

## Close Encounters: Sport, Science, and Political Culture

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Recent changes in the character of sport, its reconfigured location in the economy, and its transformed physical presence seem to be drawing the attention of an increasing number of critical scholars. For example, in *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, Robert McChesney (1999) highlights sport's high profile and extended role in late-capitalist media expansion. In fact, McChesney contends that sport is "arguably the single most lucrative content area for the global media industry" (p. 95). Relatedly, John Hannigan (1998), author of *Fantasy City*, identifies tourism, sport, and entertainment as principal forces reshaping the new urban economy. No doubt, sport holds multiple positions in contemporary urban America's infinite growth projects. But, heightened visibility does not necessarily lead to greater academic insights or scholarly tolerance.

Indeed, the well-entrenched and popular stereotype of sport as anti-intellectual has been hard for academics to shake. To put it tersely, within a context in which respect is linked to content area, sport has been less than lucrative. Perhaps the reasons behind the skepticism about, even strong opposition to, the study of sport are familiar: the mind/body split, the related denigration of the physical, academic divisions of labor. But how do we explain the line drawn around sporting matters in a field that has otherwise successfully intervened in academe's prejudice against matters of the popular? While a cultural criticism of sport has been undertaken by scholars employed in spheres devoted to studying sport (for example, sport studies and sociology of sport), and despite converging interests, practitioners of a more mainstream cultural studies (by which I mean better known and more authoritative) have been reluctant to cross the sport studies' border. Certainly, cultural critics' routine avoidance of sporting topics needs be thought about in relation to the enormous anxieties surrounding sport.

Given the above, it is not surprising that Randy Martin and Toby Miller (1999), in their introduction to *SportCult*, suggest that "the interrogation of sport raises questions of how popular culture gets studied" (p. 9). What is unanticipated, even extraordinary, is their wager about the utility of sport-related scholarship. Martin and Miller claim that:

A close encounter with the bodies at play and at work in athletic contests promises to help us rethink not only the parameters of sport itself, but the very conception of the practical and the popular as they have been understood in cultural studies more broadly. (p. 1)

In translating sport's potential to intervene in cultural studies' conventional wisdom, Martin and Miller conceptualize sport, not as discrete, but as a proliferation of sites and a problematic that unsettles apparently neat divisions that govern ways of thinking. Sport, they argue, can connect that which have been routinely disconnected: social sciences and the humanities, eroticism and violence, justice and identity, value and recognition. They contend that sport troubles the active/passive spectator articulated in the society of the spectacle; that its complexity of movement complicates geopolitics (the coexistence and dispersion, reinforcing and challenging tendencies of the local, national, global, and the personal); and that sport's ceaseless remarkability questions what constitutes the quotidian (enlarging the field of cultural politics).

As it happens, Elspeth Probyn (2000) makes similar claims about comparable close encounters. Rather than advocating a model cultural studies, she, too, argues for the conceptually enabling aspects of sporting bodies. Confronting sporting bodies, for Probyn, potentially displaces the "taming" tendencies of the now conventional "disciplined or transgressive" divide governing body and sexuality studies. Hence, she implies that sporting bodies potentially intervene in the limiting construct of power guiding the twinned problematic. Like Martin and Miller, she views sporting bodies as a means to reopen connections, to resurrect the "promiscuous nature of the body as a sociological object."

To a great extent, Probyn's wager is motivated by the stigma of sport and more precisely its "insistence on the gritty, 'shameful' aspects of human activity" (p. 13). Building on recent scholarship that attends to the affect of shame/pride (e.g., Sally Munt, T. Scheff, and Eve Sedgwick), Probyn examines sport's implication in their everyday connections. She foregrounds the shame/embodiment relationship by addressing competition, one of sport's most public but neglected (in sociological accounts) dimensions:

If a touch of shame spurs on competitive drive, it may be that sport reaches parts of the body that analyses of embodiment have shied away from . . . Following the cue of several cultural theorists, it is clear that shame as a very bodily affect has the potential to focus attention on the body as a vehicle of connection. As a frequently shamed entity, the sporting body fundamentally connects with class and race matters in ways that may embarrass middle-class sensibilities. Sporting bodies also compete, and remind us of the visceral dynamics of pride, shame and bodily affect in ways that have been notably missing within much feminist and cultural analysis. (p. 14)

To illustrate, Probyn draws attention to the Gay Games, and, more specifically, their discursive constitution. Pride is the Games' primary interpretive

device; personal best and participation their featured values; while competition is seemingly displaced. In combination, Probyn argues, the categories promote an ontology of gay life that works hard to deny shame. Accordingly, the Gay Games' ethical and supportive infrastructure facilitates their normalizing function, commercialization, and the erasure of sexuality, politics, and questions about human rights. In so doing, the Games participate in the very configurations of power they seemingly oppose. This dynamic, Probyn argues, is not exclusive to the Gay Games but central to modern sport.

To extend her point, Probyn considers an interview with Sang Ye, a Chinese national athlete, that highlights, rather than ignores, competition and shame. He "names the unspeakable" by underscoring the consequences and shame of losing. Later he illuminates the burden of sport's moral ground, arguing that performance-enhancing drugs, in fact, can be a means of leveling the playing field. Probyn uses the testimonial to provide insight into a demonizing mechanism through which the West claims "fair play" as its most cherished ideal. By asking whether "the facts of competition and shame are the province of the other," she draws attention to the complex network of connections between the modern developments of nation, sex/gender, race in which the sporting body is embedded.

### Modern Sporting Bodies

Much of the cultural studies informed scholarship emanating from sport studies has addressed familiar themes associated with modern transformations: modern state formation, industrialization, urbanization, colonization, and stratification. For example, John Hargreaves (1987) examines the role of modern sport in cultivation of an English self and, in particular, shows how sport was used to legitimate social stratifications. Richard Gruneau and Hargreaves consider the relationship between nation, disciplinary activities like sport, social improvement, and workers' bodies. In their study on the formation of the nation-state in France, Jean Harvey and Robert Sparks trace the role of gymnastics and the making of the modern citizen. Harvey and Sparks contend that accounts of modern sport must address "fundamental questions about the political status of the body . . . the political ends the body serves and the political means used to secure those ends" (p. 164). Yet, it is precisely the complexity of the connections that shape the body, sport, and politics relation that is missing in the sport studies scholarship, and to which Martin & Miller and Probyn call attention.

In their conceptual efforts, Martin and Miller offer a deceptively simple observation about sport's position in drawing bodies together and sorting them out. Tracing the forces behind those collectivities and distinctions, the multiple relations of power invested in both, as well as their effects, is one of the epistemological demands of cultural studies of sport. As Probyn suggests, such a study entails examining the ethical ground attributed to sport and, by exten-

sion, the ethical ground attributed to nation and science. Indeed, it requires considering what is mobilized in the name of the sporting contract, which itself relies on and invokes an ontology and epistemology of the “human.”

Consider “the suspicion” incited by “remarkable performances,” the ostensible goal of high-performance sport. Such performances are not simply declared breakthroughs but typically facilitate our imaginations of what and who are responsible for, the origin of, the accomplishment (the hidden hand of drugs? science? the state?). Rather than provoking debates about the boundaries of the natural (e.g., self/other; free will/compulsive will; human/machine; man/woman), visualizing strategies (e.g., drug testing and sex testing) manage the natural and, by extension, sport’s idealized coding. While, comparatively, only a small number of people are directly subjected to biosport surveillance strategies, the scientific visual system exemplifies the everyday ways “we” are encouraged to “read” and position ourselves in relation to athletic bodies. Hence, sportsmanship, sport’s ethical ground, is an interpretive device inextricably linked to modern categories, scientization, and the biological. Rather than revealing that which already exists, science, biology, and sport shape, in very specific political contexts, whether athletic bodies are met with enthusiasm and pleasure, anxiety and horror, or some combination of these.

With these connections in mind, I discuss two events that bring into relief, albeit in different ways, the effects of the modern sporting optic – the invisible powers that regulate and shape bodies and identities in what we imagine to be the isolated spaces of sport. More specifically, I seek to show how sport is bound up with biological and political claims, claims about social justice and economic injustices, and the efficacy retained by the nation form, even in a moment dominated by the transnational. Underlying the discussion of these events is the claim that political theory and science and technology studies are important for cultural studies in general and cultural studies related to sport in particular.

### Close Encounters I: Defining Olympic Anatomies

In 1968, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) implemented a policy that required that all competitors seeking to compete as females pass a “sex test” before they could compete in the Olympic Games. Since then, the IOC has deployed various diagnostic technologies, ranging from external visual, probing gynecological to chromosomal-buccal smear and gene amplification, to determine an athlete’s femaleness. Although the criteria for passing have been modified, the IOC appears to have settled on a chromosomal definition of sex, and, by extension, for determining the authenticity of the performance. While common sense suggests that science simply documents sex and that sex testing would be simple and straightforward, a wide range of boundary creatures appear within sex testing narratives: drug-crafted athletes, steroid men/women, intersexed, trans-sexed, hypermuscular females, hypernormal females, innocent victims,

communist athletes, embryos and maternal bodies. Despite the overwhelming complexity and multiple knowledges mobilized through sex testing, academic criticisms of sex tests have repeatedly been concerned with whether or not the test should be continued. Curiously, the arguments for and against sex testing rely on and suggest the difficulty of thinking outside and historically situating the familiar terms that govern sport and sexual difference: biology and equality.

In an effort to make the sorts of connections imagined by Martin & Miller and Probyn, I side step the dominant for-or-against debates and, instead, concentrate on a specific visual domain through which Olympic sex testing (including the terms governing the tests) gains meaning: the Cold War of 1950s America. Introducing “America” as an analytic category intervenes in the almost complete erasure of national context in accounts of sex testing and, as I argue, illuminates the gendered production of the communist athlete as a means to manage American anxieties related to democracy.

### *America’s visual paradigm*

Even before the 1952 Olympics, Soviet sport was narrated in the US through apocalyptic language. America’s seemingly ambiguous response (couched in terms of discomfort, suspicion, and accusation) was, from the moment the Soviets announced their Olympic plans, in the final instance, one of outright rejection. Prominent media accounts, which underscored Soviet boasts of athletic prowess, regularly included semi-detailed reports of systematic Soviet violations of fair play, even falsified reports of final outcomes. Soviet claims were not simply dismissed as inauthentic, they were represented as symptomatic of the Soviet’s excessive competitiveness, deceptiveness, and disregard for rules through which they were advancing their expansionist strategy.

Questions generated in response to Soviet sport, inseparable from the threat of Soviet imperialism, were continually and thematically grounded in truth. Indeed, Richard B. Walsh (Office of General Manager of the International Information and Education Program) began his 1951 speech “The Soviet Athlete in International Competition” by declaring America’s widespread commitment to truth:

To meet and beat down these [Soviet] lies the US Government, assisted by private groups, has greatly stepped up its truth-telling programs. In the main, our efforts are meeting with success. Through press, radio, motion pictures, overseas information centers, and the exchange of persons, we are telling the truth on an unprecedented scale. We have done well as far as we have gone. (p. 1007)

America’s truth-claims rested on two beliefs: sportsmanship and all that entailed, and the complete opposition between Soviet and American characters. Echoing what would become national sentiment, Walsh concluded: “We can expect nothing finer than American sportsmanship, for sportsmanship is *democracy at work*.”

Between his opening and closing claims, Walsh systematically recounted examples of Soviets cheating, their use of sport for propaganda, and their desperation to win. Regardless of the final medal count, he assured his audience an American triumph because, "Sportsmanship is deeply rooted in our country's heritage." While naming sportsmanship as that which most mattered and a simple expression of America's avowed political commitments, he identified communism and sport as internally contradictory, guided by incommensurable logic and irreconcilable values. Curiously, Walsh never directly discussed the topic of his speech, the Soviet athlete, although he emphatically expressed the logic behind sportsmanship. The expression was symptomatic of sportsmanship's role as a technology of national fantasy: it linked embodiment and political culture, and conduct, physical performance, and moral superiority, yielding a being called the communist athlete. As a product of democracy at work, the communist athlete would play a crucial role in enchanting the imagination of America and the body of the American athlete.

*Democracy at work: the communist athlete*

In 1952, US newspapers and magazines, including *US News & World Report* and *Life*, offered accounts and images of Soviet athletes. The impetus, of course, was the literal (and figural) appearance of the Soviets at the Finnish Olympics, and the anticipation, generated by the earlier narratives, of visible transgressions. Under the headline, "Stalin's 'Iron Curtain' for Athletes," *US News & World Report* sketched the key characteristics informing the narratives of Soviet sport: isolation and secrecy, state-sanctioned interactions, violations of the amateur code, athlete political indoctrination, susceptibility to the pleasures offered by the Western way of life, and heavy scrutinization and regulation. Although sexual difference remains peripheral to the account, the photograph of discus thrower Nina Dumbadze, subtitled "A Russian specialty: Soviet Amazons," suggests its underlying centrality.

*Life* seemingly approaches the Soviet athlete from a different angle. The article's opening image (US athlete Jim Fuchs gazing admirably at Nina Dumbadze) suggests that even international politics are not powerful enough to overcome the natural order of things. While sexual difference renders visible a "common humanity," nature, humanity, and heterosexuality do not deny the state nor do they render the state invisible. Yet, American anxieties about the need to see difference are apparent as visual images repeatedly direct attention to and from sameness. *Life's* commentary similarly negotiates the complex tensions between sameness and difference as one, then the other, is asserted and erased.

Ultimately the Soviet system was depicted through twinned threats of hybridity and imitation. Photographs of Soviet athletes in which there are no visible signs of the Soviet state were narrated as state-sanctioned performances of the ideal body, translated into impersonations of the American body. In a word, American bodies were represented as registers of life itself, as the original site of

vibrancy and spontaneity. In the final instance, it is a photograph of Soviet track and field athlete, Tamara Press, cropped to accentuate her female musculature (in *Life's* words, her "tank-shape"), that underscores the sort of mutants the Soviet experiment, if not controlled, would continue to produce. As a sign of Soviet excesses, the image questions the body's integrity as it recalls the article's opening image (expressing America's anxieties about recognizing the natural and arguably the natural ground of heterosexuality). For at least the next 20 years, Tamara Press would be America's most prominent figure of communist femininity. That she never failed the test in fact (she quit competing prior to the sex testing requirement), only enhanced her position in America's fantasy.

*American pride: sexual difference*

In 1964, *Life* magazine prominently featured America's female athletes in a 10-page, celebratory photo-essay entitled "The Grace of Our Olympic Girls." The possessive pronoun positions sporting women as part of national culture and points to their bodies as signs of meanings and values entangled in community, nation, gender, and American identity. In short, the bodies are depicted as independent, autonomous, and free of constraints, devoid of mixed signifiers and boundary violations. Quintessential signifiers of masculinity, strength and muscle, are concealed through gesture, clothing, camera angle, distance, and setting. Individualism is asserted over a collective symmetry and proportion established through gestures and claims of gracefulness, pleasure, and effortlessness. A series of artistic poses, repeated fluid and rhythmic lines and forms, suggest that sameness, unity, and coherence are what matter. Arizona diver Barbara Talmage, who appears on the cover, signifies the angelic and the (suburban) girl next door.

Two years later *Life* ran an article, strikingly different in tone, explaining the need for the upcoming sex tests. Accusations of falsity, imitation, and hybridity seemingly replace the celebratory terms of the 1964 narrative. Asking if girl athletes were really girls, *Life* foregrounds tales of suspicion, imposters, and sex-change surgery. Accompanying photographs distort bodies (Russian athletes Tamara Press and her sister are two of the featured monstrosities) and offer before and after (sex reassignment) surgery images. Noticeably missing from this account is America's claim to these girls: these are *their* Olympic girls, those girls from whom American girls need protecting. Thus, like the 1964 article, these hybrid bodies are part of a national culture industry that accomplishes solidarity and national pride through historical specific regulatory ideals of gender.

In 1976, NBC would amplify the by then familiar threat by drawing a line from security measures put in place at the Montreal Olympics (as a result of the 1972 Munich massacre) to security measures around sex. In this account, sex security is quickly translated into an issue of national security: as the camera offers glimpses of the troubling bodies of others, the American audience meets two American suburban swimmers who express their gratitude for the fairness

ensured by the sex tests. This logic takes yet another form in a 1974 NBC news clip that focused on liberation, suburban girls, and track and field. In a narrative context that represents suburban lifestyle and the Women's Liberation Movement as mutually supportive, Tamara Press is introduced as the factor undermining suburban girls' desire to participate in track and field. While seemingly celebrating the liberation of girls' track and field, the narrative is complicated by race and heterosexuality, and the division between playful and serious athletics. African American teenagers are visualized as serious athletes (unaffected by Tamara Press) who continue their running careers, even after suburban girls outgrow their preheterosexual playful interests. In effect, then, this narrative shores up the ideals and future of America's community of suburbs.

Cold War America's sanctioned female athletic body fundamentally relied upon the communist athlete. The Soviet body, which served as a phantasmatic space on which anxieties, speculations, and fantasies were projected, ultimately served as a means to imagine the American body and operations of power in America. As Americans were invited to read the body that apparently violated sexual difference as un-American and undemocratic, they were also asked to imagine a nationally sanctioned femininity, entwined with suburbanization, through the nation's female athlete and that body's place in American democracy. As a sign of suburbanization, the female athletic body was traversed by a politics of place, the promises and desires linked to racially coded, gendered forms of work, consumption, and sexuality. That is, the body became a mechanism to shape identities and conduct through the ideology of the nuclear family, secure jobs, and home ownership. More insidiously, the body was embedded in and advanced an illusory innocence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. That is to say that while the US government directly (mortgages and tax breaks) and indirectly (federally funded water and sewage facilities) financed postwar suburbia, an illusory autonomy was managed through racially codified classifications for loan eligibility and what did and did not count as government support. It was also caught up in the multiple effects of the suburban trajectory invested whiteness and that equated the good life and quality of life to consumption and distance from the inner city.

Although it is difficult to imagine that the nationally sanctioned female athlete has much in common with America's response to the NBA (the following example), the broader cultural and economic mechanisms sustaining suburbanization were creating the conditions that would give rise to the national prominence of inner-city sport, particularly basketball, during the 1980s and 1990s.

### Close Encounters II: Urban Anatomies

America's reception of African American NBA stars during the 1980s was implicated in its collective fascination with "real life in urban America." The nation's literacy of urban life, acquired through scientific and government



reports, news reports, advertisements (including Nike's *Just do it* and Ronald Reagan's *Just say no* campaigns), and coming of age narratives, relied on the overarching themes of drugs, family, violence, crime, and sport. The genre, which gained particular authority when circulated in the name of particular NBA players, identified what and who were "urban problems" as it provided images of America as progressive, inclusive, and multicultural. Thus, the popularity of NBA images and real life in urban America were not expressions of an innocent cultural enthusiasm, but expressions of America's imagined innocence.

*America's sport/gang dyad*

The apparently distinct and distant categories of inner-city sport and gangs gained prominence during the 1980s. Particularly through America's so-called war on drugs, black urban masculinity was visualized through a fundamental dividing line that distinguished two individuals: the athlete (figured through the urban basketball player) and the criminal (figured through the gang member). In this dyad, sport was depicted simultaneously as: the site of conventional values, a practice leading to a healthy, productive life, that which distinguished the previous inner-city generation from that of the 1980s, and a practice that determined the inner city's access to America's utopic promises. The gang member's deviance was imagined through the breach of the work ethic, failed discipline, pathological greed, compulsion, and inexplicable violence. In the sport/gang narrative, gangs were depicted as what and who were responsible for declining sport participation in the inner city, and, by extension, the breakdown, disorder, and forms of violence dominating urban America.

Although not immediately apparent, the figures of sport and gangs were joined by a third factor intimately bound up with nation – the nuclear family. Sport and gangs, apparent channels for the corporeal predispositions of black youth, were the imagined substitutes for the so-called failed black family (figured through the mythic welfare mother and the absent inseminating black male). While the coach represented the sanctioned father-child relationship, sport was represented as indispensable to community production and well-being. The "failed black family" and the sport/gang dyad occupied the same symbolic space: both explained inner-city poverty and violence. Stated differently, both worked to displace the complex forces (unemployment and poverty related to post-industrialization and Reagan's defunding of social programs) shaping the lives of already vulnerable populations. Through the sport/gang dyad, material conditions and their consequences were reterritorialized (classified, visualized, and essentialized) through somatic identities. Somatic reterritorializations established the plausibility of an explanation that reduced participation in sport or gangs to an expression of truth-in-being and individual choice.

In sum, the sport/gang dyad served as a relatively uncontested frame of reference in public-service announcements and public policy concerned with urban youth, crime, and violence. Coded through the commonsense and scien-

tific epistemology of representation, the dyad governed and organized ways of looking, seeing, and recognizing urban problems – that is, it shaped what and who were and were not defined as the inner city’s problems as well as its solutions. Rather than identifying discrete, corporeal identities or the truth-in-being of urban youth, the dyad was an expression of the nation’s state of mind, an expression of America’s collective investment in these categories.

*Made in America: the prison industrial complex and Michael Jordan*

In this context, Len Bias’s death induced by cocaine intoxication was made to matter in the racist imaginary. An African American basketball star at the University of Maryland, Bias’s death, 48 hours after he was drafted by the Boston Celtics, was made into a pivotal event in Reagan’s war on drugs. That war, including harsh sentences for crack possession (100 times greater than that for powder cocaine), was justified through images of threat to law and order and atrocity tales. In a context dominated by racially coded images of gangs, drugs, violence, and inner-city decay, national calls for severe punishment appeared self-evident.

Provisions established through crime bills passed in 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1994 yielded what is now called the prison industrial complex, the substantial expansion of prison construction and prison populations. Although serious crimes actually declined during this period, at least one-third of African American males aged 18–34 who lived in a major area were under some sort of control by the criminal justice system – the result of racialized patterns of arrest, conviction, and sentencing associated with the drug war. Moreover, the declaration of war, the increasing demand for harsher punishment directed at younger offenders, suggests that what called for punishment was more complex than it appeared. Indeed, the sport/gang dyad helped manage the contradictions and anxieties created through America’s self-representation as a caring and compassionate nation and its increasing calls for harsher criminal punishment directed at black youth.

It was in the midst of America’s panic about urban crime that Michael Jordan was made into a national icon. Jordan was seen as an uplifting figure, a sign of excellence that extended beyond his basketball skills to his character. Surrounded by categories of authenticity, sincerity, generosity, and responsibility, Jordan was routinely glorified in terms that rendered him extraordinary and god-like. Indeed, he was made intelligible through the category of transcendence – a category that distanced him from the weight of history and marks a moral designation. Under the signs of transcendence and morality, apparently unrelated figures and spaces were brought together, coordinated, and unified – Nike (a transnational corporation) and America were given a face and a body. The Nike/Jordan hybrid was seen as an exemplary figure of America’s political order and the embodiment of the abstract concepts and promises invoked by America (rights, justice, freedom, and community)

Like Michael Jordan, Nike and its advertising campaigns appear distant from the harsher policing mentality dominating America. For example, PLAY (Participate in the Lives of America's Youth) is part of a promotional network through which Nike sought a patriotic, charitable, and socially responsible profile. Through PLAY, Nike called for national solidarity around children's rights to play and encouraged individuals and corporations to help provide safe, clean recreational opportunities for kids. Through publications like "A Revolutionary Manifesto: A Kid's Bill of Rights," the campaign invoked diverse national sentiments and the authority that is America. PLAY's most compelling and recognized image appeared in a television advertisement featuring Jordan. Against the familiar codes of urban America, Jordan asked Americans to imagine what and who would he be if there were no sports. Here, we have a positive image and a call to action: if we don't provide opportunities for kids, the next Michael Jordan may not appear.

*American pride and consumption*

The line drawn from childhood to sport to Michael Jordan narrates "belonging" and the making of America's ideal, productive citizen. PLAY builds on and articulates America's bourgeois fantasy of innocent childhood, the precious and sacred moral center of the nation, with America's past, present, and future. A sportless and playless landscape would represent the loss of childhood and hope, as well as the absence of democratic culture as we imagine it. In this sense, Nike is part of a national culture industry that seeks to fulfill the aims of national reproduction. In a period of high cynicism and in which people struggle everyday to fulfill the need to be part of something meaningful, projects like PLAY provide feelings and opportunities which suggest that "we" (members of an imagined community) can be, or are, part of something that makes a difference. Promotional discourse like PLAY offers faith in America, the American system, and the American way of life. In so doing, they stabilize the constantly threatened personal and national identities that rely on free will and responsibility.

Yet, and ironically, the PLAY narrative also suggests that not all children are visualized through the trope of innocence. That black youth exist outside the discourse of innocence is displayed by geography as certain kids are marked as sources of danger. While sport shores up America's fantasy of childhood fun and play for white middle-class youth, sport functions to regulate, discipline, and police already deviant bodies in urban areas. Childhood, for black urban youth, is represented as a compromised category, and sport, a moral and normative imperative. Without sport (the nationally sanctioned surrogate family), inner-city youths are at once at risk from peer pressure and the source of danger. Our attention is once again directed to crime, law and order, discipline, and their correlates: gangs, drugs, sport, and Nike.

While Nike and Jordan are narrated as caring, compassionate, charitable, and virtuous, and while both are implicated in liberal-humanist themes of "self-

made” and “made in America,” both are products of transnational capital and its reorganization of America’s urban economy. America’s founding categories, the authority that is America, forge a deceptive unity only through violence. While their meanings appear certain and while they operate as absolutes in what is presumed to be a universal language of democratic ideals, their contingencies can only be masked by wasting those who threaten to disturb them. Indeed, the sport/gang narrative animating PLAY imagines sovereign agents who make choices about their fate. The violences of their conditions (produced through late-capitalist dynamics and public policies driven by the mythic family) are displaced, as the incomprehensibility of their “crimes” mobilizes desire for revenge.

The reduction of the conditions of urban America during the 1980s to individual choice functions to stabilize America’s foundational categories (those categories and values that ground America’s identity but whose stability requires ignoring material conditions and forces). Moreover, the sport/gang dyad, its corresponding somatic territorializations, and the naturalness of the categories inscribe a racialized criminal and threatening masculinity that produce desires for policing, punishment, and revenge directed at African American inner-city youth. Although Jordan exemplifies late-modern America’s self-made man, he was “made in America,” implicated in the themes guiding American pride, alongside and within an explosion of popular images of African American youth as threatening and in need of policing.

### Sport Connections

Given the wide range of issues that follow sport, I have necessarily restricted my comments and examples in this chapter. I focused on two boundary figures, the communist athlete and the gang member, to illuminate the complex connections behind the pure athletic body. Although it seems otherwise, boundary creatures are regular products of sport, they suggest illicit acts and unethical creations; they are meant to disturb, to incite feelings of horror and condemnation.

Indeed, in her now classic essay, historian of science Donna Haraway explains, “[W]e are chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics.” To live as a cyborg is to live in a condition where purportedly pure categories are always “contaminated” by the other, in which we are creatures of natural artifice as well as creators of hybrids and monsters. The opposition between nature/artifice, the nonhuman/human, and the effort to maintain/create the purity of each, as Bruno Latour notes, tends to render the processes by which hybrids are produced unrepresentable and thus invisible. The dual yet opposed processes of hybridization and purification are the root of the awesome power and productivity of modern civilization. Both Haraway and Latour suggest the pursuit of pure bodies and categories tends to foster the irresponsible production of hybrids

and monsters by rendering invisible their processes of production. And they do so in particular contexts – bound up with official knowledges of power, politics, and citizenship.

Perhaps the search for pure bodies seems an archaic dream, a utopian desire that signals a time before late modernism, but their continued and repeated appearance in sporting narrative suggests otherwise. Indeed, we need only consider the recent formation of WADA (the World Anti-Doping Agency charged with coordinating drug-testing programs, standardizing scientific and technical procedures, and implementing sanctions against athletes charged with using illicit performance enhancing substances) to see the ongoing effects of the sporting optic. WADA is the new millennium's transnational effort to uphold the transcendent and universal qualities of sport, forged around a utopian investment in maintaining a worldwide level playing field. In the name of a clean sport war, WADA is celebrated as part of a discourse of the globalized citizen that erases the specificity of bodies in a transnational moment. Illuminating the networks behind WADA, the various multinationals attempting to corner this market, and its production of boundary creatures requires attending to relations that are allusive, overlapping, generative, and repressive; and the personal, local, national, and global. By attending to the complex array of connections advocated by Martin & Miller and Probyn, we do more than contextualize an object of study, we necessarily challenge the parameters of sport, and the conventional cultural studies wisdom of the practical and political.

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