are integrated into the array of body/identity forming technologies available, but do not by any means exhaust the extent of possibilities for contemporary masculine subjectivities. An acute preoccupation with one's body necessitates a narcissism which has traditionally been exclusively associated with female subjectivity. As we also see in extreme endurance disciplines such as the marathon or the triathlon, which tends to produce virtually indistinguishable bodies in their sparseness across genders, the body work that is performed produces sexually ambiguous subjects that are not easily defined by rigid male-female dualities. Sean Nixon's (1992) exploration of the male shopping spectacle extends the postmodern masculine hybridization into other realms of consumption. The increasing cultural sensitivity to gender as social construction creates multifarious social locations for a more fluid exchange of cultural capital like muscle that unevenly interweave with and create conditions for the implosion of sexual dimorphism, making us all perhaps a little more androgynous.

The saga of the decline of muscle as unambiguous marker of masculinity echoes that of the once insoluble relationship of sport and masculinity. Muscle has become but one more sign in an inexhaustible supply of irreferential signifiers laid out before us like fossilized bones awaiting assembly. Its intelligibility relies primarily on a speculative nostalgia that can only loosely decipher fragments of semiotic relevance by invoking and provoking our ironic sensibilities towards gender. The strategy of masculine embodiment through the frenzied acquisition of dense muscle fiber obfuscates the wholly superficial project of identity formation that is bodybuilding, contrary to the recuperative efforts of the likes of Wacquant who attempts, through his seductive prose, to salvage

some transcendent meaning from the self-disclosed nihilistic asceticism that his subject, the transformed, privileged son of literary/scholarly stock cum muscle megalith Samuel Fussell, represents so quintessentially. In a move loaded with its own logocentric irony, Fussell denounces the sign games of constructivist sociology that eschew the 'powerful *moral and sensual dynamics* that work upon and through the body so as progressively to transform the mental and corporeal schemata through which the individual perceives reality and endows it with meaning and value' (1995c:173). As such, he fails to account for the seductive play of ontologically barren images that predominate our high consumer age, in which gender is but one more accessory to be donned playfully and ephemerally. Though Wacquant acknowledges the 'manly illusio' - 'the shared belief in, and collectively manufactured illusion of, the value of the games (real) men play' (1995c:173) - that is the world of bodybuilding, he simultaneously accedes the bodybuilder's own conviction and consequent delusion of embodied masculinity to an operational masculinizing effect. Yet his neglect of Baudrillard's indispensable insights into the femininity of seduction would surely have him modifying his theory of *Why Men Desire Muscles* (1995c). As Baudrillard says,

In sexual mythology, the transition towards the feminine is contemporaneous with the passage from determination to general indetermination. The feminine is not substituted for the masculine as one sex for another, according to structural inversion. It is substituted as the end of the determinate representation of sex, as the flotation of the law that regulates the difference between the sexes. The ascent of the feminine corresponds to both the apogee of sexual pleasure and a catastrophe relative to sex's reality principle.

And so it is femininity that is gripping, in the present and fatal situation of sex's hypereality - as it was yesterday, but in direct contrast, in irony and seduction (1990:5-6).

The seductive power of the sign of muscle does not have men move closer to a masculine order, even if only in a falsely conscious manner, as Wacquant would have us believe, but to a fundamentally feminine order in which determinacy is implausible and

the simulated experience reigns. Recent developments in the world of sport, which will form the crux of the following and concluding section of this thesis, clearly uphold Baudrillard's amorphous vision of gender identity.

**Conclusion: CONTEMPORARY SPORT'S INEXORABLE FLIGHT FROM ITS
FOUNDATIONAL WARRIOR ETHOS**

Every talent must unfold itself in fighting
- Nietzsche

...the structuring refrain of competitive sport is 'could have done better'. This then produces 'a constant lack, of recurring incompleteness', 'the ever incomplete athletic body is a symptom of the logic, the structure of competing'.
- Elspeth Probyn, *Sporting Bodies: Dynamics of Shame and Pride*

A decision to write on sport and masculinity as I have inevitably demands one to make difficult and justifiable decisions as to which sports? why? and what do they tell us about masculinity? In simple terms, my objective is to demonstrate that sport, as a whole, fails - entertainingly, spectacularly and even poetically, but fails nonetheless - on fully delivering on its promise to males to repair the damage that is their masculinity. Therefore, to argue this claim convincingly, it is incumbent upon me to develop a sufficiently elastic epistemology as to render it applicable to not only a select few, convenient sporting cases, but to demonstrate the general validity of contemporary sport's petering masculinization.

Time, space and will prevent me from providing an infinite supply of sporting analyses as those that constitute the chapters of this thesis. However, I hope to immediately devote some attention to explaining my three sports of choice to precisely convince the reader of the epistemological malleability that I allude to above. The trajectory of this thesis moves us from the abysmal world of boxing to the surface temple of bodybuilding, with an extended (and perhaps indulgent) sojourn in the blissful plenitude of soccer. The question of why boxing, soccer and bodybuilding seems inevitable and fundamental. My response, on the one hand, is if all sports, even the seemingly most virile, stumble and flounder on their way to masculine actualization, then

why not boxing, soccer and bodybuilding? For the choice would appear to be rather arbitrary and ultimately inconsequential. But, on another, possibly more fruitful level, my choice of sporting analyses reflects my agenda to trace modern sport's increasing dissimulation and alienation from its foundational warrior metaphor.

The arrangement of the chapters from boxing, to soccer, to bodybuilding is clearly in a descending order of combativeness and increases the metaphorical divide from the warrior template to a possibly unbridgeable chasm. If we harbor even the remotest tolerance for Elias' theory of civilizing processes (1978), however teleological and monolithic we may find it, we must agree that the perennial calls for the abolition of boxing (or more accurately prizefighting) cannot but be linked to our present, at best, ambivalence, or, at worst, disdain for its irrefutable and unflinching barbarity.

The martiality of soccer requires of its spectators a greater leap of faith and consequently a greater imagination than that required by boxing's, if not waning, then closeted, aficionados. Whereas the distantiating of boxing from war may seem slight (Joyce Carol Oates (1994:47-48) claims that the boxing referee's main responsibility in the ring is to prevent death - a job whose ultimate futility is temporarily assuaged by its immediate necessity), the dimension of physical confrontation is, theoretically and ideally, entirely eschewed in soccer in favor of a spatial and territorial agon. Positioned as it is within a broad historical legacy of 'ball games', which although specifically contrasted with American football and rugby in chapter two, really invokes a whole spectrum of team sports from hockey and basketball, to such unlikely and more marginal derivations as lacrosse and handball that require the spatial circulation of some ball-like item to achieve the ultimate penetration of some goal-like cavity. The ostensible

references to balls, sticks, penetration and holes alone should answer any questions regarding their immense popularity to multitudes of males around the world.

But of all these ball games, and of all sports in general, none can match the vertiginous popularity of soccer in today's lucrative and burgeoning global sports' market. It would appear that soccer's pronounced distantiation from the war metaphor as compared to the hyper-virility of boxing, or even as compared to soccer's historical cousins - American football and rugby - has done nothing to curb its immense international popularity. Rather, it would appear to have propelled it into the stratosphere of sporting success with an accompanying fandom of unparalleled zealotry.

The soccer fan is precisely given disproportionately more attention in this thesis than any other sport fan. His infamy in light of the phenomenon known as 'soccer hooliganism' should address any concerns regarding the acknowledged preferential treatment. The evidence of elevated levels of spectatorial violence endemic to soccer, not to mention its uniquely organized and pre-meditated character, is suggestive of the precarious psychic balance of the masculine identity. I argue that one of the symptoms of soccer's increased distantiation from the warrior metaphor is a compensatory impetus upon the soccer fan(atic) to recuperate a less ambiguous masculinity than that pervading the artistic flare of soccer, elevating it above the territorial 'game of inches' quintessentially represented by the lumberingness of American football. Caught as it is between embracing the war model with its territoriality and transcending it with its refined athletic artistry, soccer demands of its devotees a schizophrenic loyalty that appears to manifest itself in the volatility of the soccer terraces.

In bodybuilding, we arrive at the apex of sporting masculinity's warrior elision. The bodybuilder's only reference to combat is his muscle, a muscle devoid of use-value and wielded purely for the sexually antithetical purposes of display. Muscle may symbolize strength, power and aggression, but in bodybuilding muscle remains fixed at the symbolic

level without ever being deployed for actual corporeal struggle. The competitiveness in bodybuilding is restricted purely to the aesthetic development of muscle on the body, to be adjudicated upon by leering judges and spectators alike. As such, bodybuilding pushes the feminizing corporeal narcissism and display inherent to other sports to new heights. It doesn't fail to entirely disavow the feminine as in boxing, or agonize over its majestic, but shameful assimilation of femininity as in soccer, it is femininity incarnate, transposed onto the male body through the floating signifier of muscle; as feminine as a beauty pageant, with only a deceptive mask of masculinity. That the femininity is achieved through the development and exhibition of muscle is only incidental, despite its paradoxicality. As Sam Shalid, creator of the revolutionary male objectifying Calvin Klein ads of the 1980's, has declared, 'Pecs [pectoral muscles] are the new breasts!' (Sedgwick 2001:225). The bodybuilder's muscle is but an estranged and ironic reference to the promise/threat of combat, and as such invokes masculinity desperately and implausibly.

While bodybuilding's affinity with sport ceases at the juncture of the sign, it is critical to consider bodybuilding's integral role in the growing simulation of sport. In a fairly recent and brief piece in *Sports Illustrated* magazine, all but forgettable really if not for my obscure interests, one of Mike Tyson's many and increasing ignominious exploits in and out of the ring was being considered. His regrettable conduct during the bout in question (unlike some of his more memorable transgressions, he did not engage in anything quite as sensationalistic as rape or cannibalism, but, if I remember correctly, merely hit his opponent repeatedly below the belt) resulted in what the writer felt was a premature and lackluster evening of boxing entertainment. That observation prompted the writer to contrast the boxing exhibition with a Professional Wrestling spectacle that had recently been held in the same venue (Madison Square Garden, I believe). The writer

contended that Tyson's conduct drew attention to an inherent entertainment risk of prizefighting - its unpredictability. Whereas an event such as that typically produced by The World Wrestling Federation can guarantee a satisfying evening of 'sports entertainment' (the actual term applied to The WWF's brand of sport simulacra by its founder and spiritual guru, Vince McMahon). This in spite of the fact that the agonistic element of the contest is merely symbolic and wholly simulational. It is precisely because professional wrestling is thoroughly and unabashedly symbolic that an 'entertaining' evening of sporting simulacra can be delivered without fail, and without the anarchic quality that a fighter (in every sense of the word) like Mike Tyson threatens .

Bodybuilding's absolute worship of the sign of sport and masculinity through the cult of muscle provides the entry point to contemporary sport's thorough severing from its foundational warrior ethic. Whether the impetus is a civilizing one or an entertaining one, bodybuilding permits sport simulations like pro wrestling a precedence to trumpet all the reigning semiotics of masculinity without necessarily including the corporeal consumptiveness of the increasingly anachronistic business of proving manhood through bloodied affairs. The parallels between bodybuilding and pro wrestling are abundant and compelling. It's no coincidence that pro wrestling seeks and provides the hyperbolic muscularity (read masculinity) of the bodybuilder. It appears entirely irrelevant to the pro wrestling fan that their contest is of no actual determination as to the superior combatant. All that is sought is the surface spectacle of muscled male bodies engaged in a well-choreographed and scripted theater of mock battle resulting in a pre-determined, empty paradigm of victory and loss.

But before we should hastily restrict our consideration of sporting simulacra to the easily dismissed world of 'sports entertainment', we must be prepared to contemplate the waning binary of authentic sport versus sport simulacra. Baudrillard reminds us that if it hasn't been televised, it hasn't happened (1983: 49-58). And as contemporary sport's

viability is increasingly tied to its televisual compatibility, the line between sport and entertainment blurs beyond recognition¹. We are finding not simply that 'legitimate sports' such as basketball, hockey, American football are making structural adjustments to increase such things as scoring, fluidity of play and regular action stoppages to accommodate corporate sponsorships, we are witnessing sporting derivatives (or bastardizations if you prefer) emerging that simultaneously address the imperatives of televisual coverage and guarantee distilled sporting entertainment without the superfluous machinations inherent in a traditional athletic contest.

All-star games in the North-American sports market, already a product of the televisual imagination, have introduced specific events such as the Slam-Dunk Contest in the NBA and the Home-Run Contest in MLB that assure the fan of ample opportunity to view the repeated execution of their respective sport's ultimate feat of athleticism. And while the strength, timing, coordination and general athleticism necessary for the execution of a home run or a slam dunk is not entirely dissipated in these contests, as in an executionless contest such as bodybuilding, or in a thoroughly choreographed and contrived one such as pro wrestling, the combative, agonistic element is all but elided as the particular sign of sporting excellence is transmitted gratuitously without athletic resistance and without metaphorical context.

Even the hyper-virility of American football could not dissuade a 'sports entertainment' pioneer such as Vince McMahon from attempting to televisually enhance the masculine semiotics of America's hyperbolic version of the long, fertile legacy of the

¹For example, another theory, among many, for soccer's relative failure in North America up to this point is the difficulty in accommodating ads during the television broadcasts. TSN, the Canadian sports network, attempted an interesting solution during its most recent European Soccer Championships coverage by concurrently displaying a reduced screen of the game through the requisite television spots. Postponing the transmission of the ads is clearly not an option.

'ball game'. His launching of a new football league known as the XFL recently appeared predicated on introducing, highlighting and multiplying the games multifarious signs of its unflinching percussiveness. As though signaling to the reigning purveyor of American football, the NFL, that simply showcasing a game that exposes its practitioners to actual and enormous levels of bodily deterioration is not sufficient, the XFL endeavored to allow cameras and microphones to penetrate the previously sacrosanct spaces of player's helmets, locker rooms and huddles to provide the full auditory and visual spectrum of signs pervading its grinding, grunting, crunching cataclysms.

So as sport becomes increasingly reliant on the mass circulation of signs of masculinity, the agonistic element of the sporting spectacle recedes into the realm of symbolism. Contemporary sport would appear to be moving away from the corporeal consumptiveness of the supremely masculine contests such as boxing and into the corporeal productiveness of simulational sports such as bodybuilding, that demand the provision and circulation of masculine semiotics such as muscle. The illusion of actual combativeness in sport has created greater semiotic and physical space for the inclusion of femininity. It is only now that the warrior metaphor in sport is sufficiently subdued that we are seeing the unprecedented proliferation of females and femininity in sport. For although women's struggles to achieve equality in all public spheres has even resulted in the seemingly preposterous request to be granted the male imperative to participate fully in war, Joyce Carol Oates provokes us into questioning the tenability of female combat through her erudite assessment of boxing:

Boxing is a purely masculine activity and it inhabits a purely masculine world.... And though there are female boxers - a fact that seems to surprise, alarm, amuse - women's role in sport has always been extremely marginal.... At boxing matches women's role is limited to that of card girl and occasional National Anthem singer: stereotypical functions usually performed in stereotypically zestful feminine ways - for women have no natural place in the spectacle otherwise. Boxing is for men, and is about men, and *is* men. A

celebration of the lost religion of masculinity all the more trenchant for its being lost (1994: 71-72).

Women are encroaching into the former male preserve of sport at such a furious pace as to render its semiotics of masculinity and its discursivity of exclusive and inviolable masculinity irremediably subverted. As sport has always brought us to our bodies in ways that other masculine pursuits have not, the femininity that permeates contemporary sport produces and preserves the body in ways that a foundational, combatatorial masculinity could and did not. And as the signs of masculinity in contemporary sport multiply exponentially to compensate for a declining gender binary, the body's polymorphousness can no longer be adequately stemmed. The logical extension of the athletic body results in the transcendence of all boundaries and limitations such that the exigencies of gender dichotomies represent surmountable obstacles of inconvenience. Whether one looks to the sinewy bodybuilder or the spare triathlete, the extremes of all sport work to dissolve the limitations of gendered discourses and corporeality.

The avant-garde of sport that is Extreme Sports moves us away from the obsolescence of masculine agency into the metaphysical realm of existence itself. David Le Breton demonstrates in *Playing Symbolically with Death in Extreme Sports* (2000) that males and females alike seek to establish the limitations of their bodies through these arduous and dangerous quests; 'The subject thus crosses deserts, seas or jungles with any machine that is capable of producing suffering, calling on tenacity and strength of character. This intense relationship with the body is being seen today as a search for truth where significance springs from the heart of individuals giving them a feeling of jubilation, sometimes even ecstasy, and of being in perfect harmony with the world' (Le Breton 2000:1-2). The agonistic element is projected onto the nature of existence itself and requires no gender paradigm to structure it. As Elspeth Probyn (2000:20) elegantly informs us, the 'structuring refrain of sport' is a recurring sense of lack that propels our

bodies to strive for more and better. Some observers such as Thomas Osborne (1997) have erroneously interpreted a sociology of the body as misguided for failing to recognize the human quest to forget the body, to live with a body subdued. Sport and its unquestionably growing presence in the lives of Westerners, whether recreational or competitive, demonstrates quite unequivocally that many of us seek to have our bodies present and vociferous in our lives. It is rather that through the contestation of our bodily limitations encouraged by sport, in line with other body-altering technologies of science and medicine, the impediments to bodily and identity fluidity such as gender are necessarily subverted to the point of discursive and material untenability. And where the gendered body ends, new possibilities of identity begin...

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