Some Competing Analogies for Sport

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THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF ANSWERS to the perennial question of what sport, and sports history, might mean to the person who watches rather than participates. I begin with the rather neutral word "watch" to throw into relief the greater specificity implied by alternative terms. What difference is implied when we speak of "beholders" rather than "spectators?"[1] Of the "audience" rather than the "crowd"? Of "die-hard" rather than "fair-weather" fans?[2] Should we think differently about those who have an "enthusiasm" for sport, and those who are "deeply committed" and those who suffer a "dependency?"[3] The terms we choose depend on the kind of analysis we are doing. The kind of analysis, in turn, often depends on an analogy or identification between sport and a literary or media genre: examples might include the soap opera, the lyric poem, the sacred text, the feature film and the novel. Sometimes these analogies are made explicit; often they are not.[4] In this paper, I would like to suggest some ways in which distinctions between "different breed[s] of rooter" depend on the analogy at play.[5] All analogies, of course, are partial. Most of the examples I draw upon here involve European athletes performing within Europe, but some involve Southern Europeans in North America, South Americans in Northern Europe, and so on. There are no limits to the global marketplace of performance and spectatorship. While different cultures inevitably develop different analogies to describe their experiences, the general approach that I am attempting to develop, like twenty-first century sport itself, is comparative and international in scope.

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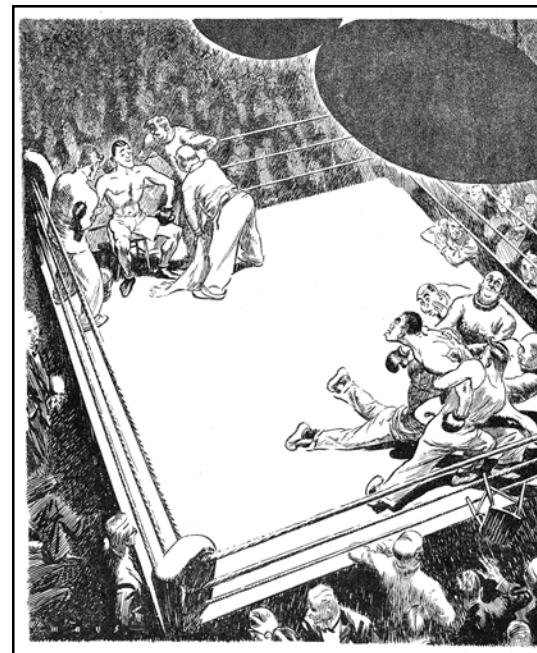
Uses and Gratifications

Media Studies has analyzed "mediated sport" at length and at least since the 1970s has concentrated on its "uses and gratifications"; that is, the focus is less "what does the media do to people" than "what do people do with the media."[6] Building on Gramscian ideas of "resistance," "intervention," and "contested terrain," numerous studies have explored the heterogeneous and historically variable "interests" of spectators, depending on class, race, nation, gender or sexuality.[7] "The social world of actual audiences," states cultural theorist Ien Ang, "consists of an infinite and ever expanding myriad of dispersed practices and experiences."[8] For many commentators, however, common ground can be found in the idea of "pleasure," which in turn is often linked to "identification." "If the pleasures of sports viewing have a structure," maintains cultural theorist Garry Whannel, "then identification is central to it."[9]

A focus on identification is just one of the ways in which Media Studies indicates that sporting events should be absorbed into the larger category of popular media texts. Sports scientists Kathleen Kinkema and Janet C. Harris, for example, make links between mediated sport and soap operas: "stereotyped characters and storylines, creation and resolution of suspense or drama as a central plot unfolds and exploration of particular themes are components of narrative that are often present in media portrayals of sport."[10] Henry Jenkins' ethnography, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), meanwhile, extends the focus to the popular assimilation and use of a wide range of different kinds of media texts. For him, what connects cult television, video games, Hollywood movies, genre fiction, comic books, Japanese animation, and sport is the way in which their fans are traditionally described in pathological terms, suggesting "religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness."[11] Jenkins prefers to think of fans as "active producers and manipulators" of meanings that are often emotionally complex or ambiguous. The fan's response to the media text "typically involves not simply fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism, and it is the combination of the two responses which motivates their active engagement with the media."[12]

Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works. Because the texts continue to fascinate, fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but must rather try to find ways to salvage them for their interests.[13]

Sarah Wurble (Shelley Winters) in *Tennessee Champ* (MGM, 1954). COURTESY OF KASIA BODDY.



"Go easy this round, Basher; The Hair Cream Company is takin' 'is pitcher," *Punch*, October 1935.

Jenkins' acknowledgment of the failure of popular narratives to satisfy distinguishes his approach from most discussions of "uses and gratifications," and I will return to this in a moment. But first, I would like to consider in greater detail two specific aspects of the "media text" with which fans must struggle: characterization and plot.

Media Studies draws attention to the fact that the text in which sportsmen and sportswomen appear extends beyond the sporting event itself. In other words, "a boxing match featuring Mike Tyson cannot be isolated from all the other media images of Tyson we may have consumed."[14] There are various ways in which Media Studies talks about the protagonists of its texts—they are sometimes referred to as "celebrities," "icons," "heroes," or "role models." But perhaps the most useful way to understand the inter-relationship between the sports performance and "subsidiary forms of circulation" is through the concept of stardom as developed by Film Studies.[15] What is now known as Star Studies developed as one of several reactions against *auteurism*—that is, the theory that the film should be considered as the product of the director alone, that a film is authored in the same way as a novel or poem. Sports commentators who stress athletic genius rather than training strategies might also be thought of as auteurist critics: the athlete (or sometimes the star coach or manager) is praised as the author of the performance. Star Studies, however, offers a different approach, placing the figure of the film star within a complicated nexus of studio, genre, text, and audience. Any one element in that nexus can form the object of inquiry.[16]

One way of distinguishing a movie star from a mere actor is to say that while the actor plays the part, the star is always partly himself or herself. So when audiences flocked to *Anna Christie* (1930) or *Ninotchka* (1939), it was to see Garbo talk or Garbo laugh, not

the character she was playing talk or laugh. The studios recognized that fact very well and marketed the films accordingly. A similar kind of fandom might involve a comparison of David Beckham's performances while "starring" at Manchester United (as directed by the auteur Alex Ferguson) with those while co-starring at Ancelotti's AC Milan or even while making guest appearances as a substitute for Capello's England. As in the case of Garbo or other movie stars, the sports star's off-screen appearance and activities (interviews in newspapers, paparazzi photographs, appearances on TV charity fundraisers) attract intense interest and constitute part of the whole media text within which he or she is scrutinized by different types of audience. It is when the whole media text is taken into account that the notion of the sports "viewer" or "spectator" seems inadequate.

On this level, the comparison of the sports star and the movie star seems uncontroversial. But John Ellis' "basic definition" goes further: a star, he says, is "a performer in a particular medium whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation, and then feeds back into future performances."[17] That is, if Garbo's earliest roles shaped the way she was initially presented off-screen in places like fan magazines, her portrayal in those magazines then had an impact on her screen performances as well the audience's reading of those performances. It was because Garbo had become associated with the phrase "I want to be alone" that the line was written into the scripts of *Grand Hotel* (1932) and *Ninotchka*; Garbo was required to perform her star image. While there is already a lot of talk about the subsidiary forms of circulation at work in sport, little attention has been paid to how the feed-back process might work; that is, the way in which off-court activities might affect not simply the way spectators *view* on-court activities but those activities themselves. In the case of Mike Tyson, it seems very clear that his star persona—developed with reference to horror as well as boxing movies—did inform his ring performances.[18] But what about less obvious examples? When Robinho performs a step-over, it is not always, or even usually, for functional reasons (because it is the best way to score), but because step-overs are part of what the star image of the Brazilian footballer demands (even at Manchester City).[19] Being a star can get in the way of being a good footballer, just as it can get in the way of being a good actor.

The plotted nature of the sporting event is something that commentators also dispute. Whannel, for example, argues that sports events have an edge over "fictional narratives" such as soap operas precisely because "they are not predetermined by authorship, nor can they be predicted by cultural code or even specialized knowledge." Sports, he states, "offer the rare opportunity to experience genuine uncertainty."[20]

But uncertainty only exists at one level of the sports viewing experience. We may not know *exactly* what will happen, but we do know the *kind* of thing that will happen and the range of things that *could* happen. In any football match, two teams will definitely spend at least ninety minutes trying to get the ball into the opposition's goalmouth; there will most likely be corners, throw-ins, and saves; there may be goals, sendings-off, and penalties. Similarly, while we do not know exactly what will happen in any single Hercules Poirot story, we know that at least one person will die and that his or her final movements will be reconstructed through the employment of some Belgian "little grey cells." In other words, ritualized (that is, repetitive) pleasure is something that both sport and genre fiction acknowledge. Genres, as literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss observes, provide two

things. For writers/athletes, they offer (historically shifting) "models" to be followed; for readers/spectators they suggest (historically shifting) "horizons of expectations."[21] We read one Agatha Christie novel after another precisely because we want to enjoy familiar, repetitive pleasures—with, of course, a few variations thrown in. We watch game after game for the same reasons: at home we wait for the commentator to tell us which player has scored a goal on his birthday; and at the stadium, we enjoy taunting the opposition by chanting "Who are you?" It is not uncertainty but the fine balance between certainty and uncertainty that makes sport and genre fiction appealing.

Thinking about sports in terms of narrative is complicated, however, because plots can be detected on many, ever-longer, timescales: the single game, the season and then the "annals of history," as in "This one will go down in the annals of big European nights at Anfield" or "Colin Cameron headed the winner and made Wolves history with their first Premiership goal."[22] History, understood to mean rivalry, can exist between players, clubs, nations, and in different contexts—Nadal and Federer at Wimbledon is one story; Nadal and Federer at the French Open another.[23] If the most interesting question that sport asks is "Who will win?" perhaps its success lies in an ability both to answer the question definitively (at the level of game, set and then match, and then, later, at the level of tournament) and to keep asking it indefinitely.

Another way of putting this would be to suggest that there are two kinds of time at play in sports narratives: the sacred and the secular. Arsenal won the 2003-2004 Premiership competition and, in terms of sacred time, that unbeaten team will always be the Invincibles; "the team's Platonic essence stays intact."[24] In secular time, however, the collective noun "Arsenal" now refers to an almost completely different set of individuals and has gone on to new victories, draws and defeats; as far as we know, it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This process is one of the ways in which sports resemble soap operas. The personnel changes but the story never ends: one football season or tennis tour leads into another with any break filled with the "methadone" of pre-season tournaments, or, at the very least, transfer or injury news.[25] Sport encourages anticipation as well as remembering.[26]

The nature of the story also depends on who is telling it, and for whom. The same event can, as the cricketer and history graduate Ed Smith notes, provoke widely differing, "often contradictory," explanations. "Most arguments in sport and in history," he maintains, "are not about what happened but about what matters." Smith is particularly interested in the "uses of history" for participants who are interested in planning future strategies.[27] But history also has competing versions, and uses, for spectators and supporters. The story of a particular football season produced by a fanzine is very different from that produced by an individual club program (or website), and different again from that produced by television and radio sports commentary. A consideration of the full range of modes employed in those narratives is not possible here; nevertheless I would like to mention two particular features.

Popular sports history of various kinds superstitiously loves numbers, which it calls "statistics," although the numbers evoked have nothing to do with records designed to establish predictability according to mathematical criteria. Consider the talismanic quality attributed to an athlete's birthday (something which sports commentators always remind

us of), or an anniversary. When Spain beat Italy on penalties on June 22, 2008, the *Daily Mirror* reminded readers that "the Spanish suffered against England at Euro 96 on June 22 and also went out of the World Cup in 1986 and 2002 in identical fashion on the same date," and praised the final penalty-taker Cesc Fábregas for lifting "Spain's penalty shoot-out curse:" "the young midfielder ended the hoodoo."[28] A kind of magical thinking is also at play in the obsession of fans with the counter-factual, with stories of "what might have been" (what if Gareth Southgate had not missed his penalty in the England-Germany semi-final of Euro 96?) and with fantasy teams and "superfights." Would Rocky Marciano have beaten Muhammad Ali or, even more difficult to judge, how would either of them have fared against the great nineteenth-century bare-knuckle champions?[29] How would the England Ashes-winning cricket team of 2005 have fared against the England Ashes-winning cricket team of 1981? Would you rather have Freddie or Botham in your team? These kinds of narratives require a knowledge of history, but then use that knowledge to elide historical specificity. They are, perhaps, the sporting equivalent of magical realism.

In club sports, acquiring a knowledge of history also seems to be part of the process of connecting to the club "essence:" "narrative production," argues historian John Efron has argued, is the "binding force of the supporter experience."[30] To partake of that essence, the supporter must learn the history—not for scholarly reasons (although scholarship is involved) but as a kind of initiation. New players too, or indeed new managers and owners, are urged to learn about the history of the club as if that knowledge will instill and sustain loyalty, will itself work magic against the effects of the market. If individual matches resemble genre fictions, the history of the club (in football) or of the weight division (in boxing) tends to assume the status of a holy text, a kind of Biblical succession of patriarchal figures. Bertie Mee begat Terry Neill begat Don Howe begat George Graham begat Stewart Houston begat Bruce Rioch begat the messiah Arsène Wenger (and here the New Testament begins, when the attritional survival strategies of the off-side trap gave way to redemptive free-flowing total football). Boxing purists ignore the profusion of "Alphabet titles" and accept only "The Man Who Beat the Man."[31]

Sport As Lyric

If the ongoing secular experience of sport spectatorship is the focus both for media studies (which tends to assume that mediation itself produces meaning) and histories by or for supporters, accounts of sports by novelists, poets, philosophers, and the "higher" journalists tend to concentrate on some version of the sacred. While it is not impossible for sacred time to correspond to season-length chunk (the Invincibles again) or a calendar year (a tennis grand slam), more often it is found in much smaller temporal units: the seconds it takes for a knockout, a hole-in-one, the perfect drop shot. While media scholars read sport as an endless soap opera, latter-day Romanticists seek isolated moment in time that enables an escape from, a transcendence of, temporal process.

In the early nineteenth century it became commonplace to say that poetry could be identified *as poetry* by the existence of discrete moments of powerful feeling. "Poetry" could be found, therefore, as much (or more often) in single lines or short passages as in complete poems. Indeed, long poems were considered incapable of sustaining such strong emotion, and short pieces were praised as manifestations of poetry in its purest form.[32]

John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that all genuine poems must be "short poems; it being impossible that a feeling so intense . . . should sustain itself at its highest elevation for long together . . . a long poem is always felt . . . to be something unusual and hollow."[33] Edgar Allan Poe went even further to suggest that "a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase 'a long poem' is simply a flat contradiction in terms."[34] "What we term a long poem," Poe says, "is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects."[35]

A similar view of sport seems to lie behind some recent discussions. Latter-day Romantics are not interested in the long haul; unlike "supporters," they find no interest in a "complete record" of Cambridge United fixtures, 1970-2005 but instead locate "sport" in the brief athletic-aesthetic effects that punctuate games, matches, and competitions.[36] For the literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "it was not Babe Ruth's impressive lifetime statistics that made him . . . the greatest baseball player of all time, but rather that one moment in 1932, in a game against the Chicago Cubs, when he 'announced' a decisive home run by pointing in the direction where the ball that he was about to hit would leave the stadium. As indeed it did."[37] The word created the deed. Of course Gumbrecht is far from unique in his focus on a "specific, concise movement," or "sudden, surprising convergence," on "moments of intensity" and "epiphanies" of athletic inspiration, and in his two-fold conclusion: first, that such out-of-the-ordinary moments of beauty are what constitute the greatness of sport; and second, that the possibility of their happening explains the appeal of sports spectatorship.[38]

I would like to separate out these two points. The first seems to be a response to the question "what makes someone a great athlete?" (a very different question, it might seem, from Media Studies' emphasis on what makes a great star). Ed Smith highlights a comparison made by the literary critic Christopher Ricks between the "great athlete" and the "great artist:" both, says Ricks, are "at once highly trained and deeply instinctual." Smith finds this formulation useful because he wants to argue that too much attention has been paid to the conscious (professionally trained) side of sport and not enough to its subconscious (amateurish, instinctual) aspects. "Physical genius," he maintains, "often depends on an element of mystery."[39] Smith is writing a paean to the values of "amateurism," but his ideas overlap with sports psychology's discussion of the "zone."[40] Since the 1970s, psychologists have been conducting studies asking athletes to describe that "special place": "heightened states of consciousness during participation in sport."[41] But, ironically, the goal of analyzing the conditions needed to achieve the extraordinary—"an experience of a time that stood out from the average"—is to find ways of making such moments more ordinary.[42] It is not my intention to argue that athletes do not experience "heightened states of consciousness"; rather I would like to consider the ways in which commentators from disciplines other than sports refer to these states to support their quasi-religious discussions of sport. Once again there is a desire to connect the athlete—who may report feeling that "the performance almost becomes a holy place"—to the spectator, who experiences "a sense of alterity generated by the freedom and beauty of the sports activity."[43] While the mechanism that connects athlete and "beholder" is said to be distance—"a distance large enough for the beholder to believe that his heroes inhabit a different world"—the beholder's body, nevertheless, inevitably betrays its desire for identification. "In your

recollection," writes Gumbrecht, "you can recreate [the game's] form, and as you hold on to it in memory, you feel an impulse running through your own muscles, as if to embody what your hero achieved."[44] The experience of being "lost in focused intensity" provides a link between the "fascination of watching sports" and "motivation of performance."[45]

In 2006 the American novelist, and former highly-ranked tennis junior, David Forster Wallace turned his attention to what he called "Federer Moments." Wallace's concern was to connect the experience of the artist/athlete producer of moments of "beauty," "inspiration," and "impossibility" (concluding that he was of "a type that one calls genius, or mutant, or avatar") and that of the spectator. Federer Moments then were defined, first of all, in terms of spectator reaction: the "times, as you watch the young Swiss play, when the jaw drops and eyes protrude and sounds are made that bring spouses in from other rooms to see if you're O.K." Foster Wallace entitled his essay "Federer as Religious Experience," slightly to make fun of Wimbledon's self-styling as the "cathedral of tennis," but largely in earnest. He interrupts his account of the 2006 men's final at several points to reflect on the seven-year-old boy who performed the ritual coin toss. The boy had liver cancer, and Foster Wallace struggles to imagine, then decides "one cannot, of course," how his mother coped with her child's illness and his "question—the big one, the obvious one." He concludes the essay by stating that the tennis player's "inspiration" is "contagious"—what the Federer Moment allows is for the spectator too to feel "inspired and (in a fleeting, mortal way) reconciled." If we need to ask "reconciled to what?" we need only read Foster Wallace's footnotes 1 and 17:

> Rather like certain kinds of rare, peak-type sensuous epiphanies ("I'm so glad I have eyes to see this sunrise!" etc.), great athletes seem to catalyze our awareness of how glorious it is to touch and perceive, move through space, interact with matter.
>
> Whatever deity, entity, energy or random genetic flux produces sick children also produced Roger Federer, and just look at him down there.[46]

In other words, by watching Federer's transcendence of the laws of mere materiality, we can, just for a moment, ourselves transcend those laws.

Such transcendence, however "fleeting," inspires the spectator, first to awe and then to a sustained, and also somehow sustaining, memory. Federer Moments or Gumbrecht's "epiphanies" thus resemble Wordsworth's "spots of time" in that they

> . . . with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A renovating Virtue, whence, depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
> A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.[47]

For all that it stresses "presence," the model of the beholder seems to commit one to living in the future and the past, to waiting for a moment that you will later be able to cherish.[48]

But the Federer Moment, or the Babe Ruth moment, also serve another function, serving as a kind of Arnoldian touchstones, as a synecdoche for cultural—as well as sa-

cred—value. Redemption from capitalism's "cult of distraction" is a common theme in discussions of sport spectatorship.[49] If the neo-Gramscians wanted to reclaim "active audiences" or redefine fans as "poachers," the neo-Kantians wants to turn spectators into beholders. Gumbrecht also wants to rescue sports from its status as a "marginal topic" in "global academia," and one way to do so is to suggest an analogy between sports spectatorship and the "pure disinterested satisfaction" required by Kantian aesthetics.[50] His ideal spectators then "converge in the enthusiasm and intensity with which they experience and later remember key events—and this occurs despite the fact of who won or lost the competition."[51]

Disinterestedness is also the ideal proposed by Joyce Carol Oates in her celebrated 1987 essay *On Boxing*. The essay frequently contrasts the way that men see ("male spectators identify with boxers") with the way that women see (with "characteristic repugnance"), but Oates's point is to distinguish both these perspectives from that of the aficionado (the product of a "trained" eye).[52] While women watching a fight are "likely" to identify with the loser and men with the winner, she writes, "There is a point at which male spectators are able to identify with the fight itself as, it might be said, a Platonic experience abstracted from its particulars."[53] This Platonic position is *not quite* gender-free—women other than Oates usually do not assume it—yet usual categories of gender are transcended. Her ideal spectators, like those described by Gumbrecht and Foster Wallace, are connoisseurs.

Sport As Novel

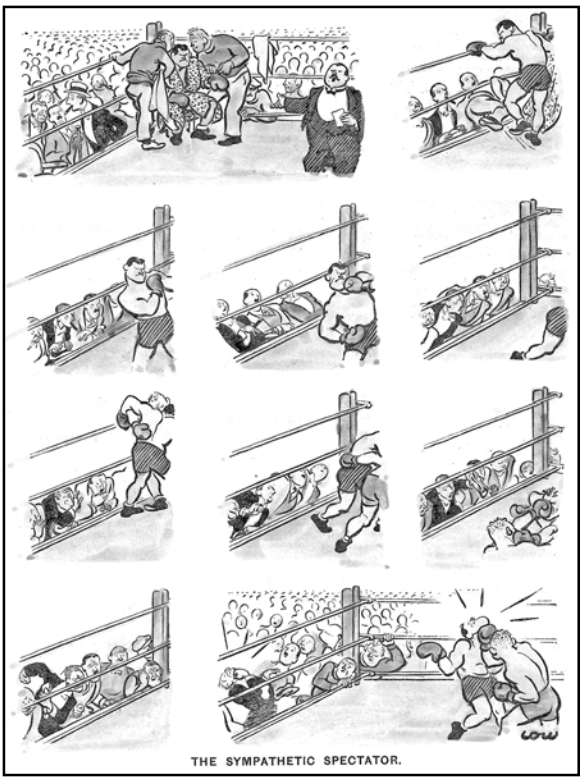
While I would not want to discount the experience of spectators who do not care who wins or loses as long as beauty exists, neither would I describe those experiences as typical. To argue that the essence of sport lies in exceptional moments makes as much sense as it does to suggest that the essence of poetry lies in one or two lines. Do most of us really watch sport in this way, flicking from Sky 1 to Sky 2 to Sky 3 and then on to ESPN, in search of an epiphany?

For the essayist Phillip Lapote, part of the point of "being a sports fan" is "coming to terms with failure:" what Nick Hornby, in his memoir *Fever Pitch* (1996), calls "entertainment as pain" or "fandom as therapy."[54] Like Hornby, Lapote finds that his "chagrins" as a fan have affected him far more than his "triumphs." But he goes further to suggest that the "doldrums" of sports have "meditative value" and provides some examples. In one, he struggles to balance comic despair with realism:

> I used to think that a player had only to be traded to the Mets for his batting average to dip thirty points. Was it the ink in the uniforms that sapped their strength? More likely, Shea Stadium is simply not a good hitters' ballpark because of its mound, wind patterns and dimensions.[55]

In another, watching John Starks of the New York Knicks "hogging the ball and hitting nothing" in the final of the 1994 National Basketball Association playoff against the Houston Rockets, Lapote evokes the "film noir-ish edge" of sports spectatorship:

> Every time I watched Starks square his shoulders and send up a clinker, I felt like Scottie Ferguson in *Vertigo*, trapped in a repetition-compulsion nightmare brought on by the endlessly circular defects of one's character. . . . I had fallen for an unsuitable love object, a femme fatale with the eyes of John Starks.[56]



William Low, "The Sympathetic Spectator," *Punch*, October 1924.

All Lapote's stories of disappointment involve other people: he prevents one girlfriend from seeing the 1986 World Series; he does not propose to another because "sickly grief" consumes them both when the University of Houston Cougars lose the 1980 National Collegiate Athletic Association final. Lapote experiences the "utterly heartbreaking" Knicks defeat in the company of "two neighbors, visiting Danes from across the street." At least, he suggests, their "criminal act" of overly invested "psychic energy" was shared. Disappointment seems to be a more democratic currency than epiphany.

But if Lapote manages to avoid triumphalism or aestheticism, he nevertheless enjoys the spectacular drama of defeat. What happens, however, when defeat happens undramatically, regularly? That is perhaps the central question posed by Nick Hornby. Occasionally Hornby succumbs to the temptation to read football (of the seventies and eighties Arsenal variety) as metaphor for Britishness (dour and aggressive) and, more often, his own state of mind:

> My whole life flashed before my eyes. A nil-nil draw, against a nothing team, in a meaningless game, in front of a restive, occasionally angry but for the most part wearily tolerant crowd, in the freezing January cold.[57]

This last passage concludes the book, suggesting that Hornby felt the need for an encapsulating image. But the real interest of *Fever Pitch* lies less in encapsulation than in successiveness. The book works best when Hornby is not proposing that his experience as an Arsenal fan represents some other (more important) kind of despair, but when he

simply describes, day by day, year by year, how fandom provides a space for "unfocused unhappiness," a place to "be still and worry and mope."[58] Gumbrecht complains that we feel "obliged to be *critical*" about sports but, for many, criticism is not an obligation but another reliable pleasure.[59]

One way of thinking about the different ways in which encapsulation and successiveness communicate meaning to us might be in terms of the linguist Roman Jakobson's categories of metaphor and metonymy. If the "essence of metaphor" is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another," metonymy evokes "the whole by a connection. . . the imputed relationship being that of contiguity."[60] Jakobson suggested that the metonymic mode tends to be foregrounded in realist prose (which is interested in the world we inhabit) whereas the metaphoric mode tends to be foregrounded in Romantic or surrealist poetry (which is interested in seeing the world we inhabit transformed by contact with another order of meaning or value).[61] In suggesting a shift in emphasis from epiphany to successiveness, then, I am suggesting that we follow the example of Frank Bascombe, the narrator of Richard Ford's novel *The Sportswriter* (1986), and consider the novelistic as well as the poetic aspects of sport: metonymy as well as metaphor. For Bascombe, the lesson of "writing sports" is that "there are no transcendent themes in life. In all cases things are here and they're over, and that has to be enough."[62]

For Hornby, a 1989 goal scored by Arsenal's Michael Thomas—the "once-in-a-lifetime last-minute Championship winner"—is "the greatest moment ever"; a moment so powerful that the eighteen years of frustration that his book details are "all forgotten in a second."[63] Why then, we might wonder, does he not say anything about the goal itself or the sequence of events leading up to its execution? One minute Thomas is "through, on his own;" then, a "please God let him score" later, he is "turning a somersault" in celebration. To say anything more, Hornby seems to recognize, would remove the aura of "the moment."[64] To produce a detailed description of each pass, tackle, and run would, at the best of times, be slightly demystifying. In this particular case, however, such an account runs the risk of descending from the sublime to the ridiculous. The journalist Jason Cowley recently interviewed the players concerned. Michael Thomas spoke of being "lost to the moment," but Steve Nicol, the Liverpool defender, recalls a simple series of accidents:

> Unmarked and sprinting deep into Liverpool territory, Thomas miscontrols Smith's pass, the ball spins away, bounces against Nicol before, improbably, falling for Thomas. "How do you explain that?" says Nicol. . . ." When the ball bounced off me it could have gone anywhere, but it just fell perfectly for him. How do you explain that? You can't, except to say that things happen.[65]

Being lost to the moment is the stuff of the lyric; things happening, that of the novel.

While David Foster Wallace searched for transcendence in tennis, he also remained a novelist, attentive to things happening. In the same essay in which he presents the Federer Moment as a metaphor of life (the body that defies biology) fleetingly "reconciled" with death (the body governed by biology), he also produces a metonymic account of the men's final; that is, he pays due attention to the details of cause and effect, and to contiguities in time and space. The story begins with some scene-setting as the Centre Court tarpaulin is rolled back and net posts are secured. And then the players come out:

> The Swiss is in the buttermilk-colored sport coat that Nike's gotten him to wear for Wimbledon this year. On Federer, and perhaps on him alone, it doesn't look

> absurd with shorts and sneakers. The Spaniard eschews all warm-up clothing, so you have to look at his muscles straight away. He and the Swiss are both in all-Nike, up to the very same kind of tied white Nike hankie with the swoosh positioned above the third eye. Nadal tucks his hair under his hankie, but Federer doesn't, and smoothing and fussing with the bits of hair that fall over the hankie is the main Federer tic TV viewers get to see; likewise Nadal's obsessive retreat to the ballboy's towel between points. There happen to be other tics and habits, though, tiny perks of live viewing. There's the great care Roger Federer takes to hand the sport coat over his spare courtside chair's back, just so, to keep it from wrinkling—he's done this before each match here, and something about him seems childlike and weirdly sweet.[66]

Here Foster Wallace seems to have forgotten that Federer is the genius source of pure beauty or a symbol of the life-force. Dapper and pernickety, fidgety and neurotic, this Federer rather resembles a character in a realist novel. If we encountered this passage at the start of such a novel, we would note these details of appearance and behavior, and expect their implications to become clear over the course of the next couple of hundred pages. Indeed Foster Wallace himself had already imagined such a character in the opening page of his not-entirely-realist 1110-page novel *Infinite Jest* (1996). *Infinite Jest*, too, opens with some scene-setting, with the eighteen-year-old narrator, Hal Incandenza, being interviewed for a tennis scholarship at the University of Arizona. "I have committed to crossing my legs I hope carefully, ankle on knee, hands together in the lap of my slacks. My fingers are mated into a mirrored series of what manifests, to me, as the letter X." After observing that the "high-traction sole" of his "complimentary Nike sneaker runs parallel to the wobbling loafer" of his Uncle Charles, Hal composes what he "project[s] will be seen as a smile," but it is misinterpreted as a grimace. "Just a bit of a let's call it maybe a facial tic, slightly," says his uncle.[67]

In a novel, aspects of setting and appearance constitute the "tiny perks" of live reading.[68] As they accumulate from page to page, we begin to deduce from them a personal history: a continuity of existence in and through time, from event to event. We do not only watch Hal Incandenza exercising his tics: we *follow* him. More likely than not, if we are still reading on page 500, we have identified with him. So it is where Federer is concerned. If, like Foster Wallace and the Wordsworthians among sports commentators, we feel awe as his "kinetic beauty," we know, too, like Foster Wallace the novelist, that lyric moments are never enough. If fans are sometimes disinterested spectators, they are also always followers. And what we follow, obsessively, like readers lost in a good novel, is the bits and pieces in-between epiphanies, the tics and habits whose ordinariness enables us to recognize the extraordinary when we encounter it.

In order to explain what beholding, following, consuming and praising sport involves, commentators have compared it with some of the many other things we behold, follow, consume or praise. While analogies with (among those other things) poems, novels, movies and soap operas do not tell us exactly what sport is or what it might mean, they do, taken together, demonstrate the sheer diversity of the responses it has provoked. Sports history, of and in Europe and elsewhere, should take that diversity into account.

[1]"Beholder" is Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's term of choice; he contrasts it with "television viewer," which he takes to be a synonym for "potential customer." *In Praise of Athletic Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2006), 8, 144.

[2]Daniel L. Wann and Nyla R. Brancombe, "Die-Hard Fans and Fair-Weather Fans," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 14 (1990): 103-117.

[3]Phillip Lapote, "Confessions and Self-Justifications of a Sports Fan," in *Body Language: Writers on Sport*, ed. Gerald Early (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1998), 3-13; Garry J. Smith *et al.*, "A Profile of the Deeply Committed Male Sports Fan," *Arena Review* 5 (1983): 26-44.

[4]As Allen Guttmann has pointed out, sports studies not only ought to be, but already is, multidisciplinary. "Does Clio Need Help? A Plea for a More Extensive Use of Literary and Visual Texts [1]," *Sport in History* 28 (2008): 120.

[5]Lapote, "Confessions and Self-Justifications," 3.

[6]Garry Whannel, "Reading the Sports Media Audience," in *MediaSport*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Routledge, 1998), 225; Nancy Cheever, "The Uses and Gratifications of Viewing Mixed Martial Arts," *Journal of Sports Media* 4 (2009): 25-53.

[7]Sports examples include Alan M. Klein, "Sport and Culture as Contested Terrain: Americanization in the Caribbean," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8 (1991): 79-85; and Robert Edelman, "There Are No Rules on Planet Sport: Post-Soviet Spectator Sport," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 217-243.

[8]Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1990), 155. For a recent overview of "active audience studies" and its opponents, see Jack Bratich, "Activating the Multitude: Audience Powers and Cultural Studies," in *New Directions in American Reception Studies*, eds. Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33-56.

[9]Whannel, "Reading the Sports Media Audience," 229. Allen Guttmann argues that identification is particularly strong in what he calls "representational sports," sports in which the spectators feel that the athletes on the field represent them in some way. See Allen Guttmann, "Sports Crowd," in *Crowds*, eds. Jeffrey Thompson Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 131.

[10]Kathleen M. Kinkema and Janet C. Harris, "MediaSport Studies: Key Research and Emerging Issues," in *MediaSport*, ed. Wenner, 32.

[11]Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 12. On images of the obsessive loner and the hysterical crowd, see Joli Janson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and the Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9-29. Hollywood is fascinated by both types of pathology, perhaps viewing sports fandom as a mirror to movie fandom: *The Fan* (1996) explores the figure of the lone stalker (Robert De Niro) of a baseball star (Wesley Snipes), while the motif of the baying crowd appeared as early as *Blood and Sand* (1922), hounding star bullfighter, Juan Gallardo (Rudolph Valentino).

[12]Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 23. Jenkins adapts the idea of reading/ viewing as "poaching . . . on the property of others" from Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xii.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Whannel, "Reading the Sports Media Audience," 230.

[15]John Ellis, *Visible Fiction: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982), 98.

[16]A recent overview of the field can be found in *Stars: The Film Reader*, eds. Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy (London: Routledge, 2004).

[17]Ellis, *Visible Fiction*, 91.

[18]See Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 367-368.

[19]The term "performance" is routinely applied to sports but without full recognition of its theatrical connotation.

[20]Whannel, "Reading the Sports Media Audience," 229.

[21]Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23. Jauss was Gumbrecht's doctoral supervisor and, as Christopher Young notes, much of Gumbrecht's work is conceived in opposition to Jauss. Christopher Young, "Kantian kin(a)esthetics: Premises, Problems and Possibilities of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*," *Sport in History* 28 (2008): 9.

[22]Both examples are drawn from Leigh and Woodhouse, *Football Lexicon* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), 17-18, 96.

[23]On the importance of an awareness of "deep historical attachments" for the experience of watching the 2007 Rugby World Cup final between France and England, see Richard Holt, "The Appeal of Spectator Sport," *Sport in History* 28 (2008): 54.

[24]Lopate, "Confessions and Self-Justifications," 6.

[25]Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch* (London: Indigo, 1996), 33.

[26]The protagonist of Richard Ford's novel, *The Sportswriter*, Frank Bascombe switches from writing novels to writing for a sports magazine because he needs "something to look forward to, every two weeks." *The Sportswriter* (London: Flamingo, 1987), 49.

[27]Ed Smith, *What Sport Tells Us About Life* (London: Viking, 2008), 70, 81.

[28]Oliver Holt, "Euro 2008: Cesc Fabregas ends Spain's penalty jinx," *Daily Mirror* (U.K.), 23 June 2008, <http://www.mirrorfootball.co.uk/news/Euro-2008-Cesc-Fabregas-ends-Spain-s-penalty-jinx-article52895.html [9 March 2010].

[29]Boddy, *Boxing*, 257, 364, 444-445; idem, "Die Rücker des Rock: *Rocky Balboa*, 2006," *Beliner Debatte Initial* 19 (2008): 92.

[30]John M. Efron, "Critique of Pure Football," *Sport in History* 28 (2008): 127.

[31]The respected online boxing magazine *Cyber Boxing Zone* only lists linear champions: <http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/champ.htm> [9 March 2010].

[32]On the emergence of the "lyric as poetic norm," see Meyer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 133-136.

[33]John Stuart Mill, quoted in Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 136.

[34]Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Edward H. Davidson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), 464.

[35]Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Davidson, 455.

[36]Kevin Palmer, *Cambridge United: The League Era—A Complete Record* (Southend-on-Sea, U.K.: Desert Island Books, 2000).

[37]Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic* Beauty, 32, 47 [QUOTATION], 54, 190, 49, 73. Gumbrecht says that he is interested in beauty not the sublime, yet many of the moments he picks out have "breathtaking singularity" and approach the "absolute limits of human performance," both features he associates with the sublime.

[38]Ibid., 78, 190, 32, 54.

[39]Smith, *What Sport Tells Us About Life*, 16-17.

[40]The Oxford English Dictionary defines the "the zone" as a "state of perfect concentration leading to optimum mental or physical performance" and quotes its first use in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 October 1976: "Tennis players speak reverently of the mystical atmospheric condition known as 'The Zone.' Passing shots chip away at the lines, first serves pop in and mistakes simply don't materialize. Arthur Ashe's experience in The Zone during his last Wimbledon championship bordered on the surreal" (<http://dictionary.oed.com> [9 March 2010]). Gumbrecht quotes a description by Stanford running back J.R. Lemon (*In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 196-197).

[41]Janet A. Young and Michelle D. Palin, "The Zone: Evidence of a Universal Phenomenon for Athletes Across Sports," *Athletic Insight: The Online Journal of Sports Psychology* 1 (1999): 21, <http://www.athleticinsight.com/Vol1Iss3/Empirical_Zone.htm> [9 March 2010].

[42]Ibid., 24.

[43]Basketball player Patsy Neal quoted in Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White, *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sport* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1995), 28. Joseph L. Price, "An American Apotheosis: Sports as Popular Religion," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 203.

[44]Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 8 [1ST QUOTATION], 19 [2ND QUOTATION]. Gumbrecht does not want to "read" athletics as a "signifier" of "something spiritual" (or indeed as a signifier of anything); nevertheless, he consistently describes the experience of watching athletics in terms of "communion," "transfiguration," and "what the Christian tradition used to call a halo—and what today we might call an aura" (pp. 30, 32, 78).

[45]Ibid, 51. The Olympic swimmer Pablo Morales coined the phrase "lost in focused intensity."

[46]David Foster Wallace, "Federer as Religious Experience," *New York Times Play Magazine*, September 2006, pp. 48, 83. Gumbrecht's version of Federer Moments are the "unique" movements which "symbolize—by transfiguration what we call 'vintage Federer'" (*In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 79).

[47]William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), book 11, lines 258-268, in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 565. Gumbrecht is particularly concerned with "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and *In Praise of Athletic Beauty* begins with a selection of his own "spots of time." Although Hornby defines himself as an "obsessive" fan rather than as a disinterested beholder, a frequent mental revisiting of past events is also an important part of his experience (*Fever Pitch*, 9-10).

[48]Although Gumbrecht says memories are "secondary at best," it is memories that emerge "with sudden impact" that he largely discusses. Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 14-15.

[49]See Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 1926, in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323-328; and, applied to sport, Ava Rose and James Friedman, "Television Sports as Mas(s)culine Cult of Distraction," in *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media, and the Politics of Identity*, eds. Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 1-15.

[50]Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 21. On Gumbrecht's use of Kant, see Christopher Young, "Kantian kin(a)esthetics."

[51]Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 43.

[52]Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (London: Pan Books, 1988), 9, 72, 100.

[53]Ibid., 73.

[54]Lapote, "Confessions and Self-Justifications," 6-7; Hornby, *Fever Pitch*, 21, 17

[55]Lapote, "Confessions and Self-Justifications," 6-7.

[56]Ibid., 8.

[57]Ibid., 247.

[58]Hornby, *Fever Pitch*, 43.

[59]Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 29. Hornby partly agrees, locating pure uncritical enjoyment in the pre-Lapsarian realm of childhood (*Fever Pitch*, 29).

[60]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5; Anthony Wilden *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication* (London: Routledge, 1987), 198.

[61]Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), 95-96, 92.

[62]In the epilogue, however, Bascombe is granted an unexpected "glistening one moment." Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 22, 381. Christian Messenger describes this as a "sort of ephipany-without-cause." *Sport and the Spirit of Play in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 243.

[63]Hornby, *Fever Pitch*, 41.

[64]Hornby suggests that an analogy with orgasm be kept for "more workaday transcendent moments." Ibid., 230.

[65]Jason Cowley, "The Night Football was Reborn," *Observer Sport Magazine*, April 2009, p. 41.

[66]Foster Wallace, "Federer as Religious Experience," 49.

[67]David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), 3, 5. Gumbrecht too takes an interest in tics (*In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, 3-5).

[68]Foster Wallace's interest in the experience or "aura" of "real presence" again connects him to Gumbrecht. See *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, passim.