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Sport and Civic Identity in the Modern Canadian City

INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL STUDIES AND SPORTS STUDIES¹

Tony Bennett (1991a) has suggested in a recent and influential anthology that "cultural studies" now serves as a term of convenience that legitimizes scholarly work on a wide array of cultural practices, from an equally wide variety of disciplinary bases and theoretical perspectives. In the Canadian context, Ray Morrow has illustrated this in his account of cultural studies as a site of cross-fertilization and debate for people based in social history, philosophy, sociology, and modern languages, as well as in emergent areas like communications and gender studies. In all of these areas, Morrow suggests that the cultural studies debates have produced some important reformulations of theory and research, and have helped to push different kinds of questions to the forefront of intellectual and political agendas. Morrow also pointed, however, to a number of other fields of scholarly endeavour where work has unfortunately become ghettoized, partly because of a failure to connect research in these fields with debates in contemporary social theory. He generously does not identify leisure and sports studies within this ghettoized group, and indeed he cites some of the good work that has come out of the Canadian sports studies community in the last decade. However, many scholars in sports and leisure studies have tended to refer to each other, and have not often enough sought to articulate their work with contemporary debates in cultural studies and social theory. Indeed Tania Modleski's comment that rock music scholars have too often sounded like enthusiastic fans, celebrating their subject uncritically and largely reproducing its ideologies, is also appropriate to much early work in sports and leisure studies.

Bennett, however, suggests that the various strands of work that make up the cultural studies movement share a commitment "to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power" (23); and over the last ten years, there has been a growing group of scholars in Canada and elsewhere who have sought to analyze sport in just this way, while also situating sport within broader projects of scholarly analysis (e.g., exercise

¹ Parts of this paper are adapted from chapters originally prepared for Gruneau and Whitson, in print.

and the body, the growth of the entertainment industries, tourism and spectacle) that share this agenda.² In some of this work, the focus is on political economy. For example, researchers have examined the political and economic interests that have constructed spectator sport in forms we now take for granted: the professional leagues in North America, as well as the Olympics and other international sporting events. In other work, sport is examined as a cultural text in which dominant social groups (classes, ethnic groups, and males) have been able to establish their own cultural practices as popular "traditions," and their own meanings and values as "natural." In both areas of research, situating sport within the "cultural studies" project has meant inquiring into the production and dissemination of meanings in and through sport, and linking this to some of the central challenges to social theory identified by Morrow: specifically the role of sport in the constitution of individual subjects and subject positions.

What this paper will focus on is the role of sport in the construction of "positional consciousness." It will be suggested that among the more significant effects of sport and spectacle in contemporary North American society are the ways that it locates us, or invites us to locate ourselves, in terms of "us" and "them." Specifically, it is proposed that the organizational development of professional sport in North America — its roots in civic boosterism and the particular forms of "representative" sport this gave rise to — has helped to normalize a discourse of *civic* identifications which are politically disabling, insofar as they gloss over real divisions of interest within cities. The membership of Canadian cities in predominantly American professional leagues, moreover, has helped to contour Canadians' cultural horizons and to render more "natural" the idea of a continental culture. Finally, Wernick's discussion of "global promo," as well as some of the literature on World's Fairs and Expositions, suggest that what may be most important in all of this is the transformation (or perhaps simply formation) of our popular understanding of civic belonging into the languages of brand loyalty and membership — as a sports fan — in the global consumer culture.

SPORT, URBAN CULTURE AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Professional sport very quickly became an extremely popular and characteristic feature of the urban culture that developed in the industrial cities of Britain, as well as in the burgeoning cities and towns of North America in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³ This fact has led many to suggest that urbanization was

a necessary precondition for the growth of commercial sport: because of the concentration of working populations, because of rising industrial wages and shortened work weeks, and the beginnings of mass transit systems. But, following the more general arguments made by Berman and Simmel, among others, it would seem rather that urbanization created new possibilities in cultural production and consumption, while urban culture and leisure were constitutive, in part at least, of the experience of modernity (see Berman). It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter in any depth into the debates about modernity. However, since the most influential contributors to this literature are largely silent about sport, it will be useful to indicate briefly how the growth of sports entertainment can be incorporated within this broader analysis. To start with the most obvious observation, the availability of new and varied kinds of professional entertainment was from the beginning one of the primary attractions of city life. Sport was clearly not alone here; indeed music and vaudeville, magicians and comedians, theatre and dancing were all part of a burgeoning professional entertainment "scene." However, sport was just as clearly one of the most popular forms of commercial entertainment, especially among men. Such popularity was not least because it celebrated and showcased skills and pleasures that were already familiar elements of male popular recreation. Indeed as Bourdieu has noted, the commercialisation of both sport and folk music simply reproduce, as spectacle, a more "professional" and packaged version of what people themselves have historically done to amuse themselves.

However, the commodification of sporting entertainment quickly led to the phenomenon, and indeed the allure, of professional careers in sport. This professionalism was controversial at first, because of the power of a class-based amateur tradition that had no counterpart, indeed no meaning, in other entertainment forms (music, for example). However, as the modern trend toward specialization of labour continued, and as it became widely accepted that professionals could be more intensively practised and skilled, so too did professionalism become the norm in those sports that were popular enough to be commercial attractions. Athletes became professionals if they were good enough to make a living at it; and being a professional athlete (indeed any kind of professional entertainer) became increasingly glamorous. Promotional hyperbole, together with generally positive media coverage of entertainment events as big local news, helped to construct entertainers as famous and newsworthy people, who were separate and somehow different from their audiences.

For the moment, though, I want to connect the phenomenon of spectator sports with another dimension of urban culture which, it has often been claimed, facilitates the experience of modernity. The creation of new kinds of public spaces have facilitated distinctively urban kinds of collective experience and consciousness. Simmel was one of the first to insist on the importance of cafés, restaurants and bars as places of sociability, where historically new and urban

2 See, for example, Gruneau, Gruneau and Cantelon, Gruneau and Whitson, Hall *et al.*, Macintosh and Whitson, Harvey and Sparks.

3 For a thorough development of this point with respect to Britain, see Holt; for America, see Adelman, and Riess. For Canada, see note 7.

kinds of community could be experienced and practised.⁴ However, Berman's discussion of the reconstruction of modern Paris, and especially the significance of its boulevards and parks as places for more anonymous kinds of mingling and people-watching, encourages us also to reflect on the important role of various kinds of urban places, including places where crowds gather, for the making available and subsequent display of self-selected (and therefore modern) identities and allegiances.⁵ Neither Simmel nor Berman mentions sport, even though their discussions refer us to many other leisure spaces in which new sorts of urban community were experienced and lived. However, Holt and Riess and Adelman (see note 3) have all offered eloquent testimony to the almost mythical place that major sports grounds — Anfield in Liverpool, Wembley in London, Yankee Stadium and Madison Square Garden in New York — were to assume in what Shields has aptly called the "emotional geographies" (4) of our major cities. This term invites us to consider both the public and personal ways that place can be experienced in cities. It also points to the wider representational significance that accrues to those places where affinities are publicly rehearsed and where solidarity can be experienced. Shields's ultimate point is that for modern cities, the public spaces that acquire special significance in popular memory, are the "high places" of popular culture, not the squares and cathedrals more typical of an older kind of city. In the minds of residents, and of those who only know them by repute, these public spaces become familiar signifiers standing in for the cities in which they are built. In Canada, such places of popular culture include the Forum and the Olympic Stadium in Montreal, as well as Maple Leaf Gardens and the SkyDome in Toronto.

At the same time, the imagery that is involved here — of an organic connection between cities, sports grounds, and the teams that play in them, needs to be examined closely. The idea that needs to be unpacked, especially, is that of "representation"; for the tradition that teams represent their communities is central to the imagery and the mobilizing power of sport in popular culture. As Ingham *et al.* have noted:

"Representation" — whether it is used in the Durkheimian sense of an organically produced, signifying practice that binds people together as a "we," or in the more typical sense of an agent/ agency acting on behalf of the community — presumes bonds of sentiment and loyalty among the sign, the symbol, the agent, and the collectivity (437).

4 See Frisby's thought provoking discussion of Simmel's contributions.

5 Giddens has suggested that one of the significant characteristics of modernity is that identity becomes a reflexively-oriented endeavour, a project in which the making and display of self-chosen identities takes on unprecedented importance.

Yet although commercial / professional sport has always sought to trade on bonds of allegiance and loyalty, it has subtly yet steadily transformed — some might say de-formed — their meanings. Cheering for the home team has seemed "natural" in sport for as long as there has been inter-communal competition. However, in the early days this typically meant cheering for home teams that were largely composed of local people: acquaintances, friends, even family. When this was the norm, it could credibly be proclaimed that the success of the home team reflected some glory on the communities that produced them.⁶ As the practices of hiring first a few "travelling" professionals and then whole teams of professional players became commonplace the relationships between teams and the communities they "represented" began to take on a different character. Ingham *et al.* depict this as a shift away from the bonds of common membership or citizenship, to something more like a merchant-customer relationship.⁷ Fan support was solicited for the best "representation" that local entrepreneurs could employ; while for their part, professional players were expected to entertain, to give the spectators "value for money," and increasingly to "send them home winners." Indeed commercial sport quickly came to be about the selling of winning. Soon, it did not matter that the home team was made up of players recruited from outside the city, or even from abroad: "What mattered was that [the team] be successful, and that the whole city be allowed to identify with that success" (Betke 1983, 54).

Betke goes on to note that, in an era of rapid urban growth (especially in the new cities of the Canadian and American west), "representative" teams that carried a city's name into battle with competitor cities became popular rallying points for a specifically civic consciousness, a sense, for example, of being an Edmontonian (or a Calgarian). Two points are worth noting here. The first is simply that even though urbanization was de-forming and re-forming the traditional organizers of identity (work, religion, ethnicity), civic identifications did not automatically follow. In many respects, cities remained "urban villages," and identifications with the city-as-a-whole had to be actively encouraged. Civic teams became very effective representational icons to encourage such identification, not least because the adversarial structure of team sports lends itself to the mobilization of partisan identifications, in which "representation" takes on meanings that are different from the pride a city might take in a local artist.

6 For accounts of the early days of representative sport in Canada, see Humber, Betke 1975, 1983; Mott 1985.

7 Ingham *et al.* offer the fullest and most historical discussion of this transformed relationship in North American sport. See Critcher for a discussion that takes this transition a further step forward from the customer relationship, where some mutual loyalty is presumed, to that of the modern free-floating consumer, who "shops around" for the best value. His discussion is of the somewhat different circumstances of English soccer, but the member-customer-consumer transition remains a useful model.

Professional sports promoters were quick to trade on this "us against them" sentiment, talking up rivalries with neighbouring cities.

At the same time, it is also worth considering that rooting for the home team in professional leagues that involve cities in other parts of Canada and the United States offers fans in provincial cities a sense of membership in the wider world. Indeed Betke suggests that it was in part through the construction of popular interest in the progress of local teams in national and continental competitions that some people of local or at most provincial horizons began to develop interests in the world beyond. Regional competitions between east and west or between Canadian and American teams made for comparisons and for wider ambitions. Before long the organizational device of professional leagues invited fans into emotional involvements (whether as rivals or supporters) with "representatives" of cities in different parts of the continent. All of this was actively encouraged by coverage in the press which, even in Edmonton in the 1920s, enabled fans to follow the fortunes of British soccer teams, American baseball teams, and the "big-league" hockey teams of Toronto or Montreal.

Sports coverage thus offered a sense of membership, however mediated, in a wider "world of sport"; and if this did not necessarily turn fans into cosmopolitans, Betke suggests that to the extent that Edmonton sports fans adopted a team like the Montreal Canadiens, or even simply became knowledgeable about events and standards elsewhere, "they were less exclusively Edmonton residents and more fully North American or world citizens" (1975, 224). I will argue shortly that it is precisely in apprehending the ways that sport has lent itself to the formation and re-formation of specifically modern kinds of collective identifications that we can begin to understand its significance in contemporary popular culture. First, however, it will be necessary to outline briefly some of the ways in which relationships between sport and "community" have been shaped and reshaped by the logic of capital accumulation, both in the sports entertainment industry itself and in the modern world where that industry has developed.

RATIONALIZATION AND CAPITALIZATION IN PROFESSIONAL SPORT

We can start by examining the rationalization of commercial sport in North America, and more specifically the emergence of the powerful "big league" structure that organizes our most popular team sports today, out of the highly precarious and competitive patchwork of "independent" teams and leagues that characterized the early years of the spectator sports business. However, in order to properly understand the transformed internal economy of sports entertainment it will be necessary to link these changes to transformations in the external environment (following Ingham *et al.* 428). In particular, the growing significance of the "major" leagues and the financial and symbolic value now attached to major league franchises can only be fully appreciated in the context of the

dynamics of urban growth and decline, in which cities compete to become (or remain) national and continental centres of importance (i.e., "big league" cities). Finally, each of these dynamics must be related to what David Harvey has called the compression of time and space by the information media, and by developments in telecommunications that have facilitated a globalization of popular culture. Today images and information can move instantly across borders in ways that are difficult to regulate or contain. This creates the prospect of global information systems, global audiences, and globally marketed entertainment products. However, it also points towards an increasing concentration of entertainment production in a highly capitalized and integrated global telecommunications industry, and to further transformations in the relationships between performers and audiences of the sort adumbrated above.⁸

Ingham *et al.* provide a synopsis of the early development of professional baseball and football in the United States. What they call the "entrepreneurial" trial-and-error stage in each sport was characterized by many locally owned teams, in small as well as large cities, and indeed several regional leagues whose claims to superior status were by no means clearcut. Good players were able to move without restriction (and to be enticed) to more prosperous teams. Meanwhile teams themselves started up and either folded or moved in search of larger audiences with a frequency that undercut the development of either customer loyalty or "traditional" rivalries. Ingham describes how after a period of early disorganization in both sports, cartels were to emerge in which the most prosperous and successful clubs agreed to work together within structures designed to enhance their mutual financial position, as well as their competitive position with respect to rival leagues.⁹ Collaboration took the form of playing schedules that excluded other teams, thereby restricting the availability of their entertainment product. It also involved agreement to refrain from signing each others' players; this cut off players' freedom to move and hence their effective bargaining power. Nonetheless, since the richest clubs could afford the best players, they were able to collectively construct themselves as the "big league" in the public mind and to relegate other leagues to a subordinate status. In baseball, of course, the original National League was to face a challenge from a rival group of owners (the American League), with sufficient wealth and market potential to compete financially for the best players. However, in order to avoid prolonged salary competition, a merger was arranged in which the rival leagues became partners in "major league" baseball. As Ingham *et al.* observe, this scenario of cartelization, monopoly and monopsony (i.e., a buyer's

⁸ See Harvey 1989, especially ch. 17; see also Meyrowitz.

⁹ In the professional sports business, the real competitors are not opponents on the field (who are in an important sense partners), so much as rival leagues (who could compete for labour and for audiences) and indeed other entertainment forms.

monopoly), and then mergers or expansions to defuse the emergence of protective competitor leagues, has played itself out in all the team games that have established themselves in the North American entertainment business (428-35).

In all sports, team owners had an interest, individually and collectively, in maximizing the potential audiences for their entertainment product. In hockey, for example, Mott (1990) recounts how Manitoba was bypassed when the structure of North American professional hockey crystallized in the late 1920s, even though southern Manitoba had pioneered professional hockey in the early years of the century and had continued to export players. Manitoba was neither populous enough to be able to offer top hockey players the kind of money available in eastern Canada or the United States, nor was Winnipeg close enough to other centres of population to be included in the "big-league" circuits. Similarly, goal professional hockey thrived in the early 1920s in Alberta and on the west coast; but these leagues had disbanded by 1926, with owners and players relating to larger markets in the east and in the United States. Betke (1983) indicates that the Edmonton team had played to packed audiences, and was not minded out of any lack of local interest. However, the Edmonton Pavilion that was large when it was built in 1913, was soon too small at 6000 seats to compete with the much larger arenas being built in American cities in the 1920s. Indeed Betke suggests that the smaller Canadian cities were able to enjoy top class professional hockey for a brief period after WWI only because there was a short hiatus before the possibilities of staging the game in larger centers like New York, Chicago and Detroit were seen and acted upon. Together, these stories from the early years of professional hockey, in which teams that were well-supported local institutions in Canadian provincial cities departed in search of larger markets, should remind us that professional teams have never belonged to their fans. Professional "clubs" have always been businesses, and the early history of franchise movement in all of the team sports reminds us that pro sport had started to become a "big city-money game" (Ingham *et al.* 434) well before the contemporary era of multi-million dollar franchise fees and player salaries. Owners have always sought to market their products into larger audiences, and players' salaries have always been related to their success in doing so.

However, in rethinking the team-community relationship, and the traditional understandings of "representation" that have been alluded to above, it needs to be appreciated that a franchise and the capital invested in it are quite simply mobile, while a community is not. Fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers or New York Giants could root for them after they moved to California, just as fans of the Edmonton Oilers or the Quebec Nordiques will be able to cheer for their favourites if they are moved to Seattle or Milwaukee. Fans should be disabused, though, of any illusions they might have harboured that their teams belonged to them. Teams move in search of larger markets and greater profitability, and

indeed they will trade actively on the discourse of community in their new location, urging the locals to get behind what is now presented as "their" team. "Franchise" is here revealed as having the same meaning it has in the travel or fast food industries: simply the right to offer a nationally recognized product, in this case brand name sports entertainment, in a protected market area. We can also see the interest of the franchisor, in this instance the league as a cartel, in placing franchises in the markets most likely to enhance its overall revenue potential, through television contracts as well as live attendance. This is especially the case today, when the income derived by major league teams from television revenues in many cases outstrips gate receipts.

We need to turn briefly, at this juncture, to the role of the media in the internal economy of professional sport, and to recognize that this too has developed in stages. It is a cliché today to say that television has transformed sport; and at one level it is certainly true, both that sport has achieved the place it now enjoys in popular culture because television takes professional sports into almost every home, and that the remarkable economy of professional sport is dependent for its current salary levels, franchise fees, etc., upon television revenues. What is less evident, perhaps, is that the sports entertainment business and the news media have always enjoyed symbiotic relationships with one another. Sports coverage (sports results *as news*, as well as sports commentary and gossip) helped to sell newspapers and then attract radio listeners, and to create large audiences that could be sold to media advertisers, at the same time that it provided free publicity for the sports themselves.¹⁰ Arguably, the audience for CBC Radio's "Hockey Night in Canada" was one of the country's first national audiences; while at the same time, the weekly broadcast was helping to construct the enduring place of the National Hockey League — not just the game but the league — in Canadian popular culture.

It was also suggested in the previous section that early sports coverage helped to construct not just local or even national audiences but audiences with a sense of membership in a wider "world of sport." In this, it should be noted that it is not only the primary coverage that contributes: the game broadcasts and the newspaper publication of game reports and statistics. It is also the cumulative effects of between-event coverage: the post-mortems and predictions that sustain interest between games, as well as the "human interest" stories that help to make professional athletes into celebrities. Finally mention should be made of the specialty press — the fan magazines and radio phone-in shows and the remarkable circulation of secondary texts: player cards and licensed apparel, that are today booming businesses in themselves. All of these have helped to constitute what could be described as a massive "sports information system," in

¹⁰ For fuller discussions of the sport / media relationship see Gruneau and Whitson as well as Hall *et al.*

which the dissemination of information and images helps to construct communities of interest and allegiance among widely dispersed individuals. Fans use these statistics and stories and representations to live and display their "relationships" with favourite teams and players, and indeed with other fans. Together they provide the material for experiences of membership in the "world of sport," and for displaying knowledgeability about that world; these are among the pleasures of being a fan. They afford identities and a kind of cultural capital that are enjoyed in exchanges with other fans. I am here adapting, into the context of sport, ideas originally put forward in discussions of audience relationships with other popular texts.¹¹ However, I am suggesting that together they can help us to think about the ways that "membership" is both constructed and trans-formed through the sports media, and to see that this predates television.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the advent of television magnified the potential audiences for professional sport exponentially, and that this was the catalyst for a series of further changes in the economics of professional sport. These include expansion, the brief emergence of competitor leagues in football and hockey, and the dramatic increases in what players can earn, from product endorsements and card shows, as well as from salaries. Underlying all of this was the fact that the instant transmission of games had an enormous appeal for millions of fans and potential fans, many of whom had previously never seen major league games or had done so only rarely. What television offered to the major leagues was the prospect of North American and ultimately global audiences, if their products could be marketed in the right places.

CIVIC PURSUIT OF "STATUS"

This leads back into our discussion of the movement of franchises, and in turn to the leverage that this has given the sports entertainment industry in its dealings with local and regional governments. The latter find themselves today, in both the United States and Canada, in the position of competing with one another to attract or keep what are scarce and mobile assets (i.e., big league franchises). They are asked for stadium improvements and luxury boxes, for rights to concession revenues, and sometimes development opportunities in adjacent real estate. All these give team owners opportunities to make more money from a facility that has been or would be provided for them at public expense. Yet there is no shortage of civic and regional governments willing to make these deals in an era when governments across the western world have been cutting back on

spending related to public services. This is because gaining or losing a "big league" franchise is believed to be a catalyst to gaining or losing other kinds of development.

Here "representation" takes on a somewhat different set of meanings, in which a city's "image" is believed to be linked to decisions to invest or disinvest, and hence to the dynamics of urban growth and decline. Again it is useful to think in terms of stages, this time in the economic development of North America. In the period of settlement in the Canadian west, Betke describes how Edmonton "boosters" — local politicians and business leaders — boldly spent both public and private monies to build an indoor spectator facility that would put their city "on the map" for touring shows and exhibitions, as well as teams. They, like their counterparts in other prairie cities, envisioned such facilities not only as providing business opportunities in their own right, but as symbols of an urbanism and a commercial dynamism that would attract other kinds of growth — to *their* city rather than to regional competitors.¹² In more recent times, Harvey remarks that the years between 1960-90 have seen a succession of changes in the fortunes, and crucially the *relative* importance, of cities and regions across North America. There were massive movements of wealth and people out of the older industrial power centres of the northeastern states, and into other kinds of economic activity in the west and south: oil and mining, new high technology industries, tourism and service industries, and in every newly booming area, financial services and real estate. In Harvey's view this constituted a new stage in the geography of American capitalism; and this, indeed, was precisely the demographic and economic context for the expansions that baseball, football, basketball and hockey all embarked upon in the 1960s. The promise was of new and affluent live audiences, and beyond this of unprecedented television revenues, if the presence of franchises across the country could be translated into national television audiences. For their part, booming cities like Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and Toronto actively pursued major league franchises, as signs that they had moved into the same leagues literally, as Los Angeles and New York.

However, the global recession of 1973-75 and the emergence of a sophisticated Asian manufacturing capability was to produce a new stage of transnational corporate rationalization and "uneven development," in which mobile capital would hold many advantages in its negotiations with local and regional governments. The latter actively pursue new developments with offers of tax breaks, infrastructure provided at public expense, etc.; only to find themselves having to offer the same breaks to their existing businesses, who are being actively courted by other cities. This is precisely what has happened with professional sports franchises,¹³ and indeed in one sense the subsidies offered

12 See Betke 1975, 1983; see also Dryden and MacGregor.

13 For example, see Gruneau and Whiston, Ingham *et al.*, Baade and Dye.

11 Specifically, Meyrowitz's discussion of the "shared information systems" created by both news and entertainment programming, and Fiske's discussion of the ways that fans "use" the materials provided them by popular entertainments to work out and display their own identities.

to sports entrepreneurs are simply highly visible instances of a new form of "public / private partnership" which routinely subsidizes other kinds of entrepreneurs in shopping mall developments and industrial parks.

For Harvey, the emergence of this "entrepreneurial city" and of norms for "public / private partnership" in which subsidies to entrepreneurs have become standard practice while public services deteriorate for lack of funds, are products of sharpened inter-urban competition across a number of dimensions, including competition for position as centres of culture and consumption.¹⁴ Like the competition for industry alluded to above, moreover, this is directed at two audiences. For outsiders, it means touting the presence of the "world class" entertainment — nationally and internationally advertised big-budget shows, as well as major league sport — and of "world class" facilities that will be attractions in themselves for conventions and affluent tourists. However, Harvey suggests that the same upscale entertainment facilities, along with "downtown consumer paradises" patterned on Boston's Quincy Market, are also aimed at keeping affluent locals in town. Here, connections come into focus between the promotion of urban tourism and gentrification; and Frieden and Sagalyn likewise suggest that many American cities have responded to the flight of industry and to suburbanization with investments designed to bring the middle classes back downtown. These typically involve substantial civic assistance to the development of "world class" entertainment venues, glitzy shopping and restaurant complexes, and even the kind of upscale housing developments (condominiums and townhouses) likely to promise steady customers for all of the above. In these scenarios, sports stadia and concert halls, convention centres and luxury hotel and retail developments, are all seen to reinforce and augment each other. Major league franchises become trophies that point to success in a strategy for urban revitalization based around consumption, leisure and tourism, and the gentrification of downtown.¹⁵

Much of this analysis is also illustrated, of course, in cities' pursuit of international sports events — notably the Olympic Games — and international festivals and expositions. Tews, for example, describes the entrepreneurial role played by civic government in New Orleans in pursuing the right to stage the 1984 World's Fair, and outlines the patterns of public spending and private gain that have followed the award of Olympic Games to Barcelona and Atlanta. Borowy and Kidd have each depicted the struggles over these same issues that surrounded the Toronto bid for the 1996 Olympics, struggles which pitted the

Toronto business elite and most civic and provincial politicians against a coalition of community activists whose key issues were affordable downtown housing, and the diversion of public monies into mega-projects while community level services were being cut back.¹⁶ Toronto's Sky Dome was well under construction during the time of the Olympic bid. However, it is worth noting that in Canada the pursuit of federal and provincial monies for facilities that would afterwards be suitable for big league sports franchises has usually been a subtext in bids for international events. In Montreal, the Olympic stadium was always intended to be a "world class" home for the Expos and, some hoped, for an NFL franchise too. In Edmonton and Calgary, the bids for 1978 Commonwealth Games and 1988 Winter Olympics, respectively, offered opportunities to get funding from senior levels of government for facilities that afterwards would be appropriate major league venues; while in Vancouver it was hoped that the domed B.C. Place would attract some major league franchise to that city.¹⁷

The literature on recent international Expositions in Vancouver and Brisbane helps us to see that the hosting of international events is also very much about self-representation, in the context of competitions among cities, both within nations and internationally.¹⁸ Indeed it is in precisely this context that Expositions and international sporting events (the America's Cup as well as the Olympics) have become much sought after mediums for demonstrating a city's modernity and dynamism, and for proclaiming its membership in a circuit of "world class" centres: places with international class hotels, transport, sporting and cultural facilities. Events like this provide unparalleled opportunities to "put the local on show for the global" (Hartley 117): for global exhibitors (increasingly, transnational corporations as well as governments), for affluent international tourists, and for international television audiences. It is worth noting here that the global reach of images and capital has changed the size of the playing field in these inter-urban competitions. For newly wealthy cities within a national context — Vancouver and Calgary in Canada, or Brisbane and Perth in Australia — the host city typically seeks to represent itself as more modern and outward looking than the older and more established power centres in their countries. For them, Games or Expositions become occasions that symbolize their ascension from provincial backwater to world city. However, in the increasingly

¹⁶ See Tews, Borowy, Kidd. Borowy and Kidd differ over the extent to which a local administration with a social democratic agenda can direct the monies that can typically be found from senior levels of government and the private sector for such events into facilities that are afterwards appropriate for use by lower income communities (for public housing, public recreation).

¹⁷ See Auf der Maur on the Montreal Olympics; see Reasons on Calgary, Chivers on Edmonton.

¹⁸ See Ley and Olds on Expo '86 in Vancouver; and Fry and Willis, and Bennett (1991b) on Expo '88 in Brisbane. See also Hartley on the America's Cup races in Perth, Australia.

¹⁴ In Harvey's typology, cities compete a) for position as manufacturing centres, b) for position as centres of culture and consumption, c) for position as centres of administration (head office and regional administration functions), and d) for governmental redistributions (1987, 264-65; 1989, 88-92).

¹⁵ See Frieden and Sagalyn, Logan and Molotch, as well as Harvey (1987, 1989).

global economy and culture, even the traditional centres of these nations — Toronto and Melbourne — seek opportunities to enunciate their positions on the world stage, lest they find themselves falling behind cities like Atlanta and Barcelona. Wilson proposes here that the Olympic Games have a long history as a stage on which cities and nations have staked claims to modernity; he also points out that three Olympiads early in the century were held in conjunction with World Fairs. In 1992, Barcelona is clearly using these means to assert its place in the new European and world order.¹⁹

PROMOTIONAL CULTURE

However, the paradox of all this, it can be suggested, is that claims to "world class" status are increasingly "pure signs, uncontaminated by referents."²⁰ The term "world class," once used to denote quantifiably superior athletics performances in an era when actual international competition was much less frequent, has become virtually empty of concrete meaning. It is now used routinely as a term of self-promotion, in the discourse deployed around international events and the facilities and cities that stage them. Indeed it might be unkindly suggested that it denotes nothing so clearly as representational ambition. Its use is perhaps especially vacuous with respect to cities, when the "signature" facilities up on which such claims are based (the huge and architecturally novel stadia, and the distinctive leisure and shopping complexes) are quickly reproduced elsewhere, in what Harvey aptly calls "recursive or serial monotony" (1987, 265; 1989, 295). The gains, in any international "economy of prestige," are as a result fleeting.

Nonetheless the very familiarity of this kind of promotional discourse, and the scale of the ambitions that it represents, can also serve to draw our attention to the increasing significance of promotion in contemporary culture, to the increasingly global reach of both promotion and popular culture, and indeed to the ways in which promotional and cultural activities are today articulated with one another in mutually reinforcing ways. Factors in the emergence of "global promo" (Wernick) are developments in telecommunications technology and in the communications and leisure industries which have created unprecedented audiences for entertainment products, and created shared information systems around popular culture of unprecedented reach. We need to note here not only new technologies for both transmission and home reception, but unprecedented

kinds of corporate integration in the entertainment industries (Thompson). These involve not only transnational conglomerates, including new levels of Japanese and European ownership in traditionally American dominated industries. They also involve unprecedented linkages between makers of audiovisual reproduction equipment (such as Sony and RCA) and the companies that produce the entertainment products that people watch and listen to on this technology. Finally notable are new kinds of integration between entertainment products, in which toys, television shows, sports events, and clothing are designed to promote each other, and in which concert tours are staged as promos for movies and videos that will reach much wider audiences.

Increasingly, the effect of all of these corporate developments is the creation of entertainment products that are aimed from the beginning at international markets, rather than at national audiences as was once the case in sports. Indeed one sign of this has been the emergence of international sports marketing firms, whose business is the selling of sports events and sports personalities to corporate sponsors around the affluent world. However, the most general outcomes, it can be suggested, include a further blurring of the lines between entertainment, news, and promotion, and a culture in which many kinds of products (and personalities and ideas) are now sold primarily through their associations with popular culture icons, rather than through more traditional modes of argument or product information. Here the contemporary importance of visibility itself, as well as the recursive aspect of "celebrity," are thrown into relief. Entertainers like Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan, events like the Olympics and the America's Cup, and even places like Disneyland, have all become much sought after signifiers, the associations they carry desired by manufacturers and politicians alike.²¹ At the same time, extravaganzas like Academy Awards dinners and All-Star games, events that began their lives as smart promotions for their respective branches of show business, have assumed a status as events in their own right: and not just as industry events but popular culture events and indeed news events.

Many more points could be developed here, and in my view a systematic application of some of the ideas in Wernick's discussion of promotional culture suggests important and interesting ways of thinking about the place of sport in popular culture. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will restrict myself to observing that major league teams have become ever more important as promotional signs for cities, in the context of continental competition among cities as centres of culture and consumption. They are also central to a circuit of other promotional goods and activities in the civic economy ranging from corporate entertaining in luxury boxes, to talk shows, to the sale of T-shirts and other familiar vehicles for corporate and individual self-presentation. Likewise

19 See Tews with respect to Barcelona. Wilson's discussion (145-56) focuses on the claims enunciated by societies emerging from Third World status (Japan in 1964, and Mexico in 1968) and by the Soviet Union.

20 The phrase is from Hartley, though his discussion is restricted to the self-representations of Perth and Western Australia, as it was staging the America's Cup in 1988.

21 The discussion here draws most on Wernick; but I am also influenced by Harvey's discussion of "the post modern condition" (1989, ch.17).

the Olympic Games, although at one level still important as an athletic championship, have assumed the place they now occupy in global culture only because of their perceived power as promotional vehicle: for the products and the public images of multinational corporations, for the cities and countries that host them, for the careers of athletes (who can then become promotional signs in their own right), and finally for themselves. Indeed the perceived effectiveness of the Olympics as a promotional signifier for others can be read as a marker of their success in promoting the Olympics themselves: as a signifier of modernity, competitiveness, and global consciousness. Today even more circumscribed sporting events like Commonwealth Games or America's Cup races raise large sums through attracting corporate sponsors and "official" suppliers, and through licensing agreements with makers of various insignia-bearing goods: pins, caps, T-shirts, and other souvenirs. Sponsors also get opportunities to entertain clients in a high profile setting, and to be associated with other business and community leaders. Sporting events thus provide a variety of promotional opportunities, and among different target audiences: i.e., other corporations as well as individual consumers. Many of these promotional activities, moreover, from advertising and public relations work itself to the production of licensed merchandise, are clearly part of the business that the events (and likewise professional teams) are figured to bring to cities.

Most important for the current analysis, though, is that all of these promotions also advertise the cities in which teams and Games are based, and it is in this context that we need to situate the civic competition, noted above, to attract the major league teams and the world class events that will act as lures to both capital and people "of the right sort" (Harvey 1989, 295). We need to recognize here the impact of the metropolitan and international media in making particular entertainment events into national and international news, as well as the effectiveness of now standard practices of information and news management — from "photo ops" to publicity releases, and the provision of "backrounders." All of this contributes to blurring the lines between news and promotion while also trying to ensure that most of the news is good news. The intent, and usually the effect, is to confer stature on both the events and the cities where they take place, through far-reaching and positive exposure. Indeed it could be suggested that the images and connotations that are attached today to the term "world class" are little more than artifices of promotional culture.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, I want to raise some questions about how membership and identity are constructed in the discourses of civic belonging and pride that circulate around big league teams and world class events. In the case of big league professional sports, Ingham has suggested that the civic identification that is mobilized in the media, and through the media in the public, as a successful season builds

to its climax, stands as an effective and modern form of civic ritual. Professional sport franchises are especially effective in this role, and not just because team names themselves become civic signifiers in a way that individual representatives cannot. Even more important is what Ingham calls the serial narrative of the sports season: regular games and renewed rivalries that provide conversation fodder for many months, all building up to the suspense of playoffs and an annual championship. This gives the sports season (indeed every one of them) an ongoing presence in the life of a city which a single event — a Fair or a Games — cannot have. We need to underline, here again, the effects of pervasive sports coverage, as well as the cumulative presence of all the other promotional texts (clothing, cards, and betting pools) in sustaining popular interest among many people who may rarely or never attend games. Yet when media cheer-leading presents "us" as everyone in the city — business people and wage earners, property developers and low-income homeowners, men and women, as well as the athletes who are paid to represent us — I want to suggest that the discourse of civic solidarity that is circulated glosses over what are real and important differences of interest within cities. It serves to construct identities that are politically meaningless, while subordinate group interests and identities are obscured in the excitement.

In the case of Expositions and Games, the representations are necessarily somewhat different. With these "once in a lifetime" events, there is usually an attempt to create popular identifications with the ideas of growth and modernity. The city is constructed as a collectivity hosting a world event, all the while demonstrating its emergence onto the world stage. Although the primary agenda is to "put the local on show for the global," as indicated above, there is also an attempt to reconstruct the horizons and aspirations of the local population, with representations of lifestyles that they too can be part of, if they learn to think more ambitiously. Thus Ley and Olds suggest that the preparations for Expo '86 provided an occasion for much discourse by civic and business leaders about Vancouver's new "world class" status, and the opportunities that lay ahead in trade with the Pacific Rim. In other Canadian cities, it has more often been the Olympics and even Olympic bids (in the case of Toronto) that have served as triggers for public discourses about greatness, ambition, and membership in the global culture. In these cases, "hallmark events" served as extended civic rituals in which the "community-as-a-whole" was publicly celebrated, while real differences within the community were papered over or temporarily forgotten.

However, it becomes necessary to ask how one belongs to a "big-league" or "world class" city, and what effects civic status has for people in different social and physical locations. For it can be suggested that only a small fraction of the citizens of any world class city really live their lives in the city that Tourist Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce promote. The promotional imagery typically depicts happy and prosperous individuals enjoying a city's many and varied "lifestyle" assets: its opportunities for scenic recreation, its cosmopolitan

restaurants and night life, its modern venues for "world class" sport and culture. The problem is that this consumer paradise is too expensive for most of the people who actually live there to participate in, except insofar as they enjoy the excitement generated by the media. The cost of tickets for world class sport (whether the major leagues or Olympics), just like the cost of the big-budget, internationally promoted shows (*Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*), effectively excludes most people. Yet often, when civic governments subsidize spectacular leisure-oriented facilities from public funds, it is unspectacular community services, including leisure services, that are sacrificed in favour of the developments that attract affluent consumers downtown.

This returns us to a final issue, namely the different ways in which relatively affluent and poorer people use a city and its amenities. For the former, who have the means to satisfy both needs and wants in the market place, what Harvey calls "community-use values" — including the quality of local public services and facilities — typically make only a marginal difference in their lives. What matters much more are rising residential property values and the presence of the smart restaurants and shops, and the choices in sophisticated entertainment that together make their lives more full and interesting. Able to avail themselves of whichever "lifestyle" amenities the urban marketplace offers, including world famous entertainment, they benefit doubly from developments that increase land values while also adding to the range of leisure choices. The less affluent, in contrast, must use the city differently or must use different parts of the city. They are more likely to benefit from good public services, and their leisure activity is more likely to make use of neighbourhood amenities and spaces — local bars and cafés, as well as parks and community centres — as opposed to the more expensive downtown amenities upon which "world class" reputations are constructed. Such neighbourhood facilities, however, are not infrequently displaced by the changes set in motion by megaprojects and gentrification. Indeed development oriented towards up-market leisure and tourism can be accused of actually widening the gaps between those for whom knowledge of "world class" events and facilities is part of their lifestyle and consumption patterns, and those whose first hand involvement is more likely to be as cabbies and cocktail waitresses.²²

What this points to finally is that membership in the global culture is very much tied to one's resources as a consumer, and that the invitation to membership in a "world class" or "big league" city is simply a way of attracting audiences to some expensive entertainment products. Here the historical transformation of the relationship between audiences and performers that was introduced in the first section of the paper — from member to customer — is completed by the transformation of the loyal local audience into sophisticated

and mobile consumers, and the transformation of our idea of the good city into one that offers "world famous" entertainment and shopping. Several points need to be registered here. The first is simply that all of these entertainments and sites of spectacle are popular precisely because a great many of us do enjoy them as consumers. World Fairs offer novel and interesting exhibits and entertainments, and a festive atmosphere that was described by both Vancouver and Brisbane locals as a "six month party." Thus it is not surprising that such events usually enjoy wide public support, or that "knockers" are often resented even by those for whom they claim to speak.²³ For their part, major league professional sport and events like the World Cup or Olympics offer enormously exciting entertainment. We get to watch people who are the best in the world at what they do, performing under conditions designed to bring out the best in them, showcased in ways that maximize the excitement. To be part of a live audience at such an event is to have our own excitement amplified by that of the crowd around us; it is to "be there" at one of the quintessentially modern entertainment experiences. Even to see it on television is to participate in a mediated way, and clearly many Canadians enjoy watching events like the World Series and the Olympics, along with all the other "world class" entertainment that global television makes available to audiences who could never attend the live events. Promotional culture works in part by making us feel "part of" famous phenomena; and it may even be that one answer to Ignatieff's question of whether there is a public language of belonging appropriate to a city like Los Angeles is to point directly at the passionate identifications that are generated around the Lakers, the Dodgers, and the Raiders.

Yet it has to be suggested that there is something at least thought provoking in the fact that many Canadian boys now wear Raider caps, and avidly follow the fortunes of the Lakers or the Boston Celtics. In Canada the effective globalization of the sports entertainment industry has meant vigorous competition for audiences by many sports products that were not previously promoted among Canadian audiences. This is clearly part of the context in which the CFL struggles; and it is also the context in which hockey at all levels has to actively re-produce its place in Canadian culture. Moreover it is part of a global trend in which Europeans, Japanese and Australians are also becoming audiences for WCT tennis, PGA golf, NFL football. For some, this is a welcome indicator that all of us are becoming more sophisticated in our sporting tastes; and indeed one kind of modernist discourse has routinely identified progress with the creation of a more global consciousness, with the breaking of the place-bound limitations of "home-made" culture. Access to experiences that broaden our interests and develop our awareness of worlds beyond our immediate environs has always

²³ See Ley and Olds on Expo '86 in Vancouver; see Bennett (1991b) on Expo '88 in Brisbane.

²² See Harvey 1987; see Olds with respect to Vancouver.

been one of the most positive promises of modern communications technologies, however much this promise has been distorted in practice.

However, as Ulf Hannerz points out, a genuine cosmopolitanism involves willingness to enjoy difference, and to engage with it on its own terms. This, it can be suggested, is qualitatively different from a transnational culture in which difference is mediated and made familiar, and in which Europeans and Japanese and North Americans follow the same sports entertainments in the same world class facilities the world over, just as Benetton sportswear and French cheeses are now available in upscale malls across the world (Harvey 1989). A more critical perspective on these same developments would suggest that much that is presented as cultural progress and sophistication also obscures a changing economy of cultural production and distribution in which "global promo" and beneath this, the resources to engage in promotion around the affluent world, have a huge impact on *which* goods and activities gain a place in popular consciousness and what kinds of consumer affinities and personal identifications are constructed around them. Indeed, it can be proposed that in the cultivation of audiences for "big league," "world class," ever more professional entertainment, what is really being cultivated, in all of us, is the taste for higher production values, tastes which can only be satisfied by highly capitalized producers and which are available, in practice, only to more affluent consumers.

Finally, I would like to comment on the ways our understandings of identity and community are reworked in this kind of promotional discourse. For what is ultimately being promoted here is an identity — that of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan consumer — an identity we are invited to assume not only through personal consumption but through our membership in a big-league or world class city. Roy Turner has suggested that in most discourse about the global culture, "community" is conceived on the model of a shopping mall, with the best communities portrayed as those that offer the most dazzling array of consumer opportunities, "a cornucopia of futures and identities." It is no accident, Turner suggests, that both community and identity are discussed in terms of "lifestyle," a discourse that has more to do with consumer choices and with self-presentation than with any sense of collective fate or purpose. In somewhat the same vein, Raymond Williams has proposed that the modern construction of the identity of "consumer" has coincided historically with what he calls "mobile privatisation" (188-89). His point is that we are also more than consumers, and he argues that what we gain in terms of new and exciting opportunities as consumers increasingly coexists with a "radically reduced" understanding of our ties with those around us. With the globalization of culture, Williams suggests, constant appeals to our interests and our sophistication as consumers have the effect of detaching our identity as "consumer" (as well as our actual habits of consumption) from the local community we continue to depend upon in many other aspects of our lives: as workers, as neighbours, as users of social and community

services. Thus even while acknowledging the attractions of big-league sport and world class events, we need to remember that community is more than rooting for a well-known team, and our cities are more than settings for consumer choices. We need to question carefully the now frequent invitations to think of civic and personal identities in these terms, and to consider fully the issues that are obscured in this discourse.

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