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Religion in Modern Sports Fanaticism: From Classical Antiquity to Online Sports Forums

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theory and Criticism

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Abstract

In tracing the concept of religion to its theorization and study by French sociologist Émile Durkheim this dissertation presents concrete and abstract support for a commonly forwarded proposition: fanaticism of the modern spectacle of sports amounts to religiosity, characterized by a social logic of vitality and totemism, notably present as well in the ancient Roman spectacle and Greek agōn. Based in the contemporary theory of French sociologist Michel Maffesoli, following Durkheim and the study of the sacred by *Le Collège de Sociologie*, this dissertation contributes an immersive and critical investigation into the nascent but encompassing online dimension of fanaticism of the spectacle of sports, including the phenomenon of the ‘Game Thread’ in online sports forums, ultimately relating a prodigious affectual and discursive scope of influence to forms of religiosity concomitant with myth and ritual.

Keywords: sports, religion, fanaticism, religiosity, sports fans, sacred, online, sociology, sacred sociology, Michel Maffesoli, Émile Durkheim

Acknowledgments

An enormous amount of gratitude is owed to my supervisor Dr. Michael Gardiner for his professional inspiration, guidance and support, without which this project simply would not have been possible. Many thanks as well to Dr. Charles Stocking for his classical expertise in the athletics of antiquity.

I am also very grateful to the *Center for the Study of Theory and Criticism* for enabling this dissertation to receive the necessary support, including its intellectually diverse and driven faculty, and the diligent and personable office staff.

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Introduction

In tracing the sociology of the sacred from Émile Durkheim through Michel Maffesoli, this dissertation presents a concept of religiosity that underlies spectacular athletic contests, including the ancient Roman and Greek period and ultimately contemporary sports fans, whose concrete and phenomenal presence has garnered a vibrant scholarly field of study, such that this dissertation also contributes a vitally immersive and novel investigation into the nascent and pervasive digital dimension of sports fanaticism.

As Durkheim's investigations into the common and fundamental elements of religion uncovered a distinctive presence of a collective force of vitality whose conceptual prescription (*mythos*) and ritualization became understood as *sacred*, a sociological tradition subsequently developed therefrom that further elaborated on the rudimentary forms of the sacred found by Durkheim, as in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, composed in part by Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris, who were decidedly mystical in their sociological treatises and drawn to the forms by which the sacred was collectively and individually empowering in practice, forming a bridge to a conception of the sacred in the work of Michel Maffesoli that recognizes and theorizes a broader spectrum of religiosity that is spellbound by and legitimizing of social phenomena such as sports fanaticism, which are often sociologically reduced (under a hyper-rational lens) in order to successfully categorize, leaving out significant elements of its established position within the social fabric, such as the aesthetics of its appeal, its everyday qualities, its dialectical ambiguities and the forms which engender reciprocal sacred (social) bonds.

In effect, this dissertation presents support (concrete and abstract) for a commonly forwarded axiom: sports (fanaticism) is a religion. While this notion is haphazardly proposed

from within the sports community, it has been duly addressed by theorists and sociologists accounting for a general phenomenon of ‘fandom’, often invoking Durkheim’s discovery of the role of (collective) effervescence as characteristic of religiosity, though ultimately dismissive of the theoretical and material validities of the analogy, as Paul Booth suggests in the *Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, in which he writes that “to engage in this narrative diminishes the fan and trivializes the object of fandom” (154).¹ At issue here, however, is not fandom as a whole (such that fandom becomes a mode of religion, as Matthew Hills labours to contest), but rather sports fanaticism in particular as a mode of religiosity – a practical collective conception of a supernatural force, encompassed by the logic of the tribe and totemism.²

The first chapter addresses a working definition of religiosity based on the sociological tradition stemming from Émile Durkheim and historical intersections with *fanaticism* and spectacular athletic contests, in which the concept of the sacred emerges as a distinguishing mark of the religious category – the recognition and collective symbolization of an immanent force of vitality that territorializes the extraordinary and the everyday. The materialization of collective effervescence ritualized through the concept of the sacred reflects a form of power characteristic of vitalism, producing what is commonly understood as an incorrigible social bond and logic of fanaticism or religion, duly found in the communion of fanatics formed within the stadiums of spectacular athletic contests. The visceral and cerebral enthusiasms, the sense of belonging to a collective, and the territorialization of the supernatural emanating from the spectacle of sports come to exemplify the fundamental role of the sacred in religiosity, as outlined by Durkheim and

¹ For example, see: *Fandom*, edited by J. Gray, C. Sandvoss and C. Harrington; *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth; *Understanding Fandom*, by Mark Duffett.

² See: Hills, Matt. 2000. “Media Fandom, Neoreligiosity, and Cult(ural) Studies.” *The Velvet Light Trap*, 46: 73–84; Hills, Matt. 2013. “Sacralising Fandom? From the ‘Loss Hypothesis’ to Fans’ Media Rituals.” *Kinephanos*, 4, no. 1: 8–16.

further elaborated by the French sociological tradition which followed, culminating in the concept of *neo-tribalism* by Michel Maffesoli, which takes account of the broad spectrum of communion and community, whereby “in contrast to the stability induced by classical tribalism, neo-tribalism is characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal” (*The Time of the Tribes* 76).³ Ultimately, as spectacular athletic contests and fanaticism emerge congruently from the history of religion, this marks a departure point in terms of an academic evaluation of sports fans and the spectacle of sports, in which elements such as the athletics stadium and team name/logo are shown to perform critical and historically significant functions in sustaining sacred social bonds, as in their formal aspects, which are highly conducive to fulfilling the sacred’s basis in vitalism – in part a matter of conflict, power or life and death.

Having established a firm link between religiosity and sports fanaticism, the second chapter immerses itself within the digital dimension of the spectacle of sports, in particular online discourses. That is, in tracing the concept of fanaticism to its roots in the *fanum* (temple), we find that the athletic stadium’s role (as *fanum*) for sports fanatics has become categorically supplemented by online spaces, in terms of both the supernatural and the everyday, such that the chapter takes account of the dynamic and prodigious affectual range materializing from the spectacle of sports, emergent within a vast array of online spaces (such as forums and blogs) that house public discourses between sports fanatics, where prophets and priests also present themselves as fundamental mythologically to sustaining the flow of sacred content, ultimately evoking the author-itative role that characterizes *mythos* (involving an association of power with the storyteller). The religiosity of sports fanaticism becomes further magnified when considering

³ In an interview, Michel Maffesoli notes that: “Some aspects of traditional tribalism are not found in postmodern neo-tribalism. What, in contrast, is particularly specific to neo-tribalism is the feeling of belonging or simply sharing a taste or style” (Tyldesley 112).

the delineation of the will to power, *ressentiment* and the priestly class by Friedrich Nietzsche, setting the stage for a spectacle of sports imbued with hope, despair and a sacred vitalism, whereby the successful story(teller) unleashes a vigorous and persistent affectual flow from fanatics, ultimately exemplifying a religious class of worship.

The third chapter questions the extent to which fanaticism of the sacred in the spectacle of sports is concomitant with hegemonic interests, including political and economic, which are imbued by elements of force (and violence) characteristic of the *agon*. In effect, the question is asked of the spectacle of sports whether its role and impact within sociality is wholly subjugating, dialectical, or reciprocal, reflected in the differences of opinion between Nietzsche and Michel Maffesoli regarding the spectrum of religiosity, though ultimately critical agreement is found in regards to the socially pervasive influence of vitalism and power in collectives. As such, the spectacle of sports emerges as a sort of microcosm of basic social conditions, in which conflicts between opinions further bespeak an eternal and revitalizing competition materializing in both the abstract and the concrete, implicating fanatics, priests and idols all at once. In other words, the totalizing *agon* jeopardizes other significant collectives, for example those based on the aesthetics and logics of Marxism, an effect of underlying bonds, such as that of the wasp and the orchid, which have followed logics of territorial proximity and aesthetic charm, for example. And yet, even within the collectives of the spectacle of sports we find dialectical territorializations characteristic of an *assemblage*, putting into question the veracity of categorizing sports fanaticism as anything but a multiplicity that shares a common bond to the spectacle of sports, duly positioned with the potential to vitalize and reproduce either hegemonic

or counter-hegemonic forces.⁴ More importantly, fanaticism of the spectacle of sports presents itself as a unique and empowered iteration of the social logics of religiosity and neo-tribalism, whose immersive study here reveals a significant creative and structuring influence on both everyday and sacred life.

⁴ As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari remark: “The territoriality of the assemblage originates in a certain decoding of milieus, and is just as necessarily extended by lines of deterritorialization. The territory is just as inseparable from deterritorialization as the code from decoding” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 505).

Chapter One – Religion in Sports Fanaticism

In approaching a study of ‘sports fans’ it is instructive to trace the etymology of the term, in this case to its Latin roots: *fanum* is a noun used to describe a sacred structure such as a temple, and from which *fanaticus* [fanatical] stems, a combination of *fanum* and *aticus* (a suffix commonly used in Latin to create adjectives out of nouns), referring to a mode of behaviour inspired by a religious system of beliefs. Fanaticism is historically first and foremost a matter of religion: the fanatical person belongs to a Church and the scope of their beliefs is matched by the zeal of their practical adoption. Where, then, do we situate sports fanatics?

In *Fanaticism*, Alberto Toscano makes note of the *fanatici*, not just as a sign of the fanatic’s “inaugural link with religion,” but also as an example of the religiously inspired actions of fanaticism:

[*Fanatici* is] the name given to the followers of the Cappadocian goddess Comana, introduced to Rome as Bellona. ‘In celebrating the festival of the goddess they marched through the city in dark clothes, with wild cries, blowing trumpets, beating cymbals and drums, and in the temple inflicting wounds upon themselves, the blood from which they poured out as an offering to the goddess’ (xvi).⁵

While this citation highlights the role that religiously inspired actions have played in the identification of the primary characteristics of fanaticism, the ideal figure of interest for Toscano is in fact the political fanatic, a historical development from the religious fanatic, in which Toscano places little emphasis on the ritual (and sacred) elements of fanaticism, instead

⁵ Toscano cites the following in the passage: “William Smith, ‘Fanum’, in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, W. Smith, W. Wayte, and G.E. Marindin (eds), 2nd ed, London: John Murray, 1890.”

correlating the scope of the beliefs of the political fanatic and their eruptions of extremism. Toscano eschews the inaugural religious fanatic as a historical antecedent to modern fanaticism, which adopts the Enlightenment-inspired discovery of fanaticism's basis in politics, referring to both its role as a term of abuse and more importantly as a description of political conviction. In contrast, it is our contention that fanaticism remains best understood through its etymological roots tying it to *fanum*, as Toscano himself remarked: "...fanaticism proper (*Fanatismus*, *fanatisme*) derives from the Roman term *fanum*, referring to a consecrated place (the opposite of this being the profane, and the act of disrespecting the *fanum*, profanation)" (*ibid*). The shared etymological roots between the sports fanatic (*fanum*) and religion are ultimately one of several ties that 'bind' (*religare*) the two concepts.

How does the fanatic's etymological basis in the *fanum* affect our understanding of sports fans? To begin with, in our case the sports fanatic's shared roots with a sacred temple or shrine belies the need to converge studies of religious and non-religious groups (such as modern sports fanatics). Contemporary French sociologist Michel Maffesoli stands as a primary point of convergence between the study of sports fans and the concepts of religion and the sacred, given his concept 'neo-tribalism' and emergence from the Durkheimian sociological tradition. While Durkheim's work, in particular *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, engaged in an ethnographical and theoretical investigation of more 'traditional' religious groups, Maffesoli posits that Durkheim also laid the foundation for a concept of religiosity and the sacred that extends to non-religious groups and their own adoption of the social functions of sacred objects, spaces and rituals, such that it is Maffesoli's contention that conceptual models of social phenomena and religious phenomena be synthesized: "In effect, it is no longer the religious

domain, *stricto sensu*, that is at issue, but rather all religions ‘by analogy,’ which could mean sports, musical concerts, patriotic gatherings...” (*The Contemplation of the World* 88).

How do we differentiate between the religious and the non-religious? In the early 1900s, French sociologist Émile Durkheim published *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a theoretical and ethnographical investigation into the nature of religion: “If it is useful to know what a certain particular religion consists in, it is still more important to know what religion in general is” (Durkheim 4). For Durkheim, the general concept of religion needed to encompass heterogeneous groups which were considered primitive and who expressed ‘religious’ characteristics. The result was an understanding of religiosity as being fundamentally a collective distinction between the sacred and profane. Durkheim concluded that “the real characteristic of religious phenomena is that they always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe into two classes [the sacred and the profane] which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other” (Durkheim 40). We suggest that the basis for the categorical and social opposition between the sacred and the profane that effectively forms the concept and practice of religiosity is the primordial distinction between life and death, in which for example Michel Maffesoli identifies vitality as “the sacred duty of ensuring a continued existence” (*The Time of the Tribes* 63). Religion extends collective representations of life (attractive) and death (repulsive) to the totalizing dimensions of the sacred and the profane, which function by inclusion and exclusion – also imbued in the logic of the tribe and the temple. Ultimately, Durkheim finds that “Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first” (Durkheim 41). In this sense, religiosity involves a collective representation of the opposition between life and death, whereby formal systems of distinction between the sacred and

the profane are affective but can be substantively arbitrary, hence Durkheim proclaims: "...a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred" (Durkheim 37). In other words, a theoretical determination of sacredness or religiosity depends entirely on qualities which are socially prescribed, and which are directly connected to collective forces and representations of vitality, power and the extraordinary.

A religious fanatic is capable of seeing 'a rock' as a matter of the sacred, just like the sports fanatic enthusiastically relates to their sports team. This is the logic of totemism, as described by Émile Durkheim. Totemic religions were tribes and clans formed from a systemic and graphic distinction between the sacred and the profane represented in animal or plant figures:

the totem is before all a symbol, a material expression of something else. But of what? ... it is evident that it expresses and symbolizes two different sorts of things. In the first place, it is the outward and visible form of what we have called the totemic principle or god. But it is also the symbol of the determined society called the clan. It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from the others, the visible mark of its personality, a mark borne by everything which is a part of the clan under any title whatsoever, men, beasts or things (Durkheim 206).

The purpose of the totem was to represent the sacredness of vitality and to bestow it upon the clan and tribe, as Durkheim remarks that "... men regard the animals of the totemic species as kindly associates upon whose aid they think they can rely. They call them to their aid and they come, to direct their blows in the hunt and to give warning of whatever dangers there may be" (139). But more importantly, the totem gives *form* (and life) to the tribe and clan by virtue of its sacred prescription, expressed for example as a name or an image, as they were for the "Indians of North America," in which Durkheim asserts that "they are painted, engraved or carved images

which attempt to reproduce as faithfully as possible the external aspect of the totemic animal” (126). Durkheim elaborates further in the chapter titled *Totem as Name and Emblem*, where he writes that “the name [personal], for a primitive, is not merely a word or a combination of sounds; it is a part of the being, and even something essential to it. A member of the Kangaroo clan calls himself a kangaroo; he is therefore, in one sense, an animal of this species” (134).

In the modern spectacle of sports, as in the totemic religiosity outlined by Durkheim, the name and the image (of the sports team) are foundational for the individual and the clan (and tribe). Throughout the major sports we similarly find the role played by names and emblems (logos) – frequently emblematic of animals (as in primitive totemism), and sometimes of natural phenomena: Panthers, Maple Leafs, Penguins, Avalanche, Ducks, Coyotes, Bruins, Blue Jays, Orioles, Devil Rays, Tigers, Marlins, Cardinals, Wild, Rockies, Raptors, Bucks, Hornets, Hawks, Bulls, Thunder, Hurricanes, Timberwolves, Grizzlies, Pelicans, Suns, Mavericks, Dolphins, Broncos, Ravens, Bengals, Jaguars, Eagles, Rams, Lions, Falcons, etc. The role and significance of these names is elucidated in Jay Baruchel’s autobiography about being a fan of the Montréal Canadiens, *Born Into It: A Fan’s Life*, where he satirizes the passion and identity for the totemic name evinced in the rivalries with opposing teams: “*I hate you (Bruins) because other teams are just places and nouns, whereas yours is the name of dread and evil and pagan bear worship on the lips of Habs fans everywhere*” (87). The passion and aura of sports names, logos, teams and players experienced by sports fanatics ultimately evokes the reverence for the sacred in religion, whose power and immanence also stems from the totemic principle and the vitality manifest through contest. In his autobiography *The Game*, former goaltender of the Montréal Canadiens Ken Dryden addresses the seemingly totemic significance of the name of the team and extra-

ordinary players (reflecting a sacred status), as well as the aura emanating from the venerated home arena:

I remember my first training camp, and wondering what *I* was doing there. *Me*. Then stopping Béliveau and Cournoyer and *knowing* what I was doing there, but wondering where I was. Feeling excited/disappointed/confused—was this the real Béliveau I had stopped? The real Cournoyer? Was this really the training camp of the Montreal Canadiens? Was this the NHL, the league I had never dreamed of playing in? (84).

Ultimately, the prescription of the sacred (typically in opposition to the profane), whether totem or temple, along with its collective embodiment and aestheticization, involving an enthusiasm stemming from the devotion to or worship of the sacred, encompass the fundamental characteristics of the fanatic, and which the modern sports fan encapsulates with the spectacle of sports.⁶

***Fanum* and Fanaticism: Greek Agon, Roman Spectacle, Olympism and Modern Sports**

Michel Maffesoli highlights the common presence of collective emotion, proximity and space in both religiosity and ‘neo-tribalism’, such that the *fanum* can come to be understood as a critical aspect of producing the religious and sports fanatic: “Before becoming a theology, or even a specific morality, religion is above all else a place...space guarantees sociality [and the group] a necessary security [and perdurability]. We know that limits fence one in, but also give

⁶ Alberto Toscano takes note (citing Tibullus) of the state of mind of the *fanatici* (of Bellona) and their relationship with violence (and prophesying): “Once set in motion by the transports of Bellona, in her frenzy she fears neither the heat of the fire nor the blows of the whip. With a double-edged hatchet, she violently wounds her arms, sprinkling the goddess with blood, yet feeling no pain. Standing, her side pierced by a dart, she prophesies events which the powerful goddess makes known to her” (xvii).

life” (*The Time of the Tribes* 131). How does modern sports fanaticism employ a *fanum* analogous to a sacred temple? Consider the presence of the *fanum* of modern sports in the city of Toronto: when one enters the city by automobile via the Gardiner expressway, the motorway which crosses through the heart of the city at the southern end (bordering the lake), the traveller is inundated by mass sites of sports, all in close proximity to the expressway. To the south of the expressway stands the BMO football stadium and the Ricoh hockey arena; nearby to the north is the gargantuan Rogers Centre baseball stadium (formerly Skydome), the Scotiabank Arena (formerly Air Canada Centre), where among other spectacles basketball and hockey is played, and the Hockey Hall of Fame. While these arenas and sacred sites reflect the scope and aura of ancient Roman spectacles and Greek *agones*, modern sports fanaticism also permeates the everyday social spaces, as across the city there are another 49 hockey arenas, 236 baseball diamonds, 170 soccer fields, 176 tennis courts and countless basketball nets. As Maffesoli professes: “Physical proximity and daily reality have as much importance as the dogma which religion is supposed to convey” (*The Time of the Tribes* 132).⁷

The fanatic is fundamentally a member of a group, and both the temple and the sports arena stand as physical and symbolic structures that protect and reproduce the sacredness of the group. In Russel Field’s article “Manufacturing Memories and Directing Dreams: Commemoration, Community, and the Closing of Maple Leaf Gardens,” we find a conveyance of consecration in the relocation of the home arena for the Toronto Maple Leafs, a hockey team which moved its ‘home’ in the city from Maple Leaf Gardens (MLG) to the Air Canada Centre. While Field’s article is a critical analysis of the content of myth and ritual involved in the event,

⁷ “Whether we are talking about the family property or the urban ‘property’, whether it limits my intimacy or is its architectural framework (familiar walls, houses, streets), it is all a part of a founding proxemics that accentuates the vividness of the spatial framework” (*The Time of the Tribes* 133).

the description of the forms which permeated the proceedings evoke provocative accounts of religiosity. For example, in a rare personalization of the event, Field added that “Maple Leaf Gardens was, in some eyes, the home of Canadian hockey, and its closing ceremonies sought to reaffirm the presumed ‘deep emotional hold’ that MLG exerted over fans” (Field 63). While Field critically investigates the portrayal of tradition, progress, and masculinity, the extent to which stadiums such as Maple Leaf Gardens are caught up in a sacred social system evinces itself. That is, as Field remarks about the closing of MLG and the opening of the ACC, “Both ceremonies invoked symbols and messages that marked out a community of hockey fans and established MLG as the institution around which they celebrate their citizenship” (Field 77).

The practical role of the *fanum* as a home and sacred site for the religious group, including protecting and being the physical and symbolic platform for the sacred belief system and its ritualization, is found analogously in both ancient and modern sports stadiums.⁸ The temple and the sports stadium are presented as spaces outside of the ordinary – as spaces which bring to life the historically shared and extraordinary characteristics of the sacred. In *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Donald G. Kyle addresses a common tendency in the study of spectacular athletics: “Moderns want to trace the roots of our sport to Olympia, but we fear finding its roots in Rome” (6). In the essay “Religion and Roman Spectacle” found in the *Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, edited by Donald G. Kyle and Paul Christesen, John Zaleski remarks of the world of ancient Rome that it “was a vital one, filled with gods and devotions – not to mention curses and the spirits of the dead” (595), a context that leads Zaleski to declare that “From an architectural standpoint, the Circus Maximus

⁸ Sinclair Bell includes the following citation in the essay ‘Roman Chariot Racing: Charioteers, Factions, Spectators’ found in *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*: “Ammianus Marcellinus, writing three centuries after Pliny about ‘the idle and slothful commons’, notes, ‘Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus’ (28.4.29, trans. J. Rolfe)” (499).

[and the Colosseum] was like a massive shrine to the gods” (596). In other words, in addition to their shared etymological roots (*fanum*), the (religious) fanatic and the modern sports fanatic also converge in the spectacles of Rome and Greece of antiquity. In her essay “The Role of Religion in Greek Sport” from the above collection, Sarah C. Murray address the dynamic between Greek athletic contests, the arena and the sacred as such: “the supreme authority over any particular games was the god of the relevant sanctuary. At Olympia one of the first things that competitors did upon entering the sanctuary was to swear by Zeus to uphold the rules of the games (Pausanias 5.24.9)” (314). The sacredness of Roman spectacular arenas meanwhile is similarly affirmed by the presence of sacred objects, including altars and statues. The practice of erecting statues of gods [“Consus, Sol, Kybele; the goddess Victory; Jupiter; Saturn; Mars; the early Italic agricultural gods Seia, Messia, and Tutilina; and the obscure goddess Murcia” (Zaleski 596)] and contest winners [“...the custom of erecting life-size statues of winning athletes in bronze and marble represented lucrative contracts for Greek sculptors in all periods” (Neils 84)] reflects the aesthetics and proximity between ordinary humans, extraordinary humans, and gods within the sports arena, and the formal functions of sacred objects and sacred sites within religiosity.

Both ancient and modern sports sites have facilitated and venerated the sacred and the extraordinary, in which we find countless congruences. For example, most modern sports stadiums feature statues which effectively demarcate a sacred site, the *fanum* of modern sports fans: outside of Scotiabank Arena in Toronto (formerly Air Canada Centre) stands “Legend’s Row,” a site for statues that venerate former hockey players who played for Toronto’s team; ‘Monument Park’, at Yankee Stadium in New York, features memorials of distinguished former New York Yankee baseball players; a statue outside of TD Garden in Boston depicts former hockey superstar Bobby Orr; outside of Anfield stadium, home of the Liverpool football club,

stands a statue of Bill Shankly, a former manager; the stadium of the Dallas Cowboys, an American football team, features a statue of Tom Landry, a former manager; in Chicago, at the United Center stadium, home of Chicago's professional basketball and hockey teams, statues of former hockey players Stan Mikita and Bobby Hull, as well as former basketball legend Michael Jordan, greet those who commune to the arena; meanwhile, in Montreal, four statues of former hockey players (Maurice Richard, Jean Beliveau, Howie Morenz and Guy Lafleur) consecrate the Bell Centre. Statues of extraordinary and ideal sports figures featured at modern sports stadiums formally invoke the sacredness of sports fanaticism, analogous to the religious forms of ancient Rome and Greece, and ultimately reflective of the general roles of ritualization and mythification in religiosity, as previously noted of the *fanatici*.⁹ It is in this sense that Russel Field rhetorically poses the question "what are hockey arenas, if not just bricks and mortar? The answer, clearly, is places of meaning and memory for a great many people" (Field 74).¹⁰ Ultimately, this meaning to which Field refers evokes the characteristic qualities of religiosity, a collective sacred embodied in the *fanum*.

Modern sports stadiums are sites for public spectacles in which the gaze of the people is unsheepishly fixed towards the contest at hand, an amalgamation of the ancient Roman spectacle and Greek agon – evoking a totalizing (and spectacular) agon imbued with religiosity, and encapsulated by Pierre de Coubertin's role in the vision for and growth of a modern incantation of a spectacular athletic agon – the Olympic Games. We can trace the religious, spectacular, and agonal elements of modern sports fanaticism to the early and later developed shared presence of

⁹ "[Ritual is] repetitive and therefore comforting. Its sole function is to confirm a group's view of itself... The ritual perpetuates itself, and through the variety of routine or everyday gestures the community is reminded that it is a whole" (*The Time of the Tribes* 17)

¹⁰ One of the slogans broadcast inside Anfield Stadium, home of Liverpool FC: '(We Are Liverpool). This Means More.'

chariot racing in both ancient Greek and Roman society, involving a tradition of socially meaningful athletic contest that unequivocally survives and thrives in contemporary Western society. The presence of chariot racing as a funeral game (and ritual) described by Homer in the *Iliad* serves as a critical point of departure for an event that eventually grew to become a pillar of both Greek athletic festivals (such as at Olympia) and Roman spectacles (such as at the Circus), each with a unique scope of influence, culminating in the modern Olympic games, professional sports and their fanatics. While sites of (athletic) contest for ancient Greeks and Romans ritualized the sacred into collective identities, their forms of worship differed significantly: Roman spectacles developed out of a mass appeal for antecedent religious rituals involving dramatic sacrificial violence (as in gladiatorial combat, chariot races and animal hunts), whereas spectatorship was secondary to the performance of athletic excellence in the Greek agon – evident in the contrast between the gymnasium and the circus and the status of the participants. Donald Kyle elaborates on this distinction in *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, in which he writes that:

Individually, Romans were drawn to the arena by the allure of violence, by the exotic and erotic sights, and by an appreciation of the skill and courage of some participants or by the anticipation of the harsh but necessary punishment of others. Attentive and knowledgeable, some spectators, including some emperors, were true fans – or fanatics; some arguably were sadists, some went for the crowd and the gambling as well as the killing, and many perhaps went to escape their deplorable living conditions (3).

As Roman *munera* and *ludi* became multi-faceted spectacles to behold, the development of *factiones* and partisans of Roman ludic chariot racing in particular as groups of fanatical

spectators (partisans) supporting and belonging to racing organizations (*factiones*) represented by one of four colours (Blue, Green, Red and White) bears noting. As Alan Cameron alludes to in *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, “from as far back as our evidence goes, the loyalty of the circus fan at Rome went in the first instance, not to the charioteer, but to the colour he drove for. The charioteer might change his allegiance, but the partisan (like the football fan today) would never do so” (202-3). While partisans made up a minor portion of the spectators, staged contests such as gladiatorial combats, animal hunts and chariot races were also compelling to a majority of Romans. Moreover, these ritualized events were presented in such a way as to reinforce the collective sacredness of the gods as well as *Romanitas*,¹¹ a formal dimension of religiosity further exploited by fanatical partisans of effectively totemic factional colours. More importantly, the nature of Roman partisans of colour-coded charioteering factions is understood to be a unique phenomenon unmatched by Greek athletic festivals, supporting the notion that the modern totalizing and spectacular agon has reproduced and amalgamated *distinctive* elements of ancient Roman spectacle and Greek agon.¹² Nonetheless, as Donald Kyle remarks in *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, while the Greek agon was similarly unique, it also shared a common ground with Roman spectacle in its ritualization of contests and simultaneous production of a sacred identity: “That Homeric epics and the Olympic festival—things shared by all Greeks—both included athletic contests, as well as religious rituals and a traditional value system, meant that later Greeks regarded athletic games as part of their

¹¹ As Jerry Toner remarks in ‘Trends in the Study of Roman Spectacle and Sport’ from *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity* edited by Paul Christesen and Donald Kyle: “Spectacles created a cultural vocabulary that helped unite the diverse peoples under Roman control. In such a multicultural empire, the games met a need for social unity, cohesion, and integration. In other words, they were key to bringing about Romanization” (453-4).

¹² Garret Fagan offers a highly useful concept in the “conglomerate spectacle” when he remarks that “the Roman arena managed to combine the ludic and punitive categories into a single, complex event suffused with religious symbolism, and thus fashioned an unholy trinity that merged all three forms into one” (5).

ethnicity, as proof of being Greek” (76). Meanwhile, a fundamental distinction between the two is the primarily aristocratic Greek athlete compared to the Roman contestant, often a condemned/convicted man, animal or slave. Ultimately, ancient Greek reverence for athletic excellence superseded the spectacular (and spectatorial) aspects of *agones* more germane to Roman spectacles, though as demonstrated by the grandeur of modern Olympic stadiums both can be said to have uniquely influenced modern sports and its fanatics, as Daphne Bolz remarks on the legacy of Olympism:

From the beginning of the 20th century, and especially from the interwar period onwards, Olympic stadiums were more than technically proficient venues for sport. From ‘industrial’-style engineering, they came to be viewed as architectural statements, sometimes following an ideological line that combined nationalism with a fascination for antiquity (238).

While the driving force of the modern Olympic games, Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), first envisioned the social democratization of athletics (through education reform) as a domestic affair (namely, for France) modelled after post-industrial England, the nascent idea of a revitalized and modern form of ancient Greek athletic festivals (in particular, at Olympia) came to appeal to Coubertin as an effective platform to disseminate the religion of athletics, what is referred to as Olympism, or as Allen Guttman notes, “secular religion.”¹³ Moreover, though the ancient Greek gymnasium, with its focus on the athlete’s education, performance and excellence,

¹³ Allen Guttman outlines Coubertin’s disposition in influencing Olympism: “In their beliefs, Coubertin and his followers were liberals in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill. Deeply suspicious of conventional theistic religions, they promoted Olympism as a substitute for traditional faith. ‘For me’, Coubertin wrote in his *Mémoires Olympiques*, ‘sport is a religion with church, dogma, ritual’. In a radio address delivered in Berlin on August 4, 1935, he repeated his frequently expressed desire that the games be inspired by ‘religious sentiment transformed and enlarged by the internationalism and democracy that distinguish the modern age’” (3).

inspired in part Coubertin's idealism of Olympism, it was invariably characteristics of the Roman "conglomerate spectacle" which contributed to establishing a modern sacred agon through athletic festival, including the ancient premise of peace among attending rival citizens. That is, the proliferation of Olympism went hand in hand with its adoption as a spectacle akin to the Circus Maximus, in contrast to being overshadowed by world fairs in 1900 in Paris and 1904 in the United States, before finding a more appropriate and spectacular stadium in London for the 1908 games.¹⁴ Though it can be noted that "the aim of the IOC [International Olympic Committee] was to promote the practising of sport and not the passive watching of it," based on the functional role of collective affect and ecstasy in religiosity there emerged the need for a proper *fanum* for Olympism, hence Daphne Bolz remarks that "In 1910 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) launched an architecture competition for a Modern Olympia ('*cité olympique moderne*') – an ideal 'Olympic place'" (236). Therefore, while the aristocratic elements of the Greek agon were primarily idealized in the growth of Olympism, qualities of the Roman conglomerate spectacle have more effectively contributed to establishing a modern secular religion of sports fanaticism. In *You Must Change Your Life*, Peter Sloterdijk affirms that Coubertin's vision for a modern religion of the agon became territorialized by forces in religiosity characteristically identified by Max Weber – bureaucratic hierarchism and economical principles: "...the Olympic movement spontaneously followed the most important of all organizational secrets: to create as many functions and honorary offices as possible, in order to guarantee the thymotic mobilization of the members and their pragmatic binding to the sublime

¹⁴ Outlining the crucial role of stadium (*fanum*) and spectacle for the modern Olympics, Daphne Bolz adds: "The 1896 Games were staged in the reconstructed remains of an ancient Greek stadium in Athens, but after the disappointing experiences of Paris in 1900 and Saint Louis in 1904 Coubertin underlined the importance of having a proper stadium to host future Olympic celebrations" (235).

cause” (92).¹⁵ Moreover, Sloterdijk positions the Hellenistic underpinnings of (modern) Olympism as being typified instead by Wagnerian aesthetic impulses and superseded by modernity, where ultimately the aristocratic moralizing ‘religion of the athlete’ became subsumed by proxemics and collective emotions within modern (religious) spectacle. The underlying agon in play at the modern Olympic games was hence not the purely Hellenistic concept attributed by Jacob Burckhardt but rather the totalizing and spectacular concept of agon that characterizes religiosity in general. While the religiosity of modern sports fanaticism contains prominent influences that run through Olympism as a modern revival of ancient Greek athletic festivals and agonism, ‘Greek exceptionalism’ must be put into context, as Paul Christesen and Charles Stocking note of Burckhardt in their introduction to *A Cultural History of Sport in Antiquity*, that “Above all other historical forces, he considered the Greek form of institutionalized competition, known as the *agōn*, to be the primary principle structuring ancient Greek culture,”¹⁶ such that succeeding intellectuals such as Johan Huizinga would respond in kind, under the guise of cultural history, with their own theoretical models for assimilating social (rituals of) competition.¹⁷ In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga thrusts the concept of ‘play’ to the forefront, suggesting that “...genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilisation” (5). His foray into the social influence of ‘play’ was insightful if not overreaching, as he was more

¹⁵ Sloterdijk resolutely distances the modern Olympics from their supposed underpinnings in Greek agonism: “The games had to integrate themselves amid the excesses of mass culture, changing into a profane event machine more resolutely at every repetition...The Olympic idea never had a chance as a ‘heathen’ form of a religion of offer from above” (93).

¹⁶ Forthcoming introduction to *Bloomsbury Cultural History of Sport, Vol. 1*. On the same topic, see *Ancient Greek Competition: A Modern Construct* by Christian Ulf.

¹⁷ “The agon in Greek life, or the contest anywhere else in the world, bears all the formal characteristics of play, and as to its function belongs almost wholly to the sphere of the festival, which is the play-sphere. It is quite impossible to separate the contest as a cultural function from the complex ‘play-festival-rite’” (Huizinga 31).

successful in identifying social connections than in demarcating a clear and decisive definition of play. According to Huizinga, play is

...a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (13).

Certainly, there are differences between modern instantiations of sports and ancient games (both involving athletic contests), but there are issues with Huizinga's conclusion regarding modern spectacles of sport, in which he states "However important it may be for the players or spectators, it remains sterile. The old play-factor has undergone almost complete atrophy" (198). In explaining why achieving excellence at the card-game bridge (while ignoring the soul) is a sterile experience, Huizinga declares that "appearances are deceptive. Really to play, a man must play like a child" (199). In such cases, we suggest that Huizinga is greatly overemphasizing the childish aspects of play, given his exhaustive enumerations of what play, in fact, consists of. That is, throughout his investigation, play becomes an all-encompassing concept riddled with contradictions. On the one hand, play is a "free activity," emulating child's play; on the other hand, "Play demands order absolute and supreme" (10). Again, Huizinga proposes that "Like all other forms of play, the contest is largely devoid of purpose" (49), and yet he writes "We play or compete 'for' something...Every game has its stake. It can be of material or symbolical value, but also ideal" (50). This theme of contradiction is particularly pronounced in the problem of

seriousness and play in his work, which Huizinga in fact addresses as a precarious point: “To our way of thinking, play is the direct opposite of seriousness...Examined more closely, however, the contrast between play and seriousness proves to be neither conclusive nor fixed...some play can be very serious indeed” (5).¹⁸ And yet, throughout his work, Huizinga envisions and outlines a concept of play that is wholly distinct from seriousness: “Play is a thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness” (45). Seriousness, for Huizinga, is associated with among other things work, which of course spoils the fun in play. As it is, play involving rigid boundaries and rules naturally contains a seriousness, a tendency which when taken to an extreme does not negate play – for it is even made abundantly clear in *Homo Ludens* that play stems from games and competition, in which the primary importance is to win. The “sterilization” of contemporary games suggested by Huizinga misses the mark, as we are witnessing changes in the forms of play, and not to the content of gameplay and the consequences which are at stake. That is, those elements found in Huizinga’s investigation into play *qua* play are in fact present in modern spectacles of sport.

By identifying the theatrical element of play (for example, to play a character; to play pretend), Huizinga further suggests that rituals are a matter of “shows, representations, dramatic performances, imaginative actualizations of a vicarious nature” (15).¹⁹ The performative aspects of play do not receive much attention in *Homo Ludens* except for their role in rituals. That is, Huizinga does not fully elaborate much on the elements of play related to “dance, music, the stage, the screen.” He does, however, allude to the analogous positions taken up by ritual and play: “Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’

¹⁸ “The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. The inferiority of play is continually being offset by the corresponding superiority of its seriousness. Play turns to seriousness and seriousness to play” (Huizinga 8).

¹⁹ “The ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play which we enumerated above, particularly in so far as it transports the participants to another world” (Huizinga 18).

cannot be formally distinguished from the playground” (10). Little wonder, then, that both the ancient Greeks and Romans have presented themselves as noteworthy examples for their part in festive (religious) athletic contests. Huizinga associates play and ritual due to their shared function of performed consecration, in which both place and performance are platforms for channeling, communicating and exchanging with sacred forces.

Huizinga considers the arena, the courtroom, and the temple as demarcated spaces of play. For play to occur, according to Huizinga, it is crucial for there to be a distinction/separation of worlds, whether from ordinary life, between reality and illusion²⁰ or the sacred and profane.²¹ In this sense, Huizinga rejects the lack of separation between play and seriousness in modern sporting spectacles.²² However, it is not the case that contemporary spectacles of sport lack the fundamental characteristics of play, for precisely in these contests do we find the basic separation of the ordinary from the extraordinary. It is true that his characterization of mass sporting events as being partially overrun by systematization and regimentation is an accurate depiction of the current state of sports spectacles, but this does not detract from its fundamental sacred elements. While contemporary mass sporting events are replete with rationality, they nonetheless function through crucial elements of Huizinga’s concept of play – including a direct connection to the extraordinary (in working contrast to the ordinary, or profane) and the central role of contest and competition (play, games), substantively contributing to the religiosity of the

²⁰ “The idea of “feigning” or “taking on the semblance of” seems to be uppermost. The compounds *alludo*, *colludo*, *illudo* all point in the direction of the unreal, the illusory” (Huizinga 36).

²¹ “Primitive society performs its sacred rites, its sacrifices, consecrations and mysteries, all of which serve to guarantee the well-being of the world, in a spirit of pure play truly understood” (Huizinga 5).

²² “In modern social life sport occupies a place alongside and apart from the cultural process. The great competitions in archaic cultures had always formed part of the sacred festivals and were indispensable as health and happiness-bringing activities. This ritual tie has now been completely severed; sport has become profane, ‘unholy’ in every way and has no organic connection whatever with the structure of society, least of all when prescribed by the government” (Huizinga 197).

modern spectacle of sports. One of Huizinga's apprehensions regarding contemporary play is its lack of 'sacred' content, particularly in contrast to the more primitive concern with vitality. One issue with this view concerning the 'essence' of play is it undervalues the role of form and function in social rituals. Formally speaking, the spectacular contests of ancient Greece and Rome share significant parallels with modern spectacles of sport, and the latter should ultimately be understood as an expression of religiosity. Popular and spectacular athletic contests in all cases create an event whose dramatic performance enchants: "Play casts a spell over us; it is enchanting, captivating" (10).

The enchantment of the modern spectacle of sports engenders a sacred world, involving both myths (words of authority; foundational events) and rituals (rules, performances). It is precisely the structured and impassioned separation of the sacred from the profane which characterizes religiosity, as this quality effectively lends itself to social (tribal) vitality. The material distinction between the extraordinary and the ordinary is an essential element to the tribalism inherent to religiosity and for this reason we see for example how the Roman spectacle's mass enchantment, its inscribed myths, and their subsequent contributions to the vitality of Romans are a form of religiosity expressed analogously in modern spectacles of sports. In his essay "Overview of Roman Spectacle", Roger Dunkle remarks that we derive the word 'spectacle' from Latin (*spectare*, to watch; *spectaculum*, a show, a sight to see) and its roots in religion (appeasing the gods), as it was used to refer to "chariot races (*ludi circenses*), drama (*ludi scaenici*), gladiatorial combats (*munus*), staged animal hunts (*venatio*), staged naval battles (*naumachia*), and Greek athletic contests featuring Greek athletes (*athletae*)" (Dunkle 381). John Zaleski, meanwhile, suggests that Roman spectacles and games were furnished in the name of reciprocity, whether between gods and the elite/the people, or simply between the elite

and the people: “The earliest known *ludi* were, in most cases, given by generals who vowed to hold games in honor of the gods if victorious in battle. These *ludi votivi* were an act of thanksgiving for military victory” (591). Aside from military vitality, agricultural vitality and funerary rites were also a common precursor to festivals and games. So, what began as a means of communication with the gods quickly attained mass (aesthetic) appeal, as Jerry Toner notes: “During the Republic, wealthy and ambitious members of the Roman elite found it expedient to spend lavishly on games in order to curry favor with the populace” (453). The popularity of spectacles paved the way for an increasing number of social applications, as emperors found in spectacles the means to appease, communicate with, assimilate and form consensus with spectators, which characterized the eventual politicization of a previously primarily sacred ritual. Regarding secularization, Zaleski concludes that “...we should not see the games of the Early Empire as turning into devices of secular political power and thereby losing their religious meaning. It is more accurate to say that the games attained a new significance, simultaneously religious and political, under the umbrella of the cult of emperors” (594).

Spectacles involved not only the competitors inside the arena, but they also implicated other rivals and battles, such as religious (Christian dissention of spectacles) and political (the struggle for power between Pompey and Caesar; the general tension between the people and the emperor). Thomas Nielsen suggests that for the ancient Greeks “the general atmosphere at Olympia was highly politicized, and the competitions were conceived of not only as competitions between athletes, but also as competitions between city-states that identified strongly with their athletes” (133). With spectacle becoming subsumed by a totalizing *agon* – a general state of competition and rivalry (*inter-*, *intra-*, *extra-tribal*) – it increasingly complicates a study of the modern spectacle of sports, largely due to the field-wide issue of primary causes:

the spectacle is itself implicated in a contest (of *power*), however, unlike the athletic contest, the spectacle has subsumed various dimensions of rivalries, making it near impossible to capture conceptually. Concepts such as ‘spectacle of sports’ become better understood as “concrete assemblages, like the configurations of a machine” (*What Is Philosophy?* 36),²³ such that each part deserves recognition for its contribution to a successful performance (output). As such, the Roman spectacle, for example, becomes understood as sacred ritual, legitimator of power, theatre, producer of identity, and war game.

Even if we can trace modern sports in large part to its spectacular forms in ancient Greece and Rome, the term ‘sport’ does not hold significant etymological antecedents in Greek or Latin, whereas athletics and athlete, stemming from the Greek *âthlos*, a contest for a prize, are fundamental to the development of modern sport, as it indicates notions of winning and losing. In *Homo Ludens*, as we have noted, Johan Huizinga forwards a contradictory typology of play, including with regards to the stakes – leading to a concept that accounts for play in both competitive and non-competitive formats. In other words, Huizinga presents the concept of play as encapsulating and privileging non-seriousness, while also remarking that play is closely connected to winning. It is our contention that Huizinga’s concept of play does not wholly account for the role of competitive play, in which the seemingly trivial “prize” for winning in fact confers the materiality of power and vitality:

What is ‘winning’, and what is ‘won’? Winning means showing oneself superior in the outcome of a game. Nevertheless, the evidence of this superiority tends to confer

²³ “The mandala is a projection on a surface that establishes correspondence between divine, cosmic, political, architectural, and organic levels as so many values of one and the same transcendence. That is why the figure has a reference, one that is plurivocal and circular by nature. Certainly, it is not defined by an external resemblance, which remains prohibited, but by an internal tension that relates it to the transcendent on the plane of immanence of thought” (*What is Philosophy?* 89).

upon the winner a semblance of superiority in general. In this respect he wins something more than the game as such. He has won esteem, obtained honour; and this honour and esteem at once accrue to the benefit of the group to which the victor belongs (50).

Even if Huizinga does not effectively integrate the totalizing *agon* into his concept of play, he nonetheless identifies its presence. For Huizinga, the agonal instinct is effectively innate, and yet it is still subsumed under the play concept, which accounts for play as both competitive and non-competitive: “The agon in Greek life, or the contest anywhere else in the world, bears all the formal characteristics of play, and as to its function belongs almost wholly to the sphere of the festival, which is the play-sphere” (31). Hence, Huizinga separates ‘play’ and ‘contest’ as he outlines the civilizing function of competition. While Huizinga alludes to the game-like elements of society, he never fully adopts the seriousness and sacredness of existence as a contest between life and death, in which vitality and winning converge as expressions of sacred forces. We find that the “sacred duty” of survival stemming from the contest of existence manifests in spectacular athletic contests and highlights the hierarchical spectrum which is the foundation of both vitality and the sacred (and not, for example, the disparity between ourselves and natural forces). For example, the ancient Greek Olympics were part of a circuit of Panhellenic festivals and athletic contests in which athletes could peacefully represent city-states. Whereas some athletes would become objects of worship, Nigel Nicholson has noted that “the ideology that they promote is the same: that excellence is inherited, that there is a separable elite of superior quality, and that physical and moral excellence are two sides of the same coin” (73). The worshipping of idols is a charge laid on the spectacle from Tertullian to Debord, and it remains a politically and religiously relevant point of departure in a study of spectators and *fanatici* of

sports, as Maffesoli proposes: “Indeed, the cult of saints in popular religion may be a useful tool for understanding the contemporary effect of a given guru, football player, local star or even charismatic luminary” (*The Time of the Tribes* 131).

Agonistic Theories of the Sacred, Fanaticism and Religion

The role of the sacred in the study of religion was the primary object for *Le Collège de Sociologie*, including one of its foremost members, Roger Caillois, who wrote of the totalizing *agon* which characterizes the divine life-force of existence: “Outside of the arena, after the gong strikes, begins the true perversion of *agon*, the most pervasive of all the categories. It appears in every conflict untempered by the rigor or spirit of play. Now competition is nothing but a law of nature” (*Man, Play and Games* 46).²⁴ As tension or conflict is viewed as a necessary element for achieving a (sacred) balance or harmony, this recognition allows the study of the sacred in sports fanaticism to become more capable of accepting difference, of seeing in religiosity and modern sports the collective expressions of an eternal force dispensing power through formal distinctions as in between life and death, in which vitality (and winning) is sacred. Georges Bataille, another member of the sacred sociologists, echoes the power, immanence and divinity of vitality: “The sacred is exactly comparable to the flame that destroys the wood by consuming it. It is that opposite of a thing which an unlimited fire is; it spreads, it radiates heat and light, it suddenly inflames and blinds in turn” (*Theory of Religion* 53).

²⁴ Writing with respect to the history of philosophy and ancient Greek social conditions, Deleuze and Guattari remarked “a generalized athleticism: the agon,” a “contest between claimants in every sphere, in love, the games, tribunals, the judiciaries, politics, and even in thought, which finds its condition not only in the friend but in the claimant and the rival” (*What is Philosophy?* 4). They further elaborate that “If we really want to say that philosophy originates with the Greeks, it is because the city, unlike the empire or state, invents the agon as the rule of a society of ‘friends’, of the community of free men as rivals (citizens). This is the invariable situation described by Plato: if each citizen lays claim to something, then we need to be able to judge the validity of claims” (9).

Roger Caillois furthermore addresses the convergence of the sacredness of the contest of existence and the ritual of games: "...one must agree with the writers who have stressed the fact that the cheat's dishonesty does not destroy the game. The game is ruined by the nihilist who denounces the rules as absurd and conventional, who refuses to play because the game is meaningless" (*Man, Play and Games* 7). Roger Caillois is responding to a passage in Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* in which he effectively juxtaposes the spoil-sport with the nihilist, conveying the sacred and gameplay elements of life. Huizinga's original position states that "It is curious to note how much more lenient society is to the cheat than to the spoil-sport. This is because the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others" (11). Curiously, for Roger Caillois the spectacle of sports is more so a matter of play and not the sacred. That is, according to Caillois the play elements of sports categorically exclude the sacred, as the latter could never be contained within the conventional and meaningless limits of play. In the appendix to *Man and the Sacred*, Roger Caillois presents a critical review of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, in which he not only refutes Huizinga's play concept as based in the sacred, but proclaims the opposite: "...if one considers not merely its forms, but the intimate attitudes of the officiant and of the faithful, I also see that sacrifice and communion are involved, that one is then fully in the sacred, and as far removed from play as is conceivable" (161). Caillois suggests that Huizinga portrays play as "something purely superfluous," in which the stakes and attitudes pale in comparison to those of life and the sacred: "Certainly, believer and player, religion and play, temple and chessboard, seem to have nothing in common. There seems to be no doubt of this" (153-4).

Caillois outlines characteristics of the sacred which reflect those outlined above by Durkheim and Maffesoli, as stemming from the social divine, forces of life effecting immeasurable reverence and collective paroxysm. However, they seem to differ in that for Caillois the sacred becomes fundamentally an abstract concept (content), whereas for Maffesoli the ritual (formal) elements or the practical expressions of the sacred come to define religiosity. That is, Caillois views the ideal category of the sacred as wholly a force and worshippers of the sacred as revitalized through this abstract force, as opposed to the expressions of formal structures: “No one can deny that play is pure form, activity that is an end in itself, rules that are respected for their own sake. Huizinga himself stresses that its content is secondary. This does not apply to the sacred, which, on the contrary, is pure content—an indivisible, equivocal, fugitive, and efficacious force” (*Man and the Sacred* 157). Ultimately, Caillois’ acceptance of Huizinga’s overreaching and self-contradictory concept of ‘play’ obfuscates the role of gameplay in the (collective) struggle of existence, in which the sacred is an empty form that initiates the identity of a new claimant (who performs in the social arena).

By referring to sports, musical and political gatherings as analogous to religion, Maffesoli identifies the primary roles of aesthetics and competition common to each: “It is because there is heterogeneity and tension between different systems that there is life” (“The Sociology of Everyday Life” 6). Existence demarcates a primordial opposition in which conflict produces rivals but also reveals a reciprocal and revitalizing relationship, whereby heterogeneity becomes a matter of practical (formal) adoption, such as in the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is a category of meaning whose scope is effectively infinite, but nonetheless remains a concept that more importantly founds and sustains a group (including humanity): “As to the war between the different gods, or the sometimes bloody conflicts resulting from different

interpretations of the same God, they all lead in the end to the strengthening of the social body” (*The Time of the Tribes* 112). As noted by Durkheim, a general concept of religion must account for historical examples, resulting in the discovery of collective belief in the sacred as fundamental to religion, as opposed to the collective belief in one or many gods, which doesn’t explain the fanatical belief in the sacred ‘rock’ or ‘tree’. While Roger Caillois identifies life (forces) and vitality as the sacred *par excellence*, Michel Maffesoli and others find the formal image and collective aesthetics as equally fundamental to the concept of religion and the sacred. In other words, while whatever is identified as the sacred is highly significant in its scope, its adoption will define its religiosity – hence even the traditional concept of religion always involves a group.²⁵

The totalizing *agon* which permeates existence (of infinite rivals) encompasses religion’s basis in prescribing a sacred and its subsequent collective adoption. Referring to Durkheim’s notion of ‘the social divine’, Maffesoli adds: “There exists, so to speak, an impulse to ‘be together’...Sporting events, musical or political gatherings, the sounds and hub-bub of the streets of our towns, and festive occasions of all kinds all forcefully underline the pre-eminence of the whole” (*Ordinary Knowledge* 72). Maffesoli traces religion (*religare*) to its Latin roots of ‘binding or bringing together’, in which the sacred is defined by what brings the collective together and sustains it (provides vitality): “We could also use the word 'religion', if it is used to describe that which unites us as a community; it is less a content, which is the realm of faith, than a container, that is, a common matrix, a foundation of the 'being-together'” (*The Time of the*

²⁵ The fact that a solitary religion (of one person) dies with the sole individual (unless adopted by others) reflects the sacred’s connection to vitality.

Tribes 38). The collective social unit, united through a sacred ideal and sustained through sacred communion, encompasses vitality *par excellence*.

Did family produce the first fanatic? We find the family unit to contain a sacred ideal (the idea of the family), a temple (home) and fanatical rituals (including rules) and states of mind, in which passion and enthusiasm surface in response to the material survival of the idea, regardless of other logics. *Neo-tribalism* is Michel Maffesoli's recharacterization of religiosity to include 'non-religious' groups within the bounds of the study of religion and the sacred: "I have already said of the Mafia that it may be 'a metaphor of society'. When the rules of proper conduct are respected, there is regulation and organic order, which cannot fail to be beneficial to all. All the actors are an integral part of the same scene, while their roles are different, hierarchical, sometimes conflictual" (*The Time of the Tribes* 119). It is not uncommon for sports teams, including its supporters/fans, to be referred to as a 'family', as manager of Manchester United Football Club Ole Solskjaer re-iterated in an interview: "As a club we've got to stick together, we've got to be united, we are a family."²⁶

Given that Michel Maffesoli's methodology involves a veritable epistemological synthesis of sacred and non-sacred sociology, it should be no surprise that his concept *neo-tribalism* appears in the field of post-subculture theory, where style and group identity were historically studied in social groups that were considered resistant to the dominant culture (and thus defined based on the content of their beliefs). Some of the fundamentals from subculture theory remain, such as the role of belonging and group identities, as Dick Hebdige remarked in *Subculture: the meaning of style*: "We should be hard pressed to find in the punk subculture, for

²⁶ theScore. "Solskjaer backs Glazers, Woodward after fan protests: 'We are a family'."

instance, any symbolic attempts to ‘retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in the parent culture’ (Cohen, 1972a) beyond the simple fact of cohesion itself: the expression of a highly structured, visible, tightly bounded group identity” (79).

Subcultures were first studied in gangs and hence grew to connote an alternative form of belief system, which overshadowed the general function of group identity and especially aesthetics, which for Maffesoli “is a way of feeling in common. It is also a means of recognizing ourselves...Be that as it may, the hodge-podge of clothing, multi-hued hairstyles and other punk manifestations act as a glue; theatricality founds and reconfirms the community” (*The Time of the Tribes* 77). In other words, while the traditional theories of religion and subcultures have attempted to explain collective rituals and styles as secondary to the primary beliefs of the group, in contrast it is the fact of being together, belonging and sharing in aesthetics which better explains religion and subcultures, hence subcultures theory being at a crossroads – similar to the sociology of religion, whereby *neo-tribalism* encroaches on each by focusing on the formal and practical similarities between religious and secular groups, leading to a theoretical position similar to George Bataille’s remark on collective aesthetics while evaluating the presence of ‘the social divine’ in the army in his essay *The Structure and Function of the Army*: “The army has an aesthetic all its own: It adorns itself with bright uniforms and is led by a band to show off its brilliance and give rhythm to movements like those of a virile and austere ballet corps” (141). The military, bound up in the contest of war, is another traditionally secular group (post-subculture, neo-tribe) that effectively functions through religiosity, like totemism and sports fanaticism. Hence, sacred emblems and names are also a primary feature of the Canadian army and its identity, including coats of arms, badges and flags, using symbols such as crowns, animals (beaver, lion, horse, eagle, moose, goose, wolf) and vegetation (maple tree and leaf,

fleur-de-lis, rose, thistle, shamrock), analogously tied to the vitality and being of military *fanatics*: “In the Middle Ages, coats of arms served as a sort of identification card. This was especially true on the battlefield where coat of arms made it possible to distinguish allies from enemies. Today, they are used to preserve traditions and inspire love of country.”²⁷

For Alberto Toscano, the political fanatic encapsulates modern fanaticism (nevertheless rooted to the ‘inaugural religious fanatic’), in particular the non-rational or extra-rational ritualization of (“unchecked”) violence.²⁸ Toscano investigates fanaticism’s progression from religion to politics, including tracing it through its eruption during the Enlightenment, as seen in the entry on fanaticism in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, where Alexandre Deleyre describes the ‘symptoms’ of fanaticism – “the effect of a false consciousness that abuses sacred things and enslaves religion to the whims of imagination and the unruliness of passions”, which Toscano remarks as a “compendium of views that our intellectual common sense would ascribe to *the Enlightenment*” (Toscano 102). Thus, while Toscano recognizes the predominance of political fanaticism and furthermore a lack of explanation (causal) for fanaticism in general, he unwittingly outlines a fanaticism that is best characterized as religious, but which also encompasses non-religious political fanatics (activists, soldiers, etc.) – reflecting the underlying thesis of this dissertation and its study of sports fanaticism: “In the end, the ubiquity of fanaticism signifies that all history is the history of fanaticism...” (Toscano 103). Given that the political dimension received extraordinary attention from Toscano in his investigation of fanaticism, it is noteworthy that Modris Eksteins, in his socio-cultural historicization of the Great War in *Rites of Spring*, remarks that by the end of 19th century in Britain “Interest in sports even

²⁷ Canada, Government. “Official symbols of Canada.”

²⁸ Of the non-rational elements of fanaticism: “Though one might hazard explanations as to the elements or sources of fanaticism, fanatical action itself, lying outside the domain of negotiation, is most often viewed as undeserving of the assumption of rationality that commonly governs our evaluation of social and political behaviour” (Toscano xi).

overshadowed interest in politics for a great many” (121). Victory and superiority are fundamental elements of the vitality (power) which is sacred to religion, hence we find the figure of the political and sports fanatic alongside the inaugural religious fanatic. In all three cases, the sacred is demarcated by a hierarchically superior ideal and its worshippers (the totemic tribe, the religious congregation, the sports team, the nation) who ritualize their sense of devotion and shared aesthetics, developing a social ethic throughout the process: “One of the most striking aspects of this relationship [between the communal ethic and solidarity] is the development of the ritual... The ritual perpetuates itself, and through the variety of routine or everyday gestures the community is reminded that it is a whole” (*The Time of the Tribes* 16-17).²⁹

The study of everyday life effectively identifies the significance of being-together, belonging and group identity in all the rituals, aesthetics and appearances which seem trivial in their scope, but rather are just as fundamental to the group as the totem is to the clan or tribe. Michel Maffesoli’s foray into everyday life and the *theatrum mundi* leaves little doubt as to the influences of sociologies of everyday life and the dramaturgical upon him. His dichotomy of *person/persona* and *social/sociality* invariably affects how we relate to social phenomena, as we become drawn toward that “organic solidarity, the symbolic dimension (communication), the ‘non-logical’, and the concern for the present” (“The Sociology of Everyday Life” 1) which characterizes the neo-tribalism seen by Maffesoli as the synthesis resulting from the modern disenchantment of the world. The non-rational becomes a critical aspect of everyday life in its conformity to the necessities of *power* and *puissance*, which Maffesoli notes as dealing with the management of life and of survival, respectively.³⁰ The efficacy of particular rituals, symbols and

²⁹ “History may promote a moral (political) attitude, but space will favour an aesthetics and exude an ethics” (*The Time of the Tribes* 15).

³⁰ “...thought, which appears the most individualized, is but a part of a symbolic system at the very heart of all social aggregations. In its purely instrumental or rational aspect, thought individualizes, just as on the theoretical

ideologies can be seen through their capacities to arouse the passions and unite the masses, another lens with which to relate to cultural phenomena – and a departure from a search for ‘social facts’ and impositions of particular moralities. With regards to the object of study, Maffesoli believes that “...ideology informs us above all about the degree and strength of sociality, questions which seem essential for sociology” (“The Imaginary and the Sacred” 66), and yet everything else, “...all those nothings which make up everyday existence, take form and come together structurally to constitute the ephemeral but also eternal *theatrum mundi*” (*Au Creux des Apparences* 114).³¹ Meanwhile, the metaphor of the tribe “allows us to account for the process of disindividuation, the saturation of the inherent function of the individual and the emphasis on the role that each person (*persona*) is called upon to play within the tribe” (*The Time of the Tribes* 6). Whereas the individual of modernity was characterized by his *function* in a stable society, the *persona* of post-modernity plays *roles*, and it is this role-playing within the *theatrum mundi* which interests and informs Maffesoli’s general sociology. As such, when it comes to a study of sports fanaticism, it therefore becomes increasingly relevant to view its spectacles from an aesthetic perspective in Maffesoli’s vein, where aesthetics are a means of recognizing ourselves and being recognized, a way of belonging to a tribe and feeling in common.

The convergence of theories of religion and everyday life in French sociologist Michel Maffesoli’s work informs this study on sports fanaticism, sharing a significant historical interest in communion as a mode of sociality. From Émile Durkheim through to Maffesoli, we encounter

plane it dissects and discriminates; however, by being integrated into an organic complexity, that is by leaving room for affect and passion, as well as the non-logical, this same thought favours the communication of the being-together” (*The Time of the Tribes* 69).

³¹ Translation (my own): « ...tous ces ‘riens’ qui font l’existence courante prennent ‘forme’, s’ordonnent en une vue architectonique qui constitue l’éphémère et pourtant éternel *theatrum mundi*. »

the foundations of a theoretical model capable of bringing to light the dynamics of the ever-growing interest and participation in the theatre of sport, incorporating concepts such as the sacred, neo-tribalism, and religiosity. Hence, the microscopic and macroscopic multiplicities that make up everyday life are paramount for the social theorist, as according to Maffesoli "...the pre-eminence of the group and the importance of the affect show how the density of everyday life is above all the product of impersonal forces...and in all its frivolity and superficiality, is truly what makes any form of aggregation possible" (*The Time of the Tribes* 89). It is a scholar's empathetic understanding of and participation in the everyday and its unfolding that "allows us to pay attention to the particular without ignoring essential characteristics," which for Maffesoli means working with "paroxysmal categories such as power, might, ritual, theatricality, duplicity, tragedy and so on," as "they are modulations of 'form'; their unreality does not detract from their methodological importance..." (*Ordinary Knowledge* 11).

For Maffesoli's intellectual predecessor, Émile Durkheim, the concept of the sacred as a (mythologized and ritualized) supernatural force is belied not only by its exceptional status (compared to the drudgery of everyday life), but also by its integration with everyday life, as he writes that "...even with the most simple religions we know, their essential task is to maintain, in a positive manner, the normal course of life" (29). Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* brought to the fore a perspective on social behaviour engaging in both micro- and macro- epistemologies. Durkheim drew from ethnography in proposing a model for religiosity, effectively an immanent social force coupled with its most typical form of ritually and routinely materializing a sacred and profane world. The belief and participation in the sacred and profane worked in tandem with the vitality of the tribe (the essence of totemism). Crucially, of interest to Durkheim was not the veracity of the content of the beliefs, but their materialization in the forms

which contribute to tribal vitality. Whereas religiosity can mistakenly be presented as something entirely supernatural and exceptional, there are constant reminders of its presence and power in everyday life: “Very frequently, the gods serve less to account for the monstrosities, fantasies and anomalies than for the regular march of the universe, for the movement of the stars, the rhythm of the seasons, the annual growth of vegetation, the perpetuation of species, etc.” (Durkheim 28).³²

While Maffesoli’s notion of religiosity is instructive, it is the (re)emergence of the concepts of ‘neo-tribalism’ and ‘collective effervescence’ that truly encapsulates Maffesoli’s influence on a study of sports fanaticism; sociality, everyday life and religiosity converge here to form a concept (of sports fanaticism) with an “aesthetic attitude responding to an aestheticizing of contemporary life” (*The Time of the Tribes* 86). Maffesoli’s separation of the social and sociality is where we can find the roots of his transition from individual identity to the ‘disindividuation’ characteristic of ‘neo-tribalism’, a concept which he espouses in *The Time of the Tribes*. Maffesoli’s central object is group dynamics: he posits both a methodology and a description of our growing inclinations towards the social logics of passion, invoking the slogan of the 2009-2010 Toronto Maple Leafs: ‘The Passion that Unites Us All’.

Not merely an event, the modern spectacle of sports comes to be seen as a dominant force in everyday life, whose everyday manifestations we may study, as Michael Gardiner notes, in the “human affect and emotions, bodily experience and practical knowledges, the role played by ‘lived’ time and space in the constitution of social experience, language and intersubjectivity, and interpersonal ethics” (3). In studies of everyday life, we find both the dramaturgical lens, at

³² “Religious conceptions have as their object, before everything else, to express and explain, not that which is exceptional and abnormal in things, but, on the contrary, that which is constant and regular... It is far from being true, then, that the notion of the religions coincides with that of the extraordinary or the unforeseen” (Durkheim 28).

once relatable to the forms of religious life, as well as the critical perspective, which contests the ahistoricity of the sacred. This dissertation's investigation of the everyday life of the modern sports spectacle recognizes an intellectual tradition, rooted in Certeau, Goffman, and Lefebvre, whose approach is not imbued with the sacred/profane dichotomy, and instead is informed by dramaturgical, ideological, and historical epistemologies. Though these theorists stick to more accepted traditional sociological tenets, they are however similarly concerned with the narrative aspects of everyday life, of rituals, games and ideologies, either at particular or structural levels, such that overlap between fields is invariable.

In Henri Lefebvre we encounter critiques of everyday life as largely imbued by forms of capitalism, effectively limiting their authenticity. In this view, individual and collective interrelations involving work and leisure have transformed in the modern world as a result of capitalist values and technological advances to a degree heretofore unseen, resulting in widespread simulacra and alienation, as is evidently observable in everyday life. Lefebvre's approach to everyday life evinces his ties to Marxism, its critique of capitalism and its consideration of praxis. As Gardiner notes, Lefebvre was concerned with and believed in the emancipatory potential of the masses, hence his interest in daily life – especially as it compared to premodern forms, such as the festival. According to this view, the social theorist's role is effectively to perform *ideologiekritik* as a form of resistance to capitalism's dominance of everyday life – and the lasting impacts of modernity on the dynamics of society (individually and collectively). However, to what extent is modernist and capitalist ideological interpellation subsumed by religiosity? Émile Durkheim addresses the fields which the study of religiosity engages: “the true justification of religious practices does not lie in the apparent ends which they pursue, but rather in the invisible action which they exercise over the mind and in the way in

which they affect our mental status” (Durkheim 360). Compare this with a Lefebvrian perspective on modernity, seen as a technocratic undertaking that “lacks a clear purpose or direction, other than that of domination. It is geared towards means rather than ends, concerned exclusively with the effective regulation of isolated systems and subsystems through the application of cybernetic techniques and forms of information monitoring and control” (Gardiner 89).

The concept of everyday life proposed by Michel de Certeau and Erving Goffman internalizes structural and historical critiques in order to pursue the narrative and performative qualities of social forms and content. In this respect, Certeau refers to ‘narrativities’, or all of the stories we are inculcated by throughout the day: “Even more than the God told about by the theologians of earlier days, these stories have a providential and predestining function: they organize in advance our work, our celebrations, and even our dreams” (Certeau 186). Michel de Certeau presents himself as a bridge between the more structural theories of Henri Lefebvre and critical theory and the dramaturgical elements of Erving Goffman and subculture theory (and the concept of the sacred, which forms a third pivot). As Gardiner notes, “In particular, Certeau would no doubt charge that his predecessors failed to analyse everyday life as it was actually lived in the context of consumer society, as opposed to some idealized conception of the everyday” (164). In the totalizing agon which permeates existence, Certeau recognizes the dramaturgical elements and therefore evaluates everyday life as consisting of tactics (of the weak and of the strong) in a game (or war). Having taken account of structural inequities, Certeau imbued social theory with an amplification of eloquence within the masses. In his own words: “Tales and legends are deployed, like games, in a space outside of and isolated from daily competition, that of the past, the marvelous, the original. In that space can thus be revealed,

dressed as gods or heroes, the models of good or bad ruses that can be used every day. Moves, not truths, are recounted” (23). A corollary of Certeau’s Machiavellian perspective lends significant interest not just to the pronouncements of authorities necessarily but also and especially to the talk of the town,³³ for he writes that “...in replaying the games, in telling about them, these accounts record the rules and the moves simultaneously. To be memorized as well as memorable, they are repertoires of schemas of action between partners...these mementos teach the tactics possible within a given (social) system” (*ibid*). What of the games of the spectacle of sports, effectively a spectacular (religious and political) storytelling machine? The modern spectacle of sports consists of a multiplicity of narrativities, from the spectacle as a whole to eminently minor events: sports is a preferred language of contemporary everyday life, including in the countless vibrant online sports communities which partake in what Certeau refers to as *La Perruque*: “It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker's ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room” (25).

The spectacle of sports is a storytelling machine that encompasses the game itself, its broadcast and further re-telling. The spectacle of sports also captures both the extraordinariness of the sacred in the ritual of the game and its vitalization of everyday life in its recounting. The game itself is mythmaking in progress, as Hans Gumbrecht remarks: “The chance to win and the risk of losing produce narrative, epic and drama” (77). The clash of extraordinary athletic specimens at sacred sites in ancient Greece (and Rome) were a means of socially reinforcing a sacred ideal through dramatic storytelling. In other words, godliness presents itself within the

³³ Thus, he writes that “Narrations about what's-going-on constitute our orthodoxy. Debates about figures are our theological wars. The combatants no longer bear the arms of any offensive or defensive idea. They move forward camouflaged as facts, data, and events. They present themselves as messengers from a ‘reality’” (Certeau 185).

spectacular contest and with the athletes. Meanwhile, the function of the ritualization of the sacred in the athletic contest is sociality, such as in contributing to the materialization of a *Volk*. Hence, there is little surprise that the development of major athletic contests (sports) included simultaneously the emergence and/or reinforcement of a social group (i.e., a nation), whose functional order has historically been tied to elements of storytelling. In discussing the role of storytelling – including the legitimacy and powers of authors and the intentions of social control – in the development of Greek and German *Volk*, Bruce Lincoln elaborates that as “a crucial resource for collective identity, myths are the linguistic form that mediates between climate and *Nationalbildung*” (53). We therefore have a considerable interest in the everyday life of the cult of sports, as they present not simply the myths at its basis, but also the manner in which the group empowers itself through the everyday belief and ritualization of its collective representation of the sacred. Michel de Certeau outlines this position as such: “As a first approximation, I define ‘belief’ not as the object of believing (a dogma, a program, etc.) but as the subject’s investment in a proposition, the act of saying it and considering it as true – in other words, a ‘modality’ of the assertion and not its content” (178).³⁴

In the spectacle of sports, the performance of the athletic contest is the primary source of myth, but it is also supported by the ritualization of sports priests and fanatics, including in the digital broadcast, play-by-play commentators, sports journalists and analysts, and the discourses of spectators/fanatics. Sports media is invaluable to the functioning of the spectacle of sports, as they effectively manage the mythologies and rituals. Sports media hold the power of broadcasting the spectacle, which lends a significant amount of discursive power and legitimacy,

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate on the function of belief in ‘gods’ (as a modality), relative to the ‘death of God’ inaugurated by Nietzsche: “For, alive or dead, it is still a question of belief: the element of belief has not been abandoned” (*Anti-Oedipus* 107).

similar to the roles of prophet and priest in religion as outlined by Max Weber in *The Sociology of Religion*, in which Weber posits that "...it is the hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of a corporate enterprise of salvation" (47), meanwhile, "the prophet, in our special sense, is never to be found where the proclamation of a religious truth of salvation through personal revelation is lacking" (54). The spectacle of sports contains a mythological matrix, in which sports athletes and sports priests ritualize the myths which sustain the spectacle. Consider the following description by a sports journalist of an idolized sports athlete, Roy Halladay – a baseball pitcher for the Toronto Blue Jays who tragically died in an airplane accident: "Roy Halladay was the impossible ideal, someone who embodied every little detail coaches preach and that players strive for; [one of] the scarcest of athletes to blend talent, intelligence, work ethic, discipline, drive and motivation in equal parts, each at uber-levels."³⁵ As sports fanatics consume and reproduce the discourses (and stories) from the spectacle of sports, including from sports 'priests' or from interviews with sports athletes, myths such as "work ethic" become inculcated into the social fabric, as Phillip Danault, hockey player for the Montréal Canadiens, implies in an interview while discussing the failure of his team's season as a whole: "We got here as a team not ready to put the work in from the start. Your identity is very important, it slowly creates a culture and everyone buys in. When everyone buys in, everything works."³⁶ For Michel Maffesoli, myths express profound collective social sentiments and empower the collectivity of a social unit, such as a nation, neo-tribe, or revolutionary movement. He notes that "Heroes, saints or emblematic figures may be real, however they exist more or less as ideal types, empty 'forms', matrices in which we may all recognize ourselves and commune with others" (*The Time of the Tribes* 10). For example, a frequently re-told myth which emerges

³⁵ Davidi, Shi. "Unanswered questions linger over Roy Halladay's Cooperstown celebration."

³⁶ Engels, Eric. "Bergevin failed to give Canadiens and their fans hope this season."

from the spectacle of sports is the miraculous, or ‘overcoming the impossible’, invoked in an online article published on the blog ‘This Is Anfield’ (thisisanfield.com), following a victory in a soccer game, titled “Anfield produces its greatest-ever night as Liverpool turn the impossible into reality.”³⁷ Another online article written by a sports journalist published by the sports media company ‘The Score’ (titled “Raptors were team of destiny...”) reinforces various myths in action:

There are certain champions in sport that emanate an indescribable aura on their journey to immortality. In recent history, teams like the 2011 Dallas Mavericks, 2016 Chicago Cubs, and 2018 Washington Capitals come to mind.

Sometimes an all-time great [team] transforms into an unstoppable force at just the right time. Sometimes a collection of hungry veterans refuse to accept defeat any longer, or a playoff mainstay that's knocked on the door of greatness year after year finally decides to kick that door down. Sometimes it's as simple as a long-tormented fan base that can sense the impossible is finally plausible, willing its team to new heights.

And sometimes, as is the case for the 2019 Toronto Raptors, a team checks all of those boxes.

Whatever *it* is that creeps up over the course of a playoff run to convince us that we might be in the presence of one of these teams of destiny, the Raptors had it.³⁸

³⁷ Rabinowitz, Joel. “Anfield produces its greatest-ever night as Liverpool turn the impossible into reality.”

³⁸ Casciaro, Joseph. “Finals takeaways: Raptors were team of destiny, Warriors needed KD after all.”

The spectacular athletic contest kicks into action a mythmaking machine (involving a sacred site with extraordinary athletes) that shapes and is shaped by the social fabric in the performance and re-telling of myths, hence the significance of sports media and their imposition in everyday news alongside the passionate social absorption of the game as expressed in everyday discourses between sports fanatics. Ultimately, the emergence of online discussion forums featuring discourses by sports fanatics reveals a vibrant narrative and affective economy. Meanwhile, in the everyday online exchanges between sports fanatics, we may observe the social forces to which myth itself is addressed, as Roland Barthes similarly remarked of spectacular contests (of wrestling) in his *Mythologies*: “What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice” (19). And these performances (contests) and myths are represented and retold by priests and fanatics everyday as forms of ritualization, mythologization and empowerment. In this case, the position of the spectator differs from the athlete and the sports priest (journalist, analyst, or commentator) by virtue of dramaturgy and storytelling: the mass of fanatics encapsulates the social forces to which myth is directed. In *The Presentation of Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman addresses the distinct but reciprocal dramaturgical roles played by performers and the audience, analogous to the modern spectacle of sports. Thus, both Goffman and Gumbrecht refer to the distance (proximity) between the two positions which results in a state of awe, mystery and mystification.³⁹ Goffman’s reference to a group of performers as a ‘team’ harkens to the agonistic rivalries of collective mythologies and ritualizations which effectively characterizes religiosity and neo-tribalism. Hence, analogous to the mythmaking powers of athletes and sports priests, Goffman concludes that “As performers we are merchants of morality” (162), pointing to the power inherent to controlling the narrative,

³⁹ “All that it takes to become addicted to sports is a distance between the athlete and the beholder – a distance large enough for the beholder to believe that his heroes inhabit a different world” (Gumbrecht 8).

which “allows a team to introduce strategic devices for determining the information the audience is able to acquire” (59). This view effectively re-organizes the passivity of sports fanatics to recognize their role in adopting and adapting ideologies, and ultimately outlines the significant role that dramatic elements and affect, materialized in everyday life through myth and ritual, play in the evaluation of religiosity in the spectacle of sports.

In light of the ecstatic and structural role of theatricality, Michel Maffesoli proposes that it is in everyday life (and its ‘banalities’, its rituals and its repetitions) where “the community is reminded that it is a whole” (*The Time of the Tribes* 17). In his book *Ordinary Knowledge*, Maffesoli writes that “Biographical exploration and, more generally, anything to do with everyday life and its analysis inevitably stresses the limitations of sociological instruments designed to explain macroscopic social forms rather than to interpret all that is meaningful but purposeless in everyday life” (*Ordinary Knowledge* 7). Another member of the sacred sociologists, Michel Leiris, shared his own sacred sociology as being “a matter of searching through some of the humblest things, taken from everyday life and located outside of what today makes up the officially sacred (religion, fatherland, morals)” in order to catch a glimpse of “a radically distinct world, as different from the profane world as fire from water” (24). Much like Franco Ferrarotti, who elected to privilege the quality of the biographical in his sociological practice (and consequently influenced Michel Maffesoli), Leiris looked toward childhood in order to find the best examples of “that combination of respect, desire, and terror that we take as the psychological sign of the sacred” (*ibid*). As such, Leiris noted that “Of all places the racetrack was most prestigious because of the spectacle that unfolded there, and the considerable sums of money won or lost there” (27). Referring to the sacred, Leiris said that “It seems obvious that we should first examine everything that fascinated us in childhood and left the memory of

that kind of strong emotion” (24), placing affect in a prominent position relative to the sacred – similar to Maffesoli and the other sacred sociologists. It is the affect which myth manifests and connects to the sacred, according to Bataille. Caillois, meanwhile, in his treatment of the festival, suggests that it “represents the time of intense emotions and the metamorphosis of being” (*Festival* 282).⁴⁰ A crucial element in the study of the sacred therefore must include its appeal to and its production of emotions, necessarily as they are collectively experienced. Effectively, as Caillois mentioned, a key to studying religiosity is identifying popular paroxysms and the mythologies which structure them, since the latter functions in a particularly latent manner. Certainly, the everyday life of modern sports fans is rife with the palpable reverberations of the spectacle’s collective effervescence.

In *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and Le Collège de Sociologie*, Michèle Richman addresses the role that collective aesthetics played in Émile Durkheim’s investigation into the concept of religion: “The challenge of the sacred/profane duality was not to rationalize the opposition of the two categories, but to communicate the distinctness of the sacred resulting from the expression of collective energies” (63). Durkheim articulated an approach to understanding social phenomena that falls under the category of ‘the religious’, which he found to entail a system of representation that divides life into a profane world and a sacred world, seemingly for its capacity to bring vitality to the tribe. Performing rituals is crucial to expressing and manifesting these forces. The key to understanding religiosity then is through its own logics. Based on Durkheim’s work, we suggest that the study of the sacred in sports fanaticism

⁴⁰ “In its most complete form, in fact, the festival must be defined as the paroxysm of society, which it simultaneously purifies and renews. It is its culmination not simply from a religious point of view but also from an economic point of view. It is the moment of circulation of wealth, the occasion for the most important markets, and the prestigious distribution of accumulated treasure” (“Festival” 301).

encompasses paroxysms, customs, rituals, myths, totems, etc., in order to arrive at a clearer picture of social logics and concepts.

In studying primitive cultures searching for fundamental principles of religiosity, Durkheim laid groundwork for a conceptual model open to a broad modern application: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (47). Consequently, we must not dismiss the seriousness with which sports fans relate and react to the game and the team: it is more than a trivial thing or temporary escape. Consider some of the taboos and superstitions players and fanatics have, such as the prohibition of speaking certain words at particular times – the word ‘shutout’ is taboo during a game (while it is on track to occur); seemingly trivial, but taken seriously by many spectators and players. For players, other rituals or superstitions include baseball pitchers who refuse to step on the white line demarcating the field of play, or by teams who refuse to touch a particular trophy for fear of it compromising the achievement of the ultimate trophy. There are also rituals that spectators and especially players partake in, in order not to spoil the potential connection with the sacred (winning), whether it means a habitual pre-game routine, a prayer, or wearing a specific piece of clothing. Both the separation into sacred and profane and its subsequent mythologies and rituals are done for the purpose of affirming the group and assuring that it not only survives but thrives. Durkheim, in this sense, shared with Max Weber an approach to the study of religion that highlights the utility that forms part of a religious dimension.

Max Weber views religiosity pragmatically – as in, the individual and/or group benefit from religious practices. That is, Weber identifies existential needs alongside economic needs,

among others, as reasons for the prosperity of religious groups and ideologies.⁴¹ Furthermore, according to Weber, the difference between privileged and non-privileged classes affects the likelihood that a particular religion will appeal to a lack of meaning in life, as opposed to those which relate more to material hardships. Meanwhile, the spectacle of sports creates the conditions for a sense of belonging, for hope and the extraordinary, which translates to sports fanatics as a reflection of higher forces, meanings and purposes. The lack of knowledge about our position in this world, in our purpose (if any), means it is existentially imperative to become emotionally attached – to look forward to things, to have hopes and dreams; it is the idea behind “having a horse in the race”, where something is at stake. In contrast, in evaluating this existential conundrum, philosopher Blaise Pascal concluded that man in nature is “infinitely far from understanding the extremes; the end of things and their beginning are insuperably hidden for him in an impenetrable secret” and as such is left with nothing but “noting some appearance of a mid-point, in eternal despair...” (67). While Pascal and Kierkegaard considered the absurdity and uncertainty of our natural condition through the lens of Christianity, resulting in “the wager” by Pascal and Kierkegaard’s “leap of faith” respectively, it is our contention that sports fanatics resolve these existential quandaries by ‘joining’, as supporters, a sports team that competes in an athletic contest whose prized trophy is regarded as sacred. The spectacle of sports produces aesthetically rich and dynamic narratives and rituals that effectively lends itself to serious emotional investments for sports fanatics, mediated by a significant sense of hope. While the loyalty of sports fans is constantly questioned, and in times of struggle belief tends to diminish, sports fans nevertheless keep faith and cling to a sense of hope. Nietzsche identifies this sense of hope as a properly religious modality, as in the “great hope” of “the coming of the

⁴¹ “Since every need for salvation is an expression of some distress, social or economic oppression is an effective source of salvation beliefs, though by no means the exclusive source” (Weber 107).

kingdom of God" – which he attributes to a (hypothetical) *victory* by those waging the war of the will to power (*The Will to Power* 122). *Contra spem spero*.⁴²

Both Weber and Nietzsche identify priests (and prophets) as instrumental to the effective function of the enterprise of the hope for salvation. Hope for the sports fanatic is akin to Max Weber's view of religion of the disprivileged, whose "particular need is for release from suffering [through salvation]" (108). Weber goes so far as to connect the disprivileged desire for compensation (through salvation) to Nietzsche's formulation of resentment (and vengeance). In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche identifies "the ways of self-narcotization" wherein 'emptiness' leads one to "attempt to get over it by intoxication: intoxication as music; intoxication as cruelty in the tragic enjoyment of the destruction of the noblest; some kind or other of continual work, or of some stupid little fanaticism," whereby "extreme pride and the humiliation of petty weakness [is] felt in contrast" (20). Nietzsche presents hope in pursuit of salvation as a religious modality for the powerless ("the desperate, the sick"), in effect supporting the wholly 'non-moral' expressions of power and willfulness of the exceptional man.⁴³ This dissertation encounters a significant presence of hope in sports fanaticism and contends it is of the religious order, a strategic (tribal) action in the face of opposing forces, as Nietzsche alludes to: "How can one wage war against the manly affects and valuations? One possesses no means of physical force, one can wage only a war of cunning, sorcery, lies, in short 'of the spirit'" (*The Will to Power* 121).⁴⁴ While Nietzsche reproaches and subjugates the moralizing masses for castrating the genius, the exceptional man – the will to power and its close association with vitality, wherein

⁴² The title of an iconic Ukrainian poem written by Lesya Ukrainka, translated from Latin as "against (all) hope I (still) hope."

⁴³ "Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no 'equal rights', between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise the latter - or the whole will perish" (*The Will to Power* 389).

⁴⁴ Nietzsche elaborates: "The moral man is a lower species than the immoral, a weaker species...I assess a man by the quantum of power and abundance of his will: not by its enfeeblement and extinction" (*The Will to Power* 205-6).

religiosity as such for Nietzsche represents degeneracy and death (*nihilism*), this dissertation recognizes the potential (*puissance*) of religiosity such as sport fanaticism, as in the empowerment of ‘passive’ actors grounded in a collective hope (for salvation). *Post tenebras spero lucem*.

In terms of religiosity *par excellence*, Max Weber remains ambiguous, except to refer to man’s belief in supernatural forces, beings, and magic. Weber notes that “... in the sphere of proletarian rationalism, religion is generally supplanted by other ideological surrogates” (100). However, we must remain skeptical regarding the differences in kind between the former and the latter, if any. Weber hints at the blurring of these boundaries when discussing Roman and Greek societies, and more importantly, furnishes us with concepts and ideas which are amenable to varying kinds of ideological worship or belief. Hence, as has been a theme of the aforementioned sociologists of the sacred, Weber remarks about the role of sentiment as a driving force behind the flourishing of particular religious practices – whether it is resentment, vengeance, anxiety, or frustration, which is what compels the enterprise of the prophet to be more of a “popular orator (*demagogue*) or political publicist than a teacher” (Weber 53), as the former’s craft relies more on collective sentiments and the appeal to emotions. As Weber distinguishes between religious and non-religious systems of belief based on their acceptance of magic, and given that the non-religious suppression of the cosmological effectively leaves a void of meaning, wherein things “simply ‘are’ and ‘happen’ but no longer signify anything”, this ultimately leads to a “growing demand of the world to have reason and meaning” (Weber 126), whose belief systems are worshipped and ritualized: “One path to salvation leads through the purely ritual activities and ceremonies of cults, both within religious worship and in everyday behavior. Pure ritualism as such is not very different from magic in its effect on the conduct of life” (151). Weber’s tacit

delineation of the sacred elements of myth and ritual further support our model of religiosity which recognizes the sacred in sports fanaticism.

We find in Émile Durkheim and Max Weber the outlines of a modern religiosity whose basis lies more within aesthetics and forms of practice and function than in the content of belief. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim makes it clear that "...religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups" (10). *Le Collège de Sociologie* followed in the footsteps of Durkheim and formed a theoretical bridge to Maffesoli by historicizing the concept of the sacred with among other things its ties to *festival*, which captured the effervescence of this collective ritual and its distinction from and revitalization of ordinary life, as described by Caillois: "representing such a paroxysm of life and contrasting so violently with the petty concerns of daily existence, [festival] seems to the individual like another world, where he feels himself sustained and transformed by powers that are beyond him" ("Festival" 282). The sacred has thus been conceived as both elemental and immanent to everyday life and yet distinct from it, much like the modern spectacle of sports invokes the spectacular in contrast to ordinary life at the same time that it pervades and infuses everyday life.

While the study of sports is an established field, few scholars are concerned with the structural aesthetics of the spectacle of sports or the daily communions in the everyday life of sports fans. Whether it is inside the stadium, the living room or the online forum, communion and effervescence characterize the experience of belonging to a sports team as a spectator and supporter. The spectacle of sports and its fanaticism reflects the tenets of Maffesoli's neo-

tribalism, which focuses on the sense of belonging and passionate logics through collectively effervescent spaces, in which '*lieu deviant lien*', an approach that integrates both form and affect, culminating in the religiosity of sports fanaticism. Our study of the spectacle of sports therefore examines the banalities, the stories, the images, beliefs, excitements, anxieties, frustrations, reliefs, and hopes which the sports fanatic embodies during the game and in everyday life, for social performances – from the most trivial to the most spectacular – reveal religiosity in action. The modern Olympics are perhaps the most eminent site of discursive struggle in the study of spectacular sports, including the charges laid by critical theorists and the bastions of social capital, however, it is our contention that the modern Olympics are another instantiation of the spectacle of sport in which 'ancient' and 'modern' religiosity converge. For example, in reference to public outdoor viewings of the Olympics on large television screens, Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young suggest that

there is no question that the Sydney live sites added a new dimension of specifically Olympic festival. Indeed, it is now possible to hypothesize that for persons actually present in the stadium for the Opening Ceremonies, Olympic ritual is quite likely to be nested in spectacle, whereas for public live site participants, convened, so to speak, by the big screens, it is more likely ritual (though unlikely ritual experience) encompassed by festival (26).

This suggests that contrary to the charges laid by some critical theorists, spectators of sport can engage in meaningful and sacred social rituals more in line with Caillois' festival than Debord's 'spectacle'. Overall, studies of spectacular sports are largely devoid of the sacred or religiosity, especially as it relates to the supporters, spectators and fans, as the modern spectacle of sports is effectively considered a secular or capitalist affair. For example, in *National Identity and Global*

Sports Events, Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young propose an ethnography of defetishization of the commodity in an effort to keep up with the increasingly influential discourses which contribute to forming the spectacle of sports. The critical theorist therefore does not necessarily see sacred ritual in the spectacle of sports, but typically materializations of power, capital and ideology. The spectacle is understood less as a cultural nexus and more as a strategy or technology of subjugation, typically through capitalist commodification.⁴⁵ One of the issues with the critical approach, however, as Garry Crawford points out in *Consuming Sport*, is that “the majority of theorization of contemporary sports fans remains firmly within the incorporation/resistance paradigm,” which “fails to acknowledge fully the fluidity of contemporary fan ‘communities’ and the highly subjective nature of many fan typologies, dichotomies and codes of ‘authenticity’” (33).

Recognizing the sacred adds a layer to our epistemological system because it relativizes the value of truth. Hence, in a study of sports fanaticism, more emphasis is placed on categories such as “Interesting, Remarkable, or Important,” as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (*What Is Philosophy?* 82). In this case, social theory therefore must be able to methodologically shift away from truth/non-truth, right/wrong and shift toward sacred/profane: “there are no religions which are false. All are true in their own fashion; all answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence” (Durkheim 3). This formal relativity is an example of the neo-tribalism that Maffesoli described as permeating Durkheim’s work, and which characterizes the amenability of religion to also include what are considered ‘non-religious’ groups. Hence,

⁴⁵ The spectacle is understood as an “integrated and diffuse apparatus of images and ideas that produces and regulates public discourse and opinion. In the society of the spectacle, what was once imagined as the public sphere, the open terrain of political exchange and participation, completely evaporates. The spectacle destroys any collective form of sociality—individualizing social actors in their separate automobiles and in front of separate video screens—and at the same time imposes a new mass sociality, a new uniformity of action and thought” (Hardt and Negri 321-22).

Maffesoli writes that “for our purposes, truth exists only in whatever allows us to seize the vitality of an era, the vitality of events, or of particular and specific situations (“The Imaginary and the Sacred” 66). Nevertheless, the scientific validity associated with the incorporation of the forms of the sacred into social theory became a point of debate among the members of *Le Collège de Sociologie*: Georges Bataille suggested that “the man who takes upon himself the burden of science has exchanged his concern for living out human destiny for a concern to discover truth” (“The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” 15). Bataille also asserted that “It seems futile to be content with reflecting reality as science does, and futile to escape it like fiction” (“The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” 16). Michel Leiris, meanwhile, expressed his disagreement regarding the group’s method in a letter to Bataille in 1939:

Although I am fully aware of the importance of the sacred in social phenomena, and of how vital it is for us, I think that emphasizing the role of this sort of thing to the extent that we have emphasized it—almost to the point of making the sacred the sole principle of explanation—is in contradiction with the acquisitions of modern sociology... (Hollier 355).

In terms of a study of sports fanaticism as a mode of religiosity *per se*, we find that certain epistemologies limit the recognition of the role of the sacred. As Michel Maffesoli distances himself from the preceding intellectual climate of rationality, individualism, ‘social facts’ and the sociologist’s moral imperative, the concept of the sacred establishes itself as a significant component of evaluating religiosity in sports fanaticism: “We do not have to say ‘ought-to-be’, or bring a value judgment to bear, but above all to report what is (or could become) the case” (*The Contemplation of the World* 62). Of course, just what exactly is the case is not a matter of an objective finding by a sociologist observing impartially, as Maffesoli concludes: “In the

comprehensive tradition, to which I subscribe, one always proceeds by approximate truths. This is all the more important when one's focus is the realm of everyday life. In this aspect...we need not concern ourselves with discovering the ultimate truth. Truth is relative, an offshoot of the situation” (*The Time of the Tribes* 5). And yet the relativity of the affair does not absolve the theorist of intellectual rigor. All of the opposite, in fact, as it becomes an invitation to not only participate in the whole but also gain intimate understandings of communities – a veritable necessity given their multiplicity. In doing so, we exit the arena of scientific truth and enter the arena of aesthetics, of winners and losers, the sacred and profane – where passion, communion, ritual and power come to the fore. The closer one gets to the passions of sports fanaticism, the more one sees the outline of a sacred world.

Equally important to Maffesoli's contributions on social concepts are his intimations on methodology, which stem from the diverse tradition of Émile Durkheim and the sociology of the sacred, including but not limited to their ethnographical and theoretical pursuits. The social theorist has a duplicitous expectation, aside from intellectualizing, to participate (share) in the collective experience, a point echoed by Roger Caillois: “Knowledge and its application are closely connected. Only one who knows the true nature of the mask and its wearer may assume that formidable appearance” (*Man, Play and Games* 105). Thus, this dissertation's immersion into the sports fanatic's experience is informed by the methodological positions stated by Maffesoli: “Understanding implies generosity of spirit, proximity and ‘correspondence’. It is because we are in a sense ‘part of it’ that we can grasp or sense the subtleties, nuances and discontinuities of a given social situation” (*Ordinary Knowledge* 21). The implications of Maffesoli's approach are far-reaching when one considers and compares them to more ‘traditional’ approaches to social phenomena. Maffesoli's methodological break from the

‘traditional’ or historically major discourses in the sociologies of everyday life and religion can in part be attributed to his situating social theory as a part of a greater whole. So, what exactly is at hand for social theorists according to Maffesoli? In effect, a study of expressions of social logics with the expectation that one can glean the whole from the part – to be in communion with others, as an active participant.

Community and Vitality in the Modern Spectacle of Sports

What is at the heart of the sports fanatic’s enthusiasm? In 2017, one hundred and twenty-five years had passed since the inauguration of the Stanley Cup, the trophy awarded each year to the winner of the National Hockey League playoffs. One and one quarter century later, the current Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, performed an interview with a national sports media outlet by the monument in Ottawa celebrating the anniversary, in which Trudeau said about the Stanley Cup: “It has a weight of symbolism and a strength of binding our country together in ways that very few material symbols do.” When he was told that twenty-four years had passed since the last Canadian champion, he wondered aloud how desperate the nation (tribe of sports fans-clans) must be getting. In other words, sports fans accord a tremendous meaning and reverence to the prized trophy, which is possessed by the winning team. While the sacred has long been associated with virility, fertility and fecundity,⁴⁶ the prized sports trophy analogously iconifies winning as a sacred representation of vitality, as the Prime Minister himself reinforced through his use of fertile (“dry spell”) language in commenting on the prospect of a Canadian trophy-holder: “I think it would be great. I remember the last time we won, in the early ‘90s. It was an amazing celebration for Montreal, it was an amazing celebration for Canada, and we

⁴⁶ “It is the power of producing rain or wind, crops or the light of day; Zeus is in each of the raindrops which falls, just as Ceres is in each of the sheaves of the harvest” (Durkheim 200).

didn't think there would be the kind of *dry spell* afterwards that we are in right now. I think we are all just really eager to bring the cup home.”

What is it about prize trophies that endows them with a sacred reverence? The commissioner of Major League Baseball, Rob Manfred, found out in a public manner after having called the Commissioner's Trophy “a piece of metal” in an interview meant to appease the baseball community regarding the cheating scandal that was plaguing the league at the time.⁴⁷ Consider the social effects of winning a prized sports trophy: jubilation and pandemonium inside and outside the stadium is followed by a parade attended by between hundreds of thousands to *millions* of sports fanatics. The city and the fanatics which populate it become tangibly vitalized, as Jay Baruchel notes in his sports-themed autobiography *Born Into It*. After moving back to Montreal shortly after the Montreal Canadiens won the championship (Stanley Cup), Baruchel, a Canadiens fanatic, describes the city as such: “The city was still feeling the effects of the previous summer's Stanley Cup victory. There was a swagger and a drive to everything. People were cultured and confident, and shit felt big-time...The city was alive and so were my parents, in a way I wasn't used to” (27). The vibrancy and vitality resulting from winning a venerated athletic contest whose prize is a piece of metal reflects the collective reverence for and sacredness of the prized trophy and the game as a whole.

Winning is a fundamental myth that founds and sustains (through ritual) groups of sports fanatics and their sacred game – winning isn't everything, it's the *only* thing. Hans Gumbrecht describes a similar situation in ancient Greek athletic (and non-athletic) contests, in which the

⁴⁷ Sharkey-Gotlieb, Simon. “Manfred apologizes for calling World Series trophy 'a piece of metal'.”

contest and the spoils of victory empowered the sacredness of a symbolic prize whose resulting benefits (vitality) were quite material indeed:

The spectator's role as witness to greatness was intensified by the fact that the Olympic games were an extremely high-stakes competition...Only the victor earned the right to wear the garland of wild olive. Any consolation for being second best was unknown – there was no equivalent to our silver or bronze medals...The same winner-take-all attitude was true, by the way, for many nonathletic institutions in ancient Greece, such as inventing and staging tragedies or comedies at Athens and public speaking. Winning and being remembered at Olympia gave athletes, their families, and their towns bragging rights that they used with a shamelessness we find hard to reconcile with our idealized view of ancient Greek culture (96).

The totalizing *agon* that has been described in ancient Greece, Rome and modern times, reflective of the primordial role of competition in existence and religion, is effectively symbolized in the (spectacular athletic) contest. That is, even non-competitive social groups partake in myths and rituals which drive towards empowerment (itself a metaphor of life and vitality). Whether it is hoping for the success of the hunt, rainfall, winning or salvation, the spectacle of sports and religiosity share in common the sacredness and power of vitality, which in sports is idealized as victory. Consider the following innocuous dialogue between two sports commentators during the broadcast of a live football match, in which one commentator evaluates the quality of one team's season, remarking the (historical) improvements from previous seasons, before casting the final stone:

- [The team] had a seven-point lead at the turn of the year, which has always been enough [to win] in previous title races. 70 points after 29 games is their best total at

this stage of any season. They only had 75 after a full 38 game season last season.

So, it's there for everyone to see the improvement there's been, but of course they're only going to be judged now on whether they can finish above [the opposing team].

-They've had a brilliant season. But there can only be one winner, Fletch! That's the thing.

-Yea, the one thing that doesn't change.

Salvation in sports fanaticism is represented by the ideal (myth) of winning, which functions as an abstract concept, hence its transubstantiation into a prized trophy (a "piece of metal").⁴⁸ While humanity's destiny remains hopelessly unclear, the sports team has a very clear teleology: to win. With victory being a renewed opportunity every year and every game, with many rivals but only one winner, the spectacle of sports offers a continuous supply of hope and drama, a corollary of the loyalty and devotion germane to the sports fanatic's belief in the sacred ideal, in which the salvation of winning would become justly earned through suffering endured (ethically, as in the ascetic priest discussed by Nietzsche). In other words, while the symbolic representation of salvation (winning) remains forever unattainable, the vitality and power associated with salvation materializes throughout the ritualizations and mythologies of the belief and pursuit of it. *Participation in Sport*, edited by Nicholson, Hoye and Houlihan, surmises that "There is a recent but increasingly firmly established belief that sport is a vehicle for the creation of social capital and the associated benefits of social inclusion, social connectedness, community strengthening, community well-being, improved local governance, and greater civic participation and volunteerism" (2). Whereas Paul Christesen admits there are several significant impediments

⁴⁸ In *Fanaticism*, Alberto Toscano remarks that 'fanaticism' according to Hegel is 'enthusiasm for the abstract'.

or obstacles to democracy resultant of mass sport, in light of the myths and rituals such as winning and justice (among others) which pervade the spectacle of sports, he nevertheless concludes that “Exclusion can promote closure, which aids in the formation of large, relatively egalitarian groups. Meritocratic status competition can promote egalitarianism, by undermining systems of ascribed rank and by hindering the development of steep differentials in social power” (263).⁴⁹

Fanaticism and neo-tribalism is characterized by a community of myths and rituals, in which the vitality of the community is the final cause, and where ethics are effectively secondary – a situation not dissimilar to that which emerges in Plato’s *Republic*, where the ideal ‘good’ becomes synonymous with ‘in the best interest of the city’. Incidentally, with the sacred ideal (the greater good) in mind, Plato identifies the significance of the role of storyteller/performer in the hopeful materialization of the ideal: “Is it, then, only poets we have to supervise, compelling them to make an image of a good character in their poems or else not to compose them among us?” (Plato 77). The ability of poets to enrapture an audience and put them under a spell facilitates a latent but significant transmission of mythological (and ritualized) truths. In *Man and the Sacred*, Roger Caillois outlines the power and potential within the mythologies which found and sustain religion: “The sacred seems like a category of feeling. In truth, that is the level on which religious attitudes exist and which gives them their special character. A feeling of special reverence imbues the believer, which fortifies his faith against critical inquiry, makes it immune to discussion, and places it outside and beyond reason” (*Man and the Sacred* 20).⁵⁰ In

⁴⁹ Christesen summarizes this position: “There can be little doubt that the capacity of horizontal mass sport to facilitate the formation of large numbers of tightly bonded, horizontal groups in and of itself exerts a powerful democratizing effect on society as a whole. That effect is sufficiently significant as to be overcome by countervailing factors only with considerable difficulty” (262).

⁵⁰ As Caillois writes in the introduction to the collection of essays of *Le Collège de Sociologie*: “Three principal problems dominate this study: the problems of power, of the sacred, and of myths” (Hollier 11).

other words, the collective aesthetics of a mythology of victory poses a significant social obstacle or rival to be overcome by a mythology of reason (*logos*) or the good.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the emergence of digital platforms for communion between sports fanatics sheds a prodigious light on these values and sentiments which pervade sports fanaticism. That is, the presence and appearance of the myths and rituals of the spectacle of sports have blossomed in the modern digital age, an area of study which has not garnered much serious consideration in scholarship on sports or religiosity.

The everyday digital life of sports fanaticism – containing an enumerable amount of publicly available discourses – presents heretofore unmatched sources of insight into the beliefs, affects, and functions of sports fanatics. While the foundations of social theories of sport are focused on the concept of the athletic contest, its participants, and their historical development into culture and civilization, this dissertation addresses gaps in these studies by incorporating the religiosity of sports fanaticism and therefore introduces the reader into the digital world of sports – in particular, online discussion forums and sports broadcasting and journalism. The investigation will come to see the extent to which the spectacle of sports is venerated and ritualized, including the depths and powers of sentiment and community, exceeding the trivialities of play or pastimes and inculcating itself into the social fabric. In effect, the sociality and sentiment of the spectacle of sports is captured in the widespread presence of sports fanaticism in online forums of communication. That is, the nascent digital world has completely transcended the previous forms of communion between sports fanatics defined by proxemics, such that sports fanatics are engaging (affectually, discursively) in sports fanaticism in rich and

⁵¹ “If a people did not have faith in science, all the scientific demonstrations in the world would be without any influence whatsoever over their minds” (Durkheim 208).

novel modes, as Garry Crawford addresses in *Consuming Sport*: “The Internet is not just a medium through which individuals gain access to a particular text (be that a sport or whatever), but it is in itself a cultural text, which is not just passively consumed by its users, but created and recreated by a significant proportion of these” (144). Crawford identifies the active participation of fanatics in the varied online communities, including the ‘bulletin-boards’ of fan-made websites, in conjunction with the passive-informative function of the internet. With respect to the oft-cited criticism of television and technology as being socially alienating, Crawford rebukes this argument by referring to the propensity for communal digital viewings of games, reflecting the enduring social dimension of the digital spectacle of sports: “watching with others, and talking about it the next day” (137). Only, sports fanatics now both watch and discuss the spectacle of sports with others in real-time online, in the very online fan communities that Crawford was uncovering. That is, while the game of sports has long evoked the extraordinariness of the event, the digital online landscape has carved out (digital) spaces for the everyday “sports talk of the town” to call home: “Sport is not just something that takes place at a specific location and time, but lives on [in everyday life] in people’s imagination and conversations, through their social networks, friendships, mass media and in their very identity” (Crawford 106). As Crawford mentions, there are a myriad of diverse communicative platforms online for sports fanatics, such that the constitution of community (and solidarity) in online discussion forums is not automatic but occurs organically. For example, consider a vibrant online community for fanatics of the Toronto Maple Leafs, located at an unofficial website (mapleleafshotstove.com) produced by fellow fanatics of the team, featuring articles and an accompanying section for comments, where fanatics congregate and correspond on a daily basis – in the form of one long and continuous chat – where the following comment was posted two

days after the National Hockey League had suspended games and the season as a precautionary measure against the global spread of a virus:

WatchthelawsuitTie

Just wanna say....I love you guys. Especially in times like these. Nice to have a community like this to "hang out" with even when the Leafs are completely on the back burner.⁵²

This particular sentiment underlies the *puissance* of all online communities and is reflective of the potential modality of online correspondences between sports fanatics which occur in the countless sports communities found online, as evidenced by the following comments posted on Reddit by fanatics of the Maple Leafs and the Liverpool Football Club, which captures the sociality and religiosity of the spectacle of sports:

Posted by u/james-HIMself

Last night I posted about my grandpa being on his deathbed and that it's been an awful week for me and my family, arguably the worst day of my life was yesterday. All I wanted was a leafs win last night and the leafs delivered big for me. It was nice to get a personal win during some personal adversity. Today my grandpa passed away. At least I had some positivity yesterday. Thank you to those who messaged me and supported me last night. Leafs are one of very few positives to me right now and I'm proud to be a leafs fan, thank you for working hard and being an amazing team.

⁵² [mapleleafshotstove.com/2020/03/12/nhl-suspends-the-2019-20-season/](https://www.mapleleafshotstove.com/2020/03/12/nhl-suspends-the-2019-20-season/)

Thank you Reddit for being beyond entertaining in the short time I've been apart [sic] of this community and being a close supportive community.⁵³

Posted by u/liverpool3

Just wanted to say thanks to everyone here for being a great community. I've been here for about six years and I've only ever heard support. I've been dealing with a few things recently and the positivity of this community has made everything so much better. Thank you all!⁵⁴

Posted by u/king__kizzle

I don't know if anyone here will remember me but 212 days ago I was in a very bad car accident which broke 3 vertebrae in my spine. It was the first day in the hospital when I made my post saying how much this team means to me. That night I went to sleep praying I would be able to run and play soccer again. The next 4 months I would be in a back brace narrowly dodging surgery. It was the toughest time of my life and I would be lying if I said it didn't send me down a dark void in my mindset. I started drinking to deal with where my head was at and ended up hospitalized New Year's Eve.

Then about 3 weeks ago I went back through the comments on my post and shed a few tears. I let all of the people that wanted me to do better down. So I used all of your comments as motivation for me to do better. Ever since then my life really has flipped back on track. I'm even able to play soccer and run again! I haven't touched

⁵³ u/james-HIMself. "Wanted to thank the Leafs aswell as the Leafs Reddit."

⁵⁴ u/AutoModerator. "Daily Discussion [2019-09-07]."

alcohol either. I just wanted to say from the bottom of my heart. Thank you and YNWA [Liverpool motto: You Never Walk Alone].⁵⁵

The spaces provided by online sports discussion forums to sports fanatics to enthusiastically partake in the spectacle of sports encompasses the empowerment and vitality at the heart of sociality and religiosity. In effect, the content and non-rationality of the beliefs of sports fanatics is secondary to the sociality of sports fanaticism. As Maffesoli notes, “the community is characterized less by a project (*pro-jectum*) oriented towards the future than by the execution *in actu* of the 'being-together'. In everyday language, the communal ethic has the simplest of foundations: warmth, companionship...” (*The Time of the Tribes* 16). The spectacle of sports and its community of fellow fanatics functions as a fundamental everyday social support system. The everyday social realities imbued with the sacred spectacle of sports became a newsworthy item during the run of success by the Toronto Raptors, featuring an article written by Evelyn Kwong and Sahar Fatima of the Toronto Star, titled ‘Represented by Raptors – How one team connects the most diverse city in the world’.⁵⁶ In the article, the journalists present to the wider public stories of social empowerment experienced by a heterogenous set of sports fanatics, including the ‘Hijabi Ballers’, grandmother Maureen Kelly, the ‘Toronto Chinese Basketball League’, the ‘Christian Basketball Ministry’, the ‘Onyx Barbers’, and the youth at ‘MLSE Launchpad’ enchanted with basketball and the Raptors. Whether it was the death of Kelly’s twenty-two-year-old daughter, the murder of 15-year-old Mackai Bishop Jackson in the Regent Park area, or the difficulties that visible minorities face socially integrating, in each case basketball and the Toronto Raptors played a significant role in repelling distress, providing

⁵⁵ u/king_kizzle. “Thank you all so much!”

⁵⁶ Kwong, Evelyn, and Sahar Fatima. “Represented by Raptors: How one team connects the most diverse city in the world.”

existential meaning, ethics and a common language to create vibrant everyday social bonds – the pillars of religiosity which inform this investigation into the sacred spectacle of sports, a contemporary example of the passionate logics and “existential networks” described by Maffesoli as “a sort of tribalism which is based at the same time on the spirit of religion (*re-ligare*) and on localism (proxemics, nature)” (*The Time of the Tribes* 40). The role of the community of fellow sports fanatics involves the shared pursuit and celebration of winning, yet even in the depressing prolonged absence of victory the community of sports fans endures. Jay Baruchel describes this unglorified but highly prevalent reality of sports fanaticism: “It occurs to me that this is the default setting for all of us. Cynicism, ruefulness, disappointment. We start every game from this place philosophically, every on-ice deed filtered through this prism” (9-10). Due to the amount of rivals competing for the ultimate prize, loss and a lack of glory permeate, while ultimate victory is celebrated and venerated for its rarity and perseverance. However, considering that even the worst teams win close to thirty percent of their games, and the mantle of glory often changes hands, we find that it is more so the self-identification with the team and its pursuit of ultimate victory, culminating in everyday social bonds, rituals, icons and stories, and in particular the materialization of a range of collective paroxysms (joy and despair), which sustains the neo-tribalism and religiosity of sports fanaticism.

Chapter Two – Storytellers and Sentiments in the Modern Spectacle of Sports

The spectacular athletic contest enchants and successfully casts a spell over spectators and players: puck-drop, kick-off, the first pitch, tip-off – these are the refrains that formally unleash the ritual of the game; the final buzzer, the final out, the final whistle – these are the refrains which formally close the ritual of gameplay. The formal boundary demarcating the game from everyday life is also observable in a palpable expression of emotions that distinctly arises during gameplay. The collective effervescence of the athletic contest plays itself out within the stadium, captured in the boos, ooohs, and cheers of the crowd, and everything in between. Affects are the unsymbolizable multiplicities that engender difference – they are enveloped in the immanent process of becoming: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 257).⁵⁷ Historically, we have relied on descriptive accounts (and first-hand experiences) to corroborate the affectual elements of the spectacle of sports, such as former player Ken Dryden’s remarks in his autobiography *The Game* on the modality of spectators at the Boston Garden (arena) during hockey games versus his Montréal Canadiens: “It’s a crowd expressive and involved, building with the action, suddenly swarming over you, shrill at first, then deep and resounding, making the exciting more exciting, fusing excitement into the game before it can escape” (143). There is a discernible emergence of intensity of emotion expressed once the ‘puck drops’ that is present beforehand primarily as unrealized potential (*puissance*). Nonetheless, while the first and final whistle explicitly demarcate the boundaries of the game, the presence and impact of sports fanaticism

⁵⁷ “Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived” (*What Is Philosophy?* 164).

does not necessarily begin and end with the game, but rather emanates a continuous (sacred) dimension vitalized by the mythological drama of gameplay. Mike Wilner, play-by-play commentator for the Toronto Blue Jays and (former) host of post-game radio segments, described this phenomenon during an AMA (Ask Me Anything) on the Blue Jays subreddit: “The thing we always have to remember is that right after the game ends, when fans pick up the phone to call into a post-game show, it's almost pure emotion. Ecstasy for a victory, anger and frustration over a loss.”⁵⁸ While these sentiments dissipate somewhat after the conclusion of the game, due to the frequency of games (typically 1-4 games per week) per playing season (up to 9-10 months of the year, or more), they characterize the sports fanatic’s being, evoking the aesthetic element to fanaticism (and religiosity).

The athletic contest is a ritual performed within the arena (*fanum*) – a concept both material and abstract. The stadium itself is composed of formal demarcations of the sacred: its mere presence produces an aura, as do its icons, such as its statues, banners, portraits, murals, flags, etc., whereby the formal boundaries between ‘the game’ and everyday life begin to blur. Even more, the totemic function of the *name* and *emblem* of the sports team ensures that the sports fanatic is always imbued with the sacred ideal that materializes and erupts during the game. And yet, the game remains the nucleus, that which gives life to stadiums, icons, myths and fanatics. The ritual performance of the game is the primary source of collective effervescence for the sports fanatic – the game is inundated with emotion, not only for the players, but also for the spectators – because it means something to both groups: there is something at stake for both players and fans. Winning and losing the game is practically a matter of life or death, as is being on the winning or losing team. The determination of winning and losing conjured in the sacred

⁵⁸ u/MikeWilnerJays. “I’m Mike Wilner, Blue Jays Radio Broadcaster. Ask Me Anything!”

athletic contest materializes the power and *puissance* immanent to existence – *to the victor go the spoils* (power, vitality). Meanwhile, the modern spectacle of sports blurs the line of metaphor, as Jay Baruchel describes the tense moments of a communal viewing (on television) of a Montréal Canadiens hockey game: “Everyone is watching. Some of us still give more of a shit than others, but we are all aware that stuff is on the line. This is our fighter, bleeding out and leaning on the ropes. Not dead, but in terrible danger” (238).⁵⁹

Sports fans, as we know, congregate in private homes or public establishments to partake in the spectacle of the game, though the intensity of emotions can drastically vary compared to the stadium. And yet, the sports fanatic in front of the television is nonetheless able to be transported to the stadium, no better exemplified than the angered fan yelling at a player or the team ‘through’ the television. The stadium, the pub, and the living room have until recently been the primary spaces (*fanum*) of communion for sports fanatics. The television was a major extension of the sporting event, as it permitted non-present spectators to bear witness to the performance either in solitude or in communion with other non-present fanatics. Digital broadcasts effectively extended the structure of the stadium (*fanum*) to new spaces. As Jay Baruchel remarks in his autobiography *Born Into It* about his fanaticism of the Montréal Canadiens, the digital spectacle also engages in ritualized communion: “We’re at my house, or my parents’ place, or a friend’s; we are home” (2). Baruchel also takes note of the analogous spell that is cast over his fellow fanatics: “Everyone in the living room is as tuned to the game as the Bell Centre is” (238). It is a significant discovery, then, that the phenomenon known as the ‘Game Thread’, found in sports discussion forums online, also captures in textual form the

⁵⁹ “Our hearts are in our throats. All of the postmodern existentialist criticism I have of this team, or this league, or the servile nature of the Canadian-American dynamic, all of it feels miles away. In this moment, everything is simple” (Baruchel 238).

collective enchantments and effervescences of the spectacle of sports previously typified by physical proximity.

The Online *Fanum* of Sports Fanaticism: Collective Aesthetics in a 'Game Thread'

Of all the spectacles which have taken place throughout antiquity, none were performed under the auspices of a digital society as is occurring now. In the brief history of the digital age, there have been many web domains where (registered or unregistered) users can publish, read and reply to public comments – whether in the form of a bulletin board forum or comments section in an article or blog post. Domains such as Reddit are just one (leading) example of general-topic online forums, whereas there are also many other topic-specific domains, ranging from all things such as travelling, sports, stocks, video games, medicine, body building, programming, shopping, etc., with their own accompanying forums. An online forum takes advantage of an individual's ability to write and publish (post) comments onto a publicly accessible web domain. A website may have a dedicated area structured as a forum or 'discussion board', or it may have a section reserved for comments at the end of a unique webpage (such as a blog article). Bulletin-board forums and comments sections in blog articles are ultimately unique webpages that can become sites of discussion – user-friendly platforms that aggregate comments – with the ability for an individual to post a comment, read others and reply (among other things, such as posting images). In these cases and others, the 'community' is entirely unstructured and reliant on repeated readership and participation – with prolonged exposure one becomes familiar with members of the community, in particular through the use of avatars and usernames.

At this moment, the online world is a nascent material dimension and deserving of additional contemporary scholarship. Some of the digital sites about which we speak of here

were popularized in the last decade, or earlier. Furthermore, the Web is still experiencing rapid growth. In other words, in the past ten to twenty years, there have been drastic changes to everything from (online) platforms to number of users. To study the modern spectacle of sports at this moment is to bear witness to the early stages of a metamorphosis into a digital landscape. While traditional media, such as radio and television, still feature prominently alongside the exponential growth of the internet, generations of sports fans have until very recently never fuelled their fanaticism with the cornucopia of material to digest that is now available online. In particular, the ability to digitally communicate with other fellow sports fans is novel to sports fanaticism, wherein previously the only such gatherings were either attending the live event itself (both inside and outside the arena), or viewing a digital broadcast in a public or private establishment with other fans and spectators (such as a bar or homestead). The ability to commune and communicate with other fans online during and outside of games is a significant development in the study of the modern spectacle of sports and its fanatics.

Online sports communities have expanded the *fanum* of sports fanaticism because of their ability to reproduce the aesthetic experience of the spectacle of modern sport. That is, the congregation of sports fanatics is no longer restricted to the physical presence of either the stadium or the digital (television) broadcast, such as a pub or a friend's couch, because online sports forums function like a large chat room, which sports fanatics across the globe access at the time of a game, participating in an animated collective ritual. The phenomenon of the 'Game Thread' in online sports communities is a unique webpage created specifically for online communion during a game. In all of the major professional sports, including football (European and American), hockey, baseball and basketball, each sports team has *at least* one online community with an active forum who regularly posts a 'Game Thread', as it attracts fanatics to

collectively participate in the myths and rituals of the game. Popular teams in fact have several vibrant digital communities (spaces), each with their own collection of ‘Game Threads’. These online forums have typically been accompanied by the production of narrative content – in the form of ‘sports journalism’ – far beyond the ‘empty form’ that is the ‘Game Thread’ (a place for fellow fanatics to chat about the game), just as there are also sites which merely aggregate content but lack an active community. While both major and minor online communities typically developed out of a media and journalism model in order to attract fanatics, the ability for fanatics to express themselves and communicate with fellow fanatics has altered the digital landscape of sports and the manners in which sports fanatics commune.

There are no ‘official’ online sports forums – just as anyone can create a web domain, so too can anyone attempt to form an online community, or otherwise a sports-specific blog which attracts a consistent readership (but does not necessarily evoke the forms of a community). There are several major and countless minor contemporary online sports forums and blogs: Reddit is a bulletin-board style online platform and a leading content aggregator and creator whose general topic popularity means that a fanatic of any major sports team is likely to find an established subreddit (every unique Reddit community is called a subreddit); Twitter is a social media platform which connects sports fanatics through public user profiles and hashtags; SB (Sports Blog) Nation is an aggregator of blogs for most of the major sports, and those blogs house active communities in the sections of every article dedicated to user comments; Maple Leafs Hot Stove is an example of a minor sports blog and online community, operating one domain for one sports team and some of their fanatics.

Reddit’s position as a major site for sports fanatics is characterized by the fact each major sports team has a subreddit that features between ten to two hundred thousand registered Reddit

users. For example, some of the most popular teams from the major sports include the New York Yankees (44,000 Reddit followers), Dallas Cowboys (101,000), Los Angeles Lakers (184,000), Toronto Maple Leafs (94,000) and Manchester United F.C. (188,000) – these operate in major sports markets and/or have a rich sporting history (and grow in number by day). Meanwhile, smaller market teams or teams with less prestige, such as the Seattle Mariners (25,000 Reddit followers), Ottawa Senators (13,000), or Everton Football Club (18,000), do not have as vibrant online communities. This is evidenced in the variety of ‘Game Threads’ throughout these sports subreddits. For example, an Everton F.C. ‘Game Thread’ typically attracts 500-1,000 comments per game; a Seattle Mariners ‘Game Chat’ typically attracts 100-400 comments per game, while an Ottawa Senators ‘Game Thread’ attracts merely a dozen or so comments; in contrast, a New York Yankees ‘Game Thread’ can expect around 2,000-4,000 comments per game, a Maple Leafs game attracts 2,000-5,000 comments per game, and a Cowboys ‘Game Thread’ has attracted between 5,000-10,000 individual comments per game. In the case of the major teams, there typically exist several online communities, aside from the subreddit, which publish their own ‘Game Threads’. For example, in the case of the Toronto Maple Leafs, there are several minor blogs with active online communities: ‘Maple Leafs Hot Stove’ for example can expect between 1,000-2,000 comments per game. Meanwhile, though a team such as the Ottawa Senators may not have an active online community on Reddit, there is a minor blog dedicated to the team, ‘Sens Chirp (senschirp.com)’, which can expect between 500-2000 comments per ‘Game Thread’. While sports blogs and subreddits produce wide-ranging content daily, it is the presence of the ‘Game Thread’ which most effectively characterizes the online sports forum as a modern sports *fanum*. Whether an online sports community uses a bulletin-board or blog format, ‘Game Threads’ are specific posts intended to provide a space (chat room) for sports fanatics to

post comments during a live game – these threads are often posted before the game, whereby discussion occurs before, during and after the game.

The ‘Game Threads’ of online sports communities not only capture the visceral effervescence of the (live) game, they also give life to their expression in textual form by sports fanatics communing online. For example, Maple Leafs Hot Stove (MLHS) is a blog exclusively about the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team.⁶⁰ As is customary, the blog publishes a post (a unique webpage) prior to every game, called a ‘Game (Day) Thread’, where registered members (or guests) can publish and reply to comments, and be unabashedly honest about their feelings, such as in anticipation of the game. Online sports communities in general provide a popular and publicly accessible platform for sports fanatics to express themselves during and/or outside of an ongoing game. Depending on the circumstances, the anticipatory emotions on any given night may vary from ardent dread to fervent excitement, from listless boredom to “routine excitement.”⁶¹ The following series of comments, displayed in reverse chronological order (as is customary), originate from a chat on MLHS which occurred in a ‘Game Thread’ prior to a critical late-season game versus the Tampa Bay Lightning, in which we can observe elements of excitement and anxiety in anticipation for the game:

Muggalicious:

Boys and girls, do I ever have a mix of excitement and plain nervousness for tonight's game. Woouoooooeeee

⁶⁰ “[S]pecializ[ing] in Leafs analysis (game reviews, Leafs Notebooks), breaking news (including breaking the John Tavares signing), and Toronto Marlies coverage (the only outlet to cover every single Marlies game). It is home to a vibrant community of Leafs fans who debate the team and enjoy the highs and lows of Leafs fandom together every single day.”

⁶¹ “Greeting the game with routine excitement, the fans move slowly back in their seats, watching, waiting, nothing to cheer, too early to boo, uncomfortable in their patient impatience... When the puck drops, the music stops, the clapping stops, and the rhythmless game begins again” (Dryden 214).

joebblue:

Go

Philthethrill → joebblue:

leafs

wendelsway1 → Philthethrill:

GO!!!!

AAAWhitby_WildcatsAAA:

Damn I am so excited for this game I can pop. Where are my mini sticks I need to warm up.

Juan Tavarase:

I'm an effing nervous wreck.

BrianGlenniesHip:

First time posting after years of reading and following the posts almost every day.

What a great year and a great feeling to be watching tonight's game looking to clinch our spot in the playoffs. Much better than talking about draft picks!

Budleigh Salterton:

FFS, this is like my playing days. Let's go already!!

DeclanK MLHS:

FUCK YOU 7:30 START. The extra 30 mins is torture.

Dangle_My_Berries:

Let's goooo boys!!!!!!

Carrick's Corner:

It's 1:30AM here in Amsterdam and no thought of going asleep tonight. Let's go boys!

drummond → Carrick's Corner:

greetings from Stockholm

wendelsway1:

Gotta watch this one....be back after....GO LEAFS GO!!!!⁶²

This snapshot of anticipatory emotion expressed by registered users of the MLHS blog materializes in the 'Game Threads' which permeate online sports communities and encapsulates the aesthetics of the athletic contest for both spectator and athlete, most prominently erupting during the game within the stadium, but also in anticipation. While the inaugural whistle brings the game into existence, the game affects both players and fanatics before and afterwards, as shortly prior to the beginning of the game fanatics and players are immersed in the emotions of the game. Ken Dryden describes his own pre-game 'jitters' (anxieties) as a player:

Slowly in my stomach and legs I get a feeling, a gnawing uneasiness, then in my chest and throat a fear. *I don't want to play tonight.* I don't want the hours of anxious waiting that must come first. The spasms of memory—the Bruins, my last game in Boston—that will interrupt me through the day; I don't want the two and a half hours that will come at the end, hours I can't control, that will make me work and sweat,

⁶² <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2017/04/06/toronto-maple-leafs-vs-tampa-bay-lightning-game-80-preview-projected-lines/>

that might embarrass me, that will give me a mood to carry around until the next game (108).

The spectacle of sports is characterized by a palpable distinction in emotional intensity compared to everyday life, evoking the contrast between the sacred and the profane. In online sports communities, ‘Game Threads’ reproduce precisely such a distinction in textual form: following the emotional comments of anticipation posted prior to a game, gameplay itself elicits a further qualitative distinction in emotion in the stream of comments; this difference is evident in the succeeding comments, which appear chronologically (with none omitted) to the community at large, revealing the aesthetic transition from the pre-game (anticipatory mode) to gameplay (experiencing the range of emotions within the game):

LeafsFanInLA:

Martina Ortiz-Louis is the most consistent anthem singer in the NHL

Philthethrill:

No mercy boys

Friendlier Moose:

I’m nervous about hutch.

Friendlier Moose:

Speeeeeeeed. Saw that coming. [Game has begun]

Mike Brabant:

Another slow start boys

Sabeoth42:

There's the speed

Lonsmos2:

Are you kidding me

Philthethrill:

Patheic [sic]

Dangle_My_Berries:

That won't hold up

LeafsFanInLA:

FACK

Sabeoth42:

Bury that

HAMMER:

That's just hideous by Rielly and Ceci⁶³

We find in this 'Game Thread' and common to the phenomenon in general the widespread appearance of (collectively) emotive and visceral textualities. It is common for a heightened series of reactions to be posted out of disgust, anger, vengeance, frustration, resentment, pity, despair, or disbelief – as opposed to the more singular modes of anticipation. But there is always a measure of anticipation which brings forth a tension that gets carried into the game and sets the stage for unpredictable and ineffable moments of collective effervescence. That is, even though

⁶³ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/10/05/toronto-maple-leafs-vs-montreal-canadiens-game-3-preview-projected-lines/>

gameplay is marked by an emotional intensity to which everyday life pales in comparison, the game itself also contains states of growing tension and effervescent explosion. The emotional extremes that are brewing within the flow of a hockey game, for instance, ritually conjuring the extraordinary, are exemplified in Baruchel's description of a communal viewing of a hockey game:

The second [period] begins with a whimper, the intensity of the first [period] replaced by its pale cousin... There are others in the room. I can't say they're watching the game like we are... They're just here for a visit, and the game will never mean as much to them as it does to us... They are apathetic about the game at hand, and I can't blame them... And then, as is the way in hockey, comes something vivid that stirs the blood. Seemingly out of nowhere, moribund routine transforms into a flourish, a moment of inspiration that galvanizes the senses. In this case, it's a big, open-ice hit... The room's attention is now on the TV; no one is checking their phone. Even if they don't like the Habs, even if they don't understand hockey, they understand what they just saw. It was simple, and pure, and profound (76-77).

Unpredictable and extraordinary moments of collective intensity are not unique to hockey, of course, as the ritual performance of each of the major sports is pervaded by the routine and uneventful – every game being a battle of attrition – until moments of heightened intrigue and excitement occur, if they do at all. Performing the ritual does not guarantee the appearance of the extraordinary, but merely opens the door to its possibility of emerging, much like Michel Maffesoli describes the process of unleashing the sacred: “But as we know, and many religious historians have shown, the sacred is mysterious, frightening, disturbing; it needs to be coaxed and cajoled, and customs fulfil this function. They are to everyday life what the

ritual is to religious life, strictly speaking” (*The Time of the Tribes* 21). As the performance of the spectacular athletic contest fundamentally contrasts the moribund routine of everyday life, Roger Caillois suggests that “The departure from this tranquillity, from this place of relative calm in which stability and security are greater than elsewhere, is equivalent to the entrance of the sacred into the world” (*Man and the Sacred* 137-8). After frustration, the reaction which most exemplifies the digital spectacle’s ability to reproduce the presence of the stadium and the behaviour of sports fanatics is jubilation. Both the spectacle of sports and online sports communities are effectively platforms for bursts of effervescence, especially in celebration of victory.⁶⁴ And orgiastic bursts of exaltation come in interruptive streams – moments of heightened drama erupt out of a tense ennui, as seen in the following eruption in the flow of comments near the end of a hockey game (at the time it was ‘sudden-death extra-time’):

Leaf, Maple Leaf

Imagine we touch the puck

Maxwell Howe

maybe the Leafs will touch the puck

King Leary

We can't even touch the puck

Sabeoth42

Can't win OT [over-time] if we never touch the puck

⁶⁴ Justin Verlander, star pitcher for the Houston Astros, speaking about the sudden (artificially manufactured) influx of homeruns this year: “You look at the course of an inning, we’re almost playing an ADD version of baseball right now, where it’s these huge elation moments.” See: Bradburn, Michael. “Verlander maligns ‘ADD version of baseball,’ longs for return of fundamentals.”

Maxwell Howe

only yawn

BoneChompski

This looks more like figure skating.

Scrub

Leave it to Buffalo to make 3v3 boring.

ApeX

Matthews gonna [sic] bury it

M K

Pocession [sic] time so far dominated by Sabres in OT [over-time]

rustynail

holy shit

ApeX

TOLD YOUUU

kawagama

OH MY GOD

Sabeoth42

Skill wins again

Steady on the Rudder

HPLY FUCK!

Norluk

No way!!

ApeX

I called it fuckin Matthews buried it

TavaresIsHere

WOOOOO

TuckerForPunishment

OMFG!

mcloki

Wow. Never in my life. Holy crap is this guy great.

Philthethrill

We are not worthy

These textual bursts of excitement and emotion in the ‘Game Thread’ chat contrast the less eventful flow of gameplay that forms a functional bridge between more extraordinary moments. The flow of the game itself is recognizable in the unfolding of the ‘Game Thread’ chat: first, in the aforementioned perceptible distinction between pre-game anticipation and the beginning of gameplay; following that, within gameplay there is the contrast between heightened moments of intensity and mostly uneventful precursors. Thus, even in basketball, which is overcome with scoring (typically an eventful moment in the major sports), there is a perceptible pattern of development and release of tension, in which the bulk of scoring events are reduced to only particularly extraordinary moments. While all moments in a mass sports game are necessarily eventful, the extraordinary presents itself in contrast to the ordinary events of the game –

observable in eruptive emotive textualities in ‘Game Thread’ chats which interrupt flows of narrative unfolding with effervescence. The online sports forum in effect, and the ‘Game Thread’ in particular, has become an extension of the stadium as *fanum*, as a site for immersion into the sacred myths and rituals of mass (spectacular) athletic contests.

Though we note a palpable difference in affective textuality between everyday life and pre-game anticipations and gameplay, both must be recognized as elements of the same religious system, much like festival (gameplay) and everyday life form a reciprocal bond. Stemming from Émile Durkheim’s remarks on the functional contrast between the extraordinary (supernatural) and the routine in religiosity and their mutual contributions to vitality, Roger Caillois finds this characteristic alive in the festival, whose emotional eruptions rejuvenate profane everyday life:

They [festivals] oppose an intermittent explosion to a dull continuity, an exalting frenzy to the daily repetition of the same material preoccupations, the powerful inspiration of the communal effervescence to the calm labors with which each busies himself separately, and the fever of climactic moments to the tranquil labor of the debilitating phases of existence (*Man and the Sacred* 99).

While the rituals of the game function more as festival, the spectacle of sports promotes various other forms of communion that both contrast and invigorate everyday life. As Durkheim wrote, “...even with the most simple religions we know, their essential task is to maintain, in a positive manner, the normal course of life” (29). Thus, aside from the 82 regular-season hockey and basketball games, 162 baseball games, 16 American football games and the more than 38 European football games per season that fanatics ritually participate in, daily life is further consecrated through more rituals of the spectacle of sports. Proceeding the emergence of both major and minor sports journalism (storytelling), online sports forums have subsequently become

a nexus of daily communion for sports fanatics. While active or passive participation in non-game rituals lack the effervescence of the game, they nonetheless reproduce myths and rituals which strengthen the collective bond and continue to oppose and vitalize everyday life.

All major sports teams have the potential to produce a vibrant online community – to develop and strengthen the bond between the game and the team’s fanatics. This *puissance* of the online sports forum is exemplified in the minor blog Maple Leafs Hot Stove (MLHS), where the forum is always open – the main chat is always in the most recently posted blog article, a user-friendly feature stemming from the simplicity of a blog site. Subreddits have imitated the success of this feature of minor blogs by posting threads in succession which aim to corral a flowing general chat: there are ‘game threads’, ‘post-game threads’ and ‘daily discussion threads’. Reddit is nonetheless inhibited because i) it typically uses a commenting system that necessitates refreshing/re-loading the webpage, disrupting the flow of the chat in forums which use commenting systems like ‘Disqus’, such as MLHS; ii) Reddit is a bulletin-board style forum and not a blog, whereby the former has a tendency to have several open and active threads. While certain subreddits have experimented with a live chat interface, with real-time comments (loaded without prompting, unlike the ‘Disqus’ system), it is by no means standard. In sum, while both major and minor online sports forums are active in everyday life, the sense of community can vary. For example, the flow of comments in the main chat at MLHS subsides overnight until the community ushers a new day in:

Reversethecurse13 (2:20 am)

Thanks for the review.

Sergei Barriezin (2:21 am)

Finally a game in 6 [video highlights] I can watch

NotSince67 (3:24 am)

Lots of comments 2 years ago on here saying things like Gauthier was fit for the ECHL, wasted roster space, and most of the MLHS community had labelled Gauthier as a complete bust.

Budleigh Salterton (6:13 am)

Good morning humans. Great day in Leafsland yesterday. Marlies win with Korkey scoring and Wolly with the bagel.

-YAK- (7:02 am)

Good Morning Stovers....it was the bottom six show that earned us the win last night....and you need that every once in awhile.....not alot of fun watching this game as the wings seem to find a way to suffocate our star\skilled players which lead to our lunch pail guys doing it their way....a win's and win...and its two more points in the bank...onward and upward..⁶⁵

An online sports forum community can be active all day, every day – users can come and go at their leisure. In effect, sports fanaticism has developed further techniques, aside from the game itself, of infiltrating and consecrating routine everyday life, and developing its own styles and rules of communion. Etiquette, for example, varies from one forum to another, however each forum evokes a multiplicity of discursive forms, including moderation. Here we can distinguish between inter-tribal and intra-tribal correspondence, the former an amplification of the friendship-rivalry dichotomy which pervades all forums. While the democratization of online discussion forums has influenced the totality of discursive communion, there remains a strong

⁶⁵ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/10/13/game-6-review-toronto-maple-leafs-5-vs-detroit-red-wings-2/>

idiosyncratic (and dynamic) element to minor online communities, though some commonalities include: denigration of rivals, shared enthusiasm and sacred bond, scapegoating, rumour-mongering and idolization. While the open public format of online forums necessitates authors and moderators, the content or extent to which moderation is applied greatly varies – leaving each forum to be shaped organically by the users in the community: a constant and daily flow of discourse evokes a formidable (discursive) river, into which one can dip one’s toes, drown, flow with/against the current, encountering biodiversity; or the river may be almost-dry, polluted or channeled into a larger body in which one becomes easily lost or undecipherable; moreover, anonymity empowers shadowy elements, analogous to the athletic “locker-room,” often materializing as crudeness, cruelty or superiority, in contrast to implied notions of respect within community.

While the performance (of the athletic contest) itself remains an eventful ritual that invigorates the fanatic, the spectacle of sports has taken the sacred exchange steps further: sports journalism and online sports forums have effectively extended the *fanum* of mass sports wholly into everyday life. Ease of access has meant a fanatic can commune with the spectacle of sports on television, on the radio, or in print form; the subsequent development of the internet therefore greatly democratized access and consequently content. In both cases, the spectacle of sports reveals its religiosity: discourses regarding sports myths and rituals were initially controlled by members of the media, much like the function of priests and prophets discussed by Max Weber; the emergence of blogs and online communities of fanatics speaks to the collective appeal – and religious import – of the (modern) spectacle of sports.

Priests and Prophets of the Spectacle of Sports: Authoring Religion in the Media

Max Weber identifies religion with the following metaphysical questions: “if the world as a whole and life in particular were to have a meaning, what might it be, and how would the world have to look in order to correspond to it?” (59). Modern metropolises are rife with sports fanatics, for whom sports myths and rituals are highly meaningful. For sports fanatics, pursuing collective excellence and glory in the spectacle of athletic contest effectively gives form and content to existence, namely by being supplied material and abstract means of worship: the former includes the ability to be present at a game, to view a digital reproduction of the game, and to write, read or hear about the game; the latter includes a narrative quality and symbolic notions of tribe and victory. As these characteristics implicate the role of myth and ritual, we find in the modern culmination of sports fanaticism the crucial presence of authority in discourses of sports and the common desire to know/for knowledge.

The game of sports invariably gives answers – there are winners and losers; to win – to the questions *how will it end?* and *what is the point?* to which fanatics are impervious from becoming internalized metaphysically. Once these terms are accepted, then *how to win?* becomes a matter of importance. It is in this sense that prophesying and extraordinary (magical) knowledge reproduce a sacred aura – the messenger both reflects and shapes (gives shape to) the divine. It is a functional relationship (of exchange),⁶⁶ whereby the declaration and dénouement of divine revelation sustains the fellowship – the same is true for the prophet as for the sports analyst. With the growth of the modern spectacle of sports into digital (online) platforms, we bear witness to the democratization of sports mythology – like the concept of *mythos* proposed

⁶⁶ “While a crowd may not have a financial stake in the outcome of a sports event, these spectators have invested their emotions. They have risked disappointment, perhaps even depression, in exchange for a chance to be present at a dramatic performance...every second of action contains a potential payoff in intensity” (Gumbrecht 207).

by Bruce Lincoln. In *Theorizing Myth*, Bruce Lincoln traces the history of the concept of *mythos* not only to poets and gods, in which *mythos* “is an assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed,” but also to its later reformulation alongside *logos* by “rival regimes of truth” (Lincoln 17-18).⁶⁷ In other words, the facticity of a discourse depends on its author-ity and the coherence between its internal logics and external passions.

Sports analysts, prognosticators, play-by-play commentators and digital broadcasts have emerged as the prophets and priests of the modern spectacle of sports – after radio, print, and television media, the internet has drastically changed the discursive landscape; the exclusivity, however, of these figures remain a specialized function of bureaucratic organization.⁶⁸ A play-by-play commentator is an individual chosen by a game’s digital broadcasting company to describe the unfolding events of the game, to present them no less than as a translator. Thus, those sacred moments which arise out of the game itself, culminating in eruptions of collective exaltation, are mediated by the voice of the play-by-play person, inexorably reflecting and shaping the divine. In other words, the play-by-play person is a distinguished figure, holding a position of authority in the overall ritual of the game, through their role in capturing the magic of the game – effectively playing the role of a priest. Ron McLean, host of the *Hockey Night in Canada* program, alludes to this priestliness in singling out the role of commentators Jim (Hughson) and Craig (Simpson) to channel the divine: “...sports is about the moment, that’s why

⁶⁷ “Homer’s *logoi* are always set in opposition to some situation or threat of violent struggle. In all instances, the term denotes acts of speech - often soothing, sometimes deceitful - that persuade men either to abandon the battlefield and renounce physical force or to find comfort and solace in moments of peace. The voices of official and conventional morality, however, tend to depict those who use and those who are influenced by such speech as irresponsible, womanly, or childish in nature.” (Lincoln 8)

⁶⁸ “...the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet’s claim is based on personal revelation and charisma” (Weber 46).

Friday's score is meaningless, last year's score is meaningless, that's why you can have the game of the century every couple of years: it's just about a moment, and possibly a great one. When it happens Jim and Craig will call it" (April 21st, 2019).

Contrary to McLean's point, the spectacle of sports thrives not simply because of great moments: what the digital sports broadcast as a whole excels at is producing myth and ritual. Without the digital broadcast, the ritual (with spectating being an active element) would only be possible for those present at the stadium. The digital expansion of the ritual expands and transforms the spectacle of sports – while spectatorship increases from 20,000-50,000 to the millions, there is a difference in presence for both players and spectators.⁶⁹ And yet the digital expansion of the game persists in its translation of the game: on the one hand the translatability of the event is weakest as ritual (due to presence), on the other hand the broadcast produces surplus mythology – neither to a benefit nor to a detriment *per se*.⁷⁰ While McLean pointed to the play-by-play commentator as the translator of the game and its extraordinariness, they are but one figure within the broadcast as a whole. That is, the digital broadcast excels at legitimating an active role in the ritualization of the game by virtue of sound and/or photography. Having channelled the ritual successfully, the broadcaster gains discursive authority, at which point mythology emerges as a preoccupation, being inherent to the function of the spectacle of sports; we have previously remarked how ancient Greeks and Romans glorified and narrativized athletes and athletic contests.

⁶⁹ "...Greek gods inhabited specific places in the world, with greater or lesser intensity, long before they began to take on various human (and nonhuman) incarnations. To be at Olympia was to be in the presence of Zeus himself" (Gumbrecht 98).

⁷⁰ "Who would want to maintain that such orgies of feeling as the ascetic priest prescribed for his sick people ever benefited any of them?" (*Genealogy of Morals* 142).

Digital broadcasts have effectively expanded exponentially the mythological realm of the spectacle of sports. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim outlines how myth functions as both form and content in religious constitution – with the significance of rituals being based on “...personalities who have a name, a character, determined attributes and a history...” (82). Digital media has effectively taken advantage of the ritual of sports’ need and use for (surplus) myth, eminently visible in any digital broadcast of a mass sporting event. Formally speaking, for example, the digital broadcast has incorporated and legitimized the authoritative discourses of the pre-game, intermission and post-game segments into the ritual of the game. In terms of content, the spectacle of sports is presented and reproduced as a wholly sacred affair.

How is the spectacle of sports distinguished as sacred? Parallels are drawn between sports and the miraculous, between athletes and gods; contrasts are made between sports and everyday life, between *my* tribe and the other tribe – and this occurs at the level of production and presentation by the sports broadcasting company, through sound, text and image. We have already identified the play-by-play commentator as the face (voice) of this priestly organization, whose overall function is to present a sacred event – to supply the game and shape it as well. In fact, some figures can themselves become iconic for their extraordinary ability to ‘channel the muse’ of the game in oration, much as Foster Hewitt “became a household name across English Canada” (Field 73).⁷¹ Thus, while the game is ultimately what appeals to spectators and fanatics,

⁷¹ “In Demodocus and his performance at the Phaeacian court, the epic shows us everything that an age steeped in oral tradition takes poetry at its best to be. Repeatedly it insists that the poet’s is a divinely authorized voice and that the tale he tells is absolutely reliable, for he is not only inspired by the Muse but tutored by her as well. In passing the test, Demodocus demonstrates what is asserted elsewhere of poets: they are able to sing knowledgeably and truthfully about the deeds of men and gods, past, present, and future” (Lincoln 21).

the play-by-play commentator and the broadcast as a whole becomes a part of the ritual and myth of the game.

While the game ostensibly begins and ends with an official whistle (gesture), the digital broadcast has effectively blurred and extended the formal lines between the game (as a sacred event) and everyday life by integrating pre-game, intermission, play-by-play and post-game rituals into the spectacle – elements which do not form part of a stadium-goer’s experience. In his *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, Hans Gumbrecht addresses this formal distinction primarily in favour of pre-modern ritual: “I believe the appeal for spectators was, first of all, being in the presence – in the physical presence – of the athletes’ shining bodies at the moment of their highest performance...being in the immediate presence of athletic greatness at Olympia meant being close to the gods” (96). Gumbrecht effectively finds an insurmountable distance between the ritual of the stadium spectator and the digital spectator, with the latter lacking in both effervescent communion and the presence required between athlete and spectator. Though the stadium does remain the nucleus of the spectacle of sports, as Gumbrecht suggests, the digital spectacle has nevertheless evolved as a significant organ of the game, capable of both reproducing the presence of the ritual and its collective effervescences (as shown in online ‘Game Threads’), thereby integrating itself into the game and becoming an active and authoritative participant – always with an eye towards the spectacular. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell decries the preoccupation with forming a limiting definition of ritual as opposed to determining more pervasive insights regarding the significance and effects of its modes. She argues that ritual is a matter of “creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’, and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors” (74). Thus, while some rituals may appear trivial in

isolation, immersion into systems of rituals such as by sports fans has revealed formidable social *assemblages* featuring the veneration of superhuman athletes.

The success of the digital spectacle of sports is based on its ability to reproduce the rituals and myths (form and content) of the game – instant and slow-motion replay, along with theatrics and analysis, reflect the ability to match and enhance the traditional appeals of the spectacle of sports. And so, while the digital spectacle of sports has shown to be a functional reproduction of the athletic contest, its success also has ushered in the capacity to further shape the spectacle, such that spectators and fanatics wholly integrate elements such as play-by-play commentators or theme songs into the cult of the game itself. In effect, the digital spectacle has subsumed the game as a formally sacred event, culminating in reinforced and novel rituals and myths – evident in any digital spectacle of mass sport.

The following series of photographs (1-19), taken from an American broadcast's build-up to a hockey game between the Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs on January 23rd, 2019, exemplifies the manner in which a digital sports broadcast both adheres to and creatively reproduces the spectacular athletic contest: [See Appendix A]

How does the broadcast reproduce traditional values? Its most pressing concern is to represent the game as the sacred event which it is. As such, it takes full advantage of the totemic qualities of names and emblems (logos). In photographs #11 and #15 the logo of the Toronto Maple Leafs is visible on the player's uniform, while in #19 it is visible within the surface of the ice; in #12 and #14 player names are visible on uniforms – all of which indicate the visible presence of names and emblems in the natural confines of the stadium, thus legitimizing its further digital presence. Hence, in photographs #2-3, 6-7, 11 (background), and 17-18, we see player names and team emblems appear in a wholly digital capacity, reinforcing the iconic qualities which are

reproduced and expanded by digital media. The sports names and emblems effectively establish and legitimize the tribe and its sacred qualities.⁷² Aside from the graphic elements present in the opening montage, there are several non-diegetic sounds present, including a narrator in the audible foreground along with an audible beat, as that of a beating heart in rapid succession, accompanied by periodic bursts of other sounds that resemble the beating of a gong, in the audible background. The combination of images and sounds results in both an epic aura and affective excitation.

How does the broadcast represent novel values? First, the totemic quality of names/emblems and the sacred aura surrounding the game itself leads to the broadcast's attempt to consecrate 'Wednesday Night Hockey', as seen in photographs #4, 10, 11 (background), and 15-16 (background). Jean Dion speaks of this principle, in which a day of sports can become iconic, as it has previously crystallized: "One could chuckle that hockey has attained the status of a religion in this country. *Hockey Night in Canada* as Saturday night mass. Montreal, the Mecca of hockey. The Montreal Forum, the Temple on Saint Catherine Street" (Baillargeon and Boissinot xi). Second, the broadcast works to present the (team) game as an affair dominated by supernatural humans. In order to draw this connection, the broadcast associates each team with their most extraordinary player. The broadcast alludes to the supernatural in the first photograph of the opening montage (#1), whereas the presence and influence of the supernatural player is reflected in photographs #6-9, 11, and 13-15, all of which integrate the influence of godly individuals into the presentation of a group contest. In the spectacle of sports, the priests and prophets reinforce the myths of the sacred group, discursively and constantly, whether it involves a sports commentator purporting that "There's such a presence and an aura about [a player]," or

⁷² See also the legitimation of sports media through mythification, such as 'TSN turning point'.

in the presentation of the game using metonymic imagery to conjure the presence of heroic or godly idols. The digital broadcast works diligently at presenting the game as dominated by exceptional individual players – noted in the eye-line matches between each team’s superstar in photographs #8-9 and 11. The game ultimately becomes a confluence of a ritual conjuring of the supernatural alongside an epic contest between two opponents.

In a second series of photographs, taken from a Canadian broadcast of a hockey game between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Colorado Avalanche on January 14th, 2019, the imagery once again represents the deification of the most extraordinary players, alongside a portrayal of fanaticism in the form of communion, excitation and competition, all conjured by the magic of the game: [See Appendix A]

Of note from this series of photographs is a seamless transition between the game and the broadcast, in particular in photographs #28-30, where an establishing shot is made of Toronto and its stadium, followed by a cut to the analyst’s panel in the studio and then a cut to a side-by-side shot between the host in the studio and the play-by-play commentator in the stadium (and then finally to game in the arena). These transitions legitimate the integration of the broadcast into the ritual of the game, in which the broadcast team is acutely aware of its authoritative role in both presenting and shaping the sacred spectacle of sports. In his opening monologue, the host of the show James Duthie effectively alludes to the priestly nature of the broadcast team: “Tons of star power on the ice tonight and tons of star power between the benches as we bring in [commentator] Ray Ferraro.”

In the third series of photographs taken from another Canadian broadcast of a hockey game between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Vancouver Canucks on January 5th, 2019, an

opening monologue follows the same principles in reflecting a sports pantheon, collective effervescence, and an epic aura: [See Appendix A]

The opening monologue, signalling the beginning of the spectacle, begins with the narrative words of host Ron MacLean: “Saturday in Canada, it’s the day to play hockey.” As the montage unfolds, the spectacle of the game is reinforced alongside images and discourses of nationality – characterized (not pictured) by brief shots and cuts of individual hockey players from each Canadian hockey team, supported by similar shots of their accompanying fanbases, as shown in photographs #31-32 and 34-37, culminating in the digital graphic in photograph #38 where an isolated map of Canada reflects beacons of light emanating from the NHL logo and the seven cities in which professional hockey is played in Canada – invoking the spectacular and tribal nature of the event.

Playing in the audible background of the montage is the song ‘Saturday Night’ by Canadian rock band ‘The Arkells’, pictured in photograph #33. As the montage continues, band members Max Kerman and Nick Dika are interviewed: “Growing up in Southern Ontario it’s pretty easy being a hockey fan, it’s sort of like a religion here,” says Max. “My dad always insisted on putting on the hockey game on Saturday night,” says Nick. The segment concludes with bandmember Mike DeAngelis’ words: “If you’re watching hockey on a Saturday night, you’re looking for a bit of magic to happen.” All of this, of course, is the prelude to the game – though given the form and content of the digital broadcast, a spectator could be forgiven for not wholly separating the digital theatrics from the game itself, especially given its historically steady integration and ultimately complete absorption of the spectacle of sports.

While practically every digital broadcast of a mass sports event also features segments during each intermission and after the game, the broadcast from the third series of photographs

includes a sports analyst who is iconic across Canada: Don Cherry, the personification of digital media's successful integration into the spectacle of sports, whose segment *Coach's Corner* embodied the priestly functions which permeate the digital broadcast of the spectacle of sports. Tony Patoine alludes to Cherry's mythological status as an iconic sports analyst in referencing his teachings: "The 'right' way to play, according to Cherry, involves a mix of virility, a sense of honour, and gentlemanly modesty; it requires strength of character, hard work, and self-sacrifice" (Baillargeon and Boissinot 10). As seen in photographs #46-49, Don Cherry's priestly status and function reflects digital media's success at reproducing the vital elements of the spectacle of sports – religiosity, or a combination of tribalism, vitality and the supernatural, exhibited in the banalities of his own prophetic orations, for example from that broadcast: "You don't beat teams 14-0, you don't beat them like that, you pay the price; you can say it after, but I said it before: the hockey gods will get you."

In *The Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber identifies prophesying and priests as critical functions, analogous to myth and ritual, for religiosity – the successful prophecy (myth) conjures a divine that is to be worshipped, while the priest offers modes (rituals) of worship.⁷³ Prophesying is not uncommon for the priests of the digital sports media, whether it occurs during or outside of the game, because it confers upon priests status and authority, while it also reifies the notion of the supernatural which founds worship.

Both of these figures – prophets and priests – permeate and perpetuate the digital spectacle of sports, most evidently in its routinization (see note 24). Consider, for example, how

⁷³ "Primarily, a religious community arises in connection with a prophetic movement as a result of routinization, i.e., as a result of the process whereby either the prophet himself or his disciples secure the permanence of his preaching and the congregation's distribution of grace, hence insuring the economic existence of the enterprise and those who man it, and thereby monopolizing as well the privileges reserved for those charged with religious function" (Weber 60).

the discourse of play-by-play commentator Steve McManaman during a soccer (football) game on March 10th between Liverpool and Burnley football clubs reflects the function and banalization of prophesying as a legitimator of authority within a hierarchized (sacred and profane) system. First, a banal piece of revelation from McManaman eleven minutes into the match, referring to home team and incumbent Liverpool: “Unusual time for a kick-off, Sunday, it’s a bit quieter than usual. Games like this, sometimes, decisions go against you. Well, you have to respond if you want to be Champions, it’s what you have to do.” Just over six minutes later, as the game has begun to unfold for the worse for Liverpool, McManaman revisits his earlier prophetic words: “As I said Fletch before, you see it happen before: Sunday 12:00 kick-off. It takes a while, for players to, arguably, wake-up.” Three minutes later, after a response from the home team, McManaman once again addresses his prescient words: “Well that’s what I said after the first goal, there’s plenty of time to get back into this game...a lot of the times you just have to be patient...Normally in the second half the space will come because teams will fatigue.” Later in the broadcast, referring to the overall race for the trophy, Steve McManaman says “There’s still plenty of time, isn’t there. You can’t just see both teams winning nine out of nine.” Finally, regarding a player introduced late in the game, McManaman muses: “He’s certainly been the brightest part of Burnley’s attack today...He’s got a bright future.”

These banal prophecies, analogous to Don Cherry’s (quoted) above, permeate and reproduce the digital spectacle of sports due to the uncertain nature of games and the authority conferred upon the successful prophet. As the spectacle of sports has successfully engendered a hierarchization of existence into sacred and profane values, sports priests invariably look to take advantage of the hierarchy in a way which also grows the spectacle of sports itself – both reflecting and shaping the myths and rituals which drive worship. In the digital spectacle of

sports, there are myriad priests who take to prophesying – including play-by-play commentators, and television, radio, print and online analysts. And as Weber notes, priestly and prophetic affairs are largely a matter of enterprise, such that widespread prophesying in the digital spectacle of sports reflects its appeal to spectators and fanatics.

Sports prognostication is both industry and institution. While play-by-play commentators are legitimized through their role within the performance of the game, sports prognosticators stake religious claim to non-game myth and ritual. That is, the spectacle of sports – the temple of sports, in which the game is presented – has successfully integrated authoritative sports discourses by extending the consecrated event firmly into everyday life. Akin to the twenty-four-hour news cycle, the spectacle of sports has taken the game as an exceptional (news) event and represented its everyday qualities, culminating in the complete immersion into the seasonal rhythms of the spectacle of sports. As such, we find that as a new season begins in any major sport, sports prognosticators all chime in: ‘*My Predictions for the Upcoming Season*’.

The proliferation of sports priests (and prophets) is invariably tied to the evolution of communicative technologies, including the printing press, the radio, the television and the internet. Sports priests, much like online sports forums, thus serve the sacred game of sports and their worshippers by provoking communion and emotional excitation, and by remedying uncertainty and the desire for knowledge through these mediums. That is, aside from the visceral elements of the game that appeal to spectators, there are also significant narrative components to the spectacle of sports. Roland Barthes identifies the passions of spectators conjured by events in the arena as being narratively formed – for example, Good triumphing over Evil.⁷⁴ Ultimately, it

⁷⁴ “When the hero or the villain of the drama, the man who was seen a few minutes earlier possessed by moral rage, magnified into a sort of metaphysical sign, leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a small suitcase and arm-in-arm with his wife, no one can doubt that wrestling holds that power of transmutation which is

is the narrative form itself which is the vehicle for content, wherein the game is the first in an endless chain of significations.

Each game contains a timebound beginning and end but is wholly subsumed by the seasonal structure of the sport, itself containing the basic narrative elements of start and finish. The seasonal structure is based on renewal: the end of the season signifies the return to the beginning of the circuit, thereby ensuring successive narrative repetitions – the story does not end as is typical, with a material lack (no more words to read or hear, images to view); instead, the end is symbolized by the awarding of the championship trophy. The result is a vivacious and enclosed narrative world, with the modern spectacle not significantly dissimilar to the ancient epic: the dispute between Idomeneus and Ajax in Homer's *Iliad* exemplifies the athletic contest's appeal to the intellect and its provocation to prophesying (the uncertain), in which spectators are fully invested in the outcome of the contest and furthermore leverage the undetermined circumstances into expressing *nous* (and thus authority in speech).⁷⁵ In this case, both the athletic contest in itself and its use as a narrative device reflect its appeal to spectators who become invested in the outcome, the significance therein symbolized by Idomeneus' wager of a "tripod" or "cauldron" – typical trophies for contest winners – to support his prognostication. Idomeneus' attempt at inserting himself into the stakes of the chariot race (through a subsequent contest of prognostication) speaks to the efficacy of prophecy in athletic contests, in particular for spectators as actively invested participants.

common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship. In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a justice which is at last intelligible" (Barthes 23).

⁷⁵ *Iliad* 23.450

In addition to its visceral elements, the social spectacle of the athletic contest excels at storytelling. While wrestling was the “perfection of an iconography” for Barthes, athletic contests as a whole are bound up in mythology – the act of inscribing social values through storytelling. Thus, while it may seem that the contestants and the outcome are the focus and function of the game, it is rather the spectators and their benefit which the contest serves (aside from itself). This explains the proliferation of discourse from the narrative world of the spectacle of sports as a matter of demand, in which the spectacular athletic contest remains the nucleus of the appeal. The critical conflation here is between the athletic contest and the matter of life and death, which in modern times is less war-based but nonetheless tribally structured. The athletic contest, as ritual and myth, is a social tool to survive and thrive; it brings people together and forms tribal relations, it evokes the supernatural and the effervescent; it informs and is informed, socially.

A major stipulation to the mythological storytelling function of the spectacle of sports is identified by Walter Benjamin in the words of Villemessant, whereby “an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid” (88-89), characterizing the appearance and domination of everyday information in contrast to storytelling.⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau also echoes an outline of this mythological dimension that sports has enveloped: “Narrations about what's-going-on constitute our orthodoxy. Debates about figures are our theological wars...They [the combatants] move forward camouflaged as facts, data, and events. They present themselves as messengers from a ‘reality’” (Certeau 185). The epitome of the mythological dimension in the spectacle of sports is the daily sports news cycle: in print, online, on television and the radio.

⁷⁶ “If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs” (Benjamin 89).

Hans Gumbrecht decries these encroachments of the spectacle of sports into everyday life: “...sports, in the disguise of leisure culture, may be escaping its conventional bounds and invading the rest of our lives, forcing us into the role of nonstop sports consumers rather than fans” (148). And yet, we suggest that the integration of the spectacular of sports into everyday life – and its previously untapped potential – reflects the core of religiosity (as suggested earlier by Durkheim).

Everyday and Tactical Sports Discourses in Modern Sports Mythology

As has been previously discussed, the modern spectacle of sports stands in stark contrast to everyday life. However, in observing the anticipation to games, it was also concluded that the boundaries of the game extended outside of its first and final whistle – its form of demarcating the game from everyday life. Now, it is fair to say that the narrative world of the spectacle of sports is both ever-present in everyday life and yet still in opposition to it, illustrative of the authority of the myths and rituals of sports. As Michel Maffesoli suggests, “Everyday life has a style made up of gestures, words, theatricality, and major and minor works. We have to be able to explain that style” (*Ordinary Knowledge* 16).

Former hockey goaltender Ken Dryden addresses sports media/journalism, as it materializes in an all-encompassing ‘narrative world’ of sports, in his autobiography *The Game*: “More and more as sports coverage proliferates beyond games, as it becomes entertainment and moves to prime time, as we look for the story behind the story to put performance into a context, and drama into life, then off-ice, off-field performance becomes important” (184). While Dryden recognizes that the world of sports is a social institution, in which players are looked upon as role models, he admonishes its foundations in celebrity culture, and he rejects the mythological aspects of the spectacle of sports: “We are not heroes. We are hockey players. We do exciting,

sometimes courageous, sometimes ennobling things like heroes do, but no more than anyone else does. Blown up on a TV screen or a page of print, hyped by distance and imagination, we seem more heroic, the scope of our achievement seems grander, but it isn't, and we're not" (189).

These are the words of Ken Dryden the player, after having established himself behind the curtain; Dryden the fanatic (in the same autobiography), however, ultimately speaks of the enchantment of the spectacle: "Hall, Sawchuk, Jacques Plante, and Bower—they were the heroes of my childhood. Performing before my adolescent eyes, they did unimaginable things in magical places" (84). He even outlines the role that the storyteller fulfills in this enchanting world, as he describes a typical childhood scene in his own backyard:

It was Maple Leaf Gardens filled to wildly cheering capacity, a tie game, seconds remaining. I was Frank Mahovlich, or Gordie Howe, I was anyone I wanted to be, and the voice in my head was that of Leafs broadcaster Foster Hewitt...It was a glorious fantasy, and I always heard that voice. It was what made my fantasy seem almost real...If I wanted to be Mahovlich or Howe, if I moved my body the way I had seen them move theirs and did nothing else, it would never quite work. But if I heard the voice that said their names while I was playing out that fantasy, I could believe it (65).

In this example, Ken Dryden successfully falls into the enchantment of the spectacle of sports by virtue of his identification with the game itself, the team and the heroic figures therein. Yet, when it comes to the ubiquitous sports interview, a result in part of the power of the story and of the idolization of the players and the game, Dryden holds these aspects in contempt: "It is not enough to score a goal and have it picked apart by the all-seeing eyes of replay cameras. A player must be able to put it in his own eloquent words, live, on-camera words that cannot be

edited for the morning paper” (185). The digital spectacle of sports involves a vibrant everyday narrative dimension, characterized by its daily presence in outlets exclusively dedicated to sports, and more importantly, in news outlets, including in print, on television, radio and online. The following comment retrieved from a daily chat at MLHS elaborates on the role which the spectacle of sports plays in routine everyday life and the sports fanatic’s enthusiasm:

-YAK-

I start my day with TSN or SN highlights...I then listen to 1050 AM with Landsberg and Colaicovo...I then switch to the FAN 590...I listen to either Leafs lunch or Hockey Central at noon....then I catch Overdrive in the afternoons...I literally do this every weekday....my point being...there is an insatiable appetite for Leaf related content...whether its good ..bad or ugly....Leaf fans will talk about the Leafs almost endlessly...⁷⁷

Sports “news” such as ‘game recaps’ and the ‘sports interview’ form part of the everyday (sports) news cycle, with players and managers giving interviews prior to and after games, for example – a consistent source of valuable content for the fanatic (who strives toward victory), in which the interview is an opportunity for the fanatic to both glean information and inspiration. The sports interview has become a critical source of myth and ritual bound up in the spectacle of sports: interviews are given on an almost daily basis, due to the frequency of games and practices during the active season. They are also used during momentous occasions, such as introducing new management or a new player. There are common objectives to the sports interview, depending on one’s role in the spectacle – whether fanatic, media or player. For example, on

⁷⁷ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/07/05/as-offer-sheet-rumours-abound-the-toronto-maple-leafs-are-well-situated-to-handle-whatever-comes-their-way/>

October 9th, 2015, the Liverpool Football Club posted an interview on their official website with newly hired manager Jurgen Klopp, titled ‘Jürgen Klopp: Exclusive first LFC interview’ in which the prologue states that the fanatic can learn about the new manager’s “decision to take the helm at Anfield and the philosophy that will come with the charismatic leader.” It also reassures fans that Klopp is “arriving with a formidable pedigree and a track record of success.”⁷⁸

Managers and players frequently speak with the media: before and after games, at practice, at momentous occasions, a scheduled radio interview, or a public charity event. This differs from a player’s presence on social media because the sports interview provides precious analytical information to the fanatic; the interview also produces narrative content, including conjuring emotional reactions such as fear, joy, sadness, amazement, collective pride, etc. While we have noted that the function of the spectacle of sports is to excite the fanatic’s body, inscribe mythological and ritual values, and create a sense of magic and tribalism, the fanatic’s intellectual faculties (desire for knowledge) are also duly targeted, as sports interviews aim to communicate tactical discourses regarding the team’s path to victory – just as the interview with Jurgen Klopp includes queries regarding the team’s overall playing strategies.

Every sports interview in part addresses tactical elements of the game and this principle bears itself out in the countless discourses produced by sports media and fanatics. In David Shulman’s article *On the Early Use of Fan in Baseball*, the claimant to coining the term ‘fan’, former manager Ted Sullivan, is cited from his sport biography: “A man came into [my office] one day and in the presence of three or four of the Browns began to ply me with questions about baseball in general. He knew every player in the country with a record of 90 in the shade and 100

⁷⁸ Liverpool FC. “Jürgen Klopp: Exclusive first LFC interview.”

in the sun. He gives his opinion on all matters pertaining to ball” (330). In awe of the ‘fiend’, Sullivan posed to his players the question of classification of this type of person, which Charlie Comiskey allegedly remarked as fanatical, whereupon Sullivan would subsequently abbreviate to ‘fan’. The information internalized by the fanatic (from available data) ultimately contributes to a tactical knowledge – featuring both a sense of rationally understanding outcomes and the potential use of the information to improve one’s chances of victory.⁷⁹ To classify the tactical knowledge which fanatics immerse themselves in, we return to the chariot race in the *Iliad* where Nestor advises his son Antilokhos about tactical points which could affect his son’s chances of victory:

The other drivers know less than you do, but their horses are fleeter; therefore, my dear son, see if you cannot hit upon some artifice [mêtis] whereby you may insure that the prize shall not slip through your fingers. The woodsman does more by skill [mêtis] than by brute force [biê]; by skill [mêtis] the pilot guides his storm-tossed ship over the sea [pontos], and so by skill [mêtis] one driver can beat another.⁸⁰

Sports fanatics are as invested in their team’s victory in the athletic contest as Nestor was for his son Antilokhos, and as such the principle of *metis* is equally fundamental to the sports fanatic. Not only is tactical knowledge observable in the endless content produced by sports media, but it is also the case that a significant portion of everyday discourses on online sports forums relate to tactical knowledge. The growth of the public presence of tactical data – its collection,

⁷⁹ This principle, abound in the spectacle of sports, is encapsulated in these choice words (the fanatic learns from the article how an athletic hero learns in pursuit of excellence) from an unassuming article posted on a Liverpool blog: “Chelsea forward Tammy Abraham has admitted that he studies world class strikers from around Europe to improve his game, and Roberto Firmino is one of them. ‘For me in my spare time I go on YouTube and watch all the best strikers in the world play in this competition [Champions League], stealing their ideas and adding it to my game,’ he’s quoted as saying by the Daily Mirror.” See: Carson, Ste. “Chelsea star Tammy Abraham admits he studies Roberto Firmino to improve his game.”

⁸⁰ *Iliad*, Homer. 23.301

availability, and incorporation – attests to the sports fanatic’s position as an active member of the team, the ultimate significance of *metis* in athletic contest,⁸¹ and its effectively limitless supply and production. That is, tactical knowledge includes both raw data and proposed theories, and it is the latter which sustains the manager, the sports priest and fanatic – outcomes contribute to distinguishing between winners and losers, good managers and bad managers, prophets and frauds.

The significance of tactical knowledge in the digital spectacle of sports is observable in the content of online sports blogs and forums – in the everyday discourses of sports fanatics. In other words, the focus on numbers and empiricism composes a critical element to sports fanatics, in concert with other elements, such as narrative. While sports media traditionally catered to the storytelling foundations of the spectacle of sports, the sports fanatic is by nature also interested in understanding the tactical elements which lead to victory or loss. That is, the flourishing of online sports blogs and forums stands in stark contrast to the previous domination/control of sports discourses by sports broadcasters and media who privileged the dramatic elements of storytelling over genuine tactical discussion. While storytelling certainly contains a strong appeal to sports fanatics, there is also fanatical interest in communicating and understanding the tactical elements which contribute to victory or loss. This distinction between discourses invokes a tension between the mytho-poetic and critical rationalist dimensions, often materializing in discussions (or arguments), especially online, which contrast and oppose “talk radio narratives” (which tend to appeal to the emotions of the audience). Crucially, sports fanaticism involves a combination of these elements (dramatic-tactical) – while sports fanatics display tendencies

⁸¹ On the dual roles of *metis* and *bie* in the modern spectacle of sports, we take note of the manager of the English football team Gary Southgate, who proclaimed that “we will put out a team full of technical ability and passion and enthusiasm.” See: www.thescore.com/eng_fed/news/1879131/southgate-managing-england-not-about-winning-popularity-contests

toward each extreme, all sports fans incorporate both elements into their shared veneration for the sacred (sports team). What is more, each is liable to becoming militant and power-hungry as the other, unsurprising given empiricism's links to 'skill' (as opposed to force) in arms as a strategy for success. Hence, the concept of fanaticism and religiosity revolve around a palpable spectrum of enthusiasm for an ideological contestant in a totalizing *agon*.

In evaluating various fanatical actors, we find that traditional sports media have historically presented the dramatic elements of the spectacle of sports over the tactical elements, and though the former is of considerable interest to sports fanatics, criticism of the tactical ignorance and narrative exaggeration and manipulation by sports media has become a common refrain of sports fanatics. For example, consider the following comments from a reddit thread titled 'Anyone else get irrationally just angry at how the narrative has formed around Mitch',⁸² regarding the validity and effect of traditional (mainstream) media narratives:

bemiguel13

Point [hockey player] is a centreman on pace for 110 points and 50 goals. Marner [hockey player] is on pace for 30 goals and 99 points. This is absolutely not the same value. And for some reason the [media] narrative is that they will both sign around 9 [million dollars]. Then here comes Mitch Magic Marner riding in on his Darren Dreger [sports media figure] high horse and everyone is saying he will get over 10 and be happy if he got 10? What. the. fuck. is. going. on. How has Dubas [team manager] allowed the narrative to get so out of hand?

⁸² u/bemiguel13. "Anyone else get irrationally just angry at how the narrative has formed around Mitch?"

Lowkeyifuxwithjuice·

The media always wants us to pay more [to players] it's so confusing and it's so bad that the TSN guys are spewing it every fucking intermission.

Imsorryimcanadianeh·

Exactly. I think Toronto sports media fears a cup win, since there was (is) so much writing on drama within the organization and a 'legacy of failure'. The media is doing exactly what it knows, and that is causing tension between the players, fans, management, etc..

While the sports media model has historically followed the principles of popular news-based media, which typically have eschewed genuine tactical knowledge for appealing dramatic narratives and easily consumable information, the proliferation of online sports blogs and forums has provided platforms for the popularization of genuine tactical discussion, a fact that has not gone wholly ignored by traditional sports media. The democratization of communicative platforms and valuable analytical data has significantly de-legitimized the self-proclaimed expertise of traditional media analysts (as in, priests and prophets). On the other hand, a public forum contains the potential to empower a flood of discourses which can drown out genuine tactical discussion. As such, moderation (of forums) becomes a critical element to developing the quality of discourse. Nevertheless, discursive authority continues to linger with traditional media personalities, based on their access to a spectacular communicative platform and knowledge, and with spectacular athletes (and managers).

Given the propensity of tactical knowledge to be substantive, banal, technical, nuanced and inconclusive, the traditional sports media isn't naturally compatible with it. The growth of online blogs is thus directly connected to traditional media's own limitations, in which

fanaticism takes precedence over corporate principles, wherein the sports priest views the fanatic most as a consumer, while a blog is primarily (though not wholly, and the divide is increasingly shrinking) an ally of the sports fanatic, who aside from the spectacular appeals of sports is also motivated to understand the tactical elements which affect victory and loss. A telling example of the contrast, among many, is an article posted on the sports blog ‘Pension Plan Puppets’ titled ‘What if one day the gravity just changed?’ in which the author investigates the floundering success of the Toronto Maple Leafs by aggregating and presenting quantitative data such as the number and quality of shots taken and received relative to the rest of the league. The overall form of the article features typical (and contrasting) forms of popular online sports blogs: long in duration, high in technical terms and graphics, and low in narrative exaggeration. The lack of narrativization is substituted with more tactical components, as in the statements “it’s widely understood that the Leafs are seeing defencemen shoot more than they were [last year] and more shots are coming from the points, while fewer are coming from the net-front,” and “...over the last five years, there is usually a moderate positive correlation between each team’s shot share and their results the previous year. The same is true of their Expected Goals %.”⁸³ One minor stipulation to this theme in the article is its brief recognition of the significance of narrative forms, as in the final subheading titled ‘Putting this into a story’, which invariably addresses the reader’s expectation of narrative finality (and overall utility), thus engaging in discourse more associated with sports priests oriented towards storytelling: “Here’s what I think happened... The competition is better. And we like to say that the effects of competition washes out over time, but the wash water has changed. It’s made of acid now, and it eats away at the offence of every team.” The article throughout does not offer any of the sort of narrative elements which are

⁸³ KatyaKnappe. “What if one day the gravity just changed?”

expected from priests and storytellers, stopping short of supporting any easily-digestible narrative – yet due to the labour and skill in aggregating and analyzing data, the author at times presents information to allies in the form of a priest (an authority on truth), supported by interactions between the author ('Katya Knappe') and other posters in the comments:

Posted by KatyaKnappe on Nov 19, 2019 | 9:00 AM

I get that no one wants to hear this. Because we've reached the stage in the narrative cycle when even reasonable people yell at all analysis as "making excuses" but if you don't know it's raining out, you're going to keep getting wet, so for the Leafs, if they don't know it's much harder to score now (actual goals are down too) then they'll keep losing.

Posted by Rickap on Nov 19, 2019 | 10:04 AM

is this kind of like the Jersey Trap 2.0 [strategy]? And defensive coaching has again figured out how to game the system? Or is it more subtle changes in defensive positioning/tactics that are having a magnified effect? By the article it sounds like the latter.

Posted by KatyaKnappe on Nov 19, 2019 | 10:31 AM

I don't think it's possible to say, or not by me anyway, if this is systems, just random confluence of events, or personnel. Hockey is a volatile sport subject to a lot of random outcomes after all. But the salary cap must be playing a part here. This is parity is [sic] boxplot form.

I might look at a theory around personnel and the changing definition of a good defender in the NHL, though and see if that's a cause.

The digital spectacle of sports thrives on investment (libidinal, emotional, intellectual, material) by sports fanatics, and the digital spectacle of sports, in particular online sports communities, produces an incredible amount of creativity – much of it tied to tactical discussion. Sports fanatics can never truly apply their tactical knowledge, nor can their tactical knowledge ever prove to be complete or conclusive. Yet sports fanatics have an insatiable desire to understand outcomes tactically and express that understanding.⁸⁴ The digital spectacle of sports is a highly functional industry because of the depth to which fanatics can immerse themselves in becoming a tactical guru – whereby the lack of conclusiveness and control over variables ensures a competition of discourses without sufficient recourse to empirical resolution. More importantly, outcomes occur so frequently (there are between one to four games per week in major sports), and so much content is available to digest, the fanatic can never match the output of the spectacle of sports. Nevertheless, short of being an athletic hero themselves, fanatics can aspire to becoming excellent supporters; while sports priests hold positions of authority, they are by no means inherently held by virtue of merit – everyday sports fans are more fanatical in their emotional and intellectual investment. The digital spectacle of sports therefore supplies the fanatic with a ‘theatrical’ world in which immersion can be totalizing (mimicking everyday life’s state of affairs) – a never-ending unfolding of narrative and constant procession of dynamic outcomes.

What is the significance of tactical knowledge and discussion? To begin with, they form one of the pillars of the spectacle of sports, under the presumption that there is a free competition between rivals, such that the path to victory becomes an object of interest. Tactical events also supply an eminent amount of content to become narrativized: these can occur during or outside

⁸⁴ See: Homer’s *Odyssey* and the manner of escape from the cyclopes

of gameplay. From the perspective of players and managers, tactics are an essential element of successful gameplay. Though they are not otherwise discussed publicly, sports interviews all but confirm the role that tactics play for players, managers, media figures and fanatics alike. The priesthood of sports media stems in part from the traditional control of discourse in sports interviews: rectified only, in part, after the market indirectly demanded interviews be made publicly available online in their entirety. Previously, interviews would seldom be published in full, whether in audio or video format – hence the sports journalist’s and the sports broadcasting company’s control of the message. Meanwhile, as blogs and online forums flourished for reasons other than having exclusive access, the playing field has been somewhat levelled with the publication of sports games and interviews in full (whether on television or online).

While sports media figures continue to benefit from controlling the broadcast of the game and access to players and platforms such as radio and television, the internet is a platform for anyone to publish video, audio, image and text. Whereas all major sports media broadcasts resemble each other to a significant degree (in their presentation and performance), fanatically inspired coverage and communities online vary in form and content (though there are some parallels as well, such as the presence of ‘memes’). Of course, traditional sports media have attempted to assuage the sports fanatic by implementing restricted forms of ‘spectator participation’, such as call-in segments or comment sections, however, online platforms that are fanatically driven are far more appealing for community-driven participation. In some ways, sports media companies have adjusted to the developing tools and interests of sports fanatics, but in general there is a categorical distinction between fanatically driven online sports platforms and traditional media platforms: the (potential) quality of communion between fanatics. Free-flowing correspondence between fanatics in online forums reflects a wholly unparalleled commons,

particularly compared to the univalent structure of traditional sports media platforms. That is, while the latter remains an authoritative source of discourse and proximity to athletes and sports teams, the former evokes the power of communion, recognition and eloquence shared by sports fans. There is significant variation throughout all online sports forums.

Even within the same fanbase, such as the Toronto Maple Leafs, there are numerous ‘unofficial’ blogs and online communities: twitter, reddit, HF boards, Maple Leafs Hot Stove (MLHS), Pension Plan Puppets, Editor in Leaf, and others. From them all, for example, MLHS is the only source to publish transcripts of interviews with the team manager after every game (which is to say there is an archive of each post-game interview transcript dating back years). Though it is highly valuable to the sports fanatic, it is nonetheless an uncommon practice. More common is the use of selective quotes in a post-game article (with its own version of the story) or reddit/twitter thread. Ultimately, while traditional sports media has been effective at broadcasting gameplay along with adding extensive additional spectacular elements, including figures such as the play-by-play commentator, sports analyst and journalist, whereby fanatics are primarily passive, fanatically-driven communities feature an open and active discourse, greatly contributing to not just the tactical knowledge of the team’s fans, but through cross-contamination eventually all of the teams’ fans (and in some cases, in tactical discussions of all major sports). And yet, as seen in the article and comments referenced above, striving to be primarily statistically and empirically based (and thus informing an ally/fellow fanatic), there remain elements of authority, supremacy and rivalry involved within the tactical discussion. That is, even (and especially) within the same fanbase, there is a constant and vivacious discursive battle. Hence, bloggers and commentators are just as liable to engage in (tactical) prophesying, including retrospectively (as we noted earlier in play-by-play commentators and sports priests).

For example, in a weekly feature at MLHS titled ‘*Leafs Notebook*’, focused on a tactical analysis of the team as a whole – from its gameplay to its overall management, author and Leafs fanatic Anthony Petrielli contributes to the tactical knowledge of his fellow fanatics, and in striving for excellence (*arete*), he also gains authority and status – further legitimized by the common practice of prophesying. In a *Notebook* written on November 25th, 2019, less than one week after the dismissal of Leafs manager Mike Babcock, Petrielli dissects the notable changes by the new manager: “Zach Hyman moved to the right wing for really the first time ever as a Leaf...With this, there is more emphasis on putting players in spots where they will succeed – *we’ve often said here* that Hyman looks better on the right...” In discussing the early returns of a player exchange executed by the team, Petrielli remarks “We said in the summer that Nazem Kadri was the best player in the trade — that’s more than holding true so far. It was frustrating watching him play left wing for Colorado, something the Leafs never tried that was *written about here repeatedly*.” Unlike the traditional sports media, bloggers such as Anthony Petrielli and ‘Katya Knappe’ are striving for excellence in their tactical discussions, which greatly contributes to the tactical knowledge of fellow fanatics. However, as much as their discourses are analytical, critical, and unconcerned with characteristic media tropes, they nevertheless embrace the (religious) enterprise of the prophet, priest and preacher, hallmarks of the traditional sports media. Nietzsche describes this modality: “The *philosopher* as a further development of the priestly type: –has the heritage of the priest in his blood; is compelled, even as rival, to struggle for the same ends with the same means as the priest of his time; he aspires to supreme authority” (*The Will to Power* 89). What is more, everyday sports fanatics are no different: though they retain the visceral elements of sports fanaticism, they also engage in tactical discussion and are affected by the aforementioned functions – concerned with authority and status. The (discursive)

rivalry between fellow sports fanatics exemplifies one of the foundational pillars of the spectacle of sports – the will to power:

Sergei Barriezin

35 points for Mikheyev. Over or under?

Muggalicious Sergei Barriezin

Over

sniperstar Sergei Barriezin

Over, I'm calling 20 goals and 30 assists.

Beleifer29 Sergei Barriezin

Over slightly! There will be 3 blue waves of offense this year.....can't hold them all back!

B_Leaf Sergei Barriezin

Over 40 as long as he plays top nine all year, which he may not if Moore emerges and Hyman comes back. So I will say either he or Moore will go over 35

AyeAyeKapanen Sergei Barriezin

I've [sic] going with over by 2

JCM Sergei Barriezin

over but close

The banality of prophesying on display here is a result of the online sports forum's capacity to give form to the sports fanatic's propensity for correspondence (exchange). That is, some online platforms cannot contain certain levels of user participation (without 'crashing'). However, those

which are so equipped can engender an unparalleled everyday community so active and substantial that even banality is achievable (in the case above, as an expression of a common trope of the spectacle of sports – prophesying and the rivalry between fellow fanatics). While we noted earlier that Twitter does not supply the same form of chat and community as a typical online sports forum does, it nonetheless is home to a catatonic level of discourse, in which the sports fanatic is active in virtually the same form as in online sports forums: expressive of direct and indirect emotion, and functioning within the mode of the prophet, priest and preacher (access to more or less ‘followers’ exemplifies this enterprise – rivalry). More importantly, Twitter is a substantial source of spectacular content and tactical knowledge – a direct result of its privileged position as a collective communication platform. However, these same advantages are also its greatest obstacles to community, with discourses of allies lost in a sea of non-allies.

While there is no ‘typical’ online sports forum, the development of online sports communities has relied on fanatically-driven platforms (such as blogs and forums) and not traditional sports media platforms. And yet, online sports blogs and forums are not impervious to the obstacles to a thriving community. That is, as much as online sports communities protect against the presence of non-allies and engender collective effervescence and cohesion, there is also an abundance of intra-tribal rivalry, owing to the motivations of social capital and religious enterprise, expressed in narrative and tactical form. The rivalries among fellow sports fanatic allies thrive in the active participation in online sports forums (platforms of discourse), where ranges of fanatical sentiment are expressed, instead of controlled, as in traditional sports media platforms (including online). The common approaches to the perpetual disagreements between fellow sports fanatics evoke the same two elements which settle the chariot race – *bie* (force) and *metis* (tactical skill) – whereby truth can become subservient to the contest. In other words,

online sports forums are home to both the benefits of dialectics and the pitfalls of fanaticism. The spectacle of sports thus becomes painted as a microcosm of the generalizable contest, in which winning is pitted against other values, such as empirical and ethical (much like the motivation of bias leads one closer toward self-affirmation than truth). Therefore, just as the spectacle of sports is driven by the sports fanatic's wish to (vicariously) experience winning, so too does the sports fanatic wish to encompass the modes of winning – experiencing it, understanding it, affecting it – an approach they bring to their online discourse.

Resentment, Power and Vitality in the Spectacular Agon

The spectacle of sports (*agon*) forges winners and losers (of players and fanatics), in pursuit of excellence (*arete*), through the implementation of force (*bie*) and/or skill (*metis*); it produces glory (*kleos*), but there are unintended consequences, such as anger (*menis*). In *Rage and Time*, Peter Sloterdijk writes “The Old World had discovered its own pathways to rage, which can no longer be those of the moderns. Where the moderns consult a therapist or dial the number of the police, those who were knowers back then appealed to the divine world” (2).⁸⁵ We suggest that the sports arena has not been adequately accounted for in considering modern anger, or as Sloterdijk further suggests, the ancient Greek inseparability of war and happiness. In all of the major sports there are frequent and explicit celebrations of national military warfare. The concept of war is widely observable in the modern spectacle of sports: games are commonly viewed as “battles”; the physical elements of the major sports are referred to as “trench warfare”; the tactical element of games, resembling warfare, has led to the normalization of terms such as

⁸⁵ “No modern human being can put himself back into a time where the concepts of war and happiness formed a meaningful constellation. For the first listeners of Homer, however, war and happiness are inseparable” (Sloterdijk 4).

offensive, defensive, (counter-)attack, and formation.⁸⁶ That is, we may observe a link from the rage of Achilles to the anger of the sports fanatic: hate, rage, revenge, and resentment are their common elements. Rage, to which the first words (and the story) of the *Iliad* are dedicated, compels Sloterdijk to address the role of the will to power, of the vital forces that inform ancient Greek religiosity, and which we suggest are also implicated in the modern spectacle of sports: “Who sings under such premises about rage celebrates a force that frees human beings from vegetative numbness” (5).⁸⁷ In addition to the major sports athletes, this is also true of fanatics in the digital spectacle of sports, in so far as online forums and ‘Game Threads’ in particular are seen as platforms for the expression of heightened discontent – not merely genuine tactical discussion. The rage which commences the *Iliad* effectively gives life to the story, a fact which does not escape the sports fanatic, as the number of games played per week and the inevitability of loss arouses frequent materializations of anger and *ressentiment*. The following comments from a ‘Game Thread’ on the Liverpool FC subreddit exemplify the sports fanatic’s rage (in the final moments of an undesirable result):

Cemerian ·

SIDEWAYS PASSING WITH 10 SECONDS LEFT R U FUCKING KIDDING ME

FinnSolomon

This team deserve a collective kick up the ass

WakoJako ·

THIS IS THE WORST SHIT IVE SEEN IN A LONG LONG TIME....

⁸⁶ “In the 1930s, forechecking appeared. In response to the forward pass, defenses began packing five men together near the defensive blueline, making passing and puck control more difficult, poised to strike in counterattack” (Dryden 248).

⁸⁷ “Through the surge of rage the god of the battlefield speaks to the fighter” (Sloterdijk 9).

TheKZOShow ·

What a fucking joke that was!

ShawnCY ·

5 seconds to fucking go and we give the ball back we deserve the tie, fucking frustrating.

e2828

Hope Klopp beats there [sic] fucking ass in the dress room

FutMike ·

Fucking frustrating

dh2311 ·

Is having a punchable face a requirement to play for Man United? I don't know what it is about McTominay but christ he looks like a twat

SSAZen

We are a very frustrating team.

tamara1781 ·

I hate this match. I hate United.⁸⁸

Sloterdijk writes of ancient Greece's transition away from the vital and divine forces of rage into the subdued intellectual approach of philosophy, and of the distance between everyday people and the hero (and the hero's rage). However, we observe the modern spectacle of sports engendering the anger of the sports fanatic as a reaction to the common conflict of winning and

⁸⁸ u/LiveCommentator. "Match Thread: Manchester United vs Liverpool [English Premier League]."

losing, of the will to power – through skill or by force, as Sloterdijk writes, “to extend the feeling of suffered injustice (or defeat) to the size of a mountain in order to be able to stand on its peak full of bitter triumph: these escalating and twisting movements are as old as injustice (and defeat), itself seemingly as old as the world” (48).⁸⁹ Defeat and victory are at the heart of the sports fanatic’s investment into the modern spectacle of sports; defeat and victory are also at the heart of the sports fanatic’s society – in part a reflection of Nietzsche’s master morality.⁹⁰ For Nietzsche, anger arises out of resentment for not being in a position of superiority (or for the condition of suffering) – a consequence of ‘the contest’ in which an initial condition of equality is staked for the condition of supremacy (materially or in status, for example). For sports fanatics, this characterizes both the essence of the game as well as inter-/intra-fanatical rivalry. Hence, the sports fanatic’s common and fundamental expectation of fairness and justice, which ensures the unequivocal recognition of the superior will to power (in using force and/or skill). Crucial to fandom is the extent to which the fan is invested in, or ‘believes’ the spectacle: the game cannot be rigged, to the effect that fans must believe in a competitive balance and in the fact that each team has a ‘fair’ chance ‘on any given night’. Fans believe not only in the team but also the competition. The occurrence of perceived injustice by referees of the game therefore leads to anger and resentment by sports fanatics, as observed in a ‘Game Thread’ on MLHS:

⁸⁹ “To the victims of injustice and defeat, consolation through forgetting often appears unreachable...the fury of resentment begins at the moment the person who is hurt decides to let herself fall into humiliation as if it were a product of choice” (Sloterdijk 48).

⁹⁰ “If one wanted to express the value of the priestly existence in the briefest formula it would be: the priest *alters the direction of resentment*. For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering—in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, *anaesthesia*—the narcotic he cannot help desiring to deaden pain of any kind. This alone, I surmise, constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to *deaden pain by means of affects*” (*Genealogy of Morals* 127).

Rhandy

F**** gary bettman [commissioner of the NHL]. He deserves all the boos he gets.

What kind of league are you in when your refs get to decide 'tonight we will let them play and not call all penalties'? Why is it that some nights some penalties are called and some nights they aren't and refs let everything go? What is the point of the rules then? League needs to be consistent and not change their tune game by game.

The Blade Scrub

I usually go to 2 games a year and if I wasn't with my wife every time, I'd get booted for loudmouthery, calling out the ref'ing with the outmost truculence.

mcloki

are you fucking kidding me Fucking Timmy Peel [referee]

Burtonboy

Now that's a shit call

Billybobjoe

Lol the ref show takes over

MC

LOL. What a joke. We've been getting dry humped by Philly all night, 1 PP [powerplay] for us. 2 fucking awful calls against us.

Auston Musttachews (Gibson)

Waaaaay worse hooks have gone uncalled

Gordon Stojanovski

Lmao that's a penalty!!! How many times this year have we been called for some fuckin love tap in front of our net yet our guys get worked over any time theyre near the net

Defeat and injustice are two prominent sources of anger and resentment for the sports fanatic, both inside the stadium and online – but there are others, such as narrative elements and tactical events. An extreme example of the latter includes reports of a police investigation into an enraged sports fan's explicit death threats sent to the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball organization, citing a wholly tactical grievance: the trading of star player Paul George (to another team).⁹¹ Violence is ultimately a common undercurrent to the sports fanatic's resentful outcries – and it underscores the modern spectacle of sports' link to *bie* (force), war and the will to power.⁹² As it is, the sports arena harbours the social practice of force and cunning – the two methods for attaining victory (power) – in the form of an athletic spectacle, in which the sports fanatic's lack of agency is superseded by its vicarious identification with the team (and its forms of active spectatorship). Everything is done to connect the spectator (and the fanatic) with the contestants on the playing field, such that the willingness to conceptually identify with a group of players nonetheless leads to visceral and material effects, such as anger and revenge. Such are the motivations behind sports media articles and blog posts such as “Firmino [player] punishes Holgate [player] two years later for pushing him into boardings with most savage skill of the season” published on the Liverpool FC blog ‘Empire of the Kop’, in which the player's revenge

⁹¹ Jones, Perris. “OCPD: Man makes death threats against GM Sam Presti, Thunder staff after Paul George trade.”

⁹² Remarking on the “social contract”, Nietzsche opines: “He who can command, he who is by nature ‘master’, he who is violent in act and bearing—what has he to do with contracts! One does not reckon with such natures; they come like fate, without reason, consideration, or pretext; they appear as lightning appears, too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too ‘different’ even to be hated” (*Genealogy of Morals* 86).

becomes the sports fanatic's as well – as the post's author implores the reader (accompanied by image and video):

Remember in January 2018 when Mason Holgate tried to put Roberto Firmino into the advertising hoardings in our FA Cup victory at Anfield? The Everton defender somehow didn't get sent off for it – but it seems Bobby never forgot! Tonight, when he came on, the game was already won at 4-2, but Firmino put the polish on it by destroying the defender with a sublime piece of skill... Sometimes, revenge is best served cold!⁹³

The banality of this example emphasizes revenge's prominent position in the modern spectacle of sports, and ultimately the dramatic (non-tactical) components of sports fanaticism.⁹⁴ That is, through storytelling, the player's pursuit of revenge also becomes the spectator's. Both within the arena and online, the sports fanatic may react to defeat, injustice and the enemy's expression of *hubris* with a lust for revenge – a virtual certainty given that victory is concomitant with joyous and exuberant celebration (pride), and loss with feelings of humiliation. Proudful celebration adds to the resentment of loss, as on top of the power conferred to the winner (which the loser lacks) is then added shame (for which the fanatic especially seeks retribution). Meanwhile, the presence of traditional sports media and online sports forums amplifies these emotional extremes. The former accentuates the glory and the humiliation, while the latter supplies a platform which both brings the voices of fellow fanatics together and permits one's own voice to be expressed amidst the collective and even potentially responded to (recognized),

⁹³ Biscan's Boots. "Firmino punishes Holgate two years later for pushing him into boardings with most savage skill of the season."

⁹⁴ "Isn't 'world' the name for the place in which human beings necessarily accumulate unhappy memories of injuries, insults, humiliations, and all kinds of episodes for which one wants revenge?" (Sloterdijk 48).

a fact which speaks to the effectiveness of the spectacle of sports at reinforcing neo-tribalism: “...in the case of the masses which are diffracted into tribes, and the tribes which coalesce into masses, the common ingredient is a shared sensibility or emotion” (*The Time of the Tribes* 28).

If collective solidarity hinges on aesthetics (shared emotions and feelings), then it should be no surprise that a successful modern institution (industry) such as the spectacle of sports produces a constant, heightened and varied array of it: joy, anger, awe, fear, hope, etc. While we previously remarked how (unlike the traditional sports media) fanatically-driven blogs reflected a concerted effort at engaging with the tactical knowledge of the spectacle of sports, further supported by the content of discussions between sports fanatics online, we have also noted the unequivocal evidence of highly emotional engagements by fanatics, which supports the traditional sports media’s devotion to drama.⁹⁵ That is, when one speaks of shared sentiment in the spectacle of sports, it is not the tactical aspects which most invigorates fanatics, but rather the emotional elements, as Roger Caillois remarks: “In considering everything as an object of knowledge or a matter of experience, it leads to everything being regarded as profane, and consequently viewed as knowable, with the possible exception of the passion for knowledge itself” (*Man and the Sacred* 134). An engagement with tactical knowledge in sports – an evocation of the Enlightenment ideal of reason – contrasts the instinctual expressions manifest in sports fanaticism; while the former is based more in cold calculation, the latter speaks to the sports fanatic’s emotional investment in the thriving enterprise of the drama of sports.

⁹⁵ “...two elementary modes of spectatorship that can be found in all sports, with stronger or weaker affinities, is analysis and communion” (Gumbrecht 205).

Hope in the Religion of the Modern Spectacle of Sports

On April 27th, 2018, at the end of the Montreal Canadiens season, Sportsnet (traditional media outlet) writer Eric Engels published an article regarding the Canadiens and their management titled ‘Bergevin failed to give Canadiens and their fans hope this season’. Aside from Engels’ narrativization of the season, the article – a banal piece that becomes forgotten by the end of the day/week – explicitly identifies the role which hope plays for sports fanatics. What Engels remarks is that hope, while it is foundational to sports fanaticism, wavers in its amplification. While all sports organizations are concerned with *selling* their fanbase a measure of hope, it is not as simple as unconditional devotion. Thus, while Canadiens management entered the season expressing confidence in the team’s chances of winning the Stanley Cup, Engels notes that this degree of confidence was not exactly shared by Canadiens fans: “The fans knew. From 2009-16, they had turned out in crowds so large to training camps held at the team’s south shore practice facility that you couldn’t park anywhere near the building. But this year? They were nowhere to be found. Their lack of excitement was evidenced by their absence...”⁹⁶ While it may be true that fan attendance at training camp was noticeably decreased, this does little to change the continued devotion of Montreal Canadiens fanatics and renewed senses of hope, even against improbable odds – attendance for Canadiens games for the season was near top of the league, as usual. But what this particular article by Engels also evokes is the recognition by a sports media journalist that hope is a crucial part of the sports fanatic’s condition. In effect, hope transcends defeat – to be a sports fanatic is to believe in and hope for future victory, to support the team regardless of the circumstances.

⁹⁶ Engels, Eric. “Bergevin failed to give Canadiens and their fans hope this season.”

Meanwhile, the Canadiens team had finished first in the conference the previous year and most sports analysts, Eric Engels included,⁹⁷ believed the Canadiens to be playoff contenders. What Marc Bergevin, the General Manager of the Montreal Canadiens, did not provide was not so much hope as results. Hence, throughout the season, during which Engels alleges Bergevin and the team did not supply ‘sufficient hope’ to its fanatics, the narrative of the team continued to unfold while future victory remained everlastingly possible. That is, while Engels claims that the lack of hope was “...clear from Day 1 of what has to be considered one of the most catastrophic seasons in the 109-year history of the Montreal Canadiens,” Engels also provided fanatics with the constant flow of content and narrative which supplies the hopeful fanatic. As the offseason that followed the end of the 2016-2017 season began, and throughout the following catastrophic season in question, Engels was one of a handful of (Montreal specific and non-specific) sports priests supplying hope (and emotional reactions in general) to fanatics of the Montreal Canadiens. Articles which range from speculative to informative, all of which are meant to appeal to the sports fanatic, with content and events created to be consumed and interpreted, to maintain a narrative flow that ensures a future with a possibility of victory. That is, while the season did not inspire tremendous confidence in the fanbase – with the spectacle of sports being a large narrative formed by countless layers of smaller narratives – there is *always* hope to be found; hope characterizes fanaticism, and the spectacle of sports is characterized by a continuously intriguing narrative, as described by the CEO of the English football league: “That is the beauty of the Premier League. You can’t even guess what is going to happen for the rest of this season, let alone next...There’s always something to keep people excited.”⁹⁸ Thus, following

⁹⁷ Sportsnet. “Sportsnet NHL Insider predictions for 2017-18 season.”

⁹⁸ Wash N’Gog. “Premier League responds to Guardiola’s nonsense conspiracy suggestion & shuts down Manchester City boss.”

their 2016-2017 season exit, Engels began the off-season with articles such as: ‘Can Canadiens be winner with Carey Price earning top dollar?’; ‘Inconsistent seasons leave Galchenyuk, Beaulieu with uncertain futures’; ‘If the Islanders don’t extend John Tavares, Canadiens must pounce’; ‘Montreal Canadiens 2017 Draft Preview’. In all of these articles, whether the fanatic is in agreement or disagreement, optimistic or pessimistic, hope is conjured by the imaginative fanatic: “I hope Galchenyuk improves and becomes a top player for the team,” “I hope we trade Galchenyuk,” etc. Each of the articles or ‘narrative events’ are opportunities for the Canadiens fanatic to remain invested in the story of the team – and signal an affirmation of hope: “I hope we trade Carey Price,” “I hope we extend Price’s contract,” “I hope we don’t overpay Price,” “I hope we give Price whatever money he wants,” etc. The constant flow of narrative events in all major sports engages sports fanatics into varying modes of hopefulness. Thus, even as Engels wrote a eulogy for the Canadiens season on April 23rd, 2017,⁹⁹ on April 27th he published an article online that could only have Canadiens fans looking forward to the future – one which *could* include the services of star player John Tavares: “If the New York Islanders centre doesn’t come to terms on a long-term extension when he becomes eligible to sign one as of July 1, 2017...then the Montreal Canadiens GM has to do everything in his power to get him.” A mere four days passed after a heartbreaking and season-ending defeat until Engels offered Canadiens fans the chance to think forward to a (seemingly more prosperous) future with John Tavares. Two months later, Engels wrote a preview of the 2017 amateur draft, an opportunity for the team to select its newest crop of players – a momentous event for the organization and its fanatics, as these players represent the future of the team – and also a chance for fanatics of the team to look forward to selecting certain players: “I hope we draft...” “No, I hope we draft...” A few days

⁹⁹ Engels, Eric. “Offensive struggles at root of Canadiens’ series loss to Rangers.”

later, prior to the draft, Engels published another article online to Sportsnet titled ‘Bergevin active ahead of draft...’, in which the fanatic is put into the position of considering many possible courses of events, inevitably leading the fanatic to hope for their desired outcome: “I hope we trade for...,” “I hope we get rid of...” While we noted that Engels wrote in April of 2018 of the failure to give fans hope “from Day 1” of the 2017-2018 season (a hockey season begins in October and ends in April), he also published an article online at Sportsnet on December 2nd, 2017, titled ‘Canadiens’ current win streak has restored hope in Montreal’, in which he wrote: “And who are these Canadiens, if not a determined-to-defy-the-odds group? They are a team no one thought could score, one that looked porous on the defensive side of the puck through all of October, and one that looked like it was on a fast track for top spot in the 2018 draft lottery race [last place].”¹⁰⁰ In fact, even during the training camp for this season Engels published (on September 27th, 2017) an article online titled ‘Victor Mete has been silver lining in dreary pre-season for Canadiens’, in which Engels observed at least one shining ray of hope for the upcoming season. It becomes clear that Engels’ article on the season’s ‘failed hope’ was in contradiction to many articles he published throughout the season containing harbingers of hope. Eric Engels’ self-contradiction has historically not been an issue, since traditional sports media outlets have prioritized publishing content that arouses and identifies with sentiments that the sports fanatic knowingly or unknowingly is harbouring (such as anxiety, anger or pride). Thus, even during a ‘dreary’ Montreal Canadiens training camp Engels writes of a silver lining, a ray of hope, because *spring* training is a time of renewal of hope for the sports team.

The spectacle of sports has inculcated itself within the everyday life of sports fanatics (and non-sports fans) by having been integrated into the modes of the traditional news media,

¹⁰⁰ Engels, Eric. “Canadiens’ current win streak has restored hope in Montreal.”

which materializes in textual, audio and video forms and is produced by sports storytellers (journalists, analysts, ‘insiders’). For example, immediately following every game sports priests (such as Eric Engels) go to work on producing and publishing dramatic and prophetic interpretations of the game (historically accessed in the daily newspaper and currently published online daily). A primary difference between bloggers and traditional media outlets has been their respective position in controlling the dissemination of information: while traditional media outlets have been defined by their control of the major sources of dissemination (print, radio, television), the internet has greatly democratized the information-sharing playing field and allowed for the rise of bloggers, who either succeed or fail at collecting a fellowship based on their reception by willing readers/viewers/listeners. Given the demand by sports fanatics, blogs have become worthy competitors to the traditional media outlets (TMO) in the modes of the enterprise of sports storytelling, mainly because previous TMOs enjoyed the spoils of the monopoly over the spectacle and relevant information by conforming to mainstream media standards, including expectations of (daily) content and form, whereas the internet has ushered in blogs and forums who have benefitted from fewer such limits and the ability to fulfill the needs of sports fanatics that were previously unfulfilled, leading to the proliferation of online communities of sports fanatics sharing information, emotions, and fantasies, invoking the notion of subcultures which Dick Hebdige describes in *Subculture, the meaning of style*: “the members of a subculture must share a common language. And if a style is really to catch on, if it is to become genuinely popular, it must say the right things in the right way at the right time. It must anticipate or encapsulate a mood, a moment” (Hebdige 122).

Between Eric Engels’ first article of the 2017 offseason, published online on April 27th, 2017, and the April 9th, 2018 article admonishing the events of the preceding season, culminating

in a declaration of a season-long break in the supply of hope, Engels published an inundating 192 articles specific to the Montreal Canadiens on Sportsnet. To what effect? The overwhelming presence of the traditional media in the spectacle of sports speaks to the sports fanatic's devotion and passion for their team, a libidinal investment effectively supporting an industry of storytellers well aware of the emotional ranges and energies evoked by the sports fanatic. The maintenance of hope and investment (in the sports team – and its story) is directly tied to the quantity and quality of storytelling. After the last game of the Canadiens season, two days before Engels' article on the lack of hope, Engels published an article, as is customary after a game, titled 'Canadiens' loss to Leafs the final disappointment of painful season'.¹⁰¹ As the title suggests, the article conjures and reflects the shame and humiliation that characterizes defeat in the athletic contest, sentiments which spur anger or resentment. And yet, Engels offers (also customary) a ray of hope to Canadiens fans (readers): the defeat, in the final game of the season (to the Maple Leafs, no less), improved their chances of drafting the best upcoming amateur hockey player (the order of the draft is the inverse of the season's final standings). Both humiliation and hope are regularly conjured by Engels (and the spectacle of sports as a whole), just as he concludes: "That could be the one positive here for Montreal, but it didn't make standing across from the playoff-bound Maple Leafs any easier for the Canadiens to digest."

Much like the traditional news media, the discourses of sports media cater to what emotionally appeals to the intended consumers of the content. Just as sports fanatics mythologize extraordinary sporting events, reinforcing the myth of victory, so too does the traditional sports media accentuate mythologies. The myth of victory is essential to the spectacle of sports as a whole, for example – from the contest, to its storytelling and finally its fanaticism. Both the

¹⁰¹ Engels, Eric. "Canadiens' loss to Leafs the final disappointment of painful season."

quantity and quality of articles by sports journalists such as Eric Engels ultimately speaks to the sports fanatic's interest and attachment to the sports team's everlasting journey to victory, evidenced by the countless comments posted daily within the online communities and forums native to effectively all major sports teams, whereby eruptions of sentiment (such as hope or despair) are constantly observable. For example, on the Carolina Hurricanes blog 'Canes Country' on SB Nation there is also a recap posted after every game (much like those written by Eric Engels and those produced throughout all sports fandoms, by bloggers or sports journalists). Within a vibrant online community these types of articles are always accompanied by expression of optimism and/or pessimism, such as on December 11th, 2018, wherein the Carolina Hurricanes lost to the Toronto Maple Leafs – an article is published to the blog after the game, titled 'Recap: Hurricanes drop snoozer to the Leafs 4-1'. In summarizing the game and offering an authoritative critique, the blog's author effectively captures a measure of resignation and humiliation in defeat: "This was a brutal one to watch. The Leafs thoroughly dominated the majority of the game and the Canes could only hold on for so long." Meanwhile, throughout the seventy or so comments posted in reply, we find an equally prescient and thriving presence of hope and despair:

Win 1 lose 1

Same old Canes

Posted by purplejeff on Dec 11, 2018 | 9:35 PM

On the bright side

On this date last season, the Canes were last in the Metro [Metropolitan division]. 8 points out of third in the Metro. And 7 points out of the wildcard. So they are in a SLIGHTLY better position than last year on this date. Granted this season they are

only 1 point of ahead of where they were on this date last season. So really, any glimmer of improvement has really just been the rest of the division eating itself, but let's ignore that. Shall we?

Posted by Will_S13 on Dec 11, 2018 | 11:48 PM

Bright side?

It's not very "bright" if you miss the playoffs again, but aren't "bad enough" to get a high draft pick...! For several years we've seen MEDIOCRITY... THIS YEAR...does not look much different!

Posted by randycane on Dec 12, 2018 | 12:23 AM

Still room to hope

We're not in a deep hole and we do have a couple of rookies who would hopefully improve as the season progresses, not to mention maybe a later call up for Necas. I still think this team can make the playoffs, maybe we'll pick up some help at the trade dead line instead of being a seller.

Posted by CanesFanFromLI on Dec 12, 2018 | 7:55 AM

[no subject]

I agree to a point. There is still room for hope only because there is still plenty of time for a few players to progress, and for the team to make some moves. The hole is not deep at this point. But the young players are as likely to hit a wall as they are to improve, so hoping they can become more impact players this season is a toss up.

Posted by Hockeydog on Dec 12, 2018 | 9:50 AM¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ahr, Andrew. "Recap: Hurricanes drop snoozer to the Leafs 4-1."

Though sports fanaticism may appear as a trifling hobby, we find that the sports fanatic is liable to having a socially and existentially significant connection to their sports team. In online sports forums we observe how sports fanatics evoke pronounced signs of emotional attachments leading to routine expressions of anger, depression, anxiety, excitement, joy, optimism and despair. Though the regular presence of (collective) sentimental outbursts signifies a thriving following, hope in particular is found to be a constant and essential element of the sports fanatic, often even in the face of deep resentment or despair – such is the significance of victory, vitality and glory, and the notion that patient devotion (especially during long bouts of suffering/loss) is rewarded – the gambler’s fallacy. The spectacle of sports gives sports fanatics the opportunity to gamble their emotions by attaching themselves to a sports team, an action which gives the sports fanatic a sense of control (over destiny), membership to a community and to a highly dynamic (entertaining, instructive, orgiastic) narrative world. Loyalty and longevity (devotion) are consequently valued characteristics of sports fanatics, engendered by the tendency for geographic proximity to define one’s fandom, hence the title of Jay Baruchel’s autobiographical account of his sports fandom, *Born Into It*, which also offers a useful parallel for the analogy between sports fanaticism, citizenship and nationalism. The spectacle of sports thus not only accounts for a tribal will to power but it also allows for the narrative repurposing of the causes and effects of the non-rational (chance) distribution of victories – mimicking eschatological (and political) ideologies. Much like the gambler’s fallacy is fuelled by the occurrence of glory/victory in the improbable, the highly unlikely or ‘the impossible’, so too is the spectacle of sports a platform for gambling and for mythologizing the distribution of glory and the extraordinary, driven by the sports fanatic’s unextinguishable sense of hope, even amid the most

despairing (and chaotic) of circumstances.¹⁰³ Consider for example comments from 2019 in the Milwaukee Bucks subreddit following a crucial loss to the Toronto Raptors, which significantly diminished their chances of a series victory:

Harrison070902

That's probably [the end of the] series if we're being honest

AaltoSax

Never

BeHereNow91

Gonna have to win in what will be the most intimidating environment we've seen all season. Gonna be tough, but we've seen this team surprise us on the road before. Just last series in Boston, even.

SocksandSmocks

Horrible. Now you gotta do the impossible. Not sure where the bucks we watched all year went.

It ain't over til it's over boys. Bring this thing back home for 7.

GeneralAverage

I really envy people's optimism that we can win in Toronto after dropping [losing] three straight. Not trying to sound all defeatist but it really seems unlikely with the mental toughness we're showing.

¹⁰³ See Pascal's wager

SocksandSmocks

I mean, what's the point of giving up? Ride or die man, gotta have hope, even if it's what kills ya.

SpazAdams

As a mariners fan and a bucks fan, all i know is pain and so losing or getting eliminated is a way of life for me. At a certain point you stop caring about the losses as much. I still have faith we can do it.

ak_555

geez I'm emotionally hurt by this loss and honestly feel sick from it, and I've had a shitty day on top of this so I'm tryna [sic] capitalize on anything remotely positive today :(

BobbyLight

If history can repeat, we did the same thing in the 2nd round in 2001 and came back to win games 6 and 7 after losing game 5 in a 2-2 series. I don't see that happening, but it's possible.

During the interview with Liverpool FC's then-new manager Jurgen Klopp discussed earlier, the last question asked of Klopp was whether he had a message for Liverpool fans, to which he replied: "We have to change from doubter to believer. Now." Throughout his interview, Klopp also spoke of rejuvenation and narrative – of the will to power which engenders hope: "...we have the possibility to write a new story if we want." Much as one season (the main contest) is formed of a collection of (lesser) contests, in which each game is a battle, every sequence between a pitcher and a hitter, every shift on the ice, every ball-possession is also a

(mini) battle; so too is each battle a story and as such the larger story is also made up of many smaller and layered stories, producing a renewable flow of drama. The key is perpetuity: just as time marches on and victors (empires, masters) cannot sit on their laurels (for too long), so too does the spectacle of sports not rest – though it does offer the efficiency and compactness of dénouement characteristic of storytelling. Television shows undertake a similar theatrical modality, however its limitations are reflected in the disparate levels of neo-tribes between them (though television shows have engendered some very dynamic subcultures or neo-tribes, on a whole sports fanaticism is a uniquely vivacious global religion). Of course, traditional media has long attempted to incorporate competition into their television programming, culminating in series such as ‘Survivor’ and ‘Amazing Race’. However, the spectacle of sports, with its totems, its proximity to tribalism and agonism, its affectual content and its unending narrative continuity, reigns supreme. It is a most dynamic way to collectively “hope and cheer for the good (guy/team)”:

Take me out to the ball game
 Take me out with the crowd
 Buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks
 I don't care if I never get back
 Let me root, root, root
 For the (home team)
 If they don't win it's a shame
 For it's one, two,
 Three strikes you're out
 At the old ball game

The song ‘Take Me Out to the Ball Game’ is traditionally broadcast (in the stadium) and collectively sung during the seventh inning of baseball games, and it highlights the collective spectatorship and support of ‘the home team’. While the spectacular athletic contest itself is capable by its nature to reciprocate the crowd’s desire to hope and cheer for the ‘good’ (as a symbol), its ability to do so has developed into an industry of storytelling and spectatorship that ultimately has supplemented the game. As an enterprise, the spectacle of sports conjures and expends the same affects which are the object of religiosity: the (sacred) good, being useful and non-moral (as Nietzsche notes), has always been hoped for, whether it is the success of the hunt, the promise of salvation or victory in the athletic contest. Hope is the wellspring from which everyday life is sustained. Hence, the daily affirmations of hope by the sports fanatic function as affirmations of existence and the will to power. To be invested in the sports team is to be invested in (the game of) life itself: each game, each article, radio segment, and online discussion contributes to vitality. Furthermore, as Julie Perrone remarks in her essay ‘The Rocket: The Making of a Hero’ in the collection ‘Hockey and Philosophy’ (edited by Normand Baillargeon and Christian Boissinot), hope is a natural and fecund condition of the sports fanatic: “For Montréal Canadiens fans, autumn is always a time of great hopefulness. It’s the start of the new hockey season, pregnant with possibility, dreams, and memories of victories past.” Even tragedy, a condition the sports fanatic knows all too well, is life-affirming, as Nietzsche declares in *The Will to Power*.¹⁰⁴ Jay Baruchel, in *Born Into It*, echoes these sentiments of hope’s vitalizing but often tragic presence in sports fanaticism: “We wouldn’t be the Habs if we were completely without hope or pride. We wouldn’t be the Habs if we weren’t annually given a toxic reminder of

¹⁰⁴ “Schopenhauer is wrong when he says that certain works of art serve pessimism. Tragedy does not teach ‘resignation’. To represent terrible and questionable things is in itself an instinct for power and magnificence in an artist: he does not fear them. There is no such thing as pessimistic art. Art affirms” (*The Will to Power* 434-5).

how awesome we were, once upon a time...It's that hope, that toxic bit of success, that keeps the wins meaningful and the losses painful, and God help us, it always makes us cocky" (235-36).

Ultimately, the spectacle of sports is masterful at casting the spell under which sports fanatics maintain a constantly renewed sense of attachment to the team's prospect of victory. As Weber notes,

The sparks resulting from twirling the wooden sticks are as much a 'magical' effect as the rain evoked by the manipulations of the rainmaker. Thus, religious or magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct, particularly since even the ends of the religious and magical actions are predominantly economic (1).¹⁰⁵

To be a sports fanatic is to believe in the magic of the game and the team name and emblem, which translates to the everyday worship of the narrative dimension of the spectacle of sports, whether tragic, comedic, or tactic. The modern spectacular athletic contest is defined by the prospect of team victory (vitality), and both the players and their supporters (spectators, fanatics) are devoted to it, even in the face of loss and humiliation. The enthusiasm of sports fanatics for the team which they see as sacred is no better exemplified than the digital spectacle of sports and the image of unbridled passion shared between fellow fanatics, whether in the hopeful rays of victory or the despairing days of suffering.

¹⁰⁵ Weber elaborates further on the reciprocal alliance between performative magic, religion and economics: "Mass religion in particular is frequently and directly dependent on artistic devices for the required potency of its effects, since it is inclined to make concessions to the needs of the masses, which everywhere tend toward magic and idolatry. Apart from this, organized mass religions have frequently had connection with art resulting from economic interests" (Weber 244).

Chapter Three – Power and Mythology in the Modern Spectacle of Sports

In contemporary terms, ‘sports fans’ are but one of many groups of ‘fans’, whereby ‘fan’ stems from fanatic[al], which in popular terms translates to ‘crazy (about)’ or ‘supporter (of)’, typically but not necessarily in the form of idolatry (for example see object-centred fanaticisms, such as ‘Lego fan’ or ‘Harley Davidson fan’). In this sense, the categorization of ‘fan’ is socially arbitrary and scientifically ambivalent. Who holds the authority to decide whether someone is categorically a fan(atic), and what criteria is this distinction based on? The concept of a fanatic is not scientific, yet it is also widely used – the abbreviated term (‘fan’) tends to be used in a complimentary sense, while ‘fanatic’ connotes a dangerous or harmful obsession (including religious, political). In effect, the pejorative distinction of the fanatic echoes the same historical contradictions that distinguish addiction and the addict from socially acceptable behaviours and rituals, in which the term develops out of a social determination of (ritual) rejection, whereby the addict is seen as the ‘junky’ who is incapable of or unwilling to withdraw from a harmful behaviour (such as alcoholism), unlike complimentary terms such as ‘workaholic’ or ‘gym-rat’, a state of affairs analogously elaborated by Zachary Goldsmith with regard to fanatics:

Both of these terms – ‘fanaticism’ and ‘enthusiasm’ – have their origins in ancient religious contexts. Both connote possession by a deity and a corresponding lack of control, agency, and reasoned thought by the person possessed. The chief difference between them, however, is that fanaticism is more closely related to a possession that leads to violence, whereas enthusiasm more often leads to a possession that results in generally pleasant things—like beautiful poetry (55).

In his dissertation ‘*An Oppressive Passion: Kant, Burke, Dostoevsky and the Problem of Fanaticism*’, Goldsmith identifies the historical development of the term *fanum* and its

derivatives, including ‘fanatic’, as originally “merely technical terms, free of value judgments...used to refer to a particular type of ancient religious practice” (47), as in a “divine possession –being possessed by a god and losing all control of oneself, body, mind, and spirit” (50). One might conclude that the term ‘sports fan’ involves a misapplication of the concept fanaticism, however, we find instead that it reveals significant commonalities between fanaticism and religiosity.¹⁰⁶ That is, both the religious worshipper and the sports fan involve a form of group-identification, social proximity and a collective set of rituals, myths and symbols which are enthusiastically and passionately worshipped outside of a logic of reason – denoting a form of ‘divine possession’.¹⁰⁷ We find that both the complimentary (‘fan’) and pejorative (‘fanatic’) forms of fanaticism invoke the same discursive battles (competition, rivalry) which characterize the conceptual ambivalences of ‘the addict’, the religious fanatic and the sports fan, alongside the inability to explain through reason their passionate enthusiasms for their ideals/idols. And yet, the presence of a social phenomenon is unequivocal, regardless of the emergence of these terms. Rather, in each case, the popular terms reflect a social attempt to formulate and (de)legitimize a group identity: the addict or ‘religious fanatic’ is undesirable, repulsive and dangerous (profane); the religious devotee and the sports fan (typically sports fans are referred to as ‘fans’ of a particular team) indicate identity and membership in a prideful group that worships sacred symbols, myths and rituals. What categorically distinguishes the addict from the fanatic is the element of a community ideal, which arguably eclipses the orgiastic elements of addiction. That is, while sociality can be a welcome benefit of addiction, fanaticism is characterized by the

¹⁰⁶ “All that it takes to become addicted to sports is a distance between the athlete and the beholder – a distance large enough for the beholder to believe that his heroes inhabit a different world” (Gumbrecht 8).

¹⁰⁷ Maffesoli asserts that: “A political event or harmless, trivial fact, the life of a star or a local guru, can all take on mythic proportions” (*The Time of the Tribes* 26), having elaborated that “Dionysus, Don Juan, the Christian saint or Greek hero - we could go on and on listing the mythical figures and social types that enable a common 'aesthetic' to serve as a repository of our collective self-expression” (*The Time of the Tribes* 10).

sociality (including ex-stasis/ecstasy) of a shared veneration of a social ideal/idol. A ‘sports fan’ is a term used by ‘outsiders’ to indicate an idea that captures the social phenomenon, while also being a term adopted by ‘insiders’ as a formal indication and reinforcement of a community. In fact, the term ‘(sports) fan’ became popularized by a sports journalist who wished to describe the enthusiasm which some persons had for professional baseball in the United States: “Previous to *fan*, the word *crank* and others, such as *rooter*, were favored by baseball writers. The need for a new word to replace the derogatory *crank* became more urgent as the game became more popular and became recognized as the national pastime” (Shulman 328). That a sports journalist’s inculcation of the term *fan* inaugurated and legitimized a group of enthusiasts, to the point where ‘sports fan’ carries significant popular weight as a symbol of a distinguished group, invokes the role and function of authority in myth, as well as the significance of a name – including as a totem in a totalizing game (agon) with rivals. Meanwhile, the fanatic’s enthusiasm for and adoption of sacred symbols, myths and rituals is voluntary and involves an affective and unshakeable worship of an arbitrary object/ideal, in which sports fanaticism becomes elevated conceptually from a subculture (community) to religion.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the generalizability of the concept of religion is an unintended consequence of the natural condition which empowers abstract groups, what sociologist Michel Maffesoli refers to as neo-tribalism:

is not precisely the nature of gods to be plural? The gods, and not one God? Is it not this that is the divine? The plurality of gods is finally only another manner of designating the immanent transcendence [*puissance*] and the surpassing of the

¹⁰⁸ Maffesoli writes of non-rational systems (based on social logics) that: “Other parameters such as the affectual or the symbolic can have their own rationality. Just as the non-logical is not illogical, we can state that the search for shared experiences, the grouping around eponymous heroes, non-verbal communication and bodily gestures are all based on a rationality that is no less effective and which is in many ways wider and, in the simplest sense of the term, more generous” (*The Time of the Tribes* 144).

principium individuationis which assures the solidity of the social bond (*The Shadow of Dionysus* 137).¹⁰⁹

The concept of religion recognizes the collective belief in god(s) or signs of immanent and omnipotent forces, together with their influence on and ordering of everyday life, as a social phenomenon (and not a set of theological axioms). In this sense, godliness is directly connected to power – including the widespread need to reconcile, understand and control seemingly supernatural occurrences, objects and individuals, from which myths and religion are born, as Nietzsche explains: “When a man is suddenly and overwhelmingly suffused with the *feeling of power*, it raises in him a doubt about his own person: he does not dare to think himself the cause of this astonishing feeling - and so he posits a stronger person, a divinity, to account for it” (*The Will to Power* 86). The spectacle of sports and superstar athletes thus evoke the power inherent to the concept of godliness, which attracts a following (herd) and eventually community. The power and *puissance* inherent to the concept (and symbol) of godliness ushers in the vitalism and social logics of communities, as Maffesoli suggests: “More important than the purity of doctrine, it is the communal life or survival which preoccupies the basic communities...popular religion is truly a symbolic whole which permits and reinforces the proper functioning of the social bond” (*The Time of the Tribes* 60).

Michel Maffesoli views the affair of self- and collective representations as a game or competition. Throughout his corpus, he outlines a conceptual foundation in approaching social and cultural phenomena, and the spectacle of sports therein encounters in Maffesoli the convergence of studies of the everyday and the religious, along with the recognition of the

¹⁰⁹ “...the constitution of micro-groups, of the tribes which intersperse spatiality, arises as a result of a feeling of *belonging*, as a function of a specific ethic and within the framework of a communications *network*” (*The Time of the Tribes* 139).

significance of affects, masks and the preservation of the tribe as highly informative methodological forms. Just as the ordinary (religious) individual is unable to wholly capture and wield the power immanent to the sacred object/ideal, so too are sports fans at the whims of sacred forces (and their symbolic representatives): in both cases the power and *puissance* immanent to existence, in particular the concept of godliness, is recognized through the awe/aura of its presence, and is further adopted as a stepping stone to community and its systematic repetition of rituals (a technique used to reproduce the supernatural). It is also in this sense that proximity and devotion to the sacred is expected to bestow a reproduction of this power, a sort of becoming-sports fan, as philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari allude to:

Schérer and Hocquenghem made this essential point in their reconsideration of the problem of wolf-children. Of course, it is not a question of a real production, as if the child ‘really’ became an animal; nor is it a question of a resemblance, as if the child imitated animals that really raised it...they appeal to ‘something shared or indiscernible’, a proximity...There is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal (*A Thousand Plateaus* 273).¹¹⁰

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche elaborates on the presence and embodiment of the power immanent to existence, including the will to power of the individual and community, which manifests as a *violent* struggle between strong and weak forces of power.¹¹¹ Nietzsche thus delineates the position: “Examine the background of every family,

¹¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari elaborate further on the function of proximity, as it relates to the ‘reality’ of the sports fan’s being: “Proximity is a notion, at once topological and quantal, that marks a belonging to the same molecule, independently of the subjects considered and the forms determined,” write philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus* 273).

¹¹¹ “The basic tendency of the weak and mediocre of all ages is, consequently, to weaken and pull down the stronger: chief means, the moral judgment” (*The Will to Power* 189).

every organization, every commonwealth: everywhere the struggle of the sick against the healthy” (124), as he further remarks that “the strong are as naturally inclined to separate as the weak are to congregate” (136). Furthermore, he alludes to the transubstantiation of the traditional religious ideals (“dogmatic concepts of theology”) into modern ‘gods’ (such as priests, or analogously as sporting athletes) who attempt to rescue our weak and our sick.¹¹² Thus, while the spectacular athletic contest features the will to power of the strong (like mythological stories), duly honoured, sports fanaticism reflects the will to power and *ressentiment* of the weak as well, a fundamental characteristic of religiosity, as Nietzsche remarks: “the formation of a herd is a significant victory and advance in the struggle against depression. With the growth of the community, a new interest grows for the individual, too, and often lifts him above the most personal element in his discontent, his aversion to himself” (*Genealogy of Morals* 135). In terms of the concept of religion, Nietzsche’s position on the will to power effectively outlines a measure of generalizability for religiosity, as he writes that “Among the sick the feeling of health is sufficient to inspire belief in God, in the nearness of God” (*The Will to Power* 86).¹¹³ This modern tendency, however pervasive, is admonished by Nietzsche as a mass profane pursuit of narcotization.¹¹⁴ In contrast, Michel Maffesoli welcomes this modality in theory, effectively an empathetic account of religiosity (within the masses):

¹¹² “[The priest’s role is] to awaken men from their slow melancholy, to hunt away, if only for a time, their dull pain and lingering misery, and always under cover of a religious interpretation and ‘justification’. Every such orgy of feeling has to be paid for afterward, that goes without saying-it makes the sick sicker; and that is why this kind of cure for pain is, by modern standards, ‘guilty’” (*Genealogy of Morals* 140).

¹¹³ “What is certain is that, since Kant, transcendentalists of every kind have once more won the day – they have been emancipated from the theologians: what joy!” (*Genealogy of Morals* 156).

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche proclaims of modernity: “Europe is rich and inventive today above all in means of excitation: it seems to need nothing as much as it needs stimulants and brandy: hence also the tremendous amount of forgery in ideals, this most potent brandy of the spirit; hence also the repulsive, ill-smelling, mendacious, pseudo-alcoholic air everywhere” (*Genealogy of Morals* 159).

My hypothesis, as distinct from those who lament the end of great collective values and the withdrawal into the self - which they falsely parallel with the growing importance of everyday life - is that a new (and evolving) trend can be found in the growth of small groups and existential networks. This represents a sort of tribalism which is based at the same time on the spirit of religion (*re-ligare*) and on localism (proxemics, nature) (*The Time of the Tribes* 40).¹¹⁵

Nietzsche writes at length of ‘the herd’, ‘the weak’, and ‘the sick’ reproachingly, in particular their tendency for moral religiosity and its undercutting of the will to power of the strong (individuals). However, while Nietzsche remained intent on protecting the will and honour of the strong in conflict with the *ressentiment* and “orgies of feeling” of the weak, Maffesoli adopts the latter broadly into his formist model of religiosity, whereby the concept of religion categorically encompasses groups such as sports fans, enabling an empathetic and immersive study of the subject, as this dissertation has pursued. Hence, we have observed that the spectacle of sports captivates its spectators into identifying with a (territorial) sports team and sharing its destiny and veneration of victory as part of the contest, analogous to the metaphor Nietzsche drew of the myth of war during the agonal state of ancient Greece: “...in this brooding atmosphere, combat is salvation; the cruelty of victory is the pinnacle of life's jubilation” (“Homer’s Contest” 34). The religiosity of the spectacle of sports is expressed in characteristic tropes such as the enterprising role of priests and prophets, along with the presence of sacred symbols, myths and rituals which not only corral and conjure the power and drama of gods, but

¹¹⁵ Maffesoli describes the role of the concept of religion in methodologically apprehending social groups: “...the mythical type has the simple role of collector, a pure 'container'. Its sole purpose is to express, for a precise moment in time, the collective spirit. This is the main distinction to be drawn between abstract, rational periods and 'empathetic' periods of history. The rational era is built on the principle of individuation and of separation, whereas the empathetic period is marked by the lack of differentiation, the 'loss' in a collective subject: in other words, what I shall call neo-tribalism” (*The Time of the Tribes* 11).

also become inculcated in the social fabric of everyday life. That is, the veracity and hyper-idealism of gods (or theology) does not feature as the distinguishing criteria for categorizing religiosity; in contrast, the spectacle of sports and sports fanaticism are pursued based on both social need and aesthetics; as a source of fanaticism is vitality (power), the rational coherence of sacred content becomes recognized as secondary to social logics. And yet, the spectacle of sports is no more theatre than ‘traditional’ religion. The spectacular athletic contest reproduces and represents the chaos (*puissance*) of the forces of existence, with the stage and arena forming the necessary spatial element, where fortune (vitality) and misfortune (death) are dispensed through force, cunning, and the miraculous/magical, whereby the spectacular athletic contest becomes instilled within the social fabric as more present than presence itself. The spectacle of sports honours the will to power of the strong and celebrates the will to power of the weak, the effects of which are tangible and visceral, including the presence and aura of the stadium and the athletes, collective effervescences, and the common ethic.¹¹⁶ While Nietzsche abhorred the (great) leveller (Christ), towards which the qualities of the strong would become depreciated, the spectacular athletic contest presents itself as the (great) leveller for whom the qualities of the strong and the sacred (power and *puissance*/heterogeneity) predominate, and also from which fellowships and communities emerge. The game (inside the modern sports arena) is the terrestrial plane where the forces of *biē* and *mētis* emerge in contest, opening the door to the sacred, as Nietzsche proclaims: “Machiavellianism *pur, sans mélange, cru, vert, dans toute sa force, dans toute son âpreté*, is superhuman, divine, transcendental...” (*The Will to Power* 170).¹¹⁷ The

¹¹⁶ See for example the association between fecundity and victory: “On Nov. 2, 2016, the Cubs won their first world series in 108 years...A Chicago hospital says its [sic] experiencing a baby boom, approximately nine months after the Cubs won the championship.”

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche alludes to the role science (and analogously, sports) has played in participating in the ‘war’ of existence: “Truth, that is to say, the scientific method, was grasped and promoted by those who divined in it a weapon of war – an instrument of destruction. To make their opposition honorable, they needed, moreover, an

quality of the metaphor is reflected in the blood, sweat and tears of the athletic contest, in which the diegetic world of the spectacle of sports and everyday life bond together.

Economics and Politics in the Modern Spectacle of Sports

While the spectacle of sports tells an epic story, the plot is unknown before-hand, even to any narrator: victory is at stake every game, every season. The function of a ‘free’ competition is thus crucial to the image of the spectacle of sports which the sports fan venerates, meaning the game cannot (appear to) be ‘rigged’, pre-determined or determined by outside influences, such that the game can isolate the forces (*biē* and *mētis*) of the superhuman contestants. The myth of the as-yet unwritten story of the game is fundamental to the sacredness of the spectacle of sports – within the prescribed laws of the arena the competition is wholly free for the actions and influences of the contestants (only). Hence, in the modern spectacle of sports the (neutral) officials representing the sanctity of the game become a vivacious point of contention, frequently (basically, every game) drawing the ire of spectators and fans: *are you blind, ref? you must be kidding me! how did you miss that? that's not a penalty!* Yet, in spite of the vehement reproaches by sports fans, in spite of the revelations of corruption of league officials, in spite of the revelations of cheating by athletes, the ideal of the game remains firm (mythologically) and continues to maintain the sanctity of the spectacle of sports. The appearance of a free competition between ideal competing forces allows for the emergence of mechanisms and icons of victory (power) which materialize in a dynamic diegetic world, one that includes the concreteness of the performance (athletic contest), evoking therein both the material and abstract forms which characterize religion. For example, in his (auto)biography *Killer: My Life in*

apparatus similar in kind to that used by those they were attacking: -they adopted the concept "truth" just as ostentatiously and unconditionally as their opponents – they became fanatics...” (*The Will to Power* 250-51).

Hockey, former hockey player Doug Gilmour describes both the mythological and the concrete elements of the sacred (diegetic) dimension of the spectacle of sports:

Even at [that] young age, I'd already heard time and again that I was too short and too small. It was my flaw. It was the reality that would threaten to keep me from living my dreams of becoming a professional hockey player. Of course, even though I knew I had the strength to do more than my stature suggested, it wasn't going to be easy to convince the world of that. And by 'world', I mean the hockey world. This was Kingston, after all. And in Kingston, hockey was all that mattered.¹¹⁸

The diegetic world of sports entralls fanatics such that myths, like that of *Killer* (Doug Gilmour, who played for the Maple Leafs between 1992-97), grow to epic proportions, being retold and relived, and continue to permeate the everyday consciousness of the sports fan. Myths in this sense offer the opportunity to embody one or more ideals, including the game's platform for conjuring the sacred. Consider the following comment by a sports fan which appears in 2018 during a banal discussion (and retelling) of the reverent qualities of former players:

HHT

Then you have a guy like Doug Gilmour who was a small guy but an explosion of energy and creativity. He wasn't just talented, his being on the ice made the players around him better players. He inspired and elevated the team with his energy - the man was greater than the sum of his parts. When he and Wendel were on the ice,

¹¹⁸ Guilmour, Doug, and Dan Robson. "Hockey Was All That Mattered."

there was always a feeling they were going to do something, not just play out the shift. Leaf legend.¹¹⁹

The spectacle of sports is a highly successful vehicle through which sports fans experience awe and correspondence with the supernatural in the ritualistic pursuit of victory (power), whereby community rises to religion (fanaticism) through the passionate and enduring consecration of the team name and emblem, and collectively ritualized reverence of icons, myths and ideals – all of which stem from the athletic contest, the *agon*, the ‘free’ competition which materializes the collective spirit through sublimation.¹²⁰ The rules and the objective of the game (of the modern spectacle of sports) ultimately distinguishes between winners and losers, glory and shame, right and wrong, good and bad, extraordinary and ordinary, sacred and profane. Furthermore, the rules of the game are just as critical (formally) to the sanctity of the game as taboos and profanation are to the sacred and religion – it is the formal distinction which initiates the power and *puissance* of the game, as life and death do with existence. By capturing such a devoted following, the spectacle of sports becomes the myth-making machine for which it is worshipped – its social proliferation is a growing indication of its connection to immanent (divine) forces. That is, religiosity in general is a social power-grab – fanaticism for the sake of vitality. Only, in the athletic contest, the primary technique used is spectacle. Nietzsche outlines this problem: “What gives authority when one does not have physical power in one's hands (no army, no weapons of any kind–)? How, in fact, does one gain authority over those who possess physical strength and authority? (They compete with the awe inspired by princes, by the

¹¹⁹ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2018/11/30/leafs-grab-bag-on-auston-matthews-and-the-power-play-the-leafs-speed-linemates-for-nazem-kadri-travis-dermotts-top-four-case-patrick-marleau-gud-pros/>

¹²⁰ “In their own ways, Machiavelli or Ibn Khaldoun were able to show that effervescence, in actualizing the conflicts of factions, permitted the purgation of accumulated violence and in so doing reestablished the *virtu* of the people. Thus, Dionysian perturbation, the inversion, expresses the conflict of values always present in the social body, while at the same time ritualizing it, giving it an acceptable, ‘passable’ form” (*Shadow of Dionysus* 95).

victorious conqueror, by the wise statesman)” (*The Will to Power* 89). The concept of spectacle was popularized in critical theory by Guy Debord in his work *The Society of the Spectacle*, though we find categorically relevant antecedents, such as in studies and critiques of ancient and modern sports that contribute to forming a historically diverse and applicable concept for our purposes. The Roman spectacle, for example, much like the modern sporting spectacle, is not reducible to any one particular function: it can be better understood as a machine with many parts and functions which address an increasing number of external and internal needs.

Ultimately, the spectacle of sports persists in a tradition wherein spectacle has contributed significantly to both religion and politics. On the one hand, the spectacle (of sports) presents itself as a separate dimension from politics; on the other hand, having inculcated itself within the social fabric, the spectacle (of sports) is inseparable from the politics of everyday life.¹²¹ Paul Veyne addresses this issue in *Bread and Circuses*, where he notes that “the Circus and the amphitheatre acquired disproportionate importance in Rome's political life” (Veyne 401).

In *The Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber writes that “The attitudes of a religion can often be explained on grounds of economic interest” (Weber 218). In other words, a fully formed and functional religion may function based on a set of affects, symbols, myths and rituals which directly relate to a representation of the divine, but the struggles of everyday life and its materialization of power through an economic value-system invariably play a part in the development of religious groups. The control of social morals and ethics, whether under the banner of science or religion, is an extension of the hierarchies of economics and vitalism

¹²¹ Writing on the signs of apathy in contemporary politics, Michel Maffesoli identifies the common role of vitality in the fanaticisms of the traditionally religious, political and modern sporting kind: “. . .the massive political disengagement we can see around us today is in no way a correlative of an accelerated dismantling, but rather a sign of renewed vitality. This perdurability is a mark of the divine, which is not an overarching and external entity, but rather is located at the heart of the reality of the world, at once both its essence and its destiny” (*The Time of the Tribes* 60).

(power) which underlie the presence of authority in these communities (and their rhetorics).

While the divine represents an ideal, its systematization nevertheless materializes and administers a hierarchy of authority and value, a notion identified by both Weber and Nietzsche: “The priest wants to have it understood that he counts as the highest type of man, that he rules - even over those who wield power - that he is indispensable, unassailable - that he is the strongest power in the community, absolutely not to be replaced or undervalued” (*The Will to Power* 88). The economic value system is ostensibly a materialization of vitality (power and *puissance*), which is the source of the divine that founds religiosity; we have attempted here to establish religion’s basis in vitality (fertility, fecundity). The questions which thus arise amount to the influence that priests and the economic value system as a whole have on the emergence and recurrence of myths and rituals in the spectacle of sports: *winning at all costs*.

While ancient Rome featured mass spectacles at the (great) cost and expense of the emperor, the modern spectacle of sports in contrast is a significant generator of economic value. The economic feasibility of the spectacle of sports has functioned reciprocally with its widespread aesthetic and existential appeal, invariably leading to what can now only be described as a highly significant and influential modern (capitalist) social institution. The power and glory of the modern spectacle of sports eclipses the modern Olympics in part due to economics: the former successfully integrates the power intrinsic to the value of money with the glory that accompanies capturing the symbolic prize of victory. See for example the difference in adaptability between sports and the Olympics: while the latter’s formal rigidity, based on ancient principles, limits its popularity, the former’s dependence on contemporary social appeal has led to countless adaptations (including becoming a year-round spectacle). In his autobiography *The Game*, former hockey player, lawyer and politician Ken Dryden describes the influence of

business and economics on the aesthetics of the national game of hockey and invariably the myths, moods and morals that emerge from it, such as after the introduction of the forward pass (rule) in hockey: “Since then, for nearly fifty years, the story of hockey has been speed. It was the forward pass that gave speed its chance; later it was the center red line, better ice conditions, better equipment, better training and conditioning of players, and shorter shifts that accelerated its impact” (Dryden 248). Changes to any and all formal aspects of the game, including dimensions of the playing area, equipment and rules of gameplay, in the name of improving the aesthetics of the game (and thereby capturing a greater social appeal), have accompanied the focus on the art (*techne*) and economics of victory. While Dryden reproaches the influence and role of ‘big business’ in the development of the spectacle of sports, citing for example the profanation of the ‘play element’ of sport by its subjection to the economic principles of the entertainment (and advertisement) industry,¹²² he nevertheless recognizes the divine basis which remains firmly and functionally entrenched within the game, the will to power (of the strong): “...on the ice, in a game, more money, less money, playing for team or country, a blocked shot, a body-check, a diving save comes only from instinctive, reflexive, teeth-baring competition” (Dryden 182). In effect, not only does the spectacle of sports share in common with market economics the driving force of competition (*puissance*), but they both converge and coalesce into a prominent mythmaking machine.¹²³

¹²² “A game is now much more a full entertainment experience, with music, video replays, and features to support the action below...Every bit of space and time is a potential message opportunity. Signs are everywhere—in the ice and on the boards, especially signs that are ‘camera-visible’. As background to the photo of the winning goal in the newspaper, but far more important during shots of practice on the daily reports of the all-sports TV channels, and during random moments over two and a half hours of a game, all of which games are now broadcast. ‘Camera-visible’ means extending the commercial message far beyond the 19,000 people of an arena. It means more money for a team. As well, there are now more and longer commercial breaks for TV to sell” (Dryden 301).

¹²³ In *Ordinary Knowledge*, Michel Maffesoli sheds light on the religiosity of worshipping myths such as competition and victory in the spectacle of sports: “We have to be able to accept that the nineteenth century myth of Progress, the great socialist dream of the turn of the century and even the representations that gave rise to the French Revolution, all functioned, on the basis of the sacred dimension, which a civilization can rarely do without” (95).

Sports teams are corporations: every year Forbes magazine releases a list of the most valuable sports franchises, revealing many multi-national successes valued at billions of dollars. Sports athletes are also business entities, influenced by the prospect of increased revenue and the value of their 'brand'. Moreover, the game itself is a matter of contractual performance (of monetary remuneration). In effect, the spectacle of sports is wholly imbued by economics. And yet, based on the ongoing popularity and enthusiasm for the spectacle of sports, the infringement of business and economic forces has not usurped the religious and spectacular elements for sports fans. Instead, they have formed an alliance of mutually reinforcing forces, which Dryden alluded to in the aesthetic benefits of improved equipment and training, maintaining the appearance and presence of a sense of the supernatural through the technological developments of ordinary life. In other words, not only does the game continue to captivate and enthrall spectators, and provide the essential communal elements, its remaining in lock-step with big business has provided access to novel platforms which connect a previously unthinkable amount of fanatics to the spectacle of sports and other fanatics. The spectacle of sports, a social phenomenon bearing the features of religion, functions as a social institution *in tandem* with the politics and economics of everyday life (driven by notions such as victory, justice and 'free competition').

The game itself has become infused with economic forces and discourses: because the spectacle of sports is a business, it functions within economic constraints, to the point where it is *part* of the game. For example, in Major League Baseball, analysts have successfully isolated an individual player's contribution to winning relative to the average replacement player and have subsequently attached a derivative dollar-value to these positive (exceptional) contributions, an analytical tool widely used across the league. Moreover, the modern spectacle has effectively

normalized the banal role of money in sports, in particular the salaries and exchange value of players.¹²⁴ As a result, the passionate sports fan is tasked with becoming an accountant and financial analyst: economic matters necessarily have become a part of the everyday language of sports fans (and not simply for the purpose of gambling). Websites such as ‘www.capfriendly.com’ provide hockey fans free and invaluable access to aggregated information regarding the salary structure for every player on every team; similar websites exist for fans of each of the major sports. Meanwhile, responding to the imposition of capital into the game, traditional sports media outlets (corporations), being a leading discursive authority and producer of an overwhelming amount of daily content for sports fanatics, also greatly contribute to the normalization of economics. Sports journalists and self-proclaimed ‘insiders’, such as Shi Davidi of Sportsnet, publish a consistent and abundant amount of sports content (online) – a mix of news, information and analysis – wherein economic language territorializes the discussion. For example, in Major League Baseball, the month of February is considered part of the ‘off-season’, when games are not being played, though preparations are being made for the start of the season, thus it is a period characterized by rebirth and hope; on February 20th, 2019, Shi Davidi published an article online at Sportsnet titled ‘Blue Jays a prime example of baseball embracing youth movements’; meanwhile, on February 21st, 2020, he published an article titled ‘Blue Jays’ Shapiro talks Asian market and Astros’ cheating scandal’. In the calendar year which passed between these two articles, Shi Davidi published 309 articles online at Sportsnet, the vast majority about the Toronto Blue Jays. The former article by Davidi begins by juxtaposing the

¹²⁴ See for example the following excerpt from a 2018 post on the blog ‘BlueJaysNation’: “Remove your emotions, your attachments. Take off your player-specific sweater and think about them [the players] as assets – nothing more, simply assets. They are trade chips. They are stocks with a term life. Their value will go up, their value will go down.” The excerpt was found: at www.bluejaysnation.com/2018/05/09/theres-an-interesting-possibility-involving-manny-machado-and-josh-donaldson/

abundance of young players who project to be part of a particularly youthful starting team with revered senior members of the club, capturing the disparity in age between the increasingly younger players on the team. In our case, what is significant about Davidi's journalistic romanticism and realism of the spring training camp is the interjection of economic discourse, in particular as it relates to the underlying reasons (cost-effectiveness) for the abundance of youth (and lack of veteran, established players) present at camp, as Davidi writes:

Increasingly, the data-driven decision-making inherent to modern-day baseball front offices doesn't seem willing to pay for and devote a roster spot to players that fit the traditional mould of the veteran leader. In the push toward objectivity, and with growing efficiency in valuing performance, there still is no meaningful way to quantify subjective intangibles.

How much is, say, the guidance and wisdom Mark DeRosa imparted on the 2013 Blue Jays actually worth? The veteran infielder renowned for his clubhouse presence delivered a 0.0 WAR for a team went 77-85 and finished last in the American League East, but six years later, Pillar is just one player who still references the influence he had.

Morales, earning \$12 million in the final year of a \$33-million, three-year contract, is unlikely to deliver enough on-field value to justify that salary. But if he positively influences Guerrero, Gurriel and others, providing guidance that serves players for years and years to come, what would that be worth to the Blue Jays?¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Davidi, Shi. "Blue Jays a prime example of baseball embracing youth movements."

While Davidi refers later in the article to the “economic dynamic” of a league-wide shift towards cost-effectiveness over competitiveness, this is meant strictly in reference to systematic effects on the ‘free market’ of players, whereby the aforementioned economic discourse is taken for granted as everyday sports discourse.¹²⁶ Economic language is common to all the major sports, though to varying degrees. While the game itself is an overwhelmingly visceral spectacle, in principle, because sports fans are crazy about their team and because they desire to interpret and understand the team’s plan for victory and its execution of this plan, they become followers and evaluators of the team with the team’s best interests (victory) at heart, and therefore are subjected to the economic factors which greatly influence the team’s destiny. Thus, one year after Davidi’s article was published online, where hope’s springing eternal and the fountain of youth converged with the cold calculations and realities of the economics of baseball, Davidi published ‘part two’ of an exclusive interview with Blue Jays president and CEO Mark Shapiro in which the posed questions addressed the team’s footprint in the Asian baseball market, past and future payroll spending, ethics (one player had recently been arrested for ‘indecent exposure’; meanwhile, a baseball team had recently been caught egregiously cheating), and potential rule changes.¹²⁷ ‘Part one’ of the interview, published online one day earlier, centred around the team’s construction of a \$100 million training complex project and the competitive advantage it brings, the signing of Hyun-Jin Ryu to an \$80 million dollar contract (to play for the team for four years) and the dynamic influence which monetary value and cost-efficiency have on baseball decisions with the objective of winning.¹²⁸ As it is, the consistency and the content of

¹²⁶ For example, in an unrelated article by Shi Davidi published on May 9, 2018, titled “Garcia provides much-needed boost as Blue Jays rally for comeback win,” Davidi writes that “Young players, regardless of their talent level, are unproven commodities...”

¹²⁷ Davidi, Shi. “Blue Jays’ Shapiro talks Asian market and Astros’ cheating scandal.”

¹²⁸ Davidi, Shi. “Blue Jays’ Shapiro on risks of Ryu signing, benefits of new training complex.”

these discourses has evolved over time to identify with the (home) team's capitalization of world markets for the purpose of winning, which in general accompanies modern sports fanaticism. In other words, economics is recognized as both internally and externally fundamental, a matter which the spectacle of sports reciprocally participates in. Meanwhile, traditional media outlets, being priests of the spectacle of sports, become complicit in mythologizing the influence of economics, encapsulated by two articles posted online at Sportsnet on September 22-23, 2017, by Iain MacIntyre and John Shannon titled 'China Games leave Canucks playing from behind heading into season' and 'NHL must keep investing in China beyond pre-season games', where both journalists normalize the National Hockey League's expedition (as a business entity) into the Chinese market. During this time, like a travelling circus, the NHL scheduled to perform 'exhibition' games in Shanghai and Beijing for the purpose of gaining a potentially highly lucrative future market of consumers.¹²⁹ In MacIntyre's article, the distinction between sports fan and consumer is tenuous: MacIntyre regularly reports on the Vancouver Canucks as an employee of Sportsnet, and as such publishes this article which informs Vancouver fans about the team's preparations and expectations for the upcoming season, as expected. For example, he reported on the potential effects of the team's trip to China on the team's prospective success ("flying across oceans and numerous time zones is never ideal preparation for a National Hockey League season"), and he also remarked on the status of younger players who remained in Vancouver in preparation for the season. However, the article also explicitly identifies the sports fan as a consumer and participant in the NHL's role in big business:

¹²⁹ MacIntyre does not hide the fact that NHL fans are considered consumers, as he elaborates in his article, which certainly is addressed to fans of the Vancouver Canucks: "For the Canucks organization, the trip has spillover benefits at home, where Vancouver's metro area includes about 400,000 ethnic Chinese. The Canucks have quietly been working on their relationship with this market segment, assisting in grassroots hockey clinics in China and building things like "Chinese New Year Night" into their NHL schedule."

In terms of marketing, the China Games are a smart foray by the NHL into a country of 1.4 billion people...there is so much money to be made in China, mountains of loot high enough to obscure little things like the lack of political and religious freedom and a myriad human-rights abuses, that the NHL really can't lose on its Asian experiment.¹³⁰

The force and presence of economics is tangibly felt in all the major sports (entertainment industry) as it has become inculcated in both the concrete and the abstract elements of the spectacle, in particular in the discourses of authorities as well as communal networks of sports fans, wherein the former is a significant producer of the territorializing language of economics. For example, John Shannon's article referenced above was equally unabashed and centred on the unequivocal "value" of acquiring prospective consumers from the Chinese market, a matter whose point of discussion in these articles rests mostly with the need to *execute the plan* – to 'win' by accomplishing the goal of increased and sustainable growth, as Shannon remarks on the objective of the exhibition games: "I suppose the hope is a percentage of the 1.4 billion people will be interested enough to watch another game on TV, or buy a t-shirt, or a sweater, or a hat of their favourite NHL team," in which he further reiterates the need to truly commit to the market expansion with zeal.¹³¹ While sports fans worship their team's road to victory, whereby success in games is influenced by capitalizing on talent and value in international markets, the aforementioned rhetoric instills the league's objective to acquire consumers and capital in international markets as a corollary goal or myth for the sports fan. For example, in another article published online at Sportsnet titled 'Alex Rodriguez reveals 5 similarities between

¹³⁰ MacIntyre, Iain. "China Games leave Canucks playing from behind heading into season."

¹³¹ Shannon, John. "NHL must keep investing in China beyond pre-season games."

baseball, business’, the staff at Sportsnet (credited as anonymous authors of the post) introduce Rodriguez as “The fourth-most prolific home run hitter in MLB history [and] now the CEO of A-Rod Corp, a money management firm...”¹³² Crucially, the very brief article conflates winning in sports with having success in business, and presents five aphoristic sports analogies which were communicated by Rodriguez – mythological utterances by a priest and guru that effectively legitimize the superiority of business ‘superstars’. The sixty-second video published online by Rodriguez forms this connection by presenting contrasting cuts of glorious sports moments throughout Rodriguez’s career with scenes of Rodriguez in business settings. In fact, it is only the exceptional CEOs of corporations whose salaries either match or even surpass superstar athletes and performers (musicians, actors and actresses). The implication is that business is also a game (contest, competition), wherein the pursuit of victory is analogous to sports – a similar analogy is infused throughout the spectacle of sports for nationalism. In both cases, the objective is to establish a tribalism which materializes a ritual and mythological worship of an abstract ideal – wherein victory is conflated with vitality and power, with ethical principles emerging as secondary. While the spectacle of sports is attractive for the materialization of myths of dutiful citizens and soldiers which form nationalism, business and economics meanwhile are attracted to the enthusiastic devotion and (ritual) worship of consumers. The vitality (power) inherent to the function of religiosity (including sports fans) is appealing to economic and capital interests who understand the value of fanaticism as a matter of consumer ‘brand loyalty’:

...some consumers seem to embrace the fanatic label. Google searches of ‘I’m a Hello Kitty fanatic’, ‘I’m an Apple fanatic’, or ‘I’m a Harry Potter fanatic’, and so on return hundreds of web pages, where individuals label themselves fanatics of these

¹³² Sportsnet. “Alex Rodriguez reveals 5 similarities between baseball, business.”

brands. In such cases, the term fanatic seems to be utilized as a means to highlight or even proudly promote one's passion, loyalty, commitment, dedication, and/or devotion to the object of fanaticism, qualities that are generally considered positive and even admirable (Chung et al. 13-14).

The brand, the country, and the sports team all feature totems – names and emblems – that function as a collective representation of fanaticism and neo-tribalism.¹³³ The presence of the totem reflects the underlying condition of competition and rivalry (heterogeneity) and the materializations of vitality in ideal social forms. Moreover, the success of the spectacle of sports in establishing itself as a social institution (religion) has resulted in its ability to become a vehicle for capital and political myths, as we have observed in the authority of utterances in online communities, media outlets and the spectacle itself. In this sense, economics and politics are a game whose ethics are largely tied to the dominant value of victory – reflecting the elementary forms of sports fanaticism. To the sports fan, what matters most is victory; the intrusions of economics and politics into the spectacle of sports reflects their attraction to the fanaticism embodied by sports fans.¹³⁴ As Maffesoli writes: “In the murky world of ideas and distant theories, all cats are black in the dark” (*The Time of the Tribes* 63).

Strong parallels between sports fans and economics can be found in online stock trading communities, in particular those dedicated to the everyday “ups and downs” of the stock market – an economic game that not only dispenses winners and losers, but also materializes affects of

¹³³ “A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or feature that identifies one sport product or services as being different from another...By defining the brand, a foundation is created for all other components of the sport organization to build on” (Schwarz and Hunter 148).

¹³⁴ “Winning cures a lot of problems. Great marketing and exciting entertainment cure all problems...The brand has to be strong regardless of the final score. When people are hopeful that things are going to be better, and it brings excitement, all of a sudden that becomes the brand.” See: www.thescore.com/nba/news/1933941

despair, jubilation, and hope. Investing and ‘day-trading’ invoke the spectatorship of sports fans, in which stockholders and traders are at the whims of the company’s performance (reflected in share price) in the market. As the spectacle of sports does not hold a monopoly over online forums, it should be no surprise that vibrant online communities exist for stock traders, whose engagement draws strong parallels to sports fanaticism. Much like for the spectacle of sports, online forums used for the discursive congregation of fellow ‘investors’ can be found in various locations, including Reddit, Yahoo Finance or ‘Stocktwits’ among others. Of course, a crucial difference between the sports fan and the stock trader is the prospect of monetary gain or loss, as opposed to a symbolic victory characterized by catharsis for the sports fan. Nonetheless, online investing communities can develop a collective set of rituals and myths which function through worshipping an empowered ideal that vitalizes everyday life. For example, the Reddit community ‘weedstocks’ has one-hundred and thirty-nine thousand registered followers, popularized as a result of cannabis legalization in Canada. And much like the phenomenon of the ‘Game Thread’ of online sports forums discussed in the second chapter, the reddit community of *weedstocks* also posts daily threads (or a ‘Weekend Post’) where fellow followers can discuss the everyday unfolding of the game of investing in cannabis stocks. Much like sports fans, the community of investors participates in a sharing of (tactical) knowledge as well as emotion – an investor’s disposition is commonly reduced to either a position (as in, on a team) of hope or despair, otherwise known as *bulls* and *bears* (to be ‘bullish’ is to be hopeful, to be ‘bearish’ is to be pessimistic); aside from neutral/sideways movement, everyday either the *bulls* or the *bears* win; either the bulls or bears are winning (in charge of the trend). The emotion which we have observed in the discourses of sports fans in online forums, such as the expression in a ‘Game Thread’ of anxieties in anticipation of a game or the passionate hope and despair of fans, also

appear in the discourses of stock investors, as in the following comments posted in a 'daily thread' in the 'weedstocks' reddit community:

bmchugh0042

I've stopped checking the daily threads unless there is a major swing one way or the other, and that's just to find out why it's happening. My life is so much better. You all should try it next week.

Deep_Underc0ver

I got headaches from all the noise in the daily [thread].

tbhwyfam

Dear lord, Can you please just make it so that I wake up one day and the top post on weedstocks is Aphria doing something big and exciting that doesnt turn out to be a total scam like Diageo or Altria or Molson rumors or buying Nuuvera or LATAM and the stock starts running hard in PM [pre-market] and continues for a few days so I can get out of this godforsaken company at a halfway decent price and I promise I'll give some of the money to homeless people or some shit. I know you like to test people like when you killed that guys family and destroyed all of his worldly possessions to see how he'd react because you had a bet with the devil and I want you to know I'm gonna be like that guy and continue to have faith that it is all for a reason. I ask this in the name of the father, son, and holy ghost amen.

productivehype

Such an overreaction to TRST earnings. Holding long and strong, sucks to see the price drop like this but I'm confident in the company.

EternalObi

I think so too. Times like these are the worst time to sell. If you sell now you are unlikely to buy back at lower price if it goes there. Might as well hang on.

anonymous_eddy

Bought into this dip. Holding with ya. Lots of potential in this one. Sad that everyone flipped the page on them and are all now bashing.

Dubscityg

I don't know if I have the stomach for this industry. I've done well the past two months but the ups and downs are crazy. Only recently have I been able to stop myself from checking every 15min. I think I'm just going to take my positions long and chill out for a bit.

12294830754

The volatility is what makes it awesome. There wouldn't be any excitement without it. Everyone would just park there [sic] money in a stock and look back in 4 years.

You can still do that, but the swings allow you to make or lose money quickly. But I get it. Take a break. I just went out of town for 10 days and barely did any trading.

Just followed it on my phone.¹³⁵

Both the investor/trader and the sports fan engage in the disindividuation which characterizes their tribalism,¹³⁶ affirming the role of empowered actors whose destiny contains the vitality of the collective – the leap of faith of fanaticism. That is, another shared phenomenon observed in

¹³⁵ <https://www.reddit.com/r/weedstocks/>

¹³⁶ “As for the metaphor of the tribe, it allows us to account for the process of disindividuation, the saturation of the inherent function of the individual and the emphasis on the role that each person (persona) is called upon to play within the tribe” (*The Time of the Tribes* 6).

stock trading forums is the galvanizing motto of sports fans to have faith (in the team, the manager or ‘the plan’): *In Klopp We Trust* or *Trust the Process*.¹³⁷ An analogous sentiment of faith is held and expressed by investors in online stock forums for CEOs of companies or for one’s “due diligence.” That is, once one has become invested, one can be bullish or bearish – as in the hope (and despair) which sustains the sports fan. In an example from the banal, on July 4th, 2018, the general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Kyle Dubas, participated in a radio interview where he responded to queries for a critical evaluation of his team by describing himself as being “probably more *bullish* on our defense [personnel] than others,” referring to the “angst with our fanbase and amongst the pundits” regarding (the defense’s) expected contributions to prospective victory.¹³⁸ Dubas also added that “I’ve got a lot of faith in our defense this year,” effectively using mass communication networks to reach the followers and fanatics of the Maple Leafs, much like public corporations and corporate figures utilize press releases and conferences to communicate with groups of investors and followers. As in the game in the spectacle of sports, a ‘market day’ opens and closes (with a bell) and is distinguished by a heightened state of effervescence – and as was noted of the athletic contest in chapter two, in which there are passages from extended moments of uneventful tension into plot-defining eruptions of emotion, so too are market days characterized by such collective effervescence (a positive press release can result in instantaneous effects on share price, which is expressed in the daily chats on stock trading forums, like in sports forums, as collective eruptions of jubilation, or vice versa). Though pervasive, collective emotions are often denigrated compared to the measured analysis associated with ‘due diligence’, which ultimately sustains a ‘reasoned faith’.

¹³⁷ ‘Trust the Process’ is a slogan that gained further notoriety by fans of the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team.

¹³⁸ www.mapleleafshotstove.com/2018/07/04/kyle-dubas-i-am-probably-more-bullish-on-our-defense-than-others-ive-got-a-lot-of-faith-in-our-defense/

Moreover, in online stock trading forums, like in online sports forums, we find a sense of community and sociality, as well as the distinct presence of prophets (and priests), capitalizing on the distance which separates the power of salvation (victory, truth) from the ordinary neutral or losing position by assuming a position of discursive authority; stock media outlets in this sense are also communication platforms which accord legitimacy and authority to analysts and journalists. While glory from victory and excellence in athletics is a non-material commodity, it also accords a highly functional power, a matter which invariably implicates the power immanent to the monetary ‘prizes’ acquired through victory in the game of economics. Nevertheless, though stock traders draw strong parallels to sports fans, the spectacle of sports is a superior mythmaking machine, encapsulated by the symbolic prize awarded to the victorious team and the emergence of a dynamic social ethics and aesthetics therein. But what of the political spectacle?

After Donald Trump’s presidential victory, Vice-President Mike Pence announced that “America have elected their new champion” and that he was “deeply grateful to the American people for electing this team.” While sports fans huddle in their home arena or public space (*fanum*) with fellow fanatics to support their team during the game, political parties similarly gather in large convention halls (or public spaces) to follow the unfolding results of an election, watching in anxious anticipation of celebration or abdication. The spectacle of sports and politics share several structural similarities, including the idealization of tribal victory, the self-identification with and enthusiasm for the team (name and emblem), a system of myths and rituals, and its presence as a sacred dimension in everyday life, involving prophets, priests and a contest between godlike contestants (political leaders) whose prize is symbolic but also accords power and vitality. Furthermore, both the sports and political arena are dominated by shared

affect, whether anger, fear or resentment, and a social logic of passions that participates in the dramatic pursuit of victory. As such, it is unsurprising that the highly successful spectacle of sports become a model for presenting the spectacle of politics. For example, the digital broadcast of the 2016 federal election of the United States on CNN shared very strong parallels to sports broadcasts produced by traditional sports media outlets. To begin with, there was a theatrically distinct separation between the teams (contestants), in which CNN portrayed the game between the Democratic and Republic party metonymically using images (reminiscent of boxing posters, including eye-line matches) of Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump, analogous to the spectacle of sports elaborated in the second chapter. In effect, the spectacle of sports was infused throughout the digital presentation of the election: the broadcast cuts from the studio to live feeds of party headquarters, where supporters are seen inside checking their phones (the scoreboard), appearing anxious for the unfolding results of the contest. The camera's transition (using cuts) from the studio, to the arena (and the players) and the spectators is reminiscent of the gaze of the camera in the spectacle of sports. While the performance of the election is rudimentary, lacking the physicality of the athletic contest, the game nonetheless unfolds and is performed, prompting the former to be presented in studio much like the sporting event. That is, an analogous use of experts and analysts to track and deconstruct the unfolding of the contest, and whose presence, associated directly with the means to broadcast the spectacle, accords them legitimacy and authority. The use of interactive and updating screens to both track and analyze unfolding contest results was popularized in sports media broadcasts, while the presence of analysts or news anchors is also reminiscent of the play-by-play commentators who narrate the modern athletic contest, as described in the second chapter. Consider the following phrases uttered by media

figures during CNN's studio broadcast of the election, owing (directly) to expressions from the spectacle of sports:

-we really don't know what's going to happen here

-her path is getting narrower and narrower, and he's got a lot of plays on the board

-this is a very close race

-same lap of the track now

-this is not the race that most people thought we'd have tonight

-very competitive

-big five point lead

-this is a remarkably competitive race

The social appeal of the spectacle of sports has captivated innumerable fanatics and become inculcated in the social fabric as a collective representation of the divine, ultimately attracting political forces (and accompanying prophets and priests, such as major media corporations) that wish to wield the power of such a socially influential role. There is a crucial distinction between the ideal contestants, priests, prophets and the mass of spectators/supporters, effectively reflecting a fundamental hierarchy of power, reminiscent of the sacred and the profane: *if you can't beat them, join them*. Materializations of the distinction of an ideal of power in sports, politics, economics, and religion emerge out of (free) contest and competition, sustained by the sociality of the herd. While sports fans are enthusiastically engaged within the diegetic world of the spectacle of sports, their influence on performance and victory are secondary, at most. Effectively, the game rationalizes and legitimizes winners and losers, as in the sacred and the profane. For example, the conflation of sports with nationalism and the preservation of the State

is addressed by Modris Eksteins in *Rites of Spring*,¹³⁹ an investigation of the prevailing social climate in the era of World War One. Eksteins thus recognizes the value and function of social power over morality or truth as the objective of the game: “The war was a game, deadly earnest, to be sure, but a game nevertheless...” (Eksteins 123). At the root is the driving force of heterogeneity and social competition (of the strong and the weak), the totalizing agon, in which fanaticism is a significant weapon: *All is fair in love and war*. The digital spectacle of the election unsurprisingly takes full advantage of motifs from the spectacle of sports in order to normalize the presence of a game with spectators and supporters of a team (and not a democracy of empowered voters). In other words, the social logic of fragmentation endures in eternity, empowering forces of fanaticism and neo-tribalism over Enlightenment.¹⁴⁰ The Christmas-day truces on the battlefields in 1914 (involving isolated incidents of playing football) exemplify the non-rationality of this social conflict:

...the Germans had to be defeated; otherwise civilization would be imperiled. What, then, brought the English out in such large numbers around Christmas to shake hands and laugh and exchange anecdotes and mementoes with the Germans? It was presumably the very same set of values that they were fighting for... This notion of probity and decorum, of playing the game (Eksteins 120).

¹³⁹ Perhaps the climax of that convergence is evoked in the explication by Eksteins of the Christmas-day truces: “That Christmas truce of 1914, with its tales of camaraderie and warmth between supposedly bitter enemies in the crater-scarred territory of no man’s land, that bit of ground between opposing trenches whose very name appeared to forbid such intercourse, is a remarkable chapter in the history of the First World War...” (Eksteins 97).

¹⁴⁰ Maffesoli elaborates on this conflict of value systems: “... the non-rational is not the irrational; it is not even defined in terms of the rational; it establishes a logic other than the one that has prevailed since the Enlightenment. It is increasingly given that eighteenth- and nineteenth century rationalism is just one model of reason inherent in social life. Other parameters such as the affectual or the symbolic can have their own rationality. Just as the non-logical is not illogical, we can state that the search for shared experiences, the grouping around eponymous heroes, non-verbal communication and bodily gestures are all based on a rationality that is no less effective and which is in many ways wider and, in the simplest sense of the term, more generous” (*The Time of the Tribes* 144).

The spectacle of sports effectively becomes a vehicle for neo-tribalism to bypass social aversion to economics (capitalism) and politics (empire). For example, Noam Chomsky refers to a major mid-19th century labour press study published by Norman Ware in which “The journals reveal how alien and intolerable the value systems demanded by private power were to working people, who stubbornly refused to abandon normal human sentiments” (*Chomsky on Anarchism* 202). Meanwhile, sports fans learn to venerate the game (including the disempowerment of spectators, based on a concrete social hierarchy), thus recognizing the primary significance of victory (vitality in power) and the secondary significance of morals and ethics (theology). In practice, however, fate is a cruel mistress, hence the value in preserving the will to power of the strong (as expressed in economics and politics) through the spectacle of sports. For example, the popularity and ethics of sports in British culture during the Victorian era was identified by Modris Eksteins as a noteworthy influence on the functional role of the British Empire in World War One: “In the Victorian era the British did become obsessed with games, and translated the sporting ethic into guidelines for social intercourse as a whole...Interest in sports even overshadowed politics for a great many” (120). Social theorists from Norbert Elias to Eric Dunning have pointed to the role of (spectator) sports in the dynamic of the social fabric, in particular the role of violence and its modern sublimation (by a “catharsis machine”), a mark of “the civilizing process” reflected in the emergence of the nation-state. In *Sport Matters*, Eric Dunning elaborates on the trajectory of this argument: “...modern sport developed first in Britain largely in conjunction with what Elias called ‘the parliamentarization of political conflict’, a process which marked a crucial stage in the English civilizing and state-formation processes” (77).¹⁴¹ While Dunning recognizes the functional social convergence of modern sport with

¹⁴¹ “It was in the context of an increasingly pacified society subject to more effective forms of parliamentary rule that recognizably modern forms of sport based upon written rules first began to emerge. That there was a strong

politics and economics, a categorical determination of causality rightly remains ambiguous, in spite of historical evidence tying western *Zivilisation* to modern sport. In other words, the unequivocal social presence and popularity of modern sport, coupled with its aesthetics and ethics, already draws critical parallels to historical developments in politics and economics. The spectacle of sports is undoubtedly a holy temple and mythmaking machine directly in touch with the social divine, but also porous to the invasion of rival authorities, such as politics and economics, such that a functional and reciprocal relationship has emerged – one which maintains the heterogeneity (*puissance*) of the spectacle of sports, evidenced by eruptive conflicts such as Colin Kaepernick’s noted kneeling during pre-game national anthems or the refusal by sports teams and players of teams who have won a championship to partake in a customary ritual of visiting the White House, even receiving coverage from traditional sports media outlets such as the aforementioned Sportsnet, who have published articles online such as “Raptors’ Masai Ujiri responds to Donald Trump’s controversial comments” that provide a platform within the diegetic world of sports to criticize both domestic and international governmental policies and rhetorics, ultimately reflecting the presence of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces within the spectacle of sports.¹⁴² The use of the term ‘hegemonic’ nevertheless implies a function more suited to the concept of an *ideological state apparatus* (ISA), ostensibly reinforcing an economic and political value system that structures western civilization.

Wherein simplicity is valued, the spectacle of sports offers an ideal form of fanaticism and tribalism, in which the distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are not highly susceptible to

connection between these two developments is suggested by the fact that there were close parallels between the emergent party rituals of parliament and the emergent rituals of modern sport. Both, as they came to develop in eighteenth-century England, began to involve less violent ways of conducting struggles than had previously prevailed” (Dunning 56).

¹⁴² www.sportsnet.ca/basketball/nba/raptors-masai-ujiri-responds-donald-trumps-controversial-comments/

the nuances and complexities which plague political discourse. That is, the spectacle of sports remains a separate entity, not wholly an *ISA*, that far exceeds the function of a political mouthpiece – even in spite of its reciprocal relationship. This is evidenced by the power, status and influence of superstar athletes, and similarly so with groups of sports fans. Examples include public conflicts between players and acting presidents (of the United States,¹⁴³ Russia,¹⁴⁴ Turkey¹⁴⁵) or between sports fans and State authorities.¹⁴⁶ Having said this, based on the expressed motivations of both players and fans, sports is seen as a space of its own, empowered and protective of encroachments from politics; whereas politics is corrupted, sports is an arena (abstract) where ideals such as ‘the good’ predominate, and their separation is crucial to the diegetic world of the spectacle of sports. The following comments (including by a site moderator) selected from a daily chat at the ‘Maple Leafs Hot Stove’ online community encapsulate this sentiment:

Amoroq

A mass shooting at a Quebec mosque tonight at least 5 dead, 2 of 3 shooters in custody.

Matthew Cameron

Shh! Can't talk about that!

¹⁴³ See: “Capitals’ Smith-Pelly speaks out against Trump” at ‘www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/capitals-smith-pelly-speaks-trump/’

¹⁴⁴ See: “Artemi Panarin’s criticism of Vladimir Putin ‘absolutely unprecedented’” at ‘www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/artemi-panarins-criticism-vladimir-putin-absolutely-unprecedented/’

¹⁴⁵ See: “Turkey looking to jail Enes Kanter for insulting president” at ‘www.thescore.com/nba/news/1450600-turkey-looking-to-jail-enes-kanter-for-insulting-president’

¹⁴⁶ See: “Hillsborough disaster: deadly mistakes and lies that lasted decades” at ‘www.theguardian.com/football/2016/apr/26/hillsborough-disaster-deadly-mistakes-and-lies-that-last-edecades’

Burtonboy MLHS

You bloody well know what happens every time there is political debate on this board. Problem is Cam we are getting complaints because many people come here to get away from those issues for a few hrs out of a day. I see enough of this crap in the news all day long and people seem to want to drag it into the one place of refuge some of us have. I see and hear enough of this everywhere else and I come here to getaway from it. Unfortunately I think it's ruining what was once an excellent place to come to talk about hockey.

Matthew Cameron

I understand that, but there are mass protests in every major city in North America. People in Canada are dead tonight because of Islamophobia spreading from the White House. We have airports grinding to a halt and legal, landed citizens being denied access to their homes and families. I just think it's a touch naive to think people on any board are just going to avoid the topics altogether.

Burtonboy MLHS

And there are plenty of other places and ways to express your views if you want. Problem is Cam we are getting complaints because many people come here to get away from those issues for a few hrs out of a day. I see and hear enough of this everywhere else and I come here to getaway from it.

Matthew Cameron

I get it. I just think it's perhaps a touch more realistic to say 'try to keep it to a minimum' than to attempt to ban it. Maybe I'm alone on this, but I feel like I know a lot of the posters on this site, even though it's a digital connection. Because of that, to

me, it can sometimes feel pretty artificial to be reading about really serious world issues like the one going on in Quebec right now, but directed to talking about which millionaire looked lazier in a scrimmage.

Burtonboy MLHS

If conversations remained civil I'm sure it would be tolerated more but it rarely turns out that way. They inevitably denigrate into full blown arguments with insults flying left and right. I see enough of this crap in the news all day long and people seem to want to drag it into the one place of refuge some of us have. A lot of people come here to read the comment sections for the hockey conversation only to find page after page of political arguments.

Matthew Cameron

For most people, it's not about 'not wanting to see it', or escapism. I buy that for Burtonboy, who is incredibly devoted to the Leafs and hockey - but for a lot of the guys complaining, it's pretty clear they didn't like their opinions being challenged, and decided to just complain.

Eddie Shore

I for one use sports to escape the reality of politics and religion. Please start your own site for it. This site is my happy place, please don't change that for me.

AutsinMatchoos

Thank you for writing this. Nailed it perfectly...This is a hockey site, lets keep it to hockey. There are other sites on the net for that type of discussion - this is a good getaway from that type of nonsense

Yaknowwhat

Agreed, this should be a politics-free zone....¹⁴⁷

The spectacle of sports and online sports communities in general transcend political affiliations, thus politically centred conflicts threaten to create irreconcilable division and derision within the clan and the tribe. The effects of sublimation here present themselves in the sports fan's preferred method of reconciling powerful forces of competition, aggression, resentment, and hatred, in which rival teams (and their supporters) implicitly consent to a set of morals, ethics, and aesthetics that arise out of the athletic contest and the subsequent categorization and legitimization of winners and losers, whereas in politics there are effectively no such agreements between rival teams (including for the distribution of 'winners' and 'losers'). How do games get settled in politics? The athletic contest is seen as a virtuous battlefield for opposing teams and forces, unlike the 'meritocracy' which underlies social stratification, business and international relations. While resentment in defeat is not eschewed in the spectacle of sports, there is a measure of graciousness in defeat which has developed – politics does not reflect such a scenario, in which the great leveller is physical force. All of this is to say that, as a whole, the spectacle of sports has withstood the imposition of hegemonic forces, even if there are strong parallels between them, and moreover, reciprocity. These parallels include the distribution of decision-making power in the structuring of the game (and the team), in which the systematic recourse for fans and citizens alike is one of disempowerment, affirmed by the implicit consent of the masses, wherein materializations of disagreement (contestation) are sublimated through the diegetic world of the spectacle of sports that envelops fans – an idealization of sociality that smooths over pesky nuances that threaten the wholeness of simplified myths which effectively

¹⁴⁷ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2017/01/28/leafs-links-matthews-vs-crosby-in-the-skills-competition/>

form and sustain a social system (as mentioned, the spectacle of sports simplify and idealize 'heroic' and 'villainous' forces). The social manifestation of devotion and passion in sports fans for a team is attractive to economic forces as a measure of "brand loyalty" and to political forces as a form of obedience to the State, or Empire.¹⁴⁸ Hence, in the vein of Maffesoli's concept of 'neo-tribalism', Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer to Etienne Balibar's position that "culture is made to fill the role that biology had played" (192) as an empowered tool of social heterogeneity, whereby "racial supremacy and subordination are not a theoretical question, but arise through free competition, a kind of market of meritocracy of culture" (193).¹⁴⁹ As one fan of the Liverpool Football Club put it in a public comment on the online forum 'This Is Anfield', "In a modern digital world, where LFC supporters come from across the globe, I couldn't give a damn about your skin colour or convictions as long as you support Liverpool with all your heart and soul."¹⁵⁰ In this sense, participation in the spectacle of sports reinforces the subjectivization of the multitude to what Hardt and Negri refer to as Empire, effectively a neo-liberal biopolitical machine: "The highest function of power is to invest life through and through, and its primary task is to administer life. Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself" (24).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Hardt and Negri assert that "The contemporary idea of Empire is born through the global expansion of the internal US constitutional project...The networks of agreements and associations, the channels of mediation and conflict resolution, and the coordination of the various dynamics of states are all institutionalized within Empire." (Hardt and Negri 182).

¹⁴⁹ According to Hardt and Negri, Empire ushers in mass consent to the game of tribal politics: "Deleuze and Guattari challenge us to conceive racist practice not in terms of binary divisions and exclusion but as a strategy of differential inclusion... White supremacy functions (rather) through first engaging alterity and then subordinating differences according to degrees of deviance from whiteness. This has nothing to do with the hatred and fear of the strange, unknown Other. It is a hatred born in proximity and elaborated through the degrees of difference of the neighbour" (Hardt and Negri 193-94).

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.thisisanfield.com/2017/01/liverpool-lose-joel-matip-month-cameroon-dispute-rumbles/#comment-3102421907>

¹⁵¹ "Biopolitics is another name for the real subsumption of society under capital, and both are synonymous with the globalized productive order. Production fills the surfaces of Empire; it is a machine that is full of life, an intelligent life that by expressing itself in production and reproduction as well as in circulation (of labour, affects, and

As the spectacle of sports is highly successful at captivating fans into a state of religious worship, it is noteworthy that its system of myths and rituals substantially align with the (capitalist) interests of Empire: the passivity and disempowerment of fans within the game as a whole, sacrificing the self for the team, the subjectivization of children to the spectacle, the (productive) economy of the spectacle, the myth of a ‘free’ (market) competition that materializes a social hierarchy of supremacy between winners and losers (including the phenomenon of idolatry), the myth of hard work leading to success (meritocracy), the normalization and legitimization of major media outlets, emotion and territory-based tribalism (over reason), obedience to authority in the form of a bureaucracy, the myth of the underdog wherein ‘anything is possible’ (such as social mobility between classes), and the nation (state) as a totem, among others.¹⁵² The notion of superiority of (superstar) athletes, as a physical reflection of the supernatural and sacred, similarly draws a parallel to the political distribution of power and its social hierarchizations, hence idolized popular figures can so seamlessly transition into politics – a situation not wholly dissimilar to the ancient Greeks, wherein skill and excellence in arms or the agon was directly associated with (political) power, as Jacob Burckhardt noted in *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*: “The nobility reigned everywhere, even in the states that were not transformed by the Dorian migration. The right of the overlords was founded on superior blood, greater landed wealth, skill in arms, and knowledge of the sacrifices and the laws” (160). The physical elements of spectacular athletic contestants (together with

languages) stamps society with a new collective meaning and recognizes virtue and civilization in cooperation” (Hardt and Negri 365).

¹⁵² Another comment posted online by a Liverpool FC fan on the blog ‘This Is Anfield’ captures the potentiality for transmission between the spectacle of sports and politics: “LFC is my country. Klopp is my King, my liege. Man U and Everton are North Korea and Russia. They are the dark side we are the light. Anfield is Camelot and we have a destiny to rub other countries faces in the dirt and flick their ears etc.” See: www.thisisanfield.com/2017/01/liverpool-lose-joel-matip-month-cameroon-dispute-rumbles/#comment-3102430646

skill) reflect a physical superiority within the *polis* (as in, “skill in arms”), whereby victors are endowed with veneration and tangible social power, effectively implicating the convergence of ancient Greek athletic contest and politics (the totalizing *agon*), whose climate of opinion regarded politics as reserved for a noble group of superior men, akin to the separation of modern spectacular athletic contestants and spectators/sports fans, effected through physical force – as noted by Aristotle in reference to the qualities which befit rulers and masters: “power to do violence” or “superior in brute strength” (Aristotle 1991).¹⁵³ In other words, the modern spectacle of sports is both a sublimation of and conceptual stepping stone to the politics of “might makes right” described by Plato and Aristotle (in Plato’s *Republic*, Thrasymachus contests Socrates by declaring that “justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves”), and which Hardt and Negri identify as underlying the biopolitical form of Empire, a process of establishing and maintaining a superiority in social-political power. In effect, the spectacle of sports reproduces forms of the totalizing *agon* which manifested during periods of ancient Greece – evident even in the preponderance of families with more than one professional athlete – as a materialization of physical superiority and domination. In his *Politics*, Aristotle outlines this convergence between force and (political) superiority: “Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labour, the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace” (1990).¹⁵⁴ This tendency or line of thinking not only emanates from the spectacle of sports in the rewards won through the use of *biē* (force), but also features in political, economic and patriarchal systems. The prominent

¹⁵³ Aristotle writes: “the superior in excellence ought to rule, or be master” (1991).

¹⁵⁴ Aristotle further clarified this position: “the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind” (Aristotle 1990).

presence of brute force in each of these social systems is unsurprising given its close association to the pervasive influence of vitalism, hence the common positioning of men in roles which encompass power. Certainly, in evaluating such social assemblages, it is advisable to take account of the role which power (as a force of violence) plays: violence is a critical and often glorified element of politics, economics and spectacular athletics, to the point where masculinity emerges as an established structural authority, arising from unbridled competition in which *winning* is the name of the game, concomitant with a determination of *losers*. In other words, political, economic or athletic success (or excellence) – individual or collective – comes at a cost, one in which the question “*Do the ends justify the means?*” lingers. Historical revelations of this dynamic include the phenomenon of group initiation, which in spectacular sports is known as ‘hazing’. In her essay “A Search for a Theoretical Understanding of Hazing Practices in Athletics,” Margery Holman identifies hazing in sports as a mechanism of power *per se*, referring to the commonplace structural presence of hierarchy and male authority in athletics, manifesting as violent “hazing actions that strip another individual of their freedoms, dignity, and self-identity” (51). The prominence of hazing in the spectacle of sports has led to revelations from former athletes, supported by witnesses, of pervasive and abject hazing, such that in 2018 the Ontario Hockey League reiterated its public stance on the issue, after former player Dan Carcillo shed the spotlight on incidents which occurred just over a decade earlier while playing for the Sarnia Sting, later corroborated by former teammates Dave Pszenyczny, Ryan Munce and Charles Amodeo, of rituals that frequently involved sexual degradation and assault by older teammates (with allegedly complicit knowledge by non-playing authorities). In a phone interview with The Canadian Press, Amodeo referred to the circumstances as “a power-trip

culture. And you couldn't say anything because if you did you were on the first bus home."¹⁵⁵

Wherever power is venerated and unchecked, as in politics, economics, or athletics, winning becomes a matter of fanaticism and warfare, a process of legitimation of the duality of superiority and inferiority, including the delegitimation of counter-ideologies (such as ethical or scientific). Meanwhile, collectives such as nations, political parties, corporations and sports teams amplify these circumstances – including an emboldening of coldness and cruelty that complements the burning drive of fanaticism. And yet, as noted, refusal to partake in the *agon* is effectively a call to exile *per se*, a principle (of conflict) which extends from hazing in athletics to nationalism, as Franz Fanon recognized: “Hence we arrive at a seemingly paradoxical proposition: In a colonized country, nationalism in its most basic, most rudimentary, and undifferentiated form is the most forceful and effective way of defending national culture” (Fanon 177). That is, recognition (of dignity) is not given *a priori* but earned (at a cost), in part due to the lengths which others will go, necessitating dynamic survival stratagems such as tribalism.¹⁵⁶

In taking account of the modern spectacular athlete's close association with power and divinity (as a measure of physical supremacy), in particular the parallels with political and religious conditions in ancient Greece, we find the principle of a struggle to the death for recognition and prestige. Francis Fukuyama addresses the totalizing *agon* in *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he references the ‘warrior ethos’ that often resulted in the culture of aristocratic societies. The warrior ethos, according to Fukuyama, is based on the underlying

¹⁵⁵ Sportsnet. “More Sarnia Sting alumni open up about alleged hazing in early 2000s.”

¹⁵⁶ See for example the combination of the pleasure principle and the death instinct delineated by Gilles Deleuze: “The sadist derives pleasure from other people's pain, and the masochist from suffering pain himself as a necessary precondition of pleasure. Nietzsche stated the essentially religious problem of the meaning of pain and gave it the only fitting answer: if pain and suffering have any meaning, it must be that they are enjoyable to someone” (“Coldness and Cruelty” 118).

mode of the master/slave relationship as a sense of innate superiority based on willingness to risk death – the struggle for recognition (*thymos*). By risking death (and performing violence) in a contest for a symbolic prize – pure prestige (and its associated tangible powers, such as lordship) – we find once again a strong parallel to the spectacle of sports as a stepping stone to agonistic politics. That the deathly primeval battle is fought for prestige alone purportedly expresses mankind’s separation from animals, that he is more than a machine or a slave to his instincts. As Fukuyama explains, by risking his own life, man proves that he can act contrary to his most powerful and basic instinct: self-preservation. And by fighting for prestige alone, or a trifle as a prize, what is underlined by the action is the will to be recognized by the Other. Meanwhile, the State (as imagined by Thomas Hobbes) functions effectively as a social response to *megalothymia*, which Fukuyama notes “can be manifest in the tyrant who invades and enslaves a neighboring people so that they will recognize his authority” (182). Hobbes finds nothing morally redeeming in the pride of the aristocratic master. Rather, it is precisely the will to recognition (*thymos*), this willingness to fight over a trifle like a medal or a flag that is understood as a primary source of violence. It is further argued that the popular trend within modernity has been the taming of the agonistic spirit in the name of mass self-preservation, in which the aristocratic class has been offered to exchange thymotic pride for less violent conditions of limitless material acquisition. In the eyes of Fukuyama, the bourgeoisie was a deliberate social concept seeking to reduce violence by pitting desire against the passions of *thymos*, instead of pitting the *megalothymia* of the few against that of the many, as Machiavelli suggested. However, agonistic or thymotic impulses have not simply disappeared – they arguably permeate our social fabric through significant efforts of sublimation and displacement, as in the spectacle of sports, the Leviathan and Empire. Jacob Burckhardt further identifies

ancient Greece as sustaining the conditions in which self-recognition (*thymos*) through contest and superiority influences politics: “It was the agon alone which united the whole nation as both participants and spectators; those who cut themselves off from it, like the Aetolians, the Acarnanians and the Epirots, forfeited to a greater or lesser extent the right to be counted among the Hellenes” (Burckhardt 168).¹⁵⁷ Thus, the issue remains the subjectivization of the multitude to the ‘well-intentioned’ State or *polis*, effectively spurred on by the spectacle of sports and the legitimization of superiority through (physical) contest as a form of political power – in which the spectacle of sports displaces the thymotic impulses of the masses through a vicarious spectacular athletic contest that dissolves the individual spectator into a collective that prioritizes empowerment, from which hierarchy and superiority naturally materialize. The agon which empowers and placates *thymos* is founded on vitality as expressed through life and death, such that the athletic warrior(s) of the modern spectacle of sports represent ideals which obfuscate the spectacular political and economic contest, as in the subjugation of a passive heterogeneous mass to a (secretive) ‘warrior class’ or nobility (symbolized by national totems), a situation envisioned by Aristotle: “that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule” (Aristotle 1990). But what of the game, the agon? The notion of a game in the spectacle of sports bespeaks a battle of wills and strategy as an ideal expression of meritocracy, a significantly flawed notion which nevertheless pervades the social fabric: “Friendship would then involve competitive distrust of the rival as much as amorous striving toward the object of desire. The

¹⁵⁷ Of the significance of spectacular expressions of the agon, Burckhardt writes: “The establishment of these Panhellenic sites [chariot race stadiums], which yet remained exclusively Hellenic, was a very important element in the growth and self-consciousness of Hellenic nationalism; it was uniquely decisive in breaking down enmity between tribes, and remained the most powerful obstacle to fragmentation into mutually hostile *poleis*” (168).

basic point about friendship is that the two friends are like claimant and rival (but who could tell them apart?)” (*What Is Philosophy?* 4).

Vitality in the Spectacle of Sports: the Wasp, the Orchid and the Social Commons

Most often a sports fan’s membership as a supporter of a team is based on territorial proximity – to become a fan of the team whose city you grow up in, to the team which your parents support. Though there are fans of non-proximal teams, becoming a sports fan is something highly personal and not something which can be negated through reason (“I fell in love with Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls”). Consider for example this anonymous comment posted in an online forum (‘Maple Leafs Hot Stove’): “I have been a Leaf fan since 1959. I am also a native Torontonion and this team is wrapped up in my identity. That was just the way it was when I was a kid, so I was brought up on this stuff. I cannot even imagine supporting another team, so I live and die with them every year.”¹⁵⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate on this epistemological position in *What Is Philosophy?*, as they assert that “A true opinion will be the one that coincides with that of the group to which one belongs by expressing it. This is clear to see in certain competitions: you must express your opinion, but you ‘win’ (you have spoken the truth) if you say the same as the majority of those participating in the competition” (146).¹⁵⁹ While we are reminded of the ubiquity of the territorializing agon, such that even what is termed ‘banal’ is a potential site of contest, in having evaluated the everyday discourses of sports fans we have found a significant segment of both (critically) active and

¹⁵⁸ Regarding the question ‘why do sports fans care?’, Noam Chomsky, who grew up in Philadelphia, forwards this response: “I don’t know anybody on the team. They don’t know me... Why do I care? Why do I get all excited if the football team wins and all downcast if it loses? And it’s true, you do: you’re taught from childhood that you’ve got to worry about the Philadelphia Phillies, where I was” (*Understanding Power* 100).

¹⁵⁹ “The essence of opinion is will to majority and already speaks in the name of a majority” (*What Is Philosophy?* 146)

passive participants – a state of ambivalence (and dialectics) which certainly factors into the lack of scholarship that sports fans have received in studies of sports and religiosity. While social theorists are most inclined to study the spectacular contest as contained within the arena, there is far less recognition of the synonymous state of collective agonism (neo-tribalism). And yet, given the associations between ancient Greek athletic contests and modern spectacles of sport, we are bound to begin properly recognizing the interplay between politics, competition, community, war, violence, tribalism, festival, (spectacular) athletics and the sacred. Maffesoli thus opines of the fateful bond between fanatics and sacred totems: “We 'belong' to a place, a group, or a local personality who thus becomes an eponymous hero...It remains to *participate* in the glory and the wrath of the master” (*The Time of the Tribes* 119).

What sustains the group is its religiosity and what forms religiosity is the quality of vitality. In *Darwin's Pharmacy*, Richard Doyle analogously situates collective aesthetics firmly within the aforementioned *agon* (of supremacy), in which neo-tribalism would be understood as a (performative, theatrical) contest for capturing attention, wholly a matter of vitality, in which Doyle writes that “such competition for attention tends to produce collectives. Common to all of Darwin's analyses of sexual selection on everything from insects to humans is the commons itself. Bowerbirds, locusts, and orators all seek attention and the production of a collective” (143).¹⁶⁰ We find in the spectacle of sports an eminent site for the social competition for attention and the commons which develops therein.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, online forums featuring a community of (sports) fans who “speak out” to each other encapsulate the selective (semiotic)

¹⁶⁰ “With ‘charm’ and the ‘dancing rock-thrush of Guiana’, Darwin introduces the possibility that survival comes not to the fittest but the sexiest, those who are adepts of attention gathering” (Doyle 139).

¹⁶¹ “What's natural is the microbe. All the rest —health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of *attention*” (Camus, *italics added*, 211).

charm and vitality of the spectacle of sports, in effect a remedy for the deafening silence of alienation. For example, in *The Globalisation of Addiction*, Bruce Alexander addresses the role that social dislocation (from the absence of social ties and bonds) plays in the onset of addictions, as he writes “People can endure dislocation for a time. However, severe, prolonged dislocation eventually leads to unbearable despair, shame, emotional anguish, boredom, and bewilderment. It regularly precipitates suicide and less direct forms of self-destruction” (114).¹⁶² In this sense, the spectacle of sports emerges as a “great symptomatologist” like the writer and artist envisaged by Deleuze, the shaman who harnesses ecodelics or the storytelling priest. Boredom, for example, is seen as a temporal experience of affectual or existential absence of social meaning and identity, and as such the spectacle of sports – present from birth – functions effectively at displacing dread, whereby boredom initiates a space for meaningful temporality, locution and a commons. Thus, while we have outlined a categorical distinction between spectators (fanatics) and athletes (actors), it should be noted that divine actors frequently confess to being *fanatics*, referring to the therapeutic dimension of religiosity – striving to remedy social dislocation. In this regard, repetition in sports fanaticism breeds a sort of mastery: repetition immerses the fanatic into more complex discourses and languages, whereby the fanatic connects, dissolves and reproduces. For example, as the spectator/fanatic perpetuates giving attention to the captivating performance, they become familiarized with the rules of the game, the numbers on the jersey (which demarcate specific players), and with underlying patterns, a dynamic semiotic commons blooms from an athletic contest. Online sports forums thus offer tremendous

¹⁶² Anthropologist Yasmine Musharbash implicates Enlightenment principles in identifying the absence of religiosity in aboriginal Australians as a harbinger of *ennui*: “...at Yuendumu, boredom is generated at the intersection of ‘the old ways’ and (post)colonial (time) disciplines, but for it to be experienced, a lack in meaning needs to be felt. This happens when the values underlying Warlpiri ways of being in the world and the world, encountered through settlement realities, are recognized as coming together in a ‘meaningless fit’” (Musharbash 315).

opportunities for correspondence, in which a dissolution into the collective is amplified by communing with others, evaluating, predicting, performing, imagining, and bursting with emotion, offering an imagined measure of control unparalleled in everyday life – manifesting in discussions frequently in the form of proposed ‘exchanges’ of players between teams (fantasy trades), projected lineups (a matter of managerial strategy) or (rule) changes to structural elements within the game. A similar trope of control emerges in reports of ecodelic experiences (such as in the intentional preparation of *set and setting*). While the game is ultimately out of the sports fanatic’s control, there is nonetheless a significant fanatical effort at empowerment, including over interpretations of truth – sports fanatics often position themselves within the role of a spell-caster, as opposed to being cast under a spell. Consider how Richard Doyle describes the function of (online) ecodelic trip reports as “first and foremost protocols, scripts for the better or worse ingestion of psychedelic plants and compounds” (47), whereby the correspondences between sports fanatics in online forums present themselves analogously, as ‘scripts’ or semiotic (rhetorical) software for the communication of an aesthetic and ecstatic experience.¹⁶³ In addition to their programmatic element, some online communities become a sort of therapy group for the consumption (fanaticism) of the ‘drug’ – a *pharmakon* – of sports, as evidenced by the following comments posted in an online sports forum community (Maple Leafs Hot Stove):

FlareKnight

This game was an experience.

¹⁶³ Richard Doyle: “I want to suggest that trip reports are fundamentally scripts, what I have called elsewhere rhetorical software: linguistic, visual, musical, and narrative sequences whose function resides less in their ‘meaning’ than in their capacity to be repeated and *help generate patterns of response*. They are part of the psychonaut apparatus, not a supplement to it. They are compositions that suggest, but do not exhaust what one may very well *become* in contact with entheogens” (52).

Neon Deon

So when we beat a bad team by a lot "they just suck" and when we barely beat a bad team while still controlling play "that was unacceptable and can't continue like this"

ChazzMichaelMichaels Neon Deon

eeeeehhhhh You're figuring it out! Just be miserable, you'll get the hang of it!¹⁶⁴

Mike K

Maple Leaf hot Stove is consuming my life

Maxwell Howe Mike K

its a mass group therapy website

Xxxxxxnew Maxwell Howe

'Therapy' implies some sort of cure.

-YAK- Mike K

it has an addictive quality to it....lol

The Colborne Ultimatum Mike K

We're all addicts.¹⁶⁵

DeclanK MLHS

6,000 comments today. Wow

¹⁶⁴ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/02/06/toronto-maple-leafs-vs-ottawa-senators-game-53-preview-projected-lines/>

¹⁶⁵ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/02/04/toronto-maple-leafs-vs-anaheim-ducks-game-52-preview-projected-lines/>

MC DeclanK

You folks do an amazing job. I'm not a social media whore, yet I'm on here all the time. Best content and comment base hands down.

Was on here a sad amount today. But again, best Leaf content on an important day, and best Leaf fans to go through it with.

DeclanK MLHS MC

Group therapy¹⁶⁶

Joe Johns Burtonboy

Hey, welcome back Bboy. I hope you had a refreshing break.

Burtonboy MLHS Joe Johns

[This p]lace is like a drug . You know you should kick the habit but keep getting dragged back in.¹⁶⁷

The sights and sounds of the spectacle of sports reverberate throughout the social fabric because fanatics have an eye and ear for it – the dancing and singing of the courtship in full effect – the sports fanatic becoming wholly enthralled and captivated (as evidenced by the sports fanatic’s unbreakable bond to the team), wherein online sports forums emerge as maps, stages (dramatic and theatrical), crowds, communities and battlefields, among other things. Hence, we find for example that the relationship between sports priests and fanatics functions reciprocally and in a mutually affective fashion, as each organization perpetually acts and is acted upon (like

¹⁶⁶ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2018/12/02/mike-babcock-post-game-leafs-5-vs-wild-3/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://mapleleafshotstove.com/2019/11/26/sheldon-keefe-that-weve-tried-to-tap-into-the-offensive-abilities-of-the-players-has-created-a-little-more-excitement-and-perhaps-a-little-bit-more-willingness-to-give-a-little-extra-on-th/>

the wasp and the orchid). In this sense, even the therapy (or support) group similarly materializes the religious tenets of a community of fanatics, a priestly class and the element of the sacred, mutually contributing to the vitality of the assemblage of the spectacle of sports. While it was previously noted how the prophet emerges in both religion and the spectacle of sports, the eruptive utterances of (sports) prophets and fanatics alike – amplified and evident in contemporary digital media or online forums – also conjures the (attention-seeking) powers of drugs or ecodelics, as Henri Michaux described in his trip report *Miserable Miracle*: “Mescaline acted in such a way that it gave me the desire to make proclamations. On what? On anything at all” (81). The lure of the drug and the sporting spectacle thrives on the vitality of affects such as symbolic utterances, at once personal and collective – that is, a concrete and semiotic network of (shared) rituals, myths, and temples, effectively capturing the attention of the spectator and reproducing a fanatic (worshipper). Is the spectacle of sports a (mass) distraction or a social method of survival and empowerment? According to Michel Maffesoli in his article “The Sociology of Everyday Life,” competition (or conflict) presents itself as an element of the natural condition at both the microscopic (everyday) and macroscopic level: “There are periods when a society (or group of societies) functions in reference to a dominant value; these are, however, preceded and succeeded in a cyclical manner, by others which seem to maintain different ‘contradictory’ values, values in competition” (4).¹⁶⁸ We find that the fundamental formal distinction between the sacred and the profane effectively initiates, sustains and empowers the conflictual (and vitalizing) nature of neo-tribalism. The game of sports pertains to the art of the struggle for existence, which is essential to the sacred and the profane. While the sacred has a

¹⁶⁸ “The frivolity of appearances: to manifest the collective-body, but at the same time to preserve, protect and shield against diverse obstacles (which threaten the group). This is precisely the function of the rules and ritualizations of ethics – to enable the expression and maximization of the potentialities of individuals” (*Aux Creux des Apparences* 145; my translation).

noted element of ineffability, like ecodelics, there remains a certain degree of epistemological permeability for empathetic investigation, in part due to technologies such as online trip-reports and sports forums. By including the spectacle of sports as a form of religiosity and the sacred, the theorist becomes enveloped by the investigation of the power and *puissance* therein, as Roger Caillois prescribed:

There are certain rare, fleeting, and violent moments of his intimate experience on which man places extreme value. From this given the College of Sociology takes its departure, striving to reveal equivalent processes at the very heart of social existence, in the elementary phenomena of attraction and repulsion determining this existence, as in its most marked and meaningful formations such as churches, armies, brotherhoods, secret societies. Three principal problems dominate this study: the problems of power, of the sacred, and of myths (Hollier 11).¹⁶⁹

What are the ties that bond modern society together? What is sacred? The focus of this investigation has invariably identified encounters with the everyday life of the modern sports spectacle, its logics, myths, passions, for it is there where we find what Durkheim referred to as the social force – the *élan vital*, from which we may gain a further appreciation for (or advantage in) the agonal nature of life, of the multiplicities of power and *puissance*. It is in this sense that contemporary (post)subculture theory is valuable for its appreciation of neo-tribalism and the art of forms. While subcultures originally were studied as self-enclosed and resistant collectives, post-subculture theory and Michel Maffesoli's concept of neo-tribalism encapsulate the quality

¹⁶⁹ Callois continues: "The precise object of this contemplated activity can be called Sacred Sociology, insofar as that implies the study of social existence in every manifestation where there is a clear, active presence of the sacred. The intention is, thus, to establish the points of coincidence between the fundamental obsessive tendencies of individual psychology and the principal structures governing social organization and in command of its revolutions" (Hollier 11).

of collective aesthetics in a technocratic age in which mobility and multi-group affiliations abound, in contrast to the recognition that much of what were considered ‘alternative forms of sociality’ contributed to the reproduction of dominant modes of being (consumption and commodity fetishism). As subculture theorist Dick Hebdige notes, “It is basically the way in which commodities are used in subculture which mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations” (103). David Muggleton, meanwhile, establishes post-subculture theory as conceptually linked to Maffesoli’s aesthetic concept of *neo-tribalism*: “Such a model dispenses with the theorization of subcultures as either oppositional or incorporated, and arguably brings us close to Hebdige’s (1988: 35) rethinking of his original (1979) approach to CCCS subcultural theory, a reformulation in which ‘the ‘subcultural response’ is neither simply affirmation nor refusal” (Muggleton 13). Thus, in addition to keeping scholarship up to date with fanaticism for the spectacle of sports and its foray into digital media and online communities, this dissertation also takes account of its evocation of religiosity in our digital and spectacular age. A particularly nascent form of immersion for sports fanatics, online sports forums and digital sports media produce a rich tapestry for better understanding contemporary sports fanaticism and the spectacle of sports, its role and function in our society, and its categorization as religious practice. Encounters with online communities have yielded not only discursive rhetorics but significant affective elements as well, as in the products of a technology of catharsis, anger, anxiety, joy, optimism, etc., in which the textual content follows in significance to the expression of deep emotional attachments through collective effervescence, ultimately a reflection of the convergence of the spectacle of sports and fanaticism into religiosity. While the scope of this project exceeded the (digital) boundaries of online sports communities by engaging with the spectacle of sports as a whole, through encounters with the everyday life of sports fanatics we

have become privy to the intimacies of a social tribe and logic, including the manner in which vitality materializes through social performance (ritual). As Maffesoli remarks: “it is worth remembering that the divine issues forth from daily realities and develops gradually through the sharing of simple and routine gestures” (*The Time of the Tribes* 25). Thus, a necessary task of the theorist includes having encounters with the everyday life of sports fanatics in order to participate in and contribute to a further understanding of the totality of which we are a part (and whole) of.

Conclusion: On the Immersive Investigation of Sports Fanaticism

“The details of one day in a person’s life are part of one’s entire life history,” writes Franco Ferrarotti of the biographical method in social research (1). In this sense, this dissertation’s theoretical investigation into the religiosity of sports fanaticism must recognize the author’s (own) immersion into the fabric of its everyday life, in which a snapshot of “one day” would invariably reveal its prodigious presence, even further highlighted by the recent “postponement” of all spectacular sports due to the global threat of the coronavirus COVID-19. To begin with, the seeds of this author’s own hockey (sports) fanaticism were sown in early childhood, during a period in which being born in Toronto, Canada conspired to inculcate prospective fanatics into the spectacle of sports, firmly established within the social fabric. These sensations included being thrust onto the ice itself with skates at a young age, as well as exposure to a persistent presence of the professional game in both public and private spaces (particularly on television). The attraction of hockey as sport and spectacle meanwhile dwarfed a similar exposure to the Christian Church and its rituals – the latter being something to escape from, the former something which enthusiastically captured attention. The delight of playing hockey effectively meshed with not only the delight of spectating the (professional) game, but also cheering for a team that was symbolized by a blue totemic logo and team name of the territory that was identified with (by residing in) – first, the Toronto Maple Leafs, followed by Team Canada, which at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan was composed of the best hockey players in the world (from the NHL) for the first time, from which a spectacular event emerged. The development of cheering for either of these totemic teams was unequivocally aided by widespread communicative technologies such as radio, print newspaper and television, greatly affecting the distribution and saturation of the spectacle of hockey (and sports). That the

professional game was aesthetically captivating as a performance was buoyed by its fixture in everyday life, being broadcast consistently on primetime television, in addition to being covered daily in print newspapers, on the radio and television (several channels dedicated entirely to sports). Its social significance and presence included becoming part of the daily routine as well as conjuring the momentous, as in the unplanned interruption of school proceedings (in order for the entire school to collectively watch a Canadian Olympic hockey game), a duly rare event. That is, one day included: selecting the 'Sports' section out of the large daily newspaper stack in the morning and reading through its captivating content; continuing at school, time was set aside each day to play in a gymnasium, sometimes with plastic hockey sticks, pucks and nets, and/or at lunch and during recess, a time for (young) adolescents to play outside in a (fenced) yard, where games would dominate the pastime – games with a tennis ball were most popular, however it is noteworthy that a game involving two teams trying to kick the ball into each other's net (characteristically understood as 'football' or 'soccer') was called "foot hockey" by the adolescents; after school, on many occasions a group of 10 or so adolescents would play a game of "road hockey" together, running or rollerblading on a residential street (as the working day was not yet finished) with sticks, nets, a ball and even (specialized) goalie equipment; and depending on the time of the season and the year, Toronto's hockey team may have reached a particularly advanced and dramatic point, causing friendly adolescents to watch the evening's game together on television; otherwise, it is likely for there to be a game or practice to participate in on any given day, a result of being registered in an organized hockey league (within the city) for players under eighteen years old. In many ways, as noted earlier in Doug "Killer" Gilmour's description of his adolescence in Kingston, Ontario, hockey (and ultimately sports) was a social fixture as much as anything else. Certainly, even the everyday iconography of sports reflected an

enthusiastic fanaticism or worship of the spectacle of sports: while a family household would be liable to adorn a kitchen or dining room with a Christian icon, this could pale in comparison to the dressings of the “entertainment” room, ornamented by various sports memorabilia and icons; in the adolescent’s bedroom, while a Christian icon would be tucked away or displayed reluctantly, a large poster of a favoured hockey player would cover most of the closet door (effectively capturing the attention of the magically inclined, to dream, to fantasize, to idealize), the space which stored among other things the “proper” attire that was reluctantly worn for Christian affairs, as well as hockey jerseys, which were worn (to school and otherwise) with pride; during heightened moments of a successful sports season, it would also be customary for the vehicles of fanatics throughout the city to adorn a flag in support of the team, similarly with attire (hats, jerseys) for fanatics. The bedroom poster of an idolized sports athlete is not only a common trope, if not a rite of passage, for an adolescent sports fanatic, it also supports the duality encapsulated by the replica sports jersey donned by fanatics: the magnificence of the extraordinary individual athlete (whose name and number are displayed on the back of the jersey) and the sacredness of the team (whose totemic logo is displayed on the front of the jersey). In effect, as a source of collective myths, rituals, and icons, among other things, the spectacle of sports embodies the characteristics of religiosity that significantly influence both the everyday and the extraordinary faculties of the fanatic or worshipper. Ultimately, the presence of sports fanaticism featured in “one day” of an adolescent or adult can be extraordinary, reflective of a substantive kind of totemic neo-tribalism. Meanwhile, the nascent emergence and saturation of the digital computer and the internet has served to invigorate and magnify the religiosity of the spectacle of sports, where the power of social bonds forms communities among anonymous active (and passive) digital personas, producing an unmatched yield of sports fanaticism. This

author discovered online sports forums over a decade ago and since that time has been a regular observer/participant, originally arriving at this destination by searching for “sports rumours” on the internet, pursuant to (potential) player acquisitions for the home team – one of the greatest matters of intrigue and emotion for sports fanatics (reaching fever levels at points such as the ‘Trade Deadline’ and opening of ‘free agency’). The internet has therewith supplied a seemingly limitless forum for a level (or quality) of speculation which most often would not meet the standards of traditional media outlets – though the latter would eventually recognize this market of attention and devote more resources to it, even if they could not match the commons of discourse online, a most immersive and encompassing communicative technology providing a wholly novel and empowering means to correspond with fellow fanatics, resulting in multiplicities of vibrant (active) communities whose (expressed) passion effectively sustains and animates the ‘magical’ elements of the sacred spectacle of sports through devotion (‘addiction’) to a collective cause, *fanaticism*.

The social logic of being a fan of a sports team is a highly seductive, productive, and prescriptive cult of attraction, like nationalism. At the center of this spectacle is the (athletic) contest, a performance that becomes the primary source of division, between winners/winning and losers/losing – invariably tied to the vitalism of life and death (and such forms of power that materialize). Meanwhile, the mathematics of the athletic spectacle encapsulate therein the refinement of the masses into a select group of exceptional contestants (actors) – a separation which both subjugates and empowers fanatics. Within this social logic, the vitalism inherent to victory reverberates louder than ideal considerations of ethics, forming a troubling opponent for the common historical enthusiasm for the latter, invariably a by-product of the willingness to use unrestrained force (a crucial element in the revered spectacular athletic contest). Nevertheless, a

particularly influential element in this assemblage is that of sociality – in a sense it is the *raison d'être* of religiosity: totems, myths and ritualizations of dynamic sacred forces function as empty (plat)forms for the organization and empowerment of social bonds based on proximity, common aesthetics and iconography, immersed in a totalizing territorial(izing) plane.¹⁷⁰ As (social) vitalism presents itself as a primary undercurrent of religion, we find sports fanaticism to unequivocally embody the mode of religiosity as a mechanism for existential coping and collective ordering, however pervious to hegemonic forces, wherein the flow of discourse is dialectical (in the Platonic sense) and invokes both hope for a common ground and despair over an eternal fractalization of impassioned conflict. Tactically speaking, while the spectacle of sports' hegemonic diversion (of attention) from ethical or political fanaticism (enthusiasm) is efficacious, its subjugation is not absolute – there is ample space for and expressions of counter-hegemonic discourses and socialities, such as those which flourished in at least one online sports community which remained vibrant during the extended cancellation of all spectacular sports during the global threat of the coronavirus COVID-19; and as noted previously, while extraordinary spectacular athletes are idolized and thus considerably influential, the spectacle of sports remains permeable to existing enthusiasms and discourses of terrific social criticisms expressed by and through athletic idols. *If you can't beat them, join them (and then beat them)*. Thus, in contrast to the accusations of widespread apathy in postmodern politics, sociologist Michel Maffesoli identifies the common role of vitality in the fanaticisms of the traditional religious, political, as well as spectacular sporting kind: "...the massive political disengagement we can see around us today is in no way a correlative of an accelerated dismantling, but rather a

¹⁷⁰ Regarding aesthetics, Maffesoli proposes that "...the aesthetics of sentiment are in no way characterized by an individual or 'interior' experience, but on the contrary, by something essentially open to others, to the Other. This overture connotes the space, the locale, the proxemics of the common destiny" (*The Time of the Tribes* 14).

sign of renewed vitality. This perdurability is a mark of the divine, which is not an overarching and external entity, but rather is located at the heart of the reality of the world, at once both its essence and its destiny” (*The Time of the Tribes* 60). The concept of neo-tribalism espoused by Maffesoli has become topical precisely in the contemporary spectacular political domain, unleashed by the personality of President Donald Trump of the United States of America, through which demagoguery and colonialism have come to match (and exceed, by threat of force) the functional rhetorical limits of ethical and critical popular discourses, as in the slogan ‘Make America Great Again’, which has effectively manifested a totemic quality through its organized and commonly shared aesthetics, a consequence of (political) tribalism and vitalism as a whole and further perpetuated through the mode of sports fanaticism by reinforcing non-rational social logics where both collective and individual power and *puissance* (and their antithesis) are foremost prized – even above ethics. And yet, in opposition to well-established criticisms of an increasingly totalizing and subjugating state of (capitalist) labour, the spectacle of sports (and neo-tribalism) flourishes in its capacity to arouse emotions (the faculties), ideals and a substantive sense of belonging and meaning infused into everyday life and the sacred.¹⁷¹

This immersive study has thus granted the study of sports and religion an invaluable perspective into the enthusiastic social (non-rational) logics which abound the social fabric in the form of sports fanaticism, recently territorialized by digital technologies, such that spaces (*fanum*) have

¹⁷¹ We are nineteen years removed from Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, a culmination of his research on civic involvement, in which he concluded that: “...across a very wide range of activities, the last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors. We spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction, we spend more time watching (admittedly, some of it in the presence of others) and less time doing. We know our neighbors less well, and we see old friends less often. In short, it is not merely ‘do good’ civic activities that engage us less, but also informal connecting” (115).

emerged that even further magnify a formidable Church of Sports, an eminent site for sacred myths and rituals of sports fanatics, priests and athletes.

Appendix A



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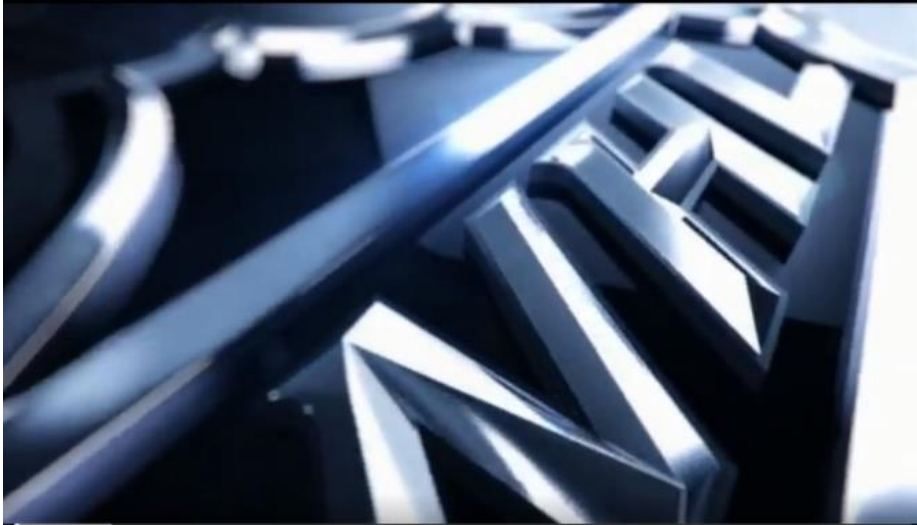
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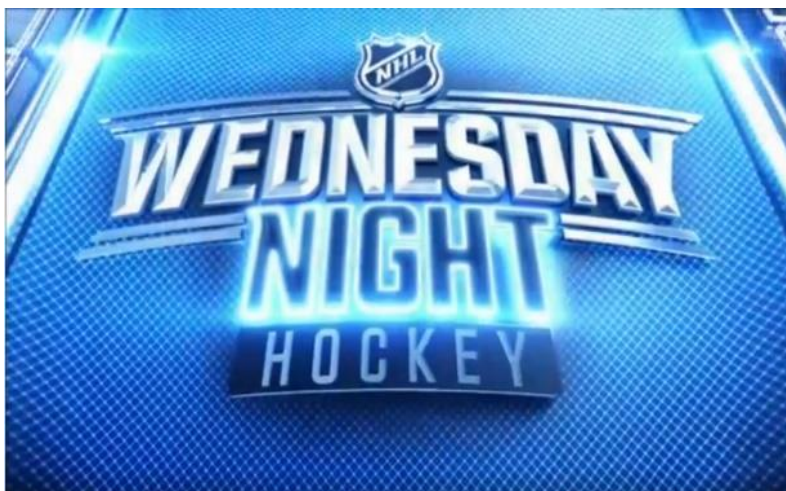
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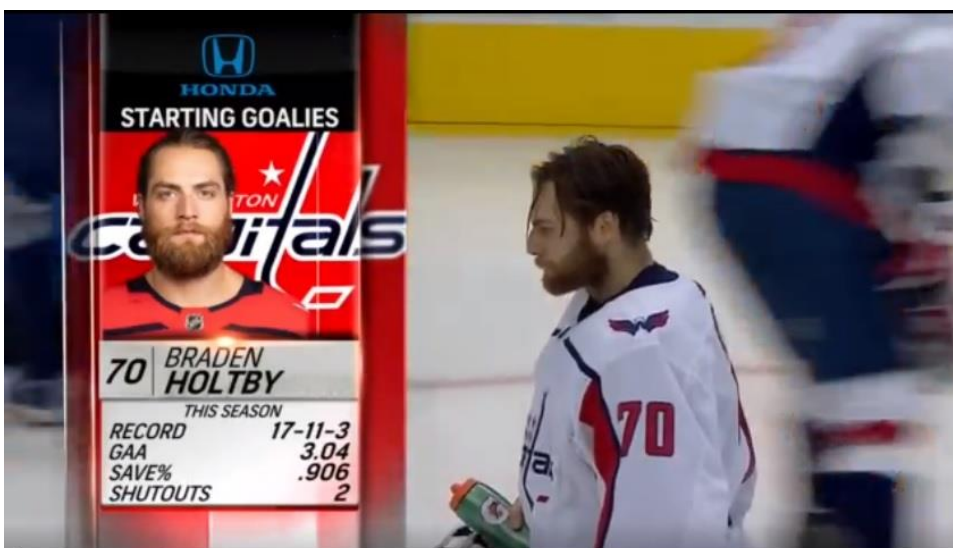
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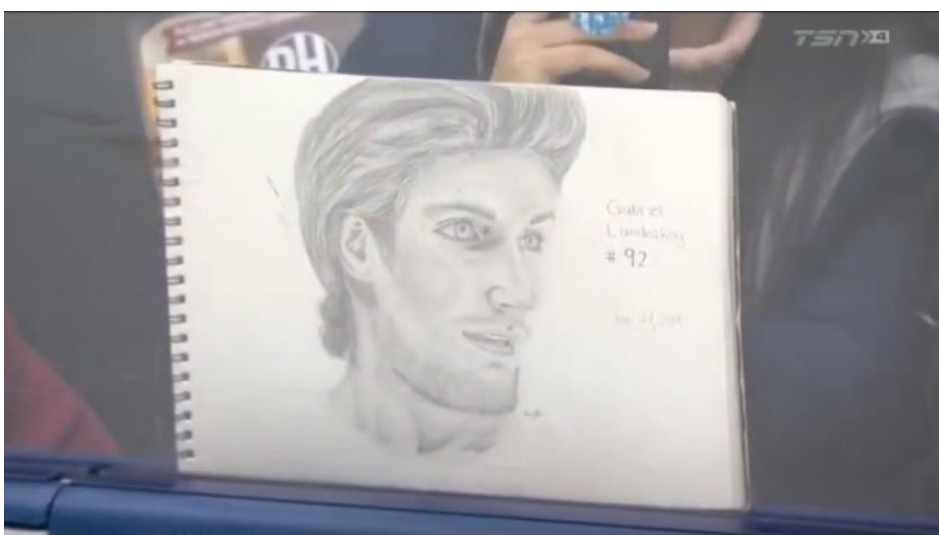
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