A Phenomenological Investigation of Sport and Fandom Through Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Alexander Regina

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF SPORT AND FANDOM THROUGH HANS-GEORG GADAMER AND MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Alexander Regina

December 2017
ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF SPORT AND FANDOM
THROUGH HANS-GEORG GADAMER AND MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

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December 2017

Dissertation supervised by Erik A. Garrett

This project aims to uncover the phenomenological and communicative roots of sport fandom from the fan perspective, taking into account the many ways in which fans come to contact sport and integrate corresponding experiences into their own lives and sense of being in the world. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are used to understand the conventions of play that manifest in sport, leading not only to the co-creation of the game experience due to the intertwining of spectators and players but also to the interplay of temporal realms that leads to what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons. Through this fusion, we come to recognize difference and intertwine perspectives to craft a constructive hermeneutic approach to dialogue. Additionally, this project surveys the importance of sport for society, the ability of fandom to join people together and establish meaning, the creation of shared spaces through attachment to stadia, and the influence of sport on how we consume in the marketplace.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family, especially to my late grandfather, Joseph Arduini, for not only being such a profound influence on my character but also introducing me to the love of sport. To my father, Robert Regina, for being my best friend and companion in countless sporting events and memories made—for all the time spent at games, practices, and team events through my youth that allowed me to fall in love with the game of hockey. To my mother, Cindy Regina, my first teacher and the driving force behind my pursuit of an academic career. Thank you for always believing in me and giving up so much to dedicate your time to my upbringing. To my girlfriend, Allyson, for your belief in my resolve and intellect, giving me the motivation I needed to stay focused, and for your support in the most trying times of this project. To the rest of my wonderful loving family for all the encouragement and emotional support throughout my long career at Duquesne University. Lastly, I dedicate this project to my dog, Angela, for providing me with companionship and comic relief when I need it the most. I love and appreciate all of you more than I could ever hope to articulate. Thank you for your guidance, patience, adoration, and faith. I pray that this dissertation makes a meaningful contribution to my field and validates your unwavering belief in my abilities.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the course of history, sports have consistently occupied a coveted space within the human experience. Since the first civilizations, people have actively participated in both the playing and spectatorship of organized sports. Contrary to the legacy of a Puritan ethic, it is play, not work, that is the essence of our American experience, for play allows us to exercise freedom and develop values. However, sports are more than just play, for they are symbolic manifestations of our most serious human interests of power, beauty, and the conquest for perfection (Mihalich, 1982). There are various reasons for the love affair between sports and the human race, ranging from fulfilling primal desires to compete and obtain honor to more modern implications of finding a way to create meaning in an increasingly distancing world. Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002) and his notion of play can contribute to the study of sport by positing play as an experience laden with hermeneutic value and meaning, allowing one to build a collective consciousness, open lines of communication with others, and revel in the aesthetic beauty of the spectacle (Gadamer, 1975).

As Gadamer points out regarding aesthetics, sporting events offer a departure from reality and create a space full of magic. From the hyperreal\(^1\) atmosphere created by the lights, colors, sounds, and spectacles of the stadium coupled with the presence of chanting fans, songs and signage, and the appearance of the hated rivals on the other side of the field, fandom offers a way for individuals to extract fantasy. Sporting events are indeed fantasy, but take place alongside reality and share the same temporal moment,

\(^1\) The postmodern semiotic concept of "hyperreality" was contentiously coined by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard defined "hyperreality" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"; hyperreality is a representation, a sign, without an original referent.
making the experience an escape from the everyday monotony of life while still grounded in time. Here the fan can go to a place where the players on the field, rink, or other such stage become subjects of the fans’ own tragedies, defeats, struggles, and triumphs. Within the walls of stadia, spectators are invited to be a part of a unique experience where they can aspire to be a cohesive group and watch their collective fate play out within this sphere of magic and intrigue, the great theater of society.

Jacquie L’Etang, one of the leading scholars in the study of sports as they connect to society and media, explains that sports can unify nations, promote social change, and affect the national psyche, making them powerful cultural agents. In the same vein, L’Etang explains that sports can also serve as an arena for debate about elites, resource allocation, privilege, exploitation, justice, racism, gender, the body, and ideologies (2006). The notion of opening political and social dialogue through the ethics drawn from sport will be addressed later in the concluding chapter of this project. But what is it about sport that makes us want to purchase a ticket for the right to be seated amongst the masses?

Michael Novak (1976) echoes the importance of sport by using a metaphor to assert that sport attains to the same level as a religion, explaining:

They (sports) dramatize our sense of order. They show how the experience of defeat is a kind of death. They feed our lust for unfaked excellence. Sports are our nation’s strongest forms of natural religion, inculcating discipline, a taste for perfection, and the experience of beautiful and perfect acts.

David L. Andrews (2001) further supports Novak’s positing of sports as religion by explaining that to ignore the role of sports in today’s world would be analogous to
ignoring the role of the church in the Middle Ages or ignoring the role of art in the Renaissance. Sports must be recognized at this level of influence, for virtually no aspect of life is untouched by them. Andrews goes on to further support his argument by saying, “propelled by media machinations, sport has risen to replace work, religion, and community as the cultural ‘glue of collective consciousness in latter twentieth century America,’ while simultaneously becoming the ‘most potent of global idioms’” (2001, p. 132). In modernity and moving into the postmodern period, institutionalized sport came to prominence in lockstep with the maturation of the modern capitalist economies of Western Europe and the United States, providing a guidepost of social control for urban masses.

Personally, I have spent much of my life and sadly most of my resources pursuing the ecstasy of being part of sporting events. The energy surging through crowds, the noises of thousands of hopefuls all anticipating the same result, and the camaraderie that comes with belonging to a fan base is nothing short of life-affirming for a true fan like myself. The time and resources invested in sport proves priceless time and time again as I build my own personal history with the teams I cherish, the fan base that I belong to, and the collection of great moments that are gathered over time. I have traveled around the country following my favorite teams and have built a personal archive of the great defeats and tribulations as well as the triumphant victories and times of flourishing success. In the process, I have also acquired something very dear to my soul, a collection of memories where I was able to transcend my existence and feel like I was part of something that will forever be a part of history. What I always found most intriguing regarding my experience with sports is the need to be present at the game, to entrench
oneself in the crowd, and, in doing so, to be endowed with the sensation that you are a piece of a great framework, a co-creator of the experience itself. This feeling is something awe-inspiring, electrifying, and transcendent to me—representing the driving force behind my inquiry into sport and thus the foundation for this project.

Additionally, I have been fortunate enough to play hockey at the collegiate level for several years, which has afforded me the perspective of a player, giving me an appreciation for the beauty of the game from the playing surface. My experiences in training, practice, competition, and team camaraderie have provided me with an understanding of what sport demands of the body, how it builds character, and ultimately how it changes the way one operates as a fan. There is great value in understanding athletes, their embodiment of the sport that they play, and the unique circumstances that create the subjective experience of these participants in a game. Throughout this analysis of sport, the fan will be the primary focus, but contemplations of the player and the body of the athlete will be interspersed, for the existence of fans is nothing without players. The relationship between the two will be articulated in many ways in this work, and I will look to interject my experience as a player where appropriate to help unpack the concepts brought to the forefront.

The origin of the word “sport” can be traced to a derivative of “disport,” meaning to divert or amuse. A fitting definition for one of the most captivating expressions of human freedom, control, and physical greatness, sport removes us from the mundane activity of daily life and transports our attention to a realm of fantasy and possibility. Amusement is a byproduct of the sporting experience, indeed for both participant and observer, and represents an unadulterated form of joy that stands outside of time, for it
has no true beginning or end. Despite the clocks and boundaries that govern official
games or other organized competition, the concept of sport itself stands outside of any
imposed limits, for it exists always as an option for engagement and beckons
participation for its own sake. In a basic sense, sport offers a degree of purity that is
difficult to attain in most aspects of life, in that participants often engage in it with the
singular agenda to experience the pleasure it offers.

There is great delight in moving one’s body through space and time, to do so with
grace and skill, and in so doing to test the skill and grace of the opponent (Weiss, 1969).
Men and women who are able to demonstrate such elegance and beauty in movement in a
fashion far superior than their average peers are looked upon with admiration, for their
skillset is a testament to self-sacrifice, careful cultivation of bodily control, and, of
course, raw talent. Much can be said on the athlete and sport itself: its elements of
rhythm, focus, intentionality, decision-making, direction, and pragmatism. This project
will not fall short in explicating the essential role the athlete fulfills in creating the fan
experience, but sports from the perspective of the active participant—the athlete—has
received a considerable amount of attention in the academic community in the past few
decades (see Novak, Feezell, and Riess). Yet the perspective that continues to go largely
uninvestigated in sport literature is that of the fan. Several projects have made inroads
into the topic of fandom, including the aforementioned authors, Novak, Feezell, and
Riess, but they fall short in their dedication to the fan as a central focus, usually relating
the experience of the fan as an ancillary consequence of the production of sport. Novak,
for example, begins a valid philosophical investigation of the fan but does not reach
beyond basic conditions of spectatorship, while avoiding the communicative and phenomenological value of fandom as an intersubjective phenomenon.

However, Novak (1976) does offer an admission that the allure of sport has been greatly neglected in the academic community, stating that

Considering the importance of sports to humankind—considering the eminence of stadia and gyms and playing fields on university campuses, comparing the size of the sports section to any other in the paper—our intellectual negligence is inexcusable. Only prejudice, or unbelief, can account for it. What “grabs” so many millions? What is the secret power of attraction? How can we care so much? (1976)

This passage indicates a sense of academic snubbing of the topic of sport, and also leads one to believe that by way of posing the questions of what grabs so many millions and why “we” care so much about sport, Novak (1976) will be addressing the dimension of fandom. However, the use of “we” reveals itself in his work to mean participants in athletics, not the larger sense of “we” that signifies fandom. His work certainly has validity for the study of sport and will be utilized in this project, but I wish to take a basic understanding of fandom further into the realm of phenomenology and attempt to explain the fan’s experience as a unique perspective in itself. My interest in the fan is grounded largely in my own fandom and the desire to understand just why sport has been such a central influence in my personal life and worldview. Therefore, I would like to take Novak’s (1976) passage and repurpose its inquiry to the draw and power of fandom in order to give much needed attention to that subject.
As I reflect on my affinity for sport and interest in fandom, I can’t help but recall a simple sign in my grandfather’s garage that my uncle had created many years before that read, “The fans, not the players.” At times throughout my childhood and adolescence, I would gaze at the inconspicuous message and contemplate its meaning and attempt to form a context for the phrase (and for the very existence of the sign). I discovered many years later that my uncle was not only a sports fan but also a student of phenomenology, and this knowledge made a once perplexing message perfectly clear. My uncle was wise to recognize that organized sport needs players to facilitate the game, but irrevocably draws its lifeblood from the spectator, for without the eyes of the onlooking masses, sport truthfully is relegated to just a game.

I offer this personal anecdote of a frequent childhood pondering to highlight the inescapable fact that sport can only flourish when individuals are willing to give themselves to becoming true fans and therefore welcome the ecstasy of spectatorship into their own lives, continually creating meaningful experiences with the players, fellow fans, stadiums, and the game itself. This circumstance serves as my entrée to the field of phenomenology, a discipline that can be applied to understand why fandom is so influential to the existence of sport, in that fans are the locus of meaning and purpose in the games that are played, for without their presence, sport would exist only in the periphery of human experience and not be grounded within it. Attending a game, watching on TV, or coming into contact with a sporting event in most capacities offers a unique view into the subjectivity of the individual—both of fan and player—as well as a view into the intersubjectivity of all forces involved.
The fan experience and the contagious range of meaningful encounters that emerge from spectatorship is the impetus behind the popularity of professional sports in the modern era and is therefore the vehicle by which great revenues can be made, stadiums can be erected, athletes can be richly compensated, and localities and individuals alike can form a sense of identity. There is something truly majestic in the participation of a fan base. Within the confines of sports venues, people feel as if they are a part of a larger living being, feeling more fulfilled as a mere fraction of a grand assembly than they could ever aspire to feel as an individual, yet maintaining their subjective being. This seems ironic, certainly, but it illustrates what sport lends to the common man, and that is an opportunity to engage in transcendence of the self. When immersed in a sea of beating hearts gathered as one body entrenched in a hyperreality full of ecstasy and stimulation, all clamoring for the same team, the same result, fans can find ways to step outside of their own temporal nature and help create their own history, define their own legacy as fans, and ultimately claim victory over their own mortality. Such an opportunity defines the appeal for participation in the sport and gives birth to the true value of spectatorship, and arguably for participation in the game itself. We watch with the realization that it is just a game, but once we give in to the sensational nature of the spectacle and allow ourselves to be captivated by the magic of the synesthesia that banishes all constraints of time, responsibilities, and reality—the game becomes everything.

I know I am not alone in my affinity for sport and the pursuit of grand moments, ecstatic sensations, and the desperate need to belong to something greater than myself. With that said, this project seeks to explore the phenomenological underpinnings of the
fan experience and attempts to expose the various nuances that sport offers as rich fields of academic inquiry in the field of communication and phenomenology. I will look to discuss the phenomenological intrigue and hermeneutic value of sporting events through fan communication, the fertile grounds for new ways of understanding identity through a new typology of fandom, the phenomenological experience of play, new ways to imagine our bodily experiences, reimagined paradigms of consumption, and the opportunities for discourse that emerge from sporting events. Overall, it is my goal to uncover academic currency in the love for the sport experience that I share with the millions of human beings that pack stadiums around the world.

**Statement of Problem**

According to Joseph C. Mihalich, the philosophic study of sport has only been seriously recognized since 1972, leaving thousands of years of great conquests and subjects of communicative inquiry unexamined (1982). Since then, sports communication literature has certainly grown, but there remains vast untapped potential for study in the fields of communication and phenomenology. Much of the current literature looks at sport through the lens of mediacology and sociology, whereas the research grounded in communication is rather light, only recently beginning to increase in volume. There is quality literature on leisure in the field of communication that should be recognized in the study of sport, but it falls outside the scope of this project (see Holba (2007), Veblen (1967)). The reason for this is that my focus on the phenomenological standpoint of the fan precludes the possibility of positing spectatorship as purely leisure, for we will prove that serving as a fan can be just as taxing as playing the sport! Turning to the field of phenomenology, we see that sport is a mere afterthought for most scholars, as only a
limited number of works are dedicated to the genre of sport and even fewer tackle the subject of fan experience (see Allen-Collinson (2017) and Critchley (2016)). The question that dominates much of the research on sport is quite basic—how does sport influence societal behavior? And secondly, how can we use sport to assimilate people, understand groups, and find avenues for social progress? Lastly, although progress has been made within the genre toward a more faithful examination of sport, the question posed by much recent literature is why so many people are drawn to participate in sport? However, the question how does sport fundamentally influence and change the way we communicate and build individual and group identity through the fan's experience has yet to be thoroughly discussed. More importantly, the question how does sport give our lives meaning is all but ignored.

Moreover, much attention has been given to similar questions in the arts, theater, and music as fields of study while sporting events have been largely left on the periphery. I believe sport should be firmly positioned within the domains of art and theater as it inspires the same feelings of wonder, magic, introspection, and beauty. As Hans-Georg Gadamer points out, play is in itself an art form, for it is movement of interworking parts and a form of beauty that draws the spectator in just as a painting might (1975, p. 25). We must give more attention to the existential value that sport can offer through its ability to mimic human experience as it creates tragedy, offers moments of catharsis, and delivers drama to the spectator. The aforementioned conditions make this project a timely and fruitful pursuit, as I hope to advance the conversation in sports communication by revealing its phenomenological roots.
Significance of Problem

Overall, it is my hope that this project advances the study of fan experience as a legitimate area of inquiry for communication scholars and phenomenologists alike. In a more accurate sense, I believe this project can bring about new ways of understanding the human experience at large by examining a microcosm of the shared lived experience. The parallels that sport draws with the paired topics of life and death, defeat and triumph, individuality and togetherness, and struggle and perseverance can all be examined to explicate the true value in sport for existential study and define its basic appeal to human beings. Additionally, sport offers a unique way to understand identity formation and group communication when observed through a phenomenological lens. Lastly, this project can shed light on the capabilities of sport to offer transcendent experiences to the spectator and, in doing so, give rise to a way to reach meaning.

Investigating the role sport plays in the lives of the spectators and players can provide valuable contributions to multiple disciplines. In phenomenology, the role of the spectator as a co-present but detached creator of the live fan experience opens the door to exciting new applications of the chiasm as detailed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This can be achieved through an examination of the body/mind paradigm in Merleau-Ponty, applying it to the distinct but cooperative groups of players and spectators engaged in a sporting event and elucidating the roles each plays in creating a lived experience. This can also be expanded to revisit the notion of “flesh” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 184) through Merleau-Ponty as the relationship between the spectator and the game itself. In order to do so, I will look to place the sport experience in the realm of a cooperatively made theater that relies on the continuity of sensation between spectator and player/game
to complete the chiasm of bi-directional exchange that results in an anonymous sensibility shared by both parties.

Another contribution to phenomenology I wish to make is to expand the understanding of Gadamer’s idea of “fusion of horizons” (1975, p. 305), which describes an understanding of the existential nature of the link between the past and present. The idea here is that contextual and interpersonal elements of experience inform an individual’s sense of being in the present by combining a sense of history with the current conditions of his or her worldview. Such an examination can be commenced by looking to the temporal nature of sports and the creation of history that comes along with fandom and making connections to the experience of the present that is continually being created with an uncertain future. There is an opportunity here to explain how past experiences may endow fans with an awareness or unique consciousness that causes them to believe they can actually influence the outcomes of games in the present and therefore determine the future. Additionally, insight can be attained into the cultural appeal of sport: fan traditions and rituals, the sharing of history amongst generations, and the establishment of belief systems.

In communication studies, this project could be used to find new ways to open dialogue through the fan experience as a member of a group. In order to move forward in this pursuit, I intend to use Gadamer’s (1975) hermeneutic approach that calls for an understanding situated in larger groups instead of the individual only, larger groups much like a fan base. For Gadamer, hermeneutics come from a shared space, and dialogue can emerge when people can recognize that their prejudices and past experiences cannot be removed from the present. This situation is akin to a fan base where there is a shared
history and prejudices against other teams, players, and so on are likely well established and recognized. Returning to Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and enlisting the aid of a variety of sources on communication ethics, I will explain how sport fandom offers a dialogic ethic that allows for a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding one another.

Additionally, I wish to make my mark on the study of sport communication by providing a much-needed paradigm of fan typologies that can be used to define groups of individuals based on their investment, motivations, and experiential value as those relate to being a member of a fan base. In doing so, the goal is to explain the various levels in which fandom manifests and offer new ways to understand fan involvement from a communicative point of view—to uncover why and how fans relate to sport, games, athletes, and other fans.

For the study of phenomenology in general, this project may help make a meaningful contribution in a much-needed area: the work of Gadamer. As Chris Lawn explains, there is a critical lack of study in the English-speaking world on the works of Gadamer due in large part to his hermeneutical approach being overshadowed by the dominant belief in methodology and science during his time (2012). Gadamer wrote in opposition to Cartesian and Enlightenment thought. He believed that hermeneutics involve an oscillation between past and present, whereas the dominant school of thought abandoned the past’s role in understanding in the name of forward progress. Lawn explains how the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (largely informed by Gadamer’s studies with Heidegger) are grossly overlooked by the academic community.
(2012). One result of my project may be to give Gadamer a renewed voice in the study of hermeneutics, especially in its application to the genre of sport and fan experience.

Lastly, I believe this project can contribute to both phenomenology and communication in understanding the foundational appeal of sport. I intend to use Gadamer’s work on play as well as a variety of sources on the subjects of meaning and transcendence to elucidate the fundamental appeal of the fan experience and hopefully give birth to a new way to view loyal fandom. Gadamer’s work on tradition and the transmission of history will also play a crucial role in my project as I attempt to explain the transference of meaning between fans. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty will be used to explicate the embodied aspects of fandom and offer a new way of imagining the concept of game.

**Methodology Overview**

This project relies on phenomenological research grounded largely in the works of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, as well as secondary sources that contribute to their body of work. Paul Weiss’s *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry* (1969) and Joseph C. Mihalich’s (1982) *Sports and Athletics: Philosophy in Action*, two works that could be considered as seminal contributions to the study of sport, will also be utilized in a large capacity to develop the foundational objectives of inquiry in the field. Both Weiss and Mihalich (1982) take a similar approach to the nuances in sport, and Mihalich often refers to Weiss’s ideas to open a dialogue into the field of study. Both works are essential to any project involving a philosophical/phenomenological investigation of sport, as they were some of the first published projects on sport during the infancy of the genre in academia. Where Weiss and Mihalich fall short, as was the case with Novak (1976), is their focus
on the athlete’s participation in sport, to the practical exclusion of the spectator. Using their groundwork for the philosophic roots of sport, I move the conversation into spectatorship and fan experience with a direct focus on the elements of fandom while also honoring the vital role of athlete as it relates to the production of meaningful encounters for the fan. Additional secondary research is implemented to advance my research in each nuance detailed in the chapters to follow. I also draw upon my extensive experience within the realm of sport, including my participation in fan bases, my travels and observations of other fan groups, and my sensory experiences with live sports to provide some ethnographical support. All sources will be applied to the basic understanding of the phenomenological underpinnings of the sport experience through the lens of the fan, while making sure to explicate the role and experience of the athlete.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter serves to provide a base for this project, offering a general sense of appeal of the sport genre and also pointing out the deficient areas of study where this examination can make a serious contribution. The introduction also details my inspiration for engaging in this study—my interest born from the critical role that sport has played in my own life and that of so many others that comes from its magical ability to offer transcendence of the self. Additionally, the first chapter provides a foundational structure for how I will proceed in uncovering the phenomenological roots and implications of fandom as it relates to the study of both phenomenology and communication.

The second chapter of this project examines the fundamental aspects of sport, athletes, and fandom. Chapter two begins with a brief history of sport that is expanded later in the chapter in relation to the evolution of fandom throughout history. The focus
then turns to a discussion of the athlete and the set of appeals that come along with their stature and public image, their ability to draw the interest of spectators and therefore allow fandom to emerge. Athletes are then posited as the mediating entity between fan and sport, acting as liaisons for vicarious experience. With this idea in hand, I then visit the emergence of the fanatic by tracing fandom through ancient Greece, Rome, and the Middle Ages. The second chapter concludes by detailing catharsis and vicarious achievement as two of the fundamental motives for the connection between athlete and fan and the concomitant importance of sport in its ability to offer meaning, which constitutes the basis of fandom.

Chapter three holds my most unique contribution to the ongoing study of sport phenomenology and sport communication, as I offer a structure of typologies of fandom to offer a better understanding of the motives for different genres of fans becoming engaged in sport spectatorship. I separate fandom into eight typologies: Socialites, Businessfans, Casual Fans, Collectors, Purists, Mimetics, Parasocials, and Fringe Fans. Each typology is divided based on the fan type’s seminal motivations for fandom and includes a description of the manners in which they are likely to be observed participating in a fan base, as well as the communicative implications of their behavior. This includes an examination of how some typologies may appear to others, and also how they may blend together. My typology framework provides a base of categorization that is used frequently throughout the rest of the project to draw parallels between fan behavior and its phenomenological underpinnings.

In chapter four, attention is turned to the phenomenological method itself, as well as the notion of play through Gadamer and others. Beginning with a summary of the
phenomenological method and its aptness for studying sport, the chapter then moves towards the phenomenon of play and its value in socializing and joining human beings. This includes a positing of play as a dramatization of real life, a simulation of reality that allows the accumulation of embodied practical knowledge, with an understating that play is spontaneous and always available to human beings. Next, I utilize Gadamer’s work to explain the link between play and the transmission of history with his marquee notion of the “fusion of horizons.” With the idea of fusion in mind, I end the chapter with an account of the transmission of meaning through play objects, and the possibility of perspectival intertwining as a byproduct of the sharing of such items.

The fifth chapter turns to the work of Merleau-Ponty to articulate the corporeal elements of sport that foster embodied phenomenological experiences, while explaining how sport, too, can act as a body. Here I apply the mimetic and purist typologies to the embodied practices that define their mode of fandom as a condition of the athlete being immersed in the act of play. To do so, I use Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of the phenomenological body to posit equipment as figurative extensions of the corporeity of athletes. I then draw upon Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh to explicate the linkage between fan and player that can be fostered through the use of equipment and the parallel experiences between both parties. From there, I examine the bonds that foster empathetic sensations on behalf of the fan through the work of Theodor Lipps and then reimagine the concept of empathy through Edith Stein. The chapter concludes by utilizing Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the chiasm and the condition of interplay between mind and body to revisit sporting events as chiasm at work, highlighting the interplay between fans and players that must take place to create the game experience. For this reason, I imagine the
game experience as a body and expound upon the chiasm in its ability to offer opportunities for co-creation of meaning between spectator and athlete.

Chapter six advances the notion of chiasm and the interplay that forms the game experience to explain how strong fan relationships build imagined and phenomenological dwellings and a sense of shared space. I begin with a description of sport that accounts for its role in society, including its ability to act as a social unification mechanism and the locus of both individual and group meaning and identity. Adding to this idea, I posit transcendence of the self as a motivation for identifying with a fan base and use ritual to describe the ways in which group identity is continually reified. From there, I make the move to explaining how communal identity comes to define place, detailing the intense connections fans maintain with stadia. This juncture includes a reimagining of the concept of “home-field advantage”; giving the definition that carries an implied sense of familiarity with phenomenological and communicative roots. Having established the strong affiliations between fans and venue, I include a section on phantom stadia and the ways in which fans and sport organizations resurrect past stadia through means of physical and symbolic transference. To unpack this notion of transference, I revisit Gadamer’s idea of fusion to help explain how stadia require our intertwining of past and present in order to maintain a presence in the collective consciousness of a fan base. In closing, this chapter points to intermediate spaces as a consequence of strong localized groupings that expand beyond the stadium and into other cities or areas of public domain—making faraway places seem very much like home to fans.

The penultimate chapter, chapter seven, utilizes the fan typologies from chapter three and Douglas Holt’s (1995) categorization of fan consumption to define the
consumption patterns of fans as they relate to their primary modes of and motivations for participating in fandom. This chapter commences with a brief definition of consumption as it relates to sport, placing fans in the realm of consumers and making it clear that fans consume sport through a variety of subjective purviews that best fulfill psychic and emotional needs. Holt’s typologies of fan consumption are then employed to mark divisions between fans regarding their patterns of consumption while applying them to the typologies from chapter three to offer a clear picture of how fans come to experience a game. Next, this chapter focuses on the influence of new media and technology in sport, including a brief history of the proliferation of media outlets dedicated to sport and the sweeping changes brought to both gameplay and the rules of sport. Lastly, the chapter concludes with an examination of the increasingly popular realm of fantasy sports and the lasting implications they have brought to the consumption of sport. Additionally, the problematic communicative issues for fandom that emerge in the wake of new media and fantasy sports are explored, focusing on the changing dynamics of fan loyalty.

In the final chapter, chapter eight, I draw a few conclusions from this project that can be used to better understand the communicative implications of sport—namely its ability to open dialogue. The chapter begins with a description of how sport fans come to access privileged discourse through participation and attendance at games, permitting entry into debate and public discussion. From the idea of earning the right to discourse, the chapter turns its focus to explaining how a dialogic ethic emerges from the ethic of play found in sport that manifests amongst players and, in turn, amongst fans. All of this leads to the final conclusion: that a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding can be extracted from ethic of play and fan interactions, a hermeneutic when, if applied to
other realms of societal discourse (politics, civic engagement, interpersonal interactions), can result in a level of mutual understanding rarely achieved in public debate. To build this constructive hermeneutic, I once again return to Gadamer and the fusion of horizons as the condition under which we can recognize and respect perceptual bias and work towards the learning and new ways of thinking that can come from meeting one another while standing in our own truth position. Here I recognize that there is no concept of a universal truth, and using a dialogic ethic, that we can meet on common ground to continually create mutual understanding and new horizons of communal meaning.
Chapter 2: Origins of Sport, Athlete, and Fandom

At the inception of this project, it is of vital importance to understand the basic history and origins of the sports realm that provide the underpinnings of its appeal and implications in the human experience. In any phenomenological study, one must first understand the origins of the object of inquiry, as it exists as the basis of human experience. For the purposes of building a foundational knowledge of sport, we should first review its history, the origin of its participants, and the seminal elements of fandom that continue to drive its popularity and appeal.

Sport: A Brief History

Sport participation and spectatorship can be traced back to the beginnings of the human race, serving as a useful way for people to increase their mastery of nature and come to terms with their own existence. The skills exhibited in athletic competition are those that are regarded by society as the capacities needed to survive, as well as being developed for their own sake. Strength, agility, mental fortitude, and the like are all included among the merits of sports and have forever been admired as qualities of the hero, the champion, and the leader. Such qualities are what human beings strive to master, and when we cannot do so, we tend to build vicarious relationships with those who can. From this divide in physical performance and ability between individuals, we derive the importance of the athlete as icon, which will be discussed shortly.

Returning to the origins of sport, we can trace athletic competition to prehistoric times, as evidence of sprinting and wrestling can be obtained from cave paintings in France that date back to 17,000 years ago (Barber, 2007). Other cave drawings in Mongolia from the Neolithic age of 7000 BC show wrestling matches surrounded by
onlookers, indicating perhaps the first organized spectator sports. Additionally, artifacts from 6000 BC in Libya show evidence of the practice of organized swimming and archery. The ancient Sumerians, Babylonians, and Persians of Mesopotamia also left behind clear evidence of competitive sport via terracotta relief works dating back to 3000-2340 BC that depict men engaged in boxing and wrestling matches, each tablet exhibiting various poses and striking methods (Vörös, 2007).

In the ancient era, one need not look further than Greece and Rome for strong evidence of the prominence and importance of sports during this period. In Homer’s *Iliad*, there are detailed descriptions of funeral games held in honor of deceased warriors such as those hosted for Achilles (Homer & Fitzgerald, 1974). In *The Odyssey*, King Odysseus proves his royal status by showing his excellence in throwing the javelin (Homer & Fitzgerald, 1990). Such famous literary works coincide with the first Olympic games that were held in Greece around 776 BC in Olympia as homage to the gods. Chariot races (later discussed in this chapter as a foundation of the modern fan), footraces, javelin throw, long jump, and discus throw are among the events originated in ancient Greece and Rome that have modern parallels.

The Pre-Classical Mayan era included a sport known simply to historians as the “Ball Game” (referred to as “Pok-a-Tok” in Mayan relics) that was played by all the major civilizations from the Olmecs to the Aztecs around 300-900 CE. Taking place in the sacred precincts of Mayan cities as a part of religious festivals, the goal was to move a large rubber ball through a stone ring attached to a wall without the use of hands. With obvious parallels to modern soccer, the Ball Game was a much more serious enterprise. Not only was the ball potentially lethal, being large and heavy enough to break bones and
cause head trauma, but the losing team was often sacrificed to the gods. Therefore, slaves and war captives were usually those forced to play the game for the entertainment of the onlookers and as a tribute to the Mayan gods. The victors were awarded hachas and palmas, trophies depicting deities, sometimes fashioned out of human heads (Cartwright, 2013).

What made the Mayan ball game so influential to modern sport was the invention and use of the first forms of equipment. In order to provide protection against the enormous heft of the ball, leather shields and padding were fashioned to cover the body and were used to deflect and propel the ball into the rings (Cartwright, 2013). Analogous to the paraphernalia athletes wear today, the Mayans use of protective shielding may have been the first instance of the embodied use of equipment that will be discussed in chapter four.

Another example of early ball-oriented games can be traced back to ancient China, an early conception of what we know today as soccer. First recorded 2,000 years ago, “Cuju” was a popular sport during the Tang (618-907) and Song Dynasties (960-1279), one that involved a ball fashioned from pieces of leather and an inflated animal bladder. A singular goal was crafted from bamboo sticks and placed in the middle of a field where teams of any number of participants would attempt to kick the ball into the goal. There was no limit to the team size, so long as they were equal. In fact, there is an account of a women’s team consisting of 153 players that was so proficient in possessing the ball that it never touched the ground through the course of the game. Archery, swordplay, golf, and polo were also included in the ancient Chinese civilizations, indicating that variety in sporting enterprises can be seen to be a consistent thread
through history (Jue, 2013).

The Middle Ages boasted 700 years of violent forms of early football in England and Ireland, as well as more civilized sporting events such as jousting and fencing that were usually reserved for members of the aristocracy and the wealthy. The Middle Ages marked a clear demarcation of sports as they relate to class structure, claiming dignified sports for the upper class and leaving the dangerous violent sports for the peasants and commoners. Horse racing also rose to prominence during this time as a favorite spectator sport for royalty (Mihalich, 1982). The middle-class came to enjoy archery and target shooting, a sport that gained popularity as the necessity to use weapons for hunting began to wane through social progress. Classes were further divided in the era, as only those of the noble middle class practiced the crossbow whereas the mid and lower level ranks used traditional bows and firearms (Guttmann, 1981). Such social inequality in sports can be argued to still persist today, as the upper class tend to prefer tennis, polo, and recreational games while the working class dominates contact sports like football (Mihalich, 1982).

The Victorian age (1837-1901) brought about a new dynamic of sport by integrating the concept of teams as a dominant structure in competition. Throughout the United Kingdom, schools and religious communities sponsored the formation of teams in a wide variety of sports and, in doing so, created local pride through community affiliations with teams. Along with the tradition of the Middle Ages that produced sport as a spectacle for fans, the spread of a team philosophy made sporting events a marriage between spectator and player in the sense that we know it today. In other words, people in this era became closely connected to not just a player or team but also a representative
locality (Skillen, 1993). Our strong associations with cities, colleges and universities, and even states or countries as they are represented by our favorite teams is very much a consequence of the sporting philosophy of the Victorian era. As Skillen explains, the pursuit of excellence became a microcosm of communal virtue when teams became associated with civic areas (1993). This provides a fitting explanation for the immense amount of pride individuals and communities are likely to display when “the home team” wins, and is a product of the vicarious associations we share with teams that will be highlighted at the end of this chapter.

The development of modern sports was due largely to the Western culture’s emphasis on team sports, originating from the British Empire and other parts of Europe. The ancient games provided the foundation for modern sport, as they promoted the physical qualities of the superior athlete. Modern sports and the idea of the professional athlete gained popularity thanks to the industrial revolution and the capitalistic structures of economy that provided more leisure time and disposable income for spectator sports (Mihalich, 1982; Weiss, 1969).

We must now turn to analyzing the influence of the athlete as public idol, an idea that draws upon the prowess of heroes in ancient literature and incorporates the existential needs of the modern human, which, in turn, has given rise to the emergence of fandom.

**What Makes an Athlete?**

Human excellence is something that man has sought after since the beginning of existence. It is encoded in our human nature to want to achieve levels of greatness that transcend our very being and will serve as a demonstration as to what it means to be a
master over oneself, an occupation, or a skill. We idolize those who have achieved excellence in their own right and strive to be more like them. Unfortunately, most human beings are not endowed with the means to rise to such levels due to relative genetic, physiological, and mental conditions. Those who are born with raw talent, natural capabilities, or predispositions to actualize their greatest potential are seen in a different light when they give themselves to the rigors of training and repetition to hone their abilities and become masters of motility. As a society, we recognize individuals who possess the necessary fortitude to shape the body through self-sacrifice and relentless dedication. The ability to govern one’s body through rigorous training is what sets the elite athlete apart from the mere amateur, for like anything else in a mortal life, talent alone cannot beget greatness in the absence of determined practice.

The athlete is like us in that with each breath oxygen flows through his lungs and blood through his heart, yet as our bodies age and begin to work against us in many ways, the athlete seems impervious to time and aging. The sharpening of skillsets and training of the body through rigorous practice makes the athlete appear to be infallible and lasting. Like the game they play, they, too, stand outside of time and do not seem to be governed by it. Sure, there inevitably comes the day for any athlete when he or she can no longer compete and retires from the sport. But with few exceptions, most athletes retire at a relatively young age, and therefore are forever remembered by fans in their current state, at the height of their abilities and prowess. Eventually, the retired hero is replaced with another young specimen of human excellence, and the cycle continues on. In the eyes of the fan, the entire team—the entire game or sport—is eternally youthful and vibrant, the pinnacle of human existence. Even after athletes have left the sport, they are remembered
by what they achieved while at the zenith of their physical condition and are celebrated in a manner that has no regard for their current or progressing age.

The likes of Michael Jordan, Babe Ruth, Wayne Gretzky, and Tom Brady, all marquee names and all-time greats in their respective sports, did not rise to prominence by chance. Instead, those we remember by name as synonymous with a sport are human beings that embodied the tools for transcendence over their sport through self-sacrifice and respect for preparation. They are undoubtedly remembered for their contributions to the game (statistics, records, championships, scoring, and so on), but also for their perceived static position in the history of the sport, forever masters of the game to create a sense of beauty and mysticism for the spectator.

There is something fantastic about watching someone with complete autonomy of their own body perform what seem to be magical acts on a playing field, magic in a sense that average people cannot even imagine having the ability to do so.

Athletics puts primary emphasis, not on the effort to subjugate others, as a theory of aggression maintains, but on the opposite effort to deal properly with other realities, in order to enable one to become excellent in and through the use of a body. It attracts the young and has an appeal to all because it is one of the most ready means—perhaps the most ready means—by which one can become self-complete. (Weiss, 1969)

Taking this idea further, Weiss explains that it is often the young who are drawn to sport because it is an area they can master without the advantages of advancing age. For example, if one feels short of intellect or simply doesn’t have the life experience to actualize skills in other areas of life or occupation, what one can default to is the rigorous
practices that build the body, sharpen athletic skills, and appropriately channel excessive energies into a skillset one otherwise cannot acquire (1969). The desire to excel and gain reverence at a young age is one of the reasons athletes are made, trusting in nothing but their own bodies and willpower to move to greater heights in both literal and figurative stature. This is not to say that all young people are afforded the opportunity to excel in athletics, but exposes the fact that athletes are made in the juvenile stages of life. It is not often (if ever) we see a grown man suddenly develop into a star athlete. Instead, the athlete recognizes his or her opportunity for excellence early and cultivates skills through training. Weiss goes on to question why anyone, especially a young man, would want to subject himself to a life of strenuous exercise, rote routine, physical punishment, self-denial (dieting, exclusion of vices, and so on), and constant scrutiny and direction (from coaches, trainers, and the like). In the same vein, this life usually includes exclusion from social groups other than teams, limits time to spend with family, and ultimately entails pursuit of a goal with a lot of risk and strife and no promise of reward in the end. The answer, he contends, may go back to the idea that they participate in this lifestyle with full recognition that athletics may be their only way to achieve excellence—the only domain over which they can hope to have control (1969).

On a subliminal level, athletes realize that they lack intellect at a young age and are not promised its development in the future. Perhaps they are devoid of the financial prowess they need to achieve perceived excellence through acquisition and social status. Or maybe they simply recognize that they were born with a gift that is begging to be exploited and feel a duty to do so. Whatever the reason may be, such individuals subject themselves to a life of physical punishment because they realize it is their most attainable
and available road to prosperity.

For this reason, the athlete has been the subject of much reverence throughout the course of human history, dating back to ancient times and some of the first civilizations. As Weiss explains, “An athlete once was, and still can be, treated as a sacred being who embodies something of the divine in him. He is credited with the dignity of embodying a supreme value” (1969). The athlete is like a deity, one who embodies the capabilities to be super-human and who becomes the surrogate of the masses to represent and satisfy the desires for victory and honor amongst the public. The ideal athlete is a special type of being that supporters want to view as the quintessential leader, hard worker, and humble sufferer in the face of conquest. In this manner, athletes uphold the moral values and virtues of excellence that achievement-oriented societies wish to emulate and practice (Grano, 2007).

Weiss helps to provide further clarity on the admiration of athletes as he writes:

The athlete is a man apart. The beauty and grace of his body, his coordination, responsiveness, alertness, efficiency, his devotion and accomplishments, his splendid unity with his equipment, all geared to produce a result at the limits of bodily possibility, set him over against the rest of men. Mankind looks on him somewhat the way it looks on glamorous women, the worldly successful, and the hero. (1969)

We look to specific archetypes of athletes to alleviate personal stresses and preoccupations as we attempt to grasp our own being in the world and make sense of what we encounter. In the face of strife, we look to the underdog athlete to break the mold and provide us with assurance that any obstacle can be overcome. In the event that
society is beleaguered by change and instability, we take comfort in the veteran champion, a hero among men, who restores consistency and familiarity to his fans through his calculated and predictable success. Through athletes, we utilize vicarious associations to acquire our own personal avatars in the public eye, individuals who appear to transcend the limitations of the body and who can fight against uncertainty and struggle on our behalf.

Athletes in the public eye have a unique responsibility to uphold certain moral standards deemed acceptable by society, and they thus try to promote the common good of those who admire them. In many cases we expect our sporting heroes not only to excel in sport but also to demonstrate consistently high standards of behavior and moral conduct (Summers & Morgan, 2008). Daniel Grano (2007) calls the relationship between the athlete and his admirers dispersed throughout the general public a “contract.” By using the word contract, he is claiming that there exists an unspoken agreement between sporting icons and the public to uphold the values of society in an effort to reaffirm the communal values of the populace.

The on-field actions of athletes stand to represent the larger sociopolitical arena of fans, usually divided into regional sections that view sports teams as extensions of their identity. Through this identification, the victories and defeats of the team become symbolic of the life and death of the interests and values that each region represents. Grano explains that this deep emotional attachment to the successes and failures of a team or specific athlete stems from the reification of the importance of the sporting event (2007). In other words, the athlete serves as the liaison between the fan and sport and the vehicle through which the fan gains access to the meaning available in sporting events.
This notion of athlete as experiential medium will be revisited at multiple junctures throughout this project to describe the ways fans connect with sport. For an athlete to display deficient character and fail to uphold the wishes of society is to void Grano’s proposed “contract” and threaten the agency of the player to bring sport to the fan.

The position of the athlete is one of immense social influence, power, and fortune, so it is foolish to believe that athletes will always present themselves as model citizens. This is indeed the expectation of the public, but they are nonetheless still human beings living in an environment very alien to most people. Weiss describes the condition of the athlete as it relates to these shortcomings as he says, “Athletes, of course, often fall short of these noble ideals. Sometimes they misbehave….Too often they yield to the pressure of organizations, to slogans, and to the persuasion of raw power…the are tempted by money and what they think is glory” (1969). Weiss was writing in the late 1960’s, long before social media and technology blew wide open the doors of athletes’ private lives and made every misstep and gaffe readily available to the public for scrutiny. Given some of the egregious and disturbing actions of athletes in recent years, one may say that Weiss’s quote is a grand understatement, and perhaps he would agree.

Coming back to the more wholesome conception of the athlete, Randolph Feezell supports the notion of a fan/player relationship, explaining that the athlete is the vehicle by which spectators, having the inherent ability to recognize and appreciate excellence, are captivated, by fascinated, and attracted to ideality.

Feezell quotes Weiss to explain the importance of the athlete as a representative:

Few men work at becoming all they can be. Fewer still try to do this by achieving a disciplined mastery of their bodies. But all can, and occasionally some do, see
the athlete as an expression of what man as such can be and do, in the special
guise of this individual body and in these particular circumstances. In the athlete
all can catch a glimpse of what one might be were one also to operate at the limit
of bodily capacity … By representing us, the athlete makes all of us be
vicariously completed men. We cannot but be pleased by what such a
representation achieves. (2006)

This statement recapitulates this past section well, providing a summation of the
appeal of athletes to the spectator, restating the importance of training and bodily
excellence for the athlete, and speaking to the function of representation that the athlete
serves for the fan through vicarious means. The vicarious nature of this relationship will
be examined in the next section as a central benefit of engaging in fandom. Moving now
to understanding the fan and tracing the origins of fandom, the takeaway from this
section above all else should be that the reverence towards athletes is only partially a
consequence of their excellence. What many treatises on sport to this point have failed to
recognize by focusing only on the appeal of active participation is that true veneration of
the athlete in the eyes of the fan comes from their ability to provide passage into the
nuanced meaning of sport. In other words, the greatness of athletes is only valuable to the
extent that it allows fans to interact with the overall sporting experience. I will not make
the mistake of others in overlooking this crucial point of emphasis. Therefore, the
purpose of this project is not to explicate the justification of the athlete as we have done
briefly, but instead to discuss why the pursuit of excellence by the athlete has given rise
to the creation of the fan and to uncover the phenomenological value of the athlete’s
embodied experiences.
To this point, it should be apparent why individuals dedicate their lives to athletics, why the great degree of reverence conferred onto the athlete, and what constitutes the genuine appeal of their greatness to any being that lacks the means to pursue a career in athletics. At this juncture, we will now pivot to understanding what has given rise to the “fanatic” through a summary of its evolution through time, and, in doing so, underscore the existential purpose that sports and athletes have in the lives of individuals.

**The Emergence of the Fanatic**

In order to provide a fitting introduction to the discussion of fandom as it has begun and evolved throughout the ages, I would like to revisit Michael Novak for a wonderful explication of the perspective of the fan in what connects human beings to sport. Reflecting on his fandom after a loss by his favorite baseball team, Novak (1976) writes:

> How could I be forty years old and still care what happens to the Dodgers? How could I have thrown away three hours of an evaporating life, watching a ritual, an inferior dance, a competition without a socially redeeming point? ... Quietly, I knew the answer. What I had just seen was somehow more important than my other work, was deeper in my being than most of what I did, spoke to me of beauty, excellence, imagination, and animal vitality—was true in a way few things in life are true. My love for sports was deeper than any theory that I had. The reality is better than its intellectual defense. (1976)

Novak’s passage displays his wonderment regarding the appeal of sport, affirming it to be a real attraction, but questioning the theory that would explain it. By referring to
games as “inferior dance,” he is almost lamenting the time-consuming nature of his hobby, possibly suggesting that it is a fruitless pursuit. Yet towards the end of this passage, he comes to terms with the idea that the love of sport does not need an intellectual defense, for it is something sublime and truthful that elicits no rational explanation. The “truth” Novak mentions is that of a life-affirming, meaningful experience that makes fandom so essentially rewarding. I contend that participation in fandom is fulfilling in that it allows us to belong to something that promotes transcendence beyond our being, in that it opens the window to experiences that wouldn’t be accessible in our own lives. The fan is the average person, one who lacks the ability to participate in sport on a professional level but is captivated by both the game and the athletes who play them. Games, stadiums, crowds, atmospheres, and such have their own appeal to the fan, as will be discussed at length in chapters to follow, but for now we must focus on the love affair between fan and athlete—the relationship that provides the access of the masses to the realm of sport.

Many of us grow up playing sports and enjoying the various physical and emotional benefits of competition; some of us, like myself, even have had the opportunity to play at an advanced or collegiate level and experience heightened levels of competition. Sadly, however, there comes a time when our skillset meets its maximum potential, our aging body begins to betray our athletic abilities, or we realize that what once was a aspiration of “going pro” was irrevocably a pipedream. There is nothing wrong with coming to terms with your own abilities. If anything, it is essential to establishing a proper and stable life once earning a living, as being an athlete is no longer an option (if it ever was!). In many instances, people move on with their lives long before
their abilities in athletics have been surpassed by the demands of increasing competition levels and still maintain an active interest in the sport, participating in recreational leagues and therefore still enjoying the game at a competitive level.

In the case of the professional athlete, we recognize that they have made it. They have done what we could only dream of doing. There is something seminally enchanting about someone who has been able to defy the odds and designate themselves among the most elite group of human beings to ever walk the earth, the ones who can be recognized as vocational athletes. It is not hard to imagine why men and women are happy to watch individuals half their age for fulfillment and with admiration; the athlete is a bastion of youth and human excellence that transcends time and allows spectators to vicariously stand outside of time and claim excellence along with them.

Youth and the transcendence of aging are but a fraction of the many appeals an athlete offers to the layman public. Included in the allure of watching prodigious athletes is the thrill of belonging to a group of likeminded individuals, the pleasure of achieving vicarious victory, the privilege of witnessing the fantastic, and even the satisfaction of belief in one’s own influence on the outcome of an event. Sport affords people the ability to step outside of their own mortal restraints and limitations and take part in something unavailable in normal civilian life. As Critchley (2016) explains, sport provides an opportunity to witness life and death. There is life in the victories and death in defeat, yet regardless of the outcome, there is the promise of another game, another season. The persistence of the sport and the predictability of the seasons and schedules draw us in, for the ongoing survival of the sport is also victory over death. We are attracted, Critchley argues, to the cyclical, seasonal nature of sport because it promises perpetuity of
opportunity for witnessing victory and standing above the death of defeat (2016). Our lives are guaranteed to end in defeat—nobody can survive death. However, for fans, sport gives us a chance to reject mortality and deny death by being a participant in something that will continue to exist long after we are gone. To play in a game, or to watch from the stands, is to stand outside of time and cement one’s presence in the event—a finite component of a larger phenomenon that archives each game in its movement toward eternity. To be part of the history of sport is to be embedded in a tapestry that transcends the bounds of time and gives us a path to immortality.

In order to reap the emotional, psychological, and social benefits of sport that cannot be achieved by one’s own body, one must still be present at the event. Today, we enjoy many methods of participating in sport through attending games, watching on television, keeping track of our teams on our mobile phones and Internet, participating in fantasy leagues, and engaging in a multiplicity of other mediated sources that bring the game right to us. One can argue that sports have been over-mediated, becoming available from so many sources that its very nature as an isolated sanctified experience is being cheapened by the noncommittal methods in which it can be accessed. This is due in large part to the commoditization of sport, a condition to be lamented by many factions of fans, but with the promise of reclamation of meaning and value for some, as will be examined in chapter seven. Still, the truest of fans, the individuals who integrate fandom into their being, approach sport with the intent to participate and belong through live events. In its infancy, spectatorship could be attained through but one route, being present and attentive at the sporting event itself. Here, we have the emergence of the spectator, and later, the fanatic.
Let us now turn to the history of fandom through several periods of time to trace the origins and evolution of fandom as we know it today. We will begin with ancient Greece and the Olympic Games, move to ancient Rome and the famous Chariot Races, and then end in the Middle Ages and the spectacle of jousting tournaments. Having a historical purview of fandom will aid us in recognizing fandom as a perpetual and lasting element of the human experience, as well as help to uncover the origins of spectatorship that remain today. Our first stop in our journey through history is ancient Greece and the Olympic games, an era that gave rise to some of the first organized sporting events for spectatorship.

**Ancient Greece and the Olympic Games**

The ancient Olympic Games were a sporting event held every four years at the sacred site of Olympia in the western Peloponnese in honor of Zeus, the supreme god of Greek religion. Running from 776 BC to 393 CE, 293 consecutive Olympiads were held at Olympia, drawing the participation of spectators from all over Greece and beyond (Crowther, 2001). Serving as the most important cultural event in Greece, the games were a product of the Greek education in philosophy that included the development of a healthy body and competitive spirit. The winner of the first and only event in the first Olympics, the stadion foot-race, was Koroibos of Elis. From then on, each victor was recorded and the corresponding event bore the name of its winner, thus providing the first accurate chronology of the ancient Greek world. The foot race remained the only event for the first 12 Olympics, run over the distance of approximately 192 meters and divided into heats that determined the participants in the final race (Swaddling, 1980). What was unique about the ancient Olympics was that individual times were not recorded, giving
victory only to the first place winner and disregarding the efforts of the others (Skillen, 1993).

The games began with a procession that traveled from the host town of Elis to Olympia, led by the designated Olympic judges. Once the procession arrived, athletes and officials swore an oath to follow the established rules of the game and to compete with honor and respect. Upon the games completion, a religious ceremony known as the hecatomb would take place, involving the sacrifice of 100 oxen at the altar of Zeus. Modern parallels can be drawn here, for the sporting events of today are often bookended with ceremonies at the commencement and end of games, such as the national anthem, pre-game dedications, ceremonies, and post-game handshakes and ritual pleasantries (Cartwright, 2013).

Held in 776 BC at the first full moon of the summer solstice, the first Olympics attracted masses of spectators with hopes of participating in the atmosphere of the feast and cheering on their favorite athletes. The stadion of Olympia served as the site for the first competitions, holding a capacity of about 45,000. The first spectators of the games were all men, as women were not permitted to attend, with the lone breach of this rule being the case of Kallipateira—a woman who trained her son Peisirodos and who, in exuberance at his victory, loosened her clothes to reveal her sex. From that point forward, interestingly enough, trainers and athletes were required to participate in the nude in order to prevent future complications. The men that attended were largely of the upper classes since the journey to Olympia was something only the rich could afford (Cartwright, 2013). However, accommodations were scarce and anything but fit for nobility, as many attendees were reduced to sleeping in tents without a decent supply of
drinking water until 153 AD, when Herodes Atticus build an aqueduct to bring water near the stadium. Slaves and foreigners were relegated to watching from the surrounding embankments of the stadium where most of the ancillary festivities were held (Crowther, 2001).

Despite the poor lodging conditions, spectators continued to come in mass, which provided opportunities for merchants, entertainers, and food vendors to make healthy sums of money—perhaps the earliest example of the commercialization of sport and the origins of the various kiosks inside our stadiums today that offer a wide variety of consumables for fans. Other factions of society exploited the masses as well, for it was not uncommon to see politicians there offering propaganda and aspiring leaders attempting to gain popularity amongst the Greek people. Some of the more prominent politicians and dignitaries were gleefully welcomed by the spectators, much like how spot appearances by celebrities are picked out by stadium cameras today. Additionally, the crowds gathered around the outskirts of the stadium were subject to religious ceremonies, sacrifices, speeches by philosophers, poetry recitals, parades, banquets, and victory celebrations (Crowther, 2001). Remnants of this carnivalesque atmosphere have persisted throughout the evolution of sporting events, making modern parallels with the festivities that teams often hold around stadia for inaugural games and special occasions.

Spectators during the ancient Olympics were hardly different than the denizens of modern stadia, cheering boisterously and openly expressive in their support or disapproval of athletes. Upon completion of a race, spectators would gather to shower the victor with flowers and laurel leaves, a practice similar to fans waiting with personal gifts after the conclusion of a game today. Not only disposed to show favoritism, spectators in
ancient Greece were knowledgeable of the basic rules and the history of sport and appreciative of the performative aspects of athletic competitions. As previously mentioned, spectators play a key role in the earliest descriptions of Greek athletics in Homer, especially in the funeral games of Patroclus, spectators are depicted as well-informed and engaged (Homer & Fitzgerald, 1974). As Zion Papakonstatinou points out, “the same picture emerges for the archaic, classical and later periods and it is further corroborated by the fact that despite the occasional critic, the evidence suggests that sport was highly regarded by the majority of Greeks throughout antiquity” (2011).

Papakonstatinou explains that sport fans often travelled great distances and suffered strenuous conditions to watch the best athletes in the major contests, noting the case of Caicilius, a dedicated Olympic fan from 3rd century AD Veroia who travelled to the Olympics twelve times during his lifetime and proudly documented the fact on his tombstone (2011). Such finite and lasting declarations of fandom are even more common today, as individuals request to be buried in their favorite jerseys or have their ashes spread out amongst stadia. What we see in ancient Greece in what has been articulated so far is the development of a competent and invested fan that exhibits a nuanced understanding of sport and appreciation for the dynamics of the game.

Through the evolution of the ancient fan, we begin to see certain patterns of behavior emerge that serve as common practices today: devoted support of one faction over another, strong personal ties to players and the game, and celebratory rituals for beloved victors.

Additionally, I find it worth mentioning a passage from Polybius where several observations of ancient Greek fan conduct are detailed:
When some obscure and far inferior opponent is pitted against a notable and invincible athlete, the spectators immediately bestow their favor upon the weaker of the two, and try to keep up his spirits, and eagerly second his efforts by their enthusiasm. And if he succeeds so far as even to touch the face of his opponent, and make a mark to prove the blow, the whole of the spectators again show themselves on his side. Sometimes they even jeer at his antagonist, not because they dislike or undervalue him, but because their sympathies are roused by the unexpected, and they are naturally inclined to take the weaker side. But if any one checks them at the right moment, they are quick to change and see their mistake.

(Poliakoff, 1995)

This passage demonstrates early emergence of some modern fan behavior in that we see the notion of the “underdog” come into being, a common appeal for fan favoritism when spectating from an unaffiliated point of view. We also see evidence of antagonism and the interplay between spectator and player, a topic to be addressed in chapter four. Lastly, the latter part of this passage reveals a code of ethics among fans and a view of the intersubjective nature of fan experience in that the reactions and intervention of other fans may affect one’s behavior towards or perception of the game.

The ancient Greeks provided some of the first examples of organized sport and fandom through the advent of the first Olympic Games. In this section, we have provided a brief history of the games, but more critically, we have uncovered some of the seminal instances of fandom. The passion, partisanship, and spirit of the early Greeks serves as a precursor to the next faction of antiquity to be addressed in our expedition through the history of the fan. Next, we turn to the chariot races of ancient Rome, another grand event
that captivated spectators and further developed the meaning of fandom.

**Fandom in Ancient Rome: Chariot Races**

Perhaps one of the oldest examples of spectatorship can be traced to sixth century BC Rome and the popular chariot races that took place amongst the Etruscans, an advanced civilization of non-Italic people that held dominance over Rome for some time and greatly influenced the Roman culture. Initially created as a form of funeral game, analogous to the Greek tradition, and as homage to the deities Sol (sun) and Luna (moon), chariot races evolved to take place on non-festival days, carving out their own unique place in Roman life as an event for its own sake, the first mass-spectator sport.

Races were held in a *circus*, a stadium-like venue named for its oval shape, the largest and most popular of which was the Circus Maximus\(^3\) of Rome that was situated between two large hills and was originally made up of a sandy track and temporary markers. Over time, the popularity of the races helped inspire efforts to develop the area into a well-

\(^2\) Funeral games are athletic competitions held in honor of a recently deceased person. The celebration of funeral games was common to a number of ancient civilizations. Athletics and games such as wrestling are depicted on Sumerian statues dating from approximately 2600 BC and, in some accounts, were not merely held to honor the deceased but also in order to propitiate the spirits of those who had died. According to literary tradition, funeral games were a regular feature of Mycenaean Greek society. The *Iliiad* describes the funeral games held by Achilles in honor of Patroclus. Many of the contests were similar to those held at the Olympic Games, and although those were held in honor of Zeus, many scholars see the origin of Olympic competition in these earlier funeral games. Historical examples of funeral games in ancient Greece are known from the late sixth century BC until the end of the Hellenistic period. They could celebrate either civic heroes, such as the founders of cities, or private individuals, and in either case might become annual events (Poliakoff, 1995; Gardinier, 2002).

\(^3\) The Circus Maximus was a chariot racetrack in Rome first constructed in the 6th century BCE. The Circus was also used for other public events such as the Roman Games and gladiator fights and was last used for chariot races in the 6th century CE. It was partially excavated in the 20th century and then remodeled, but continues today as one of the modern city’s most important public spaces, hosting huge crowds at music concerts and rallies (Cartwright, 2013).
maintained stadium with permanent barriers and massive spectator areas that held around 250,000 people, a capacity that exceeds most professional venues even today (Humphrey, 1986). Unlike the Greek games that forbid the entry of women, the Roman races allowed men and women to sit together, providing an opportunity for romantic encounters. Also in stark contrast to the Greek accommodations for the fans, the Roman arenas lured upper class audiences with promise of *vela et sparsiones*, or “awnings and perfumed sprays,” indicating some of the first “luxury” seating options analogous to the suites and boxes in current stadia (Guttmann, 1981).

Quickly becoming the most popular sport in Rome, the chariot races appealed to all walks of life, from slaves to the Emperor himself, an ancient example of the great unifying power of sport as a social gathering mechanism. In fact, many charioteers started as slaves and gained enough popularity and acclaim through their efforts to be awarded great sums of money that not only bought their freedom but also imbued them with great social prowess and fortune. It is believed that charioteers were among the highest paid athletes of all time when adjusting for relative monetary value of the time period (Lorenzi, 2010). However, great fortune did not guarantee the charioteers a spot among the nobility in Rome. Conversely, charioteers were viewed as a fringe group of men that were childish and grotesque in their pursuit of the sport and paradoxically looked upon with just as much disdain for their barbaric interest in the sport as they were revered for their excellence in its execution (Auguet, 2003). I believe one could draw a modern parallel to the plight of the modern athlete in this instance, in that athletes are undoubtedly adored for their actions of the field but consequently can be seen as entities outside the realm of normal civilian life in both their behavior and sensibilities in society.
Just like the Roman slaves who were able to rise to fame and fortune, many of our modern sports stars come from economically destitute families and regions but use athletics as a means to improve their standard of living and social status. Still, the rapid transformation of social status brings with it unique consequences that confuse the ontological position of the athlete. Especially in the event that some athletes carry with them a dark history of violence and crime, we cannot truly decide where they fit into society—as idolized criminals or, at the very least, as celebrated people with questionable moral fortitude?

Weiss echoes this idea of athletes being relegated to the fringe of society, noting:

>Weiss echoes this idea of athletes being relegated to the fringe of society, noting: We sense in them a power which we also sense in their perverted forms—in the prostitute, the criminal, and the villain. They are at the end points of the spectrum in human promise; they define our boundaries, good and ill. (1969)

Returning to the ancient charioteers, regardless of the public sentiment about the charioteers themselves, their participation in the sporting event began in history with the aforementioned religious and ceremonial context in place but quickly blossomed into a captivating demonstration in its own right for the masses. As the sport continued to evolve, one of the earliest examples of the concept of a “league” began to develop. Fueled by the popularity among spectators, the Romans sought to expand the participation base and breadth of the race events. Increasing the volume of players and number of teams to form larger leagues is the foundation of professional organizations today, and is analogous to the ongoing expansion of existing leagues. Who would have ever fathomed professional hockey teams in warm climates like Nevada, Texas, and Florida? Or a football franchise in the small residential suburbs of Green Bay,
Wisconsin? The impetus of expansion is fan interest; that is, just like any product, expansion is driven by demand. Where there are enough willing fans and sufficient funds, leagues can expand indefinitely. Here we see early evidence of the power of the fan and their ability to bring about the proliferation of sport, which relates also to the necessity of the fan for spectator sports to flourish.

Once chariot races were established as a freestanding competition for no other purpose than entertainment, the Romans demarcated the races into “factiones,” in which separate companies or stables were recognized to provide clear a separation between competitors. In order to further highlight the distinction, racers and associated personnel wore the same color to indicate their mutual interest. Four companies were created with the colors red, white, blue, and green being used to represent each faction respectively, a clear example of an early “team” concept that has been the footing of all subsequent professional leagues (Harris, 1989). The colors represented the first logos, jerseys, insignias, and so on that we continue to employ today to fashion distinctive and recognizable deference among the players and fans of modern sports organizations. Just as colors and team identity hold great meaning in the modern era, the ancient Roman fans also associated themselves with particular companies and displayed their loyalty by proclaiming themselves to be partisans of blue, red, white, or green, and also by wearing the colors of their favorite racers. Once publicly identified as a supporter of one company over the other three, Romans would enthusiastically wear the colors of their faction and hold its charioteers in high esteem above all others, boasting to other camps of their perceived superiority.

This is no different than today when a New York Yankees fan comes to meet a
rival Boston Red Sox fan. Both are wearing the discernible colors and insignias of their treasured teams and will assuredly do whatever they can to assert the prowess of their franchise and fan base as being superior to the other. The same two fans will attend games with hopes that their presence will somehow make an impact on the game, whether it be through their display of loyalty, chanting, signage, or otherwise. This too has ancient roots as Romans began attending races in their respective colors to cheer on their favorite company, offering coordinated incantations meant to sway the outcome of the race in their favor. Many Romans believed that their personal efforts and presence at the races would indeed impact the outcome, so much to the point that it was not uncommon for individuals to chant “hexes” on opposing racers and their supporters that would assure misfortune and defeat (Auguet, 2003). At times, deep associations would lead to violence when members of competing factions would intermingle, yet another modern parallel to the scenarios that often develop inside NFL stadiums and the infamous “hooligan” culture of European Soccer. In fact, Romans required close supervision from designated crowd control personnel, often allowing their partisanship to boil over into outward acts of violence. Constantinople’s Hippodrome, an arena for chariot races and gladiator fights, was originally constructed from wood, but after being set on fire by riotous spectators on four separate occasions, the city began its reconstruction using marble (Guttmann, 1981). The typology of fan mentioned here will be further explicated in chapter three under the designation of the fringe fan.

Anyone who has attended a sporting event or has come in contact with professional sports in any capacity will recognize that this marked the emergence of behavior that has persisted throughout time—this was the beginning of the fan.
Interestingly enough, early fandom was met with some resistance; just as the charioteers were viewed as childish members of an animalistic fringe society, so too were their constituent supporters.

In the first century CE, the Roman writer and statesmen Pliny the Younger spoke to the disgust of Romans who were appalled by partisanship within the races:

I am the more astonished that so many thousands of grown men should be possessed again and again with a childish passion to look at galloping horses, and men standing upright in their chariots. If, indeed, they were attracted by the swiftness of the horses or the skill of the men, one could account for this enthusiasm. But in fact it is a bit of cloth they favour, a bit of cloth that captivates them. And if during the running the racers were to exchange colours, their partisans would change sides, and instantly forsake the very drivers and horses whom they were just before recognizing from afar, and clamorously saluting by name. (Harris, 1989)

This quote perfectly illustrates that early fandom was met with resistance as partisanship based on mere color distinctions was viewed as shallow and childlike. As Pliny the Younger explains, the swiftness and power of the horses is a valid reason for enthusiastic engagement in spectatorship, but to willfully cheer for one horse over another based on the color of their rider is shameful and lacks sincerity for the love of the competition. Indeed, Pliny the Younger would find himself in the minority today against those who have embraced the ideology of teams and fan affiliations, but there remain individuals who will forever see spectatorship of any sport as a frivolous and a meaningless pursuit.
The communal aspect of fandom will be detailed further in chapters to follow; however, we must revisit the latter part of Pliny the Younger’s thoughts on fandom in order to clarify the great importance of a fan base. He asserts that fandom is shallow and noncommittal as he claims a change in color from one charioteer to the next would redirect the support of admirers. This excerpt suggests that fandom is based entirely on appearance and the hollow signifiers used to separate one team from another, proposing that a mere swapping of color will sway the partiality of fans towards a dissimilar party in an instant. This is a severe miscalculation of the sensibilities of the loyal fan. To imply that loyalty is so easily lost or gained due to external appearance can only be valid in the absence of meaning and history that is shared between fan and player or fan and organization. Once established, the ties between a fan and their preferred franchise cannot be undone by a simple change in appearance. Surely as time moves forward, players come and go, or move on to other teams (hence change their colors), but the fans’ loyalty remains with the company, the faction, or the franchise. Such a bond is often so fortified and unwavering that the team could literally relocate to a different city and carry with them the love and adoration of the fan base they leave behind. In such instances generations must pass in order to fully eliminate the ties they have formed with the franchise.

To suggest that fan loyalty is fickle enough to be exterminated by a transformation in appearance is absurd. Surely, over time such changes would have resulted in new fans not having shared history with the team or players and therefore welcoming the current team as it is presented, but to say that this alteration can happen instantaneously undermines the very nature of fandom. Loyal fans adopt the colors,
players, insignias, and likeness of a particular franchise as an extension of selfhood. They are one with the company they adore and will forever remain this way, barring extreme circumstance. The strength of this loyalty comes from a deeply rooted belief in the magical, often supernatural, role that fans play in the success and failures of their team, the comfort and joy that come from belonging to a group with similar aspirations, and the rare but beautiful opportunity to transcend a mortal existence. Such qualities of fandom posit loyalty in a realm far beyond any material or superficial quality and instead well within the dominion of existential identity, intersubjective belonging, and purpose. However, I will offer a notable exception to this type of fan loyalty in chapter six when introducing the communicative implications of fantasy sports in the technological age.

The Romans carried forward what the Greeks began—the notion of favoritism and partisanship. Where the Greeks idolized individuals and cheered for single competitors in the Olympic games, the Romans initiated a lasting trend in becoming affiliated with specific organizations or factions. Chariot races mark the beginning of a more specialized and recognizable form of fandom through the support of teams, the wearing of representative colors, and the willingness to act out in defense of one team over another. Here we have uncovered the roots of modern fandom in the predisposition to integrate the love for specific teams into the fan’s subjective being. Moving along, we now turn to the Middle Ages to examine an era of fandom defined by class division and more organized spectacle of sport.

**Sport in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: The Spectacle of Jousting**

Currently, one can attend a Renaissance festival at the local community park and witness people taking part in jousting matches for the entertainment of all who are in attendance.
Although diminished by the use of foam lances and done in the presence of a variety of safety precautions, the sport of jousting certainly has a rightful place in any festival meant to revitalize the tradition of the Middle Ages. Taking place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, jousting matches were an integral part of Medieval and Renaissance culture. Just as the Olympic Games and Roman chariot races drew large crowds and stirred up great fanfare, so too did the spectacle of jousting. I use the word spectacle here, for what set Medieval sports apart from its predecessors was the creation of the mass-promoted sporting event, a valuable contribution to fandom that will be reviewed in this section.

Most sports during this era were quite unlike the massive crowds of antiquity, for they were relegated to smaller events due to social class distinctions. Divided into three sects—nobility, bourgeoisie, and peasantry—each class came to recognize certain sports as their assigned folk games. The peasants enjoyed soccer, while the middle-class practiced crossbow archery, while the nobility—knights and squires—took part in tournaments. Little history is known about the sporting events of the peasantry, and not much more of the bourgeoisie, for the focus of Medieval sport was undoubtedly placed on the jousting tournaments held by the upper class (Guttmann, 1981).

The formative times of what later became the spectacle of the tournament were marked by crude exhibitions of violence in the countryside with little appeal or access for spectators. Instead, knights simulated war in their battles, often blurring the distinction between simulation and reality, resulting in fatalities. Such events were so unorganized that they had the tendency to spill over into villages and incite violent acts of pillaging and terrorism of private citizens. It wasn’t until the sixteenth century that the war-like
ritual sports of the knights were transformed into more regulated and safer contests. The movement from the violence of the early games to tamer exercises was precipitated by the social conditions of the sixteenth century, which had seen people distancing themselves from a hostile war-like culture to one more civilized. Here, jousting matches began to take on an elegant nature, creating a sporting spectacle that drew crowds of aristocrats to grand concourses instead of isolated country fields. Weapons were mollified to prevent serious injury, and a wooden barrier was erected to stand between contestants to avoid devastating collisions. Additionally, the combatants were required to hold the jousting lance in their right hand, delivering strikes to the opponent at an oblique angle that rarely caused the opponent to fall off his horse. Scoring then was based on the number of splintered lances and the form of the strikes, a more dignified and amicable method of competition than the previous (which was often scored based on who lived!) (Guttmann, 1981). The changes being described here mark some of the first evidence of the production of sport for mass consumption. By making the game safer and implementing a code of ethical conduct for the players, jousting matches became the first sport meant to be reproduced on a regular basis, safeguarding the long-term viability of its players and therefore its accessibility to spectators.

The civilization of jousting brought with it an increased importance for spectators, evidenced by the long lead-times between a tournament’s announcement and its scheduled date. In some instances, a jousting match would be announced up to two years before it would take place, lending plenty of time for preparations and promotion of the event. This is analogous to the grand sporting spectacles we enjoy today, such as marquee matchups between champion boxers and, to some degree, championship games like the
Super Bowl. As I write this section, I recall the recent bout between boxer Floyd Mayweather and mixed martial artist Conor McGregor that was promoted for over a year and amassed a fortune of more than 700 million in total revenue (Blaustein, 2017).

During preparations, stands and pavilions were constructed to accommodate spectators and were tiered based on class, effectively opening the doors to other classes previously excluded from the events. Oddly enough, the lower tiers were reserved for the lower class, leaving the luxury boxes near the top of stadia for others, which is quite contrary to distinctions made today based on ticket pricing and sight-lines. It is also worth mentioning that separate galleries were made for women, private rooms were made for mayors and political figures, and the King’s box was placed at the very top of the stadium. The latter of the two examples given here are parallel to the luxury suites built for corporations and celebrities, and the King’s box was not dissimilar to the “owner’s suite” found in most stadia today.

From a social standpoint, women were not only welcomed but also revered for their presence at jousting tournaments, being depicted in medieval artwork as figures just as large in the background as the knights clashing in the foreground. However, as was the case in ancient Rome, the admission of women seemed to have a promotional undertone for young men to attend the events. Le Clef d’Amors, a thirteenth-century adaptation of Ovid’s Ars Amatoria, contains a passage that reads, “All kinds of people come to view / This knightly sport, so why not you?” The crowd includes lovely women as well as tournament buffs:

These tourneys, I repeat, provide

A fitting field for you who would
Learn the delights of womanhood.

For many a fancy wench abounds

Round and about the tilting grounds;

Gaily they flock from far and near. (Shapiro, Wadsworth, & Bowden, 1997)

This short passage may suggest that women, although welcomed to the jousting spectacle, were admitted in order to bolster the appeal of the matches to young men looking for romance. Nonetheless, the Middle Ages marked the first era of women’s participation in the audience of sport. Also, thanks in large part to the emphasis on safety measures for both players and spectators, this period gave rise to the beginnings of crowd control. A common sight throughout stadia today, paid officials policed medieval tournaments, officials who would maintain distances between spectators and contestants and prevent violent assemblies inside the stadium (Guttmann, 1981).

Through a more inclusive and structured approach to sport that welcomed both sexes and promoted the safety of participants, the spectacle of the Middle Ages continued to grow to proportions of grand pageantry. Kings and noblemen far and wide would hold enormous events that gave spectators the chance to experience magnificent displays of not only competition, but also art, fantasy, and aesthetic beauty. As the Greeks did with the Olympics, Medieval hosts would often organize beautiful and lengthy processions from the host city to the site of the event. The proceedings started to include gigantic floats that depicted deities, noblemen, animals, monsters, and the like, much like our Rose Bowl and Super Bowl parades of today (Guttmann, 1981). Such events gave spectators the chance to partake in wonderment and joy while also adding to the allure and glamour of the sporting tournaments. In short, the Medieval era continued the
movement away from barbarism and animalistic violence in sport to produce the more structured and organized form of spectator sports that we recognize today.

We can consider the Greek, Roman, and Medieval eras as a fitting snapshot for the history of fandom. Although volumes have been written on the history of sport in these time periods, our purposes require a more narrowed focus on the evolution of spectatorship. By working through the three time periods, we have been able to extract some of the foundational elements of fandom that persist in our culture today: the Greeks gave us organized sport along with ceremony and a closer relationship with athletes, the Romans provided social class inclusion and enormous stadia for spectating while giving rise to more defined forms of partisanship, and the Medieval civilizations afforded us more tame and civilized sporting events while proliferating sport as a spectacle for reproduction and mass-consumption. When grouped together, the three eras can be appreciated for forming the foundation of spectatorship as present in post-modernity.

Having traced the historical background of sport, explicating the relationship between athlete and fan, and, finally, examined the evolution of fandom, this chapter will now conclude with an analysis of the primary value for participating in fan culture. In order to rationalize the basic draw of participating as a spectator in the realm of sport, we will review the ideas of catharsis and vicarious achievement as possible explanations.

**Historical Motives of Spectatorship: Catharsis and Vicarious Achievement**

This section will focus on catharsis and vicarious achievement as two foundational draws for fandom. When we huddle in masses and pack stadiums now and throughout history, there must be an essential benefit for our efforts. In the introduction, I pointed to catharsis as a function of drama and mentioned drama as a parallel to sport.
Now, we turn to understand what catharsis means and how it is achieved in sport fandom. Moreover, the term vicarious has been put forward to explain the relationships between fans and athletes. This, too, will receive the necessary attention as I propose vicarious relationships to be vehicles for the sharing of meaning between fan and player. A closer look at both items should make the magnetism of sport a more comprehensible notion from the purview of fandom.

**Catharsis.** The word catharsis, used in an English language sense, implies a purgation or “purging” of buried emotions of resentment, anxiety, and the like. Such actions as watching sporting events, engaging in a shouting match with someone, or watching a horror movie are commonly considered to be cathartic in nature, allowing for the expelling of emotions that are otherwise hidden beneath the surface. The idea here is that the catharsis associated with each vehicle is of the emotion most suited to the experience. For example, a teenager would enjoy a horror movie for its ability to invoke and purge fear, a common emotion for young people coming to terms with the world. Therefore, the value in watching the movie is to experience and resolve the feelings of fear from a position of safety as a spectator. However, one would not call the feelings drawn out by a horror movie an example of “the tragic pleasure” of Aristotle, nor call the movie a tragedy. The Aristotelian notion of catharsis will be examined shortly.

Before we arrive at Aristotle, it is important to continue our discussion of what catharsis signifies. According to Eva Schaper, catharsis can be seen to have two possible meanings: the idea of “purgation” used in a medical sense to indicate the expulsion of harmful elements by removing their causes, or “purification” used in a religious sense of cleansing the spirit to prepare for a state of exaltation (1968). When applied to emotions,
the distinction being made here is that medical catharsis is purgation from emotions and the religious analogy is the purification of such emotions. The issue with this division is that purification does not exclude partial purgation, says Schaper, for in purification something may be ejected, as in distillation, though something remains. In the medical sense, purged organisms are usually understood to be purified, and the religious extension of the term can be seen as a metaphorical use of the chemical sense of purification (1968).

Richard Thames (2012) further elucidates the etymology of catharsis, drawing upon Kenneth Burke’s use of “purgandum” and “purificandum” to describe the division between the rhetorical and dialectical nature of catharsis. Thames explains that purification (purificandum) is dialectical and effects transcendence for the subject while purgation (purgandum) is a dramatic process that effects catharsis through real or symbolic victimage (2012). However, dialectical and rhetorical (or dramatic) devices, according to Burke, exemplify competitive cooperation in that they are both present in offering transformation for the subject.

As Thames explains:

Dialectical purification and dramatic purgation then are both the same and different—the same insofar as the dialectical aspect of drama is emphasized, different insofar as the rhetorical is. And rhetoric and drama are different insofar as the former involves victimage and the latter its imitation (all the difference in the world to the victim), but they are the same insofar as both are ultimately partisan. (2012)
This passage not only explains how purification and purgation work together but also highlights the imitative aspects of drama, a vital concept to be addressed in this section as it relates to the mimetic capabilities of sport to mirror reality. As Thames points to the partisan nature of dramatic purgation and dialectical purification, he goes on to explain, “Economic, political, and social tensions may be purged by sacrifice upon the stage, but the curtains close and the playhouse doors reopen on a world that remains unchanged” (2012). If we apply this quote to sport, making the “stage” the game experience, it nicely summarizes the fact that the catharsis obtained from sport is grounded more in aesthetics, being created from experiences of representative dramatic acts of reality played out through the events of the game. Once the spectators leave a stadium, the world is undoubtedly the same as when they entered. However, the mimetic nature of the sporting experience in its ability to conjure emotions and provide psychic resolution to human issues is nonetheless valuable and one of the main appeals of sport fandom. What I wish to take away from Thames is the notion of dramatic purgation through imitation, and moving forward, I will use Schaper to further define catharsis as I see it manifest in sport through aesthetic presentation. For now, let us recognize the conflation of these possible definitions of catharsis and return to Aristotle for some clarity.

The Greek connotation of catharsis is a derivative of the medical term *katharsis*, indicating purification, a more advanced cleansing that removes base emotions instead of just temporarily restraining them. Usually associated with the purification of fear and pity through the experience of tragedy, this is the form of catharsis more closely related to Aristotelian theory. However, there is a great deal of confusion as to what Aristotle meant
in the use of the word catharsis. The term “catharsis” is used once in the course of Aristotle's *Poetics*—in the fourth chapter in his definition of tragedy. The passage reads, “Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper catharsis, or purgation of these emotions” (Halliwell & Aristotle, 1998). However, Aristotle does not explicitly define what he means by catharsis, sparking an ongoing debate among Aristotelian scholars.

Modern scholarship is largely in favor of reading catharsis as “purgation from such emotions” based on Aristotle’s unambiguous use of catharsis in book eight of the *Poetics*, one that requires this structure to be centered on his descriptions of the ideal tragedy (see Twining, Taylor, & Barney). This definition is in line with the medicinal connotations of the word, which was the most common understanding among Greeks during Aristotle’s time. Humphrey House and C. G. Hardie reject the medical usage of the term, but do agree that a purification of sorts is a valid definition, claiming that catharsis is a “moral conditioning” that comes from an expulsion of excess and defect in our emotions, an expulsion that leads to equilibrium (1967). Others concur that Aristotle did not imply a medical use of the term, but instead a psychological definition that involves safety valves geared towards the relief of repressed human emotions (see Lucas, Read, & Richards).

From this point, the contestable idea for many scholars is whether or not Aristotle meant to say that tragedy is the only avenue to catharsis, or even if catharsis is a requisite result of a good drama. As Daniels and Scully explain, Aristotle does claim that the end of a tragedy is to effect a catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear, but does not explicitly
claim that this is the only avenue to experience catharsis. Daniels and Scully explain that if this was indeed his belief, Aristotle would have devoted much more effort to confirming it, but instead focuses on what should and should not be contained within works of dramatic tragedy (1992). As both Schaper (1968) and Daniels and Scully (1992) contend, the commonly held belief that Aristotle calls for tragedy to effect such catharsis is problematic when put up against the implied focus on the structure of ordering of events of a drama as being a potential emphasis for the emotions it may conjure. In response, Schaper holds that Aristotle’s use of catharsis might be metaphorical, using catharsis of emotions in analogy to catharsis in other contexts. Furthermore, Aristotle does speak of catharsis in the medicinal sense, using purgation as the process of purging excessive passions, but does not make mention of anyone attending drama to alleviate pathological states. This would disrupt the possibility of restricting catharsis as a condition of quality drama and would make a definition of “freeing from emotions” fail to address the multiple ways in which catharsis can be reached (Schaper 1968).

Schaper believes that Aristotle hints at the true meaning of catharsis through his writings on the pleasure of emotions produced during imitation. She writes,

> We take pleasure not in the terrible events as such, nor in our own emotional states, but in the tragedy in which tragic events are presented to us. An “imitation,” in Aristotle’s usage, is no mere pretense; mimesis is the presentation of a coherent action, made transparent and intelligible through artistic formulation. Tragic pleasure, then, is what results when the emotional impact of pitiful and fearful events is made in a work of tragic art. (1968)
This passage describes catharsis as the process of experiencing emotions elicited by the representation of tragedy through mimicry, through art and theater. Catharsis, then, would be the emotional release of recognizing allusions to reality being played out in the form of dramatic works. In the instance of a game, the events that unfold would provide accessible and palatable representations of real life that can be experienced from the distance of the observer and elicit emotions in line with the reality the events represent. The mimicry of drama and its ability to provide meaning for the spectator will be examined further in chapter four under Gadamer’s theory of transformation into structure.

Gadamer speaks directly to the nature of mimicry in drama in *Truth and Method*, claiming:

> What is experienced in such an excess of tragic suffering is something truly common. The spectator recognizes himself [or herself] and his [or her] finiteness in the face of the power of fate. What happens to the great ones of the earth has exemplary significance. . . .To see that "this is how it is" is a kind of self-knowledge for the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusions in which he [or she], like everyone else, lives. (1975, p.132)

Gadamer’s passage aligns with Aristotle’s notion of drama promoting tragic suffering, but he remarks that its excess promotes a sense of commonality amongst spectators when they are able to relate to what the drama represents. In other words, the “self-knowledge” Gadamer refers to is the ability to recognize sameness between the events of a dramatic work and the real-life human condition, achieved through mimesis. If we understand art and theater (and sport) as mimicry, it then would then be the order of the events of the dramatic act, or the particular formal structure of the act, that would
bring about emotions and lead to catharsis. If true, this would confirm Daniels and Scully’s suspicion that Aristotle may have been more concerned with the content *within* tragedy instead of its end result. What Aristotle seems to say in his notion of catharsis is that mimetic works so organize their material that we can recognize the allusions to reality that inspire our emotions, allowing spectators to derive intellectual pleasure from the order in which they unfold.

The use of mimetic works would place catharsis on an aesthetic plane, thinking of it as a result of a work of imitation and the deliberate construction through which something of human nature is made clear to us. Looking back to the work of Thames, we can recall the role of drama as presenting simulated reality to the audience through imitation, allowing purgation to take place alongside a dialectical presence that draws the audience into a conversation (2012). Drawing again upon Gadamer (1975), the conversation taking place involves the interplay between players and spectators, a stimulus and response loop that allows meaning to be created as the events of a game continue to unfold. The imitation of reality presented in drama (and sport) necessitates an interplay of sensations between participants that derives emotional release as they witness representations of the human condition taking place as an art form. When we use purgation in a physiological context of human beings witnessing not live events but artistic formulations of them, we can understand an aesthetic meaning of catharsis. Schaper explains this aesthetic rendering of catharsis:

> In all enjoyment of art we find a response to something which is presented to us not actually lived through by us as agents. All aesthetic enjoyment involves us thus as spectators. For Aristotle, catharsis is the response to an imitation, to that
which is presented as if it were real, to that which is convincing and probable
despite not being fact, to that which is complete in itself by virtue of conforming
to some formal principles of art. “Catharsis,” then, is a term of aesthetics and not
of psychology. (1968)

This excerpt suggests that aesthetic pleasure is enjoyment of the forms of artistic
composition taking place in the full Aristotelian sense. When emotions are aroused from
work of imitation, they are aroused through seeing how all events fit together, a response
not entirely emotional or wholly intellectual. Instead, the fusion of the two is
characteristic of aesthetic experience, leaving catharsis a condition of spectators who are
able to fully submit to the role of aesthetic observers. This means tragedy is not the only
way in which we can extract cathartic relief, for it is available in artistic presentations that
bring forth emotions we would feel towards similar situations in life. According to
Aristotle, the basic tragic emotions of pity and fear are painful, and if tragedy is to give
pleasure, the pity and fear must somehow be eliminated. Both pity and fear, in the
aesthetic sense, can be aroused by looking upon dramatic events as representations of
real-life possibilities that could easily befall the spectators. The spectator then learns
something about his or her relationship to fate and destiny through observance of the
dramatic portrayal of reality that exists both as an aesthetic and as a possible real-life
experience. Catharsis, then, can be achieved through the clarification of the significant
events that unfold during a drama that leads to an enhanced understanding of the
universal conditions that govern humanity. In this view, catharsis is neither a medical nor
religious event, but instead an emotional and intellectual one. With that said, recognizing
the numerous theories for catharsis, I believe Schaper’s aesthetic definition fits well for
this project, as sporting events are indeed mimetic representations of the human condition.

The requirement for spectators to submit to an artistic production is analogous to sports fans coming to realize that sport is in the end, “just a game,” just a dramatic representation of real life. I cannot imagine a more applicable understanding of catharsis in the realm of sport fandom than placing its emergence in mimetic drama. In the introduction I refer to sport as the great theater of society. It is the representative “art” form in which the toil and conquest of the human condition is played out for our consumption (in this way sport is like a dramatic play). We attend sporting events to be in the presence of a dramatization of our beliefs, desires, and fears where our needs can be reconciled through the events of the game. What will unfold through the course of a contest is uncertain, but its unfolding is what captivates us, illustrating the point of Schaper’s aesthetic understanding of Aristotelian catharsis (1968). The distance from which we observe sport is like that of the spectator at the theater, allowing the experience of real-life events without the spectators being an agent of them. Here our excessive emotions are purged through watching representatives (players) find resolutions to our needs: victory through the vanquishing of the opponent, fear in the anticipation of potential defeat, pity in the observance of a fallen player, elation through the dramatic unfolding of the events of the game. We turn to sport to avoid going to war, allowing our desires for violent struggle and our repressed feelings of inferiority to be played out and conquered by the outcome of the game. As Guttmann explains, a modified version of catharsis theory may be valid in sport, for exciting the spectator and then providing release of normally proscribed and inhibited behavior stabilizes our social systems.
(1986). Grano echoes this sentiment by claiming regular participation in sporting events helped aid the progress of the industrialized workplace by providing a means of group catharsis through spectatorship while also offering an avenue to experience the leisure needed to sustain the proper mentality required by the demands of industry (2007).

As Aristotle explains in the *Poetics*, human beings naturally engage in mimesis in order to experience the realities of life without having to undergo them in actuality. For this reason, we take pleasure in drama *instead* of feeling actual pity and fear (Halliwell & Aristotle, 1998). Sport offers exactly this, a mode of experiencing human emotions through the drama of the spectacle from an aesthetic position. Much of the fans’ emotional cleansing achieved through catharsis in sporting events is accomplished through the players in the game. Previously alluded to throughout this project, this vicarious relationship is the connection through which fans access the realm of sport and, in doing so, are able to experience the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. The next section will explain the vicarious nature of fandom and provide further insight on the seminal charm of sport. If we are to view catharsis in the realm of sport from an aesthetic approach, we must also recognize the agency provided by the players that allows spectators to access the dramatic mimetic portrayal of real-life through play.

**Vicarious Achievement.** Along with cathartic relief, fandom in sport also provides spectators with the opportunity to achieve greatness beyond their personal means through vicarious connections with players, teams, and other fans. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, the fan is the average man or woman with a limited horizon of possibilities compared to that of a professional athlete. As we discussed regarding catharsis, human beings have primal needs and emotions that need to be satisfied, one of
which is transcendence of the self through victory. I have argued that athletes are the liaison for the fan to access the world of sport, and also the medium by which the drama of the spectacle unfolds. As the direct link between fans and the ecstasy of sport, athletes are the vessels through which fans come to experience the range of emotions native to the human experience, making cathartic release possible. Therefore, the relationship between fan and athlete is markedly of a vicarious nature. Fans share in the achievements of the athlete as if victory was their own, and struggle in the agony of defeat as if they were personally responsible. This connection is as meaningful and sincere as any in a human life and is undoubtedly one of the main draws of fandom. Skillen describes the relationship between fan and athlete thus:

To the extent that an audience “identifies” with its heroes, it shares in their glory. If “we” won, I through my “representative” won. I am proud, I can look down, not only on the vanquished athlete but on the “them” that he represents … I may identify with an individual champion, But if, as since the ancient Olympics, athletes have regional and local identities, then this is no mere personal fantasy. Rather it becomes a constitutive part of the imagining of a community, of the affective unity of a collectivity.

This passage reiterates what has been said so far, adding the idea that local identities play a crucial role in vicarious relationships that foster collectivity. When fans share common bonds with players and teams, they also share a relationship with one another. The vicarious nature of sport pervades entire cities, regions, and even nations, uniting all with a communal consciousness. This can give rise to a strong sense of in-group culture, something that will be discussed further in chapter six. For now, let us
imagine the ways in which vicarious associations manifest within a fandom and provide fans access to meaningful life experience.

When we think of fandom and its ability to unite, we cannot help but consider pride as one of the essential shared emotions. Decrop and Derbaix hold that pride is often presented as a compulsive search for glory and inner distinctiveness, supporting both individual and group identity process, which reiterates much of what has been discussed regarding the role of sports and identity (2010). Vicarious pride is fostered by the previously mentioned “we” mentality that attributes the accolades of a specific team to a larger group. Hence, you will often hear a proud fan say “we won the championship,” or conversely, “we lost the game on a bad call.” Although the individuals’ involvement in an experience is separate from the actual athletes, loyal fans consider their place on the team to be just as imperative to success. Decrop and Derbaix refer to such involvement as vicarious achievement, where fans experiences a self-esteem boost and greater sense of purpose when their team succeeds and, conversely, remorse when they fail (2010).

Vicarious pride and the “we” mentality become the fundamental driver behind loyal fans seeking sporting experiences in order to maintain a sense of belonging. Such pride finds its roots in both current achievements and a prestigious past, resulting in a collective feeling of worth that can become synonymous with a city or social group. Thus fans become proud of not only their team but also their town and praise both accordingly as a part of their identity. Physical venues within the city that host the sports teams are quickly encompassed in the identity of the city and the loyal fan, producing the awareness of home. Each of these elements contributes to a fan’s desire for social prestige, self-esteem, and sense of empowerment through affiliation with a sports team.
As long as sports exhibition has existed, human beings have integrated their team and their fandom into their identity and carried a great sense of pride that is born from a consciousness of empowered belonging. We can return to the factions of the Roman chariot races for early evidence of this fact. The result is an increasingly intense affiliation with teams, one that has the potential to quite literally define one’s mortal existence.

Returning to Skillen, he goes on to claim:

Non-participants who, more than “fans,” become intoxicated as if they themselves had drunk from the victory cup rather than from the beer can. And so instead of feeling a “wholly overlooked” nobody in the civic street, the individual, himself, perhaps an utter incompetent, exults in a fantasy of triumphal “active” citizenship. So the proudest moment of his life may be “the time when Stan McCabe hit Larwood all around the Sydney Cricket Ground.” And so, although it is indeed the case that just because the few are gloriously successful the many are humble failures, it is also the case that the many are flushed with pride through their champions’ achievements. (1993)

This excerpt does well in explaining that vicarious associations can provide a profound sense of meaning for fans, to the point of becoming life-affirming. Skillen’s anecdote of the fan and Stan McCabe is a fitting exemplar of the majestic power of sport to pull the marginalized from obscurity and instill a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. This power does not cease at the individual level but continues on through the masses, bringing commonly revered moments and heydays of exuberant joy for generations of people. Growing up in the Pittsburgh area, it was quite easy to run into
someone on the street who will gleefully reminisce on the 1970s and the dynasties of the Pittsburgh Pirates and Steelers. In my adult lifetime, I have witnessed five major championships and attended each of the victory parades through the city of Pittsburgh, marveling at the hundreds of thousands of people that pour into the streets, cheering loudly and using vernaculars such as “this is our cup” (Stanley Cup) or “we got the ring” (Super Bowl victory). The use of such phrases is evidence of the principle of vicarious achievement, and the feelings it brings about are intense and lasting. Personal and localized legacies are very much attainable through sport, and more specifically, through the bond we share as a fan base.

An interesting caveat to consider is the vicarious relationships that evolve throughout typologies of fandom. In the next chapter, eight distinct groupings of fans will be defined and exemplified based on the characteristics and relative level of fandom displayed by constituent members. I will point out that fans of the parasocial and mimetic typologies exhibit the strongest vicarious relationships with professional sports teams: the parasocial maintains that of a strong sense of belonging akin to being a member of the team, while the mimetic fan raises the bar with a vicarious embodiment of players. In addition to better understanding vicarious bonds, we will look to this chapter to provide clarity on how types of fans find meaning in fandom.
Chapter 3: Typologies of Fandom

This chapter is meant to serve as the bridge between the previous discussions on sport and the emergence of fandom and the understanding of exactly what qualities delineate fans into typographic groupings. What makes this categorization so important to understanding phenomenology through a fan perspective is the idea that each type of fan assumes the role of spectator for various personal, psychological, and social reasons. Several items throughout the remainder of this project contain phenomenological points of contact and inquiry that would be best understood in terms of the type of fan that is most likely to experience them. For instance, the motives for watching sporting events varies greatly between individuals based on how attentive they are to the game, what personal meaning and emotions they are able to extract from watching sport take place, how they experience games with others, and what aspects of sport they see as having the most value, whether it be for entertainment, interest, or otherwise.

Understanding the value of typology as it relates to fandom, I will designate eight specific groupings of fans and offer definitions and descriptions of each: the socialite, the businessfan, the casual, the collector, the purist, the parasocial, the mimetic, and finally the fringe. The order here is deliberate, organized according to increasing levels of interest and meaning, save the fringe fan who will be mentioned to describe those on the periphery of the spectrum that exhibit behaviors outside of traditional fandom, and at times undermining the sport experience.
The Socialite

Our first typology of fan to consider is the socialite, or social fan that approaches the act of watching sport in any capacity in a non-committal, detached manner. I am designating this type of fan as the least invested and therefore the most inconsequential type of fan to the legacy of sport. However, the socialite does retain some impact on the intersubjective nature of the game experience, which will be discussed shortly.

The socialite is one who is motivated to attend games, watch sports on television, or participate in other sporting events solely for the purpose of entertainment. More specifically, the entertainment that the socialite seeks is akin to going to the movies or to a bar with friends. They attend the game in the presence of others, typically likeminded in that fact that the group will not have a working knowledge of the teams, the game, or even the sport. They may also be those in the parking lot tailgating before a game with a group of friends but without any plans to enter the stadium and watch in person, placing the value of social interactions during the pre-game tailgate well above that of being a spectator. Detachment and preoccupation with their own interests outside of the game define this grouping, for they are the folks one can observe at a game in danger of being struck by a foul ball while gazing at their cellular phones. Additionally, the socialite is likely to fade in and out of attentiveness to the game, requiring more savvy individuals to explain the progress of the game, the meaning of an officials ruling, or perhaps the basic rules of play of the game itself. Still, even when explicated clearly, the aforementioned information will be hardly digested, but met with the same blasé detachment with which they approach the entire event.
This is not to vilify the socialite, as their presence as low-commitment fan is not detrimental to the game, or the fan experience. Conversely, this type of fan, though ignorant of the nuances of the game on the field, is likely to participate in the pomp of the crowd and willfully join the chicanery of others. A socialite might take part in the “wave,” chant in tandem with others to bolster the crowd, become actively involved in pre-game, in-game, and post-game ceremonies and events, display signage in support or opposition of specific teams, or perhaps wear the colors and insignia of the local team. In doing so, they contribute to the intersubjective experience of the crowd, and become parts of the larger whole that create said experience for others. All of this is done as a function of the totality of experience the game has to offer as entertainment and not necessarily enacted out of love for the team or sport. In other words, going to a baseball game is just “another night out,” making the venue in which they are situated as a place of recognizable difference the only metric of aesthetic value that they will derive from the price of admission. Detachment and lack of genuine interest in sport defines the socialite, but moving up the ladder of fandom, we will see this impartiality manifest in different ways with the businessfan.

The Businessfan

Titled as an intentional play on the term “businessman” the businessfan is one of nearly total disinterest in the game, edging out the socialite in degree of fandom for their assumed potential to be more invested fans under more personal circumstances outside the conventions of a business setting. To explain more accurately, individuals who can be classified as businessfans attend games to entertain clients, enjoy luxury suites geared towards socializing with colleagues, and essentially occupy a space within stadia in
which they are literally and figuratively separated from the general public. The hope for fandom comes from the possibility that such individuals may be more loyal fans when they are not distracted from the game by the more economical and formal reasons for being present at the game. For example, a person may attend a game with clients as a true fan forced to abandon his or her passion for the sport for the evening in the interest of occupational pursuits, and therefore may experience lament for missing the game due to their attention being commanded elsewhere.

Regardless of the businessfan’s interest in the game, they occupy an interesting and unique space in the stadium. Usually situated in disjointed, private boxes or separate suite-like configurations, this type of fan is present at the game, yet disjointed from the experience and ostensibly removed from the possibility of intersubjective interactions (except for amongst those who also inhabit the disjointed space of the luxury suite). Most professional stadiums accommodate the business class, the wealthy, and corporate outfits with extravagant seating options that offer an excellent view of the field, but also maintain a distance from the public. This is typically achieved through separate ticketing processes that prohibit public entry into the areas designated for corporate boxes, discrete entrances to the stadium and elevators to the boxes, designated bathrooms and meeting spaces, private parking areas, and even distinctive concession options than the rest of the venue. It is not unreasonable to believe that one in possession of a premium seating ticket as described here could attend a game without ever contacting the public.

In addition to the physical distance of the businessfan from the rest of the fan base, there is also a prevalent sense of communicative distance. Either out of professional necessity or an implied sense of acceptable behaviors transferred from the business
environment into the game setting, the businessfan will conduct his or her self in a more reserved manner than those in the rest of the stadium. Consequently, it is unlikely for the people in premium areas to engage in the fanfare of the crowd as the socialite would. As a veteran of the cheap seats, I can admit that there is a real sense of class division between the public and the business-oriented spectators, if only in the mind of the public fan. One of the most common sentiments of stadia in an era of increasingly corporate motivations for providing designated areas for businessfans is that they cheapen the crowd experience, in that their detachment from the game manifests in an audible nature as entire sections of fans do not participate in the ballyhoo of the crowd. Fans who hold a close connection with the team and/or venue look upon the privatization of seating areas with genuine disgust, cringing with anger each time they see another corporate sponsor plaster their name on a concourse or when more luxury boxes are constructed at the expense of public seating.

The corporate influence in professional sports is much to the chagrin of loyal fans, and in their eyes, the perceived injustice of such is directly attributed to those in the businessfan typology. This is why fans will willingly communicate their disdain for the commercialization of stadia, feeling as if those, who either by choice or by obligation do not act as members of the crowd, are diluting the atmosphere of the game. Having attended such a multitude of sporting events, I can personally convey the chief complaints regarding the businessfan: they come late and leave early, get the best tickets that should be reserved for more invested and boisterous fans, and give the stadiums an air of objective impartiality and therefore negatively impact the energy of the
atmosphere. In a sense, they do not enrich the component of the intersubjective sphere of experience assigned to the fans.

Grouping the increased presence of the businessfan with the proliferation of corporate interests in sport venues, we can understand the discord of other fan typologies through what Boyle and Haynes describe as the paradox of progress. The paradox being that as sport moves into a more prevalent and widespread spectrum via mediated forms and big revenues from sponsorship, the sport experience can be cheapened by its movement towards mass appeal. The idea is that to some fans, much more is lost than gained in allowing sport to expand through corporate channels (2009). This would explain the overriding sentiment of fans that feel as if their experiences and opportunities for meaningful interactions with sport are being diminished and diluted.

This posits the businessfan in a rather untenable position as a spectator. Their presence is largely a point of controversy for many fans, yet what makes them so insufferable in the eyes of the average fan (non-participatory, lack of interest, tardiness) may be the context in which they attend the game (as a business meeting, entertaining clients, the necessity to act professionally). Then again, with the catered all-you-can-eat buffets, premium beverage options, and private bathrooms, can we really sympathize with their unpopularity? Chapter six will offer a separate examination of the corporate influences on sport by discussing the business elements of sport and patterned modes of consumption exhibited by typologies of fans. In chapter six, we will learn that despite the disdain for the businessfan accounted for here, all fans are subject to the marketplace and media driven influences of sport and partake in what it has to offer through various
modes of consumption. The next level of fandom to discuss is the casual fan, unlike the businessfan and the socialite in that they maintain some level of attachment to the game.

The Casual Fan

The casual fan approaches the game experience with a basic but recognizable level of interest and brings with them at the very least some fundamental knowledge of the sport, game, and players. Unlike the socialite and businessfan, the casual fan attends the game with the intent to be a spectator. His or her presence at the game is usually planned well in advance, coordinated with friends or family, and is typically motivated by the simple desire to see “a game.” I purposefully refer to the game as a singular event here for the casual fan’s participation is occasional and sporadic, as they do not feel drawn to the event the way more invested fans will (explicated later as the purest, parasocial, and mimetic typologies). Unlike more loyal fans that feel a sense of obligation to be present at multiple events throughout a season, the casual fan has no sense of commitment, but instead carries heightened expectations of the game experience. For instance, casual fans will look forward to the aesthetics of the stadium, will expect to see a quality performance from the players, and will wish for an entertaining experience as a member of the crowd. In other words, their infrequent attendance places an advanced level of pressure of the game to provide entertainment, aesthetic delight, and hopefully a victory for the “good guys.”

The added emphasis on the game to deliver an ideal experience makes the casual fan a willing participant in the crowd as a co-creator of experience. With the understanding that their contact with the team is limited, the casual fan has a propensity to make the best of the experience at hand, engaging in fandom for short periods of time
in the same fashion of more invested and dedicated fans. Acting somewhat as an imposter, the casual fan will dust off the childhood baseball hat and slip on a jersey of a former player found on a discount rack and attempt to blend in, chanting, cheering, and shouting throughout the game. The casual fan does not feign investment in the game with malicious pretenses, nor do they consciously act as a fraud, for they simply attend the game within their own set of beliefs regarding the team and personal level of interest. To those around them, there is nothing suspicious about the casual fan. Yet, although there is no intent to deceive, they can be easily unmasked when approached with the potential for dialogue from a more dedicated fan. Their sparse attendance patterns and lack of critical game experience does not allow the casual fan to obtain the necessary knowledge to engage in the privileged discourse of true fans, an idea that will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Having a lackluster knowledge of the team (perhaps only knowing the names of a few top players) can easily lead to their exposure as a casual fan with one question. However, unlike the previous typologies described here, the casual fan does hold some rudimentary understanding of the game, players, and team and can carry on with small talk during the game. This elementary understanding of the game is usually coupled with a genuine but limited interest of the team’s success. The casual fan wants to see a victory like anyone else, but the desire to be present at a win might be more of a byproduct of the scarcity of his or her opportunities to view a game than of authentic interest in the long-term performance of the team. The casual fan, regardless of the outcome of the game, is able to leave the game behind as a bracketed experience and will not revisit its events.
Nor will the casual fan be entirely concerned with the continued success of the team, as the primary focus is the team’s performance while present.

Despite the potential that exists for a casual fan to desire victory for more self-serving reasons, this is the typology of fandom where we see the first signs of sincere interest in the game beyond atmospherics and amenities of venue. The casual fan has a favorite team and desires victory, attending the game with the hope of witnessing an outstanding performance. The next typology of fan has an increased level of authentic interest in the team’s success, but like the casual fan, their ulterior motives for attending games can be viewed as more self-serving. Next we will explore the collector, a fan who attends games frequently with the hope of acquiring mementos of the experience and relishes in his or her ability to mark personal history.

**The Collector**

There exists a certain type of fan that places prominence on the accumulation of objects, memorabilia, promotional items, and other consumables as a response to a deeply rooted need to mark history. This typology of fan feels the urge to possess items that are game or date specific, mark a certain season or special event, or represent a physical component of the game (such as a game-worn jersey, or a foul ball). In short, the collector is one who attends games frequently with the aspirations of obtaining tangible evidence of their experience, of the game itself, and of their affiliated team. We must recognize that this fan is much more devoted to the team than the previous three, but maintains an ancillary focus on perceived personal gain through the acquisition of game relics.
Examples of this type of fan can be observed with relative ease throughout a stadium setting: those who wait near a dugout or locker room for autographs and pictures with players, purchase commemorative merchandise in the gift shop, walk around the concourses hoarding discarded promotional items from other fans (such as a “bobblehead” giveaway), lean aggressively over a child to snag a foul ball, and wait after the game near the player’s exit to have another chance to obtain autographs and mingle with the players. Furthermore, this typology would include those that fill out their own scorecards at baseball games despite scoring data being readily available on the displays around the stadium, or carefully tucking away a game-specific, dated program at a hockey game. In such instances, the collector is gathering evidence of their presence at the game, likely in an effort to fulfill psychological and emotional desires to document their experience.

Although most individuals in this typology exhibit strong affiliations with the team beyond the act of collecting, like the casual fan, there remains the possibility for this fan to be an imposter. The accumulation of memorabilia does not obviate a true and lasting affiliation with a team, nor a basic appreciate for the sport. The fact that this fan can be viewed less as such and more of a consumer can leave some ambiguity in their investment in the team. Some folks will clutter the walls of a game room or social area with sport memorabilia from various teams and genres of sport, but when faced with a dialogue, may exhibit a tenuous grasp on sporting subjects beyond the superficial nature of their acquired artifacts. This type of fan can hardly be deemed as such, for they simply represent fandom through display of memorabilia: their fandom may be defined by the quantity of accumulation, instead of the quality and depth of affiliation. The propensity to
consume makes this type of fan a dream for the marketing and sales departments of a sport franchise, an idea that will be articulated in chapter six.

It has been my experience that others can see this typology of fan, like the businessfan, as a sort of nuisance. Their obsession with consuming and acquisition can result in the display of rude or anti-social behaviors during a game: such as the case with the person who rips a foul ball out of the hands of another, one who commands a large space in the seating area to accommodate the excessive amount of items they have acquired at the game, or fans who stay after the conclusion of a game to gather objects left behind by other fans (a nuisance more to the venue staff than other fans). There appears to be a certain level of disdain reserved for those who consciously gather items beyond reasonable or sensible limits, like the patron of a grocery store that purchases the lot of a sale item and effectively prohibits others from enjoying the discount. This is not to say that all collectors exhibit such extreme behaviors, for many of them go largely unnoticed during a game, quietly going about their business. However, we cannot ignore the conceivable inauthenticity of the actions of the collector through the lens of fandom.

Understanding the collector creates a typology of fan that is certainly more invested than the previous groupings, but leaves ambiguity for understanding the core motive for their fandom. The next typology marks a great division of motivations and intent in fandom, moving far away from the material, social, and casual encounters of other fans into a much deeper, critical attachment to the game. We will now turn to the purist, the type of fan that stands as an impartial admirer of the game itself.
The Purist

To be a “pure” fan is to be a student and aficionado of sport (or a sport) without affiliation to any one team or franchise. Purists derive delight in observing the more mechanical, technical, and bodily aspects of the game, while appreciating the structure of professional play including the rules and conditions by which the game is created. Like the collector, the purist has a passion for the history of the game, but for reasons far removed from personal connections and material pursuits. History is of tantamount importance to the purist for it is a measurable and communicable aspect of the sport, where like a text, it can be archived and studied. Yet history is not allowed to cloud the perception of the game in the present, for to approach a game with a sense of expectation and predetermined bias would be to undermine its beauty as an opportunity to be empirically studied in real-time.

Given the appeal of the movements, rules, and history of the game as elements of primary focus, the purist could be said to have an objective view of the game. What moves the purist is the ability of athletes to exercise greatness through their use of motility and embodied action in accordance to the stipulations of the game. Since the game and upholding its integrity is the locus of attachment for the purist, players who are able to achieve prominence through a virtuous display of ethic and character with respect to the game are revered and appreciated above all else. This is precisely why the notion of team is not important for the purist, for they look upon the game not as a totality of experience, but as segmented moments of action that can be dissected and discussed for their worthiness to be considered excellence in play.
In “Sport: An Historical Phenomenology”, Anthony Skillen does not use my terminology of purist but describes the “ideal” spectator as such: Hence, it seems to me, what we might think of as the ‘ideal’ spectator: the appreciative admirer of ‘great play,’ must himself have a measure of grounding independent of the sport’s honorific culture itself such that his modesty of achievement is matched by personal humility...(1993, p. 357)

Skillen’s comment does well in encapsulating my discussion of the purist to this point, positing the purist as one who watches with the purpose of witnessing great play alongside an appreciation for the history of the sport, honoring its own unique culture and rules. However, this quote offers more depth to our understanding of the purist, calling for an understanding of the game detached from its own presentation as a historical object. In other words, the purist will have an advanced understanding of the sport grounded in its process that isn’t influenced by his or her knowledge of its history. The idea here is to look upon each game anew, leaving open the possibility of being dazzled by the play without a historical bias or preconceptions. History is learned by the purist twofold: as a vehicle for preserving the honor of the game and as a means of objective comparison of games to be witnessed in the present and future.

Returning to the original focus of the purist, the aspect of play and players playing the game well should be explicated. In the next chapter, play will be discussed as a phenomenon in its ability to create beauty through motion. The athlete understandably performs a major role in the creation of beautiful play, and the purist centers their focus on the athlete as the locus of analysis. Having no affiliations with a particular team, purists appreciate the athlete as the primary creator of game experience.
This notion is articulated well by Anarcharsis II, speaking to the early Greek Games but used here as a reflection on sport in general:

No one can describe in mere words the extraordinary pleasure derived from [Greek Games]...feasting your eyes on the prowess and stamina of athletes, the beauty and power of their bodies, their incredible dexterity and skill, their invincible strength, their courage, ambition endurance and tenacity. You would never stop applauding them. (1980, p.12)

The allure of the athlete described here can be easily correlated with much of the discussion on athlete from the second chapter, affirming the reasons why competitors are so profoundly revered. But this description fits well for summarizing sport’s appeal to the purist as well. Purists appreciate the embodied actions of the athletes more than any other typology of fan, an idea that will be unpacked later in chapter five when I discuss embodied actions of players and the use of equipment. Consider for a moment an instance where a quarterback has just thrown a dramatic touchdown pass, hurling an arching missile into the atmosphere to have it land perfectly in the outstretched hands of a streaking wide receiver. The elation of the crowd is apparent through the explosion of noises and cheers, reveling in the moment and the excitement of a big play. Where for most fans the pleasure derived from this moment is a change on the scoreboard, the purist finds value in the perfection of the action itself. He or she will point to the shrewd play calling of the coach, recognizing a defensive miscue and exploiting the error. Next, the purist will appreciate the acumen of the quarterback to identify his opportunity for exploitation, and be an awe of his wherewithal to position himself accordingly and exercise supreme bodily action to launch the ball with precise velocity and direction.
Lastly, he or she will recognize the speed and intelligence of the receiver utilized to occupy the space required to catch the ball, and the ability to contour the body to complete the catch. All of this will be looked upon with an attention to legality and fair play, as well as an appreciation for the embodied knowledge of all players involved (the correct motions of the linemen, staying within the boundaries, avoiding penalty, respect of the opposing team, etc.).

As it was the case with the previous typologies we have discussed; the purist is also subject to public scrutiny. Their detachment from team dynamics and objective view of the game can arouse suspicion amongst other fans. Usually attending games without any signifiers of allegiance, they may stand out as an unknown amongst a fan base. “Who are you rooting for?” may be a question proposed to the purist with undertones of confusion and mistrust. Reason being, as we have communicated in chapter two, fandom has long been defined by affiliation and patronage. Fans are accustomed to overt displays of favoritism, denoted by a wide range of behaviors from cheering for the home team to wearing the colors and insignias of either the local favorite or the opposition. To observe someone so indifferent to the outcome of the game can cause ontological confusion, as fans are unable to decide if the purist is a comrade or enemy. Surely, not all purists are so impartial to the teams they observe, but the foundation of their fandom in the essential elements of the game obviates an air of unaffiliated objectivity.

I have placed the purest at the third most invested fan not as a consequence of their fandom for a team (fandom in a traditional sense), but instead for their intense love for the game. As a spectator, the purist is among the most involved and interested, falling short only to our next two typologies and the apex of fandom, the parasocial and mimetic
fan types. At the top of the spectrum of fan involvement, these types of fans enjoy deeply rooted ties with a team, its players, and the fan base. The next section will discuss the parasocial fan and the multiple aspects of phenomenological contact points they sustain with sport.

**The Parasocial Fan**

Horton and Wohl originally coined the term “parasocial” in 1956 to refer to a kind of psychological relationship experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with performers through mass media. Initially referring to television personalities, the term explains how regular viewers come to feel they know familiar media personalities on the same level as friends or family members. Parasocial relationships psychologically resemble those of face-to-face or personal interaction, but are mediated and undoubtedly one-sided. Beside the rare occasion of running into media personalities in the street, there is little opportunity to foster a real relationship. In such instances, the fan or admirer will recognize the personality and offer acknowledgement, yet must be aware that the recognition is not mutual. In this project, I am reimagining the term to apply to the distanced relationships fans perceive and maintain with players and teams. To be a parasocial fan is to exercise the highest level of interest and loyalty, at times conflating the boundaries between player and fan, team and fan base. This section will now turn to provide a detailed explanation of this typology, how the term is redefined in the realm of sport, and ways in which parasocial relationships manifest, including deep personal associations, embodied connections, and elements of superstition and belief.
The parasocial fan is the true fanatic, one who has incorporated a team or teams into their very identity as a human being. Unlike the parasocial relationships defined by Horton and Wohl (1956), the parasocial fan, through attendance of games, practices, and at the like, is afforded multiple opportunities to come into much closer contact with players than one could with television personalities. I make this distinction early, for it is essential to recognize my use of parasocial not as a pitiful notion of belief in unreciprocated relationships, but as a condition of fan experience. To be more accurate, the parasocial elements of sport can be found in the ability to “follow” a team both literally and figuratively, through media as well as physical travel and being present at athletic events. This is distinct from the previous definition, for a fan of a movie star cannot climb into the television screen to contact them, nor is there abundant opportunities to meet them in person. Sport offers a much more accessible climate for the fan, having multiple scheduled and predetermined points of contact such as games, player appearances, and open practices. By reducing the distance between fan and player, sport allows the parasocial term to be expanded into a richer dominion of meaning and personal affiliation.

The parasocial typology includes individuals who feel a strong sense of belonging in a fan base, looking upon other patrons of a team as a communal family and extracting emotional capital from their involvement in the fan base and its camaraderie. How this sense of belonging spans into the spectrum of place and gives rise to group identity will be reserved for discussions of stadia in chapter five. At this juncture, we must place the parasocial fan as one who draws upon the community of fandom to achieve purpose, but also views the team as an integral component of their own narrative. Some of the key
signifiers of this typology would include: the purchasing of season ticket packages, scheduling daily life events around games and team events, possession of personalized memorabilia and authentic team apparel (where the collector typology draws similarity), demonstrating knowledge of player’s personal lives and referring to them by first name, attending non-game activities such as autograph signings (with the collector) and practices (with the purist), and displaying a propensity to work team-related dialogue into everyday situations. For many parasocial fans, contact with a team breeds an obsession that results in a profound sense of belonging and importance with the team. I emphasize “with” here to indicate that fans in this grouping are likely to share somewhat delusional affiliations with a team, feeling as if they are part of the team and the players need them for continued success.

To further unpack the sense of purpose and belonging of the fan, let us examine the behaviors and beliefs of this typology. A fan’s belief in their purpose is consequence of perpetual involvement with the team that engenders a sense of shared history in which experience is archived and decoded in terms of “I was there when” and “I remember what happened when.” Both categories are based on past experience, which provides reasonable expectations of outcomes given a context of prior results and events. Again we can observe the act of attending games in order to gain the requisite experiences to participate in privileged discourses, an idea unpacked in chapter eight. For the parasocial fan, the collections of experiences that build their own legacy with a team become the most important outcome of their fandom. Therefore, a parasocial fan may experience considerable anxiety if they are unable to attend a big game where the conditions of the impending event conjures memory of their past attendance at a game of similar
circumstance, resulting in a perceptual obligation to be present in the best interest of the team. This is to say, of course, that the past outcome was favorable. Conversely, fans may be just as likely to refrain from attending a game where there is a perceived notion of their presence being “bad luck” when equated with past experience. Interestingly enough; however, most fans will engage in a revisionist history of their own past experience and will just assume that their presence is required, regardless of previous results.

Over time, shared history and the integration of a team’s successes and failures into the psyche of the fan may result in a sense of belonging with the team beyond that of a fan, but of a teammate. For this reason, one can see fans attending every open practice, arriving early for batting practice or warm-ups, traveling the country to watch games, and ultimately conversing with players in public spaces with an implied sense of familiarity. As a professed member of the team, the parasocial fan will participate in various events with a sense of willful responsibility, almost as if they are on the team’s payroll! This is why you may hear fans say things like, “the coach needs me there tonight,” or, “the boys are going to need me for this big win.” Superstition can run rampant for the parasocial fan at this stage, for every detail of their ritualized behaviors and processes as it relates to their participation may be looked upon as a pivotal consequence for team success. I once spoke to a Pittsburgh Penguins fan that indicated he must eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on a game day because not only does it mimic captain Sidney Crosby’s pregame ritual, but also guarantees a win. In the history of the National Hockey League, a team has never gone an undefeated 82-0. Therefore, his “guarantee” is evidence of a revisionist personal history, a selective recollecting of only the desired results of his ritual in an effort to reify its purpose. Similarly, while visiting Cleveland, a Browns fan told me
that wearing her father’s old Bernie Kosar jersey helps will her team to victory. A quick glance at the Cleveland Browns’ record over the last half-century will effectively reveal her ritual as an exercise in futility, for even Kosar’s pedestrian 81.8 career quarterback rating cannot save the franchise. At face value, examples of this nature may cause the parasocial relationship to seem piteous and delusional at best, but we must recognize that in actuality, it’s a meaningful byproduct of firm identification with and love of a team.

The parasocial fan’s unique involvement as a fragmented member of their favorite team can take a very personal turn, giving rise to embodied sentiments of affiliation. Here we must make a move toward the mimetic fan, a typology that occupies a very specific space in fandom. The mimetic’s involvement as a fan is deeply rooted but comes with an impulse to turn their sporting experience into actionable practice. Mimetic fans incorporate their observations of their sport idols into their own lives through play and mimicry.

The Mimetic Fan

The mimetic fan is one who appreciates the players of a game for the opportunity to learn from their excellence. Like the parasocial fan, the mimetic fan has a high level of investment in the sport, but for more practical reasons. Unlike the parasocial fan that strives to be closer to a team and its players in spirit, the mimetic fan is more interested in an embodied connection. By using the term mimetic, I am referring to the notion of mimesis, the Greek word for the practice of mimicry or representation. Mimesis can be understood as the yielding of one to become the Other through replication of mannerisms, character, and actions (Taussig, 2017). I use this term because the mimetic fan extends their fandom into everyday life by practicing what they observe in sport and oftentimes
will adopt the persona of players and attempt to emulate them. The mimetic fan is an amateur athlete, unable to perform at a professional level but content to endeavor to parody the motions of those they observe.

Mimetic fans are more numerous than one might be led to believe, as Guttman explains:

There is actually a strong positive correlation between active and passive sports participation. Dozens of empirical studies of European and American sports fans have demonstrated that approximately two-thirds of all in situ spectators are active in sports. Two examples should suffice: 63 percent of the baseball fans at Boston’s Fenway Park described themselves as active athletes; 63 percent of the soccer fans at a game in Cologne reported that they have played the game. (2004, p. 309)

Guttman’s statistics demonstrate a strong presence of the mimetic athlete and show that spectatorship cannot be assumed to best describe “couch potatoes” and “armchair referees.” Quite the opposite, this affirms a strong relationship between amateurism and fandom of professional sports. I will not make the mistake of saying all amateur athletes are mimetic fans, but the data suggest a great likelihood of the connection.

Children often serve as a fitting example for understanding mimesis in sport, for one does need to search long to see Little League and Pop Warner football players assuming the mannerisms, stances, and attitudes of their favorite athletes. Mimicry is carried on through representation of the bodily movements of the athlete, as well as more esoteric components of their likeness, such as the brands of clothes they wear, preferred food and drink items, speech patterns, and hairstyles. Not limited to childhood, mimicry of athletes continues in adulthood as weekend warriors and the members of beer-league
sport organizations try to incorporate the abilities of professional players into their own style of play. A mimetic fan may attend a practice to observe how his or her favorite players hone their skills, devoting the same level of focus as a purist to the athlete’s process and form. Later, the amateur athlete as a mimetic fan will emulate their observations in an effort to perform well in recreational leagues, with the assumption that doing “what the pros do” will provide this result. For this reason, the mimetic fan, being a parasocial fan with some practical experience in sport, maintains a strong sense of embodiment of the game and the player’s perspective.

For instance, a parasocial fan may cringe when a player falls victim to a big hit in hockey or football, may be overcome with worry and dread when a player appears to be injured, or perhaps show frustration when equipment malfunctions during play (such as the breaking of a hockey stick or baseball bat). In such examples, the reaction of the parasocial fan is not of objective response to the occurrence, but a vastly deeper and personal level, as if they were a teammate on the field, or even the player themselves. The mimetic fan takes this a step further, drawing upon their own experience as an amateur athlete and sympathizing with the player to the point they can actually transfer the sensation to their own body. This is a truly amazing condition of fandom in that strong affiliations with a team can lead to embodied experiences and transference of sensation from player to fan. The embodied connections that are forged between mimetic fans and their athlete idols will be further investigated through empathetic embodiment in the next chapter, an idea that will now be introduced.

This phenomenon was recognized as early as the 1700s, as Adam Smith commented on vicarious experience in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: 
The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation. (1793, p. 4)

Smith’s description of the mob watching a dancer on a rope is paralleled by Theodor Lipps in his description of the tightrope walker being observed by spectators who embody the grave tension of the situation, as if they were the ones on the rope. Lipps explains that the act of the audience holding their collective breath and mimicking the balancing act of the tightrope walker is actually empathy, viewed as an experience involving one’s entire subjectivity including a strong sense of kinesthetic sensation. Lipps later expanded his definition of empathy as a holistic, interpersonal, kinesthetically based process, conjuring immediate bodily-emotional perceptions in the observing person as a kind of inner imitation. For Lipps, we experience the properties of aesthetic objects (or in this case subjects) as our own because they elicit the same responses in us that are stimulated by expressions and movements of the body, and we project these inner subjective qualities onto them (Coplan & Goldie, 2014). Both Smith (1793) and Lipps describe the experience of embodying the physical state of another person, a fascinating connection that can be forged between human beings in this case, between spectator and player.

Such a circumstance of deep connection changes the way that a mimetic fan watches the game. Unlike any of the typologies discussed so far, the mimetic fan watches through the eyes of the player, feels what they might be feeling, and engages the experience with a parallel level of intensity in their own right. Imagine a hockey game where a player breaks his stick on a shot. This is a fairly common occurrence, and most
fans think nothing of the matter. However, a mimetic fan will be able to relate to the disconcerting nature of breaking a stick, recounting perhaps his or her own experiences of it and identifying with the temporary, yet considerable amount of frustration that it brings. In the same vein, the mimetic fan feels the impact of a crushing hit on a player through the same embodiment of experience, for they too have been hit before.

The mimetic fan certainly has a more embodied sense of meaning when watching a game, for unlike most fans, they participate in some capacity in sport. Though, others can meet their engagement in discourse during games with some hesitation, for other fans may see the mimetic typology as a blowhard and a charlatan. Evidence of this sentiment can be easily obtained while listening to sports radio. In multiple instances throughout the day, people will call into shows and immediately qualify themselves as an authority in the topic being discussed by identifying himself or herself as a former or amateur athlete. You can anticipate the forthcoming eye-roll from the radio hosts, for declaring oneself as an athlete with expertise on a topic is destined to be met with sarcasm and skepticism. Not only because it is unnecessary for the sake of discussion, but also because it nearly impossible to make a meaningful comparison between professional and amateur skill levels and perceptions. This is not to say that the connection between mimetic fan and player should be ignored, for it is rich with purpose and meaning in the realm of sport. Nevertheless, the connection is subjective in nature, extremely important to the individual but mostly nonsense to the layman public.

The mimetic fan shares the zenith of fan involvement with his or her parasocial counterparts, rounding out the typology of fandom I wished to express in this section. It should be noted that many of the typologies of fandom exhibit characteristics of other
groups, creating fans that easily fall into more than one category based on their behaviors and connection to sport. In the instance of a mimetic fan, their attention to the details of athletic motility and the practice of sport could easily make them a mimetic purist, one who maintains a objective distance from team affiliations but sees the value in the close study of the physical aspects of the game in their own self-interest as an amateur. In the same vein, a parasocial fan could possess characteristics of the collector as their strong connection of the team may result in or require physical evidence by way of memorabilia and items of intrinsic value. Nor would it be unreasonable to believe a businessfan to be any of the other typologies, for it may be the requisite formality with which they attend the game that stifles the characteristics that would reveal them to be otherwise. While the typologies I have laid out here do not suggest absolute demarcation, they do offer a framework from which we can observe modes of fan experience. However, there is an additional typology that must be included. We need a classification for those that cannot be categorized in this paradigm, for their very presence at a game is ontologically difficult to discern. They may present themselves as a fan, both through appearance and behaviors, yet their actions call into question their true motivations for attending. I wish to call this the fringe typology, those who operate as fans in the periphery of the spectrum and exhibit behaviors that push the limits of acceptable fan conduct.

**The Fringe Fan**

Fans who attend games with an apparent agenda, whether it is for comic or violent disturbance, should be classified as belonging to the fringe typology. Many terms have been used to describe this group, ranging from Hooligan and Thug to Drunkard and Buffoon. Fringe fans are somewhat akin to the collector as they enter a game with more
personal pursuits in mind, but they differ greatly in how they are executed. On the surface, a fringe fan could easily be mistaken for a parasocial fanatic, cheering loudly, sporting the colors of the home team, and displaying a firm understanding of the game. This ruse can continue indefinitely, until the fringe fan designates him or her as such by revealing their true character.

Examples of this typology will include: fans who disrupt the game by invading the playing surface (such as “streakers”), those who attend with intent on causing trouble or starting fights, and a fans who excessively heckle players or make a scene in the seating areas. These instances serve to define the fringe fan as one that attends the game to draw the attention away from play on onto them, thus breaking the ethic of the spectator and potentially undermining the game itself. As we will discuss later in this project, the game cannot exist and must cease to be when impinged by outside sources. Crossing into the field of play, causing a disruption, or interfering with players makes play impossible, if even for a moment.

Returning to Anthony Skillen, he explains that what many soccer fans call “Hooliganism” has been a characteristic of spectators from the very start of sport, dating back to the chariot races of ancient Rome mentioned in the second chapter. Skillen claims that, “The hooligan, in other words, both apes and competes for attention with the champions” (1993). Recounting the definition I have provided for the fringe fan, we can see that Skillen echoes the idea that fringe fans, like hooligans, attend games to compete for attention with the “champions” (players) on the field. From a traditional fan perspective, this behavior is objectionable and their presence is unwelcomed. Players
certainly share this sentiment, for it is often their space that is assaulted and their livelihood that is put in danger.

Bobby Moore, former captain of England’s World Cup soccer campaign in 1966 is quoted on the disdain for the fringe fan, explain:

I’ve a simple message to that moronic minority who do not go to watch football and its great players, but go to fight, throw missiles at policemen, invade the pitch and make an utter nuisance of themselves. Clear off. (Marsh, 1978)

Moore’s statement is certainly direct and critical of the fringe typology, with apparent justification. According to Allen Guttman, at least 118 people were killed due to fan violence in soccer games between 1958 and 1992 in Argentina alone. Since then, there has been an average of five soccer-related deaths per year. But, as Guttman explains, fan violence and hooliganism is a global issue, with the most horrific of instances taking place at Heysal Stadium in Brussels in 1985 where Liverpool supporters killed thirty-nine Italian soccer fans. The incident resulted in a lengthy ban of English participation in European venues, but did nothing to stop the spread of fan violence throughout the European Union (2004). Eventually, says Guttman, hooliganism crept into North American soil and manifested throughout college sport venues. North American hooliganism is slightly different from its European roots, characterized by more verbal than physical abuse, and a propensity to end in the destruction of property. Ironically, whereas European hooligans preempt the outcome of the game with violence, North American ruffians prefer to engage in celebratory violence after the game, often burning cars, smashing windows, and tearing down fixtures inside stadiums (Guttman, 2004).
Moving beyond the riotous crowds of college sports, evidence of fringe fandom can be found in just about every spectator sport, and at multiple levels of play. The National Football League is no stranger to violence, often giving rise to heated arguments between fans (both of opposition and of the same fan base) that have resulted in gruesome outcomes. For example, in November of 2016 one of my fellow Steeler fans died from head trauma after being assaulted by a Dallas fan at the Steelers’ game versus the Cowboys a few days prior (DeArdo, 2016). Some other recent tragedies in American football included the 2015 shooting of a Cowboy’s fan in the parking lot of AT&T Stadium, the 2014 beating of a 49ers fan that left the individual with permanent brain damage, and the 2013 deadly beating of a 30-year-old man in the parking lot of Kansas City’s Arrowhead Stadium. It is clear that fan violence is a league-wide issue, but it is not limited to the gruesome beatings and shootings. According to the Washington Post, a study of the NFL 2015 regular season revealed an average rate of 6.34 arrests per game for simple assault and other acts of public violence, with some teams having an average of over 24 arrests per contest (Babb & Rich, 2016). Additional acts of violence can be cited across all major sports, indicating that fringe fans are alive and well. But we must inquire as to who is included in this group and try to uncover the motivations for violent behavior.

Allen Guttman explains that the original hooligans or fringe fans could be characterized as young working-class males who use sport as a vehicle to expel their violent feelings that come from frustrations, disappointments, and alienation in their personal lives. Guttman goes on to contend that such individuals feel marginalized and can be classified as the socially estranged, welcoming violence as an outlet to be
recognized (2004). I am not certain that the same can be said for those who run naked onto a baseball field or ruthlessly heckle a player, but all share in the common thing of diverting attention away from the game to the actor. Also, it should be recognized that other typologies of fans could easily slip into the fringe domain in the presence of libations or other stimulating circumstances. In fact, it is common to see the passion of parasocial and mimetic fans to boil over into acts of malice when under various influences. The same goes for a socialite or casual fan that can jump several typologies and feign great interest in a game while under similar conditions. Whatever the origin of their malfeasants may be, it is clear that the fringe fan pushes the limits of fandom and obscures its characterization. If the virtuous fan is one who watches with respect for the distance between spectator and game and understands that outside interference destroys the game experience, then it may be difficult to call a fringe fan a “fan” at all.

Having created a workable typology of fandom, we will be able to return to the descriptions of the groupings throughout the remainder of this project to help make sense of exactly what type of fan is likely to enjoy various phenomenological experiences with sport. It should be clear that, with the exception of the fringe fan, all of the aforementioned typologies find commonality in their respect for the play found in sport. Albeit attended to at various levels of interest, there is a common recognition of the necessity of play to create the game of sport. This next chapter will unpack the notion of play and further elucidate the embodied and intersubjective aspects of fan experience that have been introduced in this section. However, the first objective of the next chapter will be to explain the phenomenological method and locate its importance in the study of fan experience.
Chapter 4: The Phenomenological Method and Phenomenon of Play

Phenomenology and existentialism, while primarily philosophical, have had important applications in psychology, psychiatry, theology, literature, drama, and the fine arts. However, only in recent decades has the discipline been applied faithfully to the study of sport (Martinkova & Parry, 2012). Utilizing the works of Merleau-Ponty, Standal and Moe (2011) provide an examination of embodied learning through sport participation, something that will be expounded later in the chapter, while Hockey (2007) also focuses on motility and the bodily element of sporting. Allen-Collinson (2009) writes on the sport and the female body in her critique of the act of running, while in the same vein, Koski (2005) applies phenomenology to understanding the bodily experience of long-distance running. Similarly, Cunningham (1966, 2015) writes on the phenomenological experience of dance and the human body’s ability to achieve artistic expression through movement. Breivik (2011) provides an analysis of high-risk outdoor sports to reveal the phenomenological connection between human beings and nature. Most recently, Brymer and Schweitzer (2017) published an examination of the phenomenology of the “extreme” sport experience, pointing to the transcendent nature of high-risk sporting as a vehicle to liberation and meaning. As it may be apparent, most of what has been written on sport thus far has applied phenomenology to the human body, the athlete, and the act of movement through various modes of sport. Others have made inroads to expanding the phenomenological study of sport beyond physical and kinesthetic subjects, moving into more peripheral nuances of the sporting experience. Vannatta (2011) makes an interesting turn in using static phenomenology to assess the implications of instant replay in professional sports and its efficacy for officials to make
proper rulings while Aggerholm, Jesperson, and Ronglan (2011) contribute to the field by reimagining the performativity of professional players by observing creativity as a way to transcend the self and stand above the competition. Still others, such as Skillen (1993) utilize phenomenology to view sport throughout human history in order to uncover its influence on our culture and daily lives.

Despite the excellent works of those mentioned and many others, the phenomenological method has been greatly overlooked as a lens through which to view the fan experience. Mumford (2012) begins a turn towards fan experience in his book *Watching Sport* that examines the aesthetic appeal of sport for the fan but maintains a distanced focus from a more objectivist point of view akin to the “purist” mentality discussed here in chapter three. Lee, Kim, Newman, and Kim (2013) also review spectatorship, but through a psychological lens that focuses on group emotion and sociological implications. Speaking to the atmospherics of stadia, Uhrich and Benkenstein (2010) offer an intriguing view of fandom as it relates to game experiences, but hold a narrow focus on consumption as the main goal of fandom. What the discipline of phenomenology lacks on a large scale is a nuanced analysis of the fan experience that considers multiple perspectives and paradigms of interactions between fans and players. From this point to the end of this project, my goal is to help fill this void with a multi-faceted review of the fan experience.

In order to begin this exploration into the phenomenological roots of sports fandom, it is essential to define the phenomenological method as it relates to this project, offer groundwork for the origins of fandom, and explicate Gadamer’s notion of play in order to situate play as the essence of both sport and spectatorship. Additionally,
Merleau-Ponty will be brought in to understand the embodied aspects of play, leading to a discussion of the appeal of practice sessions and the relationship between athlete and equipment to typologies of fans. Having a fundamental understanding of each of the aforementioned nuances, when combined, will provide an excellent foundation for the rest of this project and will offer a framework for comprehending the numerous ways in which phenomenology can offer rich insight to the sport genre.

**The Phenomenological Method**

Phenomenology is considered a disciplinary field of philosophy or movement in the history of philosophy that involves the study of structures of experience and consciousness. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, originally, in the 18th century, “phenomenology” meant the theory of appearances fundamental to empirical knowledge, especially sensory appearances. The Latin term “Phenomenologia” was introduced by Christoph Friedrich Oetinger in 1736. Subsequently, Johann Heinrich Lambert, a follower of Christian Wolff, used the German term “Phänomenologia.” Immanuel Kant used the term occasionally in various writings, as did Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In 1807, G. W. F. Hegel wrote a book titled *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (usually translated as *Phenomenology of Spirit*). By 1889 Franz Brentano used the term to characterize what he called “descriptive psychology.” The tradition of phenomenology

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4 Descriptive Psychology is the intellectual discipline that makes explicit the implicit structure of the behavioral sciences. It concerns conceptual, pre-empirical and theory-neutral formulations that allow and facilitate the identification of the full range of a subject matter. To the extent legitimate examples or possibilities are found outside an existing descriptive formulation, the formulation is enlarged or revised. The pre-empirical work is accomplished through identifying and interrelating the essential concepts, the vital distinctions, characterizing all possible instances of a subject matter. The empirical project, on the other hand, involves finding the specific possibilities and patterns that actually occur. To do this, we use our conceptual tools and go out and look. Descriptive
as we know it today was launched in the first half of the 20th century by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), largely regarded as the founder of the movement, but championed by others such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Since its birth as a school of thought, phenomenology as a discipline has been central to the tradition of continental European philosophy through much of the 20th century, branching off into a philosophy of the mind that gained traction in the Austro-Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy. Accordingly, the foundational nature of the human experience and our mental processes in relation to the world is studied in overlapping fashion between the two branches.

One might inquire as to why I have chosen phenomenology as the vehicle behind this project in its attempt to expose the underpinnings of fan experience in sport. The short answer for this selection is that like phenomenology, fandom is philosophically grounded in experience and consciousness. Quite literally, it is the study of “phenomena” defined as the existence and appearance of things, the way human beings experience them, and the meanings we can derive from such experience.

Phenomenologists study conscious experience from the subjective or first person point of view, recognizing that experience cannot be restricted to merely the senses, but instead

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Psychology separates the conceptual and empirical from the theoretical (Schwartz, 2014).

5 In philosophy any object, fact, or occurrence perceived or observed. In general, phenomena are the objects of the senses (e.g., sights and sounds) as contrasted with what is apprehended by the intellect. The Greek verb phainesthai (“to seem,” or “to appear”) does not indicate whether the thing perceived is other than what it appears to be. Thus in Aristotle’s ethics “the apparent good” is what seems good to a man, whether or not it really is good. Later Greek philosophers distinguished observed facts (phenomena) from theories devised to explain them. This usage, widely adopted in the 17th century by scientists who sought to explain phenomena of natural science (e.g., magnetism), is still current.
must attend to the rich content that is derived from the sense through contact with phenomena. To be more precise, this is the condition of phenomenology that looks at intersubjectivity as shared experience, encompassing how the subjective person comes to interact and be in the world with other subjects and objects. This is done through the study of the structure of several types of experiences including perception, thought, imagination, emotion, memory, social activity, embodied action, and desire. Furthermore, the structure of these forms of experience usually involves what Husserl (2001) termed “intentionality,” or the directedness of experience toward things in the world indicating that a consciousness is present and that it is also consciousness of or about something. In other words, Husserlian methods involve recognizing that our experience is always directed towards something or intends to examine things through particular concepts, thoughts, images, constructs, etc. This distinction holds that the aforementioned process of intent and the use of conscious processes are what give birth to meaning in experience, which is separated from the things from which the meaning is derived (Husserl, 2001).

Every human being inevitably has various types of experience including perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition, and action. Thus, the domain of phenomenology is the range of experiences including these types. It should be noted that experience as a concept includes not only relatively passive experience as in vision or hearing, but also active experience as in running, swinging a baseball bat, or driving a car.

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Franz Brentano (1838—1917) is generally credited with having inspired renewed interest in the idea of intentionality; especially in his lectures and in his 1874 book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. In this work Brentano is, among other things, concerned to identify the proper sphere or subject matter of psychology. Influenced in various ways by Aristotle’s psychology, by the medieval notion of the *intentio* of a thought, and by modern philosophical views such as those of Descartes and the empiricists, he identifies intentionality as the mark or distinctive characteristic of the mental.
car. Such descriptions of experience are species specific in that only human beings have the required level of consciousness to practice phenomenology, which makes this field of study uniquely human by its very process.

Upon reflecting or analyzing experience through our consciousness, one can appreciate the complex levels of cognitive awareness that is involved in fully understanding encounters that take place throughout daily life. Such an account of awareness involves elements of temporal awareness in streams of consciousness, attention that distinguishes between focal and marginal awareness, spatial awareness that accounts for perception, awareness of one’s own self, embodied action and the kinesthetic qualities of one’s own movements, purpose or intention in performing actions, awareness of other persons, and understanding of social interactions including collective actions. This list is not exhaustive, but details the multiplicity of levels in which the phenomenological process must operate to provide a full-spectrum of analysis of any given incident or event in time. As Husserl claimed, phenomenology as a form of philosophy is a rigorous science⁷, requiring attention to detail in observance of the

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⁷ The idea of philosophy as rigorous science is rooted in Plato and Aristotle (based on Socrates’s impetus of seeking the truth and on his aspiration toward knowledge and wisdom), for whom the activity of philosophizing was closely related to both the empirical research of nature, and the mythical and religious thinking which appeared when the natural boundaries of what could be perceived, observed and stated were surpassed. The Husserlian idea of philosophy as rigorous science germinates and sees the light as a counterpart of his critique of naturalism, historicism and philosophy as Weltanschauung. For Husserl, philosophy is a universal science, which tries to discover and underline the generally valid structures of human thinking and doing. In order to achieve this goal, philosophy should use a rigorous method to gain access to the way in which phenomena appear to (pure) consciousness, as well as to the way in which they lead, through consciousness’s subjectivity, to the constitution of knowledge (in general, and in particular to objective knowledge). According to Husserl, phenomenology is the necessary condition for the possibility of developing a rigorous (truly scientific),
manifestations of phenomena and how they are integrated into the subjectivity of consciousness (1965). Additionally, unraveling the layers of consciousness involved in any interaction brings other element of experience into contention, which include context both in an interpersonal and cultural sense, bodily skills, language and social practices, intentionality, embodiment and the corporeal dimension of the experience, and the social background of the subject. All of this is to say that phenomenology is grounded on a subjective level that investigates the practical and social conditions of experience and rejects all objective assumptions that could be made from an outside viewer. Phenomenology firmly places perception and all its nuanced companions as the base of one’s own amalgamation of reality, and the conditions that compose the intersubjective world.

Returning briefly to the merits of phenomenology as a methodology to analyze sport and fandom, the foundational elements of its process should obviate its value in understanding our interactions with the complex synesthetic nature of sporting events. Few things in this life involve experiences so laden with meaning that is created from all five of our senses, our connection with our culture, our use of language, ongoing interactions with both teams and others, perceived elements of time and history, our sense of embodied experience, and most importantly our concept of self and self-awareness as a fan or part of a fan base. To look at a fan or to gauge their experience as a member of a

empirical psychology, but also a general (objective) theory of human thinking, feeling and action (Gelan, 2015).
fan base from an objective point of view would be vastly inadequate. As is the case each time we step into a stadium or take a seat in an arena, conscious experiences have a unique feature: we experience them, we live through them or perform them. This is in stark contrast to objective science that seeks to define experience in terms of empirical conditions of verifiable truth. The problem for phenomenologists is that there is no such thing as empirical truth if we account for the subjective nature of experience. To claim something to be as true still carries with it a necessary condition of subjectivity. Another who claims to have found a better truth will debunk what one scientist may deem as truth. In both instances, the truth is relative and subjective at its base. To fully understand the lived experience, there cannot be a pursuit of absolute truth but instead a relative sense of perceptual truth more akin to belief.

There are indeed many things in this world we may observe and engage, but we do not truly experience them in the sense of living through them, or being consumed as a part of them. Think for a moment of a fan situated in a packed stadium and surrounded by various stimuli simultaneously competing for attention of the sense while he or she engages with the crowd in cheering, waving a flag, brandishing a sign with a message for a player, or simply waiting nervously for the next play. This is not a scenario that can be categorized as routine engagement with a static object. Instead, this is a very personal and intimate experience of an atmosphere rich with meaning and possibilities that is far removed from the predictable nature of reality and anything that is captured in this moment is purely subjective while open to intersubjective influence. As one fan may cheer loudly and allow themselves to be consumed by the fever-pitch energy of the crowd, another fan may be having a casual conversation with a business associate, or
perhaps standing in line for a beverage and thus being severely limited in their potential range of experience. Yet another fan may be supporting the opposition, sitting anxiously in an unfamiliar place weathering the waves of perceived hostile energy with hopes that his or her team will ultimately silence the raucous congregation at hand. Depending on the result of the upcoming play, each person’s already vastly different experience will be once again molded and manipulated by the conditions around them, the game itself, and their own sensibilities.

This experiential or first person feature—that of being experienced—is an essential part of the nature or structure of conscious experience. It is often not possible to capture the full phenomenological value of the experience as we are engaged in said experience in real-time. In many cases we do not have that capability: think of the state of mind of the two opposing fans, both are caught up in similar and intense feelings that draws all the attention of their psyche. In many cases, a fan (or even a player) is likely to use such phrases as being “lost in the game,” or “consumed by the moment.” Both are instances that indicate the subversive nature of the first-person perspective that requires later reflection to fully appreciate. In such moments, we acquire a background of having lived through a given type of experience, and we look to our familiarity with that type of experience: being shaken by the roar of a crowd, yearning for victory, intending to rush the field if the home team wins. Therefore, we reflect on various types of experiences just as we experience them, always from the first-person point of view. Phenomenology assumes that we record experiences based on our familiarity with them from living through them or participating in them and build our own meaning of such events based on both reflection of the present and application of the past. Much more on this subject
will be discussed later in this paper through the use of Gadamer’s “hermeneutic circle” (1975). Furthermore, there is an intersubjective nature to all experience in that we do not come into contact with stimuli or objects alone: we are subjects to a larger world of experience that impose interplay and influence on our experiences at all times. Going back to the examples of the different fans seated in a stadium, their subjective experience is just as easily influenced by the actions of others. The roar of a home crowd may intimidate a visiting fan, or a foul ball may strike an unsuspecting fan and cause physical harm that would drastically alter the experience to be had. Phenomenology makes us aware of the intersubjective nature of the life world, and we now turn to understanding the world as such through embodiment.

**Phenomenology and Embodiment**

Sections of this analysis will turn to yet another concept grounded in the field of phenomenology, the idea of embodiment, a central theme in European phenomenology with its most extensive treatment in the works of Merleau-Ponty. His account of embodiment distinguishes between the objective body, which is the body considered as a physiological entity, and the phenomenal body, which is not just some body, some specific physiological entity, but my (or your) body as I (or you) experience it. Of course, it is possible to experience one’s own body as a physiological entity. But this is not typically the case. Typically, I experience my body tacitly as an incorporated potential or

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8 The hermeneutic circle is a prominent and recurring theme in the discussion ever since the philologist Friedrich Ast (1778-1841) drew attention to the circularity of interpretation: “The foundational law of all understanding and knowledge”, he claimed, is “to find the spirit of the whole through the individual, and through the whole to grasp the individual”. Friedrich Schleiermacher in a lecture of 1829 adopts as a principle the notion that the same way that the whole is, of course, understood in reference to the individual, so too, the individual can only be understood in reference to the whole.
capacity for performing intentional acts. Moreover, this sense that I have of my own motor capacities understood as a bodily capacity, does not depend on an understanding of the physiological manners involved in performing the action at hand (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 1999). The division between the objective and phenomenal body is essential to understanding the phenomenological treatment of embodiment. Embodiment is not a concept that pertains to the body understood as a physiological entity, but relates to the phenomenal body and to the role it plays in our object-directed experiences.

Merleau-Ponty provided an ontological view of the body, why Husserl’s (2001) main focus is the epistemology of the body. For Husserl, lived embodiment is not only a means of useful action, but an essential part of the deep structure of all knowing. As described by Husserl, the body is not an extended physical substance in contrast to a non-extended mind, but a lived “here” from which all “there’s” are “there.” It is a locus of distinctive sorts of sensations that can only be felt firsthand by the embodied experiencer concerned; and a intelligible system of movement potentials allowing us to experience every moment of our situated, practical-perceptual life as pointing to “more” than our current perspective affords. Husserl’s ideas eventually lead to the notion of kinaesthetic consciousness⁹, which is not a consciousness “of” movement, but a consciousness or

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⁹ Husserl describes the articulation of kinaesthetic capabilities into coordinated systems of specific movement possibilities; outlines the “if-then” structure through which actualizing certain kinaesthetic possibilities brings coherent fields of appearances to givenness; suggests how a different “if-then” structure—one linking the deployment of my own kinaesthetic capability with the bodily feel of the movement concerned—is implicated in coming to experience other moving bodies as other sentient beings “like me”; and addresses the tension between “embodiment” as an ongoing dynamic, subjective process and the “body” as one object among others in the world. For Husserl, this embodied, experiencing subjectivity (the body-as-constituting) is above all a
subjectivity that is itself characterized in terms of motility. Motility is defined as the very ability to move freely and responsively, making the lived body the center of experience, both its movement capabilities and its distinctive register of sensations playing a vital role of how we encounter other embodied agents in the shared space of a discoverable world (Behnke, 2011).

Thomas Csordas explains this definition further, pointing to embodiment as a more fitting notion than body as it relates to lived experiences, claiming:

The expression ‘the body’ has become problematized and replaced with the term ‘embodiment’. This change "corresponds directly to a shift from viewing the body as a nongendered, prediscusive phenomenon that plays a central role in perception, cognition, action and nature to a way of living or inhabiting the world through ones acculturated body (2005, p. xiv).

Such a reimagining of the body concept is crucial for performing phenomenological research, for the body is the primary vessel of lived experience and is the primary contact of the life-world. Our bodies are the first lines of communication with the exchange between our self as subject and the world as object, containing within them practical knowledge of motility and directedness towards the world.

The obvious applications of the notion of embodiment defined here as a part of phenomenology as it relates to sport will be the importance of the body for the athlete, as well as its fundamental role in the act of play. Bodies serve as the medium by which play takes place, and also by which it results in knowledge, or more specifically, embodied

\textit{kinaesthetic consciousness} (Claesges 1964)—not as a consciousness “of” movement, but as a consciousness or subjectivity \textit{capable of} movement (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).
knowledge that promotes one’s ability to exercise intent in motility without the necessity of thought.

In summation of my selection of phenomenology as the methodology for this project, I cannot fathom a more applicable field of study to attempt to enrich with such a bountiful yet untapped resource like sport and the fan experience. The very nature of fandom is inherently subjective and should be studied to uncover the high levels of meaning that can be created through one’s interaction with a team, other fans, the stadia in which they play, and the strong connections to the self and identity that can be fostered through participation in sport as a spectacle. In an effort to continue our foundational understanding of sport as a phenomenon, we must now turn our focus to the concept of play and its manifestations in society, selfhood, embodiment, and the game of sport.

**Phenomenology and Intersubjectivity**

To this point, we have made it clear that subjectivity reigns supreme in our experience of the life-world and phenomenology’s purpose serves to unlock the value of being a subject in the world through a rigorous application of philosophy. However, what is particularly fascinating about human experience, and especially that of being involved in sporting events, is that intersubjectivity is just as crucial to the contemplation of meaning in any given moment. The very nature of fan experience is grounded in a social context defined by intersubjective experience. We do not attend sporting events alone, for even if we go to the game unaccompanied, we are to be met by a sea of others once inside the stadium. The nature of professional sporting events having spectators posits the fan experience in the realm of inescapable intersubjectivity. Therefore, the fan and player or spectators and teams do not experience one another in a vacuum, but as Erik Garrett
explains, there are historical and cultural elements at play in any interaction that precede the encounter and define the conditions under which it can occur (2015). Our presence in the life-world as subjects and our interaction with the world is predicated by a milieu of societal, historical, and objective influences.

Garrett explains the role of intersubjectivity further as he describes the condition of being in the life-world as such:

So, the life-world itself must become a philosophical object of inquiry for phenomenology. As a subject of inquiry, the point is to not secure “objective knowledge” that would treat the life-world as something different from what it is—living, changing and meaningful. For the life-world to truly be understood as life-world, the starting point of investigation must be a philosophic inquiry into all the various living communities of vibrant interaction that are the grounds of possibility for our transcendental subjectivity. Transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity ultimately constitute the life-world. (2015)

What Garrett accurately describes is the style of phenomenology to favor understanding of how meaning is crafted within various communities and under the guidance of the preexisting nature of the life-world, while avoiding the attempt at declaring definitive knowledge of what is actually taking place. This of course is based on the teachings of Edmund Husserl, who posited intersubjectivity as a central theme in transcendental phenomenology. Discussed at length in *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl claims that intersubjective experience plays a fundamental role in our constitution of both ourselves as objectively existing subjects, other subjects of experience, and the objective world (Husserl & Cairns, 1960).
Transcendental phenomenology tries to rebuild the rational structures that form and make possible the aforementioned categories. In order to comprehend this type of experience from a phenomenological approach, we must group our beliefs in the existence of the respective target of our act-ascription *qua* experiencing subject and ask ourselves which of our further views justify that existence-belief as well as our act-ascription. It is these further principles that make up the rational organization primary to our intersubjective experience. Such beliefs require phenomenological investigation, for they must be first and foremost unconscious when we experience the world in its natural state.

Sports as a societal construct have a high degree of intersubjectivity at play as the fans and players come to meet under multiple conditions of respective pretense. As mentioned previously, the fan and player experience does not happen in a moment that is closed off from all influence of the life-world. Instead, there exist multiple histories, communities, and potential communities in contention. Some of the items at play that will be examined in finer detail later include: the shared history of the fan with the team and franchise, that of the player and the team, the fan and the sport, player and sport, the personal beliefs and upbringing of each person involved, beliefs of the communities in which games take place, the communities of fandom and commonality that are present, and ultimately the potential restructuring of all of the former, contingent upon the events of the game experience. For each individual on either side of the game, they enter into it with a unique perspective and a personal history that will inextricably influence the manner in which meaning is derived from the experience. Additionally, the experiences
of the game will either reify the preconceptions brought into it, or through the sequence of its progression and conclusion will reshape them.

**The Notion of Play**

This section approaches the concept of play from a phenomenological standpoint. We will begin by explaining play as a socializing element and then move into a phenomenological investigation using Gadamer, Huizinga, Caillois, and a host of other theorists. Play will be defined and its conditions will be explicated in an effort to land on a concept of play that provides understanding of the dynamic of spectator and player in professional sports. We begin this section with a description of the ways in which play can form social consciousness and cooperation.

**Play as a Socializing Agent.** It has been noted that in direct contrast to the Protestant work ethic that built our country, play, not work, is the basis of human existence. We are meant to play and spend our days making meaning in our lives through various forms of competition, gamesmanship, and recreation. There is much to be said regarding the value of games and the creation of them, as they require elements of discipline, thoughtfulness, and cooperation. Such skills undoubtedly carry long-term worth throughout a life outside of athletics, as the competitive spirit and teamwork often facilitates strong relationship, lasting careers, and personal advancement. On a deeper level, overcoming obstacles in games likely helps individuals conquer tasks through civilian life, which can lead to a greater sense of purpose and offer opportunities for self-actualization. The spirit of teamwork also lends well to building cooperative, well-adjusted members of society that have a sense of altruism and have the ability to be selfless in given scenarios. It’s no surprise that many successful companies actively recruit former athletes to fill positions
in many sectors of their companies, recognizing the formidable qualities of a true “team player” and how such a mentality helps to build a positive work culture and promote healthy competition.

Often, the games of children are not sanctioned or scored, but are instead a vehicle by which a child channels energy and finds ways to discover amusement. Simple acts like throwing a ball to someone and having it thrown back, running a race around a schoolyard, or simply bouncing a tennis ball off the side of a barn are all examples of play for play’s sake. There are no spectators, no coaches, rules, or time limits. This is play in its simplest form. However, what we must keep in mind is that play is often predicated on the idea of participation (Weiss, 1969). Surely there are ways to play alone, as an only child I can attest to that (and so can my father’s garage door that is mired with hockey puck dents). Each of these examples require participation as well, albeit the participation of one. Yet, most play involves others and therefore gives birth to socializing opportunities through interactions with others, even if just in opposition in the case of individually-based sports. This is an essential part of life for a young human being as it builds a foundation for interpersonal communication, cooperation, and ultimately participation in society as time goes on. In many instances, play becomes the inspiration for a child to fall in love with athletics and participate in more structured methods of play in which the individual can achieve quantitatively defined milestones and compete against others. In this instance, we again see a division between self-play and communal play, in that the personality and proclivities defined by one’s skillset at a young age may pull them in one of two directions in sport, one being an individualistic sport like figure skating, golf, and tennis—or instead toward a team-oriented sport like hockey, football,
and baseball. No matter the direction the child chooses, the fundamental attraction to the activity is undoubtedly traced to their love for play for the sake of play itself.

So far it is clear that play can be viewed as a socializing device, a mechanism by which the young are taught how to assimilate into a society and forge relationships with others.

Joseph Mihalich speaks to sport as a socializing element as he quotes:

Sports and athletics constitute the fundamental reality because they are the source and the bastion of the most important human values of “courage and honesty and freedom and community and excellence.” These are what we strive to inculcate in every facet of our lives including the work-world, and their clearest and most consistent expression is the world of sports and athletics. This is the sense in which sports and athletics constitute “the chief civilizing agency in our society and culture.” More people in our society learn the values of civilization from sports and athletics than from any other single source of cultural formation.

(1982)

What Mihalich (1982) speaks to is the socializing nature of play as not overt or apparent, making demands on the participant to become a part of society. Instead, play has latent undertones of sense-making and self-discovery in that it is a way of interacting with the world and physical manifestations of forces that affect the lives of human beings, later revealing the metaphysical as play becomes more complex. Gadamer might explain the socializing forces we have discussed here as a product of play in society in that we are taught to follow the rules of the game from a young age, being taught a code of conduct that befits the game even when it doesn’t fit our own tendencies (1975). We
can view society as a game in which the same structure of rules must be followed as in a game. If we make this move understanding the formative capabilities of sport, it is not difficult that one who embraces the rules of sport through play will also respect the rules of society. At its early stages this is all part of an ongoing discovery process through play. I will continue to discuss the discovery process of play from a phenomenological standpoint in the next section.

The love of play is perhaps one of the most endearing elements of sport in that no matter how the circumstances change regarding its officiating, scoring, draw on spectatorship, or even compensation for its participants, at its base it’s still just a game. Much of what has been said so far regarding play is largely simplistic and would be best suited for study within the sociological genres and beyond the scope of this project. To be clearer, the societal influences of sport through its normalizing structures and ability to assimilate individuals into a larger cooperative framework provide great value for study. However, the goal of this project at this moment is to move beyond socializing aspects of play and unwrap the phenomenological influence play has on the way we experience sport, and through this experience derive meaning. Nonetheless, it is crucial for our purposes to recognize the basal value of sport for both the individual and society at large, for the appeal of play is the driving force behind both participation and spectatorship in sport. We will now move to a more phenomenological discussion of play utilizing theory from the likes of Gadamer, Huizinga, Caillios, Novak, and Weiss.

**The Phenomenology of Play.** When analyzing the notion of play it is important to understand its influence on our own sense of self and existence. Returning to the idea that play results in knowledge of the world and living environment, we must also include the
lessons it offers for forming the human psyche and sense of embodiment. Our relationship with the world is informed by how our mind and corporeal exterior comes into contact with various stimuli, and play is often the vehicle to provide the basics of such awareness.

George Sheehan, an internationally recognized medical authority on sports and physical fitness describes the importance of play as such:

Play is the answer to the puzzle of our existence, the stage for our excesses and exuberance. Play is where life lives, where the game is the game. Some of the good things that play provides are physical grace, psychological ease and personal integrity. Some of the best are the peak experiences, when you have a sense of oneness with yourself and nature. These are truly times of peace the world cannot give. It may be that the hereafter will have them in constant supply; but in the here and now, play is the place to find them, the place where we are constantly being and becoming ourselves. (2013)

This quote highlights one of the many modes of play to be addressed in this chapter, the therapeutic of play. Sheehan associates play as a mortal’s heaven on Earth, alluding to the nature of play to promote peace in body and spirit. Play is a vehicle by which we can regulate our emotions and find inner harmony and balance. Paul Weiss (1969) confirms the therapeutic nature of play explaining that play occurs in a bracketed time period that separates itself from the workaday world and allows people of all ages to engage in refreshing, peaceful activity. Additionally, the peace created by play stimulates the mind, activates the imagination, and provides relief from routine, all of which human beings need to develop a healthy mindset. Psychological research confirms the
developmental benefits of play, explaining play allows children to practice cognitive skills including language, problem-solving, creativity, and self-regulation (White, 2012). In exploratory forms of play, such as a child playing with wooden blocks, objects become recognizable for their physical properties and relationship to the rest of the world. This begins a child’s interpretation of how things can be placed in relation to their sense of being, leading to object play such as using multiple wooden blocks to build a tower or small house (Pellegrini, 2009). The end benefit of free play is the ability to develop a sense of being in relationship to other stimuli and objects from the practical knowledge gained through physical contact (Fein, 1981). As Richard Combes explains, associations with outside forces learned through continued contact become embedded in the cognitive apparatus of all normal sentient creatures, making it second nature to project what has been experienced into bodily space. In other words, children experience bodily sensations well before they are consciously aware of their own bodies, and through play are able to gain an exteriorized sense of being through continual exercise of their outer sense modalities (1991). We can then view play as the process of coming to terms with the world through a care-free approach that simulates future interactions in the adult life from a non-serious point of interaction; it is a way of acquiring useful knowledge on how to negotiate the lived experience. This chapter will include a further analysis of the benefits of play as we examine the condition of the child and puppy.

One’s ability to gather embodied and objective knowledge of the world is not guaranteed through play. According to Weiss (1969), we must recognize the caveat that in order to reap the benefits of play, one cannot be focused on the benefits. Just as the professional player must lose himself in the game to become part of it, so too does the
average person seeking relief from reality. An adult may tell a child to “go outside and play”, but being directed to play does not promise constructive experience, for the child must be able to submit to engagement with the activities of play. Nor can one enjoy the pleasure of play when the pursuit of pleasure is the only reason for participating (1969). What Weiss is suggesting is paradoxical but also very difficult to achieve in the modern era. Human beings are so inundated with outside pressure that one must wonder, after the blissful innocence of childhood has passed; can anyone really “just play”?

There is hope for arriving at play in adulthood, and that is being able to appreciate play for what it is, a detachment from all pursuits of careers, finances, and daily life. After childhood has left, the conditions of play allow adults to exercise their imagination, expend extra energy, lessen the burden of tasks weighing heavy in daily life, and escape from routine and responsibility. When committed to play, the rules of the world give way to the rules of the game, creating a new structure of norms and regulations that exist only for the sake of the game. To play faithfully is to be in the game, ascribing to the rules and embracing the rationale of the controlled space created by the game, arbitrarily bounded off from the rest of the world. In other words, the responsibilities that persist in daily life transform into a sole obligation, to assume the role of player and carry out the task set forth by the game (Huizinga, 1970). Gadamer echoes this sentiment well in saying; “play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play” (1975). When lost in the game, Gadamer describes the condition of “the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player” as the circumstance of playing without goal or purpose and in the absence of strain. When the primacy of play prevails, the players can be said to experience subjectively what we would call relaxation, not in the sense of leisure but of a state of
being that does not require initiative. Gadamer compares this state of play with that of the interplay of other stimuli and objects: the play of light on a hillside, the play of waves on a beach, the interplay of limbs, etc. Such examples highlight the “to-and-fro” movement of interplay that can be observed as having the primordial appearance of “something is playing” or “something is happening.” Returning to the player, play originates not from its engagement per se, but from the movement of intertwined forces (1975).

The appearance of play as “something is happening” put against the condition of play that necessitates its lack of purpose may seem problematic. How can something be said to be happening but also be done without a purpose? Gadamer (1975) and Huizinga (1970) both state purpose is not a condition of play, but they do not mean to say that play provides no psychological or developmental benefits. The purpose they speak of it perhaps the idea that play does not assume an end in that the means are the primary focus. This does not exclude play from having a purpose, and human beings and animals alike serve as a testament to play’s developmental value and therefore its purpose.

As Gadamer explains:

It is obviously not correct to say that animals too play, nor is it correct to say that, metaphorically speaking, water and light play as well. Rather, on the contrary, we can say that man too plays. His playing too is a natural process. The meaning of his play, too, precisely because—and insofar as—he is a part of nature, is a pure self-presentation. Thus in this sphere it becomes finally meaningless to distinguish between literal and metaphorical usage. (1975)

This passage describes the play of both animal and human as being a consequence of nature, suggesting a primal importance for the act of play in biological development.
For Gadamer, both animals and humans play to engage in acts of “as if” without direct intent to carry out the actions being simulated (Gadamer & Bernasconi, 1986). A puppy and an infant discover the world through play in much the same manner. Each comes into the world with a blank slate of expectations and knowledge of the environment around them but through play is able to test the makeup of the world at large. Think of a puppy that continually runs up and down a ramp, seemingly enjoying the sensation of sliding downward as evidenced by its repetition of the act and pleasant gait in doing so. There is purpose in this act, for the young dog is discovering the relationship of gravity and the physical world that make up its environment, information that is stored internally to inform future bodily movements and expectations. Another example would be the play fighting, biting, and barking of the puppy which are all acts done in an “as if” fashion but nonetheless preparing the dog for adulthood.

Such an anecdote is interesting to ponder, for the puppy is able to learn through play in the absence of language or direction. You cannot communicate the laws of physics to an animal, yet they can still gain an embodied knowledge of what you would attempt to articulate through their own interactions in play. The same line of reasoning can be applied to a child who begins to gain a foundational understanding of the world by throwing a ball and observing its movement through space, the differences in sensation between running and falling on grass versus asphalt, or perhaps the awareness of resistance when playfully pushing another child. The embodied knowledge of the world being described here can be explained by what Edmund Husserl termed kinesthetic
consciousness. In both cases, the puppy and the child are not able to participate in language and appropriate dialogue that could directly inform them of what they are already tacitly uncovering on their own. As Weiss claims, “At the very beginning of life the mind’s course is determined by what the body does and what it encounters. Soon the imagination, aided by language, the consciousness of error…begins to operate” (1969). He illustrates what should be somewhat apparent at this point, the body is used through play to discover what the mind cannot yet understand, and the body is the vehicle for early self-discovery.

Neither the child nor the puppy tries to learn through play, which is why its ability to normalize behavior is subliminal and remarkable. Its ability to educate the body and offer vital lessons for coming into the world magically takes place in a realm decidedly detached from time. Mihalich explains the nature of play:

Play and games are defined as freely organized and voluntary human activity with its own spatial and temporal boundaries and having its own purposes and rules apart from routine existence and apart from definite and measurable socioeconomic productivity. (1982)

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10 Husserl conceived kinesthetic consciousness as the capability to articulate bodily motions into specific systems of coordinated possibilities. This involves linking the deployment of one’s own capabilities of movement with the bodily feel of the movement itself. Such a feeling addresses the tension between the embodied self as a subject in relation to the objective nature of the world. As the child comes to learn the rigidity of an asphalt playground, the body is making sense of the interaction and negotiating the exchange between the child and the world as object to create an ongoing sense of being. Over time, interactions between the subjective self and world lead to a sense of embodied positioning that allow one to react appropriately to stimuli and move the body accordingly—such as opening a door with a kick when the hands are too full of items to operate the handle (Zahavi, 1994).
Mihalich fortifies this sentiment as he explains, “play and games are first of all free and voluntary and basically spontaneous—they represent things we want to do freely and voluntarily as opposed to things we have to do according to socioeconomic rulers for survival” (1982). The idea of spontaneity here is that play is engaged much like an artist approaches a canvas. There is no obvious need for a transmission of any one subject to the canvas, for the artist has the freedom to create what comes to him naturally. There is no governing rule that necessitates how and why the artist will paint, it is instead a matter of spontaneous interaction. Marshall McLuhan echoes this sentiment, claiming games “have no existence or function apart from its effects on human observers” (1964). Both quotes posit the act of play in the realm of spontaneous acts that have intrinsic value in their participation.

The spontaneity of play gives rise to a unique positioning in temporality. As previously mentioned, play does not conform to temporal restrictions and has the ability to take place outside of time. Roger Caillois further describe play and games in this timeless, non-essential manner at length as he says:

Play and games also occur in their own space and time as opposed to routine (work) locales and standard clock and calendar time. Play and games, generally speaking, start and stop at the command of the participants and the directors of the activity, and they have their own locale or their own space and place which is sometimes grandiose, like Olympic sites, and sometimes mundane, like a street corner or someone’s backyard. Play and games are literally like theater—they take place on their own stage and have their own opening and closing curtains. (2001)
Caillois’s passage highlights the unique space commanded by play in that it can happen virtually anywhere but it does not adhere to the schedule-driven workaday world but instead has its own temporal dimension coexistent with reality. Huizinga summarized this notion of temporality in *Homo Ludens* as:

A voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and space, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is different from ‘ordinary life’. (1970)

Here again we see play being defined as a phenomenon that commands its own time and as standing outside of ordinary life. Yet what Mihalich (1982) and Huizinga (1970) both mention is the idea of participants in play needing to ascribe to rules of a binding nature. How can something “playful” have serious rules? The answer may be in Huizinga and his stance that the rules of play are sacred for noncompliance destroys the possibility of play. In order for play to manifest and for participants to enjoy the pleasures of departing reality into a separate spatiotemporal sphere, those who play must submit to the act of play and therefore follow whatever rules govern its creation. To apply this idea to the world of sport, a basketball player could easily dribble the ball in one place for an indeterminate period of time. However, the rules of the game do not permit this action, for it has been deemed that such behavior destructs the flow of the game. Therefore, dribbling in one place is met with an infraction meant to discourage the behavior and resume play. Taking this example further, a player who, despite the penalty for doing so, continues to draw infractions for dribbling in one place cannot be said to be playing the game. In fact, such disruptions of play cause the cessation of the game in its entirety until
it can be reestablished. To be lost in the game, then, is to abide by the rules. To abide by the rules is to be permitted to share in the unique temporal nature of play, to be isolated from an a priori reality.

Understanding that play and games are spontaneous in nature, governed by their own rules, and free from the impingement of time, we can now address the distinction between true and serious play (non-play). Actions geared toward work and economic pursuits are traditionally closely measured by time. Wages are defined hourly or by salary, and people are compensated based on the time they spend completing a task. While engaging in work, time not only persists during the activity but also informs the value of the labor being produced. Here we can draw the distinction between Huizinga’s notions of play versus seriousness (1970). Borrowing from the work of Hegel (1770-1831), Huizinga claims play is taken over by seriousness when play becomes the means to production and consumption as productive interests defeat the voluntary nature of the act. Non-serious and therefore true forms of play involve either seeking an alternative reality through play, or transforming reality through it. This brings up an interesting point of debate for the world of professional sports. Is the play of a professional athlete in actuality a serious venture?

The argument can be made that professional sports are geared towards production and consumption: the production of the game spectacle and the consumption from the paid attendance of spectators. As I will discuss at length in chapter six, we cannot deny the business side of pro sports, nor abstain from mentioning the myriad of ancillary business interests that accompany games: television revenues, advertising, merchandising, promotions, etc. However, I wish to place professional sports as play in
Huizinga’s sense of transforming reality. Although the players are paid to play and what they produce is indeed consumed, their main product is play itself, a form of play that allows the spectator to experience a reimagined form of reality. The new reality seems to happen outside of time as sporting events carry with them a transcendent nature of timelessness, indicated in both the way sport persists and the way the fan engages with its perpetual history. This perceived condition of sporting events allows them to fulfill the promise of play to operate outside of temporal boundaries. Moreover, the players can be said to be playing within the rules of play (with notable exceptions now and then) and therefore submitting to its rules and allowing its continuation. Furthermore, we can place the production and consumption aspects of professional play into a peripheral understanding of sport as spectacle, holding that economic pursuits are a byproduct of the play instead of its purpose.

Gadamer appears to support my position on the professional player’s hope for play. After making the admission that play is often manifest as an act of representation for most play is a “playing of something,” Gadamer turns to works of art and theater (made analogous to sport in this project) as a presentation of play. He explains that games aimed at an audience are thought of as derivative of true games, since they move closer to becoming a show or spectacle instead of a game. However, Gadamer explains, it is part of the essence a game that the player is filled with the spirit of the game, allowing it to take him over (1975). According to Gadamer, this is even more the case when the game is meant to be presented to an audience: the audience is not a detached, objective spectator but also part of the game. In this way, play becomes a play, the play itself as a whole, made of players and spectators. Now the players are not only fulfilling their roles
in a game, but they play their roles, representing them for the audience. We should mark this condition as an entry into the next chapter and Merleau-Ponty’s project on the human body and the intertwining of the mental and physical. Gadamer’s explanation of the oneness of spectator and player in this section can be paralleled with Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the mind and body as one. It is not just the players that are absorbed by the game, but also the audience, putting the spectator in the place of the player. Gadamer (1975) calls this phenomenon *transformation into structure*, raising play into ideality, but Gadamer says that only in this state is play intended and understood as such. In this state, play has the character of a work in that it is repeatable and permanent, transferring the structure of play into a work (Simms, 2015). Recalling the discussion on catharsis from chapter two, we here again see the transformation into structure playing a role in making play the mode through which we come to experience dramatic representations of reality, an emotional release made possible by the *interplay* of the events that come to unfold.

Under Gadamer’s ideal play, I believe we can place sport and the interplay between spectator and player. Unlike the works of art described by Gadamer, sport is not scripted in order to be reproduced but achieves continuation from its own unique set of rules, just as the very act of play comes to remain as such. More importantly, the mutual absorption and interplay of the spectator and player that creates the ideal play situation for Gadamer is very much a foundational element of spectator sports. We can see play manifest as an interplay, an oscillating to-and-fro movement between fans and players throughout a game. The crowd becomes boisterous in anticipation and the linebacker delivers a devastating hit to the opposition, the opposing baseball player crushes a ball into the stands and the home fans gasp with disgust, or the “jumbotron” shows a
previously injured player returning to the lineup and the crowd stands in ovation. The end result has communicative implications in that spectators and players as groupings engage in a dialogue with one another. The stimulus and response of the interplay mimics that of a conversation where the fans calls are answered by the players actions and the players actions elicit a response from the fans. The examples of this interplay are literally endless as they relate to the fan/player dynamic and positively confirm Gadamer’s idea of transformation into structure.

The transformation of play into structure occurs when the events that unfold in play, such as the progression of a game, can be experienced by the spectator as drama, a representation of reality through mimesis. Gadamer (1975) asks us to see reality as a horizon of possibilities that are forever indeterminate, and therefore cannot offer truth. However, dramatic events unfolding through play as a representation of reality do indeed offer truth, as they are transformed into truth through their recognition as representations of reality. Therefore, play events cannot be viewed as enchantment or fantasy but instead as reality being raised up to the level of truth (Karnezis, 1987). Just like art and drama, sporting events are mimetic representations of reality made accessible as propositions of truth thanks to the events being recognized by spectators as known conditions of reality. The truth or meaning of the game solicits dialogue between fan and player that is carried out through the stimulus and response of unfolding events. The dialogue is not forced, but instead a consequence of the submission of spectator and player to assume their roles in the dramatic representation of reality at hand.

In Truth and Method, Gadamer says that the attitude of the player or participant in such a game is not one of subjectivity, of trying to overcome or destroy another position,
"since it is, rather, the game itself that plays, in that it draws the player into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of playing” (1975). Gadamer is referring to the truth of any work (of art, drama, or play), the truth emerges from the willingness to participate in the exchange and submit to the flow of dialectic available in the interplay of messages between the observers and the observed. Karnezis explains the condition of submitting to play as such:

    Again, we have the notion of the medial function of play insofar as it functions as a self-representation. We get a sense here that Gadamer has a real belief in the Platonic myth of recovery or delivery of knowledge out of ourselves. This is extremely important, for what it points to is a certain basic faith in one's already being in truth which we have forgotten and yet is recoverable by a teacher who can reawaken, or, better, awaken the memory of the hope of its recovery.

    Recognition means some sort of shock of illumination whereby what is recognized seems, somehow, familiar. But this recognition has an aspect of immediacy—almost as if we were carried out of ourselves, losing our ordinary attachment to appearance, in order to obtain even greater insight into truth. One, in a sense, must lose oneself in order to find oneself. (1987)

    This excerpt serves to bolster our understanding of Gadamer’s ideality of play that requires mutual submission from spectator and player to become agents of play and carry out the to-and-fro movement of exchange. The truth available in a play event can only be found by being lost, meaning one must come to contact play able with recognition of it representation of reality, but without the intention to impose subjective truth upon it.
Moreover, the ideality of play described by Gadamer that allows the spectator to be put in the place of the player provides further evidence for the existence of the embodied possibility for spectatorship described earlier in this section. This is the condition of the mimetic fan in that they embody the position of the player through mimesis of their physical movements and general likeness. Perhaps it is the circumstance of Gadamer’s idea of transformation into structure that makes this connection possible, using play as the medium that negotiates the communicative exchange between onlooker and participant. Such a circumstance also relates back to Merleau-Ponty’s principle of embodiment, in which play may allow the physical extension of the player for the body of the fan through active mimesis.

In summation of this section, we can recognize the various points of contact through which spectators engage in communicative modes of play with the players, and also contend that professional sport is indeed a form of play. Also, we can determine that what allows communication between spectator and player is the interplay of signal and response brought about by the intertwining of sensations in a game setting. Now that we have examined the phenomenological descriptions of play and have defined the interplay between spectators and players, we have achieved an understanding of how play relates to sport and the fan. Moving to the last section of this fourth chapter, we will look at how objects of play store potential and transmit history.

The Objects of Play and Transmission of History

In the first chapter, it was confirmed that sports, as Caillois describes play and games, could be viewed as a form of theater. Our discussion of catharsis in chapter two furthered this argument, linking the emotional connections to sport with that of mimetic
drama. Sports are vessels through which human experience and emotions can be dramatically displayed and played out, like theater they command their own dimension of time. Simon Critchley, a renowned academic in sport philosophy added an intriguing turn to the sense of timelessness and play as it relates to sport in his presentation of his work “The Working Class Ballet—A Poetic of Football” at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on November 18, 2016. I was lucky enough to attend this seminar and hear his explanation of play standing outside of time for it is always abundantly available. Taking a moment to unpack this idea, what Critchley is saying is play can be instigated at any moment without a clear signal of commencement and can persist indefinitely, making play perhaps the only thing in a temporal realm that can be done in this fashion. For Critchley, drawing upon Gadamer he describes play as “something that exists as the self-presentation of itself” (2016). In order for a professional athlete to truly play, they must submit to the game and become part of it, forsaking all outside distractions, compensation incentives, and life outside the game. Thus Critchley confirms the spontaneous characteristic of play as well as the necessity for a player to be absorbed by play for it to continue.

Moving forward, Critchley explains that play is not only available through its production, but also in objects. Using his philosophical background, he defined a soccer ball as not only an object, but also something that exists in reality to represent potential, the potential for play. Any sport ball sitting dormant and untouched on a floor or tabletop has within it the constant and unwavering potential for play. All one needs to do is simply pick up, kick, or throw the ball and play has instantly begun without any mark in time, here again confirming the spontaneity of its nature revealed previously. Through this line
of reasoning, the ball is play itself, play is the result of being drawn to the ball by the
potential it solicits to the onlooker, and time is an irrelevant component of this
interaction. To continue to play, one simply keeps moving the ball through whatever
means necessary and to stop play, the ball is merely returned to an inactive state by
putting it down. This is why, as Critchley explains, sports enthusiasts and players alike
often describe the ball, puck, or otherwise as having “a mind of its own” and ostensibly
possessing its own life (2016).

Much can be said here regarding how this “life” comes into significance during
game play and will be addressed in chapter three when discussing the corporeal nature of
sport. However, at this juncture it is important to realize that the perceived life of the ball
may be due in large part to the potential of play it exudes to all present. Such a sense of
life carries with it all of the accumulated experiences of past play with the ball and also
its foreseeable future. At my childhood home, there remains a handful of scuffed
baseballs, dry-rotted gloves, worn-down hockey sticks, and sagging footballs that are
saturated with personal experiences and meaning—games played with friends in the
driveway or on the street, catches with my father, little league practices, tailgates for
Steeler games. For this reason, despite their weathered appearance, each time I look upon
these artifacts of my childhood I am called to once again pick them up and resume play in
the similar fashion, as if no time at all has passed and their long years of waiting have not
been in vain. I am sure I am not alone in attaching profound meaning to inanimate
objects, for throwing them out or giving them away would be unthinkable. To dispose of
the potential play and memories of past play embedded in the ball would be to discard a
part of my self and my own personal history, and to deny myself a part of my future.
As Weiss points out, even new equipment beckons to be used and therefore have its life activated. He describes new boxing gloves hung on a rack in a sporting goods store, claiming that their lack of use has not yet allowed them to be consider “equipment” for sport, for only their potential to be used as such exists at that moment. Once purchased and used, they transform into equipment and become an optional extension of the person who uses them (1969). This is not to say that only manufactured items intended to be used as equipment become objects of sport, for a wooden stick in the hands of a teenager can be made into a baseball bat, and a broom can be repurposed to function as a hockey stick. Regardless of how items are used for sport, the central operation of using them at all is one of extending the limits of the body for the sake of play. This thought suggests embodiment of equipment between object and user, an idea to be discussed in chapter five.

What Weiss (1969) does not recognize is that any items on the shelf of a sporting goods store is not only potential equipment, it is potential play. We have made clear that the very nature of the gloves, balls, cleats, and bats have phenomenological undertones that suggest their precise purpose just by existing in reality. As one browses through a sporting goods store, they are not only selecting equipment to be used in the field of play, but are also deciding which possibilities of play they wish to activate and incorporate into their own experiences and personal history, and thus what items will become extensions of their own body. The purchase of a football is nearly like procuring a living thing in that it has an uncertain future but is destined to be moved through space and time, changing in appearance as time goes on and being instilled with its own unique memories.
What makes this relationship unique is that the football can only have this specific life with the user, for their horizons of temporality and experience are forever intertwined. Just as the relics in my father’s garage have their own meaning, that meaning resides solely in me (and in those who have played with me), and the life of each ball or piece of equipment survives only by my continued use and memory of the object. Should someone else come into possession of the items someday, they begin a new life with the next owner while still maintaining the potential of play that is incarnate to them. The only hope for maintaining their history and therefore their former life is to elucidate their meaning to the new owner, describing how and where they were used, and ultimately what they meant to me.

However, this is obviously an impossible task as any phenomenologist would deem it unmanageable to communicate the exact meaning the items posses from one owner to the next, for it is not possible to accurately transfer perception from one point of view to a differing point of reference. Parents and other family members will certainly make a valiant attempt to do so, often bequeathing childhood heirlooms of days past to the next generation along with anecdotal evidence of their role in their lives. I can relate to this practice as my father gave me a Pennsylvania Rubber football that he used as a child, made doubly special by the fact that it was produced in my hometown at the factory where my grandfather worked. My mother also gave me her baseball gloves from her youth; items my hands have long outgrown, but still have her nickname “Ardu” (short for her maiden name Arduini) inscribed on the cuff. In both instances, my parents did their best to communicate the importance of the gifts as it related to their own personal experience and upbringing.
From a phenomenological standpoint, the football and the gloves are more than objects to me, they are figurative extensions of my parents and the objects embody their likeness. I cannot look upon them without imagining how they would have been used in their own time, using my informed understanding of what they meant to my parents, the time in their lives in which they were used, and the value they placed on them for providing enjoyment through play. Slipping my hand into my mother’s baseball glove or gripping the laces of my father’s football provides me with a mystical opportunity to transport myself through time and borrow some of their subjectivity and personal history in my own sense of being. When using the glove, it is as if my mother and I are sharing a hand, breaking the imposition of time to possess a common limb. In doing so, I embody the extension as my own as one does with any piece of equipment, yet the meaning infused in the glove as object essentially allows me to embody my mother. In this instance, a fly ball landing in the webbing of the glove creates a moment that belongs to bother her and I, for the history of the glove makes it impossible to separate ownership of its function based on my own perception that recognizes the glove as an extension of my mother.

In this experience I have described, we can recognize once again the idea of equipment having a life of its own through its appearance as a bodily extension. We would not deem a person’s hand to be a “dead” object so long as the owner of it was still living, for its attachment to a living body necessitates its classification as such. The same can be said for a glove when recognized as a bodily extension in that its usage requires embodiment by a living being that directs its use. What is unique about the glove in this instance is that it does not require life to exist alone, for it always possess the potential for
play and can be embodied by any user to activate its potential. However, when put into use by someone who recognizes the glove as an extension of another person (such as the case of my knowledge of the importance of my mother’s glove), we could make the claim that a person no longer living could be partially resurrected by embodied utilization of their equipment. To use my grandfather’s golf clubs on the course is to bring part of him back to life, in a sense sharing a part of our body and through its use and movement causing the equipment to reveal its appearance of life.

Though this mode or reasoning we might be able to better understand the importance we place on objects from our loved ones, both living and deceased. It is possible that we have a difficult time letting go of the possessions of those we cherish because we see them as an extension of who they were while living, an object of their personhood that continues to represent their likeness after they have come to pass. When I wear my grandfather’s sweatshirt, it as if I am sharing an extension of his exterior, something once used as both an extension and protective article of his skin. The same reasoning can be applied to obsessions that collector, parasocial, and mimetic fans may have for obtaining “game-used” articles and memorabilia from favorite players. Such items have meaning far beyond those that can be purchased at the souvenir stands, for they are viewed as figurative pieces of the players who used them.

In the recent past, I have attended several events where my local professional sport organizations held special sales of previously used equipment in an effort to raise money for charity while making room for new items in the locker rooms. At such events, those who attended could easily be identified in the collector, parasocial, and mimetic typologies. The collectors peruse the sale in search of the ultimate conversation piece,
and the parasocial fan sees an opportunity to fortify their bond with the team through owning the same equipment as their imagined fraternity of comrades. However, the mimetic fan approaches the sale hardly able to control their excitement. In accordance with their desire to embody the qualities of their idols and mimic their movements, the option to purchase physical extensions of players offers a magnificent opportunity for the mimetic fan to become a player and integrate their likeness into their own. For example, a mimetic fan will see sliding into Mario Lemieux’s skates as a way to possess his talents, for they recognize the life experiences and past performances of the player manifest in the equipment. The mimetic fan sees owning the equipment of the professional as a way to embody their practical bodily knowledge, and albeit in a delusional sense, perhaps believe that they can actually conjure the talents of the player in question through their own use of the equipment!

Returning to the glove and football given to me by my parents, this type of gifting or passing along of cherished items or heirlooms is not unusual for human beings, and is quite commonplace in sport. One does not need to search long at any major league stadium or arena to see fans sporting jerseys and other clothing that obviates a significant difference in age between the item and the wearer, perhaps in appearance, the names of long retired players on the back, or the now retired logos of the franchise’s past. The same goes for the old bats and balls, gloves, bobbleheads, pictures, baseball cards, sticks, trinkets, and the like that grace the homes of many sports fans, often handed down from father to son, grandfather to grandson. Interspersed amongst all the fanfare and merchandise will be items acquired in recent years and unique to the owner, objects that will one day continue the cycle of remembrance for the next generation. Such a practice
aligns well with Gadamer’s concept of the transmission of history, and the fusion of horizons in that the present is constantly informed by the past and there is no such thing as only the present. Furthermore, Gadamer’s theory of play can be applied to understanding the fusion of horizons as the concept involves the interplay between the past and the present to create a dialogue between horizons that ultimately makes sense of being in the world.

**Gadamer’s Fusion of Horizons and the Transmission of History through Play**

This section will focus on explaining how play and play objects can be seen in the Gadamerian tradition as promoting the transmission of history and also the experienced history of the shared human life. As we have covered in the previous section, heirlooms of play objects can be viewed as extensions of selfhood that carry with them considerable meaning and personal and shared history. In a sense, our passing down or passing on of these items promotes a transmission of history in the Gadamerian sense by fusing the horizon of the past with that of the present. In doing so, play objects also bridge the distance between those who come to exchange them by allowing the subjectivity of the recipient to take on elements of the subjective elements of the giver. Through this event, what Gadamer (1975) describes as prejudice\(^\text{11}\) is present on both sides of the exchange, lending to interpretation of the items in question. After a thorough analysis of the transmission of history through the fusion of horizons as it relates to play objects, we will

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\(^{11}\) Prejudice in a Gadamerian sense does not carry the negative connotations of bigotry or false-judgment, but instead to be read as “pre-judice”, or the condition in which individuals enter interpretation. For Gadamer, prejudice is the way in which we see the world from a situated historical vantage point and is the mode through which we can gain understanding. To be open to interpretation is to be aware of one’s own prejudice brought into and encounter and also to recognize that of the other. In a sense, our prejudice defines the horizon of experience in which we access the world by making us aware of how we a predisposed to encountering it (Chan, 1984).
then conclude this chapter with an investigation of play itself as a conduit for understanding. This will be achieved by comparing interplay to the event of the fusion of horizons and having within it a dialogue between subjects, or subject and world.

**Transmitting History through Play Objects.** The last section included a detailed description of the meaning of play objects as being held above that of other objects in the world due to their communicated importance from one person to another (or also to a person from the self). I wish to analyze this phenomenon through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer as a possible application of his historically affected consciousness that involves transmitting history through what he has famously coined the *fusion of horizons* (1975). Let us begin with a foundational understanding of Gadamer’s theory as it relates to his hermeneutical approach of arriving at understanding in the world.

Gadamer adopts much of Husserl’s work in his theory, and his account of tradition is an adaptation of Husserl’s claim that the understanding of an object is the understanding of that object *as something*. This means that understanding involves projecting meaning in perceiving that is not characteristic of the perceptions themselves. Therefore, the content of perception is always subject to a prejudice, for it always involves a point of view of something (Husserl, 2001). The prejudice for Gadamer is not the temporary state of the Enlightenment, but instead a precondition of the human experience that brings the knowledge of past experience into the present. Here, Gadamer draws on his primary mentor Heidegger in arguing that all interpretative projections of meaning are rooted in the situation of the interpreter (Piper, 1998). The meaning of any object is therefore co-determined by one’s own life circumstances by one’s existence in *Dasein*. The important point here is that Gadamer sees our personal outlook and
expectations as the true hermeneutical starting point, paying respect to our nature as a historically situated being with a finite range of understanding (Chan, 1984).

Our prejudice or the expectations we carry are not static for Gadamer, but continually modified and reshaped through new experiences. Not only are they forever in flux, but also our prejudices are also not derived from our activity as subjects, but from our psychological experiences, our familial and social environment, our education, and cultural tradition. This being said, our prejudice is not freely at our disposal but instead subject to understanding through our reflection on experience. Woven together, our malleable prejudices make up our overall reality and scope of understanding. It is this fabric of interwoven predispositions that Gadamer sees as our personal horizon (Veith, 2015). Instead of a fixed position of reality, we must see a horizon as limits that can move, expanding and contracting as new experiences come to be had and alter our perceptions. In this sense, they are as ungrounded as the prejudice that constitutes them, for they are connected to horizons beyond what we can ever hope to know, which Gadamer attributes to one “great horizon” (Veith, 2015).

Gadamer’s notion of personal horizons explains the condition under which we engage in hermeneutics for it is our understanding of our own foundation of relative significance with which we approach the world and understanding. The idea is that to understand horizons beyond our own, we must “transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the text speaks” (Gadamer, 1975). However, this transposition is not limited to understanding text, for it is also the way we meet others, the world, and history. History is an important component of Gadamer’s work for he sees history as the continuously moving element that brings about new experiences that alter our own
horizons. For Gadamer, history is not a dark age of ignorance as in the tradition of the Enlightenment, but is instead a lasting determinate of the present (Simms, 2015).

Gadamer claims, “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices” (Gadamer, 1975). This is to say that the past is what persistently reforms the present, much like how the hermeneutic understanding of reading a text is achieved through referencing back to what has already been absorbed while moving forward in the text.

Using this framework, our understanding and prejudices are both to be seen as a perpetually changing consequence of our horizon coming into contact with others (such as the past). When horizons come into contact, they are ultimately connected by a higher universality that pervades them both, for each horizon is open and unfixed and does not stand alone outside of history but is a part of its larger whole (Veith, 2015).

Understanding as described by the encounter of horizons supposedly existing by themselves but subject to the “great horizon” defines Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons.

The fusion of horizons is the event that allows the past to inform and reinvent the present: the past is foregrounded by the present, meaning it is not put into isolation, but placed against the present in interpretive experience. As Gadamer explains, “The fusion of horizons of interpretation changes constantly, just as our visual horizon also varies with every step we take” (1975). The horizon is not fixed but is constantly changing and modified little by little over time, not by the sheer weight of accumulated experience but by a process of expansion. A “fusion of horizons” embodies a measure of agreement and this in turn is a partial understanding: “Understanding is always the fusion of...horizons”
(Gadamer, 1975). The thought here is that a horizon can be brought into contact with another horizon instead of one obliterating the other (like in Cartesian thought and the Enlightenment), where an event of union takes place. Gadamer says this happens both down and across time, that is, diachronically and synchronically (Lawn & Keane, 2011). This situation involves a to-and-fro interpretation between horizons; the process of interplay Gadamer uses in his other writings on play (Simms, 2015). We will return to this concept at the end of the section to describe play as an avenue to transmitting history. For now, let us return to the fusion of horizons and discover its use in understanding tradition in Gadamer.

Through the fusion of horizons, Gadamer provides a way for all understanding to occur (limited in scope by the finite nature of the human being). All understanding takes place within an embedded horizon but that horizon is necessarily and ubiquitously interconnected with the past. We are not locked in the past, but in a present that is always unified with it. This is the character of tradition, being made up of past, present and future (Lawn & Keane, 2011). Our attempts at understanding have a forward-looking element (we are always projecting into the unknown future) but our understandings in the present constantly draw upon and fuse with the past. Tradition is then the social origin of our prejudices; the discourses, social practices, and symbolic order in which we are located, the particularity that defines us and the “baggage” that we carry (Piper, 1998). Gadamer sees tradition as what informs our being and understanding as it manifests entirely in and through our prejudices, thus providing a horizon from which we may view the world (Chan, 1984). Like our horizons, tradition is not a static phenomenon. Gadamer makes this clear in saying, “tradition is not simply a pre-condition into which we come,
but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of the tradition and hence further determine it ourselves” (1975). There is an element of freedom in tradition that makes it a “living” tradition where the past is merged with the present as in the fusion of horizons to create what Gadamer calls the principle of “effective history” (Chan, 1984). Tradition then, is part of what gives us understanding and an effective history is one that provides knowledge that shapes our recognition.

The effective history of tradition is what allows for transmission of meaning throughout horizons and individuals. Successful completion of transmission relies on play, the constant being-in-effect that intertwines past and present, the effecting and the affected (Veith, 2015). Gadamer speaks on the interplay between the “movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter” which results in the fusion of the individual horizon with the horizon of historical transmission (1975). To explain this phenomenon more clearly, we can turn to Veith:

Without human effort, no idea, object, or event retains its significance, and by embracing somethings rather than others, we alter the substance of history. Thus, everything we find with us today has in some way been preserved through an act of mediation, and it need not occur explicitly as a conscious, subjective act. (2015)

Veith’s passage explains that tradition cannot persist without the engagement of humans who value and cultivate some things over others. Also, our attempts to make sense of the world draw on and converse with, but also revise, transform, and subvert the prejudices we inherit (2015). Tradition is therefore communicated by human beings through the inclusion of historical elements in our social, familial, and cultural ways of
coming to terms with the world. Tracing the line of reasoning so far, our prejudices inform our horizon in which fused with others leads to understanding that is then comported into a sense of effective history that allows the transmission of traditions through knowledge that reshapes the very prejudice from which we started.

Now that we have a firm comprehension of Gadamer’s notion of play as it relates to the fusing of horizons and transmission of history through tradition and effective history, we can now apply his work to ideas previously examined in this chapter. In the closing section, we will now look to illuminate the ways in which Gadamer can be applied to play objects and fan experiences.

**The Passing Down of Play.** Let us return to the example of my mother’s baseball glove and my father’s football and recall their intrinsic meaning. It has been established that both items were a source of significance for the previous owner (my parents) and the recipient (me). As Gadamer (1975) would explain, this transference of meaning was no coincidence. Knowing what we have gained from the previous section, we can see how Gadamer’s notion of horizons and tradition mediated our exchange. My coming to know of the play objects was the result of Gadamer’s fusion in practice.

I will begin with the glove and football as items subject to prejudice in the Gadamerian sense. Defining prejudice as the expectations and predispositions we have towards objects, we can safely say that my parents carried a favorable prejudice towards the items as representative objects of childhood, joy, happy memories, and youthful exuberance. When presented with the items, my prejudices were not to the items as meaningful objects, but simply objects in themselves. For instance, I would look upon a glove or a football devoid of a narrative simply as an object of potential play, with hopes
of enjoyment, or with casual optimism. Yet my prejudice at this early juncture is still unique to me in that I am a sports fan and athlete, so I would obviously have a more favorable approach to such items than someone who despises physical activity. Besides this basic prejudice, I enter into the exchange without any additional suppositions save the items having an inherent meaning based on my love for my parents.

At this stage, my prejudice forms a horizon of interpretation that looks at the glove and football as thoughtful gifts that could be used for enjoyment. However, my parents have their own horizon of understanding of the items (and of the world) that differs from mine and requires articulation. When my parents explain the subjective meaning of the items to me, they are revealing their prejudice that resides in their respective horizons and therefore make it accessible to me. By conferring their subjective interpretations of the items to me, they are revisiting their own history and past experience with the glove and football, effectively demonstrating their own concept of a fused horizon.

What takes place next is the true phenomenon of the exchange. My prejudice of the items as potential play coming from people I care about necessitates a shift in interpretation when my parents disclose the meaning and history of the objects. I now have a renewed set of expectations and feelings toward the objects in recognition of their prejudice. When I accept the objects from then and assimilate their meaning into my own understanding, my parents and I engage in a fusion of horizons. Therefore, when I use the glove or throw the football, the item becomes a new subject to my own horizon while still existing in theirs. My horizon shifts, for the object now becomes a part of my own history, and each time I use or look upon the glove and ball, my present state is informed
and reformed not only because of my history but also with respect to that of my mother and father.

Taking this exchange a step further, it can be said that the play the ball and glove possess as potential and historical play is what is mediating the transmission of history and conferring onto me notions of tradition from an effective history. The effective history of what I know to be true about the objects based on what I was told informs my understanding of the items and allows me to perceive them as elements of tradition. I have an understanding of how many happy days in the sun in which the glove accompanied my mom and I know how special the football is to my dad coming from his own father’s rubber factory. At this point, the items themselves are of a family tradition in a Gadamerian sense because they acquired a history that was communicated to me through a fusion of horizons that is now actively informing my understanding of them and defining their relationship to me.

What has taken place here was facilitated by play, the interplay or intertwining between my horizon and my parents’ horizons, mediated by the glove and ball. The intertwining is evidenced by the shared meaning I now possess with my parents in common items, allowing my understanding to be informed and shaped by their subjective position through them. This is why I made the earlier remark that when a ball lands in the webbing of the glove, the moment belongs to both my mother and I simultaneously and serves as a moment in history that continues to move as a horizon in relation to my own. Each use of the glove from this point has a unity in horizons of my mother and I, yet has a separate impact on my own experience with the glove that becomes my unique history over time. Should I one day give the glove to my child, I will be engaging in the process
all over again and through communicating my prejudice of the glove will fuse three horizons. The continued creation of new meanings of the objects that comes from the fusion of horizons is akin to using a constructive hermeneutic, an idea that will be visited in chapter eight. Recognizing the presence of bias or prejudice towards objects or the world and allowing them to stand with respect as components of our subjectivity leads to new learning and a reframing of reality that comes from fusion creating new perspectives (both on a personal and shared level).

The passing along of heirlooms is extremely common in fandom as family members recognize the value in tradition and preserving personal and familiar history through the gifting of jerseys, baseball cards, equipment, and the like. We will revisit this notion in chapter seven when we discuss the consumption elements of sport as well. But here we are focusing on the transmission of history and maintenance of tradition that is prevalent in sport and fan bases. We look to the notion of play as the facilitator of understanding that emerges from transmission of history.

The phenomenon of fusing horizons is evidenced far outside physical items and takes place on a more social and familial level. For instance, the affiliations we have for a certain team are often deeply rooted in a familial context, as we tend to root for whom our mothers and fathers, grandparents, etc. root for. Here we see again the interplay of history and the present take root in the relationships we have with loved ones. Their horizon and prejudices informs those of the younger generations, leaving the opportunity to be reciprocated. Much of our adoration from a team may be the consequence of a fusion between the horizon of our loved ones and our own, a product of their ability to transmit an effective historical perspective to us. As a Pittsburgher, I am constantly
reminded of the traditional nature of fandom as my family, like those of many others, boasts generations of Steeler, Pirate, and Penguin fans. The Steelers provide the best instance of shared history: young children wearing Joe Greene and Jack Lambert jerseys, elaborate tailgates of young and old together, discussing the history of the team and fabled players, and cluttered living rooms full of memorabilia passed down over generations. Interestingly enough, even season tickets at a Steeler game fall under this category of tradition, for one is actually permitted to include their seat license in their will! Therefore, the physical seat at the stadium becomes a point of fusion and object of shared history. To sit in your father’s seat is to fuse your perspective of the game experience (both literally and figuratively) with his.

Other examples of this phenomenon reach beyond the social and cultural level and are grounded more in the psychological realm of prejudice amongst fans. Certain opposing teams come to be known those who “have our number” and specific stadiums become a “house of horrors” when the long-term success of the home team has been lacking in their respective venues. Purists, drawing upon their affinity for team history, may make claims such as “the Penguins never win in Chicago” or even more specifically, “the Pirates never beat the Padres at home on a Wednesday night.” Parasocial fans, relating to their strong ties with a team might say, “we always dominate the Bills at home” or “our boys play harder against the Flyers than anyone else.” Such statements are evidence of the fusion of horizons where the past has interplay on the perception of the present, and even into the future as is the case with “the Pirates will never win a World Series as long as I am living.” This element of fan sentiment and accompanying discourse supports Gadamer’s fusion as well as his notion of effective history, for all of the
aforementioned beliefs and understandings are communicated through the fusion of past and present and are subject to being changed over time through the constant to-and-fro movement of the horizons. Sometimes as fans, we hope that fate changes our fortunes today and allows us to revise our own sense of history with a team and therefore reinvent our understanding. After all, should the Pirates win a World Series, what would the naysayer fan come to believe? Their horizon would need to be adjusted, as their historical perception of the team would be shaken.

In this fourth chapter I have reviewed play in its nature from a variety of angles and expounded upon its applications in society, the game experience, the use of phenomenology, and in constructing understanding of objects, fandom, and history. Most of what has been discussed in this chapter can be related back to the idea of interplay, or the intertwining of experience and movements that allows us to formulate understanding of our own being and ultimately the moving horizon in which we are situated. This next chapter will take the notion of interplay and apply it to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s foundational work on the relationship of the mind and body that allows us to be in the world. Through visiting the interplay between mind and body, one can use Merleau-Ponty’s notions of flesh and chiasm to understand the sporting experience through the perspective of the fan.
In this fifth chapter, I plan to use the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to draw parallels between the interplay of spectator and player to the corporeal concept of existence and interdependence. The spectators are the intelligible onlookers who understand the game and consume the experience of the game itself much like the mind of the human being. The players, in contrast, are in the game itself and necessarily are consumed by it, making them the vehicle in which the fans’ experience plays out. For this reason, the players on the field are much like the body in that they physically create the experience for the fan. Together, fans and players create the totality of experience and their relationship them can be seen like Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh,” an unclaimed distance belonging to neither mind nor body but irrevocable necessary for experience to take place. This begs the question: What is sport without spectators? In this chapter I will explain why spectatorship is so vital to the dynamic of the game experience. Returning to my introductory ponderings of my Uncle’s sign that read, “The Fans, Not the Players” certainly comes into play in this chapter as the essential importance of the fan as part of the symbolic body-proper of sport will be examined. However, we must also understand the role of the player in the nature of the game dynamic, as they create the body of play that carries out the will of the spectators. The concept of flesh also opens the door for understanding creations of in-groups and out-groups, akin to the notion of home and visiting teams and their respective fan bases. This idea will be part of the discussion of the social identities created through sport that will be detailed in the chapter to follow.
Expanding upon the theme of the corporeal, I intend to apply Merleau-Ponty’s work on the “chiasm” to explicate how fan experience mimics the interplay of sensations that are produced and interpreted simultaneously. Such a discussion will involve highlighting the mutual necessity of each party to be present with the other, and the exchanges that take place that define the relationship. For instance, players often cite the fans as the reason for finding the motivation to play better, run faster, or otherwise excel beyond their means. Conversely, fans rely entirely on the success of the players to fulfill their needs to witness greatness, derive meaning from their fandom, and create the entertainment they crave. This is a clear example of a chiasm at work as a condition of being in an environment that can only exist on the pretense of an exchange of sensation. To begin this chapter, let us review Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s iconic phenomenology of the body.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the Concept of Body**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is sometimes referred to as “the philosopher of the body,” placing the ambiguity of the body as materiality and consciousness as the vanguard of his philosophical investigation. The body Merleau-Ponty investigates is not the objective material body, but the subjective, lived body in its ongoing dialogue with the world (Bullington, 2013, p. 26). In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*¹², Merleau-Ponty speaks to the subjectivity of the body as he explains, “In so far as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object…is that it is by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible in so

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¹² *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) was deeply influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre’s ideas on the body, flesh, and corporeity. Sartre was the first to introduce the concept of flesh (*la chair*), which becomes fundamental to Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy on the body as subject (Merleau-Ponty & Fisher, 1969).
far as it is that which sees and touches” (Merleau-Ponty & Fisher, 1969). At the
foundation of Merleau-Ponty’s project is the understanding of the body as the sole
facilitator of our lived experience with what he calls the “lifeworld,\(^{13}\)” or more precisely
our perception that is informed by the chiasm\(^{14}\) of the visible and invisible elements of
the world. Human experience is the unique result of the ongoing dialogue between
subject (body) and the world, which are born together and are co-present in every instant
(Bullington, 2013).

Practical modes of action of the body-subject are inseparable from the perceiving
body-subject, for it is the body through which we access the world (Keat, 1982).

Merleau-Ponty dedicates a large portion of perhaps his most famous work,
*Phenomenology of Perception*, to the articulation and justification of this concept by
examining Husserl’s (2001) concept of the lived world from a “first person” (through my
body I inhabit a world of meaning) point of view to provide a phenomenological account
of the human body. The body is viewed not as a scientific object of Cartesian dualism in
which a consciousness inhabits the body, but as the primary locus of experience of a
human “being-in-the-world.” Therefore, Merleau-Ponty is not only challenging the
possibility of conceptualizing the body as object with an ontologically separate
consciousness, but also proclaiming that human beings are indeed bodies in themselves
(Keat, 1982).

\(^{13}\) Lifeworld: (German: *Lebenswelt*) a term originating from Husserl and used by
Merleau-Ponty to explain the lived experience may be conceived as a universe of what is
self-evident or given that is experienced by subjects simultaneously.

\(^{14}\) The term derived from the Greek letter chi (x) that indicates an intertwining or a
crossing-over relation or arrangement. Merleau-Ponty uses the term in his late ontology
in order to capture his understanding of the flesh and the reversibility of the visible and
invisible, such as the phenomenon of touching while being touched (Landes, 2013????).
To think of the body as a thing greatly limits our potential to comprehend not only what it means to be human, but also what it means to communicate both within us and with others (Bowen, 2005). Viewing the human body as merely an object is especially problematic throughout the works of Merleau-Ponty, as a substantial portion of his life’s work is dedicated to explaining the subjective body. Merleau-Ponty makes us aware that many of our ideas about the human body and the nature of perception are influenced by natural science. Scientific explanations of perception make it difficult to reflect upon how we experience our bodies in the world. For example, we can understand and would not deny that we perceive light as a stimulus to the occipital lobe of the brain. We cannot refute that this is indeed how the synapses of our brain coincide to register light and allow us to perceive it. However, this is not the way we live and see the world. From a phenomenological point of view, the stimulus of light would elicit an embodied response, such as covering one’s eyes with a hand or reaching for a pair of sunglasses. The difference between the biological and phenomenological response being found in the experience of light provoking an embodied action that is based on how the stimulus is encountered. If we focus only on the scientific body-as-object and attempt to reduce all experience to the reactions of nerves, chemicals, and sensory stimuli, we miss the meaning of perception and how the world unfolds before us. Human experience is the unique result of the ongoing dialogue between subject (body) and the world, which are born together and are co-present in every instant (Bullington, 2013).

Merleau-Ponty recognized that one’s own body (le corps propre) is not only a thing or a potential subject for scientific study, but also the permanent condition of experience that allows perceptual openness to the world (Merleau-Ponty & Fisher, 1969).
There are three components of perceptual experience in his project: one being the body as the subject of experience, the second being the world as the object, and the third noted as consciousness as the relationship between them. Together, the three facets account for the holistic experience of embodiment, and ultimately the unique way in which the world is viewed from the perspective of each human being (Marshall, 2008).

The belief in the unity of body and mind as one led Merleau-Ponty to reject the Cartesian philosophy of the mind and body dualism and the consciousness of the mind known as the *cogito*,¹⁵ expressed as *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) most famously addressed by René Descartes, in which the proof of existence can be derived from awareness of being. To be more precise, this notion of being splits the consciousness into a thinking self and a bodily self (Descartes & Cress, 1998). Against the Cartesian ideal, Merleau-Ponty postulates that the body cannot be viewed as an object of merely a material entity in the world, for the body is what gives birth to the possibility of perception, which is the primary evidence of being. The dualism for Merleau-Ponty is not of mind and body but of immanence and transcendence that combines as one body.

The immanence of the body refers to the material; corporeal flesh and bone aspects of the body with the transcendent qualities include intellect, imagination, and cognitive capabilities. Cartesian philosophy prioritizes the transcendent aspects of the body while Merleau-Ponty believes that without the immanent body, the transcendent consciousness would not exist. Contrary to Descartes’s project, Merleau-Ponty explicates

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¹⁵ Latin for “thinking,” the cogito is the philosophic principle that one's existence is demonstrated by the fact that one thinks, and a concept central to Descartes’s Cartesian Philosophy of the dualism of body and mind. Landes (2013) explains that Merleau-Ponty’s return to lived experience and being-in-the-world requires a new cogito that accounts for a body and mind that are one in the same.
that we don’t participate in the world in a purely intellectual manner, but that our bodies inherently prompt questions as well as responses to the world around us (Ladkin, 2012).

We can return here to chapter four and the anecdote of how the child and puppy both come to understand the world through play. The process of coming into the world is often, in its early stages, not an intellectual act but instead a product of embodied experience acquired through action. As Merleau-Ponty explains it, our bodies ask and answer questions in their own way, as our visible exterior comes into contact with the forces of nature and the world, storing tacit knowledge of perception and sensation as we mature. The intellectual element of this process comes in the latter stages of development, sometime after our bodies have discovered how we move through time and space and provide a basic understanding of reasonable expectations in our daily interactions with the environment. What Cartesian thought brushes aside is that existence, as defined by a basic recognition of being able to move and interact with stimuli, is primarily discovered through the body, not through thought. As the mind develops, it begins to utilize the information obtained by the body and formulate a more complex understanding of the world, creating a fusion of both mind and body that Merleau-Ponty claims cannot be overlooked.

In his book, The Visible and Invisible, Merleau-Ponty seeks to develop a new concept of being that accounts for the intertwining of body and mind. He contends that the failure of science is objectifying the body in a manner that assumes a victory of the interior over the exterior, and the mental over the physical. Bodily understanding must account for consciousness as the space between the subjectivity of the body and the objectivity of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This is a vital addition to the subject of
mind and body for the purposes of phenomenological investigation, for the discipline relies so heavily on subjectivity that can only be captured through both body and mind.

Practical modes of action of the body-subject are inseparable from the perceiving body-subject, for it is the body through which we access the world (Keat, 1982). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is viewed not as a scientific object of Cartesian dualism in which a consciousness inhabits the body, but as the primary locus of experience of a human “being-in-the-world.” Therefore Merleau-Ponty is not only challenging the possibility of conceptualizing the body as object with an ontologically separate consciousness, but also proclaiming that human beings are indeed bodies in themselves (Keat, 1982).

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both argue that there is not simply a body apart from a self, but a body and a self, which inhabits the body. The body could be conceivable without a self, but the self is a product of embodiment so there could not be a self without a body. From the embodied position, we experience the world; therefore, it is the function of the body to open our access to the world. Our body allows us to sense the lifeworld around us, allowing us to interpret the world through various sensory stimuli. Yet at the same time, there is the mass of the body itself that we may be aware of but cannot truly sense, creating asymmetry between corporeity and embodiment. This friction highlights the double nature of the body in that it is an enigma, both open to the world and others that constitute our flesh and simultaneously remaining closed to itself (Sjöholm, 2003). A person has and is a body simultaneously, which is the unique situation that separates the body from the realm of other things. This situation of both having and being a body contributes to the uncertainty of the classification of the body as a thing. A body is
enigmatic in the fact it is never quite reducible to being a thing, but it also never rises above the status of being a thing (Bowen, 2005).

Weiss echoes this notion well, confirming the existence of body separate from mind against the Cartesian ideal, as he states:

We men live bodily here and now. This is as true of the most ecstatic of us as it is for the most flat-footed and mundane. No matter what we contemplate or how passive we make ourselves be, we continue to function in a plurality of bodily ways. Whatever our mental state, throughout our lives our hearts beat, our blood courses through our arteries, our lungs expand and contract. Our bodies grow and decay unsupervised, and, in that sense, uncontrolled. Only a man intoxicated with a Cartesian, or similar, idea that he is to be identified with his mind will deny that he is a body too. (1969)

What Weiss explains is that all human beings are primarily a body and spend time being just as such. There are times when our mind is idle, when we sleep, or when we eat and drink. The mind is sometimes placed in the background of our being and we operate in its absence, giving irrefutably sound evidence that we are primarily a bodily subject. According to Merleau-Ponty, we cannot regard our bodies as the object-like instruments of guiding, knowing, and intending consciousness as we go about our everyday dealings with the world. Conversely, we must recognize that it is our bodies themselves that understand what to do and how to do it through intentionality, which directs us toward the world. The concepts of intentionality, aim, meaning, action, significance, etc. are applicable directly to the body, not indirectly by way of intentional consciousness that is separate from the body-as-object. To be more precise, the human body possesses
knowledge that allows us to interact with the world tacitly without constant reflection. Merleau-Ponty designates this knowledge as prakognosia\textsuperscript{16}, or practical knowledge, that forms the basis of all relationships between the human subject and the world and cannot be broken down into the primal terms of body and mind. If we adopt the stance that the world is constituted as an object by and for the subject, we must also recognize that this subject is itself a kind of body.

Endowed with practical knowledge and able to make the world an object to itself, the body is central to motility as basic intentionality. Turning back to the cogito, consciousness for Merleau-Ponty is not based on “I think that,” but instead “I can” (Keat, 1982). Anecdotal evidence of this fact can be easily obtained in observation of daily activity such as driving a car or getting dressed, and applied easily to sports in motions such as swinging a bat or catching a football. Each example highlights an embodied knowledge of the act that does not necessarily require the presence of intelligible thought. Conversely, the actions are routine and perfected over time by repetition, resulting in a knowledge that Merleau-Ponty would say exists within the body, or more specifically the limbs. Even more complex actions, such as those of a craftsman who makes wallets or an

\textsuperscript{16} Prakognosia, i.e. practical knowledge, cannot be analytically decomposed into more primitive concepts, such as ‘body’ and ‘mind’; and that this prakognostic body in some sense forms the basis for all other kinds of relationship between the human subject and the world. In particular, as he goes on to argue in Part Two of \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, our bodies provide the basis of our perceptual relationship to it, including, for example, our perception of the spatial relationships between its various elements. These relationships are experienced by us not in the form of the ‘objective’, impersonal matrix of a Newtonian space, but always from the perspective of our own, action-oriented bodily organization. ‘Up, down’, ‘on, under’, ‘near to, far from’, and so on: these are the dimensions of a lived, ‘phenomenal’ spatiality, gaining their sense from our embodied intentionality (Keat, 1982).
artist that makes a living as a potter, are embodied practices that are reducible to a problem-solving process taking place through intentionally motions of the limbs. The wallet craftsman negotiates the thickness of the leather with the motions of the hand and force of the needle, while the potter is constantly competing with the clay in his hands to impose his target of direction upon it. Neither requires deliberation through intellect, but instead a practical knowledge of the relationship between the body and the medium, which when coupled with practice, results in routine motion that can result in relative mastery in their respective crafts. This instance announces what Merleau-Ponty deems the intentionality of motility, or the embodied knowledge of movement and purpose.

Merleau-Ponty describes the relationship between motility and the body as subject in the world perfectly:

I can therefore take my place, through the medium of my body as the potential source of familiar actions, in my environment conceived as a set of manipulanda and without, moreover, envisaging my body or my surrounding as objects in the Kantian sense [i.e. as the objects of a Newtonian ‘scientific’ universe]. There is my arm seen as sustaining familiar acts, my body as giving rise to determinate action having a field or scope known to me in advance [‘practically’ known, by the body itself], there are my surroundings as a collection of possible points upon which this bodily action may operate. (2003, p.105)

Understanding the idea that intentional motility results from embodied knowledge, and that such knowledge can precede the appearance of a self and make the self as body a subject in the world, we can look into an example of this condition via William the hockey fanatic. Through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of
the subjective body, those who have come to experience his actions know William as a hockey fan as a result of William’s appearance of embodied fandom. The presence of physical mass that allows us the possibility of action and participation in the world immediately negates the idea of a purely mental self (Brubaker, 2004). The fact that William is recognized as a hockey fanatic is attributed in large part to the fact that his corporeal body maintains practical knowledge that allows him to act as a fan, presents embodied displays of fandom to others, and possesses the knowledge of the behaviors a fanatic may display.

For example, William’s display of team apparel, logos, and related outward displays of affiliation provide primary evidence of his status as a fan but becomes an extension of his identity when he is seen wearing such apparel through multiple encounters with others. Once William is identified as a man who often wears clothing that represents his team, it can be said that he integrates such representation into his being and then embodies fandom in his very nature. His affinity for wearing such items is likely due to his own attempt at embodied fandom, seeing the team insignias as a fitting extension of his own self and wanting to present himself as a fanatic to others. Yet what completes the process of embodiment as a fan is the moment that his displays are recognized by consensus of others as being intrinsic to his subjective self. In tandem with this condition, William’s knowledge of the game will give rise to evidence of his fandom when observed in a game setting. His bodily responses to the events that unfold in a game may show interplay of stimulus and response that would suggest a familiarity and practical knowledge of the game. For instance, William may contort his body in accordance with the movements of the players, moving from side to side as players dodge...
the opposition while moving the puck up the ice, or perhaps retreating in his seat when witnessing a big hit. By doing so, he demonstrates through mimicry, a practical knowledge of the game in line with that of a player. It is easy here to also recognize the link between William’s movements and Lipps’s theory of empathy between spectator and tightrope walker that was used to explain the mimetic typology in chapter three. What is being described here is akin to the mimetic fan typology, and can be used as an example of how embodied knowledge of the game through mimicry and outward displays of affiliation come to be a part of someone’s subjective identity as seen by others.

The possibility for movement and action that is born from this tacit knowledge directly informs his narrative to others. This logic also applies to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body as the locus of perception for the human being. Our attitudes, beliefs, way of life, temperament, etc. are inextricably linked to our experience with the world and our body in the sense that our body both allows us to develop such items and it can also severely inhibit them. Signifiers, like those found in William the hockey fanatic, are fundamentally tied to the capabilities or limitations of our corporeity, and constitutes a formidable component of our narrative. What these elements, amongst others, form is our identity, our narrative in the eyes of others, and our self to the other. As we have gathered from both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the concept of a self cannot exist without a body. When we see William, we know nothing of his body other than how he appears and interacts with us, which ironically is generated through the body itself if we understand Merleau-Ponty. The network of relationships we maintain with both the world and others define a human being, and at the heart of our relations with one another is our narrative (Steeves, 2004).
The next section will discuss embodied action as it manifests in athletes in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty and therefore becomes the subject of observation of the fan. We will begin with a description of the motility and embodied knowledge of the athlete as it relates to their appeal and reverence, harkening back to chapter two and our understanding of their social prowess. Then we will turn to understanding the value of an athlete’s embodied qualities in through the lens of the purist and mimetic typologies of fans described in chapter three. In doing so, the hope will be to explain why fans are so drawn to the bodily exercises of the athlete and shed light on why typologies of fans hold this aspect in higher regard than others.

**Embodiment and the Appeal to Fandom**

If we can return to chapter one and the examination of the athlete, one can apply their basic appeal and identification as such being attributed in large part to their motility. As we have pointed out so far, athletes are admired for their bodily excellence and command of movement. In other words, their intentional motility as it relates to their sport is nearly perfect and recognizable for the disparity in the quality of their movement in relation to the status quo. An athlete spends their life rigorously training to work towards the goal of perfection in motility and possessing a sublime knowledge of the movements, patterns, and direction that directly equates to success in their sport. Therefore, their knowledge of the game and how to excel in it is stored in their limbs, muscles, tissues, and the like. Excellence in command of the body is learned and predispositions such as raw talent can accelerate the rate of ascension in skill. It is important to make clear the learning process, for every movement is comprised of a series of small motions that need to be perfected to create the whole.
Weiss offers an example of a baseball player perfecting a swing: without knowing how to grip the bat, he cannot pick it up. If he does not know how to grip the bat, he cannot swing it. During the act of the swing, the batter must have an understanding of how to contort and move the body in a fashion that generates power and best supports the act of the swing while also directing the bat to the incoming ball. Picking up, gripping, and swinging are three distinct and separate movements that are interrelated in that together they must be practiced to be combined into the singular act of a swing (1969). One would be hard-pressed to locate a professional baseball player that would have to consciously make separate decisions as to how to pick up, grip, and hold the bat each time they stepped to the plate. If this were the case, they most assuredly would not be in the major leagues! Instead, their years of training and experience in the game make their movements while at bat entirely embodied and of second nature.

As a hockey fan growing up and attending school in the Pittsburgh area, I was fortunate enough to watch Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins mount his illustrious career in the National Hockey League. Being perhaps the marquee player of his and my generation, he undoubtedly posses a high degree of natural talent. However, what makes him truly great and recognized as the face of the league is undoubtedly his meticulous preparation and attention to detail in his movements. I have been able to witness the beauty and grace of “Le Magnifique,” Mario Lemieux, and the pure scoring acumen of “The Great One,” Wayne Gretzky. Yet, I have never had the pleasure of witnessing a player who has mastered his motility and intent like Crosby. His embodied knowledge is so profound that one can observe his surgically precise actions continually adapting to each scenario presented throughout a game, maintaining perfect symmetry with the
demands of each passing moment. In the fast-paced game of hockey, a player does not have time to consciously decide what is to be done next, but instead must have the practical bodily knowledge to direct themselves in an appropriate manner in relation to play. Perhaps this is why many remark upon the beauty of sports like hockey and soccer and compare them to ballets and symphonies, pointing out their harmonious nature in movement and purpose. Returning to Crosby and his mastery of movement, I wish to share a memory that I believe best exemplifies the true athlete who is able to deconstruct movement into diminutive parts to achieve greatness in performing the whole.

I can recall watching practices inside Pittsburgh’s Mellon Arena while attending college and like most folks in the stands; my eyes would follow Crosby in awe of the intricacies that make him stand above the rest. One afternoon, I watched him take hundreds of face-offs in the corner of the rink with only a coach and another player. During this time, I observed that each time the puck was about to be dropped, he would skate into the circle and position his feet, grip the stick, bend towards the ice surface, adjust his head and viewpoint, readjust his grip on the stick, and eventually proceed to direct his body and coordinate movements to gain possession of the puck once it was dropped. Each movement that created the entire act was being meticulously perfected through repetition, adjustment, and the banking of knowledge into the body.

I wondered why Crosby was focused on this aspect of his game, given his excellence in the sport. This prompted me to view his stats from the previous season, realizing despite winning the scoring race, he was near the bottom of his position in faceoff win percentage. It was at this moment I realized I was witnessing a true master of his craft and a student of the game who understood that fundamental skills are always
subject to improvement no matter how much raw talent one may possess. Crosby’s exercise in rote repetition was anything but mundane and boring to me, for he unmistakably recognized the power of embodied knowledge and was displaying his willingness to be a liaison to instruction of the body as subject. In this instance, we cannot ignore the mental aspects that make up the intentionality of his actions. At some point, he had to consciously decide to practice face-offs and then instruct his body to make adjustments each time he engaged in a repetition on the ice. With that said, the storing of bodily knowledge was a result of his minds intent.

It has been established that an athlete’s body is superior in intentionality of motility, further sharpened in skill through repetition and training. However, there is a mental aspect in this process that must be included to fully understand how the mind and body of the athlete operate. Coaches, trainers, and mentors all have a role in the intelligible dynamic of the process of shaping an athlete, as well as the mental processes of the athlete him or herself. Weiss explains the importance of training nicely as he says:

He who can perform acts without first having to master moves has aptitude. No one, no matter how apt, is naturally great. To be a great athlete it is necessary to become one. But to become one it is necessary to be prepared to become one. And to be prepared to become one it is desirable to have the benefit of instruction. Training, the art of getting men’s bodies to move along vectorially determined routes, provides that instruction. Its object is to bring men to the point at which their bodies follow the lure of the incipient future in which their vectorial minds terminate. (1969)
Going back to my observations of Sidney Crosby, what Weiss (1969) is describing is the intelligible aspect of embodied learning, the critical idea being that the mind is utilized both on the part of the trainer and athlete until it is no longer needed in process on the playing surface. This also marks the division between training and conditioning. The latter is the practice in which athletes condition the body to best handle the rigors of competition and action, but the former is the process of unlocking the potential of the body to achieve greatness in motion without implicit instruction.

Essentially, training has the purpose of bringing the body to a point of self-directedness that does not require intervention when engaged in the game. When Weiss says “in which their vectorial minds terminate,” he is talking about the divine moment when the body takes over all necessity for thought and performs as if its detached from the mind, operating under its own volition as if having its own intellect.

This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty wishes to explicate when he addresses the nature of the body as subject. Cartesian thought would conclude that the mind must be consciously aware of the bodily movements of the athlete in order to form a cohesive notion of being in the world. Yet, as the mantra of many coaches continually reinforces through time, the best way to be in the world as an athlete in a game is to “not think, just play.” Although tired and cliché, this adage does well in summarizing the ideal operation of an athlete: to achieve total control over the body through implicit knowledge of the game and its demands on intentional motion in order to be lost as a subject in the larger guise of the game itself, becoming part of a harmonious flow of moving parts that creates beauty in its lack of imposed direction. To be lost in the game, giving oneself to become part of a harmonious whole, it is essential to sport and the fan experience.
What the Crosby example demonstrates is twofold in that it confirms Merleau-Ponty’s notion of bodily presence as subject, but also explains the appeal of the mechanical aspects of the athlete in the eyes some typologies of fans.

One may ask why a fan would be so inclined as to watch a practice session of their favorite team or make arrangements to attend a spring training baseball game. There is no “game” being played in the case of practice, and there is no “consequence” of the game during spring training. Yet for some reason fans of all ages flock to open practices and the like and watch intently for hours on end! What could possibly be the draw of such an event? I believe that observing the process of embodiment is the answer. Recalling two specific typologies of fandom laid out in chapter two, the purist and mimetic fan, we can address the appeal of observing an athlete’s training and shed light on the meaning of the practice experience for the fan.

**The Purist: Beauty in Embodied Practice.** We can recall that the purest is one who holds the game above all else, forsaking the idea of being tied to any one team in favor of appreciating the game for its beauty in motion and coordination. The purist judges the value of the game through individual acts of players, and compares what is being observed from an objective point of view with past exemplars of related acts in similar scenarios. Therefore, the purist appreciates excellence in command of the body as it relates to achievement in the game relative to the other players involved and all of those who came before. Entertainment for the purist can be said to be found in player’s abilities and attributes that allow them to realize greatness within the confines of the rules and regulations of the game, thus placing them on a level plane of observation with all other players both current and past. For this reason, a purist will seek out opportunities like
practices to observe what they value most being carefully molded and developed. There is an appreciation for players, like Crosby in my example, that take the time to make minor and meticulous changes to their approach that will be implemented in game scenarios. What the purist witnesses through practice and simulation provides them with a more detailed and commensurate understanding of the motions of the game and the capabilities of individual players that can then befit another mental benchmark of performance to be utilized in times to come. To explain this more accurately, watching Crosby take hundreds of face-offs is a valuable experience for the purist by revealing the secrets of the physical aspect of the game he or she holds most dear, while simultaneously sharpening their sense of relative abilities amongst players than can be later archived as a means of comparison.

In the end, the purist may claim that Crosby is the “best they have ever seen at taking face-offs,” which to other typologies of fans may seem as a frivolous, overly analytical comment in relation to the overall game of hockey. However, this statement will gain the interest of other purists and may foster a debate on the subject where others will be able to make valid arguments for their own opinions based on observations. In this scenario, the debate is likely to boil down to the practical knowledge of the player that is displayed as an embodied understanding through play. This is why you can walk the aisles of stadia and hear conversations amongst purists that argue, “Who has the best baseball swing” or “what quarterback exhibits the most perfected throwing form.” Such topics of discussion confirm the purists regard for Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment through the athletes they observe and also reifies the nature of their typology.
The next typology of fan observes the embodied practices of athletes from a more personal standpoint, putting emphasis on the opportunity for self-integration and learning of the practices to be observed. The mimetic fan is one who revels in the ability to assimilate the actions and movements of players in their own lives and in doing so draw closer to the sporting experience.

**The Mimetic Fan: Embodied Representation.** As we have discussed in chapter two, the mimetic fan is one who thrives on the ability to represent the bodily actions of players in their own amateur pursuits, believing that mimicking the movements of greats will lead to personal success. The goal of this typology of fan is to embody the likeness of professional players in various ways, both physically and aesthetically. Practices and training sessions offer the mimetic fan, like the purist, a chance to gain insight into the physical dimensions of the player. However, the difference between the purist and the mimetic fan is that purists look upon embodied practices with objective judgment, where mimetic fans observe with the hope for subjective integration.

Returning to watching Crosby perfect his face-off routine, I can side closely with the mimetic fan in the appeal of watching a practice. As an amateur athlete, I too look for ways to improve my own game and see the value in observing professionals as a means to do so. To be present at a practice is like being admitted to a private clinic of sorts, in that one has the opportunity to learn from the processes that cannot be dissected, as they play out in real-time during a game. Therefore, a practice serves as a tutorial for the mimetic fan, presenting a unique learning experience that would be difficult to find elsewhere. The mimetic fan may attend practice events to make mental notes on their observations of the players, watching intently for routines and motions that can be
integrated into his or her personal regimen. The relationship the mimetic fan shares with players is that of mutual embodiment in that the fan simultaneously adopts the actions of the players, both developing practical knowledge of the game. As explained in chapter two, this relationship defines the typology of the mimetic fan and leads to the embodied knowledge of the game that designates a higher level of fandom. By watching the players practice, the bodily link between fan and player is strengthened, giving rise to opportunities of empathetic mimicry as explained by Lipps and discussed previously through William the hockey fanatic. Through his or her bond with players, the mimetic fan will spectate from a more personal and attached position; moving as the players move, withdrawing when they are struck, leaning in and gritting their teeth as they struggle towards victory.

Continuing with Merleau-Ponty’s work on embodiment, there is another interesting dynamic of the spectator/player dynamic that should be examined, the embodied nature of sport equipment. The next section will define equipment as extensions of the human body and begin to explicate why it plays such an important role in sport. The following section will begin the turn towards conceptualizing embodied equipment as flesh and uncovering its vital role in the relationship between players and fans.

**Embodiment and Equipment as Extensions of the Body**

There is much to be said on the role that equipment plays in the embodiment of sport and actions that support the game. Previously, we recognized the value of a piece of equipment at rest as an item that represents potential play and having its own appearance of life and autonomy. New gear is not truly equipment until it is acquired and activated
by the user to fulfill its intended purpose: a bat is not a bat until it strikes a baseball, a basketball is not a basketball until it is dribbled and shot. The act of play with items not only activates their potential and therefore gives them “life” that transcends their status as object, but it also embodies the object by way of extension. For Merleau-Ponty and in the phenomenological tradition, anything that augments or can be attached to the body in a way that manipulates the forces of the world around it can be considered an extension of the self. Pieces of equipment, such as boxing gloves and hockey sticks are incorporated into our being as a body, for they assist in our encounters with the world while acting as a body as subject.

David Goldblatt, in “The Extended Body and the Aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty” speaks on the value of prosthetics and explains the phenomenon of extensions as he says: When we think about prosthetics in this general sense of an extended body, additional examples from everyday life are not hard to find: the third baseman’s mitt on his hand but also the space considered the defensive domain of that position, the fork in the hand of the diner but also the plate on the table are examples (the ‘I can’ of the fielder or diner), which after a time being unthinking or natural extensions of ourselves for purposes of expanding our status and/or powers, without which the doing of what we intend would not be a possible circumstance or at best would not be possible to do well. Prosthetic effects are oriented toward a future and are expressed under conditions of intention and responsibility…This general sense of prosthesis implies an integration of a body with something otherwise thought to be external to it. In this more general sense, there are links between self and world where the world’s objects are unthinkingly
perceived as part of our selves, and the distinction between acting with them and being without them, that is, as external objects or parts of our bodies—this ambiguity—is simply irrelevant. Those times, those conditions, I am thinking of as prosthetic occurrences, their effects and experiences. (2016, p. 28-29)

The term prosthesis here is used to describe the use of artificial limbs to help the body perform well in the world. Usually understood in a medical sense, “prosthesis” can be expanded to include the equipment of sport, as they too augment the body and make it more capable to exist as a subject in the world that is created by the rules of the game. It would be nearly impossible to play baseball in any fair capacity without a glove and certainly without some version or fashioning of a bat. Since equipment does not facilitate the game alone and requires direction of the human body to be utilized effectively, we can posit equipment as prosthesis, extensions of the body. When Goldblatt (2016) used the phrase, “there are links between self and world where the world’s objects are unthinkingly perceived as part of ourselves,” he is directly speaking to the recognition of the inseparable nature of body and equipment, or in his case, prosthetics.

We cannot conceive of a professional football player without the required pads, helmet, and cleats or a hockey player without skates and a stick. To see either of them playing in a game stripped of their gear would be difficult to rationalize and place ontologically. Therefore, we can conclude that a player of any sport is defined not only be the presence of a person but also by the appearance and presence of the necessary equipment that allows them to participate in the game. We cannot make the error; however, of assuming that simply putting a glove on a person makes them a baseball player and the equipment is automatically embodied as extension. Instead, there is a
process of training involved that integrates the equipment into the body over time and practice.

Weiss (1969) explains that equipment has a nature and career of its own and can be united with an individual only at certain points, after the user has demonstrated the acumen and ability to use it in accordance with its purpose. Despite the body of the player and piece of equipment being subject to different causes, going through different courses, and being comprised of different matter, the athlete makes equipment an extension and part of himself through merged its function with his motility. Weiss (1969) draws a parallel between a human being learning their own body with the act of integrating equipment as he quotes, “through constant use a man gets the feel of his skates and hockey stick. He learns their heft, their capacities and limits, and acts accordingly. He shifts the center of gravity from within himself to a position which includes himself and them”(1969).

As a former college athlete, I can relate well to the growing pains of getting familiar with new equipment and can confirm that only time and repetition will allow one to fuse with a stick or a new pair of skates. There is perhaps no greater feeling of anxiety a hockey player experiences than when his trusted skates begin to falter or when his favorite stick breaks. Unless the replacement is of exact specifications, the process of integration begins anew, bringing with it a sense of uncertainty of one’s ability to play the game well until the new equipment becomes familiar.

I can also personally speak to the profound impact that the relative feelings of heft, weight, length, and curvature between something as simple as a hockey stick can have on performance. Once a player has embodied the specifications of a stick, to lose
this familiarity is for some time, analogous to having a sudden change in the length of an arm or weight of a leg. Equipment can truly be viewed as an extension of the self and function much like a limb, for when equipment fails, the body feels in disarray and gives the player pause, threatening to compromise ability in the game. Subtle differences in all types of equipment is instantly magnified when placed on the body or used in conjunction with it. This makes it particularly difficult when an equipment manufacturer stops producing the equipment one had come accustomed to; it’s as if you need to be born again as a player with a new extended body! Weiss continues his description of the embodiment of equipment in claiming that

The shift is somewhat similar to that which he underwent in the course of his acceptance of his body. But where, in connection with the body, he had to do little more than undergo an internal change, here, in connection with his identification with his equipment, he must contour himself and his acts so that they accord with the equipment’s structure and functioning. (1969)

This quote articulates my experience with new equipment as well as provides the reasoning behind the sensation of becoming a new player and reinventing the body to accommodate the conditions of the items being used. From a phenomenological standpoint, what has been discussed here demonstrates clear circumstances of the subjective and intersubjective nature of experience. The feeling of embodiment that one possesses with equipment is personal, formulated over the course of time, and inextricably linked to their own perceptions of both the item and its conditions of being, as well as how it functions with them in the world. Using the equipment of another, even someone of similar stature, is not a matter of simple replacement for the sake of
functioning in the game. When you hand someone your hockey stick, you essentially transfer an extension of the self onto the other person, as if trading your arm for his or hers. As any hockey player will tell you, the moments in game play that force one to use the equipment of another are often anxious times that seem to remove the player from the game, breaking the feeling of continuity of play that comes from being a body consumed in the game. Ideally, Weiss describes the intended outcome of embodied equipment in saying, “the athlete eventually arrives at the point where he hardly notices his equipment. He acts with it and through it, as though it were just his body extended beyond the point at which it normally is, or can function,” and furthermore, “He who uses equipment properly makes it into a continuation of himself” (1969). Weiss’s comments on the embodiment of equipment leading to unnoticed sensational integration moves the discussion towards our immediate sensation of anonymous corporeity—Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh. The next section will discuss the concept of flesh as it relates to the embodiment of equipment and in doing so, further explain the unique connection between players and the mimetic fan typology.

**Equipment as Shared Flesh**

Merleau-Ponty’s work on flesh emerges from his attempts to come to terms with the possibility of both being a seer and being seen simultaneously; touching and being touched. He explained that human beings are neither subjects placed in the world that then render the meaning of objects, nor are they subjects that are imposed upon by already defined objects. The human being is instead already in the world and engaged in a creative exchange with objects that solicit our momentary contemplation of what they mean and represent. Merleau-Ponty recognized the need for an explanation as to what it
is that allows us to exist in this intermediate realm of classification, where we are neither purely subjects or objects within the world, yet have the ability to experience both sides of the spectrum. As Rosalyn Disprose (2008) explains, we encounter the world as a horizon of possibilities and meanings, and it is only our bodily experience that allows us to bring the encounter of the world down to our own understanding and be able to internalize what we contact externally.

At the foundation of this ability is the idea of reflexivity, our propensity to recognize that things appear to us while we appear to them, a condition of being in the world undergirded by intersubjectivity. In order to participate in such an exchange, there must exist an element of our bodily experience that transcends the subjectivity of perspective and the objectivity of the body. For Merleau-Ponty, this is the concept of flesh; a worldly constant that is of elemental existence akin to water, fire, and air (Disprose, 2008). Flesh precedes our existence as neither a spiritual nor material thing, but a thing in itself that officiates the experience of being both open to the world and simultaneously closed to the self. In short, the flesh allows for embodied experience that allows us to experience the chiasm through reversibility.

From the embodied position, we experience the world; therefore, it is the function of the body to open our access to the world. Our body allows us to sense the lifeworld around us, allowing us to interpret the world through various sensory stimuli. Yet at the same time, there is the mass of the body itself that we may be aware of but cannot truly sense, creating asymmetry between corporeity and embodiment. This mass is a pre-thing, something that precedes our ability to exist and allows us to experience
being, the flesh. In his book *Imagining Bodies*, Merleau-Ponty scholar James Steeves eloquently describes flesh as he notes:

The flesh is essentially the pure imagination, pure possibility, that does not await actualization but rather bears it as a mother bears her child. The flesh exists in latency and virtuality, and imagination before all self-perception and at the heart of perception, which gives birth to the very imagining body in which it is able to realize itself. (2004)

What Steeves (2004) is illuminating is the nature of the flesh giving rise to the possibility of experiencing being, or living in the world as an organized self. Flesh is the level of the phenomenological body that allows the intertwining between perception and the perceptual world.

The flesh is also the structure of transfer and reversibility between sensing and being sensed, between consciousness and world. It calls for an engagement with the world and also a distance from it, allowing us to be involved with beings while maintaining a separation from them (Steeves, 2004). The notion of flesh highlights the double nature of the body in that it is an enigma, both open to the world and others while simultaneously remaining closed to itself (Sjöholm, 2003). Flesh is what allows us to become aware of ourselves as perceivers in the world, and also infers that others come to awareness of existence in a similar fashion (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

Having a preexisting mass before coming to be aware of being allows us to share a common landscape with others where we are both observing and seen, continually engaging in an exchange that informs us as to who we really are (Brubaker, 2004). The common space we share as human beings allows us to make sense of the life-world in a
manner that is completely individualized and unique to personal perception, yet undeniably informed by the reflections of the Other. In “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty explains that flesh is the common fabric of the world by which exterior and interior are joined, allowing the world to become intelligible (Merleau-Ponty & Johnson, 1993). The world, he explains, is “made of the same stuff as the body” (Merleau-Ponty & Johnson, 1993). The synergy of the material world, the other, and the subject is the foundation of our own flesh coming into contact with the world and the flesh of the other which Merleau-Ponty calls the chiasm\textsuperscript{17} which will be discussed shortly.

Informing Merleau-Ponty’s body of work on the flesh and the chiasmic experience was Jean-Paul Sartre, who in *Being and Nothingness* introduced the idea of the flesh (*la chair*) and the concept of intercorporeity, which together form our bodily experience with the world and others. Sartre defines flesh as “the pure contingency of presence” in which we are both in the world and also able to experience the flesh of others (1966). His understanding of the flesh interacting with other flesh gave rise to the idea of the “double sensation” which was the precursor to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the chiasm. Both men were recognizing the condition of touching while being touched, or the simultaneous acknowledgment of both existence in the world and interaction with the world. This relationship distinguishes the body of the self and the body of others in a manner that demarcates the inner experience of corporeity in contrast to seeing the exterior body of the Other. For Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the internal body is experienced but at the same time indefinable and essentially invisible. We know that we

\textsuperscript{17} Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the reversible nature of sensations. The notion comes from the idea of being-in-the-world and the enigmas of simultaneously touching and being touched, or seeing and being seen. The chiasm is a fundamental experience of the flesh (Landes, 2013).
have a brain, liver, kidneys, etc., but their location within our body is situated within a realm of knowledge that Sartre calls “folk” anatomy (1966). More accurately, we know the makeup of our body by proxy, for we only know what we see in books or are told by our doctors.

From a physical point of view, we are limited to seeing the external appearance of the other, having only the same knowledge of approximation as to how the internal components of the other are arranged (Boulé & O’Donohoe, 2011). Hence the distinction of the visible and invisible made by Merleau-Ponty that separates the things we can experience directly and observe as a material quality from those that are experienced but unable to be seen, like the inside of our body, the difference between the sensed and being sensed. The two categories of experience are mediated by flesh, which serves as the common ground between them (Steeves, 2004). At the forefront of this tension is Merleau-Ponty’s theory that suggests only through another’s perspective can we come to know ourselves, based on the experience of being in the world and experiencing our own flesh in the presence of others. Flesh can be seen as the space between two beings not always categorized by material but instead the surrounding space between entities that indicates a visceral presence (Ladkin, 2012).

We can use the knowledge of the importance of equipment and its phenomenological relevance to make a turn to understanding flesh. We should recognize the presence of the glove, bat, stick, or otherwise with the player who uses it as reciprocity of sensation, of touching and being touched. Just as our bodies are largely unaware of the specifics of presence in the world, existing as a subject without implicit recognition of the forces upon them, so too is the relationship between person and
embodied equipment. The hand in a baseball glove is experiencing the rigidity and composition of the glove, experiencing its tactile surface while the glove envelopes the hand and provides an extension thereof. The hand is both touching and being touched by the glove but the sensation is persisting mostly unrealized by the player who has successfully incorporated it into his or her sense of being. Therefore, the glove is an extension of the player insofar as its embodied relationship to the hand goes unnoticed. Regardless of the type of equipment in question, the circumstance described here is a fusion of self as subject and object, positing the embodied equipment as a way to conceptualize Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh. When one integrates equipment into their sense of being in the world, the equipment serves as a mediator between self and world just as any other part of the human body. A pitcher’s baseball glove then can be seen as extending the flesh of the hand, and a hockey forward’s stick continuing the reach of the flesh that is the arm. The player relies on the equipment to act as flesh, for if it becomes noticeable as something outside of the body while engaged in play equipment has the potential to serve as a disruption. The world the player comes into contention with is that of the game; the “flesh” of equipment must mediate this exchange faithfully and avoid being sensed as anything other than self to fulfill its true purpose.

Returning to my anecdote of the breaking of equipment and the use of replacements, we can now recognize the difficulty that faltering or substitution equipment can offer for the player. The use of another player’s hockey stick or baseball glove is not a matter of simple inconvenience instead a shift from the integration of self as body and object to a recognition of the division between the two. Such a change is problematic for the player, for the normal mode of flesh that mediates the interplay between the subject
and the world (game) is altered, just as if one would have to carry on after losing an appendage. Surely the change is not nearly as permanent or severe, but nonetheless highlights the vital importance of equipment to become a form of flesh as it has been conceptualized here through Merleau-Ponty. Interestingly enough, the fan can share the plight of the player in such instances. Recalling the deeply rooted embodied connection between mimetic fans and their favorite players, I will now move to explaining the mutual “flesh” of spectator and player.

**The Proximal Flesh.** Revisiting chapter three, we can recollect the condition of the mimetic fan as one that is defined by an embodied connection with the players that they admire. Through observance and mimicry of athletes, mimetic fans quite literally try to become their idols. It has been established that much of the process of mimesis in sport involves a fan’s integration of behaviors, mannerisms, and outward acts of physical motility of the athletes. Through replication, the fan hopes to embody the physical traits and capabilities of the professional athlete in an attempt to improve their own skillset in respective sporting enterprises. However, we have only begun to explore the role of equipment in this fan/player dynamic. I have already noted the connection between equipment and mimetic fan, pointing to the fan’s desire to possess battle-tested gear once owned by their heroes with hopes of conjuring the embodied skills perceived to reside within the equipment itself. But what I must now address is the ability of the equipment itself to act as a mediator of the exchange, as a form of common flesh.

Returning to Theodor Lipps and his work on empathetic connections between athletes and spectators, he postulated that onlookers mimic the motions of the players (tightrope walkers in his example) as a consequence of recognizing the selfsameness
between the observed and the observer (Montag, Gallinat, & Heinz, 2008). In other words, the spectators emulate the players by doing “what they would do” given the same context and situation. This phenomenon comes from what Lipps describes as a projection of the selfhood of the viewer into that of the player resulting in a merging of consciousness between the two. This fusion is what Lipps terms an “inner imitation” through which the observer internally reproduces the movements of the observed person. Perceived movements are instinctively and simultaneously mirrored by kinesthetic “strivings” and the experience of corresponding feelings in the observer (Montag et. al., 2008). The idea of inner imitation as proposed here has also been used in this project to describe the emulative acts of spectators during sporting events that reveals the deep connection between a fan and player to others. Lipps’s theory describes an empathetic relationship between spectator and the observed that is based on an embodied association grounded in the literal physical bodies of both parties. What I am interested in achieving at this juncture is a reimagining of this connection that is facilitated through equipment as an extension of flesh.

Edith Stein (Stein, Gelber, & Leuven, 1986) uses Lipps’s work to revisit the metaphor of the acrobat but makes a turn towards a more distanced position. According to Stein, Lipps makes the mistake of confusing the act of being drawn into the experience of the other (the acrobat) with the movement from non-primordial to primordial experience. The distinction between the two is that primordial is accessible through the body and is given as primary experience, whereas the non-primordial is experience we can relate to, but belongs to the other. Therefore, the spectator’s empathy is derived from being led by the primordial nature of the acrobat that causes feelings not actually felt in a
bodily sense, but manifesting itself in non-primordial senses (like reasoning and recognition). According to Stein, “I am not one with the acrobat but only “at” him. I do not actually go through his motions but only quasi” (Stein, Gelber, & Leuven, 1986). According to Reynolds and Reason, this quasi nature describes the “imperfect substitution” of the emphasizing subject with the emphasized, a proximity that is not characterized by a fusion or a replacement but preserves a distance (2012). The experience is then one of distinction where the spectator feels “as if I were” instead of “as I am.” Thusly empathy is an imaginative process that involves an accompaniment with the subjectivity of the observed instead of a projected fusion of subjectivity. The experience can then be seen as mediated, allowing the potential for contact while maintaining an obvious distance, a paradox of proximity at a distance (Reynolds & Reason, 2012). I believe this quasi; “as if I were” relationship is fitting for understanding the role of equipment in mediating fan experience as flesh.

The flesh that a fan shares with a player is obviously not flesh in a literal sense, but instead metaphorical. Understanding that mimetic fans are often amateur athletes themselves and look to professionals for guidance, we can begin to unpack the idea of equipment as a mediator. Flesh that can be viewed common between the two is that of the actual equipment (gloves, bats, hockey sticks, etc.) that both the professional athlete and fan (amateur athlete) that becomes embodied by each party. I do not mean to suggest that they share the same equipment in a literal sense, but they do share the same experience of equipment. For example, both the fan and athlete will possess the necessary gear to participate in a respective sport and therefore will understand the functionality, placement, and proper usage of each item. In their own separate ways, the fan and the
player will embody the equipment through time (obviously the professional to a higher degree than the amateur). Consequently, the embodiment of equipment is what they ultimately share, and for this reason they can be understood to share a flesh, an intermediary facilitator of bodily experience with the outside world. In other words, a helmet functions the same for a professional as it does for an amateur fan, so does a pair of shoulder pads or a baseball bat. For this reason, the fan is able to conceptualize not only the physical properties of equipment, but also the sensation of integration when the gear is fuses with his or her sense of bodily self, thus becoming an extension of the self and classifiable as flesh. This is why mimetic fans will often watch players engaged in games and make comments such as “there’s nothing like a newly sharpened pair of skates” or “you gotta love a nice cherry wood bat.” Similarly, professional athletes will often make the same types of statements when asked about their own gear. Remarks such as these indicate an intimate relationship with the items on an extremely detailed and nuanced level, having an appreciation for the performative, qualitative, and even the aesthetic aspects of equipment. In turn, the relationship between the fan and player is further strengthened by this mutual experience and knowledge of the sporting gear.

Conversely, the fan is also able to relate to the feeling of malfunctioning equipment. As I previously noted on a few occasions, the anguish that comes from failing equipment can be destructive to one’s quality of play and certainly causes a disruption of the body. Bats and sticks break, skate blades dull, and baseball gloves wear out in the same fashion (albeit at different rates) for the fan and the player. In such instances, both parties experience malfunctions from an embodied point of view in addition to the more tactically based frustrations such as not being able to finish out a play or having to break-
in a new glove. This is why fans may cringe when a hockey player breaks a stick on a slap shot, gasp when they lose an edge and fall to the ice because of dull skates, or yell out with frustration when a goalie’s glove fails to secure the puck (or perhaps chuckle with understanding when the large padding does not allow for its retrieval).

In both instances, that of relating to the comfort and grace of embodied equipment and that of its malfunctions, the shared flesh between fan and player is characterized by their respective relationships with equipment. When a fan reacts either in a positive or negative manner to the player’s use of equipment, it may appear as if the empathy conjured in this moment is in line with the projected “inner imitation” as described by Lipps. In many ways, this is indeed the case; however, I believe Stein’s premise of empathy is more accurate, for it reserves a sense of distance and mediated contact (Stein, Gelber, & Leuven, 1986). In a game setting, there is a literal distance that separates the fan from the player and there is a figurative distance between the two in skill level. For this reason, the empathy experienced by the fan when a player breaks a stick or the appreciation they feel for a new baseball bat is indeed from a position of “as if I were” and not “as I am.” Despite the fact that both have an intimate knowledge of the equipment and have the ability to embody it as well, the distance between them both in skill and proximity makes the connection between the two parties one-sided. Returning to the first mention of Stein’s position, the mimetic fan is relegated to the experience of accompaniment instead of fusion—what happens to the player in a primordial sense can only be accessed through non-primordial sensations for the fan (Stein, Gelber, & Leuven, 1986).
This is not to discount the value of the connection between mimetic fan and player in any sense, nor to dismiss its phenomenological value for understanding fandom. It is quite the opposite, for Stein’s idea of empathy helps us uncover the ability for equipment to function as a shared yet distinctive form of flesh. The paradox of distanced proximity may be the key to recognizing the role that embodied items of equipment plays in mediating the exchange between fan and player, at least from a mimetic standpoint.

However, there are instances where this “flesh” impinges upon the distance between fan and player, allowing spectators to influence the game through different points of contact with the players. Such instances are chiasmic in that one faction of the game comes to influence the other, much like the intertwining of mind and body in Merleau-Ponty’s work. On a larger scale, the entire game experience can be seen as a chiasm of sensations, involving interplay of the stimuli produced by the crowd and the players that fuels the overall purview of the game. The next section will use Merleau-Ponty’s work on chiasm to posit the game experience as a “body” in itself and uncover how the chiasm works to create meaningful game experiences for the fan.

The Chiasmic Nature of the Game Experience

It has been established, so far, that in order to play and be in the game, the player must allow him or herself to be lost in the game, consumed by its own temporality and set of rules. Being lost in a game is not only a condition of true play, but also a necessity for a real “game” to exist. Should players attempt to maintain the realities of life outside the game and reject its own reality—for example a football player being occupied with finding his family in the crowd and missing the ball—they cannot be said to be involved in the play at hand. Players are often willing to ascribe to being lost in the game, as many
post-game interviews will include comments on their level of focus, not being able to hear the crowd, or even being unaware of their very actions while playing (such as not remembering how they scored a goal or caught a ball, indicating further the implications of embodied physical presence and knowledge). True professionals engage in the game and everything it demands for as long as it requires, allowing their existence to be claimed by the game.

As Weiss explains, players need to possess the skill of forsaking all outside forces, prejudices, and responsibilities of their everyday lives to become enveloped in a game:

Men enter a game armed with attitudes, personalities, bodies, and equipment. Not one of these is entirely suited to the requirements of a game. Each must be altered or manipulated until it is appropriate. The alteration may involve nothing more than a shift in outlook, or an abstraction from the many possible uses to which the items can be put, but either of these will be sufficient to point up the fact that entering a game is more than an act of going on a field. A bat is a piece of wood, a baseball diamond is a flat surface, a player is just a man—until they become part of a game. When the game is over, they usually recover their former guises or become only a potential bat, diamond, and player. (1969, p. 148)

This excerpt is perfect for understanding the game as a body, conceiving the bat, the field, and the man mentioned here as metaphorical limbs of a singular figure. Adding to this notion is the idea that all things in a game, equipment, surfaces, and players alike, are brought into a vortex or commonality that makes all items equally as important, and a necessary condition of the game itself. Without legs, a man cannot run. Without a bat, a
baseball game cannot take place. Both examples harken to the idea of discernibly separate items and actions being fused together to give rise to a fluid whole. The human body needs limbs, blood, oxygen, and nerves to exercise motility and continue living, and the game needs the items that facilitate its own existence.

As phenomenology is deeply concerned with first-person perspective, we can return to the athletes who comment on their lack of perception outside of the game and realize that this is a function of being a part of the game as a body. Listening once again to Weiss, he highlights this circumstance in explaining:

Players and spectators rarely know the whole game as it exists in fact, any more than those who produce or watch great historic events grasp exactly what occurred. To know what happened it is necessary to reconstruct an occurrence by converging on it from many angles, balancing the different reports and evidences with one another. It takes a sensitive reporter to sense what in fact occurred. But the players and some of the spectators see something the reporter often does not—what the game is for one deeply involved in it. (1969, p. 158)

This quote will provide the foundation of the remainder of this chapter, as it brings about the most important aspects of the game experience: the relationship between player and spectator that creates the game itself. What Weiss (1969) is pointing out here is the idea that reporters fail to capture the totality of meaning in a game simply because it is not available from a third part perspective. Phenomenology holds that meaning can only be discovered through careful and thoughtful analysis of the conditions of experience and subjectivity, and the meaning of a game is no different. The players, as a body, are lost in the game and have a limited view of the overall experience as a condition of being
preoccupied with the demands, rules, and bodily requisites of the competition. Should they have any other perspective, besides in moments of rest (such as sitting in a dugout or on a sideline), we would need to be suspicious of their very participation as a fact. Going back to Weiss with the knowledge of the limited perspective of the player, we see the emergence of an equally vital source of significance in the game, that of the perception of the spectator.

As Simon Critchley explains, the body of a game is created through the mutual participation and exchange between fan and player. The game is like a being in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty, in that it has a chiasmic quality of interplay between the spectators and athletes, just as the human body requires the intertwining of mind and body. The spectators, as Critchley claims, are the intelligible, thoughtful mind of the totality of the game experience. Spectators know the players, understand the rules of the game, can anticipate its events, are able to discuss the game and all of its nuances, and ultimately provide the very purpose of its existence. Just as the mind preempts the body to train and condition, the spectator directs the creation of the game (2016). It would be foolish to claim that all games require spectators to exist, as anyone’s childhood will provide irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Surely, at this very moment, games are being played that command no attention from onlookers, and furthermore some of such games may require only one participant! But the notion of “game” being discussed here are structured, commoditized professional games, perhaps more accurately described as “spectacles.”

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18 The word spectacle conjures images of extravagant display and performance, or more negatively, images of violence and atrocity. The dictionary definition of spectacle encompasses "curiosity or contempt" and "marvel or admiration." While the affective
The game as a spectacle is an event, something that has a set time of commencement but maintains its presence outside of time as a form of play. Such events are those played out in stadia filled with people, media, and all of the aesthetics of fanfare. In the case of such events, spectators are a necessity for the very feasibility of the occurrence, both in an economic and logistical sense. If we revisit the discussions of play and its relationship to catharsis from the earlier sections of this project, we can recollect that the presence of the spectator is vital to the creation of value available in dramatic representations like theater and sport. In order for spectacles to have meaning, an audience that can recognize the reality that events imitate and represent must observe them. Only through this recognition can we conjure the emotions and resolutions that offer cathartic experiences. Gumpert and Drucker speak on the nature of baseball to describe the demand for the game, explaining, “As a medium, professional baseball is a machine that uses its players as raw materials, processed in the form of a spectacle, in order to produce audiences, consumers, or fans” (2002). This is not to say; however, that the spectatorship is acquired by means of force or obligation, but instead by voluntary and mostly gleeful participation. This is one of the many striking consequences of sport in that masses of people willfully gather to engage in fandom and partake in what the response to spectacle may vary from spectator to spectator, much of the spectacle's appeal (or repugnance) derives from its visual power and ability to hold the gaze of the viewer. The etymology of the word spectacle derives from the Latin root spectare "to view, watch" and specere "to look at," and even the alternative definition of spectacle as a pair of spectacles or glasses refers to an instrument used in assistance of sight or as a mediating eye. Aristotle's from The Poetics essentially argues how the proper arrangement of dramatic elements elicits an emotional response from the audience. Aristotle's catharsis, or the purification of emotions through drama indicates a way in which the spectacle becomes an affective medium for the spectator. Spectacle, however, is not limited to theatrical performance and can appear in a vast array of contexts and media (i.e., fireworks, parades, current events, etc.) (The University of Chicago: Theories of Media).
spectacle of game has to offer, while also being co-present as a creator of the event. For this reason, the spectators become the mind of a game as body, serving as the locus of communication of the game and for the game.

The fans and spectators play a most crucial role in the creation of the game, for without them, there would be no purposeful reason for it to take place. To illustrate this point, we can review a peculiar event that took place on April 25, 2015, when, due to rioting in the city of Baltimore, the Orioles and White Sox were forced to play a game without fans in attendance. In the 146-year history of Major League Baseball, this was the first instance of its kind. It’s difficult to imagine that in such an expansive measure of time no such precautions had to be taken previously, a true testament to the strength of the league. Yet, on that late April day, Camden Yards played host to a professional regular season game as a sea of empty seats (Encina, 2016). This unprecedented event conjured interesting commentary from the participants, having never experienced anything quite like it. White Sox outfielder Adam Eaton provided his reflections on the game, speaking to his experience as he stepped into the batter’s box to the sight of an empty stadium. Highlighting the crucial importance of fan presence, Eaton commented:

I thought I underestimated it. To be honest with you, when I first went into it I didn't think it would be a big deal. There was almost this half-asleep feel because there was no energy. There were no people there… There was no music… It was almost like worse than a back-field spring training game…When you step into that batter's box and there was no nothing, you had the realization that it was a big deal that there was nobody here. We've got to play because this is our job, but there's a reason why there's nobody here. It's very somber in that sense. … You've just got a
lot of emotions running through your mind. As baseball players, as teams, we feed
off energy and when there's nothing there, it's a very surreal and weird moment
that I'll never forget but I kind of wish I could. (Encina, 2016)

Eaton was not alone in his feelings, as other players are on record discussing the
“surreal” atmosphere of the empty stadium and the lack of motivation to play as they
normally would. As Eaton described the game as having the feeling of a spring training
game, others echoed this sentiment and therefore collectively undermined the
significance of the game. Eaton’s quote signifies the requisite presence of a fan base for
the game to give birth to meaning. As McLuhan argues, when sport teams play without
an audience, the result “is not sport in our sense, because much of the quality of interplay,
the very medium of interplay, as it were, is the feeling of the audience” (2013). In other
words, the chiasmic nature of the game had been disrupted, leaving only one part of the
game as a body. On that historic day in Baltimore, Maryland, the game as subject was
played only in body and without a mind, with a physical presence but devoid of meaning.
McLuhan’s quote demonstrates the chiasmic nature of sport through pointing out the
requisite position of the audience for interplay to take place, for meaning to rise from the
contact between the spectators and the players.

Resuming the musings of Simon Critchley, this game provided such a jarring and
awkward experience for the players because its conditions made it impossible for the
players to be lost in the game. The absence of the crowd made it increasingly difficult for
the players to focus on the task at hand, to allow their training to manifest as embodied
practice and harmonize with the flow of the game within its own time and its unique set
of rules and conditions. Although the rules of baseball do not mandate the presence of
spectators, the absence of such obviated that their attendance is of paramount importance to the conditions of the game as an event, and therefore essential to the harmony of play, the interplay between player and spectator.

It is necessary to unpack this idea further, focusing on the importance of the relationship between spectators and players—the mind and body of sport as an entity—in order to continue the application of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the body. More accurately, we need to develop the idea of spectatorship as the locus of the intelligible mind of the game. To begin, it should be noted that the fans are the agents of the sport, for its institutions are predicated upon and carried forward in the individual and collective minds of those who watch, all of whom, when combined fashion the entirety of its existence. Sport is only timeless in that it has participants willing to contribute to its ongoing operation and place in society. As previously mentioned, professional sports are created for the fans, consumed by the fans, and ultimately reified because of the fans. The establishment of sport as an institution that stands outside of the limitations of temporal boundaries and projects its viability well into the future is a function of spectatorship.

Recalling Gadamer’s fusion of horizons as detailed in chapter three, we can conceptualize the institution of sport as a product of fans teaching their children, grandchildren, etc. “how” to root for a team, passing along a shared history, passing along a vision of the team or opponents, and transferring prejudices. Those who watch communicate: with others during and after the game, with media outlets, radio shows, news tabloids, etc., and with themselves. Fan experience creates meaning, which is then archived in the personal histories fans carry with a team, stadium, specific players, and franchises, eventually leading to the approximation of a memory like that of the human
mind. This memory is collective in nature, drawing upon the experiences and opinions of the whole. Just as memory informs the human mind of expectations, established beliefs, and known but relative truth, so too does the communal memory of a fan base inform the mind of sport. Understanding the fusion of horizons that takes place between generations of fans based on the aforementioned elements of perception, we can recognize the subjective and intersubjective qualities of fan experience that allows for the transmission of shared memory. Our perceptions of teams and sport in general as very personal but also influenced greatly by the opinions and beliefs of others around us, making this fusion categorically chiasmic. Gaps between generations of fans and personal prejudices are reformed and brought closer by the intertwining of individual perceptions, opinions, and experiences. Communication is the medium by which we engage in the chiasm of fan experience, being simultaneously closed to the influence of the world with our own prejudices and open to reformation through contact with others.

If one was to walk the aisles of a stadium during a game, you will hear conversations between fans that cover a wide range of topics: the history of the game or team, an individual player’s past performance, their probable actions in the situation at hand, arguments over superiority between players and organizations, hopeful predictions of upcoming plays, loathsome comments of opposing players and their fans, or even discussions on the private lives of players and coaches. This list is not exhaustive, but provides evidence that can be obtained by anyone amongst a fan base that speaks to the qualities of spectatorship that make it the intelligible vehicle by which sport is perpetuated. Put simply, if nobody watches, nobody remembers. If nobody remembers, nobody will be able to have a sense of familiarity with the game or sport, and therefore
will not converse. Should public dialogue on sport be eradicated, the game loses its meaning and has no real purpose. Once the purpose of the game has been lost, the game has no reason to continue as spectacle.

In an effort to make a turn to the works of Merleau-Ponty, I wish to take this understanding of the reciprocity of the game, the co-present nature of mind and body, and apply this notion further in terms of the chiasm. In this section, I have established that sporting events as spectacles require the presence of the fan to offer value and also that players and fans mimic the interplay of the body and mind in the thought of Merleau-Ponty. What remains to be addressed is how this interplay takes place and how we can recognize when it is in action. Returning to the previous sections, the interspace between mind and body, body and world, self and other, etc., according to Merleau-Ponty, is flesh. This intangible but omnipresent condition of living in the world is what I believe can accurately account for the space between and intermingling of spectator and player, and therefore serve as the glue that combines the two to create a game. We have reviewed the numerous ways in which fans and players can share a flesh, but haven’t delved into the intertwining of sensations that is mediated by the shared corporeal elements of the game. In this final section of chapter four, I will now discuss the chiasmic influences that lead to co-creation of the game experience, and therefore the production of meaning in sport.

The Co-creation of Experience

Let us imagine for a moment a large sporting event taking place in a huge stadium with great implications on the line. The seats are filled with hopeful and nervous voices, clamoring for victory as the players are immersed in a battle of tantamount intensity on the playing surface. The lights are bright, the noises loud, the tension palpable, and the
outcome uncertain. Each play brings with it an anxious response, soliciting an ebb and
flow of despair and hope, of concern and catharsis. Waves of emotion surge through the
crowd with each passing moment while seemingly unshaken at first, even the players lost
in the game start to exhibit the slightest tell of uncertainty and unease creeping into their
minds. Time is frozen as somehow this event, played out on a stage like a great Greek
tragedy or Roman drama, becomes the only thing in the world that matters to both those
who watch and those who play. To lose is to die, to win is to triumph over death. Both
spectator and player feels the same emotions, carries with them the same doubts, albeit
from their own unique perspective and on their own terms. The moment is boundless and
the game is everything.

This is the beauty of the game as an event. Beauty in that there is an elaborate
dance playing out before all those in attendance, a symphony of movement conducted by
an unseen force for the purposes of testing the fates, reifying the human spirit, providing
a glimpse into immortality. Recalling the embodied empathy from Lipps and Stein (Stein,
Gelber, & Leuven, 1986), we can recognize this tension as a consequence of our personal
connections to the players and teams we adore and our integrated sense of selfsameness
with those we observe. We can also identify the circumstance as a dramatic event with
cathartic potential, existing in the representation of reality and struggle being played out
before us. In this moment, there is an interplay of stimuli and emotions between spectator
and player, between mind and body. What one does seems to have an impact on the
other, and what one communicates receives a response from the other. Play in this regard,
like the observance of a work of art and the internal conversation that emerges in an
attempt to understand it, is play that is co-creation of meaning; it is the chiasm at work.
Staying on the subject of play and the continual solicitation of response from inquiry, the spectators converse with the players. Fans chant loudly, offering an energy meant to sway the outcome of the game, the players feed off of it and direct their motility in an attempt to respond. When the player responds with a big hit, goal, or catch, the onlookers reply with a roar, or in the instance of the opposition responding negatively, actions are met with detestable grumblings. What one does demands a response from the other, and together they create the spectacle at hand. What connects them is an interspace that cannot be acutely defined, for it is ever changing and influenced by circumstance, yet its existence is verified through the sensations of both parties. Here is the body of players intertwined with the mind of the fans, a connection mediated by the common flesh of the event and the chiasm of sensational co-presence. Like the human body as subject, the game requires an intertwining of self and being in the world, as it cannot exist one apart. Weiss offers a fitting point that supports the mind and body chiasm of sporting events:

The body is voluminous, spread out in space. Through it we express tendencies, appetites, impulses, reactions, and responses. The mind, in contrast, is a tissue of implications, beliefs, hopes, anticipations, and doubts. It has no size, and cannot, therefore, be identified with a brain. But the two, body and mind, are not distinct substances, closed off from one another. They are linked by the emotions. (1969)

Weiss is of course speaking on the literal human body, but the parallels to the subject of the game are easy to recognize. In accordance with much of what has been discussed to this point, it is true that emotions, laden with feelings of connection to the team, shared history, vicarious beliefs of pride and belonging, and the need for affirmation of existence and promise of cathartic relief, all combine to produce the flesh that joins body and mind
of the game. The distance between the two is not quantifiable beyond physical limitations such as railings, boundaries, or foul lines. Instead, the distance is that of an aesthetic distance\textsuperscript{19}, one that respects the beauty of the game and does not impinge upon it. To be clear, the application of aesthetic distance here is not to suggest a disinterested crowd of spectators, but instead a group of people that are kept separated from the game for the sake of its integrity. What I wish to pull from Kant’s notion of aesthetic distance here is that what makes this space sacred is the reluctance it commands against its violation.

Stepping outside of Kant and returning to Merleau-Ponty, this separation accounts for the flesh and intertwining of mind and body in a game, while forbidding that the contact becomes realized in a physical manner. This offers a philosophical reason for barriers that separate the field of play in any sporting event, allotting a space for fans that should not invade that of the players. In effect, this assures the integrity of the game by providing the

\textsuperscript{19} Aesthetic distance refers to the gap between a viewer's conscious reality and the fictional reality presented in a work of art, or in this case, the nonfictional but fantastic portrayal of sport. When a reader becomes fully engrossed in the illusory narrative world of a book, the author has achieved a close aesthetic distance. If the author then jars the reader from the reality of the story, essentially reminding the reader they are reading a book, the author is said to have "violated the aesthetic distance." The concept originates from Immanuel Kant and his Critique of Judgment where he establishes the notion of disinterested delight which does not depend on the subject's having a desire for the object itself, he writes, "delight in beautiful art does not, in the pure judgment of taste, involve an immediate interest…it is not the object that is of immediate interest, but rather the inherent character of the beauty qualifying it for such a partnership-a character, therefore, that belongs to the very essence of beauty.” The term aesthetic distance itself derives from an article by Edward Bullough published in 1912. In that article, he begins with the image of a passenger on a ship observing fog at sea. If the passenger thinks of the fog in terms of danger to the ship, the experience is not aesthetic, but to regard the beautiful scene in detached wonder is to take legitimate aesthetic attitude. One must feel, but not too much. Bullough writes, "Distance … is obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends. Thereby the 'contemplation' of the object becomes alone possible” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).
means for players to be lost in the game and function as a body without the interference of the spectators.

To be sure, there are circumstances that serve as outliers of the imposed lines of division between fan and player. Some infamous examples include: Mike Milbury’s 1979 incident where as a member of the Boston Bruins, he leaped into the crowd and beat a fan with his own shoe while other teammates squared-off with other spectators, the 2004 incident that became known as the “Malace at the Palace” where Pacers’ forward Ron Artest incited a massive brawl between fans and players to create the largest fan/player conflict in NBA history, and the egregious error made by Cubs fan Steve Bartman in the 2003 NLCS when he attempted to catch a foul ball just beyond the field of play and above the outstretched glove of Cubs outfielder Moisés Alou, effectively beginning a rally for the Florida Marlins that cost the Cubs an appearance in the World Series. A quick Internet search will produce numerous additional examples of violations of aesthetic distance, while multiple lesser offenses go undocumented each year, such as fans running onto the field of play, throwing garbage near players, and making bodily contact with players by accident. Such instances are worth mentioning, for they serve as examples of the flesh that binds spectator and player overstepping its boundaries and in some cases, leading to consequences that interrupt the harmony of the game and interfering with the conditions that make it such. The notion of chiasm is prevalent here, as the chiasmic relationship between fan and player functions to bridge the aesthetic distance between the two through a communicative interplay, but can also manifest as an interruption when the distance is totally eliminated. Although destructive to the game’s integrity, this too is chiasm in that one party impinges upon and alters the other, such as a
fan preventing a player from reaching a ball. In the case of a sporting event, the flesh must exist within the parameters of the aesthetic distance to preserve the integrity of the game, and the chiasm must be upheld as a metaphorical interlacing of sensations instead of a physical encounter.

As it relates to sport and the experience of the game, flesh serves the same purpose as it does for the human body; it makes the outside world intelligible and accessible to the self, providing consciousness with the opportunity to derive meaning from experience. Without flesh, we cannot experience the world and fans cannot acquire meaning from attending a game. Conversely, as evidenced by the sentiments of the players involved in the closed game played in Baltimore, the body of players relies on the flesh of the game to provide meaning in their work. In the instance of the game, the chiasm is at work when fans and players are aware of one another. In most cases, the fans react to the players, and the players feed off the energy of the fans. There is mutual exchange of sensation akin to the reversibility of the condition of being in and of the world according to Merleau-Ponty. Subject and object, self and world, mind and body are all chiasmically intertwined, their interdependence made possible by the flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 2003). Fans and players fall into the same category, in that both are perceiving and existing as the object of perception simultaneously in an encounter that we define as a game, a circumstance made possible by the flesh of the interspace between, and the mutual condition of being in the world as bodily subjects. As Merleau-Ponty contends, the chiasm and experience of reversibility implies that being in the world must obviate the condition of being of the world, in other words, that the subject as body can encroach upon the world and the world can encroach upon the body. Additionally, this implies that
either subject involved in the chiasm can effectively alter the other, given its ability to impose upon the other (Merleau-Ponty, 2003).

In *The Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty speaks to the idea that the world (or the other side of a chiasmatic experience) is not just an object, but has subjectivity in its ability to influence the opposite side of the chiasm as he explains:

(Chiasm) does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we may say that the things pass into us, as well as we into the things. (1968, p. 123)

For the purpose of this chapter, this is a fitting concept to be applied to the belief of both fan and player of one having influence over the other through the course of a game. Although they are separated and maintain their own subjectivity, there are circumstances where the chiasmatic link between them results in overlap, allowing the aforementioned possibility of alteration. Perhaps this is why players claim to “feed off the energy of the crowd,” become “motivated to silence the boos” of the opposing fans, or feel so loved and supported by the hometown fans in a postgame interview.

Similarly, fans will experience great delight and overwhelming dread according to the events on the field, attribute a victory to the volume of the crowd noise, claim that specific players did something in a game “just for them,” or believe that their presence at the game somehow brought good or bad fortune to their team and ultimately impacted the game. The latter of the two examples are admittedly more delusional than probable, but nevertheless, each instance is a byproduct of the chiasm creating perceived overlap. The
subjective nature of both fan and player renders each individual as beings with variable perspectives that process chiasmic experiences differently, and perceive overlap at different times. The subjectivity of all participants in a sporting event makes it difficult to substantiate any claims as to whom is right and wrong regarding the actual chiasmic influences of one party over another, or its occurrence in general. As previously noted, understanding the game experience as a whole is an impossible task due to the ambiguity of truth that comes from intersubjectivity. Since games do not take place in a vacuum between one fan and one player, or one fan and one team, there are a variety of angles and influences to consider that may have impacted the interaction between subjects in a game. This uncertainty, although frustrating for a reporter looking to capture the totality of experience, produces ambiguity that makes for excellent theater.

Together, fans and players create an uncertainty of the course of actions the events will take during a game. Due to both parties having a limited perspective, neither knows what to truly expect from the other. The rules of the game, imposed time limits, and communicated ethics of play provide a reasonable field of expectations for how the game will progress, but cannot account for the variations in intentionality on behalf of fan and player. Inaccuracies in play such as errors made by players, unexpected sequences of dramatically superior or inferior play, and the breaking of rules are all some of the conditions of the players that cannot be calculated. The growing roar of a crowd does not guarantee a resulting demonstration of greatness through an excellent play from the team. Through the flesh and interspaces of the game, the fans communicate their wishes clearly in cheering, displaying signage, and offering their own forms of superstitious rituals. However, the desired outcome is not always actuated in reality. After a swell of emotion
in the bottom of the ninth inning that comprises a fever-pitch beckoning for victory, a player is statistically more likely to fail to deliver a hit than he is to respond to the wishes of the onlookers. Conversely, the fans maintain an element of ambiguity through their attendance in numbers, interest in the game, willingness to abide by fan conduct and to maintain aesthetic distance, and also in composition (as in who is a “home” fan or a “visiting” fan). Together, they conspire to create the uncertain nature of the game that is perhaps what makes sport so appealing—the potential for unexpected events, dramatic conditions of anticipation and resolve, and a sense of mystery.

Such an environment is part of what makes sport addictive and intriguing to the fan, and life affirming to the player. The co-creation of the game experience is what fosters the possibility of what Critchley describes as the “moment of moments,” occurrences that take place in a game that stand outside of history, even more so than the game itself (2016). The iconic plays that define a franchise, affirm the value of a player and a career, leave an indelible impact on the sport or league, and transcend the very nature of reality. Novak (1994) explains the type of moments that imbed themselves as history as “sacred time,” expounding further as follows:

At moments of high intensity, there seems to be no past, no future. One experiences a complete immersion in the present, absorption in an instantaneous and abundant now. In what seems like an instant, hours of profane time elapse unnoticed. From this experience, the descent into ordinary life is like exchanging one life form for another. (1994)
This passage both affirms the timeless nature of sport and its ability to transcend temporal limitations as discussed in the second and third chapters and highlights the majesty of being present during what Critchley describes as the “moments of moments.”

From the viewpoint of the fan, the moments of moments are what drives fandom, the idea that while attending any given game, one could be a copresent creator of excellence (or even infamous failure) and forever establish a definitive presence in that moment, to be a part of the history of the game and taste immortality. For this reason, many sports fans will be happy to share their own stories and the “I remember when” experiences where they transcended their own finitude, taking pride in their involvement and reveling in their participation. The experience of such moments are transcendent incidents are carried forward both by the fan and through their communication and contact with others. We can remember once again Gadamer’s (1975) fusion of horizons and its chiasmic quality in its ability to allow fans to bridge distances in time and life experience to promote the memory and legacy of great events. Growing up in Pittsburgh, I have come in contact with so many people who had firsthand experience of Mazeroski’s famous 1960 World Series walk-off homerun that I now possess a vicarious understanding of the magnitude of the event and in many ways can actually imagine being there myself! I personally will never be able to speak on the event from the perspective of those who were present, but through chiasmic encounters with others that have allowed my horizon to fuse with their unique position, I am able to discuss the event as an appropriation of transferred meaning. In effect, having been born nearly three decades after the event, the distance between my experiences and those who attended the game in 1960 is bridged through the communicative nature of chiasmic fusion.
An important implication of being present for the “moments of moments” and being present at a game is the idea of privileged discourse, which will be discussed in the closing chapter as a possible vehicle for opening lines of communication. To be involved in the game is to gain knowledge of its happenings, acquiring subjective meaning and a sense of embodied perspective that allows one to speak about the game to others. Just as one cannot truthfully argue the value in traveling to a place they have never visited, one cannot speak of moments in sport unless they lived them. The most shrewd and loyal fans relish in their catalogue of experience that permits their entry into conversation on any number of subjects and creates an arena of rational discourse where the conditions and assumptions of topics are more closely realized.

In this chapter, I have explained Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body and applied it to highlight the ways in which fan experience exhibits bodily connections to players and the sport in general, as well as described the concept of common flesh that therefore exists between them. Additionally, I have demonstrated how the game as a spectacle parallels the structure of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body and pointed to the prevalent existence of chiasmic relationships in sport (both constructive and destructive to the game). The next chapter takes an integral step in moving towards understanding how this common corporeity manifests through a fan base and attaches itself to stadia around the world. Shared spaces, like stadiums and arenas, become the epicenter of exchange between fans and players, morphing into dwellings that transcend physical space and become bastions of existential significance. With a working knowledge of play, the fusion of horizons and transmission of history, and the corporeal elements of
fandom, I will now move to discussing stadia and the notion of shared spaces and the role they play in creating, cultivating, and empowering fan bases.
Chapter 6: This is Our House: Fans and the Creation of Shared Spaces

Within the confines of a sports venue, there is an undeniable sense of dwelling that is akin to a secondary home or place of security. Delight and fun are the proper decorum, perhaps one of the only types of places where everyone goes to enjoy their time together. There is a sense of being in such places-smells, feelings, and the presence of the other spectators: in short, humanity. The place in which sports are held is made sacred like the temples and churches of religions; the stadiums of the sports world are the sanctuaries of congregations of fans. Once communal groups form around a sport or a specific team, they establish a dwelling, a place that they can identity as home. Luckily for sports fans, this home is not only explicitly stated on the schedule and ticket, but it is a controlled environment provided by the sports team that becomes the epicenter of the group experience. The walls of stadiums and arenas transcend their purpose and instead harbor untold amounts of nostalgia, tradition, history, and emotion that is as common to the group as it is private to the individual.

This chapter will address the creation of shared spaces that result from the multiplicity of fan experiences being integrated into a discernible in-group with a common history and passion. In order to build a case for this underappreciated communicative consequence of sports, this chapter will commence by revisiting the seminal importance of sport for humanity and the underlying reasons for our love of spectator sports. Next, a move will be made towards understanding how the foundational motivations of being a part of sport leads to social unification. Once the importance of sports communities are investigated, the focus will turn to the development of place within sporting venues, and also the transference of dwelling from one building to the
next using Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the phantom limb. Lastly, I will discuss the establishment of dwelling within intermediate spaces outside stadia. I will draw upon my personal experience of intermediate watch sites to help develop an understanding of place as an extension of a group identity. To unpack the phenomenological value of stadia, Gadamer’s work on tradition and his hermeneutical approach to understanding history, prejudice, and shared consciousness can be used to explain how “home-field advantage” has a phenomenological origin. The discussion of shared place will allude to other sections of this project; including group identity and the corporeal nature of a fan base.

The goal of this chapter will be to detail how Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics that honor history as a component of the present and determinant of the future can lead to strong affiliations with a place, which is entrenched in the revitalization of the past and continual integration into the present. In the same vein, the “fusion of horizons” in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* will play an essential role in this chapter as the term speaks to a relationship between the past and present that informs ongoing understanding of contextual elements and informs interpretation.

The goal for this section is to contribute to the ongoing conversations grounded in the field of sports communication that look to understand how people organize and generate a common dwelling based on shared purpose by providing a phenomenological base for such collective spaces. I will also seek to offer new considerations to defining and understanding the concept of space as it relates to the distinction between physical and imagined spaces within and around stadia.
The Role of Sport in Society

The field of sports communication is largely underappreciated for its wealth of applications to understanding how people communicate, construct identity, and form systematized groups. Sports possess an incredible ability to give birth to organized masses of faithful followers and help to give meaning to human existence. Perhaps one of the most alluring and interesting consequences of sport are the intense affiliations spectators construct with stadiums, arenas, and other places associated with their favorite team. In a sense, sports help us to imagine places. Whether it is the home stadium of a favorite team or a local bar that reminds us of home, sports create an intricate network of intermediate places that should be recognized.

Referring back to chapter one, traditional explanations for our love for sports usually center on the ideas that they build character, promote teamwork, offer a means of fame and fortune, and build a sense of community (Mihalich, 1982). Albeit accurate in many instances, these motivations cannot account for the complete rationale of both participant and spectator in the realm of sports and athletic competition. Something is missing amongst the overt benefits of sports, as we have a difficult time coming to terms with the formative motivations for the abundance and importunity of sport. Few of us can obtain the aforementioned goals and rise to fame on the coattails of our physical prowess. Instead, we must settle for being a face in the crowd, as we eagerly observe a select group of godlike figures that pursue brilliance for our enjoyment.

Sport is a phenomenon of patterned behaviors, social structures, and interinstitutional relationships that holds unique opportunities to study and comprehend the complexities of social life. The sport arena is a rich field for the study of
communication for it requires unsurpassed primary and secondary involvement from multiple parties and propagates controlled settings of conflict and competition that can rarely be found in any other aspects of social organizations. Sport allows us to view group dynamics, mutual goal attainment, behavioral processes, and organizational networks that rival those of any formal business or society. They serve as the mainstay of honesty and freedom for a community in pursuit of excellence and offer a vehicle to portray such values in a more consistent and public way than any other social institution (Mihalich, 1982). In other words, just like any organization or social group, sports are clearly a microcosm of the larger scope of society. Yet, as a product of social reality, sports are inherently unique and powerful in that perhaps no other institution, save religion, commands the mystique, nostalgia, and romantic cultural fixation of a fan base (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).

As is the case with any organized tenet of society, sport can only exist when people interact, using their skills and concentrations to make sport into something that meets their needs. This circumstance suggests sports fans are active participants, not passive responders. Within any organization, the survival and growth of the group depends on active participation and a motive for people to come together as one to create a common dwelling. Sports offer a great intangible, a powerful draw for people to congregate to play a role in something bigger than themselves and revel in the pursuit of a transcendent goal. In other words, fan bases are created and strengthened when people are able to satisfy their need to belong. The next section will discuss the ability of sports to provide a sense of belonging, and ultimately give rise to formidable, cohesive communities that in turn create a sense of place.
**The Basis of Place: Sport as the Great Unifier.** At the heart of the group experience of sport is the coming together to engage in a unified exhibition of athletic prowess and competition. The “game” becomes the locus of interest, but surrounding the game are the masses of fans coming together to be co-contributors of the sporting experience, to establish their place. Marshall McLuhan offers a fitting entrance into this topic as he quotes:

> Any game, like any medium of information, is an extension of the individual or the group. …Games, then, are contrived and controlled situations, extensions of group awareness that permit a respite from customary patterns. They are a kind of talking to itself on the part of society as a whole. (1964)

What McLuhan is alluding to in his description of games as a facilitator of group awareness is the fact that sports have a mysterious power to unite and reflect a society as a uniform assembly. Competition taps into our basic human desires for power struggle, prestige, and victory alongside our fellow man. From the beginning of history, sports and athletic competition have brought all walks of life together to join in a single display of athleticism, passion, and pride. The bloody battles held in the Coliseum of ancient Rome, the first Olympic games of Greece, and the iconic American game of baseball played at Yankee Stadium all have one thing in common; they are meaningful events held on common ground where individuals congregate into interconnected masses to be a part of something greater than the individual.

The common phrase “It’s only a game” used in the face of defeat is a fallacy created to quell disappointment. The anguish of defeat and the elation of victory shared by both athletes and fans take a stronghold on the shared psyche, and make it impossible
to relegate games to inconsequential events (Mihalich, 1982). The game is everything, and victory is essential to reifying our communal values and upholding the honor of our societies. Games and sports are representative of our life experience and quest for the good life, and to fail in sport is to die in the mortal life, if only for a moment. We turn to sporting events for a chance to defeat our own mortality, to be entrenched amongst others in something larger than ourselves that can triumph over temporal and mortal limitations. From watching and attending sporting spectacles, we have the opportunity to fulfill our desires to be part of something grand, to step outside of ourselves and be transported into a state of being that stands above our lived reality.

In his book, *Sources of Significance*, Corey Anton writes, “People’s lives become significant when they think of themselves as members of a domain…the whole makes the individual parts meaningful, not vice versa” (2010). Hannah Arendt echoes this notion as she says, “Men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives” (1998). It is no secret that the human being is a social animal; one that thrives best when accompanied by others within a larger construct of some form of community. Much research has been conducted that supports the idea that humans have a strong desire to form and maintain relationships with others, a motivation termed “the need to belong.” When it comes to experiencing sport, human beings take comfort in being situated with others that hold congruent opinions of the experience, which further engenders a sense of belonging and place.

Sporting events play nicely into the need for interdependent people to enjoy shared identity and a collective memory. This is precisely the type of bonding that can be
observed amongst groups of dedicated fans of a sports team. Let us revisit Anton’s *Sources of Significance* to for a wonderful articulation of what it means for human beings to belong to larger purpose or identity. Anton writes:

> People can best aspire to greatness and submit to creations that transcend them in time and beauty, only when they feel called upon to serve a larger visage. They need to have something grander than themselves to which they can submit. By fastening on to what transcends them, their individuating labor and efforts are meaningfully enfolded. (2010)

In order to unpack this profound notion of human transcendence via submitting to notions of grandeur and purpose, the fundamental idea of social identity should be explored. Championed by Henry Tajfel (1979), social identity theory is concerned with the part of the individual’s self-concept and sense of worldly belonging that comes from their knowledge of their membership in a social group and the emotional significance derived from the association. In order to increase our self-image, we enhance the status of the group to which we belong (such as claiming the United States is the best country in the world, or that the Pittsburgh Steelers are the greatest football franchise). Another method for bolstering our image is to discriminate and hold prejudice against out groups, dividing the world into “them” and “us” through social categorization (McLeod, 2008). This distinction of in-groups and out-groups will be revisited shortly as a driving force behind a fan base’s strong affiliations with stadia. As it plays out in the real world, the promotion of self-image based on prejudice against others can certainly fall into outright violence and derogation. However, in the world of sport, the “us vs. them” mentality usually allows for healthy competition and dramatic fan interactions. Overall, sports offer
an extraordinarily powerful opportunity for people to immerse themselves in a shared identity.

Spectator sports provide an increasingly elusive sense of community in today’s unrelentingly distancing society in the postmodern era. Churches are closing due to lack of parishioners, PTA meetings are empty due to lack of interest, and community involvement is suffering thanks to increasing sentiments of individualism that has come with the technological age. In short, human beings are moving further away from each other both literally and figuratively with each passing year and regrettably losing sense of community in favor of mass introversion promulgated by a variety of changing circumstances in the social environment. However, we are still packing arenas and filling stadiums every Sunday afternoon. Sporting events, to this point, have proven immune to the distancing influences of the modern world and in fact, have shown growth in numbers of participants. This is contrary to the notion of an increasingly disjointed and disinterested public postulated by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. In the wake of individualizing societal forces, professional sports have maintained and strengthened their unique and timeless ability to join people together.

Underwood, Bond, and Baer quote Joe Dean, the athletic director of Louisiana State University as he speaks to the atmosphere of Tiger Stadium as a place that represents the ability of sport to combat distancing societal pressures and allow unity to prevail:

Saturday night in Tiger Stadium creates a special kind of chemistry, combining a multitude of people from all walks of life and all segments of the community and
bonding them together in a celebration that goes far beyond the spectacle, struggle
and excitement of a football contest. (2001)

Human actions are based on things that have shared meaning and sports and
athletics help us develop our social sense and a sense of community. Being a part of a
crowd or a fan base effectively socializes the individual and normalizes their behavior to
fit within the context of the larger group. Variations in special behavior amongst
individuals can be seen as a function of their interaction with specific groups (Buttimer &
Seamon, 1980). Sports fans find strength, pride, and a sense of character with a team. The
sports team becomes a figurative extension of the fan, linking personal success with team
success, and producing similar sentiments for failure (see vicarious in chapter two).
Social identity categorized in this manner creates opportunities for individuals to bond
and facilitate a specific paradigm that gives rise to the “we” vs. “they” mentality.
Communal identity assists in communication with complete strangers that would seldom
take place under normal circumstances without prior uncertainty reduction (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). General manager Bill Fanning of the Saint Paul
Saints, a minor league baseball team, articulates this idea well by quoting, “Going to a
Saints game is like going to your high school reunion. You may not know the people
sitting next to you when the game begins, but they are old friends by the time it ends”

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory holds that people have a need to reduce uncertainty
about others by gaining information about them. Information gained can then be used to
predict the others' behavior. Reducing uncertainty is particularly important in relationship
development, so it is common to find more uncertainty reduction behavior among people
when they expect or want to develop a relationship than among people who expect or
know they will not develop a relationship (Berger & Bradac, 1985). Sporting events and
fan bases are an interesting exception to this theory, as strong relationships can be built
very quickly without any prior discovery of the other. Wearing the same insignia, being
at the same place cheering for the same team, or displaying common colors is often
enough to begin a basic relation.

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This phenomenon is known as depersonalization, which is an instantaneous shift in behavior from individual to group behavior, a miraculous and mysterious change in the human psyche that is very much prevalent in sports.

In-group and out-group separations are a direct result of the deep allegiances a person feels with the team and fellow fans. Still others will build strong relationships and a sense of identity simply from the social aspects of sport fandom. Individuals may build a consciousness of belonging by engaging in ancillary activities of sporting events such as watch parties, tailgating, and other forms of localized events. Mead and Goffman (1967) both support the idea that such forms of symbolic interaction\(^{21}\) contribute to the maintenance of both an individual and group identity. Additionally, practically all shared meaning that a person acquires towards others and place is acquired as a result of these interactions. When people are made accessible to each other in these sub-communities that form around a shared passion, a strong sense of place persists (Buttimer & Seamon, 1980).

Spectator sports provide a powerful locus of meaning, linking personal success with team success, and producing similar sentiments for failure. Such a phenomenon has

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\(^{21}\) Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon. George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it. Mead’s student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term “symbolic interactionism” and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer, 2005).
given rise to the iconic Dawg Pound of Cleveland, the Cheese Heads of Green Bay, and the Cameron Crazies of Duke to name a few. Albeit extreme examples of identity extension, these groups and many like them share a cohesive experience and a common history and tradition (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). In the public sphere, extensions of identity alter an individual’s feeling of the self. Personal identity and social identity become both demarcated and related, as they both become equally important to the identity of the person. Thus we often hear someone say, “I am a nurse and a Pirates fan,” or perhaps even more accurate would be, “I am a father of three, a scientist, a football fan, and a Dolphins fan.” Such expressions indicate a bond between the societal role, occupation, psychological, and behavioral components of identity.

Development of a social identity involves building elaborate knowledge structures and amassing experiences that serve as the foundation for forming communal attitudes and opinions, analogous to those that underpin a society. The more a person emotionally invests in a team or associate group, the stronger the “we” mentality becomes and so does the inherent bias against members not included in the group. Under these conditions, a formidable sense of in-group culture begins to emerge that encompasses all classes, genders, ages, and creeds, producing an extremely liberating and exhilarating atmosphere that breaks the existing barriers imposed by formal society (Giles, Reid, & Harwood, 2010). Here one can observe a true sense of dwelling, a comfortable interspace between individuals that fosters a shared context and an atmosphere that promotes flourishing.

Interestingly enough, sports have just as much influence in breaking barriers as they do in creating them through group identification. Sports have the ability to tear down existing obstructions and promote common ground through the production of shared
spaces. Fan bases can create a place where differences are put aside in favor of a common team or passion. Such is the case during the world rugby championships, an annual event during which the forever-feuding people of Ireland and Northern Ireland ignore their shared hatred to form a singular team to represent the entire island. The constituent populations of both regions also combine during this time, laying down explosives and firearms and picking up banners and team paraphernalia (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).

By both unifying individuals into groups and also creating lines of distinctions between one fan base and another, a rich context emerges within the group identity that provides for communication under the assumption of shared values and restricted codes. The end result is the transmission of a group dynamic that attracts somewhat homogeneous and likeminded people that cherish the values represented by the common team or sport in question. In the realm of sport, this solidarity is most likely to occur within the limits of a shared space. Within shared places, ritual is often at the forefront of group formation and reification, offering codified ways to celebrate commonality and honor shared history. I would like to spend some time discussing ritual and its influence on the cultivation of fan bases and in turn its impact on group cohesion amongst fans and organizing influence on the game experience.

**The Role of Ritual:** An undeniable and essential element to any group is the practice of ritual. Cultures are honored, maintained, and advanced through time by way of ritual practices that are meant to unite and honor the past. In his article, “Ritual Solidarity and Sport,” John Goodger states that, “Most close observers of the sport scene would probably accept that ritual, in the form of handshakes, opening and closing ceremonies or the wearing of uniforms, is an almost universal aspect of sporting
occasions” (1986). Rituals represent patterns of human behavior that are social in nature and are concerned largely with the relationships among people who share a common culture. In the context of sport, what we share is being a fan of a given team. The function of ritual within this context is closely linked to the attempt to recreate emotions experienced in the past and invoke a feeling of nostalgia that ushers previous moments into the present.

Within a certain fandom, one may find rituals such as the superstitious wearing of specific apparel, tailgating before the game, pre-game ceremonies and routines, singing time-honored songs at critical moments of a game, bringing a glove to a baseball game or eating a Ballpark hotdog, handshakes, fireworks, and organized chanting. However, in order for such practices to matter Underwood, Bond, and Baer explain that individuals must be conscious that they are engaging in ritual behavior that carries meaning (2001). Anton speaks to the meaning of rituals as he writes, “Culture provides a massive codified system of rituals and symbolic practices, all issuing and maintaining various levels of worth and value” (2010). Behaviors of this sort carry with them a significance that transcends time and exhibit the manner in which fans can express dependence upon the sports arena for a continuity that accounts for a portion of their own identities and also demarcate their group identity as separate from others. Goodger further elucidates the idea of rituals as a component of identity as he quotes Bernstein and Peters at length:

Rituals may, therefore, be expressive of “ultimate values” and may serve to sustain not only the shared aspects of the group life but also internal divisions. Thus shaking hands before and after contests, pre-match talks, medal awards ceremonies, and the wearing of badges and uniform dress may, as consensual
rituals, serve to remind group members of their common, specific identity and values, and of the boundary between themselves and outsiders. (1986)

By both unifying individuals into groups and also creating lines of distinctions between one fan base and another, a rich context emerges within the group identity that provides for communication under the assumption of shared values and restricted codes. The end result is the propagation of a group dynamic that attracts somewhat homogeneous and likeminded people that cherish the values represented by the common team or sport in question. Such homogeneity and selective inclusion mirrors the process by which cultures are formed and sustained. The ritualistic component of sports can therefore be directly linked to the propensity of homogenous groups to experience social bonding while fostering a “we” mentality that may result in hostility towards out-groups, much like the sense of rivalry and even outward hatred that nations exhibit towards others.

The nostalgia that is produced by ritual behavior in the context of sports is analogous to those rituals within cultures that are conducted to revivify a sense of pride and establish communal identity that is born from the history and prestige of a nation. Pride is often grounded in the achievements and triumphs of the past. Just as a nation may revere a history of victories in devastating battles and toilsome conquests, so too may the fans of a particular sports teams revel in the accolades of past teams, the great victories in the face of formidable opposition, or the efforts of famous players that once graced the team insignia. Through ritual, one can be placed within the historical tapestry of the team and in doing so have an opportunity to transcend the mortal life to become a part of something much more meaningful, a cultural legacy. Anton confirms this idea as
he explains, “All cultures create ritual forms that enable members to symbolically transcend their sheer materiality and organismal being” (2010).

Songs often rise to the precipice of ritualistic behaviors and offer a vehicle for group participation in honoring a shared history. Look no further than the National Anthem that is sung at the onset of most major sporting events for confirmation of this idea. In Imagined Communities, Anderson explains that “Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity” (1991). The simultaneous participation in rituals like anthems affirms a persons’ belonging in a specific group and also allows one to be placed in a larger historical context.

Songs also emerge over time that relate to specific teams that serve a dualistic purpose for the fan base as both a rallying cry and an exercise in the veneration of the past. Perhaps the most glaring example of song as ritual can be found in the fight songs and alma maters of collegiate teams; each score offering a reminiscence of times past and tribute to the prestige of the school that is revitalized and honored in the present. Goodger confirms this sentiment as he quotes Dunning (1981) who claims, “Ritual chants and the wearing of group emblems are highly significant forms of communication which serve to express and sustain shared identity and values, which are themselves derived from the groups’ specific social structural location” (Goodger, 1986). Just as a proud culture may adorn themselves with traditional dress for celebrations or recant meaningful rituals, the fan culture performs the same exhibitions of sameness and pride.

When rituals are broken or mistreated, there is often a strong response from other fans. After all, rituals are performed with the purpose of maintaining communal truth and
tradition and are not meant to be broken. Going against the status quo in the realm of sport fandom puts one in a tenuous position; one that is often filled with direct outrage, distrust, and disappointment. In recent years, the National Football League has been subject to a great debacle regarding the tradition of the National Anthem. In an effort to protest police brutality in 2016, then San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to kneel during the anthem, sparking ongoing outrage and heated debate on the proper behavior during the anthem, and also what message the protest really conveys. For many, Kaepernick’s gesture was a direct insult to the United States military and therefore extremely distasteful and disrespectful, while others contended that the anthem was simply “not the time” for a protest. Since the event, Kaepernick was released by his former team and has not yet found a new employer, yet other NFL players continue to kneel, sit, and otherwise disregard the status quo decorum during the anthem. Such actions have spiraled into a hailstorm of media involvement and publicity, causing fans to protest the NFL for allowing the actions to continue and threatening to boycott buying tickets to games. In fact, NFL viewership saw the first decline in years following Kaepernick’s protest those being carried out by other players. According to a survey conducted by J.D. Power and reported by ESPN, the NFL saw a 14 percent drop in viewership from 2016 to 2017, a decrease due in large part to fans’ disgust with the anthem protests. Of the 9,200 people surveyed, 26 percent indicated that they stopped watching games due to the protests (Street, 2017). The controversy surrounding the protests and the empirical evidence of the ripple effect in public opinion is an indicator of just how important rituals are in the eyes of the fan, and in this case, in the eyes of the
nation at large. Breaking the norms of tradition can make one a pariah overnight, and the road to regain public favor will likely be long and arduous.

Rituals also manifest on a very localized level for each team and fan base. Chicago Cubs fans are known for throwing opposing homerun balls back on the field, the Liverpool soccer fans habitually sing the song “You’ll Never Walk Alone” in unison at each game, Green Bay Packers fans wear foam cheese hats to pay tribute to Wisconsin, and Texas A&M students fill Kyle Field every Friday at midnight to practice screaming for the game on Saturday, a ritual they have deemed “The Midnight Yell.” Growing up in Pittsburgh, I have become intimately familiar with waving the “Terrible Towel” at Steeler games (and for almost anything else sport related). Invented by the late Steelers play-by-play announcer Myron Cope, the Terrible Towel is a simple piece of yellow cloth that has become an iconic symbol of the franchise and the fan base. For many, even those outside the city, the Terrible Towel is Pittsburgh, a representation of not only a team but the entire population. The towel carries with it a sense of honor and respect, and to disrespect the towel is to commit an egregious crime. Every few years, an opposing player will be caught on camera stomping on a Terrible Towel, using it to clean his cleats, or otherwise exhibiting an overt sign of intentional disrespect. Oddly enough, players who have disparaged the towel have gone on to see their careers end prematurely, suffer an injury, or decline in ability shortly afterwards, leading the Steelers faithful to believe in the legend of the “Terrible Towel Curse.” This may seem outlandish, but since the most recent round of perpetrators saw untimely ends to their time in the NFL, players have all but stopped using the towel to provoke the Steeler fans.
The aforementioned examples and the discussion regarding the role of ritual posit such actions and behaviors as vital traditions for the reification and reverence of fan bases around the world. Rituals are created for the purpose of maintaining group solidarity and those who go against the norm may be met with misfortune and resentment.

To this point, I have reviewed some of the sociological and existential underpinnings of the formation of fan bases and how they begin to promote the creation of shared spaces. It is clear that sports are able to resist the influence of our increasingly distancing social preferences and maintain places where people can share common ground. In the world of sport, we often refer to this communal sense of being as “home-field advantage” and use the term to describe the benefits of playing games at home within familiar confines. However, the term should be examined through a phenomenological lens to unpack its true implications and value for fans. The next section will explain home-field advantage from this unique, phenomenological point of view and discuss its various implications for fans.

**Home-Field Advantage**

Geographically speaking, most cultures that exist in our world today can be intrinsically linked to a specific nation or part of the globe. Within localized cultures, participants in that culture have dwelling spaces, places of worship, and sacred ground that is understood as the locus of origin for their group. When it comes to a fan base, such a group will also seek out similar nuances of collective foundations; or more simply put, a place to call “home.” This is where the importance of venue comes into play in the world of sports.
When the general public experiences a visit to a sports venue, the presence of shared dwelling is likely not recognized and the purpose of the venue can simply be to serve as a place to go to for a night out. For the loyal fan, the venue has a symbolic value of a common place of congregation that represents the locus of the fan culture, a place that harbors the likeminded and is a metaphorical capsule for the storied history of its people. What this type of fan values in a venue relates back to belonging to a larger group and in belonging, to be inspired. Holt paints an enthralling picture of the venue as he explains:

In the Wrigley Field bleachers…one could argue that the primary reason for sitting in the bleachers (where the “seats” are benches, the view is less desirable than that of other locations, and fellow spectators can be obnoxious—yet tickets are often scalped for three times their value) is that its close quarters and celebratory, carnivalesque atmosphere facilitate communal aspects…In such situations, spectators’ reactions play off each other, this spiraling interaction raising the level of emotional intensity to the point where happiness is expressed as ecstatic screams, disappointment brings tears, and anger can quickly build up into open hostility. (1995)

Holt’s (1995) description of Wrigley Field highlights the communal nature of sport as one of its main draws for spectatorship. In his description, Holt explains that the most fanatic individuals purposefully forego more comfortable seats with better sightlines in favor of the bleachers in order to be amongst the most ecstatic and passionate fans. This passage is evidence of the highly participatory, embodied level of fandom that is most closely associated with fanaticism. To be entrenched in this type of atmosphere is to
belong to something magical and serve as a member of team—referring back to Anton, to transcend the self. In his work, *The Joy of Sports*, Michael Novak (1994) speaks at length on the significance of a shared dwelling and the profound sense of embodiment that membership in a group can offer. He explains:

To be a fan is totally in keeping with being a man. To have particular loyalties is not to be deficient in universality, but to be faithful to the laws of human finitude. A team is not only *assembled* in once place; it also represents a place. Location is not merely a bodily necessity; it gives rise to a new psychological reality….In sport cities around the nation, millions of lives are affected by whether in the days of their youth they were privileged to cheer for winners or, good-naturedly, groaningly, grew up with perennial losers...To watch a sports event is not like watching a set of abstract patterns. It is to take a risk, to root and to be rooted….The mode of observation proper to a sports event is to *participate*—that is to extend one’s own identification to one side, and to absorb with it the blows of fortune, to join with that team in testing the favors of the Fates. (1994)

This excerpt from Novak’s book is nothing short of brilliant in encompassing the entire spectrum of fan experience as it relates to their group, their geographic location, the deeply seeded roots of their fandom, and ultimately their adoration for the venue that serves as a mutual dwelling. It is of utmost importance here to recognize the “new psychological reality” Novak mentions that manifests as a result of having a physical location where “home” games are played. This new reality could be accurately and more simply described as home-field advantage. Such a term is used often in sports in a casual manner to describe the overt aspects of a familiar crowd that could potentially affect any
given game: crowd noise, batting last in baseball, having the final line-change in ice hockey, a more relaxed and familiar atmosphere for the players (including the lack of stress induced by travel), the familiarity the players have with the unique nuances of the playing surface that allows them to better anticipate “bounces,” and even the lesser known fact that referees are statistically more likely to decide close calls in favor for the home team.

However, the usual connotations of home-field advantage typically abandon exactly what such a term means to the fan from an experiential standpoint. For the fan, home-field advantage is a metaphysical space that combines an embodied familiarity with place informed by a rich historical and personal perspective with clarity of thought that allows one to make reasonable predictions as to how the game will be played and what can be anticipated. Any fan who knows he or she is going to a home game will undoubtedly process a wide range of emotions while traveling to and attending the game in person, many of which are subliminal in nature and never make it to consciousness. For example, one will know the best route to the parking lot, have a mental image of the venue and the location of their seat relative to other parts of the stadium, can anticipate their own unique sightline, know what colors the home team will be wearing and therefore be swayed to emulate them accordingly, will enter the game with a preconceived knowledge of process in such nuances as who will bat first or what team will decide the coin toss, can anticipate the crowd volume and size, may know where to venture to seek out familiar faces, or perhaps will even have knowledge as to the whereabouts of their favorite food and drink within the venue. This list may seem detailed but it is by no means exhaustive.
My attempt in cataloging what some may deem minor aspects of the home-field experience for the fan is to show with certainty that a phenomenological approach is warranted here, for the home experience for the fan is laden with experience, permeated by history and previous encounters, and ultimately unique to each individual while governed by the intersubjective nature of being a part of a fan base. Returning to Novak’s excerpt (1994), we can see that participation is indeed the proper mode of observation for sports. To be a fan is to participate both as a member of a group and as a component of the larger body that makes up the game: a co-present, co-creator of the game itself as discussed in chapter four. Participation is what grounds one with his or her fellow fans, it is what engenders a sense of dwelling within the confines of a venue, and it is what eventually amalgamates into a sublime sense of comfort and awareness that can be accurately coined home-field advantage.

Part of the cost of admission is the honor of being able to contribute to the legacy of the hallowed temple and leave forever the specter of who you are at that very moment in time within the confines of the venue to be revisited, if not only in your memories, the rest of your days. More objectively speaking, the inherent meanings of venues and the nostalgia they carry are largely based on the individuals’ previous experiences and the people they attend the game with the emotional connection they share with the team. Each person therefore is able to conjure different memories, sensations, and personal thoughts based on their history of their experience in that place.

Playing facilities can often become intertwined with a team identity due to a wide range of factors that foster prestige and history. For example, Fenway Park is synonymous with the Boston Red Sox as is Camden Yards with the Baltimore Orioles.
When this synergy takes place, fans relish in the grandeur associated with their home venue and create nicknames that become meaningful to the fan base. Some instances include the well-known “Big House” (Michigan Stadium) of the University of Michigan and the now defunct “Lou” (Joe Louis Arena) of the Detroit Red Wings. This elevated level of identity with the home facility leads to a distinctive sense of belonging where fans will often challenge opposing teams to visit, regarding them as a hopeless place for the opposition and a fortress that the community will defend as one. Through time, reputations are built and fans ranging from the most casual to the most fanatical recognize and appreciate the value and prestige of particular places. As Novak explains:

There is a special awe that arises when one enters for the first time—or at any time—one’s high school gym, or Madison Square Garden, or Pauley Pavilion, or wherever the symbolic center of achievement may be. Each arena is a little different: one concrete place, one patch of Earth. (1994).

This quote wonderfully accounts for both the aesthetic wonder that stadiums inspire and also the awe that they solicit based on their history and reputation. Places that come to play host to famous victories, unparalleled moments of excellence and drama, unbelievable upsets, and compelling acts of athleticism begin to build a legacy that defines and represents the place in question. New stadiums are empty vessels waiting to be filled with memories. I can attest to this notion, remembering how I felt stepping into Heinz Field after the closing of the historic Three Rivers Stadium, and Consol Energy Center after my beloved Penguins left the iconic Civic Arena (known affectionately as the “Igloo”). Each instance marked a transition where my fellow fans and myself were uprooted from the places we have come to cherish and honor and forced to begin anew in
a new home. Reflecting on these experiences, I recognize and share with so many fans that have had similar experiences the profound sense of value we place in buildings that become our communal dwellings.

In order to explore the value of place as it applies to stadia, let us delve into the example of the famous Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs. From the standpoint of a casual fan or a city-dweller in general, places like Wrigley are appreciated for providing an alternative experience, a change of pace from normal life especially in the city as it serves as a lush green landscape, an oasis within an urban setting. Games are generally entertaining, and there is a subconscious element of aesthetic value at play that draws upon history, tradition, and perhaps even patriotism. At this point, we are considering mere atmospherics and sensory experiences. People attend the game already carrying their personal history and affiliations with the team and venue, their vicarious aspirations and dreams, and their battle-tested wit for the game. What fans are seeking is one more opportunity to forever stamp their existence into a unique and irreplaceable historical moment. However, we do not attend games alone, for we are always surrounded by others and are part of the intersubjective experience of the crowd dynamic. Revisiting Anton, the feelings we derive from being with others serves to give us purpose and make us feel like a part of a larger whole (2010). Throughout a game, one can observe the ways in which a sense of belonging is demonstrated and the actions available to affirm group identity. Something as simple as the “wave” is actually a manifestation of this desire for interplay and creating a unique moment, as the fan can be both participant and observer of the synchronized motion, which can also be easily seen by players, other spectators, and also those watching on television. Loyal fans live for the interplay, building emotion
from the faces and exaltations of others like them. To experience the agony of defeat if only to feel irrevocably human with the hopes of redeeming their broken heart with victory the next game. To fully immerse themselves with all the beating hearts around them in a struggle for purpose that is maimed by a team’s missed opportunities in pivotal situations, building frustration and fear within a common soul until it can find the most divine catharsis with a single hit, goal, or touchdown that opens the floodgates of emotion for all symbolically holding hands in waiting.

Such instances truly transcend the sport and the life of human beings at large. In these examples, the place becomes a dwelling as the interspaces between individuals lessen and become more intimate. The venue is no longer a massive concrete structure that holds thousands of strangers: it becomes home. Once a sense of belonging in a place is established, the loss of place becomes inconceivable and the fan base will do anything to preserve their dwelling. Holt offers a brief narrative of a baseball fan at Wrigley Field to highlight this phenomenon:

When asked by a fellow spectator why a large section of seats in center field is not in use, Ted tells him that the seats are blocked off so that the hitter can see the ball better (reasonably common knowledge among Cubs fans) but the adds some historical detail: “In the sixties, we used to bring an extra shirt to the game. When the Cubs were up we’d have dark blue shirts on, but when the opposition came to the plate we’d change into a white shirt. [The batters of the other team] couldn’t see anything against the white background. People finally caught on, and they blocked off the seats. We thought it was fair—home-field advantage. I’ve been sitting here since 1967. The crowd around me has changed but I don’t.” (1995)
In this passage, Ted is proclaiming both his loyalty to the team and his part in the history of the venue by offering a recollection of a specific historical moment that proves him to be a co-creator of experience. This passage is applicable to millions of fans around the world, as it is but one testament of the participatory involvement of one individual that provides evidence of fandom but also serves as an example of how being “at” the game allows one to build a personal dossier of experiences as a fan. Over the course of time, an individual’s experiences in a fan base and his or her history with the team and contact with the sport are collected and transformed into a larger perspective of what defines their fandom, and also their fan base. When coupled with the strong sense of identity fans share with their teams, this purview becomes strongly affiliated with the place in which it was created: the home stadium.

One cannot make the mistake of regarding this attachment to venues as something unique to only the spectators. Indeed, players, too, carry with them similar if not stronger associations and prejudices towards or against various stadia. Their intimate experiences with the boundaries, playing surfaces, crowd volume, aesthetic appearance, past performances, and the like all play into an athlete’s ongoing perception of venue. This is a phenomena discussed often during sports radio talk shows and by statisticians, the idea that certain teams and players excel or underperform due to various specific environments and venues. Michael Novak speaks to the allure of stadia as he explains:

Where great deeds have been done, places are lifted out of ordinary life and gain a certain aura. It is like that for athletic arenas. Players often feel it. Places where they struggle, where they may suffer injury, where opportunity comes and their careers blossom or, on the other hand, suddenly decline or fail to materialize—
places where they meet their trial and testing—have a certain fascination over them (1994).

Novak’s excerpt nicely summarizes the experience of the athlete with stadia, encompassing the wide range of influences that ultimately result in the perceived aura of stadiums. He goes on to say that, “the feeling athletes have for the arena in which they struggle is a secret feeling not often voiced” (1994). From my experience as a fan, this quote is entirely accurate, for it is the fans that attribute the struggles or successes of athletes with venues and keep a record of their performance in order to make such claims. Rarely would an athlete exhibit such transparency and let his or her guard down to the point of admitting that a stadium inherently influences their ability to play well. Interestingly enough, the players do not have to voice their concerns for playing in certain venues, because the fans already know.

I find this aspect most intriguing for it relates directly to the perceptions of fans and their ability to influence the game. Bringing back the chiasmic elements of the game as an event, let us recall that the interplay between fans and players give rise to the overall value of the experience and the meaning that can be derived. In the same vein, in the eyes of the fan, this interplay is what allows the fan base to partially construct the characteristic legacy of a venue and influence the performance of both the home team and the opposition. Skillen confirms this motivation, as he claims people do not go to games just to spectate, but to participate in the event with the belief that “with some degree of justification, that they may be able to influence the result of the game by supporting their team of creating an intimidating atmosphere for the opposition” (1993). In a sense, fans often willfully take credit for the events that unfold during a game by attributing the
success of the home team or the defeat of the opponent to their own efforts as spectators. Once this sense of purpose is established, fans will overtly “protect” their place of dwelling through displays of disdain for groups that are seen as outside their particular circle. Hence our culture has derived such iconic sports clichés as “we will protect this house” and “nobody comes into our house and pushes us around.” Victories become a testament to the communal efforts of the fans as they adopt a militaristic mindset against the opposing team and fans, treating the home stadium as a stronghold of honor and a fort that must be guarded with their cheers and exaltations.

In time, the venues actually acquire a stigma based on fan interactions, which accounts for a great deal of a player’s particular perceptions or reservations about specific stadia. For instance, some places like CenturyLink Field (home of the Seattle Seahawks of the NFL) and Arrowhead Stadium (home of the Kansas City Chiefs) have become known for their immense levels of crowd noise and are regarded as extremely difficult for visiting teams since it can be nearly impossible to hear signals from coaches or fully concentrate on the game. In fact, the crowd at CenturyLink field has come to earn the name of “The 12th Man” (indicating their role as the 12th defensive player on the field beyond the allotted 11 players) and in 2013 set a Guinness World Record as the loudest outdoor sports stadium, registering a noise level of 137.6 decibels. The crowd was loud enough to trigger a minor earthquake in the region according to a local research group and was analogous to standing a few feet away from a jet engine (Sharp, 2014).

Other stadiums become known for their hostility towards opposing fans and players, surely not something to be particularly proud of but nonetheless indicative of the influence crowds can have on gameplay. The Philadelphia Eagles of the NFL are known
amongst sport enthusiasts for having animalistic fans that have turned the “Link” (Lincoln Financial Field) into a tumultuous and nasty atmosphere. Infamous for their propensity to throw garbage at opposing players and their fans (and even Santa Claus), offering explicit gestures and language, and trash talking players from the stands, the Eagles fans have garnered a reputation for their home stadium. Rival New York Giants defensive tackle Cullen Jenkins, when asked about the atmosphere at the Link, remarked, “I remember they made one of the player’s fiancé cry up there. I remember some unnecessary comments people made after Coach Reid went through that unfortunate situation with his son” (died from a drug overdose) (Raanan, 2015). Such behavior walks a fine line between attempting to promote a hostile environment for the sake of the home team and crossing over into the fringe typology detailed in chapter three. However, the reason for hostility in certain stadia may actually be a consequence of a deeply rooted form of uncertainty reduction. As Michael Hogg explains, zealots or fanatics see themselves as “true believers” and prefer to identify through extreme behavior. According to Hogg:

These groups have clearly defined attitudinal and behavioral attributes integrated by an inflexible ideology or worldview, have impermeable and carefully policed boundaries and markedly ethnocentric intergroup attitudes, and engage in assertive or radical behaviors to promote and protect the group’s identity. (2009)

Hogg’s account of this type of group certainly has undertones of the fringe typology, but unlike those in the fringe group, the motivation for illicit behavior is not to disrupt the game but instead to uphold an identity. The goal of the hostility and violence is in actuality an attempt to reinforce and maintain the stigma that they have acquired! In
a sense, one could say that they actually relish their notorious reputation and want nothing more than to preserve it. What is particularly powerful in this instance is that this type of group attaches itself to the stadium and transforms it into their collective temple of doom for opposing teams. Stadia, then, are endowed with the same identity as the fans that fill the seats, leading to the outsider’s perception of the venue that I have mentioned at the beginning of this section. For this reason, soccer stadiums throughout Europe, NFL stadiums in the United States, and even hockey arenas throughout North America are widely known and regarded as “hostile atmospheres.” The identification of fans and stadia can then be viewed as chiasmic in nature, involving an intertwining of experiences and solidified by the interplay between dwelling and those who dwell. Looking back to Merleau-Ponty, we can see how fans and stadia share a common flesh in the cohesive manner in which they are presented to the world. This connection makes the link between fan and stadium conceptually embodied, making disruptions in the chiasmus of the fan/venue relationship particularly problematic, an idea that will be examined shortly.

The last fan-produced stigma I wish to include in this discussion is that of the carnivalesque, the places that promote a seemingly ongoing “party” each time they host a game. Fans and players alike often comment on some places being just plain “fun” to visit or play a game. Such places are defined less by hostility and more by the respectful enthusiasm of the fan base that makes for an electric, albeit noisy atmosphere. Fan bases are just as happy to call this type of venue home, as the libations flow, the cheers are loud, and the game experience begins early and ends long after the event. Stadia that fit this stigma include Chicago’s Wrigley Field, San Francisco’s AT&T Park, Nashville’s Bridgestone Arena, and a litany of collegiate stadiums all over the country. The level of
fan participation is extremely involved and may include tailgating, hanging out in nearby bar districts, attending booster club rallies, the singing of team anthems, engaging in patented chants and in-game rituals, etc. Places that boast this sort of atmosphere often attract various typologies of fans and also non-fans, for the draw might be a consequence of the hedonic elements of the experience. As Boyle and Haynes note, in 2003, an estimated 80,000 Celtic supporters (soccer) made their way to Seville for the UEFA Cup Final, many of which attended just to “be there” and take part in the festival-like attitude of the event (2009). The same can be said for the Super Bowl in the United States as thousands of people buy tickets long before they even know what teams will be playing for the title, finding value in the weeklong party that surrounds the event. What links the fan bases of the loudest, most hostile, and most exciting stadia is the fan’s open and willing participation in upholding the stigma they have been given or wish to promote.

It would be remiss to ignore perhaps the most prominent stigma of stadia, that of legacy and honor. Certain places are defined less by the fan base, and more so through the team that they harbor. This is not to say that fans do not play a role in the aura of the venue, but the achievements of the team often reign supreme. Fans then become channels of the past and present greatness of the teams they represent, taking great pride in their inclusion. Additionally, the legacy of the stadia is passed through the fusing of horizons between fans and generations. In this case, stadia are recognized for the moments and memories they have hosted, the dynasty teams that called them home, and the great players that packed the seats. Iconic examples of this typology include Green Bay’s Lambeau Field, the former Three Rivers Stadium of Pittsburgh, Toronto’s Maple Leaf Gardens (now closed), and Boston’s Fenway Park. I mention such places because their
reputations are well known throughout the world of sport and exemplify how history and nostalgia play an equally important role in defining a dwelling. Surely, some places fit numerous categories of stigmas, Wrigley Field being an example of both an honored and also exciting place to watch a baseball game, and Lambeau Field as both hallowed ground and an extremely loud environment. In these instances there exists a beautiful synergy between the fans and the team that fosters a shared legacy and leads to the identification of the venue.

Given the opportunities for self-identification, transcendence, formation of cohesive group identity, pride and belonging in a fan base, and the promotion of communal legacies, it is easy to understand how and why fans become so intimately tied to stadia. As Underwood, Bond, and Baer quote, “When you consider the volume of shared experiences, the vault of memories, you understand the emotions. Really, how many buildings in your life do you become attached to? After the family home, how many?” (2001) This quote perfectly summarizes our attachments to the stadia that play host to our fandom and offer up the chance to reap the various social, psychic, and emotional benefits of sport. Fans attach volumes of memories, sensations, and experiences to stadia, cultivating a very serious and deep bond with buildings much like that of their own childhood homes.

The bonds we share with stadia are intense and important to our sense of being. When stadiums are closed and new ones are constructed, the experience for loyal fans can be very difficult and emotionally trying. I often think about my last game at Pittsburgh’s Civic Arena—a place that defined a large part of my childhood—where I attended hundreds of games with my father and my friends, and where I fell in love with
the game of hockey. Under that enormous steel dome, I watched the greatness of Mario
Lemieux and Jaromir Jagr, saw the rise of Sydney Crosby, witnessed countless
spectacular goals and unbelievable saves, and most importantly experienced an
immeasurable number of moments that shook my very soul, both in exaltation and
despair. When the final horn sounded in the last game, I instantly felt a crisis of identity
and wondered what would come next. I simply could not fathom watching a hockey
game anywhere else and felt like all of my memories and an integral portion of my youth
were to be torn down along with the building. A few months later, I had the opportunity
to enter the arena right before it was to be demolished. As I walked through the player’s
tunnel, a place I could have only dreamed about being previously, I was greeted by the
visage of the entire arena from a perspective I had never seen before. The “jumbotron”
was resting on the ground, the lights were off, the ice surface and boards were gone, and
most of the seats were removed. Only a few lingering Penguins logos and arena signage
provided any evidence of the building I had known all of my life as shadows blanketed
the once vibrant concourses and my steps echoed through a previously boisterous
atmosphere. In this moment, I took pause to realize that I was experiencing a deeply
personal moment of coming of age—facing the inevitability that all things end, and
essentially having a minor existential crisis. Tears filled my eyes as I walked away, as the
feelings that overcame me were analogous to seeing my childhood home stripped of all
familiarity and left to ruin. Here was a place I used to sit with my father after looking
forward to the game all week, where I spent priceless nights with my grandfather in the
last years of his life, the place where I felt most alive—and now it was gone.
I am certain that my experience parallels that of millions of fans around the world as they too are forced to come to terms with the loss of their favorite venues, their “home away from homes”. However, there are some ways to manage the grief of losing beloved venues. In many instances, we find ways to carry on the memories and legacy of stadia by incorporating elements of those that have come and gone into the new venues to be built. In this next section, I wish to review the phenomenological value of phantom stadia and the persistence of the “spirit” of past venues that continues to linger when fans move from one dwelling to another. Understanding these phenomena will help our conception of both the connection between fans and stadia and Gadamer’s notion of fusing horizons. I will also revisit the work of Merleau-Ponty and his notion of the phenomenological body to apply phantom limb syndrome to the lingering presence of stadia. This section will provide a more in-depth understanding of the symbolic and communicative practices that fans employ to preserve the legacy of venue, and consequently further explicate the immense amount of value stadia carries.

**Phantom Stadia: The Transference of Soul**

As the previous section concluded, I explained in great detail my experience of losing my favorite venue and the tremendous sense of grief and mourning that was felt. The loss of place can be regarded as a loss or lessening of the self, for place, like a stadium, are extensions of identity for the fans. People’s sense of personal and cultural identity is intimately bound up with place identity. Loss of home or losing one’s place may often trigger an identity crisis (as evidenced by my experience) (Buttimer & Seamon, 1980). The response against the fear of loss of place is understandably tied to an instinctual need to further establish a place as an object of possession. Within the venue,
fans feel at home and decorate it as if it were their own, hanging banners and signs on the grandstands. The team is part of the social fabric of the group that convenes to cheer them on, and the stadium is their temple, a sacred place that indicates a sense of belonging by simply being in attendance (Woisetschlager, Haselhoff, & Backhaus, 2014). When this place is lost, we search for ways to cope with the loss and keep the memory of our dwelling alive, as if memorializing a lost loved-one.

Garrett and Regina write on phantom stadia and the persistence of fan memory for abandoned or demolished stadiums in *Communication and the Baseball Stadium: Community, Commodification, Fanship, and Memory*, an anthology dedicated to sport communication. In their chapter, a phenomenological investigation using Merleau-Ponty’s work on phantom limbs is applied to describe the ability of stadia to remain in our present consciousness and memory (2017). As I have discussed in chapter five, Merleau-Ponty provides a phenomenological understanding of the human body as a general medium for being in the world, rejecting the Cartesian dualism and instead holding that human beings are body and mind in a constant intertwined chiasm of sensation (1968). Merleau-Ponty described the condition of losing a limb and retaining an embodied sense of its presence as a “phantom limb,” or the body operating based on its memory of having an appendage that is no longer present. This sensation confirms the notion of the phenomenological body in that we are not a body separated from the mind, but instead a body and mind intertwined by reversibility of sensation, making one impossible to separate from the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Therefore, body and mind share an ambiguous relationship where sensation cannot be described by entire physiological or psychological means. Instead, knowledge, like that of the experiences
embodied through having an arm, persists after the arm is gone for the sensation of having an appendage belongs to the flesh experience of our existence as being in the world as subject and object. Like phantom limbs, our consciousness maintains an embodied sense of presence and existence of past stadiums, for our experience within them is firmly grounded in our memory and embodied knowledge of our previous contact with the venues. Garrett and Regina explain that stadiums live on in “congealed scenes” in our imagination, a perfect representation of the intertwining of individual, community, specie, memory, world, and time (2017).

Congealed scenes, like the embodied memories that come from chiasmic experience, are defined by the multiplicity of sensory and bodily experiences we acquire when contacting the world. In the instance of stadia, congealed scenes are made up of the sight of the bright lights, the smell of hotdogs and popcorn, the feel of a hard seat, the smell of the grass on the field, and the sound of the roar of the crowd and crack of the bat. What is unique about congealed scenes as a function of memory is that they are always placed: it is impossible to remember something without attaching a location (Garrett & Regina, 2017). Just as our bodies are intertwined with our conscious mind, so too are our memories and experiences inextricably tangled in the interplay between our bodily being in the world as a perceiving subject and perceived object. The fleshiness of both the world and ourselves provides an intimate interconnection that makes our lived experience a fluid comingling of sensations (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Through our contact with places, our experiences become embodied and integrated into our memory, sense of self, and worldview. For this reason, stadiums become linked to our selfhood and our relationship to them becomes a very much embodied and sublime connection. Long after a stadium is
gone, we can close our eyes and have visceral experiences of the time spent within them, recalling all of the sensory stimuli and emotions we have known (Garrett & Regina, 2017). This is why it is particularly difficult to see a stadium close; our visceral memories become the only access point of a place we once adored, and we struggle to come to terms with starting over in a new place.

When faced with having to leave an old stadium behind and move into a new venue, we look for ways to reclaim and transfer our embodied sense of identification. We move the statues of iconic players to new locations, integrate physical parts of the old stadium into the new, replicate classic elements of venues past in the construction of those to come, and even transplant symbolic elements of the game, such as moving the actual home plate from one stadium to another. When building PNC Park in 2001, the Pittsburgh Pirates organization had windows from the club level in Three Rivers Stadium refurbished and moved to the new ballpark. Additionally, the right field wall was built exactly 21 feet high to represent the jersey number of the great Roberto Clemente and honor his life and career. Fans play a role in this transferring of the spirit of venues by carrying on symbolic rituals and traditions from one place to another, and collecting commemorative items and apparel that can be worn or displayed to honor the past. I was present at one of the most gripping and emotional examples of transference as I attended the first game at Consol Energy Center after the closing of the Civic Arena. Before the start of the game, a ceremony was held where hockey legend and owner of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Mario Lemieux, skated to center ice clad in a suit and tie and poured out a bottle of water from the melted ice surface of the Civic Arena on the center-ice circle in the new building. The symbolic moment of turning the page while honoring the past was
a dramatic and awesome example of the movement of the history—the soul of the arena—from one place to another.

In each instance discussed here, the physical and symbolic transference that takes place from one stadium to the next carries the phantasms, ghosts, and memories of the past into the new venues so that they may “haunt” the new dwellings, forever remaining in our minds. The “haunting” referred to here is not a negative experience, but instead a welcomed pervasive presence of the past that helps new places feel more like home (Garrett & Regina, 2017). Much of what has been discussed regarding the transference of the mystique and spirit from one stadium to another involves the blending of past memories with the present. In this sense, the process has Gadamerian undertones as the intertwining of temporal realms is what defines the notion of the fusion of horizons. I will now return to Gadamer to reapply the fusion of horizons to transference and the creation of phantom stadia.

**Fusion Revisited.** Recalling chapter four, Gadamer’s (1975) fusion of horizons stakes an important role in the creation of phantom stadia through transference. Gadamer explains that the fusion of horizons is the link between the past and the present, holding that the past is constantly informing our worldview and cannot be ignored. Our current prejudices are formulated by past experience, both from subjective and intersubjective sources. The fusion that takes place is the seamless intertwining between temporal dimensions, recognizing the inextricable link between them (Gadamer, 1975). We can see this fusion play out in the examples of transference discussed in this section. When it comes to changing venues and passing along the legacies we share as fans, what we seek
is stability and familiarity: we wish to keep the spirit of the stadium alive. Skillen explains this notion of preservation well, as he says:

For many fans, versions of tradition and history associated with football clubs and their cities provide a tangible link between the past and present. Football teams are always changing (players, managers and the alike all come and go), yet the club exists in a space that is in part untouched by these changes…to supporters the club offers a projection of a community which signifies, among other things, stability and continuity. (1993)

By addressing the link between past and present fostered by sporting organizations, Skillen confirms the value for Gadamer’s application in this section, but also speaks to the ability of sport to be sustained through the passage of time. As I will argue shortly, fans play a major role in the continuity and survival of sport organizations, and the transition phases that move teams into new venues is essential. Franchises are not made or broken by changes in personnel, management, or venue for the fan base offers sport’s greatest lifeline. In order to cope with moving on from an old venue, we promote and welcome the fusion of the past and present through symbolic and physical acts of assimilation. As Gadamer tell us, we cannot ignore the past for it has just as much value as the present in forming how we experience the world (1975). In the realm of sport, this postulation couldn’t be more accurate.

Beyond symbolic and physical means of transference, fans also employ communicative means of fusing horizons. Going back once more to chapter four, just as my parents were able to communicate the meaning of their sport equipment and fuse their horizon of experience with mine, the same opportunity exists for fans to pass along
subjective experiences and prejudices of stadia from one generation to the next. Boyle and Haynes explain the communicative practice of transference as they say:

> Popular culture, and football—even mediated football, for to some extent all the fans’ experience of the game comes through various channels of communication—in particular in the cities examined, becomes a site for the social process. It is not simply a case of one version of history versus another, but of how the clubs come to symbolize a sense of history, place and belonging to supporters who often view themselves as an integral part of the club and its historical narrative. (2009)

This excerpt stands to confirm that fan history, including the imagining of shared spaces, is communicatively based and involves the fusion of a multiplicity of horizons from intersubjective sources, naming the home city and venue as the locus. Parents take their children to stadiums and reminisce about former venues, explain the moments they had inside them, and communicate the significance of the places where their parents did the same thing with them. Just as I share my mother’s baseball glove and my father’s football, I also share their horizon of experience within venues long before my birth thanks to our ability to use language the communicate meaning. Through the same magic that allows catching a fly ball to become a shared experience, I can be transported through time to participate in the experience of stadia. From what my grandfathers passed along to my parents, I am able to go back even further into the past, allowing me to imagine what it was like to attend a game at Forbes Field, the stadium that played host to the Pirates until the 1960’s. Returning to the passage from Boyle and Haynes, we realize that our parents and family members are not the only channels that provide our sense of
being with a team and venue. The media, fellow fans, opposing fans, and even strangers that we encounter on the streets of our home cities project their own narratives and horizons and in the spirit of intersubjectivity, each play a role in how we come to envision our relationship with a team and/or venue. What this process also allows is the construction of selective histories, and the linkage between tradition and the selective interpretation of history cannot be ignored. History can be remembered or forgotten, depending on the prevailing narratives that are being promoted and carried through time through fusing horizons. Therefore, through transmission, revisionist narrative can become “given” and “natural,” becoming an assumed condition of a particular fan base or fan culture (Boyle & Haynes, 2009).

Considering the symbolic, physical, and communicative methods of fusion, one can recognize that phantom stadia exist and continue on through an oscillation between past and present. In some instances, like pouring the water from one ice surface onto another, we carry our ghosts forward. In other scenarios, such as communicating our memories and experiences, we travel backwards in time to reclaim them. In the case of the ahistorical, revisionist methods, we may avoid going backwards on certain subjects altogether. Garrett and Regina quote historian John Thorn, who said, “the ball parks that are gone have the charm of being gone. There is something wonderful about being lost” (2017). Yet, the presence of phantom stadiums and our methods of retrieving and reifying their memory maintain their charm without rendering them truly lost.

Our ability to move the spirit and aura of places from one place to another through symbolic and communicative processes is not limited to revitalizing the ghosts of days past. Through group identification, our associations with a fan base, and our
propensity to congregate with likeminded people, the domain of fandom is virtually limitless. All around the world, one will find factions of transplanted fans forming intermediate meeting places far away from their point of origin. Fandom has an imperialist element to it in that groups of people can establish dwellings seemingly anywhere through the transference of fan culture, shared history, and common discourse. I will now turn to explaining this interesting phenomenon, fans’ ability to create home away from home.

**From the Stadium to the Local Pub: Intermediate Spaces of Commonality**

It is impossible to ignore the deeply rooted connections between sports and the need for people to vicariously experience excellence, form individual and social identities, and build strong relationships with fellow human beings. Through these connections, a sense of place materializes in a variety of contexts that transcend physical locations and limitations. Such a unique and dynamic creation of place echoes the idea of imagined communities originally posited by Anderson (1991) as groups of shared interest that emerge through active participation. In the instance of sports and fan bases, the imagined community is most accurately described as a network of places that encompasses the home city, stadium, the homes of each individual fan, and virtually anywhere likeminded fans may gather. The imagined communities of sports suggest a redefining or at least an addendum to our understanding of place. Place loses its connotations of a singular, physical space and is instead seen more accurately as a ubiquitous sense of dwelling built upon the intangible connections of people and a shared interest.
In the same vein, place can be distinguished from mere location by being understood as the human response to physical surroundings. The way human beings create and experience place is wholly contingent upon the emotional attachments that they associate with geographic locations. From a seminal standpoint, place is nothing more than a component of the being-in-the-world experience of human beings, drawing upon physiological and psychological qualities of the relationships we build with others and the emotional value we place on locations (Malpas, 1999). Through the importance human beings endow to locations, we can further view place as a social creation that takes on an identity itself, while entirely avoiding relegation to one specific point in favor of the combining of multiple spaces. When we use phrases such as “Steeler Nation” or “Cornhusker Nation” amongst the fan bases described in this essay, we are referring to this intertwining of spaces that accounts for both immediate physical locations and the intermediate places that form as a result. The “nation” is true to its namesake, as this type of place represents an amalgamation of disjointed people that inhabit a boundless dwelling of shared interest as if they were part of a discernible culture.

As Buttimer and Seamon explain, “To discuss place, we have to freeze the dynamic process at an imaginary moment in order to take the still picture. The observer who explores place speaks of housing, whereas the resident of that place lives the process of dwelling” (1980). This quote perfectly illustrates the need for a more in-depth understanding of place within the realm of sports communication. It is the process and experience of dwelling that moves place beyond physical boundaries and allows such phenomena as the creation of place through sport to exist as a legitimate notion for scholars to develop. Those who dwell within the intermediate places attached to a
common interest will continue to redefine the concept of place and provide rich opportunities for the study of communications.

The notion of place, then, presents an interesting nuance as both a facilitator and barrier to a fan’s freedom and level of comfort. Place, taken in a literal sense in this context, has geographic connotations that influence the local sensibilities and interests of sports fans. However, there is a unique and powerful exception to consider in this scenario. What happens when local sensibilities are transferred into foreign places? This section will evaluate the creation of dwelling within place by looking into the curious case of satellite or disjointed sports bars.

**There’s No Place Like…Home?** Fans of a sport are participants in a unification that brings a place into being. Communities, like fan bases, must exist in spaces, but their members collectively and symbolically turn spaces into place, and place into dwelling. Aden et. al. offer the idea of “intermediate places” to encompass all of the locations that are generated by sports fans. Sport communities simultaneously exist in the home venue of the sports team, the locations of the fans at any given time, and the location of other geographically dispersed fans (2009). Drawing on my personal experience following the Pittsburgh Steelers around the United States, this chapter will now turn to developing the notion of intermediate places and how extensions of the home venue can be created anywhere in the world through fan participation.

I wish to focus on the establishments around the country, namely bars, which take on an identity associated with a specific sports team or disjointed geographical location. Such places are commonly referred to as “watch party” sites, as they devote all of their resources to catering to a unique niche of fans for a specified team. Watch party sites are
the quintessential intermediate places, as they offer the warm atmosphere of the home crowd despite their physical distance from the team with which they identify.

Establishments that offer watch parties and organized events offer a physical place for fans to interact, while at the same time providing the agreeable illusion of being connected to likeminded fans both at home and across the globe. Therefore, such places are both a kind of re-creation of the place represented by the team and a unique place for fans to gather as a community (Aden et. al., 2009). However, most interesting is the condition on which they provide a sense of place and belonging for fans. Watch party sites can only exist through active participation of the target demographic. Thus, it is not the pub owners and staff that gives rise to place, but the patrons that convene to reclaim and reify their bond with their fellow fans.

As a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I share a love for sports with the people of a city known around the country for their dedication, loyalty, and utter fanaticism for their sports teams. Most notable is the bond between the city of Pittsburgh and the Steelers of the National Football League, an association that can be arguably made synonymous. As a devout Steeler fan, I have traveled to 15 cities and their respective venues in support of the team. What always struck me to be an absolutely staggering phenomenon was the immense following the Steelers have garnered in every city I have been able to visit. From black and gold littering the streets, the nearly home-like attendance at opponents’ stadiums, to the “Steeler bars” one can find around any corner, the Steeler’s faithful have built an empire around the country. The intermediate places created by the fan base have given rise to a global network of bars, watch sites, and
booster organizations that have propagated numerous satellite locations representing Pittsburgh.

Perhaps my most notable experience was in the desert of Arizona, just outside of Phoenix. My fellow travelers and I were directed towards a large complex of bars that was dedicated to supporting the Steelers. Upon walking in the establishment, I was overwhelmed by the Pittsburgh sports memorabilia covering the walls, the numerous televisions all showing historic Steeler games, and the staff dressed in black and gold and wearing the team insignia. There were periodic chants of team fight songs, drink specials representing famous Steeler alumni, and nearly all patrons were either currently living in Pittsburgh and traveling or were born in Pittsburgh and had since moved to Arizona. Despite the fact that miles of barren sand and enormous Saguaro cacti crafted the landscape outside, with the yellow bridges and luminous skyline of Pittsburgh far away, inside the building felt a lot like home. I have been to numerous other places in cities like San Diego, Charlotte, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa Bay that shared the same atmosphere and offered similar sentiments.

Rodger Aden and a host of his colleagues conducted ethnographic research on the creation of place and the results were published in the article *Communities of Cornhuskers: Generation of Place Through Sports Fans’ Rituals* in 2009. Aden et. al visited various locations around the country that serve as watch party or satellite sites for the Nebraska Cornhuskers, a prominent collegiate team known for their dedicated fan base. The research that they report has undeniable parallels to my experiences as a traveling Steelers fan. Aden et. al. explain that the watch party sites were so inundated with Cornhusker themed decorations, patrons wearing the school’s iconic red apparel,
and conversations about the team that it was nearly impossible to distinguish the bar from the actual city of Lincoln, Nebraska (a city that I also visited and can attest to their fanaticism for their team). At most of the watch sites, even the food was produced in Nebraska and imported into the bar, adding yet another element of Cornhusker flavor. Upon visiting a watch site in Chicago, one of the contributing authors explains that he was continuously reminding himself that he was indeed in Chicago and not Nebraska. Psychologically, the intermediate place of the watch site had essentially taken on the symbolic experience of actually being in Nebraska and with Cornhusker fans (Aden et. al., 2009).

As Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) explains in his book Space and Place, emotional and atmospheric aspects of spaces cause the usual limitations of physical location to be made irrelevant. Place is traditionally created and understood by what we can visually see, but must also account for what we feel and imagine. Tuan explains that human places become real through dramatization, namely of the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life (1977). Understanding sports as a microcosm of the societies they represent, it can easily be postulated that they also are the central means for the dramatization of group values and therefore clearly and vividly create places.

Throughout this chapter, the common thread that can be seen as the driving force behind the creation of place is fan participation and the many ways in which fan involvement influences the proliferation of shared identity, history, dwelling, and ultimately transference. It has been established that venues are far more valuable than simple buildings, for they serve as the locus of fan experience, blend with fan identity in a deeply embodied sense, allow for group involvement that transcends mortal life, and
become as integral to the fan for a sense of belonging as the family home. I have redefined home-field advantage as a phenomenological circumstance characterized by the intertwining of self with place, or spirit with history, and individual with community. To this point, I have examined multiple nuances of fan experiences that make up the overall love affair that human beings share with the world of spectator sports. Our deeply rooted ties to players, teams, stadia, etc. are integral components of our lives that grow stronger in time, becoming extensions of our identity. Once we become fans, an addiction takes us over: we need sport to fulfill our desires, provide us emotional release, and afford opportunities to brush with immortality. As is the case with any sense of need and any addiction, our love for sport can be exploited.

In the seventh chapter, I will switch gears move into a commercial investigation of sport, delving into the opportunistic nature of fandom to allow marketers and businesses to capitalize on our need to be spectators. I will look to define consumption practices as they relate to various elements of the fan experience and apply the ways fans consume sport back to several typologies of fandom as well as the phenomenological roots of the fan. Much of this project so far has been dedicated to clearly elucidating the value of fan experience from a phenomenological perspective, but we must now turn and examine another element of fandom: how the love affair between fanatic and sport translates to the bottom line.
Chapters 7: How Fans Consume: Marketing Implications for Fandom

This chapter will serve to explain the categories of consumption of fan bases, offering detailed descriptions of the modes through which different fan typologies consume and highlight the primary motivations for each grouping. I will also address the role of media in consumption, and the changing landscape of fandom practices as it relates to consumption in the technological age. In doing so, I will look to expose some of the contentious scenarios that have been created through engaging in sport from a mediated distance—namely, fantasy teams. Through a thorough examination of the aforementioned practices and the new modalities of fan experience, I wish to reveal the vast opportunities presented to marketing professionals and those engaged in the business side of sport to capitalize on motivations for fandom.

From profit-driven enterprises such as merchandise, concessions, and season ticket packages to more experiential pursuits like in-game entertainment, featured events, and aesthetics of the venue, there exist multiple contact points with the fan and their subsequent experience of a team. This chapter will focus on the consumptive aspects of the fan and game experience and attempt to highlight the underlying foundations of fandom that give rise to demand of augmented experiences, merchandise, and other forms of material desires that commemorate events. Additionally, I will seek to explain the non-material, magical and personal meaning that is often projected onto previously purchased apparel and merchandise and offer a phenomenological explanation for such practices. To begin, I wish to offer an iconic event in sport history and use it as anecdotal evidence of the multiplicity of ways in which fans consume the sporting experience. Afterwards, I will explain the roots of sport as a business enterprise and highlight the motivations that
drive fans as consumers, and reveal what value sports offer as a product. As Skillen explains, the new era of sport experience includes gigantic stadiums surrounded by television screens and limitless amounts of food and drink. Venues have become “figurative extensions of our own living rooms”, and therefore, spectators should be considered consumers (1993).

**Consumption in Sport**

The date is October 13th, 1960 and after a grueling 6 games of baseball, the Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Yankees are deadlocked at 9 all in the bottom of the ninth under a clear Pittsburgh autumn sky. Having been outscored 55-26 to this point in the series, the Pirate hopeful are huddled together in the confines of historic Forbes Field, paralyzed by anticipation and perhaps marveling at the unlikelihood of what they are currently experiencing. With a city on his shoulders, a young second baseman named Bill Mazeroski walks up to the plate with an opportunity to win the World Series. Yankee’s pitcher Ralph Terry works to a routine 1-1 count, then prepares to throw a pitch that would forever change the game of baseball and the identity of a franchise. Mazeroski hammers the Terry pitch 406 feet to left-center as a crowd stands in unison, growing louder with each foot the ball travels. The ball sails over an awestruck and yielding Yogi Berra and lands in the bleachers, sending the fans and their beloved team into absolute bedlam; the improbable had become reality and the Pirates were world champions.

Mazeroski’s historic blast marked the first time a player had ever won a World Series title with one swing of the bat (and remains the only game 7 World Series walk-off homerun in baseball history), and became a moment forever revered and celebrated by the entire baseball community (perhaps except for Berra and Terry). For over five
decades the media has revisited this historic moment, always seeking out commentary from the more than humble Mazeroski around the anniversary of his great achievement. Baseball enthusiasts like to dwell on the improbability of the circumstance, the big names in the pin-stripes on the opposition, and the significance of the first World Series walk-off win. The majority of the conversation around such pivotal moments in the sports world is justifiably focused on the players and the game, but what about the guy in the bleachers who caught the ball? How about the usher that held a second job at the ballpark simply for the opportunity to be a part of a big moment, a part of history? Or more importantly, let’s hear from the fan that locked eyes with Terry the previous inning and instilled the right kind of fear into his soul, a feeling of contempt that willed him to hurl the fateful pitch. The fan that now sits with pure solace while mayhem continues around him, reveling in a life-affirming moment where he was a part of a living, breathing, and pulsating entity that was every bit as tantamount to that moment as the Louisville Slugger in Mazeroski’s hands. Can we assume all that attended were deeply invested in the game, or perhaps were some spectators there for an aesthetic or social experience? Is it possible that some fans were there to just watch a good game, regardless of who won? The scenario and questions that I provide here allude to the multiplicity of fan experiences that are highly subjective and cannot be understood with blanket terminology. One cannot assume the motivations of others for attending a game, for their reason for consuming the experience is often a mystery.

It is no secret that sport is a big business. Look no further than the enormous corporate sponsorships, athlete endorsements, ticket prices, commercial deals, and media rights for evidence that a serious amount of money is changing hands in all of our major
professional sports. Mihalic (1982) explains that sport is like any other enterprise in that it employs great athletes that perform in order to amass fortunes for themselves and also for the team owners. Players are both human beings and business assets, as the investment that management places in their salaries is expected to generate favorable returns. However, professional sports are not the only cash cows in the marketplace, as Mihalic points out, even collegiate football and basketball programs operate with multi-million dollar budgets and make untold fortunes for institutions they represent. Although colleges are supposed to provide education above all else, Mihalic tells us “the roar of the crowd on Saturday afternoons has an economic echo suited to the marketplace as well as the campus” (1982). Considering college coaches are now paid as much or more than those in professional leagues and some of the wealthiest institutions have the best collegiate sport programs, it is easy to see that the “roar” goes far beyond and economic echo and instead represents the sound of fortune.

Skillen claims that sport has been a big business dating back to antiquity, positing the Roman chariot races as the first example of mass consumed sport both defined in spectatorship and financial terms (1993). The classical era laid the foundation for the enormous amounts of money that would exchange hands at ticket windows, merchandise booths, food vendors, and the like for thousands of years to come. In the modern era, the business of sport has morphed into an empire, carrying with it new ways of marketing to the public, establishing value, and giving rise to new fields of study (such as sport marketing and management). One of the most interesting conditions of the business of sport is that unlike traditional enterprises, the core “product” is nearly impossible to define! Instead, the value proposition that sport offers is entirely subjective, but carried
out largely through intersubjective contact points. Holt may offer some clarity to the core value of sport, as he claims people consume for two purposes. In terms of structure, we consume with actions that involve directly engaging consumption objects (object actions) and through interactions with other people in which consumption objects serve as focal resources (interpersonal actions) (1995). Holt’s division places consumption based on action, our participation and engagement with the objects we wish to acquire, experience, or otherwise enjoy. I believe sport allows for both dimensions; the merchandise, food, and related paraphernalia representing the object actions, and the price we pay to be admitted to stadiums, purchase television packages, and participate in sport through an experiential lens are categorically interpersonal actions.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will address both modules of consumption and relate them to the typologies of fandom that were laid out in chapter three. Returning to Holt (1995), I believe most of the value we derive from sport come from the latter part of his division in that most sporting experience can be viewed as consuming through an interpersonal dynamic. After all, much of this project has placed sport firmly in the realm of the social and has examined the subjective and intersubjective qualities of our phenomenological contact with sporting events. In the next section, I will assess the interpersonal side of consumption through fan bases and provide a framework for later discussion of fan typologies and they ways they consume sport.

The Price of Admission. Consumption has been the primary means through which individuals have participated in culture and transformed it. The idea of participation here means that fans consume based on how they see themselves fit into the larger social framework and how they seek to frame their own worldview. The
intersubjective nature of fan experience manifests in the consumptive elements as well, as fans rarely partake in games alone. Recalling from chapter five the ability for sport to create imagined places and foster unity, it is easy to see why we consume sport in groups and approach its experience as a communal event. From watch parties on Sunday afternoon in the family living room to tailgates outside the stadium, fans consume sport as members of groups and therefore have their personal experienced altered by those who accompany them. Boyle and Haynes quote Garry Whannel, as he describes the intersubjectivity of sport consumption:

The cultural experiences involved in consuming sport may be commercialized and commodified but they always involved other forms of experience and exchange—to do with shared experiences, with popular memory, with a sense of place and space, a sense of cultural tradition, and an awareness of and openness to the unpredictability of sport events. (2009)

This selection serves to recapitulate a variety of items that have been discussed through this work: our membership in a fan base is the basis of our sporting experience, sports unify and create imagine places and shared history, we engage in fusion with others to create common memory and perspectives, and ultimately we do all of these things while acting as consumers.

Human beings are able to use consumption to fundamentally shape the way the world come to be experienced by aligning what they attend, purchase, and observe based on their own set of personal desires and prejudices. Storey echoes this sentiment for society on a larger scale, claiming that “Culture is not something already made which we consume; culture is what we make in the varied practices of everyday life, including
consumption. Consumption involves the making of culture.” (2010). Both Bermingham and Storey speak to the incredible influence that consumption practices have on the way human beings experience the world, interact with others, and form identities. In the realm of sport, consumption is equally if not more influential for the fan experience, and like society, defined part of its culture.

Fandom constitutes a space defined by its refusal of mundane values and practices, its celebration of deeply rooted emotions and passionately embraced pleasures, its very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture (Storey, 2010). Fandom is empowering in that it creates a participatory culture from the channels through which it converts people into spectators. In other words, being a fan is dynamic, allowing participation through many methods and a litany of contact points that are customizable to fan preferences. Some fans want to sit in their living room wearing their lucky jersey and watch a football game, some want to fill out a scorecard at a baseball game and admire the beauty of the game, still others want to drink copious amounts of alcohol and engage in all the festivities the game experience has to offer. Each way of contacting sport is subjective and valid, and ultimately the way through which each respective fan consumes the sport. From a business standpoint, sport is very much a form of entertainment, a service that is sought out for its own economic utility. Like any product or service, sport is purchased or experienced by fans with the intent to reap its value, address needs, and satisfy wants. Skillen announces this point nicely as he says:

The conceptual link that I have been stressing between ‘action’ and audience exposes the deep but fine line between sport and entertainment, or show business.
And, although the spectator at professional sports is likely to be aware of his own frailty as a physical actor, he is compensated by the sense that, as part of the public, he has the power to shape, if not this particular game, then the fate of the game itself—it exists after all for his pleasure. (1993)

Skillen’s quote exemplifies the idea that we consume sport on our own terms and expected from it certain benefits. We want to be entertained, moved, excited, and stimulated. How we achieve our desired outcome is up to each individual; however, as Skillen mentions, the benefit that we all share in partaking in sport is the opportunity we have to co-create experience. Looking back to chapter four, it was this sense of co-creation and presence at the game that I defined as one of the main motivations behind our fandom. Each fan has his or her own way of being part of the chiasmus that is the game experience with various levels of intensity and meaning. Regardless of the degree of emotional investment, our price of admission to a sporting event is our permission to enter a fantasy where we may choose whatever path to satisfaction we wish to pursue.

With Holt’s (1995) division of object action and personal action in mind, we can imagine the many ways that sport can fulfill each motive for consumption. Much of what has been discussed in this project applies to the interpersonal actions—buying tickets in the most raucous sections in the stadium, traveling to intermediary sites of fan culture to watch games and engage in night life, tailgating with friends before and after a game, and engaging in experiences that bring one closer to the team and players, such as autograph signings and waiting after games to shake hands. On the other side of the spectrum, some fans derive the most satisfaction from more material, object oriented consumption behaviors. The collecting of memorabilia, apparel, special giveaways, game-used
equipment, and other physical evidence of fandom are all equally formidable modes of consumerism within fandom.

Now that a framework for understanding the consumption patterns of fans has been established and sport has been firmly posited in the realm of business akin to any traditional firm in the marketplace, attention can be focused on a deeper conception of the specific ways in which fans consume sport. In this section, I will turn to addressing the various metaphors for consumption practices that make up the overall fan experience. This section will rely heavily upon Douglas B. Holt’s work, How Consumers Consume: A typology of Consumption Practices (1995). I have selected this work to drive my discussion for it does a superb job in defining consumption typologies and uses baseball to examine each nuance. Holt’s work connects the realm of sport with categorical motivations for engaging in fan experience and highlights the relationship between sport and business.

Making use of Holt’s categories, I will further the conversation by applying my own typologies of fandom detailed in chapter three in order to bring light to the ways marketing professionals can define contact points with fans based on their preferences for engaging sport.

**Drawing Lines in the (Infield) Sand: Divisions of Consumption in Fandom**

Holt’s (1995) typologies of consumption are based on his ethnographic research during two seasons spent collecting data and interviews from fans at Chicago’s Wrigley field. Since his research was conducted from an ethnographical standpoint, the subjective value of his findings aligns well with this project’s overall phenomenological purview.
Drawing upon the ethnographic strategy of Erving Goffman\textsuperscript{22}, Holt claims to have taken a distanced approach to participant observations to study the lesser known or taken-for-granted actions that constitute consumption practices amongst a fan base. Holt places consumption into four categories: consuming as experience, integration, classification, and play. Each faction is further delineated into specific sub-categories that provide descriptive titles for specific behaviors. I will address each main typology and then proceed to discuss the sub-divisions that most accurately represent the types of fans I have created in chapter three. I will begin with perhaps the most interesting and dynamic of the groupings, the experiential consumers.

**Collect Memories, Not Things.** The experiential typology deals with the consumers’ subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects dealing with the hedonic, aesthetic, and subjective dimensions of consuming. Pioneered by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) the research on this grouping is psychological and phenomenological, emphasizing the emotional states that are experienced while consuming. According to Holt, experiential consumption is how people come to understand intersubjective encounters and use them to make sense of situation, roles, and objects. Spectators use this framework in three ways: through accounting they make sense of baseball, through

\textsuperscript{22} Erving Goffman (1922-1982), born in Alberta, Canada, led the turn to the micro-sociology of everyday life. Goffman’s program began as a development of the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, which set out to uncover the moral order that makes society possible. Where his predecessors, the British social anthropologists, analyzed religious rituals in tribal societies, Goffman examined the secular rituals of modern social interaction. He believed that such rituals construct the modern self, which he studied by examining the conditions in which it is threatened or blatantly manipulated. Goffman analyzed abnormal situations and institutions, including mental hospitals, confidence games, gambling, spying, and embarrassment in social encounters, to reveal the social conditions upholding conventional realities (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences).
evaluating spectators construct judgments, and through appreciating they respond

Accounting involves applications of interpretive frameworks to understand the
game of baseball (or any sport) through wading through the rules and complexities of the
game while experiencing the game itself. This process involves typifying objects to
assign them specific values, and then contextualizing the information with connections to
relevant facts to create a better understanding. To understand what designates a “single”
in baseball requires a contextual understanding of the rules of the games, as well as the
various movements happening on the field that designate a hit as such.

For the veteran fan, this process is second nature and little-thought is given.
Additionally, the purest typology, in their nuanced understanding of the game will hardly
recognize the difficulty of sense making through accounting that less experienced fans
may be attempting. The typologies that will be most subject to accounting will be the
casual, social, and possibly the businessfan. Each of these three typologies are
characterized by a limited understanding of sport due in large part to their general
detachment and lack of genuine interest in the game. Casual fans are likely to have a
working knowledge of the rules of the game but may require some explanation from
more seasoned spectators at certain junctures of the game, whereas the social fan will
most likely have very little awareness of the events unfolding. Should the social fan want
to learn, they will seek consult from the purists, the parasocials, and the mimetic fans for
an education. However, this requires effort and a general desire to know the game. The
businessfans are a difficult typology to categorize here, as their mandated formal
behavior at games may prevent them from engaging in the accounting process, or even
from watching the game. The typology most likely to engage in and benefit from the accounting process is the casual fan. Their sporadic attendance does not allow for many opportunities to learn the game in person, but they are likely to be consuming sport through other forms of media, such as watching on television at home. Casual fans, having a basic appreciation for the game and being somewhat invested in the success of the team are most likely to seek out a better understanding of sport, and therefore should be the primary demographic for marketing directed towards this sub-typology.

In order to reach this type of fan, marketing teams would make use of programs, literature on the sport, and documents that explain rules and common terminology. One can observe such materials on within game day literature handed out to each fan upon entry, in pictorials posted in the concourses, and at times during in-game demonstrations from “experts” on the sport displayed on the jumbotron. Other suggestions that I can offer for building contact points with this type of fan would be to offer promotional items that help generate email lists, offer tutorials and demonstrations on the sport, and make stadium facilities readily available for touring and information sessions on off days.

Many of the suggestion here are being utilized by organizations. The goal here is to focus not on selling the casual fan on the game experience, but instead on the game itself. A casual fan may never have a deep appreciation for the game that raises their level of emotional (and monetary) investment if they are not taught to appreciate it. Therefore, the goal for marketing to the casual fan, those who consume by accounting, is the carefully promote a passion for the game that will result in a long-term customer relationship once the casual fan is able to successfully account for the game and then move into more invested typologies.
The next subdivision, evaluating, takes places after accounting is no longer necessary and fandom moves into a deeper appreciation for the game. This patterned behavior of consumption is characterized by the enjoyment of passing judgment on situations, statistics, players, and actions. The distance of hit, the speed of a slap shot, the arch of a football, and the strength of a player are all metrics that are used as means of comparisons against benchmarks of performance and used to pass critical judgment. Those who consume through evaluation do so through comparing standards within a framework. As Holt explains:

For example, while any pitch of any professional pitcher is exceptional by the standards of most people’s general framework, the baseball world framework allows one to discriminate between an older, tactical pitcher who can only throw 80 miles per hour and a young fireballer whose velocity approaches the century mark. (1995, p. 5)

Holt’s description serves to encompass three important dimensions of the game that allow for evaluation: norms, history, and conventions. The specific facts, records, and objective expectations that have been archived through previous experience and contact with the game become the benchmarks of appraisal for this fan. Each metric provides a narrow focus on detail, and allows fans to make proclamations regarding the relative abilities of players. Claiming that Sidney Crosby is the best at face-offs or that Mike Trout has the best hitting power of any baseball player are declarations made from evaluation.

Looking back to fan typologies, this mode for consumption squarely fits the purist typology. The purist’s appreciation for the game, physical abilities of the athlete, and
ability to pass judgment on the technical and performative aspects of the game makes evaluation the purist’s main method of fan experience. Purists buy tickets for the privilege of watching the beauty of the game, while also continuing to build their own personal dossiers on players and conceptual history of the game.

The purist typology is a particularly difficult demographic to reach with marketing, for they are often immune to the classical tactics of enhancing fan experience. This is not to say that purists do not enjoy a cold beer and a hotdog like the rest of us, but their fundamental motivations for consuming sport are grounded in the actual motions of the sport, therefore they are unlikely to appreciate anything specifically related to the team. Some possible avenues to consider to reach the purist would be to effectively manage the actual playing surface, ensuring the integrity of the field or ice to make sure the game can be played at the highest possible level without impediments. Additionally, offering scorecards at baseball games and programs with statistical information and player profiles may fruitful for enhancing the purist game experience. In a more specific sense, having a strong security presence at the game to remove distractions from unruly fans will be appreciated by the purist, as will be simple comforts such as comfortable seats and plenty of bathrooms available—anything that will keep their primary focus and time spent at the stadium on the game.

Appreciating is the most involved and expansive consumption method in the experiential typology. Characterized by the emotional appeal of sporting events, this typology applies to a wide range of aesthetic, sensory, and emotional appeals. Fans who consume through appreciation may place value on the aesthetic beauty of a ballpark, the taste of a sandwich, the grace of the motions of the game, the energy of the crowd, or the
perceived traditional or nostalgic values of the sporting experience. Holt offers an anecdote of contextual sensory experience:

For instance, drinking a cold beer on a hot day in the sun is a pleasant experience for many, but this activity is particularly appreciated by baseball world participants, for whom it is meaningful because of its symbolic linkages with the baseball world ideal of a day at the ballpark…Spectators who otherwise rarely eat hot dogs occasionally remark that for some reason, hot dogs always taste better at the ballpark. (1995)

Holt’s passage confirms the notion that appreciative consumers appreciate the aesthetic elements of sporting events, where sensory stimuli are manipulated by context. Something about having a hotdog at a baseball game makes it delicious, perhaps invoking feelings of classical Americana and manipulating the sense based on the contextual nature of the ballpark and what is considered to be “the thing to do” while watching a game. Another example would be attending a football game with the hopes of being part of a boisterous crowd to enjoy the visceral, sensory stimuli and feeling the energy of the crowd, or buying seats that have the best view of the city vista in the background of the stadium.

The examples given here are but a sample of the multiplicity of motivations that make up this mode of consumption, but position the appreciative mode of consumption as an incredibly difficult demographic to measure. The basis of this typology can be vaguely defined as hedonism; a term used here as a condition of seeking out some form of pleasure relative to the desires of the individual. The subjective and intersubjective
elements that congeal to present hedonic opportunities for consumption are virtually limitless.

Consumption experience is multidimensional, encompassing hedonic dimensions such as feelings, fantasies, and fun. Furthermore, such experience can foster a sense of emotional attachment in the long run that can alter consumer behavior. Presently, experience consumption is increasing throughout the globe whether it is going to a casual movie on a weekend, attending a museum, or sitting front row at the Super Bowl. Hedonic consumption is a precarious field of consumer study for it is at its core a very non-material purchase that places paramount value on stored experiences, memories, and momentary feelings over the acquisition of tangible and lasting items. Experience consumers purchase due to perceived value over inherent or defined values, and this perception is wholly in the mind of the individual (Holt, 1995).

Raghunathan and Corfman explain that hedonic stimuli are often consumed in the company of other people, making it of utmost importance to know how social influence affects the enjoyment of shared experiences (date). It is likely that the stimulus behind this change in consumer behavior from traditionally tangible goods to intangible events could actually be born from a need to transcend an increasingly global and complicated world by finding ways to bond with other human beings in social settings. For some, this bond can be exclusively introverted and private, gaining all the value from an experience simply by being there.

What further complicates this consumption pattern is the fact that it includes all the typologies of fandom. The social fan is just as likely to enjoy the beauty of a stadium as the parasocial fan, the mimetic fan will be just as enthralled by a raucous crowd as the
casual fan, and the fringe fan will certainly savor a cold beer just as much as the purist. Appreciation is as dynamic as the milieu of motivations for fandom in general. The subjective and intersubjective influences on hedonism are so numerous that it is not unreasonable to believe that every fan would require a customized game experience to fully enjoy what the event has to offer. In many ways, loyalty programs, surveys, and advanced data-mining tactics are being utilized in attempt to do exactly that. However, the process of cataloguing each fan and reaching them on their own terms is not only unprofitable, but also an impossible task.

All of this is to say that for marketers, the appreciative fans of the experiential dynamic are both a fruitful and extremely complicated demographic. How can we possibly narrow down value offerings to such an ambiguous and versatile grouping? The answer is simple: options. Organizations across the country are continually expanding their offerings—from concession selections, customizable season ticket packages, in-game entertainment, fan experiences, and promotional giveaways—sports marketers are casting a wide net. Boyle and Haynes support the rationale of a strategy for expanding the value offerings from a sport organization, describing the new generations of North American fans as consumers “in search of experience and participation.” Fans no longer seek out specific offerings, but simply experiences in general (2009). This shift is actually in line with the post-modern era and the domination of petite natives that make it increasingly difficult to offer any form of “mass appeal.” Therefore, marketers are correct in working hard to broaden the horizons of fan experience.

Having attended sporting events in a number of cities, I have witnessed the appeal to hedonic consumers manifest through a wide variety of attempted strategies. From the
most childish and gimmicky appeals such as in-game mascot races and T-shirt cannons, to more complicated measures like gathering fan surveys and allowing fans field access, I have observed the desperate attempts of organizations trying to keep the seats full of bodies. In summation, when marketing the game experience to the appreciative group, one can only guess as to what it is that a fan actually appreciates. Less than a decade ago, the concession options at a professional stadium were limited to traditional fanfare (hotdogs, hamburgers, soda, draft beer, etc.). Now, you can peruse the concourses of stadia for your favorite microbrew and have a chef at a kiosk prepare a fresh plate of sashimi. By broadening the horizons of traditional marketing schemes into modernized, complex value propositions from multiple points of contact, sport organizations can attract and establish an increasingly diverse fan base. Moving forward through this examination of typologies of consumption, I will now transition to integration.

**Becoming the Game.** Integration is a form of consumption where converse to experientially driven motivations, consumers focus on object driven actions that seek to facilitate symbolic uses of objects. Such a practice is performed in one of two ways: through self-extension that symbolically draw external objects into one’s self concept, and exact opposite process of reiterating the self-concept to align with institutionally defined identities (Holt, 1995). The end goal is to break down the distance between consumer and consumption object, creating a linkage between the self and objects (merchandise, ballparks, other fans, teams, etc.). As Holt explains, this is done through three modes: assimilating allows fans to become competent participants in the game, producing involves fans shaping their actions to alter the consumption object itself, and personalizing includes the ways fans assert their own individuality and bond with the
This section will rely mostly on one typology, that of the parasocial fans, and will begin with assimilation, the process of becoming one with the game.

Assimilation as a mode of consumption can take place through a variety of channels: watching a game on television, going to the game in person, conversing with others about sport, or reading the sports page. However, attending the games proves to be the most effective way for consumers to assimilate, allowing more direct interactions with players, venues, other fans, and the like. In addition, attending allows the fan to better understand their own role as a spectator and decide their identity as a fan (Holt, 1995).

To assimilate, one needs to learn how to think, feel, and act like a participant of the sport, attaining a high degree of competence of the game. The goal is to move towards a point where the consumer no longer has to consciously decide how to be a spectator, but enacts their fandom naturally, almost as if they are part of the team. Some of the ways assimilation takes hold are: knowing the stadium and the best seats and sightlines, understanding architecture of the venue that influences gameplay (the boundaries, the “bounces”), wearing team paraphernalia and dressing the part, simulating what players would say to referees for bad calls, and understanding statistics of the game and being able to discuss them with others.

After extended exposure with a team or game of sport, the assimilating consumer can become very closely affiliated with the organization, at times to the point of delusion. Fans may believe themselves to be a part of the team. Through the wearing of official apparel, getting to know the players (not in a personal sense), and feeling as if they understand the game on the same level as those who play it, this type of fan establishes
relationships with teams that mimic participation as an athlete, manager, etc. It is easy to relate this consumption category to the parasocial fans who over time, indeed build such strong relationships with the teams and sport that they follow that they embody a sense of personally responsibility for the successes and failures of a team. Remembering some of the main tenets of this typology, the assimilated consumer/ parasocial fan will feel as if they are “needed” by the team and their attendance is as mandatory as that of the players on the field. Fans will consume sport through assimilation through intimate contact with the team: attending team practices, showing up early for batting practice, traveling with the team to away games, and otherwise finding ways to solidify their parasocial bond. Additionally, we can consider the mimetic fan as having some qualities of assimilation, for they too have a desire to understand the game and its players on a deeper level, albeit for different reasons. Mimetics assimilate for the purpose of embodying knowledge of the game and its practices and therefore would hold high regard for the physical aspects of the game, like the play of the field, the use of the player’s equipment, and the ways in which players exercise their motility while observing a game.

Producing, the next mode of the integration dynamic, involves spectators acting to enhance their perception of being significantly involved with the production of professional sports. The conditions of major sporting events allow limited ways in which fans can directly influence the game. In fact, as I have pointed out regarding the integrity of play, fan involvement is necessarily restricted to preserve the flow of the game. However, fans that prefer to consume sport in this manner find other ways to become co-creators of the experience. Much of what is done comes from a communicative base, where fans interact with each other and make predictions for upcoming plays, final
scores, and individual player performances. A claim such as “I guarantee you the coach put in Jones if Roethlisberger throws another interception” will certainly follow with a “who called it?” once the claim is validated by actions on the field. In a way, the production mode allows fans to engage in a fantasy world with the sport, where they simulate their own conversations with managers, players, and officials through dialogue with the self and others. This is why many fans will often shout, “I would have never called that play!” or “you know that was a bad call stripes!” To the laymen fan or casual attendee, such proclamations may seem borderline insane—after all, to whom are they speaking? Yet yelling at umpires and verbally questioning play calls from the coach is actually just the way this type of fan wishes to experience and consume the game.

Another way that fans produce is to build relationships, no matter how distanced and unrealistic, with personnel of the game through various points of contact. This is why celebrity worship has become as prominent in sport as in the media: people find ways to “get to know” the players and build one-sided relationships with them. Here again we see the parasocial typology of fandom rise to the surface, as they are defined by the unreciprocated relationships they foster with teams and players. Some of the ways this mode of consumption plays out are akin to the behavior of the parasocial fans: waiting for players after games to converse and obtain autographs, trying to get players’ attention during a game with a sign or by shouting, attending conventions where players might appear, or calling players by their first name. The goal for both the producer and the parasocial fan is to establish close connections with the team and then make that linkage readily visible to others. This typology of fan and consumption practice relish in their
ability to appear as if their level of fandom is at the apex of intensity, to the point that others will somehow recognize that they are part of the team.

Personalizing, the last component of the integration typology, involves finding ways to assert one’s individual presence within the context of a team, organization, or game setting. This often involves manipulating objects to take on a symbolic meaning that is meant to communicate the strong affiliation between the fan and intended target (the team, a player, the sport in general). Again, fans have limited contact with their desired targets and are forced to find other ways to leave their mark on the game. Often, the goal is to standout amongst the crowd and gain the attention of others in order to proclaim one’s extreme level of fandom. Some of the ways which fans accomplish this task may include: painting one’s bare chest with team insignia, making large signs and banners and draping them from the grandstands, personalizing team apparel such as jerseys with individualized messages of names, or decorating hats with blinking lights and glitter. To some, certain practices in this typology may seem narcissistic and even tacky, but the personalizing fan sees it more as a proclamation of their love for the team and therefore an act of altruism instead of self-promotion. The parasocial typology once again reigns supreme in personalizing, as fans further their bonds with players and teams through overt acts of declaring their patronage and dedication.

Marketing to the entire integration typology is actually quite easy, for it applies generally to the parasocial typology, one that is defined by the willingness to take part in sport. The predisposition of this group to want as much contact as possible with the team or organization makes marketing much less complicated than the experiential typology. As a season ticket holder for the Pirates and Penguins for several years now, I have
firsthand experience of the ways in which marketing teams reach out to the parasocial fans and therefore the integrating typology. Field passes, player meet and greets, autograph sessions, open discussions with managers and coaches, pictures with players after the game, and team conventions make up a short list of the variety of outreach programs I have come to experience personally. The idea here is to continue to build and maintain more ways in which the fan can feel as if they are part of the team and genuinely matter to the organization. Parasocial fans want to feel wanted and welcomed, as if they are recognized by the team as a valuable asset and someone they rely on. Sport organizations are doing a phenomenal job in most professional cities in providing more involved fan experiences, from personalized jersey giveaways to allowing fans to run the bases, marketing teams are offering ways for fans to feel closer to the game they love. One of the greatest marketing schemes I have ever taken part of was “field days” at PNC Park where season ticket holders are allowed to actually play baseball on the major league field. I was permitted to bring a friend and was treated to batting practice, catching fly balls from a machine that simulated major-league height, and also playing the outfield while others batted. The experience was truly sensational for any level of fandom, but as I looked around at the faces near me, I saw some expressions that clearly read “Finally! Now is my chance!” The third typology, consuming as play, will now be discussed.

A Face in the Crowd. According to Holt, the play typology of consumption is based on using objects (like the ballpark) as a means to interact with fellow consumers. Unlike the other typologies to this point, those who consume through play are much more concerned with the social aspects of the game than the game itself. The interactions they have with sport are for the sake of interacting in itself (1995). The consumption object
(being viewed as sport or the game experience) is essential for play for it facilitates the actions that consumers seek. Sport and their stadiums provide a locus of experience unlike most others in that they serve to bring groups of people with otherwise few commonalities and allow new interactions to take place. Within the walls of stadia, the poor and the rich, the young and old, and the suburbanites and city-dwellers are all brought into the same dwelling, allowing for the entertainment of exchange with unfamiliar types of people while sharing a common experience. Holt explains that this faction of consumers do so through communing and socializing, communing meaning the sharing of felt experiences with each other and socializing being the ways spectator make use of experiential practices to entertain one another (1995). This typology of consumption applies to all typologies of fans to some degree, but I would like to focus on the socialite grouping since they are the most likely to consume through play.

Communing involves the ways in which fans share how they are experiencing the consumption object (the game) with each other such that their interaction with the game becomes a mutual experience. When in the company of others, there is a reverberation of mutuality that can give rise to spectacular environments (Holt, 1995). Communing can be used to define the philosophy of going to a game with the purpose of participating in the crowd. This makes this type of consumption practice rather expansive, for most fans would certainly hold the crowd “atmosphere” amongst the most important elements of the experience. Nobody wants to attend a game in a silent stadium full of sullen disenfranchised fans (albeit the only option for the city of Cleveland). Instead, fans want to be scintillated by their involvement in a crowd. Even the most casual and detached fans still derive a great deal of value from being in a loud, exciting, and even hostile
atmosphere. There is something exhilarating about being in a place so loud you can barely think, or somewhere so full of contagious exuberance that brings about its own feeling of ecstasy. Returning to chapter six and the discussion of stadia, we can apply the aura of the carnivalesque here to describe one of the reasons fans consume sport. Being involved in the “party atmosphere” of certain venues is often worth the price of admission. Fans enjoy being a part of crowds, for so few places offer such instantaneous tribalism—the moment you step into a stadium you are part of a group that is unified through its identification with a team and your only purpose in this role is to be part of the raucous mass. Perhaps this is why going to sporting events is so liberating: you can leave behind everything that defines the self existing in reality and enter the crowd as an anonymous person that can scream as loud as you want, high-five anyone you meet, and share a powerful, if only temporary bond with a group of people in a space where outside identities have no providence.

Socializing takes on a more performative dimension, involving a reciprocal style of communicating in which spectators use their experiences with the game to entertain each other. Participants take turns exchanging comments, often trying to replicate or outdo other participants in term of the quality of their response or commentary (Holt, 1995). This interplay can take place between friends and fans on a personal level, or amongst large groups of individuals around a stadium or intermediary place. For example, some fans may socialize by arguing with one another about a specific play, the value of a player, or even something outside the realm of the game such as where to find the best barbecue wings. Another instance may be the common tradition around college stadiums that involves different ends of venue competing to cheer the loudest, or some
cases where chants are partitioned out by seating sections. Consuming through socializing, then, covers the most personal models of communication like talking to a friend at the game about an upcoming weekend to more impersonal methods such as screaming at other fans across the playing surface.

As mentioned previously, this typology of consumption provides value for all classifications of fans from chapter three. However, I believe that the socialite stands to gain the most from this method. Let us recall that socialites attend games for a “night out” or a change of pace from the norm, much like going camping or taking a drive to the beach. The stadium and the game of sport in general becomes less of an invested sporting experience but valued more as a unique domain for social activity. Socialites will appreciate the aesthetics of the venue as a backdrop for their evening, will likely appreciate the gimmicky in-game entertainment and ballyhoo, and may even participate in the communal aspects of the crowd through cheering and chanting. However, the social fan’s primary concern is who they attend the game with, and whether or not the conditions around them are conducive to interacting. This typology of fandom wants to be entertained; although the game itself may be in the periphery of their consumptive attention, they will appreciate the interplay between the crowd and the events that may unfold. For instance, socialites will undoubtedly enjoy the roar of the crowd and the fireworks outside the ballpark when a home player hits a homerun, and will probably join in on “booing” the opposing team or an official, even if they don’t fully understand why they are doing so. Drawing a connection with both chapters four and five, consumption as play allows fans to encounter the Gadamerian notion of the interplay of stimuli in the world, and also the chiasmus of the game experience through the intertwining of
sensations and messages between fans and players. The key here is that they simply enjoy the interplay of the stimuli that makes up the milieu of the fan experience within the context of being able to socialize somewhere outside the norm.

Reaching the socialite from a marketing standpoint means paying attention to the aesthetics of logistical elements of the stadium, keeping in mind that socialites value access to the interplay that has been detailed in this section. Some contact points that markets must manage for this typology include the gimmickry and in-game entertainment, music selections, concourse spaces, availability of social areas such as bars and intimate seating, the public address announcer, the cuing of crowd involvement such as singing (like “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”) and ritual chanting (such as “This is our house” or “Here we go Steelers”), and even providing convenient places to charge cellular phones. Like the hedonic consumers of the appreciating typology, the best way to reach the socialite is to provide a variety of options and experiences that fit their preferences to comingle and engage in communal activity. Social fans and those who consume under the typology of play are certainly experiential based, placing on the value of the intangible elements of the stadium and the sport experience. The last typology, consuming as classification, is nearly the polar opposite of the play group. Those who consume through classification prefer “things” above all else and use them to make evidence of their fandom.

**Free Shirt Friday.** The title I have used for this section is fitting for the consuming through classification typology enjoys tangible goods that allow the marking of their fandom, presence at games, and those that display the depths and length of their affiliation with a team to others. As Holt explains, people consume with actions towards
objects in order to use them as a third-party mediator between themselves and others to communicate their identification with a team. The end result may be distinguishing oneself in a separate category of fan based on the items’ ability to provide evidence of the level of investment, length of time, or historical grounding that a fan has with a team (1995). Included in the items sought out by this typology may be: official game-worn apparel, commemorative items that mark specific events or moments in time, promotional giveaways that evidence one’s presence at a game, photos and videos of the crowd and gameplay, and personally obtained autographs from players. Each item in this list serves to show others that a fan maintains a close affiliation with the team, and may indicate that they have been a member of the fan base for a long period of time, have attending iconic games and witnessed great moments, or perhaps have been lucky enough to meet a player in person. Examples of displays of affiliation I have observed include older fans wearing jerseys from decades past or from championship eras, fans donning apparel covered with team autographs and personal messages, and jackets displaying commemorative pins from a lifetime of seasons, to name a few.

Through souvenirs, time markers like ticket stubs and commemorative giveaways, and even the more scarce items like foul balls and broken bats, the consumer who engages sport through classification acquires symbolic items that satisfy the need to document their involvement with a team. For this reason, this typology fits entirely with the collector fan typology detailed in chapter three. Surely most fans would appreciate a free T-shirt or a souvenir baseball, but it is the collector who views these items as actual extensions of their lived fandom. Collectors amass material goods to solidify their identity as a fan if not only for themselves, but also for those who come to contact them.
Other motivations for this behavior include buying items that have real or perceived future and present value, acquiring items meant to one day be passed along to children or family members, or seeking out souvenirs that relate directly to the preferences of the fan, such as a favorite player’s jersey or a game used piece of equipment.

Through my experiences as a fan, I have been guilty of crossing over into the collector typology at times, finding value in items that have some sort of personal meaning in commemorating my life as a fan. I have built quite a large collection of autographed memorabilia that litters the walls of my house, droves of game-used equipment from various sports, and promotional items that mark special events. When I reflect on my reasons for coveting material goods of this nature, I realize that I have done so not because I am only satisfied by acquisition but by the symbolic meaning attached to them. In this sense, I see myself as a hybridized version of someone who consumes through both the experience and classification typologies. My connection and appreciation for sport is so profound that I wish to obtain physical monikers of my time spent relishing in all the beauty that sport has to offer: the great moments, championship teams, times spent with loved ones and friends. The physical items that represent my fan experience provide me with joy not for their evidence of my fandom, but for the memories and feelings they invoke.

Given the description of my personal experience with merchandise and collectable items, it is possible that I have unfairly painted the collector typology into a corner of materialism without practical psychic justification. It is very likely that others engage in classification as a consumption mode in much the same way that I have. However, I will maintain that my experiences attending games confirms that many
people do indeed practice general acquisition as their mode of consumption in sport. After all, who needs an entire stack of duplicate programs or fifteen of the same bobblehead?

When it comes to consumption through classification, marketing teams should reach out to this typology of fandom by offering exactly what they want: stuff. Promotional giveaways in which free items marketed as rare and “one of a kind” items specific to dates and games are a surefire way for filling the seats. Other things to consider would be to merchandise plenty of memorabilia that is date and season specific, allowing for collectors to fulfill their need to mark history, as well as selling “limited edition” items such as plaques and commemorative articles. Additionally, I have seen a growing number of organizations establish and promote outfits within stadiums that use a third-party company to sell game used items such as jerseys, bats, hockey sticks, gloves, goalie pads, footballs, and even the bases from the baseball diamond. A variety of items with differing potential levels of meaning and significance will prove to be a profitable and easily established enterprise thanks to the collector typology.

In this section, I have used Holt’s (1995) typologies of fan consumption to clearly define the types of practices employed by individuals why consuming sport. In doing so, I have also related their patterns of consumerism back to the typologies of fandom I have created in order to augment Holt’s groupings with a more in-depth understanding as to why fans purchase, appreciate, and seek after the various experiential and physical offerings. With this information, I believe I have provided the basics for marketing professionals to reach different fan typologies and ultimately deliver value through managing the coinciding contact points with fans defined here as consumers. It is
apparent that fandom represents great opportunities for the business of sport to profit, yet there remains other considerations that need to be made regarding the changing landscape of the way we consume professional sports. The proliferation of media outlets and the rise of the technological age has brought forth new ways of contacting sport and has worked to create new demographics of sport consumers. In the next section, I will address the role that media has played in sport consumption and explain some of the new models through which fans consume sport.

**Game Changer: The Influence of Media on Sport Consumption**

The globalization of the mass media has drastically altered the world of sports. The overwhelming majority of the world’s sports fans follow their favorites through newspapers, radios, television, computers, and mobile phone screens. Sports journalism, which started in the eighteenth century, such as *The Sporting Magazine* of 1792, now offer countless specialized press releases of daily publications. A 1937 survey found that 11.4 percent of British newspapers were dedicated to sport coverage, a number that jumped to 46 percent by 1955 (Guttman, 2004). I employ this statistic to show that sport had begun its ascent in popularity in the media long ago, and in the modern era, continues to claim a significant portion of our press.

In the early stages of the expansion of the media influence in professional sports, owners of teams were terrified by the first television broadcasts, claiming that being able to loll before a screen in one’s own living room would pull bodies out of the seats and dollars out of their wallets. In some ways, this was the case, but only briefly during the post World War II era, for shortly after fans returned to the stadiums while the carousel of the sport media frenzy whirled at full speed. The rights to cover major sports created a
bidding war amongst major networks, making owners and sport organizations wealthier than ever before. In fact, in 1983 ABC and NBC shared the $1.2 billion dollar price tag for the right to cover major league baseball over a period of 6 years (Guttman, 2004).

Adding to the allure of the television broadcast was the advent of play-by-play narration and color analysts. As Boyle and Haynes explain, the addition of narration gave the televised games a sense of actuality and liveliness that drew upon multiple narratives and bolstered viewership from the speculative and conversational nature of their commentary, akin to a “gossip of a soap opera” (2009). Narrators gave viewers a more personal and intimate experience, almost as if they were talking directly to the fan sitting at home. In fact, commentators would often refer to viewers as “friends” and use verbiage that was intentionally informal and personal (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). This was only the beginning of the influence of media and the changes that were to come to sport in its wake.

Not only did media change the way we consume sport, it also had its own unique affects on the games themselves. Returning to Boyle and Haynes, they reveal that Australian rugby and basketball games were intentionally divided into quarters instead of halves to allow for more commercial time. The NBA and NFL have special “television time-outs” for the same reasons and in 1998, the NFL agreed to a quota increase of twenty commercials per game (a number that has only grown since then) (2009). To support the idea that sports changed for the sake of commercialized interest, television executive William MacPhail quotes, “A man just waves his hand at the referee when we need a commercial. Nobody cares.” (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). Even the rules of the game changed, evidenced by the NBA instituting the 24 second clock rules in 1954 and the 3-
point line in 1982 to make the game more exciting and “TV friendly.” More of the same was done in the early 2000’s in the NHL, as referees were asked to cut down on impediments of play such as hooking and holding and goalie equipment was required by league rules to be smaller; both changes made in an effort to increase scoring and therefore viewership. The changes went even further beyond gameplay and rule changes to actual player performances, as Muhammad Ali’s fights against greatly inferior opponents were designed to last longer than necessary to ensure that all paid advertisement deals made in advance of the fight would be aired and honored (Boyle & Haynes, 2009).

Not only did the commercialization of sport bring about media influence that would change the rules, timing, and events of a game, it also fundamentally changed the ways people consumer sport and ushered forth a new era of spectatorship.

According to Boyle and Haynes, the involvement of media has divided sport consumers into two sectors, one of traditionalists and the other of modernizers (2009). Traditionalists are largely what the previous section sought to examine: those who translate to the bottom line from filling the seats of stadia and contacting the game experience through a variety of offerings and outlets. Their contact with the team is often meaningful, direct, and at times symbolic of their investment in the team. The modernizers are said to encompass the newly developed realm of consumers that make up the business and commercial community that engages in sport through more detached, mediated methods and do not guarantee particularly meaningful exchanges or a high level of investment in teams. Boyle and Haynes go on to explain that perhaps the most basic way to divide the two would be to describe those who are active participants through
attending games, and those who are passive in participation by watching on television or through some other mediated method (2009).

Having traced a brief history of sport media and its commercializing impact on professional sporting events, I will now discuss these “other forms” of media that have come to prominence in the digital age of fandom. As perhaps the most indicative sample of media influence on sport consumption existing today, I will use Fantasy Football (and fantasy sport in general) as a lens from which to view the phenomenon of mediated consumerism. Upon conclusion, this chapter will end with a review of some of the communicative effects consumerism has had on sport, both of the problematic and beneficial nature.

**Mobile Phone Managers: The Empire of Fantasy Football**

This section is dedicated to the most prominent and profitable consequence of the new forms of sports media. Initially created by journalists in the 1960s as a diversion, fantasy sports, ranging from football to fishing claimed a quiet subculture of fandom for decades until the streamlining and instantaneous feedback that came with the Internet (Oates, 2014). In the early days of fantasy sports, someone would need to volunteer to keep score through analogue methods, arduously sifting through newspapers to calculate statistics and render final scores based on pre-approved metrics of player performance in real games. If games ended on Sunday, fantasy players were lucky to hear the results by the following weekend! Since the mid 90’s, the internet-based versions of fantasy sports have claimed billions of players worldwide and are generating even more billions in yearly revenue. Fantasy sports have become the premier consumption model for traditionalists and modernizers alike. Using Thomas P. Oates’s (2014) book *The NFL and*
his idea of vicarious management, I will look to reveal the true motivation for the
booming fantasy industry from fans’ perspectives by focusing on fantasy football.
Additionally, I will spend some time relating the mimetic, purist, and parasocial
typologies to the reasons why fans engage in fantasy sports.

Sport fandom has been transformed in a number of ways through the
implementation of media networks as well as the burgeoning of mobile technology and
Internet access. One of the reasons for the sweeping changes of how we consume sport,
says Thomas Oates, is the commodification of athletes through fantasy sports. Oates
claims that athletes are now presented as consumable items (through fantasy sports and
video games), able to be selectively and self-consciously chosen by sports fans through a
process he calls vicarious management (2014). Vicarious management invites audiences
to identify with the institutional regimes of the NFL rather than with the athletes, a mode
of fandom located in new media applications where athletes are framed as property with
value, but ultimately disposable. Oates explains that fantasy football, allowing fans to
“draft” teams to compete and simply “add and drop” them when they are no longer of use
imitates the management practices of general managers and executives while both
designating athletes as objects and also fulfilling esteem motives for the user (2014).

In addition to providing entertainment for the fantasy player, the fantasy industry
has made a fortune through its partnership with the NFL and other firms looking to join
the bandwagon. For years prior to the adoption of fantasy football, the NFL resisted the
idea claiming that it was a form of gambling and therefore unethical for a league that is
against it. As Oates explains, by the 2000’s, the NFL could not help but recognize the
incredible marketing potential and revenues to be made from something so immersive
that reaches more fans than the NFL owners could have ever imagined. Of course, they were correct. Now, fantasy players watch the NFL two or more hours longer than the typical viewer (2014). This has led to cross-marketing opportunities, gigantic advertising revenue, and partnership with all sorts of companies. It is clear that incorporating fantasy football was a prudent business decision and that fantasy sports are unbelievably popular, but why? Oates’s notion of vicarious management may hold the answer.

The allure of fantasy football begins the self-esteem boost it can offer, where your decisions for drafting and managing rosters result in wins and losses against opposing teams managed by friends, co-workers, etc., producing measureable results for fantasy managers. Given that many leagues employ a budget for waiver pick-ups (the ability to remove and add players to your team after the draft is complete) the monetary limit for acquisitions simulates a salary cap and the business side of managing a football team (Oates, 2014). By vicariously managing fantasy teams, fans are able to play out their actual fantasies of operating a professional sport franchise. In turn, winning at fantasy can simulate winning in life, and therefore result in psychic income, boost self-esteem, and of course, provide entertainment by making the games more interesting to watch due to the personal stake in players’ performance.

At the root of vicarious management is the ability to simulate having close ties with real players, despite the fact that they are commoditized and relegated to objects. Also, it allows for fans to create and operate their own teams, which instills a sense of purpose and strong connection to the sport in their minds. Lastly, I believe fantasy sports are an outlet for those that are extremely analytical and statistically driven, having a strong appreciation for their ability to predict player performance and select players
accordingly. For these reasons, it is clear that fantasy football has strong parallels with the basic motivations for fandom with mimetic, purist, and parasocial fans.

Mimetic fans appreciate fantasy sports for the opportunity to simulate the role of coach and manager. Returning to chapter three, mimetic fans thrive on the representation of the games they love, incorporating the motility of players into their own in an attempt to excel in amateur athletic pursuits. However, I believe we should reimagine this typology slightly to include those who desire to mimic the intellectual side of the team experience, to become the general manager and run things how they see fit. Fans may idolize the prudent moves and excellent negotiation skills of team management groups and may wish to emulate what they learn from their actions with their own teams.

Purists, being driven to consume sport in order to evaluate players, understand the history of the game, and make calculated judgments about player potential and relative abilities also find a home with fantasy. The obvious connection here is that fantasy football involves an analytical approach to successfully draft, budget, and maintain a team. Even the strategy of the draft comes into play for the purist, who will look to maximize their team based on their draft position and the relative values they place on players based on their real-life experience of having watched them. Fantasy sports, then, link the fantasy realm with reality for the purist, allowing them to actualize what they have learned through observance of the game on their own terms.

Parasocial fans will engage fantasy sports as yet another intimate contact point with the players they idolize, as well as the sport they love. However, as I will discuss at the conclusion of this chapter, their strong team loyalty may prove fantasy sports to be a problematic activity. Regardless of their team loyalty, the parasocial fan as a deeply
integrated member of fan culture will want to participate in fantasy sports for the sake of opening the doors to the dialogues, social events, and the like that come from communing in a fantasy league.

All of this is to say that fantasy sports are not only entertaining and profitable, but their popularity may be based in large part to the social, psychic, and personal desires that they fulfill. Through vicarious management, fans consume sport by engaging in imitation. The self-esteem motives, simulation opportunities, and communal bonding that fantasy football offers make it such a powerful empire. As entertaining and fulfilling fantasy sports may be, they do make for some interesting communicative problems for fandom.

Returning to Boyle and Haynes’s division between traditionalist and modernized fans, I will explain how fantasy sports can cause a great divide between the two.

**The Logo, Not the Name on the Jersey.** My title represents one of the most cliché yet valuable adages in all of sport; the idea that the team comes first and players are responsible for playing for its sake and its sake only. This is something coaches say on a routine basis, players allude to in interviews to deflect or transfer personal responsibility, and even the reason why some teams forbid names to be stitched on the back of their jerseys. Part of the ethic of the sporting world is to sacrifice for the greater whole, and always think of the team before self-interest. Played out in professional sports, this philosophy is as important to the fan as it is to the players. But what about fantasy sports? What affect does an activity based on drafting players from multiple teams have on subjective fandom?

As I alluded to previously regarding the parasocial fan, those who have strong ties with a sport team may be faced with communicative tension when dealing with a fantasy
roster. Fantasy players have a vested interest in the success of their team (some to the point of near hysteria), yet also may maintain deep bonds with a real team. Purists are largely immune to this issue, seeing as they categorically stay away from team identification and only care about performance of individual players, but what about the parasocial, mimetic, and to a lesser degree the casual fans? When their fantasy player is matched up against the hometown team in reality, a small crisis can occur. The same goes for when the star players from the local favorite play against a fantasy player as a member of the opposing fantasy team. Should one root for the fantasy player or the real ones?

This tension is becoming increasingly prevalent amongst fan bases as the emotional investment in fantasy sports continues to rise. Shockingly, my experience has been that fantasy players will often root for their players, even when it would negatively impact the team they have loved and followed all their lives! Others will say, “I hope player x scores a ton of points against team y (the local team), as long as team y still wins.” In both cases, fandom is shown to have tenuous ties with individuals when their own self-interests are put in play. One of the many reasons I believe sport is so beautiful is the fact that we cheer for teams for no other reason other than because we are connected with them on emotional, physical, and even spiritual levels. When the team wins a championship, we don’t get a ring or a paycheck, but instead the simple satisfaction that our beloved team is now the best. Yet, throw in some self-esteem and put a little of our personal finances on the line, and in an instant we may turn our back on the team that fulfills so many desires for entertainment and purpose in our lives.
I believe that this is evidence of the basic narcissistic nature of human beings. When we are confronted with anything that carries personal value or potential impact on our self-esteem, we will turn away from our favorite teams. From a communicative standpoint, this poses difficulty. How do we then identify and define our fandom, and how can we explain it to others? This is where the traditional and modern fans find a great divide. Traditional fans maintain intimate associations with teams and gain the most pleasure from vicarious victory, pride, and affiliation. It is not unreasonable to believe that many traditional fans are of older generations and have long-established contact with the teams they support and are perhaps not technologically savvy or interested enough in technology to participate in fantasy ownership. Still others may hold the success of the team in such high regard that even when faced with a fantasy dilemma, will ultimately side with their real team. I for one fit this typology as someone who both plays fantasy football and loves my hometown Steelers. For this reason, I have adopted the method of refusing to start any of my fantasy players against the Steelers should they be set to play them, regardless of how favorable a matchup I may be foregoing.

For many modernized fans, the roots with a team in real life may be a little more shallow. A variety of elements can play into this being the case, including but not limited to less time spent with the team (both due to age and attendance at games) and weaker affiliation based on family ties and history. More prominently, I believe the issue may be that most fantasy players fall into younger demographics that have grown up with mobile technology and have contacted sport through a more distanced and detached position because of the over mediation of sport. Being able to not only watch games in high definition at home but instantly accessing replays, highlight, game information, statistics,
journal articles, sport websites, and the more at the click of a button has inundated younger generations with sport to the point of extreme commodification. For this reason, some people may not feel as much of a subjective attachment with sport teams, for their entire lives have been about instant gratification, mediated communications, and individualist motivations.

Strangely enough, the proliferation of fantasy sports has actually increased game attendance despite its possible creation of detached fandom. As Boyle and Haynes explain, mobile phones and other forms of technology become the main contact point between new modernized fans and sport, reaching out to masses of people and teaching them about the contemporary patterns of modern football (2009). Through the use of technology and partaking in fantasy leagues, enough basic interest is being generated that is making more people than ever attend NFL games. From a communicative standpoint, I find this to be a true phenomenon. Reason being, in an age that is defined by technological advances and distancing social dynamics, the pervasive nature of technology has had profoundly destructive consequences on the ways we communicate. Works like Closer Together, Further Apart by Weiss (1969) and Schneider and Sherry Turkle’s Alone Together serve to accurately account for the ways that digital age communication has impaired the ways we engage in interpersonal communication, interact in groups, and conduct our lifestyles. Kids are playing less outside and more video games indoors, people prefer the asynchronous method of text to calls or face-to-face interaction, and family dinners are either non-existent or riddled with screens. Yet, with the connection between technology and fantasy sports bringing about increased interest and attendance in sport, we see yet another way in which sport has the magical
ability to stand the test of time and continue to draw people into groups and public spaces.

This is but one of the many communicative consequences of sport, and in this section we have focused only on fantasy sports and its implications. This project has covered a wide range of ways in which fans contact, appreciate, consume, and integrate sport in their own lives. Much of what has been discussed involves the way we use sport to interact with others. In the example here and through several others, we see how sport unifies, makes available the conditions under which to commune and socialize with others, and ultimately provides us with subjective and intersubjective experiences that help to form our own sense of self, make sense of the world, and derive meaning in our lives. Undoubtedly, sport is a rich field of study full of applications to our existence as human beings and how we come to understand our place in the world through participation in fandom. Part of what fandom promotes is coming into contact with others, and therefore, opening lines for dialogue and new ways of seeing opportunities for discourse.

In the final chapter, I wish to make conclusions as to how everything discussed to this point is blended into a framework that promote civilized and constructive ways of approaching and conducting discourse. I will look into three main areas for evidence of the value of fandom for the field of communication: the right to privileged discourse achieved through dedicated participation in fandom, the spirit of debate that emerges from learned ethics of play, and the ability to understand and respect the referent point of bias when engaging others to build a constructive hermeneutic approach to communication ethic.
Chapter 8: Conclusions: Opening Dialogues through Sport

This final chapter will take everything already discussed into consideration and attempt to make a lasting contribution to the study of communication by revealing how sports give rise to discourse. This section will focus on the role of the spectator as a part of an intelligent mass that engages in open discussion about the game while observing. Utilizing Gadamer’s (1975) “fusion of horizons” I will look to demonstrate how fans, through the coalescence of tradition, experience, and meaning, are able to recognize difference in a constructive hermeneutic approach to communication ethics. The goal is to show how participation as a spectator affords the fan the necessary credentials to engage in rational argumentation about the game, players, ideas, etc. with others who, through their own experience, have also acquired the same qualifications. My argument here is that Gadamer was correct in claiming that genuine understanding can only be achieved through recognizing prejudice, attending to history, and realizing that one cannot remove themselves from the past for it constantly informs the present. When fans can recognize their bias on their own team, players, or fellow spectators that has been informed by multiple nuances through their personal history with the team, they can then make rational arguments for their position when engaged with others. My closing thought in this chapter and in my project is that we could use this information to make inroads to public discourse outside of the realm of sport if we were able to use Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach to gain understanding of our own self and the world we live in.

I begin this chapter with a brief explanation of privileged discourse and the idea that participation in sport through fandom is requisite to open lines of communication and unlock the potential for dialogue through sport. Before conversations can take place,
debates can be waged, and biases can be recognized, one must be an active participant in
sport to gain the necessary knowledge that is needed to engage others in communication.

**Paying Dues: The Right to Group Discourse**

In order to lay the groundwork for a discussion regarding the availability of
dialogue through sport, I would like to quote Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood at
length via an excerpt from the book, *World of Goods* as the motivations of a loyal fan are
examined:

He (the fan) knows the famous victories, infamous losses, and draws: he loves to
talk about historic games, good referees, vast crowds, inspiring captains, good
years and bad, the present and the old days. Inside him are grades of passionate
judgment. Another enthusiast need only utter two words to betray the vast amount
of sharing that is possible for them both. These joys of sharing names are the
rewards of a long investment of time and attention and also of cash. (1979)

Such an observation of the true nature of fandom is vital to understanding the
pretenses in which fans must enter conversation. When one buys a season ticket package
or a single game ticket, they are afforded passage into a realm of experience rich with
interpretative value and laden with meaningful experiences. Through attending games,
fans actively participate in all that sport has to offer and will be able to gain the required
framework of understanding of the game and all of its nuances that will allow future
dialogue to take place. Going back to Douglas and Isherwood, their passage highlight the
importance that experiential knowledge has for unlocking the potential for exchange
between fans. As I will expound upon shortly, one must enter conversations armed with
the appropriate level of topical knowledge that will allow meaningful dialogue to take
place. This is true not only for sport, but for any spectrum of engagement between people. As the passage confirms, “another enthusiast need only utter two words to betray the vast amount of haring that is possible for both.” This statement alludes to the condition of dialogue in that when it is initiated under false pretenses, meaning one party has not earned the right to speak through the acquisition of knowledge and experience, dialogue will break down. Therefore, the cost of a ticket is not only a price paid to be entertained, it the investment made to belong to the experience itself and assimilate into a specific culture, witness unique phenomena, and gain a conceptual framework for how the world exists in this dimension.

Referring to fans of literacy by being applied here to fandom of sport, Storey explains the characteristics of discourse in fan culture as such:

Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts (experiences) are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers (fans) speculate about the nature of the mass media (the sport) and their relationship to it. (2010)

Storey (2010) speaks to the spirit of debate that defines fan discourse and its integral role in making sense of sport. From here, we activate the “I was there when” and the “I know this because” notions of our ability to make valid arguments for sport. Without these elements of experience, one will not be able to faithfully partake in communication on the subject with other.

The price paid in this case includes the right and privilege to speak of the event, to be engrossed in conversation with another that exudes an unrelenting pride and honor.
that come from belonging to a historical moment. Here is where sports fans, loyal and perhaps fanatical sports fans, find their eternity. One’s attendance at a game marks their place in a particular historical moment. In effect, those that attend an event and engage in the aura attached to it are co-producers of the experience. Interdependent fans value such conversation that Yang, Mao, and Perrachio call “”perspective taking” in which they seek understanding of the game experience through others’ viewpoints and respond to others’ needs and expectations (2012). Utility is essentially infinite in this circumstance and can be continually enjoyed throughout the entire life of the fan. In order to engage in such perspective taking, one must have taken the necessary steps in attendance, conversational accuracy, and emotional attentiveness to be allowed to speak. Those who try to address a pivotal game from an outside perspective such as having viewed the event on television will be quickly dismissed and all their opinions or emotional appeals based on the experience will be worthless to those that attended the event. Regarding the idea of paying for the right to engage in discourse, Baron and Isherwood go on to say:

The actual physical outlay that makes new names flow into the collection can be called “proving.” The proof of a pudding is in the eating. If no one ever ate the food or saw the football match, there would be no way of judging one opinion truer than the other. Physical consumption allows proving, testing, or demonstrating that the experience in question is feasible. But the anthropological argument insists that by far the greater part of utility is yielded not at proving but in sharing names that have been learned and graded. (1979)

Underwood, Bond, and Baer echo this sentiment of utility by explaining that lived experiences build a sense of association between fans that contributes directly to equity
As touched upon in chapter six, such associations quickly take root with the team itself, the players, and perhaps even the physical venue. The right to discourse amongst a loyal group of followers becomes an integral part of the member’s life. People may become laden with a sense of responsibility to correctly articulate and understand the minute nuances of the game which drives them to ritually engage in outside activities such as reading material about the upcoming game, checking on the health of injured players, or perhaps reviewing historical statistical data related to upcoming matchups (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Such preparation ensures that the fan is well-informed oracle of the experience that can impart his or her knowledge on others and continue to foster the sense of pride and accomplishment in belonging. When our understanding of that of which we speak is experientially, psychologically, and even physically grounded (such as embodied understandings like that of mimetic fans) ideal forms of discourse can unfold.

Attendance over time leads to earning one’s right to contribute to fan discourse. What makes sport discourse so valuable is its ability to foster spirited debated conducted under respectful and playful circumstances. The ethic of play that influences sport seems to reach beyond the playing surface and into the stands, providing a framework of mutual respect that leads to opportunities for discourse to emerge. The next section will review this ethic of play and how it guides conversations amongst fans.

**Sport and Ethic of Play in Dialogue**

Sport has a unique model of governance built into its fabric through the use of rules, officiating, and administrative boards that oversee the ethics of play. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, sports tend to acquire a rich history of social norms that emerge over time for both player and fan. Such “unspoken” rules or professional
courtesies are not enforced by any formal law or governing body but are instead upheld by play itself. There are countless examples of the organic creation of an ethic of play throughout major sports: wishing an opponent well before and after a fight in a hockey game to assure that no bad intentions should be felt, engaging in a bench-clearing brawl in baseball but showing enough restraint to avoid throwing a punch and risking a fellow player’s livelihood, reducing the contact and force of thrust amongst linemen in the latter stages of a lopsided football game, or perhaps allowing a fellow golfer to put first because he or she is furthest from the hole. All of these are examples of idiosyncrasies of the game that are seemingly put in place as rules, but only carried out through the good sportsmanship and ethical fortitude of the participants. Oftentimes, codes of conduct in sports run contrary to the spirit of competition. Is it not the point of sport to dominate the other, show little mercy, and ultimately exhort the power of the superior over the weaker being? The answer may be more complicated than one might imagine. Indeed the spirit of competition holds that there must be winners and losers, and that the winner has every right to showcase their cultivated excellence over the other. However, lines are drawn in the sand that facilitate an ethical code of play that upholds common courtesy as seen fit by the fraternity of the sport itself, and therefore avoid harm from excessive (of deficient) displays of force or maintains a level of humanity for the participants.

Paul Weiss (1969) asks us to imagine a boxing match in which traditional combatants aim to strike each other above the waist, waiting for opportunities to deliver a blow to the head as the best route to victory. In this scenario, there is always an opportunity for intentional acts that, within the confines of a competitive environment that supports winning at any cause, to be executed; but they are not. For example, a faster
avenue to victory would be striking the opponent in the groin, therefore incapacitating him into a vulnerable position where the knockout punch could be easily administered. However, this type of action is rarely ever seen in professional boxing as it steps outside the code of ethics for the athletes involved. Jumping back to chapter four, this aligns with Gadamer’s ideas of the governing rules of play that are imposed to uphold the integrity of the act of play itself. On a basic level, play relies on tradition and rules to exits. The boxer does not strike his opponent outside an acceptable range because as a player lost in play, he must avoiding acting in a manner that halts the availability of play. From a young age, the boxer or any type for athlete, is endowed with a fundamental knowledge of how to respect and protect the form of play in which they become involved. As Weiss goes on to explain, athletes are trained and raised in contexts of discipline and self-control that range from their workout regimens to the advice and direction of coaches. Coupled with their personal indoctrination into the sport, the rules and regulations of their leagues and organizations further explicate the modes of proper conduct and fair play. Over time, this blends into a form of consciousness, a background of the athlete’s mind that defines such acts as not only illegal or frowned upon, but quite literally unthinkable (1969). At no point in the match does the boxer even consider the option of striking the groin, and the latent but not explicit assumption of the boxer is that the other party, as a member of the same fraternity or sport, will also abide by the same ethic.

This is a truly interesting and enchanting part of sports, the idea that each party will do their best to prevail, but some degree of civility will remain. Surely there are exceptions to the ethic of play and now and then certain players step outside the norms of
the game and commit egregious acts of violence towards others. In most cases, such individuals are properly reprimanded in some fashion by either their team or league and justice is served on behalf of the victim. We cannot ignore the natural flaws of human nature in speaking about an ethic of play and need to come to terms with the fact that all ethical codes are destined to be violated at times. However, the larger takeaway in this instance for the field of communication is to recognize this ethic of play as something undoubtedly honorable in the realm of sports, but also that it is emulated by fans. Giving credence to this concept, we can see how ethics of play in fan dialogue offers us a glimpse into an exciting opportunity for discourse, or at the very least provide some provocative parameters in which it can occur.

Drawing upon my personal experience as a visiting fan through this country, I can recollect countless interactions that I have had with fans of the most hated rival organizations that followed this same line of ethic. In numerous instances I found myself pitted against the most fanatic representatives of enemy fan bases that were called to begin a conversation simply because of the colors or logos on my jersey. Surely, anytime one ventures into a foreign city representing their team, they must be prepared for a certain degree of scrutiny from the opposing fans. It would be naïve and also dishonest to claim that all of the interactions I have had have been pleasant and constructive, just as players will occasionally violate ethical codes, so too will fans (especially under the influence of libations). However, the majority of my conversations proved to be passionate, intelligible, full of gumption, and overall enjoyable. I have come to realize that as a fan, especially a visiting fan, you and your team of choice follow a similar path in that you must weather a malicious environment in order to prevail.
As a fan, you are a representative of your team and must be ready to defend them through dialogue and argumentation. There is much to be said here regarding preparation: a loyal and devoted fan will have the most verbal arsenal, anecdotal evidence, and personal experience to successfully defend their point, casual fans that simply don the colors of a team are at an extreme disadvantage. Your preparation comes from your loyalty to the team and the game itself. Your acumen for the sport comes from your attention to it, whether it be from watching in person or on television, reading the sports news outlets frequently, participating in talk-radio, researching advanced stats and player bios, etc. There are countless ways to build a knowledge base of a sport or team and like anything else, it takes a great deal of time, sacrifice, and effort to become an expert. With each game you attend, every news article you read, each time you research the game or a player, you are building your own personal legacy with that team or sport and consequently you are culturing knowledge that will allow for the best argument against naysayers. In short, you are gaining the requisite standing to participate in privileged discourse as discussed at the start of this chapter.

The most neglected aspect of a fan’s knowledge is that of the opposition and their unique history, beliefs, and values. It is easy to be blinded by bias and fall into the trap of focusing solely on your team, fellow fans, and shared history. Arguing for your side requires an understanding of the opposition and being able to craft arguments based on extensive comprehension of all points of reference, recognizing the bias of others and understanding what constitutes their fortitude in their own beliefs. In numerous instances, I have found myself engrossed in conversations with both likeminded and opposing fans of all walks of life, all over the country, doing my best to defend the honor of my team or
convince the other party to see my point of view. Interestingly enough, such discussions are often very fulfilling and enjoyable, rarely crossing the line that would deem the dialogue as defamatory or aggressive. Speaking on behalf of the value of knowledge of the opposition, I have found that there is no quicker way to gain respect of the other than to demonstrate an appreciation for their point of view and recognize their reasons for adoring another team. It is human nature to be flattered when someone offers the opportunity to discuss one’s own beliefs, leading to a more civilized and constructive dialogue that rejects ignorance of the challenger’s bias but attends to it instead.

This is where I contend there is an ethic of play both on the field and in the bleachers. Just as the players engage in competition on the playing surface, so too do the on looking fans, and in both cases, there is a level of competition and a common goal for victory that is honored but not placed in front of human decency. I have enjoyed multiple interactions with opposing fans that were filled with statistics, “I remember whens,” mentions of past accolades and history, and even intangible elements of locality and fandom that all presented excellent arguments for which team is superior on and off the field (and consequently, which city is better). The majority of such encounters brought out heightened emotions, rapid speech, strong feelings of pride, shouting, and at times even crass language and genuine disdain for the other party. Nevertheless, the interactions observed an ethic of play that allowed the dialogue to become strong and competitive, but never to the point of violence, defamation, or an unwillingness to continue the conversation. Conversely, I have found that sport-driven dialogues will not likely end in agreement, but usually lead to compromise and mutual respect. No matter how heated a dialogue turned argument may become, in the end there is a consensus
between the combatants—both love the game, both cherish their respective teams, and both understand why that adoration fuels the passion of the other. Like the players on the field, the fans clash with dreams of victory in their minds, are willing to give maximum effort to emerge victorious, but maintain an ethical standard of play that puts humanity first under the concern for the integrity of the game.

Using this understanding of ethic of play and applying it to the fan’s interaction offers insight into extremely rare conditions for opposing parties to engage in dialogue. What if we were able to harness this same passion underscored by mutual respect and apply its value to other areas of civil life? Just imagine if citizens of this country could engage in political debate with the same ethic as intelligible sports dialogue! Both parties would be well-schooled on the merits of their side, would have attended and participated in organizational meetings and debates, would have a sense of history and purpose for their beliefs, and ultimately would be able to present rational arguments for their opinions! Too often in the modern era we see political, religious, and moral discussions take a very revolting turn into aggression, dogmatism, and dehumanizing language. In many areas of public discourse, we simply do not have an appropriate ethic of play in place, or if we did, we may have lost it somewhere along the way. Additionally, unlike the knowledge of our beloved teams that we gain through concentrated efforts to learn the game and our players, perhaps society has a fundamental lack of knowledge on our own belief systems. Moreover, it is possible that average citizens also exhibit a basal deficiency in effort and desire to take part and learn within their own belief systems. Surely following a professional sports team and learning a sport is much more exciting and appealing than striving to learn the nuances of politics and society, but is lack of
attraction a fitting excuse for otherwise poor citizenship? Regardless of the reasons that cause us to engage in public forum with such malice and disregard for other perspectives, it would be a worthy and potentially world-changing project to attempt to move the ethic of sports discourse into national and global matters. The avid fan best equipped to argue on behalf of his or her team maintains a working knowledge of that team, but also of all other teams, and the game itself.

The hope for engaging in debate in the realm of sport or otherwise is to engage in a constructive hermeneutic. The goal should not be to use means of debate to deconstruct the arguments of the other and find ways to bring them down, but instead to appreciate and recognize the groundedness of the self and other, the inherent prejudice and bias for both parties, and engaging in working towards building up the middle-ground that allows for dialogue. We cannot proclaim that our way of thinking is superior and dogmatic in nature, for to do so is to stand above history and make claims that we are not able to justify. Instead, we attend to the historical moment and are grounded by it. Narratives understood as a story unique to each person in dialogue with the narratives of others opens respectful dialogue when fostered under the idea that all communicators embrace their own proposed narrative of dialogic civility (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Kant’s metaphor of “ought” can be applied here, in that we should attend to narratives as a means of learning from difference and moving away from notions of universal goods. Rorty (1979) agrees, saying that ethical communicators ought to attend to the historical moment, answering its call to keep the conversation going (Arnett, Arneson, & Bell, 2006). In the next section, I will address the ways to open dialogue through a constructive hermeneutic approach using a variety of sources that will help gain understanding in how
to properly deal with bias and individual narratives in order to find common ground. The goal is to return to Gadamer and his notion of the fusion of horizons as a practical metaphor for creating a constructive hermeneutic.

The Neutral Zone: Managing Perspectives through a Constructive Hermeneutic Approach

To begin a discussion on the unique prejudices and biases that inform the position from which all human beings engage in dialogue, it is important to understand what has given rise to the multiplicity of perspectival standpoints and how build a dialogic ethic.

As Lyotard explains in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, the postmodern era is one of petite narratives that form the temporal ground in an era that rejects ideologies for their inability to account for difference. Under this condition, Lyotard claims that multiple narratives provide theoretical grounding for an emerging communication ethic of dialogic ethics (1984). Dialogic ethics assumes an embedded communicative agent, recognizing that a human being lives within an ongoing conversation that began long ago. Understanding presupposes narrative, which gives birth to a given set of social practices, virtues, and understanding of the good that were carried forward through dialogue. This ethic acknowledges one’s own ground and learns from the position of the other to allow insight to emerge between persons, effectively changing the historical moment and revealing the good created through the exchange that then becomes new meaning (Lyotard, 1984). Echoes of Gadamer’s fusion are present here, and I will return to this idea later. A dialogic ethic is helpful, for as Alasdair MacIntyre explains, the problem with post-modernity is that there is no final word on what is universally ethical (1966). MacIntyre concludes:
No single set of moral ideas can penetrate our diverse society. Each person must choose with whom to be bound, and adopt the moral ends and rules of the social group. Otherwise, social grouping is impossible. One cannot look to human nature as a basis for ethical valuations because the various ethical perspectives all come pre-packaged with their own view of human nature. The discussion merely moves back a notch to “human nature” where again the impasse stands. Moral philosophy has a history, and knowing that history inoculates us from false absolutisms. (1966)

Back to Lyotard, negotiating competing social goods through a dialogic ethic I the communicative answer to an era in which there is no one single ethic or final word. Supporting Rorty, Lyotard holds that dialogic ethic begins with the presumption that we enter an ongoing human conversation that is never completed, and that new ideas emerge between persons of difference (1984). A dialogic approach to communication rests on the presupposition that several goods undergird and shape discourse, with each party in the exchange protecting and promoting a given good through communicative action (Arnett, Bell, & Fritz, 2010).

As is the case where fans of opposing teams seek out meaningful interactions through debate or discussion about their teams, there has to be a mutual willingness to engage understanding of diversity over the condemnation of difference. We must allow ourselves to be transported into the otherness of temporality and conviction, walking side by side with doubt, vulnerability, and the willingness to learn. Dialogic ethics, then, through this process of engaging difference and the learning that emerges proves that the ground we stand upon in our convictions is temporal and fragile (Lyotard, 1984). At the
root of difference is bias; the assumptions or tainted ground created by perspectives that need to be moved towards theories in order to avoid becoming ideologies that limit difference. Communication ethics offers an admission of bias that gives rise to particular understandings of the good protected by the other and calls us to own the bias, recognize it, and remember that there is no universal truth. Common sense is reimagined here not as a metanarrative, but as the recognition that we can have the same goods and follow similar narratives (Arnett, Bell, & Fritz, 2010). A Steeler fan’s experience in trying to comprehend the very idea of being a Browns fan when in conversation with one may indeed result in some type of claim that anyone with common sense would not support such an abysmal franchise. Yet, their fandom is grounded in unique narratives and ways of being in the world that are grounded differently, and therefore need to be respected as such with a recognition that the petite narratives of post-modernity have eradicated common sense as defined here. In this example, the two fans have hope in producing meaningful dialogue where communication is made for learning about the prejudices and bias of the self and other as the first principle of communication ethics, to look for a constructive hermeneutic instead of tearing down the other. Dialogue begins with bias, then moves to learning that cannot be demanded from the other but allowed to emerge through genuine dialogue between people who interact with openness to meeting difference (Arnett, Bell, & Fritz, 2010). Even when it may seem impossible to ever understanding why a particular person supports a specific team, player, or sport in general, the approach of dialogic ethics preserves some hope for an understanding to be reached. Ethical discourse, then, focuses on questions about the good life, either for the individual or the group. The kind of reasons that constitute cogent arguments in ethical
discourse depend on the life histories, traditions, and particular values of those whose good is at issue (Habermas, 1981).

Much of what has been said to this point revolves around the ability to meet people on their own terms and remain open to finding middle ground that can give rise to new learning. Even the most heated debates between likeminded and opposing fans can generate a new way of seeing the historical moment from what emerges. I can recall an encounter I had while attending a hockey game in Philadelphia. Clad in my Penguins jersey, I was felt as if I was essentially a beacon for harassment and provocation. True to my suspicions, before long a Flyers fan accosted me. The gentlemen seated next to me began the conversation with a variety of threats and insults, most of which I brushed off casually. Through the course of the game, the conversation morphed into less of a roast and more of a debate, moving from hockey into a general discussion about the superlatives of Pittsburgh in comparison to Philadelphia. As one is charged to do when bearing the insignia of the home club, I did my best to argue on behalf of my city and so did he. We both presented compelling arguments for the worth of each city, citing sport history, famous players, fan involvement, and even local cuisine and infrastructure. By the end of the game, what began as a potential fight ended with a friendly handshake, for we landed on some commonalities between the two cities as well as a recognition that we both live in the great state of Pennsylvania. Also included in our mutual understanding was the fact that we both love the game of hockey, and it was the best game on earth. Additionally, I could genuinely understand why he held the city of Philadelphia and the flyers fan based in such high regard and I believe he walked away with an appreciation for my position as well. What I have offered here is by no means a groundbreaking or life
changing encounter, but it is evidence of the process of owning a recognizing bias and allowing learning to come from points of difference, ending in new knowledge of each other’s position and perhaps a new way of looking at each other’s cities and fan bases.

I believe whatever small feat was accomplished that evening can be attributed to our ability to move from opposite sides of the metaphorical ground we stood upon and instead reposition ourselves to stand side by side in conversation.

This illustrates Paulo Freire’s walking metaphor that Arnett articulates by saying;

“Walking is an appropriate metaphor for a postmodern moment of confusion. We need to keep going, but not so fast that we move from one extreme to another extreme, exchanging roles of master and oppressed” (2002). Arnett’s quote provides an excellent image for how to go about building a constructive hermeneutic from difference. Our discussion began as oppression of the other, but through the practice of a dialogic ethic was able to be moved towards a “walking” that allowed each position to be recognized and attended to, resulting in emergent knowledge and a new way of understanding something. Returning to Freire, he claims that people liberate themselves from oppression in fellowship with each other, cultivating their own growth through situation in daily life that provide useful learning experiences (2000). I would like to think that my interaction with the Flyers fan was a mutual departure from oppression that ended up taking on the guise of a learning experience based on the comingling of our perspectives with respective recognition of and attention to perspectival bias.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer provides a recipe for human knowing of particular narrative and worldviews through a four step process: admission of bias, calling for the respect of one’s bias and that of the other, allowing the interplay of the two differing
image to shape the give direction through fusing horizons, and then realizing that the meeting of bias may have produced a new worldview with its own set of bias (1975). Recounting the discussions in this chapter to this point, I believe Gadamer’s framework fits the process of playing out a dialogic ethic perfectly. Going back to the second chapter, let us remember that Gadamer explains that bias is inevitable and impossible to eradicate—we all have prejudices that are carried into contention with others and the world. Our bias comes from a myriad of influences in our lives, pulling from the temporal, social, cultural, and familial domains (Risser, 1997). Realizing that we carry bias from a variety of sources leads us to realize that bias is subject to change; our worldview is constantly in flux. For this reason, the fusion of horizons makes sense for understanding how we come to create a worldview that takes our past into consideration with what is being presented in the present. Horizons are never complete for we continually come into contact with other horizons that inform ours, and then fuse to create yet another new horizon. The goal of this exchange is not to obliterate the horizons of others, nor to eliminate that of the past (Lawn & Keane, 2011). In this way, Fr21eire’s walking metaphor fits nicely with the idea that we are to move away from oppression of the other to celebrating difference to allow new knowledge to rise.

Understanding for Gadamer is achieved through the fusion of horizons that and is carried out through the use of language, and therefore is dialogic in nature. Whether one is reading a text or talking to another person, the dialogue that moves towards understanding is an oscillation between subjects, and interplay of questions and responses—between the temporal realms of past and present (Lawn, 2012). History is not a succession of fixed points but a continuous movement that carries us along with it.
Being able to recognize that our perception is forever moved forward and backward by history allows us to imagine that our biases are subject to change, and therefore can be open to influence from other horizons—that of the other (Simms, 2015)

As a code of communication ethic, Gadamer’s fusion attends to the truth-claims of the other situated in a horizon of historical meanings and allows the meshing of the horizon of the interpreter (Piper, 1998). Once horizons are fused, the new horizon that is created represents an new way of understanding for both parties, yet this process is never entirely complete. Knowledge is gained and we move closer to understanding, but there can be no absolute truth as this process starts anew each time we contact another horizon. The idea that no truths are absolute harken back to MacIntyre and Leotard and their conception of the post-modern era and the multiplicity of petite narratives that exist to make the metanarratives of ideologies impossible. With the recognition that there is no universal truth and the fact that Gadamer’s fusion attends to the bias and prejudice that is brought to the exchange in an effort to lead to new knowledge to be continually built on top of the place we stand, it is clear that Gadamer’s notion of fusion describes a constructive hermeneutic.

In summation of this section, sport fandom is a way that we come to commune and gain experiences that afford us the ability to participate in privileged discourse. Once we are able to enter conversation, we come bearing our own set of perspectival prejudice and biases (favorite teams, best players, greatest cities) and come to meet that of the other (both likeminded and opposing ideas). What we need to do then is establish an ethic of communication, in this case informed by the ethic of play in sport, and engage in a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding. This requires us to resist the urges
to engage in oppression of the other, which in the realm of sport that is defined by competition and struggle, doing so may prove a great task alone. However, if we are able to manage our impulses to dominate the other, our fan experience opens the door to exciting lines of communication. By engaging one another with mutual respect and recognition of bias, fans are able to change their own worldview by carrying out Gadamer’s fusion of horizons by recognizing that all truth is relevant and cannot be absolute. With this understanding, our personal and collective histories are merged together with our present purview of the world and ourselves to give rise to new ways of understanding, effectively creating new worldviews in the process.

Through sport, our participation in fandom has majestic capabilities for encouraging constructive hermeneutic approaches to take form. Few domains are met with the enthusiasm and lust for knowledge and contact with which fans come to meet sporting events. In fandom, dialogues are free flowing, liberated, and imbued with the mutual respect that is instilled by sport’s ethic of play. Returning to the questions I proposed earlier in this chapter, applying the same constructive hermeneutic approach of sport in our civic lives and political arenas would greatly impact the way we come to build consensus and learn from one another.

The Final Buzzer: Closing Remarks and Suggestions for Further Inquiry

The purpose of this project was to expose the phenomenological roots of fandom that underpin the motivations for participation in sport while revealing their value for phenomenological and communicative inquiry. Additionally, I sought out to give a renewed voice to Hans-Georg Gadamer and apply his theories of the fusion of horizons and the transmission of history to better understand how sport allows people to come
together with a sense of perpetuity; passing along the shared sense of history and collective meaning that defines a fan base. Lastly, one of my main motivations for engaging in this project was to reveal my own motivations for dedicating so much of my life to sport and attempt to conceptualize exactly what it is that draws so many to become fans. Through my work, I believe I have fulfilled the aforementioned goals as well as advanced the conversation in sport communication and philosophy with the contribution of my fandom typologies and corresponding applications to various modes of experience, consumption, and identification that exist between spectator and sport, between fan and player.

Through my eight chapters, I have placed sport and the fan experience as a rich field of academic inquiry through its nuanced connections to self identification, group cohesion, the notion of transmission through play, means to co-create experience, ability to give rise to dwelling and conceptual spaces, influence on our consumption, and finally open new avenues to dialogue. Nearly every component of the human experience and being in the world can find parallels to the circumstance of fandom and the intimate relationship that people share with players, teams, and sports in general. Sport truly is the great theater of modern society, for it is a dramatic portrayal of reality that commands our attention and invokes emotions in accordance with its ability to represent our needs for competition, desire for victory, and struggle for defeat over the mortal life.

The use of Gadamer’s work in this project has renewed a voice that has been unjustly neglected in understanding the human condition by using his idea of fusion to explicate how it is we come to understand our relationship to the world, to others, and to our own sense of being. By recognizing and honoring prejudice, human beings are able to
meet on subjective terms and blend horizons of experience to create new knowledge and foster the emergence of a common purview. For this reason, I believe I have unveiled the ability of fandom to build a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding through Gadamer’s fusion, as well as explain how a sense of communal history is able to persist through generations of fan bases. By blending past experiences with the current state of affairs afforded by the present with respect to the influences of our own unique worldview, there is hope for meaningful dialogue that respects the multiplicity of human experience and leads to mutual understanding. To recapitulate the value of such an approach to communication, one can only imagine how wonderful a place the world would be if civic engagement were to be entered with the same pomp and spirit of ethical competition that we find in the world of sport.

In closing, I would like to make a short list of suggestions for further study in the field of sport communications and phenomenology. For one, I believe there is great value in spending some more time with the aesthetic dimension of sport. Although falling outside the realm of this project, the use of Gadamer’s *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Late Essays* would offer an excellent entrance into understanding the aesthetic draw of sport that captivates and inspires awe in the mind of the fan. Such an exercise may further expose the seminal appeal of participation in a fan base and provide even more insight into the transcendent and existential value of sport spectatorship.

Additionally, I believe Gadamer’s notion of festival would provide a meaningful application to the communicative value of sport. Through examining sport with the Gadamerian idea of festival, one could illuminate the function of sport in society to define seasonality, mark history, create meaningful events that join people together (such
as a Super Bowl party), provide societal communion and peace (like a victory parade), and ultimately influence one’s behavior. I see another line of communication being unlocked through the ritualistic, predictable, and perpetual nature of sporting events, moving people to better understand their own conditions of temporality and devise ways to reframe the passage of time by partitioning it into meaningful events that call for communing and socializing.

It is my sincere hope that this project and others to follow are but the beginning of a long, fruitful future of academic attention to the realm of sport. Returning one last time to my Uncle’s sign, I reflect once more on the message, “The Fans, Not the Players” and realize that it is as poignant for describing the significance of fans in the maintenance of the sporting enterprise as it is for considering what makes fandom so precious. Players, although vital to the chiasmus of sport, come and go; they are forever fleeting in the greater framework of the timeless nature of sport. Fans, on the other hand, are forever. We may never gain the social status and enjoy the great fortunes of professional athletes, but we will never be traded to another team, see our careers come to an end, or fall out of favor with those that cherish us. Being a player is temporary and the youthful exuberance that defines sport imposes both unspoken and explicit limits on the time one can spend as a professional athlete. Fans never retire. For this reason, the lifelong commitment of fans to their sport, teams, and to likeminded others makes fandom an enduringly valuable mode of human experience for both ongoing study and as a way for human beings to access meaning and ward off finitude.
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