

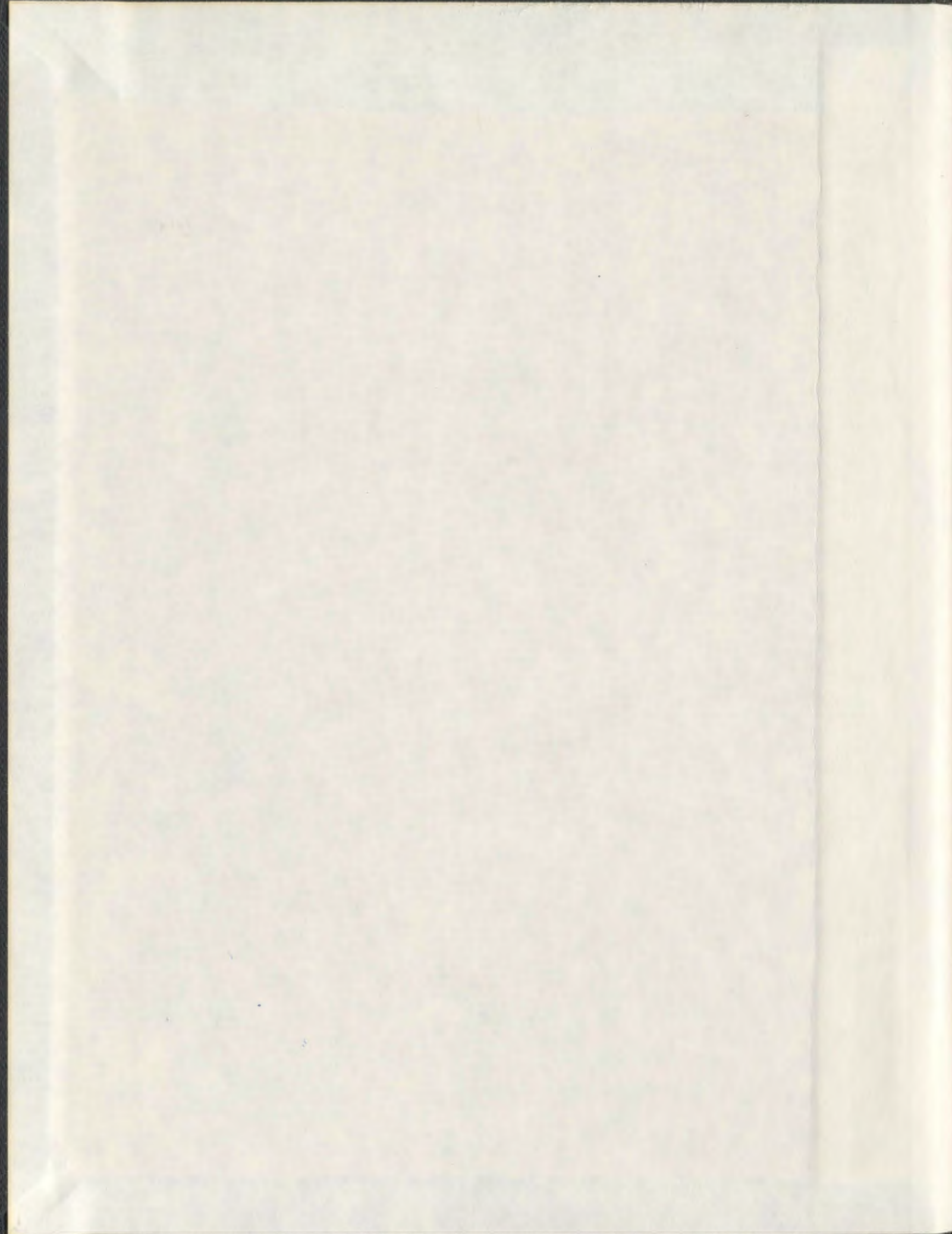
**POWER-PLAY: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE
"MEANINGFUL UNIVERSE" OF PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY**

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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MICHAEL A. ROBIDOUX



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**POWER-PLAY: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE
“MEANINGFUL UNIVERSE” OF PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY**

by

Michael A. Robidoux

A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Professional hockey is an industry teeming with paradox: it is a *game* that is *worked*; it involves *men* behaving as *boys*; and it is where professional development inhibits personal growth. This seven month ethnographic investigation of a professional hockey team enabled me to observe players in their working environment and the manner in which they express themselves in the labour process. The study illustrates that individual success depends on players devoting themselves entirely to the “game” and to their “team,” and thus, players voluntarily accede to a system whereby their own labour power is exploited for capitalist gain. It is evident that players are cognizant of their unfavourable predicament within the labour process—which is generally dismissed as being “part of the job”—but they respond accordingly by constructing their own system of meanings within the workplace, allowing them the sensations of power and dominance.

It is this system of meanings, or this “constructed universe” that is significant, as it serves to create and perpetuate both occupational and personal identities. By constructing this sphere outside of the corporate hegemony, the players have established an exclusive domain where existing behavioural patterns dictate “norms” within the “world of hockey.” These norms draw from a physically superior, white, heterosexual male model which discriminates against all other experience: whether it be in terms of

ethnicity, gender, class, occupation, or any other classification. As a result, the process of empowerment is essentially a reductive force in the players' lives, undermining any substantial challenge to their compromised position within this occupational community.

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I am grateful to Dr. Gerald Pocius for his critical insights, but also for his friendship that I have valued throughout my tenure as a graduate student at Memorial University.

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Introduction

The objective for this thesis is to explore the occupational community of professional hockey in order to gain an understanding of how the extensive periods of time hockey players spend together as a unit generate traditional processes of learning, dictate behavioural patterns, and ultimately influence individual competence within the group. Aside from the skills that are mandatory in playing the game of hockey, upcoming players learn traditional behaviours and roles in order to satisfy the demands of their occupation. The *team* atmosphere in which the players are immersed creates a perpetual environment of group interaction, scrutiny and verification and as players either thrive or struggle under the group's gaze, they are forced to perform their roles within the rigid boundaries predefined by existing team/group structures. Divergence from these "unsaid" codes of behaviour is interpreted as subversive, as it undermines the desired levels of group unity and cohesion.

It is my intention to discuss how professional hockey players' identities are shaped and defined through the labour process. There will be special emphasis placed on the difficulties one faces working within an environment that both celebrates, and exploits, male physical supremacy and general elitism. Paramount, then, is the manner in which power relationships are generated and perpetuated within the group. An attempt will be made to properly perceive male hegemony as "no more than a politically interested

figuration” which is subject to scrutiny and subsequent deconstruction (Spivak 517), allowing for the inherent discrimination within professional hockey to be properly weighed within its occupational context and addressed for what it is: as a problem of production. These behaviours are suddenly less connected to the concept of sport, but rather to the ideological concerns of ownership, whereby the owners have successfully utilized sport (hockey) as a means of generating revenue.

In order to achieve these goals, I made arrangements that would allow me to immerse myself within a professional hockey community as a participant/observer, with the aim of conducting an ethnography of the group. And while an ethnography was performed, and the project ultimately realized, an admission of failure must be conceded. The arrangements I made to enter the community did not come to fruition, and as a result, I was not able to gain access to the community as was initially desired. Moreover, I was not able to establish the rapport with the players that I thought possible when starting the project, and was therefore, throughout the research, an *outsider*.

I struggled, for the majority of the project, to overcome this outsider status, but was simply unable to transcend the brute fact that the professional hockey community is deliberately segregated from the larger society—a fact that ironically contributed to my overall thesis. My presence, while perhaps not being a threat to group unity, was certainly an intrusive

one that was verified by the players nicknaming me “the spy.”¹ Therefore, the research process proved to be most revealing as I conducted the study from an outsider’s perspective, enabling me to appreciate the nature of this occupational group. It should be stated also, that while I was never a part of the group, the players did gradually become used to my presence, to the extent that during the early stages of the season following my ethnography, one of the players whom I had interviewed—Lester Dell—telephoned me at home asking if I could provide him with some information about courses offered at Memorial University. With this said, there was a level of familiarity that allowed me to gather what I felt was a substantial amount of research data to complete the project.

Gaining Entrance into the Arena of Professional Hockey

When I first entered the Department of Folklore in 1994, the thought of studying a professional hockey team for my PhD dissertation was not something I had considered, or even thought possible as a folklorist. It was not until my second semester in the program that I heard distinguished folklife scholar Archie Green discuss aspects of occupational folklife at a

¹ As I was approaching *Reds*’ player Tedd Simms for an interview, he looked at me and said to team captain Darren Feld, “Hey, it’s the spy!” (Fieldnotes 28 Jan. 1997). In order to maintain anonymity and clarity, I have designated the team with which I worked the “*Reds*.” The individual players will also have pseudonyms unless otherwise specified. See “Appendix A” for a list of player names and profiles.

guest lecture held at Memorial University. Following his presentation, I made a comment to him about the occupational concerns of professional hockey players, to which Dr. Green responded with genuine interest. He claimed that the study of professional sport was not being considered by folklife scholars yet it was something that needed serious study. I was later approached by my academic advisor at the time, Dr. Martin Lovelace, who also expressed interest in the idea, and felt it was something worth pursuing. I was hesitant because I felt that as a former hockey player² I might be too close to the sport to provide any kind of suitable commentary on the subject, but was soon convinced that this would not be a serious obstacle for me; rather, it would likely prove beneficial. Consequently, it was less than two months after my brief but productive encounter with Dr. Green that I began investigating the possibility of studying a professional hockey community for my dissertation.

Once it was decided that I would take on this task, obvious concerns materialized: who would I actually study, and how would I physically

² I had only stopped playing competitive hockey five years previously (1989). I was most recently a player for the Laurentian Voyageurs of the Ontario University Athletic Association (OUAA). Previous to playing in the OUAA, I played for a variety of Junior organizations, but I was initially drafted by the Peterborough Petes of the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) in 1986. For those unfamiliar with hockey, Junior hockey in Canada is the primary location from which NHL organizations draft /select their players. "Appendix A" lists the teams for which the players in this study played previous to playing professional hockey—83% of the professional players listed here played Junior hockey prior to playing professional. The various Leagues, both

approach this particular community to allow me to perform such research? I quickly dismissed the notion of attempting to conduct a study of a National Hockey League (NHL) team for the simple reason that the high profile nature of NHL organizations would make it virtually impossible for me to gain access to the players. I decided that it would be best to approach an American Hockey League (AHL) franchise, since the AHL is closest to the NHL in terms of talent and in terms of its business operations, yet functions with relatively minimal fanfare and media attention in comparison to the NHL. The distinction between the NHL and AHL is highly significant, and it must be understood that my research of one league does not speak for the other. There is, however, an important relationship between the two leagues that needs explicating which will be discussed further in "Chapter Three." What does need stating here is that although a distinction between the two leagues is necessary, one cannot consider the AHL apart from the NHL.

With the decision made to approach an AHL team to do my research, I then had to decide which team I would study, and how I would approach them. Without having any connections to an AHL franchise, my decision in choosing a team was purely arbitrary, in that whatever team would allow me to work with them, would be my team of choice. Before even approaching the team, however, I made up my mind that my research must remain completely anonymous. I made this decision for three reasons: first, I felt that if I

Junior and professional, will be discussed in detail in chapters to follow.

guaranteed anonymity to the players and to the organization, they might be more willing to allow me into their environment to do my research; second, I felt that those involved might be more at ease and more forthright in their dealings with an outsider coming in to study their community; and finally, because the majority of the people with whom I was working were local, national and sometimes even international personalities, I felt it highly important to conceal their identities. With this in mind I set out in search of an AHL franchise that would allow me the opportunity to study them during their hockey season. My search began and ended with the *Troy Reds*.

It is important to note that when I first approached the *Reds* with my research proposal, I felt that my hockey background would be a pivotal factor in gaining access into this hockey community; therefore I made a point of stressing it in my first interview with their Director of Operations. And judging from my first meeting with him—which took place in June of 1996—it seemed that my past experience in hockey was of value to him, and was what likely got me through this initial stage in my research quest. In fact, I left the meeting feeling confident that my research proposal had been well received, and that I was well underway in my attempt to insert myself into the *Reds'* organization.

My meeting with the Director of Operations was short and to the point. I presented him with a three page document which highlighted my academic

and hockey career, along with a point by point summary of my research proposal. What this research proposal consisted of was quite simple: I was seeking some form of employment (menial or other), preferably within the locker-room, which would allow me to participate/observe the players' formal and informal work routines. Ideally, I wished to conduct an ethnography of the work lives of professional hockey players, and the only way I felt this could be achieved was by participating in the everyday events of the dressing-room. Thus, I volunteered my services (without charge) to become an assistant to the *Reds'* training staff. Since I had witnessed dressing-room protocol for so many years as a player, I would already possess a certain level of dressing-room competence which would enable me to perform satisfactorily whatever tasks were asked of me without interfering with the players or coaches.

While constructing the plan and discussing it with colleagues and my advisor, it seemed highly reasonable and something that I felt could be achieved. On the morning of the interview, however, as I was driving to the *Reds'* office, the plan suddenly seemed outrageous and almost certain to fail. It was for this reason that I was overcome with relief and excitement when the Director of Operations said to me that the proposal sounded very interesting and I had his full and total support. He explained to me that he would have to discuss my suitability for this position with the team's athletic

therapist—who was in charge of the training staff—but he patted me on the back and said not to worry: he would do whatever he could to help me get this project underway. Aside from two brief phone calls I placed with him after this meeting where we briefly spoke, I was never to have contact with the Director of Operations again. I was never to get this assistant training staff position, and I was forced to take the next step in my research quest, which was to approach the *Reds'* training staff myself.

I left the Director of Operations' office that morning in June with the expectation that I was going to be contacted by the training staff by the middle of the next month. By the third week in July I was quite apprehensive and decided to try contacting the Director of Operations to learn of any progress in my situation since our meeting. After a week of leaving messages with his office and not having any of my calls returned, I was beginning to panic. The next week I began calling his office on the hour, every hour in hope that I would reach him, but his secretary who was taking my calls kept informing me that he was either in a meeting or that he had just stepped out. By the end of July my perseverance had paid off and I finally got the chance to speak with him. He explained that he spoke with the athletic therapist and that the athletic therapist was going to get into contact with me. At this point in time, my faith in this particular individual was waning, and I felt it would be wise to ask for a number where I could reach Al Jones (the athletic therapist). He was hesitant at first, but

eventually gave me the phone number to the *Reds'* dressing-room where Al could be reached.

Unfortunately, acquiring the number to the *Reds'* locker-room did not provide any relief to my anxiety or frustration, as I was still unable to get through to Al Jones. For over a month I left messages on the *Reds'* answering machine and with various staff who worked in the *Reds'* dressing-room, yet no one would get back to me. By the end of the August I was convinced that I was not going to be able to work with this organization, but I remained obstinate for the simple reason that I wanted to have some kind of definite response from the team. I had just about given up hope when I received a phone call just as I was stepping out the door to leave town for an academic conference. As I was scrambling to get myself prepared for the trip I was naturally taken off guard by Al Jones finally returning my call. Moreover, Al was calling to tell me that he had considered my proposal and was sceptical that what I was proposing could be achieved. With nothing to lose, I simply began explaining to Al what I was hoping to accomplish with this project and stressed the potential significance of the research. The more I spoke, the more I could tell Al was becoming interested in the idea, and as the conversation developed, Al began discussing other aspects I could consider and what he felt would be positive implications of the research. From the outset of the phone call I knew this was my only opportunity to

stave off imminent rejection, and by the end of the conversation I had managed to persuade Al to assist me in this research endeavour. That night I left for Bouctouche, New Brunswick without any concrete notions of what role I would play with the *Reds'* organization, but my confidence was renewed that I would have, at least, limited access to the team.

I was unable to solidify my relationship with the team until their season began in October. The season for the *Reds* would actually begin in September, but this would be as a part of the parent organization. Because the AHL is a farm system for the NHL, the players would initially report to their respective NHL teams to attend training camp. Those players that do not fit into the NHL team's roster are generally sent back down to Junior, or are sent to their AHL affiliate. Therefore it is not until NHL training camps are concluded that AHL franchises can begin their own season. I was then forced to wait until October before I could resume communications with Al and find out how I could gain access to the team.

One of the additional difficulties I was facing approaching the *Reds'* organization was that the team had recently hired a new coach for the 1996-97 season, and Al was not sure how he would react to my presence in the dressing-room. Al informed me that the coach, Hal Murphy, was in charge of what ultimately took place in the dressing-room, and since Al had only known Hal for a brief period of time, he did not want to make any decisions

that would not be welcomed by the coach. Therefore, my fate was literally in Al's hands, as it was up to him to approach Hal and find out if it was possible to provide me with a position that would allow me to participate/observe in the dressing-room dynamic.

I received a phone call from Al on the sixteenth of October and was informed that Hal was not in favour of giving me that kind of access to the dressing-room. I suggested a variety of other possibilities, and all were dismissed; he explained that Hal felt my presence would be too intrusive and would consequently have a negative affect on the team. Instead, what was offered to me was the opportunity to observe the players in their natural work setting, which meant studying them while they practised and played their games. In addition I was permitted to approach the players for interviews or to simply discuss any questions I had, and was occasionally allowed access into the dressing-room to observe behaviour within these more informal periods. The situation was not ideal, but suitable for me to conduct an ethnography of a professional hockey team strictly as an observer. It needs stating that when I first set out to do this project I was intending to do three months of fieldwork, but once I entered the "field" I was immediately aware that three months would not be sufficient to establish a suitable rapport with the players, training staff and coaches to get quality research results. I decided I would spend the entire season with the team, which meant studying them from October 1996 to April 1997.

I conducted twenty-four interviews over the course of this research period with American Hockey League players, coaches and staff. The interviews can be broken down as follows: nineteen with current AHL players (five of which were players playing on teams other than the *Reds*); three with coaching staff (two with *Reds'* coaching staff and one with the head coach of the Philadelphia Phantoms³); and two with the *Reds'* Athletic Therapist. Two of the players were interviewed twice, and aside from one player who chose to respond to the questions in writing (submitted to me the following day), all interviews were tape-recorded interviews. In addition, I conducted four telephone interviews the year previous with former and current professional hockey players and one former Junior hockey player. All four of these players were personal acquaintances of mine—I had not previously met any of the other twenty four individuals cited. From this information, along with spending seven months studying the players in their occupational environment, I was able to conduct an ethnography of this community. I do not want to suggest that this is the ideal methodological approach, and in fact, I recognize serious problems that arise out of it. Therefore it is necessary to discuss briefly the limitations and strengths of

³ This is Bill Barber who played for the Philadelphia Flyers of the NHL. He is the only individual to whom I have not assigned a pseudonym. I made this decision because his reputation in the hockey world is exceptional, and I felt that it would provide necessary context to his comments throughout the thesis.

the approach I have taken in order to empower readers in *their own approaches* to this ethnographic study.

The Dilemma of Ethnography

The inherently imperfect nature of ethnographic research has become a source of contention for scholars. The postmodernism/poststructuralism/deconstruction debate has forced social scientists to re-evaluate the plausibility of ethnography, to the extent that those who continue to write ethnographies are often doing so apologetically, and subsequently ineffectively because of all the “Navel gazing, self-doubt, equivocation about truth, and even obsessive guilt” (Cintron 380). The mere suggestion of “ineffective” ethnography is problematic because it predicates the possibility of *effective ethnography*: an argument which has recently become suspect. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, the collaborative authors attempt to bring clarity to this debate by problematizing further the concept of ethnography, but subsequently they reassert its effectiveness as a valuable contribution to the understanding of cultural behaviour. The result, however, has not been clarity, and the debate continues, leaving scholars to contend with the uncertainty of their own research and writing.

It would be beneficial here to reconsider James Clifford’s and George Marcus’s contribution to the growing trend of ethnographic scrutiny. In an

attempt to address concerns and scepticism of the ethnographic tradition, Clifford and Marcus put together a collaboration of essays providing varying perspectives on ethnographic writing and its value for scholars as a means of illuminating cultural behaviour. An overriding theme throughout the text is the admission that ethnographic writing is a form of fictional⁴ discourse (Clifford 6). The intent, however, is not to discredit ethnography, but to elucidate the limitations of any “scientific” understanding of culture. It is important to recognize that the imaginative forces at play in all ethnographic writing are not hazardous but an unavoidable outcome of what is inherently an interpretative process. While Clifford acknowledges that what he has “been stressing may be a source of pessimism for some readers,” he asks:

is there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts? And may not the vision of a complex/problematic, partial ethnography lead, not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical? (25)

This vision, however, has not yet been universally welcomed, and as with any postmodern discourse, the potential for nihilism—in this case ethnographic—is always painfully near. As a result, the *Writing of Culture* has contributed to a growing trend in anthropological discourse, among both postmodernists

⁴ The use of the word “fictional” here does not imply “falsehood” or “something merely opposed to the truth,” but rather “the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive” (Clifford 6).

and modernists, centred on the question, does the partial reality of ethnography imply ethnographic futility?⁵

In setting out to do my own research I have been forced to grapple with this question, and consider what my role is as an ethnographer—or whether or not I am even comfortable with the term. I began to question if what I was doing was, in fact, ethnography, or some other form of qualitative/descriptive research/fieldwork, i.e., “a journalistic inquiry, a case study” or “an oral history” (Wolcott 47). Did the work I was doing in the field qualify as ethnographic? Were there time restrictions? Did I have to physically move into the community? Were there stipulations of which I was unaware? All of these questions have forced me to reconsider ethnography as a concept, and re-evaluate my role as an “ethnographer,” a term I have since come to accept with a certain degree of comfort.

Much of the controversy that surrounds ethnography is that it is essentially a problematic concept. The problem is that,

the term refers both to the *processes* for accomplishing it—ordinarily involving original fieldwork and always requiring the reorganization and editing of material for presentation—and to the presentation itself, the *product* of that research, which ordinarily takes its form in prose. (Wolcott 47)

Thus, ethnography is composed of two equal parts, involving the observation/collection of data, and articulation of what has been

⁵ A mere sampling of this literature are works by R. A. Berger, G. A. Fine, M. Sahlin and R. Cintron.

observed/collected through written discourse. Therefore, failing to provide one of these component parts disqualifies the research as ethnographic, which means that research cannot come to ethnographic fruition until it is in its written form. It is here that the inherent problem arises, in that this relationship is based upon transforming human experience, not as what some wish to believe, representing it. By its very nature, then, ethnography is a creative process that involves selecting aspects of culture (what effects this selection process will be discussed later) in order to communicate selections of what was selected in the form of a document. What then is the correlation between what is actually researched and what is presented via the written product?

If we consider the creative process further, what is evident is that ethnography, as it is experienced by the reader, is at least four times removed from the actual cultural activity being studied. There are four separate stages that best illustrate the end result of ethnography. The first stage is *selection*, whereby the researcher documents aspects of cultural activity. The selection process is subject to categories of information the researcher consciously and unconsciously brings to the field. The second stage is an *interpretative* stage, which involves the researcher attempting to make sense out of what has been selected. But as Stanley Fish argues, "Perception is never innocent of assumptions, and the assumptions within

which it occurs will be responsible for the contours of what is perceived,” which therefore implies a level of indeterminacy in any interpretative strategy (8). The third stage is the researcher essentially attempting to *articulate* the notions gathered from the field and transforming them into prosaic or poetic messages. Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis discuss this third stage as they consider Bochner’s own transformation of what was once a “mundane list of observations and notes, nearly formless, entirely fragmented” into a “Drama” that “did not assert itself from the field but was sifted, organized, and built up out of a confused mass of quotidian detail and ambiguous feelings” (159). Finally, in order for any work to be realized it involves a reader, which once again establishes another stage of *interpretation*. However, this stage is the reader’s gestalt of the final product, which must be understood as being dissimilar from the written text. It needs stressing “that perception is always mediated (and therefore objects [be they written texts or cultural texts] are never available directly,” and thus, are subject to the reader’s imagination⁶ (Fish 12). The argument I am putting forth is not intended to contribute further to the postmodern problematizing of ethnography, nor would I argue it to be postmodern;

⁶ Staying true to Fish’s argument, the reader is “never individual or private, but is always the product of the categories of understanding that are his [hers] by virtue of his [her] membership in a community of interpretation” (11).

Claude Lèvi-Strauss articulated succinctly the degenerative reality of ethnography over forty years ago:

Intentionally or unintentionally, these modern seasonings⁷ are falsified. Not of course, because they are of a purely psychological nature, but because, however honest the narrator may be, he cannot—since this is no longer possible—supply them in a genuine form. For us to be willing to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted; through a degree of manipulation which, in the most sincere writers, takes place below the level of consciousness, actual experience is replaced by stereotypes. (39)

As a result, ethnography can be best understood as the displacement of experience, which forces the ethnographer to communicate the experience as it presently exists in his/her mind. The result is a unique blend of the reader's imagination, the author's imagination and the initial experience that was studied.

What then are the implications of a mode of scholarship that admittedly reinvents its subject matter in its attempt to convey its findings to an audience? What is gained by a research endeavour that is inherently fallible? In response to these queries, I turn to French historian Fernand Braudel, who asks, "How should one tackle such a complex, living entity and break it up so as to be able to lay hold of it, or at least some part of it?" (10).

⁷ Lèvi-Strauss is extending a metaphor that he has constructed to illustrate Western culture's desire to appease its uni-dimensional existence by briefly experiencing the disjointed glimpses of exotic culture: "We might say, then, that through a twofold reversal, from these same lands our modern Marco Polos now bring back the moral spices of which our society feels an increasing need . . ." (38).

The ambiguity and multifaceted nature of cultural dynamism makes it impossible to articulate in any definite or indisputable manner. Attempting to represent what inherently defies representation in an empirical and totalizing fashion is not only ineffective but dangerous. Therefore, ethnography, which does not intend to represent but interpret culture, is best suited for cultural exploration and commentary. Without pretensions of scientific precision, the ethnography does not speak for its subjects of study, but contributes to an existing, imperfect, human, dialogue. In contrast to an attempt to achieve closure, ethnography opens itself up to debate, contradiction, consent and potential conflict. It needs emphasizing, however, that the inherent indeterminacy of meaning does not suggest “that the facts disappear, but that their limits are exposed” (Visweswaran 82). Therefore the indeterminacy of ethnography is actually its strength, as its contested meaning generates further dialogue, and in its imperfection and contradiction is as close as possible to being an “accurate” reflection of what is being studied.

Having said this, however, there is an onus on ethnographers to be cognizant of the limitations of ethnography, which consequently imposes upon them a greater sense of responsibility. Because ethnography is essentially an interpretative process and a contribution to an already existing dialogue, the reader must be duly informed in this relationship. Readers must be made aware of the factors that have helped shape the

ethnographic text, allowing them to enter into this dialogue able to critically accept or reject what is being discussed. It is imperative, then, that authors open themselves to their readers, and relate how their individuality—personally and professionally (if a distinction is to be made)—makes *their* particular interpretation of culture unique. In my own situation, the significance of being a white Canadian, heterosexual male, and a former hockey player doing a study of professional hockey culture cannot be ignored. Undoubtedly my perceptions of the community are different from those with a different ethnic, gender, class . . . background. The manner in which I was received by the community also affects my perceptions of the community, and their subsequent dealings with me. Moreover, the theoretical biases I bring with me as a scholar must also be shared with the reader. It is through self-revelation that authorial authority is minimized allowing for a more effective dialogue between the reader's imagination, the author's imagination and the primary experience.

Please Check Your Bags, Sir

When I initially contemplated doing a study of professional hockey, one of the factors that contributed to my final decision was that I satisfied a demographic that would seriously increase my chance of gaining entrance into an exclusively male, predominantly white and professed heterosexual hockey community. But along with this aforementioned identity, I was also

part of a privileged male voice that has been a source of contention for myself and many others in the academic community who recognize the “need to reclaim the voices of those whose insights and experiments are absent from mainstream genealogies” and the need for “an analysis of the practices and presumptions that have erased, trivialised and marginalised their voices” (Bell 3). In response to this predicament, there have been male ethnographers who have attempted to remove their gender from their writing and appropriate a more recently valued female centred discourse and become what Les Back designates “proto-females” (217). But as Back correctly asserts, “‘Feminised’ discourse is not the same as feminist social theory, because the former does not carry the political commitment of the latter” (217). The danger that presents itself here, is that by denying one’s gender, it implies that gender is superfluous to fieldwork and to writing, and ultimately allows “whoever is most powerful” to appropriate “the most attractive value system” (Back 217). How then does one resist perpetuating an androcentric discourse without denying one’s gender in the ethnographic process?

It was apparent early on that by reflecting on authorial representation I was indirectly distancing myself from traditional male discourse, without appropriating a voice that was not my own. A major influence of feminist theory has been its ability to successfully challenge the presentation of male ethnography as if it were generic or genderless. Therefore, by acknowledging

one's gender as it affects the outcome of our research, the male voice is automatically decentred. Jonathan Rutherford explains:

Putting masculinity into the picture isn't about insisting that all men should be nice, and fit some stereotyped image. Nor is it about creating a male confessional and a fetish of self disclosure. It's about making ourselves "seen," about making our. . . masculinities a basis for discussion instead of assuming that men as gendered subjects do not exist. (46)

Therefore the baggage I bring with me as an ethnographer—in particular my gender—needs checking, in order to illustrate how it “informs and affects” the cultural activity I am studying.

For example, the fact that I am a male studying male culture as opposed to a female doing the same study is highly significant. Similarly, the fact that I was once part of a hockey community, and have professional hockey players as friends and acquaintances must also be recognized.⁸ Moreover, I enjoy watching and playing hockey in both its vernacular and organized forms, and I have entered into this field of study after having only been removed from competitive hockey since 1989 (five years). Is it not realistic to think that these experiences in this exclusively male domain would make my perceptions of the community distinct from those without this background? Therefore by addressing these concerns, the reader has a greater opportunity to scrutinize what I am presenting through the ethnography, and suitably respond to any authority I will undoubtedly claim.

⁸ None of whom played for the particular team I studied.

I agree with Kamala Visweswaran when she argues that “the reflexive mode emphasizes not what we know, but how we think we know,” enabling readers to assign their own value to what is being discussed (80).

The Layout of the Work

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, with the third, fourth and fifth being the most ethnographic. The first chapter offers a brief discussion of the development of occupational folklife studies in North America. I have based much of the discussion on Robert McCarl’s contribution to the field and how his work has influenced my own understanding of occupational folklore. I eventually build on what McCarl offers by illustrating the usefulness of incorporating Marxist and semiological theory into existing occupational folklife theory. The intent is not to reduce or reject previous approaches to the study of occupational folklore, but to further another dimension of this research that has yet to be fully realized. By utilizing Marx’s writings it is possible to argue for a more developed understanding of the “products” of the trade, so that it is the worker her/himself who is ultimately produced through the labour process—“the *whole* of *what* is called *world history* is nothing but the creation of man by human labour” (Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” 166). Therefore, the act of labouring is an expressive one, which is in essence a means for the individual “to express and authenticate

himself in being as well as in thought” (Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” 208).

The second chapter is an historical narrative of the development of sport in Canada. I trace the evolution of sport from its vernacular origins to its current status as a multi-billion dollar industry. By examining the manner in which sport has developed, a threefold process of repression, incorporation and segregation is made evident, which allows us to perceive sport as a contested cultural entity. Its value intensifies with the introduction of professionalization, and it is out of this professional framework that hockey in Canada is explored. Throughout the discussion, an emphasis is placed on the various controlling forces and power relationships that contribute to a Canadian sport identity, and how these forces affect those individuals who engage, as players, in its execution.

The next three chapters are dedicated entirely to the fieldwork conducted for this project. As already stated, the research was performed from the perspective of observer and not that of participant/observer. I did not have unlimited access to the players and was unable to spend much time with them during the more informal periods of their working day, such as time spent in the dressing-room winding up/down from games and practices. The danger that arises from this limited perspective is that the research is conducted potentially from the same vantage point as that of the spectator. It is this perspective, however, that I wished to transcend in order to discuss

the actual community of professional hockey as it is experienced and lived by the players, as opposed to discussing it as it is experienced by the general public: that is, as “spectacle.” I am able to avoid discussing the community from purely a spectator’s point of view by basing two of the three chapters on the players during practice as opposed to at the games. It is during practice, away from the crowds that the players are seen working, both formally and informally, at perfecting their skills and simply expressing themselves within their occupational environment. Moreover, there are segments of the ethnography where I consciously resist discussing the spectacle of the sport despite its at times overwhelming nature. In “Chapter Four,” the only chapter dedicated entirely to the formal game of hockey, the concept of spectacle is addressed specifically in order to explain why I have chosen not to pursue this aspect of professional hockey.

Finally, the last three chapters consider critically the observations that are made in the field about this particular professional hockey community. The sixth chapter examines the rituals that are in place to signify the transition the players make from members outside of the community to members within it. The seventh chapter is a discussion of the product of this transformation; in other words, it considers what the players become as they enter the hockey community. The fact that this is an exclusively male domain has led me to explore the manner in which masculinity is expressed and lived within this group. What I discover is that there are learned

behaviours that perpetuate a pre-existing identity that players are pressured to assume on entering the League. These structures do provide players with a sense of security in knowing what is expected of them as males, and as hockey players, while also providing them with the sense of power as a unified body. The last chapter explores the players' perceptions/constructions of power and how these perceptions/constructions contribute to their own exploitation and individual powerlessness.

Chapter One

Re-Evaluating Occupational Folklife: Expression of Self Through the Labour Process

The study of occupational folklife, like the discipline of folklore in general, has gone through significant changes which have forced folklorists to reconsider *who* should be the subject of such an area of study, and *how* this area of study should be pursued. Folklorist Robert McCarl Jr. has been a catalyst in the re-evaluation of occupational folklife, as his revolutionary approach to the subject of working-class culture and working environments has attempted to liberate folklorists from the constraints of more traditional folklore scholarship, where collecting texts in marginal occupational settings became the standard for research. In one of his least celebrated, but arguably most significant works, "The Production Welder: Product, Process and the Industrial Craftsman," McCarl astutely observes the creative and expressive process within an industrial workplace, thus removing the perception that folk culture does not exist in a more urban and technologically advanced setting. It has been over twenty years since this influential work was published, however, and little has been done to advance the theoretical offerings McCarl has contributed. As a result, the excitement he brought to the field has been left largely undeveloped.

It is my intention here to discuss the value of McCarl's work by focusing on this one leading article—"The Production Welder"—and

generally relate how this work has contributed to occupational folklife studies as a whole. Later, I will explain how his work can be utilized even further when incorporated with Marxist and semiological perspectives. Although McCarl never draws directly on Marxist writing, his work lends itself well to Marxist interpretation for the simple reason that he recognizes the worker as an expressive individual whose trade serves as the fundamental mode of expression. He recognizes that the labour process is an expressive/communicative act, which means that both the formal and informal modes of production are imbued with meaning, and hence subject to interpretation.

Recognizing Folklore in Occupational Contexts

For early folklorists in North America, the occupational environment was not an especially valued venue for the collection of “manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc., of the olden time”(Thoms 862). Despite such works as Fletcher S. Bassett’s *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors* (1885), and Franz Rickaby’s *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy* (1923), interest in occupational groups was minimal. Perhaps because of its often diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds, the occupational group was not considered to be a true folk group for folklorists looking for more homogeneous structures. As a result there was a general failure to see “the traditional artistic expression of those who find their

identity (at least to a large degree) in the way they earn their living, rather than in where they live or their racial background” (Coffin and Cohen xxiii-xxiv). Moreover, the quest to find the “folk” often led scholars to the margins of society, as Archie Green observes: “early folklorists were not particularly drawn to on-the-job behaviour, unless the job consisted of tasks such as crafting arrowheads or moccasins”; and thus, the neglect of the ever-present, predominantly urban workforce is not surprising (“Industrial Lore” 72).

In his introductory chapter in *Only A Miner*, Archie Green accentuates the dearth of folkloristic scholarship. Green locates “amateur” folklorist George Korson as the first real consistent collector of occupational materials in an industrial setting. Green credits Korson as the first to perceive how the “industrial front is crucial to understanding the transition from rural to urban life, from the realm of folk to present-day mass or popular culture” (*Only a Miner* 13-14). As a result, Korson spent thirty years of his life—roughly from 1927-1960—collecting songs that he understood to be folk, from various mining communities, in an attempt to salvage a way of life that he believed to be disappearing. By 1960 Korson had amassed the first intensive collection of mining songs, making it the most complete collection of occupational materials of an industrial nature.

George Korson’s work did not, however, generate a sudden interest in labourers and their expressions of folklore. It was not until 1972, with the

publication of Green's book *Only A Miner*, that the study of occupational culture was legitimized as an area for folklore research. Aside from offering his own substantial collection of mining songs, Green challenged the notion of "folk"—already revolutionized by Alan Dundes seven years earlier¹—and demonstrated the fallacious understanding of a folk group as a homogenous whole. Green argued that the existence of a pure folk group is virtually impossible, and in areas such as the United States (or Canada) where a polyphony of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds is responsible for its very existence, diversity is even more apparent. In attempting to expose the multiplicity of group affiliation, he asks:

Juan Villa, an individual, may label himself as an American, a Latin, a Mexican-American, a Chicano, a Texan, a Catholic, A Democrat, a ranch-hand, a catskiner . . . The network of associations and activities to which he belongs and by which he lives is unique for Juan Villa, and his many groups are not mutually exclusive. In which group is Juan folk? From which does he draw lore? To which does he contribute lore? (4)

It is evident here that he intentionally avoids any attempt to impose restrictions on the notion of folk group, and by recognizing the diversity of group affiliation, he is able to stress that occupational group structures are not in conflict with traditional notions of folk culture.

Establishing an occupational group such as miners as a viable research community, Green collected expressive texts (vernacular songs) in the same manner that folklorists collected texts in more traditional folklore

¹ See Alan Dundes's essay "What is Folklore?" (2).

settings. But with this work, questions arose concerning the plausibility of studying other occupational groups. If mines provide a legitimate source for collecting expressions of folklore, is it possible that other more industrialized labour environments house behavior worthy of folkloristic investigation? In 1974, Bruce Nickerson asked in *Journal of American Folklore*, “Is There a Folk In the Factory?” Reflecting upon expressive behaviour in a industrial plant he encountered while participating/observing as a machinist, he identified behaviour that he believed to be either “folk” or “folk-like.” This tentative acknowledgment of folklore in the factory allowed him to recognize the restrictions folklorists faced accessing these behaviours because of genre-based approaches to the material.

On entering a mining community for studying folklore, Archie Green maintained a traditional folkloristic approach: collect a legitimized folklore genre—folksong—and perform a textual analysis of the material. Nickerson argued, however, that by approaching an occupational setting with a preconceived notion of what kind of genre will be collected, more important forms of expressive behaviour may be neglected (134). Nickerson did not wish to discard the study of genre classification in folklore, but rather, he believed that by understanding broader contextual and cultural issues, folklorists may begin to look at specific forms of genre activity that best suit the study of the group in suitable circumstances. He suggests four main areas of expression be studied in order to gain the necessary insight for more

specific genre based investigations: “face-to-face verbal material; traditional customs. . .; crafts; and cultural attitudes” (135). Because it is Nickerson’s belief that folklore genres are inherent to the occupational arena, he is able to argue that the factory is a suitable environment for the study of folklore.

The argument that Nickerson raises here is important for two reasons: first, his work allowed folklorists to seriously consider the viability of doing “folklore” research in occupational fields that were not only affected by modern industrial developments, but thrived on them; secondly, the usefulness of genre-based studies was suddenly subject to scrutiny, despite his own return to genre-based research. These two crucial aspects of Nickerson’s work serve as the focus for Robert McCarl’s article, also published in 1974, “The Production Welder: Product, Process and the Industrial Craftsman.” While Nickerson’s and McCarl’s concerns are remarkably similar, there are enormous disparities in these two works. The fundamental difference lies in their approach: McCarl is not attempting to discover *if* there is folklore in the industrial work setting, but rather, he provides a means for folklorists to recognize expressive behaviour in the workplace, and elucidates why this expressive behaviour *is* folklore.

In addition to responding to queries concerning what avenues were available for those wishing to study occupational folklore, McCarl was also reacting to the changes that were occurring in folkloristics at this time. With

the influence of contextualism and performance theory,² McCarl recognized the value of shifting from “the focus upon folklore as ‘item’—the things of folklore—to a conceptualization of folklore as ‘event’—the doing of folklore,”³ and applied this understanding to the field of occupational folklife (McCarl 243). In effect, the move from studying the items of folklore to studying the “events” of folklore allowed for a departure from genre-based investigations of culture. The reason is simply that the expressions of texts began taking precedence over the texts themselves. It was suddenly possible to discuss the products of all behaviour as expressive. In other words, this shift allowed those such as McCarl to consider behaviours within the workplace that were not conventionally considered as “folklore,” but performed the same communicative function. For example, although a welded joint is far removed from oral story telling in its appearance, it communicates meaning (at least esoterically) in similar fashion. It is from this vantage point that McCarl was able to completely revolutionize the study of working culture.

Revolutionizing the Field

Before I begin, it is important to explain why I am limiting myself to this one McCarl work—“The Production Welder: Product, Process and the Industrial

² Works such as Richard Bauman’s and Americo Paredes’s *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* were highly significant in influencing this transition in folkloristics.

³ McCarl is referring to Richard Bauman’s introduction in *Towards New*

Craftsman”—as opposed to emphasizing other more recent and popular works since written. The reason, simply, is that there are few folklife works that utilize sufficiently the innovative theoretical framework McCarl suggests in this particular article. Even McCarl is seen struggling with his theoretical premise throughout much of his writing, and continues to fall back on what is essentially a folkloristic approach he proposes to move beyond. First, let us consider the arguments McCarl puts forth in “The Production Welder.”

There are two fundamental areas that McCarl addresses: first, he argues that folklorists have been generally preoccupied with oral expressions, and consequently neglected the more physical productions of human expression (243); second, McCarl believes the search for cultural activity that is dying or on the verge of dying has been counterproductive. McCarl argues clearly that by examining the “material outputs of man’s activities” in an industrial setting, it is possible to identify an entirely different performance of folklore that is not threatened by urbanization (243). The industrial workplace is a thriving site for the production and reproduction of folklore; but only when the processes of folklore become the focus of study, as opposed to purely studying more traditional texts, will environments such as a “production sheet metal shop” be appreciated as the vibrant folklore community that they are.

McCarl draws heavily on his time spent as an apprentice within a sheet metal shop in Oregon. There he made a crucial discovery concerning the manner in which meaning is communicated within different workspaces. In addition to language used to express meaning on the job site, the physical materials were similarly manipulated to make up “aspects of a communicative process subject to constant scrutiny and criticism by other workers” (244). With this discovery the products of the trade suddenly came to signify something more than a “weld, bent metal frame,” or “sheared pieces of metal”; they were now properly being recognized as part of a semiotic system⁴ containing valuable information. He connects the products of the trade and other more overtly expressive acts by building on Michael Owen Jones’s work on a rural chairmaker. Jones realized that craft served as an expressive outlet for the chairmaker (along with serving a utilitarian function), and emphasized the worth of these products as texts for folklorists. McCarl simply borrows the approach Jones took to study “mountain-man chairmakers” and applies this model to welders in an industrial setting.⁵ In so doing, the initial distinctiveness of these two types of “workers” are

⁴ Although Robert McCarl does not once incorporate semiological terminology into his work, he discusses objects as part of a “communicative process,” which I have taken the liberty to call a “semiotic system”. Later I will be discussing how semiological theory will help advance McCarl’s discoveries.

⁵ Michael Owen Jones Ph.D. dissertation focuses on chairmakers in Appalachia, and is suitably entitled “Chairmaking in Appalachia: A Study in Style and Creative Imagination in American Folk Art.” His dissertation has since been published and republished, first as *The Hand Made Object and Its*

minimized, allowing McCarl to study the welder as a craftsperson in his/her own right.

It is McCarl's ability to make a definite correlation between the rural craftsperson and the industrial welder that makes his work revolutionary. He is able to successfully discuss the welder as a craftsperson by focusing on the processes of labour—or in folkloristic terms, the processes of “performance.” McCarl delineates these labour processes of the welder and of the “folk artist,” and in so doing the creativity of both trades becomes clearly apparent. His argument goes as follows:

the rural craftsman manipulates the raw material . . . to realize the form of a product which is generic and easily recognizable; whereas the welder manipulates processed materials . . . to realize the form of a product (weld) which is not easily recognized by the outsider . . . (“The Production Welder,” 245)

Although the materials and tools involved are dissimilar, the creative process is driven by the same principles: creating “a material manifestation of his ideal based on the specific use to which the product will be put” (245). Of further significance is the esoteric/exoteric factor that is additionally brought out in this initial comparison. The apparent uniformity of the welder's product initially prevents outsiders from recognizing the inherent expressiveness of the weld; but through McCarl's esoteric vantage point the *apparent* uniformity proves fallacious, and what ultimately serves as a

means of recognizing the unique communicative processes within this *folk* group.

The information that is expressed and interpreted by the welders is done according to their own informally constructed system of meaning which McCarl argues “does not disappear in the face of automation” but it “becomes more difficult to locate and understand” (247). His response to this difficulty, then, is to begin investigating the complexities of communication through the labour process. He begins by considering how this esoteric knowledge is acquired by the workers. He recognizes the value of formal learning that “provides him [the welder] with the skeletal process information necessary to begin practicing or running beads,” but, he attributes a welder’s competence or incompetence within the working environment to the informal modes of learning, which he roughly categorizes as “oral and visual/physical channels”:

The actual interaction of the welder with the metal and the welding torch or rod, and his daily exposure to other welders, their techniques, jargon and oral lore, constitute the primary mode of transmission for the beliefs and practices of this group. (247-248)

As the welder seeks to produce the desired final product, all of these formal and informal factors contribute to the actual realization of his/her goal.

What constitutes a good weld is not a static concept: the welder must “read” the situations and learn to provide the suitable product in each specific context. For example, a “welder’s approach to a ship door is much different

than his approach to an office door” because of the functional difference of the ultimate products (247). Therefore, just “as a chairmaker subtly alters both style and product each time he makes a chair, the welder’s craft is equally dynamic and subtle” (247).

The final product, then, takes on new meaning. Welders respond to the demands of labour and supply a visible text that becomes subject to both esoteric and exoteric scrutiny. The actual weld is much more than simply a functional item; it is an expressive act that is rich with meaning. Despite the limited reading of those outside of the group, esoterically the weld signifies a great deal. It indicates how a particular welder interpreted a welding situation; it explains how the welder responded to the initial reading of the situation; it can indicate the welder’s skill level; and (after reading enough of a particular welder’s final products) reveal one’s value as a craftsperson. In other words, through the products of the trade, individuals express themselves as members of their particular occupational group: they are defined by their performance of their trade. And it is from this understanding of the labour process that McCarl is able to astutely define the craftsperson’s (whether rural or industrial) role within this process:

the attitude of the craftsman is a combination of desire for economic subsistence and possible improvement, ego involvement with the product for as long as it takes to create or repair it, confidence and ability to produce a functional product with the correct form using the established style of production, coupled with an indeterminate pleasure from the manipulation of materials. (“The Production Welder,” 249)

Finally through McCarl's elucidation of creativity in the industrial arena, folklorists were not only encouraged to study workers—no matter how technologically advanced—they also recognized the expressive nature of the labour process.

The Quiet Revolution

Robert McCarl's application of a process centred-approach to occupational folklore is of great import; however, the value of his work is unfortunately overshadowed by his unnecessary insistence that the product—the welded joint—is similar to the products of the traditional craftsperson. Despite McCarl's valiant attempt to move beyond traditional folklore scholarship (where a satisfactory text is necessary to validate a folklorist's presence), the journey is not quite complete as he still feels the need to legitimize the welder as craftsperson by discussing the *products* of the trade in terms of the *products* of the rural craftsperson. Granted his arguments are sound and ultimately correct, but his return to a text undermines the innovation of his work. In fact, his later works return repeatedly to a traditional folkloristic approach that relies on generic classification. For example, in a special issue of *Folklore Forum* dedicated to occupational folklore, McCarl's contribution explores narrative within the workplace—an accepted folklore genre. "Jump Story: An Examination of an

Occupational Narrative,” as the title suggests, focuses “on a personal experience story in the occupation of smokejumping” (1). In the same year McCarl published an article in *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife* where he returns, at least temporarily, to the progressive theoretical framework proposed in “The Production Welder.” He argues that

Occupational expression is inextricably linked to the work processes and micro-environments in which it functions, and therefore the study of these processes demands a comprehensive view of the relationship between the forms of communication and the environment in which they occur. (4)

He continues by saying that “stories about first days on the job, accident and unusual occurrence accounts, jokes, jargon, the use of nicknames, bullshitting, ragging, and stories about particular characters and individuals” may be a more accepted “body of material because of the attention paid to it by early investigators,” but “it is no more easily approached and understood in context than technique with which it is inextricably bound” (12).

Having said this, however, McCarl returns once again to a traditional “body of material” in likely his most celebrated work, *The District of Columbia Fire Fighters’ Project*. He does not abandon the notion of studying the occupational community through its techniques, but contends that “by concentrating on the work techniques of an occupational group we are

isolating the 'critical centre' of the occupational culture: narratives, joking relationships, nicknames, customary behaviours" (26). Furthermore, he states that the dynamics of performance in a work setting "are expressed and received in variety of ways: joking, job performance, stories, retirement dinners, gestures, oral and written evaluations" (28). Aside from "job performance" he relies on behaviours—or the "body of material"—that he suggests folklorists transcend in their explorations of occupational culture. His comments which read, "Having been trained as a folklorist, I was continually struggling to overcome any preoccupation with narrative" are somewhat ironic considering works to follow such as "Occupational Stereotype, Technique and the Critical Comment of Folklore"⁶ (1986) and "Accident Narratives: Self Protection in the Workplace" (1988) where narrative is once again a focus. Moreover, in "You've Come a Long Way—And Now this is Your Retirement" McCarl does not specifically centre on narrative, but, his reliance on verbal expression is evident with the inclusion of nine and a half pages of transcribed dialogue—something that he criticizes his contemporaries for doing one year later: "Even contemporary folklorists like Bruce Nickerson and Michael Bell emphasize the verbal material and

⁶ Narrative is not as central in this article as it is in the latter, but McCarl expresses his reliance on narrative when he writes:

At the same time, however, the discrepancy between the actual occupational experience on a fire or in a rescue and the television presentation requires critical comment. This comment takes the form of personal experience narratives which

minimize the work process" (*The District of Columbia Fire Fighters' Project* 25).

My discussion of McCarl's work is not intended to criticize what he has accomplished in terms of his theoretical and methodological approaches to studying occupational folklore. Similarly, I do not wish to undermine the value of McCarl's approach to understanding "technique" in the workplace as a means of gaining an understanding of the occupational community; but, what I am saying is that his attempt to liberate the study of occupational folklife from traditional, text-centred, folklore scholarship did not come to fruition. Instead, the tendency for scholars to enter into the occupational arena and begin "looking for folklore" has remained, despite signs that might indicate that the field has been successfully revolutionized. For example, in 1978, during the height of disciplinary re-evaluations, a special issue of *Folklore Forum* was put together to document the product of the occupational folklife transformation. By briefly considering the articles present in this issue, however, one questions if in fact a transformation occurred at all. Other than the second article, by Philip Nusbaum, "A Conversational Approach to Occupational Folklore: Conversation, Work, Play, and the Workplace," the journal is made up of articles that use traditional folklore

genres as a means of studying occupational culture—primarily narratives and jokes.

Articles by Robert McCarl (“Jump Story”), James P. Leary (“Strategies and Stories of the Omaha Stockyards”), Susan C. J. Berkman (“She’s Writing Antidotes”) and Jack Santino (“Contemporary Occupational Heroes”) are all framed around narratives in the workplace. Catherine Swanson’s article, “Joking at the Office” and Richard March’s article “Lust and Disgust on the Job” use joke as their vehicles of expression, again reinforcing an approach that is not dissimilar from earlier studies such as Ben Botkin’s 1946 article, “Living Lore on the New York City Writer’s Project” and Wayland Hand’s 1950 essay, “Songs of the Butte Miners”—both of which access occupational communities through recognizable folklore forms such as narrative and song.⁷ The only adventurous approach in this special issue of *Folklore Forum* is Nusbaum’s article, which is unfortunately as problematic as it is innovative. He argues that it “is not stories, or strikes, or strongmen, or worker boss alienation, or a static system of interpersonal linkages or any special body of material” that express worker identity, but rather, it is everyday conversation that ultimately establishes social structure within the workplace (26). But by discarding stories, or strikes, or strongmen, or worker

⁷ Granted, the authors in *Folklore Forum* consider these texts from a performance centered approach, but they are still grounded in the notion that one needs to be *searching for these texts* in order to do folklore research.

boss alienation,” and replacing them with everyday conversation, he is simply replacing one “body of material” with another, and in the process denies activities that are not only expressions of labour but also of occupational identity. It should be stated that McCarl’s “revolutionary approach” to occupational folklife was based on his recognition that there are more advantageous ways of studying working communities; he does not suggest that previous approaches were in any way flawed or misguided. Similarly, I do not wish to imply that the mode of scholarship evidenced in this special issue is devoid of value or of academic merit; however, *more can be done*.

A decade after this special issue in *Folklore Forum* a second major publication on occupational folklife appeared when *New York Folklore* put together a special issue. According to guest editor Mia Boynton, the goal was “to gather together and present a new group of folkloristic or folklore-related essays on the traditions of the industrial workplace” (1). Unfortunately, aside from Boynton’s own contribution to the journal, a fresh perspective does not emerge. Instead, the collection continues from where *Folklore Forum* left off ten years earlier. For example, there is an article on narrative in the workplace, once again provided by Robert McCarl (“Accident Narratives: Self Protection in the Workplace”); there is a section on an occupational group’s singing traditions written by Brenda McAllum (“Songs

of Work and Songs of Worship”); and there is an article about joking and humour in the occupational environment provided by Amy E. Skillman (“The Humour of a Tradition Bearer in the Lumber Yard”). There are two works that do not fit within this pattern of scholarship, but are not especially progressive either: Sandro Portelli reflects about his experience in the field—more specifically, “the role of equality and difference in field research”—in the late 1970s collecting folk songs from Italian folk singer Trento Piotti (“Research as an Experiment in Equality”); the other work is by Michael Frisch, and it is simply a transcription of an interview he conducted with a woman named Mary Daniels (“Mary Daniels: A Portrait in Steel”).

It is only Mia Boynton’s work that appears to move beyond a traditional folkloristic approach by recognizing that the process of labour in itself is expressive behaviour that informs us of the occupational community and the individuals within it. She states at one point that the workers

develop their own ways of dealing with one another and of resisting major inconveniences, such as safety gear that doesn’t fit right and impedes the work process, and they make use of traditional practices such as long breaks, nicknaming and prolonged joking episodes to create their own sense of experience and variation on the job. (88)

Boynton’s comments here reflect her understanding that any response to the worker’s environment is in essence a means of defining oneself within the workplace. It is also highly noteworthy that she *does not* reject more easily accepted expressions, such as joking or nicknaming, but incorporates *all*

aspects of behaviour into her study, whether it be taking extended breaks, or as she states later, expressing one's gender: "She, because she was entering the steel plant as a female worker, needed strategies of survival" (91). Thus, Boynton's recognition of the expressive nature of "working" can be seen as one of the lone works that serve to develop McCarl's earlier theoretical framework. Her work demonstrates what McCarl never seemed to accept fully himself, which is that the alternative to item-centred scholarship is not simply locating less conventional items—in the case of "The Production Welder," "welds, bent metal frames, sheared pieces of metal . . . occupational stories, latrinalia"—but rather, understanding the *processes* as expressive acts (McCarl 244). The challenge, then, is to begin exploring the enormous potential of production which is only achievable by gaining an understanding of what is fundamentally being produced.

Producing the Self Through Labour

If we are to begin to understand what the ultimate result of any act of production is, we must explore the process further. It has been established through "The Production Welder" that through the act of production the labourer literally expresses her/himself as a working member of a particular community. But according to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the ramifications of production exceed occupational identification; for Marx and Engels, it is the essence of human existence that is manifested through the

production process. The emphasis they place on production stems from their grounded understanding of human history. The basic principle that dictates all existence is the fundamental need for “*producing*” a “means of subsistence”:

life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. (Marx and Engels, “Feuerbach . . .” 27)

As people engage in producing a means of subsistence, they are in turn producing the foundations that envelope them through the act of living, i.e., political, social, economic and cultural constructions. By locating people and their responses to circumstances as the determining factor for not only historical development, but for the very existence of history, an important revelation is achieved: “As individuals express their life, so they are” (Marx and Engels, “Feuerbach . . .” 18).

It is this expression/production of self that is of enormous interest to folklorists. If we wish to truly gain an understanding of people and their behaviours, we must acknowledge the role of production. Marx and Engels argue that it is imperative that the

mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. (“Feuerbach . . .” 18)

Raymond Williams reinforces Marx's and Engels's position when he reminds us that

in this human historical process, we produce ourselves and our societies, and it is within these developing and variable forms that "material production," then itself variable, both in mode and scope, is itself carried on" (91).

Therefore from a Marxist perspective, the physical products of our activities are only important in that they are the consequences of human development. In producing a weld or a chair, the craftsperson is in fact engaging in a process of defining the very essence of what it means to not only be a welder or chairmaker, but what it means to be a person "enter[ing] into definite social and political relations" (Marx and Engels, "Feuerbach . . ." 22).

The labour process, then, becomes especially valuable for folklorists to gain insight into the lives of the people and culture they are studying. Our occupations continue to serve as the essential means of production, in that we define ourselves through our work. In *It's a Working Man's Town*, anthropologist Thomas Dunk points out that the "necessity of paid labour and the fear of losing it dominate the lives of the working class" and thus, workers are entrenched in the labour process struggling or thriving in a perpetual performance of the self (41). The key term here is "struggle." Marx and Engels state that "the nature of individuals . . . depends on the *material conditions* determining their production," and, in our own modern context, material conditions are grossly industrialized ("Feuerbach . . ." 18

emphasis added). With the growing influences of technology, the individual's ability to express her/himself is seriously inhibited, but not to the extent that individual expression is nullified as Marx and Engels lament in *The Communist Manifesto*:

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence the cost of production of a workman is restricted almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance . . . (87)

Despite Marx and Engels's romanticizing of traditional labour, their realization that a large portion of the labour force was/is being oppressed by technology is still a concern for folklorists today. Robert McCarl, although very aware of the machine's presence in the workplace, rejects this deterministic understanding of the labourer as a passive being, operating as a mere extension or "appendage" of technology.

The tension between worker and machine is considered in "The Production Welder" as McCarl discusses the intrusive role of management and their measures to maximize labour efficiency. As if directly responding to Marx's concern expressed in the passage above, McCarl cites an example where "management decided to try out a spot welding machine to take over a welding task previously done by hand" (251). With the introduction of this machine—which was actually an effective tool—the "boredom and lack of

skill involved in feeding material into it forced the welders to revert to the old hand method whenever possible" (251). The welders outright defied management by refusing to employ a method of work that served to simplify the labour process. Moreover, the work that remained because of the men's rejection of the incorporation of the machine was a task that senior workers often avoided and generally consigned to junior workers. Why, then, would these welders risk the consequences of defying management to do more work (especially work that was mostly avoided by those who were in a position to do so)?

Quite simply, these workers are resisting what Marx and Engels believe to be the workers loss of control of the productive process. With the increase of automation in the workforce the worker's control is reduced, and thus he/she is increasingly alienated from the act of production. Marx argues that worker alienation is the result of the production process.

that is not part of his [the worker's] nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. ("Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" 124-125)

But in resistance to worker alienation the welders that McCarl studied were reincorporating themselves back into the mode of production, despite the fact that in doing so they were making more work for themselves. The work that was initially theirs, and therefore meaningful to them, was reacquired

through their own subversive behaviour. The magnitude of these acts of subversion,⁸ is not only relevant in this individual circumstance, as their behaviour sheds light on the dynamism within the production process, and the subsequent flaw of Marx's understanding of the worker within it.

As Marx points out the automation of labour may superficially appear to serve the worker, but it essentially serves the insurmountable demands of capitalist production. These demands for surplus are not the product of the basic demands of the workers, simply because they far exceed their needs. Consequently the value of production is logically reduced, since the products of the trade no longer belong to those who are actually involved in producing them. From this, Marx concludes that the "product of labour is labour which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing; this product is an *objectification* of labour" ("Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" 122).

Yet while the objectification of labour is possible, it is not, however, a necessary conclusion. Marx fails to acknowledge the active role of the worker, whereby the reality of an objectified labour force is resisted through a means of personal expression. It is this creative aspect of labour which Michael J. Bell focuses on in his essay "Making Art Work." Bell considers

⁸ These acts have also been referred to as acts of "sabotage" by Martin Sprouse in *Sabotage in the American Workplace*. He defines sabotage within the workplace as "*anything that you do at work that you're not supposed to*

assembly line workers in an automobile plant, and breaks down one particular worker's daily work routine. His study indicated that what appears to be an unconscious, automated labour process is, at least in this case, a "deliberate" and "self-conscious experience" which serves as "a display of style and expression that molds the individual pieces of the work process into a truly creative event" (220). Thus, what is apparent is that workers defy being alienated from their labour through the process of production, which is not an objectified performance as Marx suggests, but a vital means of expressing both individual and group identity. The challenge that exists, then, is to first recognize where this expressive behaviour lies, and secondly discover what is being expressed.

Labouring in a Capitalist Context

Before any kind of analysis of performance is attempted, it is crucial that the context in which the performance occurs be fully understood. Since I am considering an occupational community within a capitalist framework, the inherent principles of capitalist production must be considered. We have already touched upon the conflict between the worker and the modern technological age in which she/he works, but this antagonism must be further elucidated to suitably consider the behaviours within the occupational group of our particular study: professional hockey. Hence we

do" (3).

must begin by exploring where the labourer fits within the capitalist system of production.

At its most basic level, capitalism is based entirely on producing surplus value at the expense of the working class. According to Sheila Cohen, it is a system of exploitation that essentially consists of one class employing “labour for less value than it produces” to guarantee the generation of profit for the hiring class (42). As alluded to earlier, however, the inherent exploitation of labour within the capitalist labour process need not imply that the labourer is a passive victim of his/her material surroundings; rather, he/she can be an individual engaged in an oscillating process of conflict and consent. The worker, who is often not concerned with debates of political policy and ideology, is conscious of his/her position within a system where “quantitative maximization of output and reduction of socially necessary labour time . . . dominates managerial strategy” and hence, consciously and unconsciously complies with and resists his/her role within the workplace (Cohen 43). This conflicting relationship becomes clearer when we consider the reality of power within dominant culture: power lies within a class’s ability to naturalize its dominance, creating the illusion that the existing power structures are somehow innate. The exploitation of labourers has become part of this reality, serving to reduce the natural conflict this unfavourable relationship generates, and ultimately establishes and maintains capitalist hegemony.

The concept of hegemony is most beneficial as it implies a negotiation of power and subsequent consent to domination rather than a group's outright submission to an overt execution of force. It should be stressed that hegemonic structures are never stagnant and are extremely difficult to maintain. As sociologist John Hargreaves explains, dominant culture is forced to make

genuine concessions to other classes and groups; by accommodating imaginatively and positively to opposing pressures; by forming alliances with potential enemies; by being able to foresee and pre-empt alternatives to its hegemony; and by assessing accurately what combination of coercion and persuasion to use. (115)

Alternately, the dominated class is constantly involved in a process of "negotiation, concessions, threats and pressures before opposition can reach serious proportions," thus keeping hegemony in a state of flux. Therefore, in a labour context, the worker accedes to an exploitative labour process, but, simultaneously resists servility. In fact, occupational environments are filled with subversion, as workers seek to regain degrees of power they relinquished entering the unequal partnership with management. While subversive acts are diverse, they perform a uniform function, which Thomas Dunk argues is to oppose the formal structures of work (7). Logically then, most acts of subversion occur within the informal processes of labour, where workers are able to establish "a new system of meaning" where "they [the workers] are morally and intellectually dominant" (Dunk 159). But only by

acknowledging the inherent conflict within the context of labour are we able to decipher this esoteric system of meaning, and competently discuss performance within the workplace as a negotiation of power.

It has been stressed that the hegemony of a class is largely maintained by its ability to execute its power over those living in the dominated classes in a non-conflicting manner. In other words, the desired hegemonic structure would be for those in power to maintain its dominance without making it noticeable in everyday life. In so doing, the thought of subverting aspects of authority is difficult because of the lack of any specific impositions of power. In the occupational arena, this naturalizing process of power is perhaps more easily achieved for the simple reason that employers are aware of the fact that workers are dependent upon having and maintaining a job for their basic survival. The unequal/exploitative relationship between worker and owner is generally accepted in capitalist societies as a natural relationship, that only becomes contentious if the exploitation surpasses an accepted level of suitability. In direct response to the undesired realities of the job, a maxim has arisen that in its very utterance naturalizes subservience: it's just part of the job—"It's part of the game [job]. And that's just the way it works" (Copper Interview).

Granted, then, that the expression of dominance is often cleverly disguised as natural life processes, and that without any overt execution of coercion there are generally few opportunities to formally counteract. With

this said, however, it is also true that the dominated classes are cognizant of their subordinate role, and that in response to their situation the same subtle behaviour can be found which serves to challenge authority without having to assume a revolutionary posture. As a result, much of the inherent antagonism that exists within the unequal relationship of labour appears to remain silent. Yet as Cohen explains, the lack of formal resistance does not deny what she describes to be a relationship that is bound in conflict:

The dialectic of structure and response within the capitalist labour process springs not from some externally delivered political awareness, a radical response by workers to the oppressive domination of management, but from the contradictory relationship inherent in the production process itself, that of exploitation. (41)

The obvious difficulty for those studying these processes within the workplace is decoding behaviour that, by its mundane and everyday nature, appear to be purely benign, but in fact is rich with subversion. How then can a researcher begin to access behaviours that are so deeply disguised in what have been constructed as natural life processes?

“Reading” Behaviour

In folkloristics the study of behaviour has been generally understood in terms of “performance.” The concept of performance—“an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience”—has been of great value to folklorists for two

major reasons (Bauman 41). First, it satisfies the “artistic” component of modern perceptions of folklore as *artistic* communication in small groups; and secondly, it offers boundaries/limitations to the types of behaviour folklorists should be studying. And while this utilization of performance theory has enabled folklorists to move beyond the texts of folklore, it has simultaneously neglected other forms of behaviour that are not especially “heightened” or “framed,” but are equally rich with meaning, and thus, an obvious difficulty arises. The heightened performances folklorists typically study are in their very nature expressive acts deliberately intended for a public audience (regardless of how intimate the audience may be); yet the more mundane communicative behaviour is generally hidden in the everyday occurrences of its expression, which make it more difficult to, first, appreciate in a performative sense, and secondly, interpret.

The difficulty in recognizing the significance of the mundane actions of everyday life is not unique to folklorists, as other culturally related disciplines have recently begun considering the potentials of looking at the familiar rather than the strange.⁹ A problem that presents itself is the apparent complacency evident while these behaviours occur. But by

⁹ John Aguilar's *Anthropologists at Home in North America: Methods and Issues in the Study of One's Own Society* is a collection of essays which consider the possibilities of doing anthropology at home in one's own society in order to study the familiar and the ordinary instead of the exotic and the unfamiliar.

reminding ourselves of the unarticulated inherent political tension evident in the labour process, it is possible to recognize that, precisely because it is commonplace, such behaviour is in fact ideologically and culturally rich. It is precisely from this premise that Roland Barthes approaches everyday behaviour in his enduring work, *Mythologies*. The work is an examination of the lived events of everyday life—from wrestling to plastic—and he discusses them as highly politicized occurrences. The work is in direct response to Barthes's "feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history" (II). In other words, Barthes sets out to de-naturalize life processes that have gone relatively unquestioned because of their innate guises, and to expose and interpret the multiplicity of meanings that are hidden within their routine performances.

While the argument that Barthes puts forward is not revolutionary, the success of his work lies in the manner in which he accesses the mundane and the ordinary. His approach draws from Ferdinand de Saussure's systematic approach to language which he called semiology. It is not necessary here to explore in detail the work of Saussure, except to say that it considers the representation of forms as distinct entities with their own intrinsic values. More specifically, semiology "is a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their contents" (Barthes 111). Barthes

makes use of Saussure's work with language and carries it over into other communicative acts such as "photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity" and considers the representation of the event separate from the event itself (110). In so doing, the actual event can suddenly be read/interpreted as a multivalent text rather than simply for the naive action it appears to be.

Barthes applies Saussure's linguistic semiology to the semiological analysis of non-linguistic forms of discourse. He begins with a simple phrase: "*because my name is lion*" (116). Barthes illustrates that if we consider this phrase as a pedagogical tool for teaching elementary grammar, its meaning is not *a result due to lion designation*, but rather "*a rule about the agreement of the predicate*" (emphasis added 116). The representation of the concept remains unchanged, yet its meaning has completely altered because of the new system of meaning (or in ethnographic terms, new context) in which the phrase has been expressed. Thus, the representation of concepts is arbitrary, to the point that in different communicative situations, it signifies something different.

Barthes then moves away from a purely linguistic message and offers the example of a photograph in *Paris-Match* to further illustrate consistent representation (he employs the term "sign" as the physical manifestation of the representation) and its inconsistent signification. The example is of a

French soldier of African descent standing with eyes uplifted, saluting the symbolic colours of the French Empire. The literal images within the photograph are expressions of colonial loyalty (saluting to French iconography) and French superiority (those who were once conquered by France willingly stand in honour of French power). But the same photograph in a new system of meaning may equally signify abject subordination, impoverished identity and subsequent debasement as a result of French Imperialism. The sign does not need to change for its signification to alter drastically, and ultimately represent an entirely separate concept from the first. Hence, the vehicle employed to express meaning is separate from meaning itself.

The power of this argument is that it moves beyond a phenomenological understanding of hermeneutics, because the image is unique in every communicative situation, despite its consistency in form. The phrase *because my name is lion* is at one point a grammatical example, and in another system of meaning, an explanation. The same form is in fact two disparate entities: they are not simply two different interpretations (although each entity on its own is ultimately subject to an indefinite number of interpretations). The same holds true in any labour context and the manner in which the labour process is fulfilled. A construction worker resting her/his head atop of a shovel along the roadside is in a specific resting pose, yet in a new system of meaning the same pose is a communicative

device capable of multiple meanings, such as worker resistance or even subversion. In the “Preface” to *Feminist Messages*, Joan Radner makes similar observations of women manipulating (both consciously and unconsciously) the polysemic codes of patriarchal discourse to communicate female-specific meanings. Radner argues that disempowered females—which can be translated equally well to workers in the unequal predicament of labour—“communicate a variety of messages to different segments of their audiences” with little to no male scrutiny because the “essential ambiguity of coded acts protects women from potentially dangerous responses from those who might find their statements disturbing” (vii-viii).

These physical or linguistic expressions, however, must not be mistaken for the concepts they are representing. As researchers studying the mundane and the everyday specific to the workplace, it is essential to make these distinctions to move beyond purely naive readings, in order to realize that expressions of labour may be anything from a joke, to an expression of pride. What is being communicated can *be* all of these things and more, not simply different interpretations of the same expression. The point is that we must seek to locate these other values ($x = y$), which is achieved through acknowledging material representations—language, film, sport—as *vehicles* for manifesting concepts, not as the concepts themselves. Thus, a simple act of reading the paper in the morning at the breakfast table may be an

individual acquiring information: yet this same sign/event may be a wife avoiding conversation with an uninterested spouse. The event is at least two separate concepts that are embodied within the same sign: the first in its very simplicity lends itself to a naive reading, while the second (as real as the first) is disguised within the naiveté of the initial reading.

A “Working” Understanding of Sport

The subject of this particular thesis is professional hockey, and although professional sport does not fit within the traditional conventions of labour discourse, it serves as an excellent site for examining worker performance and production. A deliberate decision was made to approach professional hockey in terms of labour as opposed to approaching it as a sport, because the relationships and behaviours within are shaped by the fact that the *players are working, not playing*. The professional hockey player does not engage in the sport of hockey as a means of recreating, but instead, enters the arena as does any employee who enters the workplace to perform a job in order to be paid for services rendered. Therefore the professional hockey dynamic is rooted in the same antagonistic relationship inherent to any labour context whereby labour power is exploited for the generation of revenue for owners. This relationship is comfortably hidden behind the sporting facade—behind the game—which makes it that much more significant to approach the community as the volatile labour institution it is.

The task at hand, then, is to consider the professional hockey labour process as a continuous performance of players/workers striving to express themselves as productive individuals, within a system of efficiency employed by management that exploits this artistry for capitalist gain. The struggle that manifests itself can be perceived as two groups motivated by the desire to produce, but two completely separate acts are generated. It is here that a semiological understanding of expression becomes most effective. Thomas Dunk observes astutely that the means for worker resistance are greatly restricted by the existing hegemony because “their cultural tool box is full of tools that were designed for other purposes by the system they are struggling against” (159). Therefore the struggle to be a creative individual within the hockey environment may often mean performing a task which involves incorporating the unique skills and precision for which the player is known, ultimately creating a distinctive product/end that is interpreted esoterically as his own. While the creative act is successful, the superior nature of the product/end, along with the effective manner in which it was achieved, cater to the demands of management, and thus reinforce worker subordination. But it is by removing the representation of the event from the actual concept being expressed, that we are enabled to perceive two completely separate acts. The player’s fulfilment of the demands of labour both reinforce subordination, and simultaneously liberate him as a creative human being, in a process that Dunk argues is the active resistance of workers to “their

subordination by creating another system of meaning. In this sense, they are cultural 'bricoleurs,' creating a meaningful universe in which they are morally and intellectually dominant" (159).

The incorporation of Marxist and semiological theory into a process-centred approach to labour provides the researcher with a more developed means of approaching occupational culture: more so than if any of these theoretical approaches were employed on their own. Through a Marxist perspective it is evident that the inherent antagonism within the labour process is an integral component for the workers in their everyday fulfilment of the demands of production. One cannot study the dynamics of an occupational community without being fully cognizant of the exploitative relationship between labourers and owners. Not only does it shape the actual context in which workers exist, it also influences the workers' responses to their conditions. These responses, although overlooked by Marx, are the creative elements of labour which are fundamental to occupational folklore.

Therefore, all three of these approaches to cultural expression allow the researcher to uncover behaviours that are often hidden within the mundane events of everyday life. The mundane disguise of these events does not, however, reduce their significance. The labour process can be appreciated as being imbued with political and ideological meaning, in addition to satisfying the demands for surplus capital. By stripping away the

naive readings of worker performance, we are able to understand folklore as being an integral component of the labour process, which therefore allows us to begin discussing the occupational group at hand.

Chapter Two

Repression, Incorporation and Segregation: The Evolution of Sport in Canada

As one begins to explore the phenomenon of hockey in Canada, one quickly realizes that the task at hand is not an easy one. The game of hockey far exceeds sport or occupation, and rather, has come to symbolize a way of life in Canada. Throughout the nation children and adults can be found playing hockey, in either its more vernacular¹ forms of street/ball hockey, or in more organized forms of play on rinks and arenas as part of the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA). Hockey has become part of the Canadian mythos and media and artistic forms have and continue to celebrate its mythological status.²

The political implications of hockey are also profound as the game has served as a national symbol for a country whose identity is consistently scrutinized by its own people. Few other institutions in Canada have the unifying potential of hockey, making it “one of this country’s most significant collective representations—a story that Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be a Canadian” (Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in*

¹ I use the term “vernacular” here to signify play as it is experienced “by the people,” in contrast to organized play that is not mutually attainable for reasons of class, gender and/or skill (Rapoport 3).

² Literary works such as Roch Carrier’s *The Hockey Sweater*, films such as *Slapshot* and television programs such as *Hockey in Night in Canada* are

Canada 13). Perhaps the most celebrated hockey, and in turn, Canadian story occurred on September 28, 1972 when Paul Henderson scored the winning goal in the final game of an eight game series against the Soviet Union. In a 1997 television documentary, *September 1972*, which retells the story of what was designated "The Challenge Series," hockey star Phil Esposito remarks solemnly about the final outcome of the series: "It was done. We accomplished what we started and it will never be the same again" (*September 1972*). Narrator August Schellenberg summarizes the series as follows:

Team Canada arrived home to a heroes' welcome; Canadians rejoicing from coast to coast. There were twenty-seven remarkable days, never to be seen again.

That wasn't how it started; it all began as fun. But things changed. In one incredible month we renewed our love for more than just a game. [*Inserted in the commentary is Paul Henderson, who states, "I don't think we were ever more Canadian than we were on September 28, 1972."*]

There is something about September, September of '72. Its magic will always live. (*September 1972*)

As with all stories, however, hockey is a construction that has been cleverly manipulated by hegemonic forces in this nation, and in order to fully explore hockey as it is lived, it is important to deconstruct much of the ideological weight associated with it.³ In order to begin such an endeavour it is

examples of various media/artistic forms celebrating hockey in Canada.

³ To start, the catalyst behind the "Challenge Series" of 1972, Alan Eagleson, is serving a jail term for defrauding the athletes he represented first as a player agent, then as President of the National Hockey League's Player

necessary to examine the phenomenon of sport in a larger, more historical context.

Sport in the Victorian Era

Still very much a part of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Canada's political and social climate was inextricably linked to England.⁴ Understandably the development of sport in Canada was a reflection of British sport policy, which in itself was only beginning to be defined. During this period in British history, the need to establish a means of regulating popular sporting activities was growing. Previous attempts—by both political and religious factions—to control these popular forms of entertainment involved restricting the events, but as John Hargreaves

Association (PHPA):

The RCMP charged Eagleson in December 1996 with four counts of fraud and theft from Hockey Canada, the NHL and the players' association between 1982-86. He also was charged with two counts of theft over \$5,000 involving Air Canada travel passes and two counts of defrauding Labatt Breweries of more than \$5,000, stemming from his activities during Canada Cup tournaments.

Besides his duties with the NHLPA, Eagleson was a member of the Hockey Canada board, a close friend of then-NHL president John Ziegler, organized the 1972 Summit Series with the then-Soviet Union and the subsequent Canada Cup tournaments, and represented Canada in almost all its dealings with the International Ice Hockey Federation. ("Alan Eagleson Reportedly . . .")

⁴ French Imperialism also played a role in Canada's development, as Richard Gruneau indicates in *Class, Sports and Social Development*, but with Britain's ultimate domination of Canada, British influence was most

explains, these attempts failed: "Not only had the old festivals and the activities surrounding them largely survived, they were elaborated and extended through an accelerated process of commercialization" (17).

Hargreaves's use of the term "survived" is slightly misleading here; although participation in popular pastimes⁵ continued through the centuries, there was an ongoing process of negotiation and coercion that ultimately modified these cultural expressions. It must be understood that sport policy in Britain by the end of the eighteenth century was being created within "an arena for the play of power relations" which saw "sport as an object of struggle, control and resistance" (Jarvie and Maguire 109).

At this point in British sport history, the working class had grown in size and strength, forcing the existing hegemony to consider seriously working-class existence as a threat to power. With the French Revolution still fresh in the minds of the classes, efforts were being made by those in power to repress any challenge to authority. A growing concern for the ruling classes was the increase in "free time" available to the working class as a result of an industrialized workplace:

A more complex and specialized division of labour developed. . . . this transformation produced unprecedented material affluence and created a separate and expanding sphere of leisure time. (Jarvie and Maguire 12).

apparent (94).

⁵ Richard Holt in *Sport and the British* provides an example of one of these loosely organized events called "purring," which was a "ferocious shin-kicking contest fought between pairs of men in heavy clogs" (60).

The concept of leisure was not in itself threatening, as capitalist thinking and the church recognized the value in offering less oppressive work schedules and creating healthier working and living environments to allow for a more productive and devout working community. But as Robert F. Wheeler points out, for the first time people “were forced to decide for themselves how they would spend their few non-working hours” which usually resulted in “the traditional pleasures of dance and drink” (192). It became evident for the ruling classes that successful maintenance of hegemony was not achieved by denying leisure activities; rather, by influencing the expression of these activities, they could successfully control “where the majority of people live, including women and children, and where the majority, including men, often express their most precious feelings of love, hope and joy” (Yeo 136).

Therefore, in order to maintain control of working class recreation, dominant groups sought to incorporate leisure activities that were culturally relevant, but simultaneously devoid of the unruliness and “immorality” of traditional pastimes. Moreover, the ruling classes were looking to establish activities that reinforced bourgeois values which validated the existing power structures (i.e. political, religious and gender hegemonies). Venues that best suited these objectives were popular sporting pastimes, that were at one time considered socially unacceptable and anti-bourgeois, but were suddenly

deemed “a social cement” and “a useful safety-valve” (Hargreaves 34). In addition to being a highly valued means of entertainment for the working classes, they could be easily co-opted as the embodiment of a British, nationalistic, patriarchal, bourgeois culture: “It was in sports above all then, that the essence of Englishness, what distinguished us from the effete, inferior foreigner, was encouraged and expressed” (Hargreaves 34). In essence, the dominant classes appropriated a popular form of entertainment that they failed to physically abolish on several occasions,⁶ and used it as a disciplinary measure:

It seems to be indisputable that the shift from games to sports in the strict sense took place in the educational establishments reserved for the “elites” of bourgeois society, the English public schools, where the sons of aristocratic or upper-bourgeois families took over a number of popular—i.e. *vulgar*—games, simultaneously changing their meaning and function in exactly the same way as the field of learned music transformed the folk dances—bourées, sarabands, gavottes, etc—which it introduced into high-art forms such as the suite. (Bourdieu 342)

For those working-class males permitted to participate in these activities, sport provided a suitable alternative to time spent working in unsuitable working conditions, and a vehicle for both individual and collective fulfilment that “had been displaced by industrialization” (Wheeler, 193).

⁶ Eileen Yeo writes of the struggle to “suppress or regulate cultural forms through state authorization” and working class resistance to these measures in her essay “Phases in the History of Popular Culture and Power Relations in Britain, 1789 to the Present” (138).

It is necessary to realize, however, that the incorporation of sporting activities into dominant culture involved a sanitizing process that saw traditional forms of play altered—in some cases drastically—to rid them of their previous “rough play,” often involving intense alcohol consumption and extreme violence. The games that were traditionally played were loosely organized events that took place in unspecified physical spaces. They were generally devoid of official rules and/or governing bodies, and were not bound by a definite time frame (Jarvie and Maguire 12). In order for dominant classes to assume control of these cultural performances, it was essential that the performances be regulated. Thus, in addition to repressing the unruly behaviour, the concept of vernacular sport was replaced with an “elaborate system of regional, national and international organisations” whereby sport “became more specialised, bureaucratised and its values oriented around individual achievement” (Jarvie and Maguire 12-13). The result of this regulating process, however, did not serve to incorporate working-class activities into the dominant framework; the success of regulated sport in Britain actually transformed it into a bourgeois pastime that was suddenly denied to the working class. What was initially an attempt by the oligarchy to *share* “the enjoyment of popular sports and pastimes,” had become a divisive enterprise, that saw the appropriation of working-class activities become the exclusive property of the dominant classes (Hargreaves 19).

It must be noted that the development of sport in Britain was (and is, as it continues to develop) filled with many complexities and individual circumstances that I have not accounted for in this simplified presentation of events. What I have been stressing is that these developments can be understood as unfolding in a tripartite structure: 1) repression; 2) incorporation; 3) and finally segregation. To illustrate this threefold process, let us briefly turn to the development of football in Britain, which in its original form was perceived as a threat to the existing hegemonies. Eileen Yeo describes football that was played in Britain pre-eighteenth century:

football had been a traditional Lenten sport played on Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday from 'time immemorial.' Sometimes more than 1,000 players took part in this game where the ball was carried rather than kicked towards goals either end of the town. Victory seldom happened in less than 6 hours of rough horseplay, brawling and drinking up and down the public streets. (138)

The customary gathering of a riotous mob obviously proved to be of great concern for government and church officials. It was physically impossible to control such an immense mass of individuals, and with tempers and spirits already high from the drinking and playing, the footballers were perceived as posing that much more of a threat to revolt. It was quickly decided that measures needed to be taken to prevent these events from occurring.

Abolishment of this "game," however, was soon recognized to be a formidable task. The first strategy employed by the dominant classes to curtail these events was to physically prevent people from participating.

Laws were constructed that banned such events from occurring, and areas were policed to ensure that laws were upheld. Local populations reacted violently in response to these measures, however, and as John Hargreaves writes, the situations often “developed into battles between a section of the local populace and troops and constables” (23). He cites two specific examples where the banning of football was met with violent resistance:

Similar struggles took place over the attempts to suppress Shrovetide football: the Derby struggle went on from the later eighteenth century until it was suppressed with the aid of dragoons and special constables in 1846; and the banning of Leicester football under the local Improvement Act of 1847 again provoked riots and was only quelled in 1848-9 with physical force. (23)

Hence the first stage of the development of football was well underway, with authorities committing themselves to the repression of all football activity. But as evidenced through these last two examples, resistance to this initial stage was difficult, and it was not long before an ulterior means of dealing with this “dangerous” behaviour was implemented.

The stringent measures against playing football produced more tension than the actual games themselves. Consequently it was decided that it would be easier to remove the aspects of the sport that were deemed threatening to the established order of society, instead of trying to abolish the games themselves. In order to make this possible, football was incorporated into dominant culture, where the games could be properly regulated and behaviour could be controlled. The game of football, without

“the old kicking, carrying, tackling, tripping, gouging, [and] punching” actually came to be understood as a successful method of social control (Baker 242). The affinity the poorer classes had with the game made it easy for the dominant classes to attract participation, and by making football a highly disciplined and orderly affair, the game came to embody the desired principles of the existing hegemony. Moreover by acting upon the desires of the people and providing them with a regular diet of football (or any other sport), the wants of the people were seemingly met, while providing a much needed alternative to life within the workplace. These “benevolent” sentiments are expressed in John Hargreaves’s synopsis of Edwin Chadwick’s arguments at the 1842 Commission on the Health of Towns: “Chadwick . . . advocated improved recreation facilities, arguing that open spaces and sports were essential for diverting the lower orders from political disaffection” (25). Through the incorporation of football into mainstream activities, employers would be able to monitor their employees’ behaviour away from the factories; church officials could monitor the “free-time” of their parishioners; and government officials were relieved of the implied danger of unruly mobs posing a threat to social order.

In fact, the strategy to incorporate football into dominant culture had such positive results, the sport soon became the exclusive property of upper middle class males. Because the game idealized a model bourgeois, masculine, Victorian sensibility, the game was ultimately worthy only of the

British elite. Suddenly the brutish vernacular game of football had been transformed into a “gentlemen’s” activity that prepared young males to become incorporated into the ruling classes: skills not required of working-class individuals. Playing a school sport was “conceived as a training in courage and manliness, ‘forming the character’ and inculcating the ‘will to win’ which is the mark of the true leader, but a will to win within the rules” (Bourdieu 343). Football required individuals to work well as a team, display an ability to be a team leader, be physically superior, and possess a certain ingenuity, which became highly valued qualities. The schools adopted the game as a vehicle for expressing Christian morality and British nationalism, and soon, the football “tradition”—as it was conveniently being called—became an institutionalized endeavour, completely removed from the streets from whence it originated. Therefore William J. Baker states correctly that “sports in Britain” were the result of “a class-divided society and tended to accentuate rather than to heal these divisions” (242).

Again, while this representation of the transformation of football from a potentially subversive vernacular game to an institutionalized bourgeois activity is admittedly oversimplified, it needs stressing that these sporting developments were the result of a dialectical process that shaped a British sport identity. What may appear to have been a deterministic tripartite process was in reality an intense struggle between dominant culture and emergent/residual cultures. The struggle consisted of a series of

compromises and coercive techniques from both sides. In effect, it illustrates the development of sport as a hegemonic process whereby power relationships are constantly modified in order to secure ruling class dominance. In addition the threefold process that has been described here should not be understood as static. As we leave British sport and begin to consider sport in Canada, it will become evident that from the final stage of segregation, another stage of incorporation manifested itself due to class resistance and the economic value of sporting contests.

Sport Hegemony in Canada

Recognizing the influences of British imperialism on sport development in Canada does not suggest that Canadian sport is simply the product of British sport policies. In fact, much of Canadian sport is the product of early settlers' conscious rejection of a British sport identity. This resistance is made evident as certain sports were discarded and substituted with other more local forms of play in order to establish a sporting repertoire suitable for Canadians. Ironically the process involved in establishing sport in Canada as a prominent *Canadian* institution virtually mirrors what was taking place in Britain during this same Victorian period. As a result the content of Canadian sport is dissimilar from those played in Britain, but their development and their ideological value are analogous.

As with British sport history, there were two very distinct forms of play that were taking place in Canada by the mid-nineteenth century that saw lower working-class peoples engaged in forms of vernacular play, and the upper middle classes engaged in “modern” sport. Richard Gruneau makes the distinction between these two forms of play as follows: traditional sport “tended to be periodic, unorganized, localized in specific communities, and governed by differing and often competing rules,” while modern sport “is vastly more organized, highly structured, and regulated” (“Modernization or Hegemony,” 12-13). Participation in these vernacular games is highly noteworthy, because there has been a tendency by sport historians to suggest that the lower classes did not engage in these more modern, formal forms of play, and thus did not have “time” to play. In *History of Sport in Canada*, the Howells argue that “the common man, forced to work for others for his living, had little time for recreational sport” (55-56). In fact, working-class culture could not engage in modern sport because of the specified time frames in which games were played, but this did not deny people from engaging in “play.” The Howells are correct in saying that “the active sportsmen . . . were from a minority section of the community, that is, gentleman players from the upper strata of society, and officers of the garrisons,” but their implication that the lower classes did not have time for leisure activities is false (56). In fact, “traditional sport . . . was closely interwoven with established conventions of ritual and social hierarchy,” indicating that

despite minimal participation in more formally recognized sporting pastimes, the masses have held sport as a highly valued experience throughout Canadian history (Gruneau, "Modernization or Hegemony" 12).

Acknowledging that sport was a valued pastime for a much larger segment of the population than indicated by Maxwell and Reet Howell is important for two reasons. First, it dispels the notion that only the wealthy were involved in these forms of sporting activities; second, it indicates that there was a general interest in sport, and the desire to take part in recreational events was clearly evident. Therefore, when we consider measures taken by the bourgeoisie to implant organized forms of play into working-class life, it is possible to perceive this move as being a response to an existing desire that had clearly manifested itself through mass participation in vernacular games. But the initiative to remove time constraints on the working classes was not purely an innocuous move to allow people to engage in indigenous sporting pastimes; instead, the desire to "play" was seen as a positive method of creating a healthy labour force. Thus, work schedules were altered, allowing for more consistent "participation in exercise and sport" to correct the "pallid appearance of the working man," and ultimately introduce a means of maximizing work productivity (Howell and Howell, *History of Sport* 56). It was ironically the more indigenous vernacular games that came to represent what was soon to

be constructed as a truly Canadian sport heritage, not the organized games played by the elite.

In effect, what took place was a process whereby vernacular forms of play were appropriated from the working classes by Canada's elite, and ultimately re-introduced to the working classes, but in the form of organized games. Games that were initially played by "the colonial estate-holders, military officers, and merchants" were games that were played in Europe and gradually imported into Canada (Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 95). Games such as cricket and curling are examples of British and Scottish games that were "civilized" forms of play in contrast to the "crude" and "dangerous" indigenous games that originated in North America. In *Canada Learns to Play*, Alan Metcalfe explains that "accounts by upper- and middle-class observers attest to the lack of sophistication and the roughness of many of the 'sports' played in the backwoods" and thus, organized sports such as cricket served as a suitable alternative to these improper exhibitions. Metcalfe observes astutely that attempting to establish cricket as an official sport of Canada was not simply the introduction of a game; rather, it was an attempt to maintain British hegemony: it "illustrated the powerful forces of tradition and the way in which dominant social groups perpetuated their way of life in the face of massive social change" (17). But hegemony is never static, and despite the

powerful reactionary measures implemented by Canada's upper/upper-middle classes to establish cricket as Canada's national game, cricket never gained the popularity hoped for by the colonial aristocracy and the educated elite.

After reaching its highest levels of popularity by the 1860s, cricket, and subsequently a uniquely British ideology, were successfully challenged by the pressures of "social change." Dominant culture within Canada was suddenly being forced to respond to new emergent cultures and their desire to establish a Canadian identity, rather than an imported British identity. Emergent groups within Canada recognized the value of using sport as a vehicle for establishing national pride and unity, and ultimately appropriated what was essentially a British means of establishing these goals. In effect, one sport's (cricket) ideological significance was rejected and replaced with an alternative sport that was seen as being relevant to the Canadian population. Thus, while Canada was officially being born as a Dominion, a movement had begun by Canadian businessmen—such as Montreal dentist George Beers—striving to "express a clear sense of their own Canadianness" to return to the "folk" to discover Canada's sporting identity, and reject all the previous negative perceptions of these vernacular forms of play (Gruneau, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 41). Instead of perceiving indigenous games as uncivilized and improper, they were suddenly seen as reflecting the brutal conditions of life in Canada, and thus as character

building experiences. As opposed to the gentlemanly play of cricket, lacrosse was being advocated, by Beers, as “a game rooted in Canadian soil” (Metcalf, *Canada Learns to Play* 19). Lacrosse was seen as a game that “reflected the harshness of their environment [early Canadian settlers] and was used as a vehicle to gain momentary escape from a life of hardship and toil” (Metcalf, *Canada Learns to Play* 16).

The political motivations behind the movement to incorporate the game of lacrosse into dominant culture were simply astounding. The game itself—an appropriation of a game called “baggataway,” which was played by Canada’s First Nation Peoples—was the perfect vehicle for resisting British hegemony, and establishing a new “Canadian” identity. George Beers made no attempt to conceal the ideological worth of lacrosse as he pronounced clearly in 1867 his political agenda to champion it as the new national game of Canada. In fact, his efforts were articulated overtly in a series of articles he wrote that not only enthusiastically supported the playing of lacrosse, but argued against those who supported cricket as Canada’s national pastime. Articles such as “A Rival to Cricket” and “The National Game” generally expressed the same sentiment which is evident in this one particular passage taken from the *Montreal Gazette*:

As cricket, wherever played by the Britons, is a link of loyalty to bind them to their home so may Lacrosse be to Canadians. We may yet find it will do as much for our young Dominion as the

Olympian games did for Greece or cricket for our Motherland.
(Beers)

For Beers, the game of lacrosse served as the perfect metaphor for the tenuous existence in Canada's hinterland, and the physical demands of this aggressive and often violent game embodied what Beers desired to be truly Canadian. As Don Morrow states, "Beers . . . invented the whole national-game concept, which nevertheless managed to gain acceptance by a kind of consensual validity: if something is claimed to be true enough times, it is often accepted as truth" (54).

Up until the end of the nineteenth century lacrosse was being touted as Canada's national game, and again, through Beers's initiatives, exhibition games were set up in Britain not only to show off Canada's new game, but more importantly, to show off what it meant to be Canadian. The exhibitions themselves were greater inventions than this newly constructed Canadian identity; in order to make the lacrosse metaphor complete, the games were staged matches between Canada's sporting elite and selected First Nations Peoples decorated in ceremonial dress. One description of this carefully constructed event is as follows:

The teams played sixteen games during their month-and-a-half swing through Ireland, Scotland, and England. The order of ceremonies was repeated for each match. The natives were escorted to centre-field in their playing costumes, which consisted of red-and-white striped "guernseys" (jerseys or tunics) and knickers, with white hose; blue velvet caps overlaid with much ornamental bead work and topped by two or three scarlet

feathers . . . In addition all the natives wore earrings and many silver-coloured rings. (Morrow 60)

Morrow later points out that “away from the playing fields, the natives were asked to wear their lacrosse outfits” and were “urged to hold snowshoe races on the grass, to dance ‘war dances’ or the ‘green corn dance,’ or to hold mock ‘pow-wows’ (61). There is a certain irony in this expression of “Canadian Nationalism” since Lacrosse, or as it was likely first known, Baggataway, was perceived by Canada’s sporting elite as reprehensible behaviour that was not only unfit for gentlemen to engage in, but was dangerous behaviour that posed a threat to the British colonialists. Legends of First Nations Peoples using lacrosse as a means of overthrowing British power were commonly told, such as the attack of Fort Michilimackinac on the fourth of June, 1763:

The two teams conspired to use the contest to mask an intended attack on the British fort. Having drawn the officers out of the fort to view the game, at a prearranged signal Ojibwa charged the fort, killed over seventy soldiers, and took many others—including Alexander Henry—prisoner. (Morrow 46)

It was precisely this subversive aura that surrounded the game that appealed to George Beers; if utilized properly, the subversive nature of lacrosse could serve as the perfect vehicle for emergent forces to challenge British dominance, allowing for this new emergent culture to prevail,

gaining the upper hand and propagating itself throughout society. It thereby achieves not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all questions over which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a universal plane. It thus creates the hegemony of a

fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.
(Anderson 19)

But in order for lacrosse to become a vehicle for this new “Canadian” agenda, the game had to become a suitable pastime for the bourgeoisie. The development follows the already delineated threefold process—repression, incorporation, segregation.

The transformation from lacrosse as an indigenous vernacular form of play to an institutionalized pastime has been well documented (Salter, “Baggataway to Lacrosse” and “The Relationship of Lacrosse. . .” Jette and Culin). It was once a perceived dangerous pursuit of First Nation Peoples and later became a symbol for select Canadian nationalists as a unifying element, made possible through a process of incorporation. But through the process of incorporation the game was drastically transformed until baggataway was no longer, and lacrosse was ultimately property of Canada’s elite sport enthusiasts. In essence, the game of baggataway was colonized, and “just as we [Canadian colonialists] claim as Canadian the rivers and lakes and land once owned exclusively by Indians, so we now claim *their* field game as the national field game of our dominion” (Beers, emphasis added). In order for George Beers to effectively incorporate lacrosse into bourgeois culture, it was essential that the vernacular characteristics of baggataway be erased: “At first heralded in adoption, then transformed in nature, the Indian origins of the game were finally shunned by nineteenth-century white

promoters and players” (Morrow 46). Unlike any other indigenous game, lacrosse was re-defined through written rules and regulations that removed any of the undesired aspects of the vernacular game, and simultaneously gave it a uniform and easily identifiable structure:

Under Beers’s leadership, forty-two representatives of twenty-seven clubs from Ontario and Quebec met to consider lacrosse affairs and, particularly to “Systemize rules and establish a national association.” . . . The rules of the game published by Beers in 1860 became the rules of all lacrosse. Therefore, it was not beset with the problem of different local rules that served to hinder the development of Canadian football and ice hockey. (Metcalf *Canada Learns to Play*, 182-183)

The effect of these measures initiated by Beers is discussed astutely by Don Morrow when he argues that the

publication and dissemination of these rules was a crucial factor in the evolution of the sport. Uniformity of playing regulations is a hallmark of modern competitive sport, and rules are the very foundation on which the spread of any sport depends. (51)

In the outcome, the game of lacrosse was no longer the property of First Nation peoples, but had quickly become a symbol for a new Canadian identity:

So what happened, was that a relatively minor sport was suddenly elevated to prominence because of the symbolic role that was associated with it at the time of Confederation—a symbolic role which evidently filled a great need for many people of the time. They wanted to feel attached to things Canadian, as opposed to things English, Scottish, Irish, or American. (Howell *History of Sport in Canada*, 103)

But once again, the consequence of incorporation is apparent: it did not bring two disparate cultures together, but actually enhanced the division that had already existed between First Nation Peoples and the new Canadian elite.

It needs saying here, that although the result of the incorporation of lacrosse was the segregation of cultures, and ultimately of classes, this process of segregation was not passively accepted. Nancy and Maxwell Howell address the reaction of First Nations People to the development of lacrosse in Canada:

It seems ironic that Indians should, so soon, have been barred from the game they introduced to Canada's white settlers. Nevertheless, they banded together and organized an Indian World Championship for lacrosse. (72)

The rejection of First Nations' players from white league play did not stop Aboriginal players from playing lacrosse; but First Nations' resistance did not effectively challenge segregation. In fact, the division that was evidenced in this period in Canadian Sport history exceeded that resulting from race, as working-class participation in lacrosse was also quickly shunned. The game of lacrosse was literally stolen from one culture and made the exclusive property of a privileged, white upper-middle to upper class, group of males. The appeal of lacrosse—its rough and often ferocious nature—soon became a means of dismissing unwanted membership. Violence was cleverly presented as not only a detestable remnant of the First Nations' influence on the sport, but as a result of the participation of First Nations' teams, and later, by

working-class teams. In order to remove the violence, it was decided that these two groups must be removed from the sport.

The unwanted parties, however, could not easily be removed from the game of lacrosse. Both First Nations and working class teams resisted being denied access to the game, and their impact was clearly felt as they successfully challenged upper-middle class teams for supremacy in the sport.⁷ Thus, in order for this new hegemony to avoid being usurped, restrictions had to be introduced that would regulate who could play and who could not. Lacrosse league officials decided to take advantage of the already contentious issue of amateurism versus professionalism, and use it against the more disadvantaged players. The argument was presented as follows:

The logical conclusion for lacrossists was that the incidence of disputes, violence, and undesirable conduct on the field of play could mean only one thing—some players were not gentlemen. The truth of this observation was given substance by the presence of Indians, who always played for money and, by race alone, could not be gentlemen, and of the working-class Shamrock team. . . . The incidence of violence, the Indians and the Shamrocks, the increasing emphasis on winning were all linked together into one answer—professionalism. (Metcalf *Canada Learns to Play*, 195-196)

⁷ The Caughnawaga Indians and the Montreal Shamrocks are examples of First Nations and working class teams that were dominant in the early stages of the modern developments of lacrosse (1860-1885). In *Canada Learns to Play*, Alan Metcalfe states: “the Shamrocks were . . . the most successful team prior to 1885,” and that “they were out of place both socially and athletically. Social misfits on the middle-class playing fields, the Shamrocks were Irish, Roman Catholic, and working class” (196).

The solution was to ensure that lacrosse leagues remained exclusively amateur, and it was simply prohibited that anyone accept money to play. Consequently, those who had enough money and enough leisure time to engage in play—middle and upper classes—were the only ones able to compete. In order for those from working class backgrounds and for aboriginal peoples to afford to leave their work and play lacrosse, it was necessary for them to take money for their services on the playing field. Despite measures in the 1850s by some employers to shorten the work week, allowing employees to engage in play on Saturday afternoons (it was forbidden to play sport on Sunday),⁸ there was still little time for labourers to participate in organized sports and recreation (Howell *History of Sport in Canada*, 111).

In addition to time restraints, however, governing sport bodies wished to further ensure their dominance of organized sport by developing the concept of amateurism until it became virtually impossible for anyone but the middle and upper classes to acquire amateur status. Amateurism in Canada evolved from being an understood principle of prohibiting the payment of money for play, to a “discriminatory system based on money and/or occupation”⁹ (Metcalf, “Growth of Organized Sport,” 47):

⁸ The “Lord’s Day Act of 1845” made it “illegal to play ‘skittles, ball, football, racquets or any other noisy game” (*History of Sport in Canada*, 112).

⁹ It must be noted that this system also discriminated against race; thus,

An amateur is one who has never competed for a money prize, or staked bet or with or against any professional for any prize, or who has never taught, pursued, or assisted in the practice of athletic exercises as a means of obtaining a livelihood. (Metcalf, "Growth of Organized Sport," 47).

The result of these regulatory measures was an exclusive membership that, for at least a temporary period, ensured a white, male middle/upper class hegemony of the sport community. In effect, the British hegemony was successfully circumvented, but a new hegemonic structure was introduced that, in essence, was identical: a class based sport program that functioned "as a vehicle for political socialization (learning particular ways of thinking and behaving) which reflects and reinforces the value preferences and beliefs of the dominant class" (Gruneau, "Modernization or Hegemony," 24). But this period of absolute power was brief, and the measures taken by early Canadian sport enthusiasts were unable to withstand the changes that were occurring in a period of massive social and economic change.

The success of lacrosse in Canada was achieved by marketing it as the game of the people, yet in reality the people were quickly excluded from lacrosse through the implementation of amateurism by Canada's elite. Despite repeated attempts to gain access into the sport, entrance remained difficult, and those who were unable to play lacrosse responded by taking

when the National Lacrosse Association (NLA) "incorporated the word amateur in the title of the organization" it excluded First Nation Peoples "who were legally prohibited from participation in amateur sport" (Metcalf, "Growth of Organized Sport," 46).

part in a new and exciting alternative that was more accessible: hockey.

Unlike lacrosse officials who rejected repeatedly professional interests from their sport, hockey organizers took an alternate route succumbing to the lucrative potential of professional sport. As a result, by the twentieth century lacrosse was nothing more than a residual activity—"By 1914 the glorious years of the heyday of lacrosse were drawing to a close. The tug-of-war between amateur ideology and commercial forces interfered with consistent promotion and development of the sport"—and hockey took on the role of Canada's national game (Morrow 67).

The Birth of Hockey

Trying to locate the actual birthplace of ice-hockey¹⁰ has recently been a contentious issue, and consensus has yet to be achieved. Donald Guay asserts:

Si la plupart des auteurs avancent que le hockey trouve ses origines chez les peuples anciens, certains estiment que c'est en Amérique, voire au Canada, que le hockey sur glace a vraiment pris forme. Mais encore là il n'y a pas unanimité sur le lieu, ni sur le moment où ce sport aurait vu le jour. (34)

It is generally agreed that "hockey-like" games had been played for centuries, but the debate about when the first hockey game took place centres on the question, at what point in time did the game become what we presently

¹⁰ I have used the term "ice-hockey" here to make the distinction between ice-hockey and field-hockey. For the remainder of the thesis, however, I will avoid using the prefix "ice," and the term "hockey" will signify "ice-hockey."

understand hockey to be? Hockey historian Earl Zukerman responded to this question during a heated debate with fellow hockey historian Garth Vaughan on the television program *Canada AM*, by suggesting that

you have to pick a point in time, and you have to pick a definition of what you mean by hockey. And the prevailing theory on the historical side—from most of the accepted historians' arguments—is when you have rules; when you have limited number of players; when you have limited size ice surface; when you have referees; when you have teams—organized teams and structures. That's a good starting point for the definition of hockey. (*Canada AM*)

Therefore a standardized definition of hockey allows for a more accurate assessment of the game's origins.

The various theories identify places such as Montreal, Dartmouth, Windsor (Nova Scotia) and Kingston (Ontario) as the birth place of hockey. Others argue that Canada's First Nations' youth were playing "hockey-like" games since the seventeenth century, and to a certain extent, all of these claims contain some element of truth.¹¹ It was recorded that Huron boys played a modified form of lacrosse on the ice, which had many similarities to the game of hockey, but as Guay correctly states, "ce n'est pas le hockey que l'on joué" (34). In fact, there were several games that were being played by both aboriginal peoples and European settlers which involved hitting a ball

¹¹ Selected examples of works that offer theories on the origin of hockey are: Don Morrow and Mary Keyes' *A Concise History of Sport in Canada*; Donald Guay's "Les Origines Du Hockey"; Neil D. Isaac's *Checking Back: A History of the National Hockey League*; and Alan Metcalfe's "The Growth of Organized

with wooden sticks, but as with this First Nation game, they were more closely associated with their original forms—lacrosse, bandy, shinty and hurley—than they were with hockey.

Over time, aspects of these earlier games were modified to the extent that a new game developed. The exact moment when the game was “born” is still much debated, but there is general agreement among hockey historians that the first “formally” played game of hockey occurred in Montreal “on March 3, 1875. . . played by two teams of McGill students at the Victoria Skating Rink” (Isaac 18). Other more established games continued to influence hockey’s development, however, and as Neil D. Isaacs explains in *Checking Back: A History of the National League*, hockey was in essence, bricolage:

When the game [hockey] was described by the McGill University *Gazette* in 1877, the word checking, borrowed from lacrosse, was used for the first time. And when W. F. Robertson and R. F. Smith codified the first set of rules at McGill in 1879, there were other borrowings. Robertson used terminology from field hockey . . . and they transferred many of its rules to ice, incorporating rudiments of lacrosse and polo, while the “on-sides” aspect allegedly was borrowed from rugby. (25)

Therefore, the game that took place in 1875 was the amalgamation of a variety of vernacular and modern games that were formulated to fit the regional climates, landscapes and sensibilities of Canadian males in the nineteenth century.

More importantly, by appropriating these more informal games the students of McGill were able to form a more structured game, bound by rules and regulations: “They [McGill students] took the crude elements of field hockey, hurling and shinney and molded them all together” (Messier 6). In effect, the men from McGill were able to standardize play, which gave “hockey” a definite shape and identity:

They agreed on a standard field of play and equipment, established a set of conventional rules and means to enforce them. . . . Teams were organized and the structure of competition was also defined in order to determine a winner and a loser. (Messier 6)

Consequently, the first public exhibition of *one localized version* of the game of hockey in 1875 had a miraculous effect: with standardization came official recognition of hockey as a legitimate sport in Canada. Suddenly, what had “existed only through its variant forms of localized play” (Simpson 171) was being played by “soldiers, legislators, and businessmen who had the time and money to spend on such leisure pursuits” (Simpson 171). Once again, however, there was much public resistance to the suddenly exclusive nature of hockey; in addition to working class/aboriginal resistance, a new and emergent entrepreneurial sector of the population was challenging the amateur hegemony. Hockey, unlike lacrosse, evolved with the emergent economic climate in Canada and incorporated an entrepreneurial spirit into the game, thus, paving the way for a drastically modified Canadian sport milieu.

The game of hockey is currently played throughout Canada¹² by males and females of all ages. It is played in backyards, on streets, outdoor rinks, frozen ponds, rivers and lakes, in parking lots or virtually any location where people are willing to play. But it is in the public arena, under the various Canadian Hockey Associations/Federations, that it is officially encountered. There are twelve branches of amateur hockey across Canada representing the various regions of the country,¹³ which are subject to the rules and regulations established by the Canadian Hockey Association. There were 480,432 males and 27,305 females registered as Canadian hockey players in 1996-97,¹⁴ but according to the CHA “4.5 million Canadians” were “involved in hockey as coaches, players, officials, administrators or direct volunteers (this does not include spectators, parents and occasional volunteers)” (“The Game ... What Canadian Hockey has to Offer”). All aspects of amateur

¹² The game’s popularity is also growing throughout many industrialized countries around the world. Evidence of its growth was seen at the 1998 winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, where countries from Austria, Slovakia, Germany, Japan, France, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Italy, USA, China, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Czech Republic, Canada and Russia entered teams in the hockey tournament (*The HockeyNut.com*).

¹³ The branches consist of the British Columbia Amateur Hockey Association (BCAHA); Alberta Amateur Hockey Association (AAHA); Saskatchewan Amateur Hockey Association (SAHA); Manitoba Amateur Hockey Association (MAHA); Thunder Bay Amateur Hockey Association (TBAHA); Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF); Ottawa District Hockey Association (ODHA); Quebec Ice Hockey Federation (QIHF); New Brunswick Amateur Hockey Association (NBAHA); Nova Scotia Hockey Association (NSHA); Prince Edward Island Hockey Association (PEIHA); and Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association (NAHA).

¹⁴ Information provided to me by the Canadian Hockey Association.

hockey are governed by the CHA which as an organization generates an average of 9.5 million dollars a year (“The Game ... What Canadian Hockey has to Offer”).

The CHA’s mandate for over forty years has been to “organize and regulate competitive hockey for aspiring young professionals” (Gruneau, *Hockey Night in Canada* 154). Players playing within the minor hockey system—from ages five to seventeen—are divided, or selected to play, in relation to their skill; by the age of eight the more proficient players begin playing on “select/all-star” teams, while lesser skilled players are distributed according to their unofficial ranking that particular year. The greater the population, however, the greater the filtering process—there are a variety of tiers separating a top ranked (Triple A) team from a lower ranked (C) team. By the age of fourteen players enter the Bantam division and begin being appraised by Junior, American College and even professional scouts. Play becomes highly serious at this point, as those players who display exceptional talent will become subject to the Canadian Junior Hockey League draft, or will later get the opportunity to receive a scholarship to play hockey for an American College or University.¹⁵

¹⁵ Canadian Universities are prohibited from offering athletes full paid scholarships based purely on athletic merit. Young hockey players are forced at an early age, then, to decide if they wish to pursue their hockey in Canada by playing Junior hockey, or wait until they are eligible for college and play in the American College system. There are advantages and disadvantages for playing in either, making the decision most difficult—especially since the

The vast majority of minor hockey players do not go on to play Junior/Collegiate/professional hockey, but are still able to play the game in one form or another once they leave the minor system. There are many amateur leagues that again are designed to meet the competitive needs of the participants. There are Senior leagues that offer high levels of competition, and less competitive Recreational (Rec.) leagues, such as "Beer" leagues, "Old-Timer" leagues, Intramural leagues or simply the occasional renting of the ice to play an informal game of hockey called "shinny." There is great versatility to recreational hockey, enabling people to play the sport at the level they desire. Beyond this, the outdoors provide a ready-made landscape allowing people of all skills and level of commitment to play hockey throughout the year. The abundance of leagues and players in Canada is indicative of hockey's pervasiveness in this country, yet, it has also made it a marketable enterprise for those wishing to sell the game in a professional context.

Professional Hockey in Canada

The incorporation of sport into, first British, and later Canadian bourgeois society, was made possible by introducing sport as a vehicle for social control and promoting proper masculine bourgeois values. By the turn of the twentieth century and with the increase of industrialization in

decision is generally made between sixteen and seventeen years of age.

Canada, however, two basic discoveries were made: first, “industrial time established limits on the workday” creating “the possibility of large numbers of people having regular free time”; and second, “for an enterprising entrepreneur, the game [in this case hockey] could be sold to a consuming public” (Metcalf “Growth of Organized Sport” 40-41). Therefore emergent capitalist principles were forcing themselves upon traditional bourgeois values, and as Richard Gruneau explains, sport ideology was forever changed in Canada:

New industrial technologies had saturated traditional markets, and new markets for new commodities were desperately being sought This “crisis” was solved temporarily by the development of mass consumer markets centred on . . . commercialized leisure and entertainment opportunities. These responses to the “crisis,” however, have put tremendous pressure on amateurism throughout the twentieth century. . . . (“Modernization or Hegemony” 30)

The game of hockey was quickly being perceived as a lucrative commodity, and in order for the existing hegemony to capitalize on these “mass consumer markets,” it was essential that there be a reassessment of the value of sport.

By the early 1900s the ideological implications of sport had drastically altered and the dominant classes began legitimizing their interest in sport in terms of capitalism. Martin Laba explains in “Myths and Markets: Hockey as Popular Culture in Canada” that the

Victorian spirit of the amateur intra-faculty, inter-collegiate, or inter-amateur club hockey—playing the game for its own sake—slowly eroded as the ideology of professionalism reordered the game as a commercial spectator sport. (337)

Resistance to amateurism was not simply generated by those who wanted to play the games, but also from spectators who wanted to see the best players on the field. More importantly, fans wanted to see their teams win, which ultimately led to the payment of professionals.¹⁶ Therefore, with a deep labour-pool eager for action and an already established fan-base, sport was transformed from a pastime into a financial enterprise. With this change came “a growing recognition of the need to create mechanisms . . . that could regulate ‘economic competition’: between teams, and protect the developing labour and product markets in sport” (Gruneau *Class, Sports, and Social Development* 119). Consequently, profit-making became the focus of sport in Canada, and as Rob Beamish points out, the “most efficient way to ensure profitability is by incorporation, i.e., the establishment of a business corporation” (142).

The early stages of the sport revolution saw players reaping the rewards of what was clearly an open market. With the introduction of professionalism arose a variety of professional and semi-professional leagues¹⁷ that needed talented players to sell their product. Without any

¹⁶ In Brian Macfarlane’s *One Hundred Years of Hockey* he writes a “few teams struggled along with amateur players but the winning teams were the teams that paid their players” (8).

¹⁷ The first professional hockey league was the International Hockey League (IHL) which ran from 1894-1907. Around this time other challenging leagues emerged, inadvertently creating a bidding war for the players, and

regulatory measures players would simply play for the team that would pay them the highest salary, creating what Wayne Simpson calls “bitter salary wars” (185). Rob Beamish explains:

owners competed for the best talent. Owners bid against each other for players and this hurt all owners, since the player costs rose but revenue did not necessarily increase. Teams folded with great frequency. (142)

It was for this reason that “the Canadian Hockey Association was organized late in 1909” which “set out to regulate salary expectations and made an attempt to clean up the professional game” (Simpson 186). After many failed attempts and the birth and death of many teams and leagues, cartel structures were put into place to ensure minimal “economic competition” between parties with shared sport and economic interests. Logically, then, the implementation of a cartel would return power to the owners, and seriously reduce the players’ bargaining rights, in that “cartel members agree how much they will pay for the various materials and services needed to produce their products” and on “a universal selling price for the product once completed” (Beamish 142). The result was that leagues and owners would agree on terms that would give them total control over every aspect of their business, and the stability that ensued was well received by a general public whose primary interest was an accessible sport franchise in their vicinity:

The condition that after 1911 payrolls would be frozen at under \$5,000 per team pleased the fans, who were critical of what they

subsequently driving one another into financial ruin (Simpson 184-186).

thought of as players' unreasonably high salary expectations. Fans now believed that the administrative control of the players was well in hand and that the stars of the game, whom they had come to love and admire, would no longer be seeking to jump from one team to the next to gain greater financial rewards. (Simpson 187)

Thus, by 1917, with the formation of the National Hockey League, professional hockey was well on its way to becoming one of the most lucrative sport enterprises in the world.

The success of the National Hockey League has been made possible for the simple reason that the cartel structure that was put into place by owners and the league has allowed the NHL to establish a monopoly of the hockey industry since 1926.¹⁸ The dividends of such an arrangement are obviously enormous, and in this long but necessary passage, Rob Beamish details these dividends:

The owners enjoy a monopoly because there is only one local seller for the product of NHL hockey and only one seller for the product at the regional and national level. . . . Several advantages are reaped by the owners as a result of their monopoly position. They have the power to determine membership in this exclusive league. Competition for facilities such as stadiums, parking, and food concessions is also reduced. Owners have sole access to live and televised spectator markets and they can work out various revenue-sharing schemes to maintain the stability of the league. The team owners' monopoly position enables them to influence the media concerning how sport is covered and at the same time the owners can decide, as a group, how they will market their

¹⁸ David Cruise and Alison Griffiths explains that there "was competition from two other leagues—the Pacific Coast Hockey League and the Western Canadian Hockey League. . . . By 1926, however, only the NHL, headquartered in Montreal, was left (31).

product—is it a spectacle of speed, skill, or violence, for example? Finally, the monopoly position enjoyed by the owners allows them to establish the length of the season, the number of exhibition games, the timing and length of training camps, and the structure of post-season play. (143)

The result was that league officials and owners secured absolute control over all aspects of their product, and with this control came a complete abuse of power. In *Net Worth: Exploding the Myths of Pro-Hockey*, David Cruise and Alison Griffiths provide a critical commentary on the historical developments of the NHL and reveal how the league thrived on exploitation and corruption to ensure maximum revenues. One example of the many injustices is that “most players had no idea what their legal or contractual rights were, in large part because they weren’t allowed to have a copy of their contract” (Cruise and Griffiths 81). Moreover, any attempts by players to properly ascertain their situation within their particular organization was quickly thwarted by the team, and often led to the player being traded or simply out of a job altogether.

Much of *Net Worth* focuses on the establishment of the Players’ Association—National Hockey League Players’ Association (NHLPA)—and the collective attempts to empower the players in this exploitative labour environment. Cruise and Griffith trace the progression of player representation to the contemporary labour situation in hockey, and although the status of the professional hockey player is much improved, power still lies

with owners who use noble characteristics such as “loyalty” and the “love-of-the-game” as weapons against player empowerment. As stated earlier, one of the benefits of a monopoly is the ability to control perceptions of a product through media and marketing. In the case of professional hockey, the game has been mythologized to the point that professional hockey players are immersed in what is likely the most profound contrivance of dominant culture in Canada. Martin Laba points out that hockey in Canada has come to signify the very heart and soul of Canadian existence, and ultimately serves as a Canadian myth:

hockey has served as a virtual creation tale . . . a romance that has regarded and rendered the game as a natural outgrowth of the daunting challenges of Canadian geography and climate, as organically rooted as snow, ice, forest, prairie, rock shield, and the myriad of the country’s other geographic and climatic facts. (343)

The implications of playing professional hockey are enormous, as the players become active agents in the perpetuation of a constructed mythos, created by “hockey organizations, corporate sponsors, and media interests to reinforce and maintain an abiding loyalty among fans as consumers and, of course, to build profits” (Laba 343).

What then could be more desirable than these players fulfilling their boyhood dreams, and helping to express what it means to be truly Canadian just by playing hockey? In turn, how could the players rationalize resisting an occupational opportunity that magically reaffirms an already troubled

Canadian identity? How is resistance even possible, when the players believe that they are fortunate individuals participating in a wonderful game which serves to maintain the faith in hockey as an organic outgrowth of Canadian culture, geography and climate? According to Cruise and Griffiths, when budding hockey superstar player Eric Lindros pronounced that he “won’t be dictated to” and that “Don’t go off on some belief that I’d play the game for nothing, because I wouldn’t” he generated as much anger and outrage from hockey fans as he did from owners (Cruise and Griffiths 356). Moreover, these “selfish” sentiments by Lindros are not popularly shared by many players who have also bought into the mythology of Canadian hockey, as former professional hockey player and current AHL head coach Bill Barber explains: it is essential that players play for “the love of the game and play for the fun of it, not the money part of it,” and that one needs “passion for the game” to be able to “just come in and play, and sometimes play when you’re not healthy. Sometimes play not looking at the money aspect of it” (Barber Interview). Despite the existence of Players’ Associations and player agents, the romantic perceptions of hockey in Canada, and of sport in a larger North American context, keeps professional hockey hegemony intact.

From its earliest stages, the domain of sport has been highly contested terrain. Its value is immeasurable as it served/serves as a vehicle of subversion, social control, recreation, regional and national identity, political

gain, capital gain, class unity and class division and popular entertainment.

Sport has historically been a means of empowerment for the lower classes, in that the games provided people with the opportunity to participate in a universe that was constructed and governed by the people themselves. The affinity the masses have had with sport has thus made it advantageous for existing hegemonies to assume control of sporting activities in order to remove any potential threats to its existence, while serving as a means of coercion once acquired. The overwhelming “love of the game” is what has prevented the participants from being excluded from sport, but at the same time, the “love of the game” has enabled dominant groups to establish public involvement on their own terms. In effect, the will of the players is manipulated by those in power to ensure servitude and subordination.

As sport developed into a commodity, this oscillating process of control and resistance has continued and remains evident in the realm of professional hockey. Despite the rhetoric of hockey being “Canada’s game” and a metaphor for life in Canada, it is a business and a literal manifestation of capitalist exploitation. The huge profits and powerful corporate players running hockey operations, however, have not eliminated the players’ struggle to retain some form of control of the game, and in turn, control of the labour process. But as will become evident, the players have constructed their own “system of meaning,” their own “meaningful universe” through their struggle for autonomy, which has allowed them to function outside of

the corporate and business world of sport (Dunk 159). As a result, they have successfully constructed a world where they are “morally and intellectually dominant,” yet, much like the ostrich with his head in the sand, highly vulnerable (Dunk 159). In the following chapters I will explore the constructed universe of one professional hockey team and the ramifications of existing within this exclusive domain.

Chapter Three

The “Meaningful Universe” of Professional Hockey: The Ethnography

A professional hockey game is a shared event between three primary groups: the participants; the fans; and the owners. Each party is integral for the sport's existence and their relationship to one another is essentially symbiotic. Yet despite being essential to one another to make the activity possible, each party experiences the event uniquely and ultimately transforms it into something other than the basic sporting text. For the owners and associated corporations, professional hockey is a vehicle for financial development: it is a commodity. For the fans, the game is spectacle—a dramatic event where people generally cheer for the same victorious outcome in every performance. For the players, however, hockey is both a performance and a vehicle for financial development. But more importantly, it is a means for occupational survival. Their success or failure in the sport dictates their place within the labour process, and in this highly competitive environment, stability is rare to non-existent.

In order to gain an understanding of this community as it is experienced by the players, I spent seven months studying the players in their working environment. I have already stressed that despite my background in hockey, I was considered an outsider by the team, and my status as a researcher did not change throughout the season. It is important

to state, however, that although the research was conducted from the community's peripheries, I was provided the opportunity to study the players in a manner that is substantially different from how the general public sees this occupational group. First, much of the ethnography focuses on the players while they are at practice as opposed to during the games. During these more informal periods, it is possible to observe the players, not only working on their skills to prepare themselves for games, but also interacting with one another in a more social manner. I would sit right next to the players' bench where I could hear the players as they conversed with one another; I was able to observe how the players collectively and individually responded to the tasks that the coaching staff had assigned to them; and quite simply, I watched the players as they interacted formally and informally with one another. When I was looking for information about the job or about their individual situations, I would approach the players after practice and ask them questions. There were only two occasions throughout the season where a player did not comply with my request.

Throughout this chapter and the next two that follow, I will present information that reflects what was observed over the course of the seven month research period, and discuss the players as they were seen engaging in their profession. I have limited these chapters primarily to description to provide a deeper understanding of the details of the trade and the players' roles within the labour process. Within this descriptive discourse there is an

emphasis on hockey as a “real” lived experience as opposed to merely a game or a form of entertainment. Therefore, there is immediately a bias here in my presentation of events, in that I have chosen to focus on expressive behaviour that tends to separate the players from those who are outside of this occupational dynamic. In acknowledging this bias, I am not suggesting that I am falsifying the division of experience, but rather, informing the reader that not all behaviour should be interpreted as divisive or removed from those outside of the occupational community.

Having said this, I made a decision to limit the next three chapters to what was observed only in my first week out in the field. I made this decision for three reasons: first, it is necessary that I provide detailed descriptions of the patterns of behaviour specific to this occupation in order to allow readers to comprehend more general observations made over the course of the seven month period, as discussed at length in chapters six, seven and eight; second, the occupational demands are largely repetitive—schedules and daily routines are pre-planned and followed rigidly—which means that a discussion of the team’s weekly routines speaks roughly for the entire season; finally, my first week in the field was most intense, and as a result, vivid details of my surroundings were produced that were eventually balanced over additional time and reflection. It is important to stress that the remaining seven months of fieldwork research will not be discarded, as I have used this knowledge as the basis for the final three chapters, where a

closer inspection of the players and the constructed universe in which they work will be achieved.

The American Hockey League

Before considering the team studied for this project, it is first necessary to discuss the professional league in which the team is located. As stated from the outset, I made the decision to study an American Hockey League (AHL) team because of its close affinity to the National Hockey League (NHL)—the most dominant professional hockey league in the world. It would have been virtually impossible for me to gain access to an NHL team because of the intense fanfare and media attention directed towards it; therefore, the AHL was a convenient alternative. But in order to acquire a proper understanding of the AHL player's status as a professional hockey player, the relationship between the AHL and NHL must be elucidated. The American Hockey League was the product of a union that took place in 1936 between two nearly defunct leagues, the Canadian American League and the Canadian Professional League. And although the league produced some exceptional teams that NHL Hall of Fame player and coach Al Arbour claimed were as talented as NHL clubs,¹ the AHL has always been

¹ In "Fifty of Years of the American Hockey League," by Larry Halloran, Al Arbour is quoted as saying that "You could have taken some of the [AHL] teams and put them right into [NHL] expansion" (23).

understood as a minor league that for the players at least, functions as a means to make it into the NHL (Halloran 24).

Up until the 1970s, however, the two leagues operated separately from one another, but with the formation of the World Hockey Association (WHA) in the 1970s and their attempt to usurp the NHL's monopoly of hockey in North America, the AHL's existence was suddenly in jeopardy. The WHA began poaching players from the AHL, draining all the talent from the league, forcing the NHL to intervene to protect its own interests:

All was well until the near-disaster struck in the form of the World Hockey Association.

"It may have hurt the NHL," says Gord Anziano, AHL vice president, "but it damn near killed us. They took most of the good players from us without regard to the contractual agreements the players had with their clubs." (Halloran 26)

Various NHL franchises began purchasing AHL franchises to strengthen AHL player stocks, and in return, the NHL would use the AHL as a developmental league, or "farm system." The parent organizations eventually assumed the financial responsibility of signing the majority of AHL players to contracts, which relieved struggling AHL teams of the burden of having to pay their players. In return, the NHL clubs owned the rights of the players and could call them up to the parent club at any particular time. This move ultimately provided more depth to the NHL, while offering further protection from the WHA's attempt to challenge hockey hegemony.

Since merging with the NHL, the AHL has developed from six teams to eighteen teams, located primarily in central and eastern Canada and the United States. Its relationship with the NHL has also grown; while NHL parent clubs continue to provide the necessary financial framework for teams (especially in smaller markets) to exist, the

AHL continues to serve as the premier player development source for the National Hockey League as 67% of all NHL players last season were AHL graduates while 223 players took to the ice in both the AHL and NHL. Twenty-two of 26 NHL teams will be developing their top prospects in the AHL this season. The AHL also has a proud history with 90 graduates of the AHL having been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. ("AHL Opens 61st Season Today" *Canoe* 1)

It is the close association the NHL has with the AHL that attracts players to the American Hockey League. There are other, richer leagues, such as the International Hockey League (IHL), which share in the minor professional hockey league market, but the close ties between the NHL and AHL make it easier for AHL players to step up into the NHL, thus making the AHL a more attractive league in which to play. Therefore, while the AHL has an identity of its own, and is a league unto itself, it is also an extension of NHL hegemony, in that its primary function is to produce a surplus talent pool from which NHL organizations can feed. The team studied for this project, the Troy *Reds*, is a farm system for one of the longest standing organizations in the NHL.

Entering the Arena of Professional Hockey

My experience with the *Reds* began officially on Tuesday morning, October 22, 1996. That first day I was feeling extremely anxious and apprehensive, and was completely unaware of what to expect. I had been told by the *Reds*' athletic therapist Al Jones that the team practised every morning between the hours of ten and twelve and that I should go and introduce myself to him on that particular day. He said that he would be the only one standing behind the players' bench at the beginning of practice, and that he should have some time to talk to me. I had with me my backpack, which contained a notebook, several pens, a hand-held tape recorder and two sixty minute tapes. I entered the arena at 9:45 am and waited in the stands for Al to come out onto the bench. There were already a few players on the ice, seemingly oblivious to my presence, stretching and playing with the pucks. The rest of the arena was empty, except for maintenance staff and one other gentleman who did not appear to hold any official position with the team.² As I selected a seat down by the *Reds* players' bench I began to try and see a professional hockey arena, as if looking for the first time.

² I soon learned that this particular individual—Ted Right—was a dedicated *Reds* follower who, in addition to being a loyal fan, had helped provide certain players with their temporary lodging in the city, and occasionally would provide rides for the players, if there were no other rides available. His presence will be discussed further in sections to follow.

I should state briefly that before entering into the field, I was concerned about the inherent problem of conducting research of an environment already familiar to the ethnographer. The difficulty in my particular situation was twofold: growing up within a hockey culture meant that I was to contend with the dilemma of doing “insider” research; however, my current outsider status as an academic simultaneously presented me with the difficulty of conducting “outsider” research. The pros and cons of both insider/outsider research perspectives are fully explored in John L. Aguilar’s essay “Insider Research: Ethnography of a Debate,” but it his discussion of these two perspectives combined that is of interest here. Aguilar points out astutely that having bicultural affiliation does not provide the ethnographer with the ability to see and experience the two cultures simultaneously: “One would be current and the other retrospective” (20). Although I have grown up within the same minor hockey system as the majority of these players, and I played in the same, or the equivalent Junior system as the majority of them, I am no longer a hockey player, or in any way affiliated with organized hockey—except now as researcher.

As a result, I was forced to struggle with what Aguilar calls retrieving “covert (or unconscious) culture” because as an individual once immersed in the world of hockey, I would be unable to “stand back perceptually and cognitively” to make these assessments. Similarly, as a current outsider to the hockey community, I would be denied access to this “society’s covert

culture of implicit rules and ineffable sentiments and orientations” and be forced to draw upon whatever knowledge I had retained (15). Yet as the first statement suggests, looking back into one’s own culture disables the individual from “stand[ing] back perceptually and cognitively,” and thus, illustrates that insider/outsider research is a paradox. I was in a real bind theoretically—and consequently methodologically—and was not sure how these concerns would play out once in the field. But as soon as I entered the arena on my first day of fieldwork much of my uncertainty dissipated as I slowly took in an environment that I had never really questioned before. I began simply to introduce myself to this setting that I had taken for granted for twenty years, and was suddenly seeing it again, not as a member, nor as a stranger. I felt comfortable in my unfamiliarity and soon found myself viciously scribbling notes about this extraordinary environment.

Without getting up I began scanning my surroundings and recording whatever images entered into my field of vision. I soon became overwhelmed by the layers of advertising that were littered throughout the building. The arena was literally saturated with corporate advertisements and/or promotional strategies. At the uppermost level of the building—where the walls and ceiling meet—ran a perimeter of large fluorescent signs with messages such as: “Don Cherry’s Restaurant”; “Molson Canadian Light”; “Canadian Tire”; “Hostess Chee-tos”; “Chrysler”; “Pepsi” and “Labatt’s Blue.” On the walls below these signs were more signs, such as the “Molson Cup

Three Stars Award” board and the “Chrysler AHL Standings” board that served as focal points not only because of their size, but because of the significant information each board contained. Down the aisles and sections, each individual stair had the word “Subway.” Above the ice were penalty boxes with “Thrifty” and “Re/Max Real Estate” advertising as their backdrop. The boards that surrounded the ice were similarly littered with advertising, with such companies as “Dominion,” “Tim Horton’s,” “Molson,” “The Royal Bank,” and many other more local corporations occupying spaces. The ice surface, the locus of all activity, had a corporate presence inserted between the *Reds*’ logo and the circles and lines necessary for playing the game of hockey. Present here were advertisements of the local mall, telephone company and “The Gym.”

After sifting through all the corporate imagery, I was next drawn in by the enormous clock/scoreboard suspended from the middle of the stadium’s ceiling, hung over centre-ice. The clock/scoreboard is shaped somewhat like a cube, with each of its four vertical sides identical to one another. It displays the progression of time during the game, the current score of the game and the penalty situation of each team. When games are not being played, as this particular morning, the clock/scoreboard emits only a red digital reading of the time of day—9:52—with all other areas of the board unlit. As I considered the current time, the significance of this ominous scoreboard

became apparent, and I thought of Rory Turner's and Phillip H. McArthur's discussion of "*times out of time*" in their article on "Cultural Performances":

Whether in a theatre, a stadium, main street on a holiday, the county fairground, we know when we have entered into one of these *times out of time*. We know that we are seeing or participating in something a little different than normal life.
(82)

During games the tiny red digital reading of standard time is erased and replaced by a large bright white digital reading of "hockey time" that governs behaviour for three twenty minute stop-time intervals. The significance of this literal and symbolic sign was impressive, and my perceptions of my environment were beginning to be shaped by the other-worldliness of my surroundings.

I then looked to the sheet of ice where more players had gathered and begun their warm-up routines. The ice almost seemed magical against the warm October day that I left in entering the arena. Its shiny bluish-white surface covered in symmetrical lines of blue and red was almost surreal. In fact it was a simulacrum, in that it represented ice in its appearance and texture only—all stadium ice is actually an advanced formula of water, chemicals and temperature that produces what ice manufacturers Jet Ice claim to be a

thinner ice with a faster freezing surface, which produces less snow and improved hardness . . . achieved because of the mineral-free water from which it is made and the pH at which it is used. Every time the ice is dressed, the water will freeze at 32

degrees F and at the same rate. All of which is reflected in significantly improved energy bills, easier maintenance, and customers who “like this better ice.” (Jet Ice)

This perfected ice-surface only became more surreal when I considered that the winter-like conditions existed at a time of year (autumn) incapable of supporting a frozen landscape. It is here, in a world which defies the order of time and where nature has been successfully reinvented and *perfected*, that the players are engaged in the labour process.

I had by this time seen Al Jones standing behind the players’ bench and was waiting for an appropriate time to approach him. I was feeling a bit more relaxed because my presence did not seem to be of any concern to anyone there. I was, however, apprehensive in approaching Al because I did not want to interfere with his work, nor did I want the coaching staff—who had already expressed concern about my presence being potentially obtrusive—to think I was interfering with Al and the running of practice. I quickly decided to go over and approach Al at a moment when he did not appear to be busy. I stepped up to the bench and introduced myself. He turned and shook my hand and asked if everything was okay. I said yes and explained to him that I was just going to sit and observe and take notes for the first few days. I told him that I wanted to acquaint myself with the surroundings before I approached anyone with questions. He said that was fine and that if I needed anything, or needed to talk to anyone, he would help me out. He told me that they had a game that night so the practice would be

relatively short. He said that if I wished to come to the game, I should knock at his door by 6:45 that evening or give him a call just prior to make arrangements. I thanked him and told him that I would be going and that I would see him then. I could not think of anything else to say, so I left and returned to my seat. I sat back down thinking that this encounter was relatively casual, and I felt a sense of relief. I was under the impression that my relationship with the *Reds* was precarious, and I was comforted knowing that my actual presence had not jeopardized my uncertain status.

Just before 10:00 am the entire team had come onto the ice, along with Head Coach Hal Murphy and Assistant Coach Sam Dig. The players were wearing full equipment and had on their practice jerseys. On the front of the players' jerseys was the *Reds*' team logo, and on the back was more corporate sponsorship, which read CCM—a sport manufacturing company owned by Bauer/Canstar, which has since been bought by Nike Inc. for \$395 million (Marks).³ At ten o'clock the practice officially started, which was signified by coach Murphy blowing his whistle with one short and loud blast. The players immediately skated to the centre-ice circle and fell down onto their hands and knees. A fellow teammate led the group in a series of stretching exercises at the centre of the circle. Brief murmurs of discussion and

³ As the season progressed it became apparent that every visiting team that came to play against the *Reds* also had this corporate sponsorship written across the back of their practice jerseys. It was either written as CCM or

occasional laughter were heard as the players stretched, but for the most part, they seemed somewhat uninterested as they routinely loosened up their bodies. As if detecting the group's lethargy, the individual who led the stretches started slapping his stick on the ice and called out loudly to his teammates, "Come-on boys!" in attempt to motivate them. The players responded with brief cheers echoing the initial encouragement as they got up from the ice and skated into position for the first warm-up skating drill to take place.

Practice-Drills on Game-Day

This particular skating drill involved the players skating hard up the middle of the ice (length-wise) and turning either left or right once they reached the far end of the rink. The players eased up and caught their breath on the turn and then skated along the boards back to where they started. Once back the players converged again up the middle and sprinted back up the centre of the ice. Assistant Coach Sam Dig yelled encouragingly at the players to "Pick it up!" while they performed the drill and the players responded by putting their heads down and pumping their legs to pick up speed. At 10:07 this drill ended and another drill immediately resumed with two brief commands by Dig.

The frequency of the drills was intense. At 10:13, 10:17, 10:19, 10:21, and 10:23 drills ended only to allow for another drill to begin. The transition from one drill to the next involved getting the players to stop what they were doing, inform them of what was wanted next, and then get them into formation to allow for the next drill to begin. The players rarely stood still, and with brief instructions, such as Murphy hollering “Red in this corner and white in this corner here!” the players moved, and as if by instinct, the drills would be carried out.⁴ The drills themselves were also designed to keep the players in motion at all times, and hence, a generic name is given to these types of drills, called “flow-drills.” They involve the players skating with the puck, passing the puck and then receiving the puck “on the fly” in some patterned fashion.⁵ I was amazed at how complex the drills appeared—some I had never seen before—yet they were performed with incredible fluidity.

There was one drill in particular that seemed on the verge of chaos, but was constantly performed with such precision and timing that it rarely broke down. I will attempt to explain the drill but in order to begin to appreciate the illusion of chaos that the drill creates see Figure A for further clarification.

⁴ At least this was the case on this particular day, and most days in general. There were, however, days when the players were not getting the drills done right, and the subsequent chaos often incited anger in both the coaches and the players.

⁵ “On the fly” simply means while in motion.

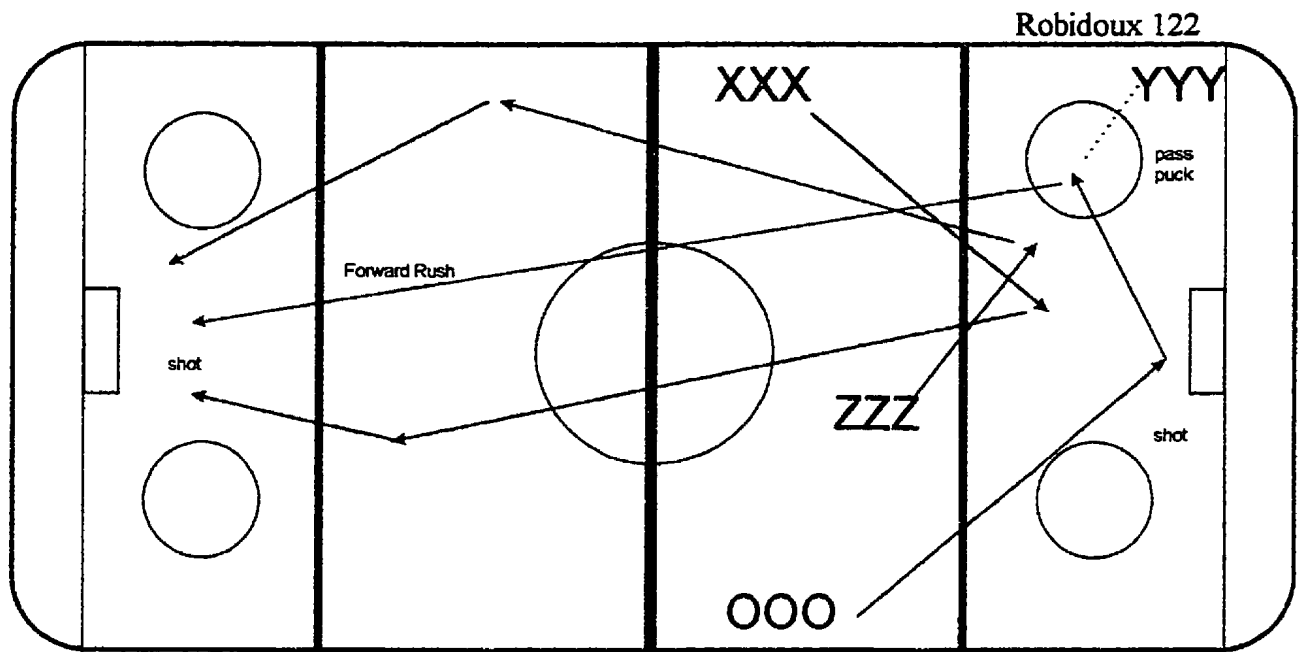


Figure A. Illustration of a complex “flow-drill.”

The drill was carried out from both sides of the rink, but for the sake of clarity, I will focus only on the one group (consisting of players “X,” “Y,” “Z” and “O”). The players were broken up into four sections: one section along the high boards (designated “X” in Figure A); a second section in the corner of the same boards as section X (designated “Y” in Figure A); and a third section was located on the middle of the blue-line (designated “Z” in Figure A). Another section was located directly opposite players X on the boards across the ice (Designated “O” in Figure A).

The drill began with player “O” coming down along the boards and shooting a puck on the net (a goaltender is in the net trying to prevent player “O” from scoring). Once the shot was taken, player “O” circled away from the net and headed up the ice along the opposite boards from which he came. As

he turned up the ice, player "Y" passed a puck to him which player "O" received on the fly. Players "X" and "Z" went into motion at the same time that player "O" had shot the puck. Their routes were basically a criss-cross pattern whereby player "X" skated into the end-zone and just before he reached the face-off circle, he turned away from the boards and skated up towards the centre-ice area. Player "Z" skated into the same end-zone but turned towards the boards so that the players passed one another as they made their turns. The timing here was essential in that as they began heading up the ice, player "O" must have received the pass from player "Y". Once the pass had been successfully received player "O" was directly behind "X" and "Z" who were rushing up the ice, and he then passed the puck up to one of the rushing forwards. Player "O" then joined the rush after the pass was made, which allowed for a three-man rush to ensue. In effect, the players were executing an offensive rush that they would perform during a game.⁶ The line⁷ then tried to score on the goaltender who awaited them at the other end of the ice, and once their scoring attempt was completed, they returned to a group and got back into line in order to do the drill again.

⁶ Because there are three forwards and two defense on the ice in a normal playing situation in hockey (in addition to one goaltender), offensive rushes consist of the three forward players carrying the puck up the ice to create a scoring opportunity. The defense can also join the offensive attack but the primary offensive unit is the three forward players.

⁷ The three player offensive unit is referred to as a "line."

The apparent complexity of this drill is in fact illusory, in that it is quite basic for the players who only really have to worry about their own specific role they play in its execution. The drills are designed so that if each player starts at the right time, skates the rigidly predefined pattern and effectively passes and receives the puck, the drill is virtually foolproof. It is the illusion of chaos and complexity that the drill intended to achieve, in hope that the players can perform within a complex system that will confuse their opponents and successfully overcome any line of defence their opponents can muster. The element of surprise has been seriously undermined in professional sport since the inclusion of video; teams gather before every game and watch videos of their opponents. In an interview I conducted with *Reds'* defenceman Steve Toll later in the season, he explained to me that they

have the video and TV there which we play back a lot of our games and find mistakes that we, you know, don't remember all the time. And we would look back and check over the mistakes and go over them and try to correct them, and work on them . . . before like say maybe before the game on Tuesday and Wednesday, we have a team coming in we'll look over some of their players, and watch a little bit of their video tape of what they do: say on a power play or penalty killing. And uh, you know special teams and go from there and see what we're going to do against them. (Toll Interview)

Despite the fact that the fundamental principle of hockey—to get more goals than the other team—never changes, it becomes increasingly difficult to carry this out. Therefore drills must be constantly modified and developed in

order to maintain a team's edge over another, or to successfully defend against another team's strategies. I was impressed by the team's tremendous efficiency and speed, as I sat there watching the series of drills unfold, each averaging about four minutes in length.

The Informal Practice

By 10:23 the team went to the centre of the ice and gathered into a circle and began stretching as they did at the opening of practice. The group then broke up in a staggering fashion and some players went to the bench to grab a water-bottle and talked to one another while taking a drink. Others grabbed pucks and began shooting or performing other manoeuvres with the pucks. The coaches remained on the ice, but it was evident that the formal, organized practice had concluded and opportunity was given to the players to practice various individual skills. Some practised their shots; some worked on their backward skating; some practiced passing to one another; and others practised skating circles and other agility manoeuvres. The practice was no longer operating at the high intensity that was evident under the coaches' direction. Although this was the first practice I had attended, I was already familiar with the reputation of certain players and the roles they played on the team because of my general interest in professional hockey. I took special notice of the veteran, starting goaltender, Paul Proux, taking time to go over to rookie goaltender, John Dent, and through his mask say something

while John took a brief break from stopping pucks. Through Paul's kinesic gestures it was evident that he was offering John advice on how he might approach making a save; John nodded his head and Paul skated away. Players resumed firing pucks at John, and Paul stood and watched the rookie attempt to stop the shots.

Individual players began to leave the ice half an hour after the practice had officially started (10:30). Some players remained on the ice, but by 10:43 only four players were left, along with the rookie goaltender. The two coaches also remained on the ice and began putting these players through various conditioning drills. The four remaining players were wearing grey jerseys, with the exception of John Dent. I was interested in this because the rest of the team was wearing either red or white jerseys. The red jerseys were worn by the forwards and the white were worn by the defence. Since the colour of jersey signified the position a player played, I was curious to find out what grey signified. My assumption was that for some reason these players were not going to play in the game scheduled for that night. I was later informed by Al Jones that my assumption was correct: the grey shirts were either players who were hurt and trying to work themselves back into the line-up, or they were players who had not yet made it into the line-up and were working their way onto the team—at this point in time they served as extras. Moreover, because only one goaltender can play in goal at one time, the goalie that is not playing is considered a back-up

and is automatically assigned to this group. These five players, then, were working to get themselves into game shape and were therefore forced to go through arduous physical conditioning.

These conditioning drills were largely endurance drills, as opposed to the short quick drills evident during practice. The players were required to skate as hard as they could for about a minute, to a minute and half, intervals. They skated in pairs which allowed one group to rest while the other skated. The conditioning was deliberately set up in such a manner to best simulate the physical demands of a game situation. Hockey is a sport that consists of the players exerting themselves to their maximum potential for shifts which last, ideally, for approximately a minute to a minute and a half. As soon as one line exhausts itself it goes to the bench to get another line on the ice that is fresh and ready to go. A professional team would usually have three primary lines and a fourth line, sometimes referred to as a "utility line" that would generally serve more of a defensive role, and occasionally an intimidating role as well. Therefore players would have about five minutes to rest in between shifts. The game is essentially anaerobic, which means high intensity physical activity for relatively short periods of time. These four players in practice were getting their bodies into "game-shape" through intensely anaerobic workouts that had them bent over and gasping for breath at the conclusion of each anaerobic interval.

I could see the sweat pouring off their faces and steam rising off their helmet-less heads from where I was sitting. At the beginning of each skating session one of the only two African Canadian/American⁸ players on the team—Ted Simms—shouted encouragement to his skating partner and to the group that followed him. John Dent left the ice after about five minutes of skating and headed to the dressing-room to join his teammates. The remaining four continued doing drills with both coaches still present and still yelling encouragement. Head Coach Hal Murphy was most vocal and called each player by first and last name as he went through the drills: “Come on Pat Smith! Come on Ted Simms!” Both Sam Dig and Hal Murphy engaged in brief banter with the players in-between skating intervals and while the players caught their breath. By 10:53 the players were clearly exhausted and were labouring to maintain any kind of stride. By skating in pairs, however, one player could not stop exerting himself because his partner would eventually pass him and create an obvious gap between them, ultimately making him look inferior. On the other hand neither player tried to skate ahead of the other player because if his partner was slower, he could keep pace without having to exert himself any more than necessary.

⁸ There are two players of African descent on the *Reds*; Ted Simms is from Canada and back-up goaltender, John Dent, is American. John Dent was demoted from the team at Christmas, leaving only one African Canadian player on the team.

Consequently the players finished each interval at the same time virtually every time.

The Exit

Assistant coach Sam Dig left the ice at 10:58 and Head Coach Hal Murphy yelled, "Okay Todd Jones, that's it!" The players immediately broke from their partners and cooled down in their own way: Pat Smith keeled over and fell to the ice as if completely exhausted; Ted Simms grabbed some pucks and started shooting them into the net; Sid Zeal laid down on the ice and began to stretch; Todd Jones went to the players bench, sat down and drank water from the water bottle. Sid and Todd were the first to leave the ice and go to the dressing-room. Ted then stopped shooting pucks and went and sat on the bench to drink some water. Pat picked up the pucks that had been shot into the net and put them on top of the net. Once the pucks were picked up he then went and joined Ted on the bench, but on the opposite end. They did not speak and continued to sit there as if they were waiting for something. For close to five minutes the players sat there just drinking water, and at 11:05 Pat got up and went to the dressing-room. As soon as he stepped off the ice, Ted got up and followed him. Practice was officially over.

The reason I have dwelt on this departure in detail is because of the overt meaning that is expressed in this seemingly mundane behaviour. As I watched the players vying to be the last one to leave the ice, I was reminded

of a passage from former professional hockey player Ken Dryden's book, *The Game*, where he articulates wonderfully the significance of leaving the ice last. The passage reads:

Larocque and I are competing again. . . . So today he is among the first on the ice, and certainly will be the last one off. It is bound to be noticed. . . . The net is empty. Larocque and I skate towards it, easily at first, then like two kids reaching for the last piece of cake, with disinterested single-mindedness. When I realize that only an embarrassing sprint will get me there first, I angle away and skate to the dressing-room. Larocque has won. But by leaving the ice first, I have reminded him that I am still the number one goalie. (152)

The act of staying longer—even if it is only for a matter of seconds—communicates much to fellow players and coaches. To stay longer signifies to teammates and hopefully coaches that you want it more than the next guy and are willing to go that “extra mile.” At the same time, the ability to leave early, as Dryden indicates here, communicates power over fellow teammates. Just as the two players for the *Reds* vied to be the last player to leave the ice, veteran goaltender Paul Proux did not take any extra practice after the first half hour, and was one of the first players to leave the ice, while his junior—in experience and skill—remained on the ice trying to prove himself to coaches and teammates. Until Proux's place as number one goalie is challenged, he has the option to stay or leave at his leisure.

I sat and wrote down these and others thoughts, and then closed my book as the game-day practice had concluded for me as well. I became

increasingly fascinated by the highly competitive nature of the players as I continued to mull over what I had just seen. By watching the players practice on this day, I had just witnessed the briefest collective labour task demanded of professional hockey players. On game-day the morning is used as preparation for the game to be played that night where the players will be required to raise their level of intensity to a higher level. With this in mind I was already beginning to get eager to re-enter the arena in the context of the game which was to reveal a whole new system of meanings.

Chapter Four

The Game

The *Reds*' home games—unless played on Sunday—always began at seven-thirty pm. The seven-thirty start is quite standard throughout professional hockey, as it allows time for those who work during the day to go home and organize themselves before heading off to a game. It is also early enough for parents to take their children along with them to the games: the seven-thirty start means that games generally do not extend much later than ten-thirty at night.

The *Reds*' games were held in a stadium that, including standing-room, held approximately 3910 spectators. Tickets ranged from sixteen dollars and fifty cents for a seat, to nine dollars for a standing-room ticket. It is an old stadium and one of the smaller stadiums in the league. As a result, it no longer adequately suits the demands of a professional hockey franchise in the contemporary sport era, and the city of Troy will lose the *Reds* unless a new stadium is built. The *Reds*' parent organization has made it clear that if a new stadium is not funded—either publicly or privately—by the end of the team's immediate term in the city, the *Reds* will relocate to another city before the end of the millennium.

The Arrival

I arrived at the stadium at 6:45 pm, as Al Jones had suggested to me earlier at practice. I was instructed to go around to the back of the arena and knock at a door and ask for Al, but as I got to the back, there were at least four entrances that could have been the door to which Al was referring. At that point I was not sure which door was the right one and was angry with myself for not paying closer attention to the instructions. I rethought what Al had told me, and could vaguely remember him saying something about "Exit Three"; I was relieved to see that each entrance had a number, and to my right was an entrance with a sign that read "3." I walked up to the door and knocked and was greeted by Security. I asked for Al Jones, and the security officer motioned for me to stay by the door while he walked to a door and knocked. Someone I had never seen before answered the door, and looked to the Officer who called past him into the room saying: "There's someone here who says he knows ya!" I continued to stand awkwardly in the doorway for a few seconds and the Officer again motioned for me to come towards the door in the corridor. Al was there applying therapeutic treatment to a player's leg on a table that resembled an examining table in a medical doctor's office. Al gave the Security Officer a knowing nod, and the Officer left me to resume his post at the initial door.

Al stopped his work with the player and came to greet me at the door.

I was already feeling intrusive. The player that was lying on his stomach receiving Al's attention looked up to see who was being let into the arena. There were two other men in the office—one being the equipment manager, Joe Sell, and the other, Assistant Trainer Lou Penn—who also eyed me curiously as I stood in the doorway. Al's greeting did not put me at ease because it was apparent that he was busy and rushed through more instructions. He explained to me that the arena generally sells out for their games, so it was important that I assume a position in the standing-room section, rather than trying to find a seat in the assigned seating. He offered advice where the best place would be for me to stand and then quickly directed me in the right direction. I said thanks to him and walked past the players dressing-room, through the blue curtains that act as a partition for the *Reds'* dressing-room area and the public space of the stadium, and headed up the hallway to find a spot for myself.

I walked only a few paces up the hall and saw a stairwell that I knew ascended up to the standing-room area. I was relieved to be in the arena without any problems and despite the fact that Al was obviously rushed in his dealings with me, he was courteous and accommodating. I walked up the stairs and entered the upper layer of the arena where I could overlook the entire stadium. The arena was virtually empty except for stadium staff and officials and approximately thirty spectators scattered throughout the

seating area. I walked over to where Al suggested I stand to watch the game and was impressed by the view. As mentioned earlier, the stadium is quite small for a professional arena, and as a result, even from the top level I was able to see the ice surface perfectly and was still relatively close to the action. I figured out where I was going to stand and once again began acquainting myself with my surroundings.

The stadium was fully lit at this point, unlike in practice where secondary lighting illuminated the ice-surface. At the level where I was standing, I was surrounded by vendors who were setting up for the imminent onrush of people. At every corner of the upper level was at least one concession stand, selling a variety of fast foods and drinks, i.e., popcorn, peanuts, pizza, hot-dogs, nachos, ice-cream and French-fries. In addition to each concession stand were numerous vendors preparing their trays to individually sell products up and down the aisles of the stadium. The obvious point of this is to allow fans to purchase food items without having to leave their seats during the game. Some individual vendors were already attempting to make sales to the few people that were in the building. The game was still forty-five minutes from starting, and there was upbeat popular music—from country music to the latest top forty dance mixes—playing loudly through the arena's sound system. The mood was one of expectancy, as people slowly began to enter the stadium.

The Game Preamble

There were still approximately thirty-five minutes before the game began which allowed me to roam throughout the building with little interference. I travelled along the top level until I reached the front of the arena and then ventured down to see where the general public was entering. As I reached the main entrance, there was a large crowd already assembled around the ticketing area. There were people buying tickets, and others standing around chatting with one another as they waited for the game to begin. There were individuals selling *Reds'* programs and tickets for a 50/50 draw to be held later in the evening. All vendors wore red aprons and hats which represented the colours of the *Reds'* uniforms. There was a store called *Redswear* directly adjacent to the main entrance which sold *Reds'* merchandise. The store was busy with customers leafing through the *Reds'* products, such as *Reds'* hats, jerseys, track suits, sweaters, T-shirts, children's wear, posters, calendars, mugs, sticks and underwear. There were people of all ages mingling, and although there appeared to be more males, the division of sexes was minimal as there were many females present, both as spectators and staff.

I worked my way into the crowd and purchased a program which was called *Reds' Magazine*. The program was a magazine published in association with the AHL, and every AHL organization throughout the

League publishes a similar magazine, but fashioned towards its own franchise. The contents of this issue were brief articles pertaining to topics ranging from *Reds'* alumni to humorous individual player profiles. There were also special features that are present in every issue, such as the *Reds'* schedule and team records. The program was forty-four pages in length and thirty three of them displayed forty-four individual advertisements. On the pages without corporate representation there were AHL and *Reds'* promotional strategies. The most interesting was a letter "From the Office of the Mayor of Troy," which read:

As we enter a new year of hockey, it is unfortunate that so much controversy has taken place concerning the *Reds* and the stadium.

The *Reds'* players are our friends. They have done much to enliven our city and in return they have become very attached to the people of Troy. . . . I would also like to thank the many sponsors who support their Troy *Reds* and the charities they support" (7).¹

Only three weeks earlier, however, a local newspaper printed an article in which the author was critical of the *Reds'* non-presence in the city:

how many Troy *Reds* stick around the city when the season is over? Besides the stadium and the [local tavern], have you ever seen any of the *Reds* hanging out around town? . . . The *Reds* are simply a gang of athletic mercenaries, and the entertainment they provide is nothing more than an amenity (Articulate 8)²

¹ A complete reference will be withheld for the sake of anonymity.

² Once again, a formal reference is withheld for the sake of anonymity.

This kind of critical commentary is not found in the *Reds' Magazine* since it is ultimately a promotional tool for the AHL, the Reds' organization, and for the many corporate sponsors. Because the *Reds* are the focus of the magazine, that makes it a desirable commodity for *Reds'* fans, and subsequently a highly useful marketing tool.

I eventually made my way back to where I decided to stand for the game and waited until 6:50 when the *Reds'* opponents, the *Mustangs*, took to the ice for their pre-game warm-up. The *Mustang* players skated on the ice to the scattered boos of the fans who were starting to accumulate in the stadium area. The *Reds* took to the ice one minute later for their pre-game warm-up and were greeted with cheers by the two hundred or so fans that were present. Each team performed various warm-up drills at its own end of the ice. The two warm-ups were similar in that they consisted of a variety of shooting drills which functioned as a means of getting the players stretched out and the goaltenders loosened up. The drills were intended to establish the flow that was achieved during practice, yet were extremely basic in order to guarantee high levels of success while doing them. The drills took various shapes but all basically achieved the same end: long shots³ on the goalies; shots on the fly from the slot area;⁴ and three on two drills, where the goalie

³ Shots taken from more than twenty feet away from the goal.

⁴ The "slot" is the spot on the ice directly in front of the goaltender, about fifteen feet away from the net.

would see three attackers coming his way and two defencemen trying to prevent a shot on goal from occurring. The warm-up lasted for exactly twenty minutes and was timed by the giant clock that hung above the ice surface. The clock was fully lit at this point and was dictating the proceeding events. The players left the ice after warm-up and the Zamboni⁵ came onto the ice to begin cleaning the surface. Again, twenty minutes came up on the scoreboard and started counting down, signifying that the game would get underway in the time allotted.

It was during this twenty minute interval that the fans began to pour into the arena. While the crowd increased, announcements were read over top of the popular music that had increased in volume. The announcer, on behalf of the *Reds*, thanked the corporate sponsors for their support and proceeded to read a list of approximately ten sponsors that were thanked specifically. The announcer then read certain regulations for the fans following the corporate acknowledgements which had been established by the American Hockey League. A loose paraphrase of the message is, "The American Hockey League requires us to inform you that anyone found using foul language, consuming alcoholic beverages, or engaged in unruly behaviour will be asked to leave the premises."

⁵ The Zamboni is a machine driven to clean and resurface the ice to maintain a smooth and slippery surface.

There were television sets on the top level where I was standing, placed roughly about thirty feet apart from one another. The televisions were airing the local community channel's coverage of the game, which allowed spectators to watch aspects of the game that were not able to be seen live at the stadium: for example a replay of the action, or a moment that was missed because of someone/thing obstructing their view. Highlights were being played from the game the night previous, which helped stir excitement in the crowd as the fans were reintroduced to the world of the *Reds*. The fans continued to pile into the arena and by 7:28 the secondary lights were turned off, illuminating the ice surface further, setting the stage for the teams as they made their way onto the ice. The *Mustangs* were first to step onto the ice and were booed vociferously; I heard screams of warning around me: "Watch out Jones! You're gonna get it tonight!" These jeers were quickly replaced with a booming cheer for the *Reds* who skated out onto the ice. As they entered, a voice boomed over the loud speaker: "Here are your Troy *Reds*!" and the song "Welcome to the Jungle" by heavy rock band Guns N' Roses blared from the speakers (Guns N' Roses). From my own experience as a hockey player, this was a popular song that was played for teams as they entered the ice, and as evidenced here, it continues to be a popular anthem for many professional teams as they make their grand entrance. The fans of Troy came alive to the thrashing beat of the song, and called out to their

favourite players as they skated around the ice in one last warm-up effort before the game got underway.

The players sprinted around their halves of the ice in clockwise fashion for less than a minute, and then all the players—except for the six starting players for each team—went to their respective benches. The players from each team lined up on their bluelines, the two goalies stood in the vicinity of their nets, and the officials for the game lined up on the centre redline in anticipation of the national anthem. Because both teams were from Canada, only the Canadian national anthem was sung. The singing of the anthem was announced by the speaker explaining that “Tonight’s national anthem is provided by [local sponsor]. To sing our national anthem is [female singer].” It was sung in both English and French and before the last line was sung, the fans broke out into cheers that made it barely audible. The anticipation had reached its peak: the anthem was concluded; the red carpet rolled out for the singer was rolled back up; the players lined up into their positions; the referee blew his whistle and raised his arm calling the players to the opening face-off; and the puck was dropped prompting players into action—the game had officially begun.

Seeing Through the Spectacle

I do not wish to relate the game here, but rather direct attention to particular events that help explain the nature of this occupational

endeavour. Because of the sheer spectacle of sport, it is easy to forget that those actually involved in the game are engaged in an experience that is very real to them. Success or failure for the players is not simply one team winning or losing, but rather the basis by which their occupational identities, and in turn, their livelihoods are defined. The ramifications of the game are much different for the players than for the fans, and logically, the game is experienced in completely different manners. I was struck by this dichotomous experience when a man about fifteen rows below me yelled towards *Reds'* forward Jerry Wall, "That's it Wally, kick his ass!" He wanted Jerry Wall to seek revenge on a *Mustang* forward for an incident that occurred in a previous game between the two teams.⁶ Jerry skated over to the *Mustang* player, with the fans encouraging him, and attempted to draw him into a fight.

For the fans, Jerry's actions are part of the hockey spectacle. Perhaps more than any other sport, hockey is a physical game that often relies on violent behaviour as a means of defeating an opponent. Consequently, if a player throws a body-check at another player, it is not uncommon for the player who receives the check to retaliate in some fashion. Tempers often

⁶ On the night previous, the two teams met and the *Mustang* player mentioned here took his stick and struck Jerry Wall over the hand with it. He struck Wall with no time remaining in the game which meant that the *Reds* were not able to retaliate for this "cheap-shot." They were forced to wait for the following night to seek revenge.

rise and shoving matches and fist fights may result. For fans, from the safety of their seats, they are accustomed to this violence, as it is a fundamental element of the spectacle of hockey. For the players, however, violence is real; the act of beating someone up, or getting beaten up, is not staged or fabricated, as the players suffer real consequences for their actions. I do not wish to imply that the players are not conscious of the performative value of their behaviour, but their performances are only a means to a highly tangible end. I was struck by this division of experience and I could not help but interpret the events in terms of this dichotomy.

There was not a fight in this particular incident with Jerry Wall and the *Mustang* player, because the Mustang player rejected Wall's challenge. The *Mustang* player's refusal to fight angered the fans who screamed at him for not facing his battle, but also served to validate Jerry who had successfully stood up for a "just cause." The incident was not over for the players, however, as they continued to physically batter one another and endure the hostile conditions of the game. For the many fans who were screaming for vengeance, they were now purchasing sodas and popcorn, clapping to the music which was played during the stoppages of play (stoppages of time) or participating in the antics of *Reds'* mascot, Chester. The presence of Chester wonderfully articulates the disparate experiences I am attempting to describe.

Chester is a person dressed up in a bird's costume with an enormous head to accentuate his already absurd appearance. He wears a *Reds'* jersey over his costume and his job is to move throughout the stadium providing humour for the fans and prompt them into cheers. On this night he had throngs of children following him wherever he went, and when there were lulls in the game's action he actually stole the fans' attention. I watched this intentionally ridiculous figure gyrate his hips to the popular songs playing over the speakers; and I watched him fall atop a glass partition that wedged up between his legs, leaving him writhing on the ice in agony (fabricated I hope). In addition to the humour that was generated by his wild antics, his surreal persona contributed to the whole "carnavalesque" atmosphere constructed around the game. His presence suspended reality for fans who not only accepted his presence, but enjoyed engaging in the physical dialogue he created.

I use the term "carnavalesque" deliberately here to draw from Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of medieval carnival in *Rabelais and His World*. In this work, Bakhtin describes three forms of folk carnival humour—"Ritual spectacles," "Comic verbal compositions," "Various genres of billingsgate"—but it is the "ritual spectacle" that interests us here: "carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace" (5). He describes the experience as a period of collective mockery and absurdity where the participants are both the subjects

and the recipients of the joke. In contrast to romanticism, medieval carnival is a celebration of grotesque realism where the “essential principle” is “degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body” (Bakhtin 19). The exaggerated and absurd bodily imagery is not individualized, however, but rather, shared: “this laughter is ambivalent; it is gay triumphant and at the same time mocking deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives,” yet “it is also directed at those who laugh” (11, 12). The carnival participants lose themselves in the laughter and the spectacle, and therefore, “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (7). There is a profound effect of this collective laughter which according to Bakhtin “expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it”; meaning, that the festivals offered people the means of seeking harmonious union with the world around them (12).

Whether these wondrous celebrations provided the healing function with which Bakhtin has credited them is questionable, but it has been argued—largely from within an earlier Freudian framework—that a void has been left as a result of the absence of medieval carnival. By the nineteenth century the value of these celebrations of the grotesque and absurd was lost on a new Victorian sensibility and they were gradually driven to society’s peripheries:

Within a town the fair, mop, wake or carnival, which had once taken over the whole of the town and permitted neither outside nor outsider to its rule, was confined to certain areas and gradually driven out from the well-to-do neighbourhoods. (Stallybrass and White 178)

Suddenly the once celebrated behaviours of carnival were seen as being too vile and extreme for the bourgeoisie, and consequently, images “of bodily life, such as eating, drinking, copulation, defecation, almost entirely lost their regenerating power and were turned into ‘vulgarity’” (Bakhtin 39). The catharsis brought on by the collective laughter of grotesque realism was no longer possible, and “many of the images and symbols which were once the focus of various pleasures in European carnival have become transformed into the morbid symptoms of private terror” (Stallybrass and White 174). Again, claiming that the banning of carnival has prevented the masses from achieving oneness with themselves and with nature may be perhaps overstated, but it is evident that the desire to celebrate the carnivalesque has remained.

Therefore, in response to this paradoxical situation, which sees society both disturbed by carnival and longing for it, mimetic glimpses of carnival have been provided in its stead. Stallybrass and White write:

Carnival was too disgusting for bourgeois life to endure except as sentimental spectacle. Even then its specular identifications could only be momentary, fleeting and partial—voyeuristic glimpses of a promiscuous loss of status and decorum which the bourgeoisie had had to deny as abhorrent in order to emerge as a distinct and “proper” class. (183)

In a contemporary context, the sporting event provides such a “sentimental spectacle” to which Stallybrass and White refer. It is important, however, to make the distinction between the spectacle of modern sporting events and the ritual spectacles that Bakhtin describes in *Rabelais and His World*.

There is no ritual or healing significance to the event; it is spectacle in the purest sense of the word. What this word actually signifies is more

than the worship of “bigness” for its own sake, more than cheap thrills and decadent pleasures is required to account for the triumph as an organized genre of cultural performance. . . . Spectacle may be society in action, groping on the level of expressive culture, toward a new order in a changing world. (MacAloon 267-68)

But at the same time there is a tendency “to be suspicious of spectacles” and associate them with “potential tastelessness and moral cacophony”

(MacAloon 246). MacAloon’s discussion of spectacle, therefore, iterates Stallybrass’s and White’s theory of “sentimental spectacle,” in that these suspect behaviours satisfy the voyeuristic urge of the bourgeoisie, but are still regarded as being base and outside of proper bourgeois values.

The concept of spectacle becomes even more noteworthy if we consider how John MacAloon relates it to the modern Olympic games. In his essay “Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle” he recognizes that the athletes are the focus of the spectacle, but at the same time outside of it. He explains:

Even more surprisingly, my interviews with Olympic athletes have turned up examples of competitors who were so restricted by their physical and psychological training regimens at the

Games that they too were mostly unaware of the vast festival surrounding the athletic competition. (260)

His comments here echo those by made by Bakhtin when he writes,

“Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it” (Bakhtin 7).

This is also the case in professional hockey, where the athletes are the essence of the spectacle of the sporting event, yet at the same time are psychologically removed from it. The players’ behaviour is “spectacular” only in the larger sporting industry context—their performance on the ice makes the spectacle possible—but their experience is hardly “spectacular.” The actions on the ice serve to entertain an audience, but the actions more immediately serve to satisfy the demands of labour. However outrageous or exaggerated the behaviour may at times appear to those outside of the game, the ramifications are real, and the players’ livelihoods depend on them. Therefore, the specular nature of hockey is an exoteric construction and outside of the players’ frame of reference.

This dichotomous experience revealed itself wonderfully to me as I witnessed Chester the mascot’s status dissolve as he left the framework of the spectators and attempted to make contact with the players. For the fans who laughed and shared in the banter Chester provided, he was “real,” but as the players returned to the ice for the third period, Chester was invisible. The players skated right past him, intentionally refusing to acknowledge his presence, despite Chester offering his outstretched arm for the players to

“high-five”⁷ him on their way out onto the ice. The parodic figure that awaited the players was a wonderful juxtaposition to the players whose intense physical and mental frameworks were hardly frivolous or facetious. For example, *Reds*’ goaltender, Paul Proux, during the beginning of each period, just before play gets underway, stands in his crease, bent over, head down, talking furiously to himself. In this crouched position, he moves his feet back and forth, as if skating on the spot and bounces rhythmically to each shuffling leg. This ritual is done each game, three times a game while his teammates skate by him and touch him ceremoniously with their sticks: each player has a specific spot(s) he will touch him; each has a specific manner in his approach to touching him; and each will have a specific number of times he will touch him.

Therefore it is important to realize that the players are the focus of the circus-like atmosphere, but at the same time removed from it. To emphasize this juxtaposition even further, the coaches walk past Chester onto the ice, wearing suits and ties. Those players that are not dressed for the game also wear similar formal attire. The players’ demeanour on the ice, their clothing, their passion, all express the seriousness of the “playing” of hockey, yet it is almost a contradiction as I perceive this intensity in the jocular environment

⁷ A “high-five” involves one person holding his hand up high over his head and a second person slapping that hand. It is a positive gesture that signifies a person’s support of another person’s behaviour, or the encouraging of another form of behaviour to exist.

of the stadium. But the occupation is more than how it is perceived from this particular vantage point despite the spectacle that surrounds it. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the spectacular nature of hockey, but at the same time I would be doing a disservice to the players by pursuing a study of their occupation in this vein. It is for this reason that I have chosen not to dwell on the carnivalesque nature of the game, but as an outsider watching the event from the stands, am at least forced to acknowledge its presence.

It may be difficult for people to look at grown men wildly chasing a rubber puck around artificial ice, beating one another up in the process in a manner other than spectacle, but if we return to the initial example cited, of Jerry Wall attempting to seek retribution for the previous night's infraction, light can be shed on the matter. First, it needs reiterating that the more extreme the behaviour on the ice, the more it tends to function as a heightened form of entertainment for the fans who, as in the last example, are heard screaming for the vengeance Wall can only bring to them in proxy. But as Wall talked about the events in an interview I conducted with him the next day, he elucidated his theatrical behaviour in pragmatic terms. He began by reminding me that during the previous night's game, at "the end of the game, the guy jumped me, and did what I call a gutless move." It was this "gutless move" that provoked the following response:

it was my first shift of the night. It was an icing call and he [Mustang player] went back to touch the puck. And I came up

right beside him and I said "Let's go."⁸ There were no officials around, and I called him on. I said—I went up to him face-to-face and I said "Do you want to go?" And I asked him a few times throughout the night if he wanted to go and he just left. And I don't know if he was backing down or, or if he had some sort of situation that he got suspended. I'm not sure, but you know, it's not always going to happen in one game. You just put it in the back of your mind, and then so you can get the guy. . . I wanted to get it done on my first shift of the hockey game, but you know it just never happened with him. Obviously he didn't want any [*laughs*] part of it. But I am sure, you know some time—I mean we play these guys twelve times throughout the season and it will happen some time. (Wall Interview 24 Oct. 1996)

But in addition to "paying" the player back, Wall discussed the significance of his actions as contributing to his success as a hockey player:

I think it is something I have to do, to create my own room on the ice. You know, I'm not the greatest skater but I'm not the worst skater. But certainly if I can do that kind of stuff it gives me more room on the ice, and you know, they're not going to come and bump me and get in my face as much. So if I create those kind of, you know, situations, hopefully it will make some other players back down so we, we don't want them to get away with stuff like that. (Wall Interview Oct. 24, 1996)

Violence on the ice can be seen as a highly expressive text that may help establish a player's identity, assert a player's presence on the ice, or be a means of retribution; but violence always serves a utilitarian function.

Without violence Wall would be largely ineffective on the ice and would likely not have a position on the team. For the fans, however, violence is an extension of the game that they pay to watch, and has no physical bearing in their lives.

⁸ Asking someone "to go" means asking someone to fight.

The dichotomous relationship that I am stressing here becomes even more apparent if we consider a specific point in the second period of the game. The *Reds* were leading the *Mustangs* by a goal, and the tension that was present with the initial ruckus in the opening minutes had subsided which left a certain complacency among the fans. Suddenly a shot deflected off a *Reds*' player's stick and travelled right into the stands, hitting a woman directly in the mouth. The woman's head dropped into her lap and a male beside her began frantically waving his one arm in search of aid. He was trying to console the woman with his other arm. As her head was lifted from her lap it was apparent that she was bleeding profusely and she was in tremendous pain. The crowd watched in horror while the woman received attention from First Aid personnel and all that was heard was the quiet murmuring of the audience. The play on the ice resumed in normal fashion but I could see that at least seventy-five percent of the people at this end of the arena watched with concern as the woman was treated and finally taken away from her seat.

I sat and watched all of this take place about a hundred feet away from me, and I thought about an earlier incident in the period, when *Reds*' defenceman Colin Best was knocked to the ice by a punch to the face, thrown at him while fighting a *Mustang* player. The fans' response to this incident could be best described as that of disappointment as they witnessed a player

from “their team” lose a fight. The significance of this response did not register until later, as I considered it in relation to the crowd reaction to the woman who received the unexpected blow to the head. There was no noticeable concern expressed over the fact that Colin likely would need stitches to repair the cut on his face. Albeit the severity of the wound the woman received was more extreme than Colin’s injury, the shock expressed by the crowd was more due to the fact that the woman should not have been hit in the first place. Colin, as a professional hockey player, stepping onto the ice, willingly opened himself up to the inherent dangers of the game. The fans, however, are paying to see the ramifications of the players voluntarily placing themselves into this predicament from their assumed sheltered vantage points. When the two worlds collide, however, the result is devastating, as witnessed with this particular woman here. The horror with which the fans watched this woman in her predicament is the horror of spectacle and reality coming together as one.

Player Performance

As the game continued to unfold the players were busy attempting to execute the strategies they had been practising throughout the week. The game moved at a ferocious pace and the players were forced to perform to their utmost potential. The score was tied halfway through the first period and coach Hal Murphy was on the bench reinforcing his players positively,

but also reprimanding those who erred with deliberate physical gestures, such as finger pointing or waving his arms, as if in disbelief. The *Reds* at this point in the season were high in the standings and had a better record than the *Mustangs*, which meant that the *Reds* should have been leading the *Mustangs*. Failure to do so meant contending with angry coaches, an unforgiving media and often the ridicule of the many spectators. Repeated unsatisfactory play would mean changes would occur and ultimately certain players would lose their jobs.

The game, however, while being played with an intensity that was required for both teams to remain competitive, lacked the emotion evident on other nights. The *Reds* were expected to win, and at this point, were meeting expectations. There were not a great deal of scoring opportunities, and when they existed, a goal was generally the result. It was apparent as the game progressed that Hal Murphy was encouraging this “boring” style of play, in that it is a style without risk. The players were playing a close checking game and only attempted to score on opportunities that the *Mustangs* gave them—in other words, capitalizing on a *Mustang* mistake. Hal Murphy is a former NHL hockey player who is relatively new to the coaching scene. His playing career was based on this defensive-minded, disciplined game where the limited success he had as a player was made possible by a strong work ethic as opposed to exceptional skills. It is not surprising that his team

carried out a similar philosophy as they frustrated the *Mustangs* who were not able to generate any kind of offence all night.

The frustration the *Mustangs* were experiencing as a team was gradually expressed through individual actions that need further consideration here. I am referring to players and coaches losing their tempers and subsequently acting out in outrage, both physically and orally. The first incident was *Mustang's* head coach Paul Martin's verbal assault of the referee after a dubious call was made against his team. The scene was a familiar one in hockey, where the coach, while standing on the players' bench, puts a foot on top of the boards and leans to the ice hollering at the top of his lungs. In most cases the referee, or whoever is being verbally accosted, ignores the barrage of name calling and criticisms and the coach generally regains his composure after a few seconds. In this particular situation, Paul Martin continued to scream until his face grew red and proceeded to go into the doorway which led onto the ice, as if he wanted to physically attack the referee. At that point the referee saw that Martin was completely out of control, and his behaviour needed to be stopped. The referee called a double bench minor penalty on Martin, which meant that his team would have to play a player short for the next four minutes of the game. His outburst did not change the referee's previous call, and the *Mustangs* were worse off because of additional penalty minutes they had to serve.

The question that arose out of this situation was why Martin unleashed such a relentless attack upon the referee when he was aware of the repercussions of such behaviour. It was not as if his team did not have a chance to win the game; they were only trailing the *Reds* by one goal. Was it possible that Paul Martin actually physically lost control of his temper and could not prevent such an outburst from occurring? Or was this a staged performance that has a significance other than what I was seeing from the stands? Was it a motivational strategy? If we look to the next incident, the same frustrated behaviour evident with Martin was evident with the players who suddenly became overwhelmed with anger. The situation occurred as the *Mustangs* were scored upon for the fifth time in the game. Immediately after the puck entered the net, two of the *Mustang* players, one after the other, broke their sticks: one over top of the goal crossbar, the other against the glass behind the goal. The one player who smashed the glass then proceeded to the bench screaming at himself—or so it seemed from where I was standing—and later at his teammates who went to the bench after him. Neither player received penalties for his conduct, but their actions were equal to Paul Martin's in severity. As I stood and watched these expressive acts outside of the players' frame of reference, they appeared almost childlike, whether sincere or not.

Once again, however, the division of experience was manifested, in that those watching the “game” (like myself) were seeing it as something outside of everyday life, but for the players, the experience was real; and thus, “playing” was real. Despite the work the players put into excelling at their occupation, their trade is based on the premise of play—“activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly” (Huizinga 13). The players’ behaviour within their trade is consistent with this premise; the elements of play have not been removed from hockey even though the players are engaged in highly serious activity, and as play theorists John Huizinga and Roger Caillois would argue, not playing.⁹ Therefore, the extreme nature of their actions was congruent with the playfulness of the game itself, but as mentioned, the game is the player’s reality and therefore subverts the nature of play. In this regard, the player who risks injury to prevent a rubber disk from entering a mesh cage is no more engaged in play than the player banging his stick on the ice because he did not score a goal; yet their actions are motivated by the nature of their occupations which has as its foundation, play. Therefore, the players are engaged in intensely playful behaviour, but are not playing.

⁹ Roger Caillois reiterates Huizinga in his book *Man, Play and Games* when he writes: “As for the professionals . . . who must think in terms of prize, salary or title. . . . When they play, it is at some other game” (6).

To illustrate further, the antithesis of the temper tantrum needs explicating. The opposite to these expressions of rage is the expression of elation after making a great play, or perhaps after scoring a goal. When the *Reds* scored their third goal early in the second period, *Reds'* defenceman, Steve Toll, skated approximately thirty feet and jumped on Jason Dodd—the player who scored the goal. Toll hugged and banged Dodd on the helmet and then proceeded to inflict the same affections on the rest of the players involved in this particular scoring play. Could Toll really be that excited by the fact that they scored a goal, or were his actions staged for motivational reasons? Whether staged or sincere, the point is that his behaviour is consistent with the inherent playfulness and ultimate non-reality of the game, despite the fact that they were being performed for reasons that were far from playful. It is for this reason that coach Paul Martin can lose himself in an emotional outburst yet once penalized he is able to recover his composure and carry on with his duties. Moreover, Steve Toll can celebrate a goal with frantic enthusiasm and be found two minutes later sulking in the penalty box for taking an unnecessary tripping penalty. The entire game necessitates this seemingly excessive behaviour; if this sensibility was not in place, the very premise of grown men chasing a puck around contained artificial ice would cease to exist.

Audience Performance

It was this element of play that seemed to draw the fans into the game, and between periods, while the “game” was temporarily on hold, the spectators were drawn further into the world of play by clever promotional strategies of game organizers and corporate sponsors. There are two breaks within the three period structure of a hockey game which allows the ice to be cleaned and resurfaced while the players go to their dressing-rooms and rest, and receive further instruction from coaches. These time periods of non-activity are twenty minutes in length and are timed by the scoreboard clock. The breaks in the action allow fans to go to the restroom, purchase food or beverages, or peruse the latest *Reds*’ merchandise sold in the stadium. While the ice is being prepared to be cleaned, game organizers have developed ways to provide entertainment for those fans who have remained in their seats, and at the same time, promote corporations who financially support the *Reds*. Contests have been set up that allow fans to compete for a wide range of prizes. During these forty minutes (two twenty minute breaks) six games were played: I will discuss the first three which occurred in the second twenty minute period.

The first event which took place was a generic one that I have seen played during virtually every Junior and professional game I have ever attended. It was a *Dominion* grocers sponsored event here, but the structure

of the event remains the same regardless of corporate sponsorship. Two fans were selected from the crowd earlier in the first period through a pre-determined selection process, and brought onto the ice with a male announcer, a female assistant and Chester, the *Reds'* mascot. The announcer was wearing a microphone headset and was narrating the events to the audience. He and his assistant were wearing *Reds'* track-suits. Chester playfully harassed the contestants and played to the audience to keep them interested in the events taking place on the ice. The people selected—a middle-aged man and a young woman—were escorted to the centre ice area and introduced to the audience. At the other end of the ice were two men setting up a board in front of the goal with three holes cut out at the bottom. The board was covered with Dominion logos and advertising. The middle hole was larger than the two outside holes.

The object of the game was to shoot a puck into one of these holes from the area where the contestants were standing, in hope of winning a monetary prize—the prize is greater if the puck goes into one of the smaller holes. The first contestant (male) was given a hockey stick and a puck was then placed on the ice in front of him, while the other contestant stood and watched—she went through the same steps after him. The man holding the stick stepped up to the puck and attempted to shoot it towards the net; the puck came close to hitting the hole in the right-hand corner but ended up missing the net.

The audience moaned as the puck grazed by the outer post. The woman was then handed a stick by the assistant and she attempted to shoot the puck into one of the holes. Her shot was straight but did not have the velocity to make it to the net and ended up stopping about ten feet short. Again the fans moaned at this failed attempt. The contestants were given second shots and the man put his shot into the middle hole and the woman again missed the net. The contestants were then given the option to take a third shot, but would be playing for double or nothing: they both agreed. The first contestant had won fifty dollars on his one successful attempt so was now playing for one hundred dollars; by default the woman was playing for fifty dollars because her total winnings were zero. Contestant one shot the puck but did not get it into one of the holes and thus lost his money. The woman stepped up and shot it straight down the centre of the ice into the middle hole and the fans cheered and laughed at the sudden turn of events. The announcer congratulated and consoled them so the entire crowd could hear, and directed them off the ice with his assistant. As they headed off the ice two more contestants were entering the scene as the next competition was being set up.

The next event was more theatrical and it involved the contestants directly competing with one another. The event was sponsored by a regional gas and service-station company and thus had a service station theme to its presentation. The two contestants—who were selected in similar fashion to

the first two—were placed on the right and left hand side of the ice. There was a piece of Plexiglas, a bucket, a squeegee and a gas tank in front of each of them. There was another pail past this first section, about thirty feet away. The contestants were given a jacket, a hat and a pair of gloves that the local service station attendants would wear while on the job. The announcer yelled “Go!”, the music started playing and the contestants began putting on the apparel that was given to them. Once they were suited up they walked in hurried fashion—they are instructed not to run for reasons of safety, though some still do when the announcer’s back is turned—to the first station where they took the squeegee and began washing the Plexiglas. After the glass was wiped, they grabbed the gas tank and sprint-walked up to the pail and began pouring the contents of the gas tank into the container. Once this was finished they sprint-walked back to where they started, which served as the finish line.

The person who was trailing in the competition began to run as opposed to walk to the finishing line and slipped, lost his balance and just barely prevented himself from falling. He ended up still finishing second and the audience, who had been cheering for both, broke out into laughter at the slapstick antics in front of them. These contestants were competing for twenty-five dollars. At the conclusion of the race they went over and shook each other’s hand, and the announcer came over announcing the winner. The announcer asked the audience to give the contestants a big round of

applause and the assistant proceeded to direct the two gentlemen off the ice.

As the two contestants made their way through the doors, a shiny new Chrysler Van was being driven past them onto the ice. This marked the beginning of the last event in this twenty minute section.

The van was driven in a circle around the ice and then parked in the middle of the rink, still clearly in view for all to see. A gentleman stepped out of the van and he was announced as the sole contestant for the next competition; he was playing to win the van. As he was greeted by the announcer, Chester the mascot got the gentleman into a headlock which seemed to embarrass him slightly, and the spectators laughed. A board had been set up at the far end as it had been in the first event, but this time the board was labelled with Chrysler logos and slogans, along with a goalie painted in the centre with a tiny hole in between his feet. The event followed the same premise as the first competition, but this time, the contestant had to shoot the puck from about fifty feet further and into only one, tiny hole—the hole on this board was only a fraction larger than the puck itself.

Once again, a hockey stick was handed to the contestant and a puck was placed in front of him. The man took time to aim, and then shot the puck towards the net. The fans were more attentive at this moment than they were during the other events, likely because of the enormous odds against winning, in addition to the large prize for which the contestant was playing. At first it looked like the puck was heading for the net and the fans

began cheering in anticipation, but seconds later the puck began to curl away from the net and ended up missing it completely. There was a murmur of disappointment among the fans, but for only a brief moment; their moans were transformed instantly into cheers as it was announced (as it is always during this event) that Chester the mascot would now make an attempt to shoot the puck into the hole for the contestant. If Chester was able to put the puck into the net, the contestant would win the van, thus giving the contestant one more chance at winning; yet this time, his hope for a victory was riding on the bird-like character with the enormous head scoring. It was not surprising that after much clowning and exaggerated aiming, Chester shot, fell to the ice, and missed the net by close to ten feet. Laughter once again ensued.

The contestant was escorted back to the van and driven back off the ice. Although he was unsuccessful at winning the van, he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself as he waved to the fans with his arm hung out of the window. All of this took approximately ten minutes to occur, leaving way for the Zamboni to be driven out with ten minutes left to resurface the ice. Game organizers, being very aware of the tedium that would result from watching the Zamboni being driven in circles for ten minutes, had instructed Chester the mascot to remain on the ice and cause havoc for the Zamboni driver until the game resumed play.

The Result

The game ended with the *Reds* winning five goals to three. The players gathered together after the final horn was sounded and they shared in brief congratulatory embraces. The players were not overly zealous in their praises of one another, and they were not especially elated by their victory. They were satisfied with a job well done and the fact that they were rewarded for the efforts with a victory. The *Mustangs'* demeanour was not much different. They were less emotional as they came together to support one another. They did not play poorly and generally looked at their performances positively. They did, however, lose, which was difficult to accept for the players, who understand winning as the essence of their occupation. I spoke with various *Mustang* players after the game and asked how they responded to the loss. One player explained that

from a personal angle, it's always tough when you lose. Even sometimes, if you have a real good game, it won't get to you as much as a—well you know, a horseshit game [*laughs*]. If you have a really bad one, uh, and I have a hard time sleeping for a couple of days, until the next game basically. So uh, you know, it's really tough. (Belanger Interview)

The *Mustangs'* goaltender expressed similar sentiments by saying:

Well uh, sure it's hard. It's disappointing, but I think uh, you know as a team, I have to concentrate, on what I can do on the ice. And I think uh, there's always place for better nights, but tonight, I think uh, you know I did my job quite okay. We gave up a lot of shots and uh, we weren't lucky. And the other goalie made some good saves, but I just try to concentrate on my stuff. And uh, do what I can do best and that's stopping the pucks—as

many as I can. . . . If there is a game that I think I gave up a soft goal, for sure I'll be mad at myself. But tonight, I think uh, I was happy with my game, uh—but when you lose, it is always uh, it's always frustrating. For the past two years I had a winning team: we were winning a lot. So when I lose I get mad, but I have to concentrate on what I can do, and if I play well, then that's a big part of my game there. (Boland Interview)

The players are well aware that they have a long season ahead of them and their behaviour after the game—both winners and losers—illustrates the pragmatic approach the players take to playing. In winning, the *Reds* were able to briefly enjoy their success; in losing, the *Mustangs* were forced to regroup and prepare for their next game. If they were unable to make the necessary adjustments and losing were to become consistent¹⁰ losing would take on greater significance and the players' jobs would become suddenly precarious. Therefore the off-day/practice-day becomes paramount for teams as they use this time to work on new strategies, perfect old ones and work on their physical conditioning to be even better prepared to go through what has just been described all over again; but for the *Mustangs*, it is with the intention of achieving a different result—a victory.

¹⁰ The *Reds* faced this losing scenario later in the season.

Chapter Five

The Practice on Off-Day¹

The professional hockey player's week during the season comprises essentially of two days: "game-day" and "off-day." Where these days fall within the week is immaterial as the players' routines are framed around whether or not there is a game that particular day. But, the term "off-day" is a misnomer since players do not actually have the day off. Instead, players are required to show up for practice and engage in the on and off-ice activities, such as physical conditioning and group viewings of previous game performances. The "off" part of the day is significant, however, as the practice never exceeds past one o'clock, and players are generally free to do as they please for the remainder of the day.

The first off-day practice I attended occurred on Thursday October 24th and I arrived at the rink as I did for the game-day practice two days earlier. I sat behind the *Reds'* bench and immediately began taking notes. The players were all out on the ice by ten a.m. stretching under the direction of

¹ The practice to which I am referring occurred two days after the *Reds'* win against the *Mustangs*. I have chosen this day instead of the day previous because that day's practice had been optional. I am noting this not only to be faithful to the chronology of events, but to show a basic reward system that is in place. *Reds'* player Steve Toll explains: "You know, we're at home here and we're winning a few games in a row. And we had six games in eight days, so a lot of those days, you try to get your rest and get back just to keep your intensity level up so you can get back at it the next day. So, you know, you might have a day off here, and if you're losing it might be a little different" (Toll Interview).

team captain Darren Feld. The players were wearing different coloured jerseys as opposed to game-day practice. Instead of red and white jerseys (with the exception of grey jerseys worn by players not in the line-up) there were white, green, blue, red and grey jerseys. Again, the grey jerseys were worn by players who were either recovering from injury or were not ready to be in the line-up, but the other colours represented where players fit within the team. The white jerseys continued to be worn by the defence, but the forwards were divided into lines, with their colours representing on what line a certain player would play.

The three players wearing red jerseys were on the first line, which meant that they were the top line on the team. The blue jerseys were worn by the second line and the green were worn by the third line: the numbering of their line corresponds to their status in terms of productive value. Team lines are not permanently fixed, however, as players who cease to produce on the ice—in terms of scoring goals—will be demoted to a second or third line and will be replaced by a teammate who is providing the team with an offensive contribution. The division of skill between lines may not be as great on some teams as others, but on virtually every team, there is enough of a discrepancy to privilege one line over the next over extended periods of time. The different colour jerseys demarcate wonderfully this distinction of status by the fact that if one line suddenly moves from second line status to

first line status, they would assume the colour of the first line, and the former first line would wear the jersey of their current ranking.

Learning the System

Once the players finished their stretching, Hal Murphy called out to the players and the players immediately assembled into formation for their first drill. The drill was basically a warm-up drill for the goalies, where the players were required to skate up the length of the ice with a puck and shoot the puck at net once they hit the blue-line. I noticed a series of events during this drill that need explication. Defenceman Steve Toll was skating down the ice and shot at goaltender Paul Proux. His shot was high and caught Proux in the shoulder area. The shot was not particularly hard, but because it was high, Toll had broken a basic precept in hockey which is to avoid putting your goaltender's safety at risk, which would include shooting a high shot in a lesser protected area. Hence, Proux's response to the shot was to skate out at Toll with his stick raised and poised ready to strike him. Whether he was only threatening to hit Toll, I was not sure, but as he approached him Toll yelled, "Sorry fuck!"; he was apologetic for his carelessness, but also upset that Proux had taken such an aggressive stance. Proux returned to his net to face more shots but continued to admonish Toll who took his place in line to carry out the drill. Less than a minute later Toll came down on Proux to take another shot, but this time he gently rolled the puck towards Proux who

simply brushed the puck to the corner. The exaggerated restraint that Toll expressed here was a means of apologizing to Proux in a manner that he could not express orally, and I wrote in my field book, "Actions make amends, not words."

The drills unfolded as they did on game-day practice, but as I soon found out, the off-day drills were generally more physical and intense. The drills also included body-contact checking, which again increased the intensity with which the drills were performed. There appeared to be a real emphasis on speed and power, and in one drill in particular these two aspects were especially apparent. The drill was straightforward in that there were simply two lines at one end of the rink. In one line there were forward players who were facing forwards, and a second line of defence—about ten feet ahead of the first—who were facing backwards. From a standstill, the forwards sprinted up along the boards trying to get to the other end and get a shot on goal. At the same time the defenceman skated backwards, parallel to the forward, until he reached the centre ice area and attempted to prevent the forward from getting a shot on goal. As the forward cut to the net, the defenceman tried to physically take the forward off the puck. The end result was generally a high contact situation with one or both players crashing the boards. The drill was highly explosive and at one point two players collided into the goal-post knocking the net and rookie goaltender John Dent flying. Ted Right (the elderly gentleman who watched all the team's practices)

groaned in excitement at the collision and said to me over my shoulder,

“There’s no fooling around, is there!”

In order for the drills to be performed at such a ferocious pace, all drills were inherently repetitive. The drills were designed so that players repeated the same action over and over again so that by the end of the drill the players ultimately performed it instinctually. The rigid patterns and timing forced the players to be aware of their exact spot on the ice at all times, and simultaneously know where their line-mates were situated. In other words, the players were practising playing in systems that regulate their behaviour on the ice to allow for optimum team performance. Each player is a component of a larger system, and thus, each individual aspect of the game is practised until they come together as a whole. By the end of practice, drills were conducted where all the component parts were working as one, which meant performing drills that were designed to get an entire line and defence pair carrying the puck from one end of the ice to other, with the intention of scoring.

The precision of player positioning was most apparent in one particular drill. The drill was done without a puck, and without words: Hal Murphy simply pointed to where a hypothetical puck was located, and all five players were required to skate to an exact spot on the ice where they would be if there actually was a puck in that area. My field notes read as follows:

- positioning is being crucially practised today

- there is a drill where one line is at an end with Murphy and he points to an imaginary puck in a specific position
- the players (all five) skate into a position on the ice where they should all be at the specific time
- whistle blows and Murphy points to a new imaginary puck in new specific location—again, formation on the ice changes
- this is the mechanization of the game that constrains players' actions and thinking (Field Notes, Oct 24, 1996)

The intent here is to make playing the game as simple as possible by structuring play, and ultimately making play predictable. As I watched the players come together as one, however, the margin of error was still quite high,² and in these particular drills there were only three defenders trying to prevent a goal from occurring, as opposed to the five that would be present during an actual game. Therefore, despite these efforts to make play mechanical and predictable, the realm of possibility in hockey is too vast for it to be fully perfected. It is this inability to ever truly master hockey that attracts players and spectators to the sport, and it is for this reason that repetition in practice can never be fully exhausted.

What I have described as the “realm of possibility” needs further clarification for readers to comprehend how hockey defies pure structure. What I am referring to here is simply the insurmountable amount of variables that present themselves in any playing situation which simply cannot be foreseen in their totality. The variables in hockey—which run

² Out of nine attempts to bring the puck down to the other end and score, only two successful attempts were made. That is a success rate of only

from a rough surface on the ice which causes a pass to run errant, human error, to a player simply seeing a better situation arising by making an alternate play—force players to make creative decisions on the ice. If these creative decisions on the ice cannot be made, the players will achieve limited to no success. An example of this was *Reds'* forward Woody Stevenson being called up by the *Reds'* parent club to play in the National Hockey League (NHL). As a player for the *Reds*, Stevenson had been an exceptional talent and highly exciting to watch. During the seven games he played in the NHL, however, he was virtually invisible on the ice and did not have an impact on the team. It is not surprising, then, that he was sent back down to the *Reds* after only a month with the parent organization.

While there are many factors that contribute to a player's success or lack of success in professional hockey, I was interested in Stevenson's comments about his stint in the NHL. Stevenson explained to the reporter in the *Reds' Magazine* that it "may be easier to play in the NHL because the game is more technical and everyone knows their job. There is less uncertainty, in a sense there is less mistakes" (29).³ The obvious irony here was that the game was easier for Stevenson, yet he was demoted back down to the AHL because he did not provide a positive contribution to the NHL club. Returning to the AHL where Stevenson finds the game "more difficult,"

twenty-two percent.

he is the *Reds'* leading scorer. Where Stevenson is unable to conform to a system that regulates his behaviour on the ice, he must be creative to produce scoring opportunities. In the NHL, where Stevenson plays perfect systematic hockey, his behaviour is predictable and ultimately ineffectual. The paradox here is that the more technical the game becomes, and the more structured it becomes, the more it forces higher levels of creativity on the ice; otherwise a perfect game would be played, which would mean a zero-zero score (a result that is highly uncommon). Thus, despite claims made by critics of professional hockey that "the [creative] activity is subordinated to a set of highly regimented, restrictive practises in order to enhance team performance" these restrictive practices in fact guarantee creativity on the ice (Beamish, 155). The systems must be at once followed and subverted in order for players to create chances for themselves and their team to achieve victory. How the players actually achieve creativity on the ice will be considered in the following chapters.

On-Ice Volatility

To describe the practice in more general terms, it can be seen as an intense physical ordeal that is largely motivated by the players' own competitive natures. As players perform their drills they genuinely try to score on their shots and are often visibly upset when they do not. The

³ Formal reference is withheld for the sake of anonymity.

goalenders are genuinely trying to stop pucks from going into the net and they too will lose their temper when they perform poorly. It is common to hear expletives used as players express their anger vocally, and sticks are smashed on the ice or against the glass as anger escalates. The intensity of the practices is not only evidenced in expressions of anger, but also in the manner in which the drills are performed. In addition to the ferocious pace and physical contact present in the drills, there is also an element of cheating. The competitive nature of the of the players can at times actually undermine the purpose of the practice, in that instead of working on weaker areas of their game success becomes paramount and they simply do whatever it takes to succeed. If cheating brings about success, cheating will occur.

I began recording exchanges—both oral and physical—over approximately five minute spans to illustrate the intensity of the players and the ramifications of their highly competitive approach to practice. My field notes are slightly cryptic, but they attempt to capture the players as they responded to one another in this competitive environment:

- their comfort with one another seems to allow players to tell one another to “fuck-off” more frequently—Toll [Steve] to Jackson [Peter], “Shoot the fucking thing!”
- Falk [Jim] says the same thing to Wall [Jerry].
- Jackson scores on Proux and Proux says “Fuck-off Jackson! You’re fuck-all!”
- Jackson only skates away shaking his head . . .
- Smith [Bill] and Coles [Chris] later go at each other’s throats for cheating on drills. The danger here is that if one returns the aggressive pose they will end up in a fight—they both back off . . .

- examples of temper tantrums are not infrequent, such as Pat Smith smashing his stick against the glass because he has screwed up in the drill
- Jackson throwing his stick into glass as he did not score on play—the glass is important to hit because it is loud and draws more attention
- Bill Smith challenges Jackson to a fight because of perceived cheap shot
- Jackson who is weaker tries to save face by responding to the challenge, but the response is small enough that he does not officially accept the challenge to fight
- [Coach] Hal Murphy comes in and reprimands Smith for picking on a small guy
- Murphy, who is tough can embarrass someone trying to be tough (Field Notes, Oct 24, 1996)

Through this brief passage I have attempted to display the aggressive behaviour evident during practice and how the players interacted with one another. There is, however, a counterbalance to this fierce and unforgiving nature that is especially significant when considered in juxtaposition to what has just been revealed.

Simultaneous with all of the aggression and frustration were jocular expressions that I found most entertaining. There were many examples of the hilarity on the ice, but two were most revealing because of the way they intertwined with the anger evidenced above. The first was actually, in its initial stage, exemplary of the unrestrained anger that I have just discussed. It began with assistant coach Sam Dig screaming at the players in an apparent rage for consistently bungling the drills. As one player began to explain to Dig why things were falling apart, his arguments were dismissed

by Dig yelling “Wake the fuck up!” The player attempted to get his point across *eight* times in a row, to which Dig repeated his command even louder. The player finally gave up and turned away allowing Dig to punctuate his tirade by screaming “and get the shit out of your eyes!” However, less than two minutes later, Sam Dig attempted to make a pass to start off a drill, but his pass went errant and did not come close to the target. Bill Smith quickly seized the opportunity to poke fun at Dig and said: “Digger! Get the shit out of your eyes!” Three players who were located close to where I was sitting burst out into laughter but Sam Dig did not laugh. I wrote in my field notes:

It is hard to tell if Dig is serious or not because behaviour which can seem so absurd can actually be serious. Yelling and screaming at the top of your lungs like a lunatic—“wake the fuck up”—so that the other person cannot continue to argue is one such example. (Field Notes, Oct 24, 1996)

As Smith returned to the corner near Sam Dig, the two men exchanged chuckles, and it was now apparent that they were making light of the situation. In this instance, one player’s anger led to humour for another. This theme of capitalizing on anger or potential anger for the sake of humour is extended in the next example.

This incident was actually made up of two particular events that expressed the same humorous sentiments. Keeping in mind previous passages that locate players throwing their sticks in rage for either missing their shot or failing to execute a drill, the next scene was identical in action but had drastically different results. In the first scene one player skated to

the net and attempted to take his shot on goal, but he barely touched the puck, and it feebly rolled in the direction of the net. The players who were waiting in line for their turn in the drill broke out into hysterics and began shouting verbal abuse at the player for his pitiful shot. In response the player who was being mocked charged over to his antagonists and began playfully pummelling them for their abuse. For about twenty seconds the players (five of them) brawled with one another and harmlessly punched each other to the head. They were all laughing and continued to mock one another. The next occurrence was a product of this playful banter, whereby one of the players who was previously brawling stepped up to shoot on net and another player, from the line in which he was standing, shot a puck that knocked the puck off the initial shooter's stick. When the shooter went to shoot he actually fell down onto the ice because the puck that he was intending to hit was no longer there. This proved to be quite hilarious for those watching, and I too was laughing at the slapstick nature of the scene. I was also amazed by the prankster's precision in being able to knock the puck off the other player's stick from about twenty-five feet away: all for the sake of humour.

I found the contrast of humour and rage interesting because of the apparent puerility of both forms of behaviour. Just as I found the frequent tantrums on the ice difficult to comprehend, the levels of play on the ice were equally remarkable. These expressive acts demonstrated what I interpreted

as a lack of emotional restraint, yet they did not appear to be perceived negatively by either players or coaches. It is significant that the aggressive behaviour was predominant during formal practice times under the coaches' strict supervision, in contrast to the "informal practice times" where jocular behaviour was more prevalent. In my discussion of game-day practice, I explained that the latter portion of the practice was an informal time, free for players to work on individual skills or simply leave the ice altogether.⁴ The two previous expressions of horseplay that I have recounted were rarely seen during formal practice times, and similarly, aggressive behaviour was virtually non-existent during informal periods. Thus, it was really during these informal practice times that the players were able to truly engage in unadulterated fun.

As I sat watching these grown men revel in their own fun and games at the conclusion of practice, I again began trying to capture the essence of what was taking place. My translation of the experience pales severely in comparison to what was actually occurring here, but I have tried to stress not only the nature of the game, but also the performance of it.

- "Okay. So it's me and Woody." [Peter Jackson says this to teammates Woody Stevenson, Mikel Zakov and Lester Dell].
- This sounds like right out of road-hockey. They [Jackson and Stevenson] play two-on-two against Zakov and Dell.

⁴ I am referring to the majority of the players who are currently in the line-up, as opposed to those players wearing the gray jerseys who would be required to do extra conditioning drills at the end of practice.

- As they play they hit each other and they stick each other: “Ah, Fuck-off!”
- They cheat and when someone calls the person for the cheating, or the supposed cheating, it is mock confrontational.
- I love the use of the term “Out” which is in reference to a safe area, or “home-free” like status—out of bounds, out of the realm of play.
- When one team scores the guys accuse others of cheating and/or call rookie goalie John Dent a sieve: “Fuck-off Dent!”
- The game culminates into football tackles, accusations and much laughter.
- Mikel Zakov and Lester Dell tie the score up at three and Woody Stevenson tells the team that they scored a “cheesy goal.”
- One team has taken advantage of the rules to which Peter Jackson says “Aw come on!” Jackson’s team is duped and they get bothered by it.
- Zakov lands on Stevenson; they lay there laughing and when Zakov gets up, Stevenson knocks Zakov’s stick to the corner
- Stevenson and Jackson score and win: Zakov denies the goal saying “You are a cheater you fuck!” (Field notes, Oct 24, 1996)

The players finished their game—there must always be a winner and a loser—and the losers picked up the extra pucks while the others exited the ice. Nothing unusual took place here, and the last players finally skated off to join the rest of their teammates in the dressing-room.

Maintaining Distance

The role of the ethnographer is one of selection, in that decisions are constantly being made to privilege one component of observation over others and insert it into the actual written ethnography: in short it is a process of editing human experience. Decisions to incorporate certain aspects of behaviour and deny others are often difficult, but none has been as difficult as what I am about to include next. The decision is difficult because I am

including it, in part, because it provides further commentary on the perceived farcical behaviour on the ice; and, it is consistent with the natural chronology of events. I am hesitant to include it, however, for two reasons: it is removed from the actual performance of professional hockey (both formally and informally); and I am concerned that I am deeming the event more significant because of my personal reaction to it, which thus might be the prime motivating factor for its inclusion. I felt that my only recourse in providing this information was to preface it with this brief reflexive commentary to allow the reader access to my imaginative process, and in turn, the process of editing.

I am referring to the manner in which the players leave the ice. Considering that the players have just been involved in a form of interactive play that is rarely, if ever, paralleled in an adult occupational sphere, it is difficult to fathom the cold exit they make as they head to the dressing-room. I have referred, on occasion, to Ted Right, loyal *Reds'* follower who, whenever physically able, attends every *Reds'* game and practice. Ted appears to be in his mid-sixties, he wears his *Reds'* hockey jacket everyday (unless it storms and he wears a jacket with a hood) and his countenance is always cheerful. He is usually at the stadium fifteen minutes before the players are on the ice, and does not leave until all players are off. As the players, in staggered fashion, step onto the ice, he calls out to every single one of them by name

either commenting on a previous night's game, or wishing them a good practice. At the conclusion of practice, his involvement is greater, as he volunteers himself to open and close the door for players as they exit the ice, also in staggered fashion. In order for the players and coaches to get off, then, they are forced to walk directly past Ted who says things like, "How ya doing Wally?"; "You're starting to come around Vesty?"; or "The team's starting to look good Hal." The players and coaches, however, avoid eye-contact and walk past Ted usually saying nothing, or sometimes a barely audible "Good." Veteran goaltender Paul Proux was the only member of the *Reds* who thanked Ted for opening the door, and responded by asking how Ted was doing. Ted's face lit up and said "Good Paulie! Have a good one" and Paul walked on to the dressing-room.

The aloof manner in which the players received Ted was difficult to comprehend after I had just witnessed the players rolling and laughing with one another on the ice and hollering playful accusations. But on further inspection, the behaviour seemed typical of this banter; team interaction was accessible to members only. The player's behaviour was intentionally exclusive and this maintained Ted's spectator status and his position outside of the community. Ted's attempts to work himself into the team dynamic serves to illustrate the striking division between members and non-members, and enforces the distinctiveness of this occupational community. It needs mentioning, however, that although I do not wish to deny my critical

response to the players' and coaches' reaction towards Ted, it is the implications of this expressive behaviour that draw me to it academically. The otherworldliness of their occupational environment is perpetuated through their exclusive behaviour and shunning of outside intervention. The ramifications of this solipsistic existence will be considered throughout the chapters to follow, but it is necessary to recognize that the division is substantial and expressed in the most mundane expressions of the players' daily routines.

The practice officially ended and the players moved to the dressing-room where they were required to view game videos for approximately an hour. Once that was completed, they were free to do as they pleased until the next day. They practised every day for a maximum of two hours, but usually the practices ran for only an hour to an hour and a half. If things were going well for the team they would occasionally have an optional practice, but rarely would there ever be an outright day off. Practices ended by noon, at the latest, and the players that did not need therapeutic treatment from Al Jones would generally go out for lunch in various groups. The rest of the day was spent either doing errands or simply relaxing with one another, as rookie forward Lester Dell explained:

So, there's a lot of free time here; there's so much free time on your hands after practice you know. Go out, go home and then you have something to eat. And then you have the rest of the day to do chores or just relax there. You know, just do whatever you have to do. (Dell Interview, 10 Feb. 1997)

Thus, on off-days, the players' workday began at around nine in the morning and concluded at around one in the afternoon. On game-days the morning schedule was structured similarly; in the evening the players had to show up an hour and a half before game time and would leave the rink after the game at about eleven thirty. This work routine was followed throughout the entire season while they played their games in Troy. The team's schedule was set up so that they would usually have between two and three weeks at home, and then go on the road for about a week to two weeks playing games throughout Eastern Canada and the United States. They travelled by bus primarily, as do all AHL teams.

The Dressing-room

Before concluding this chapter it is important to consider one more aspect of the professional hockey environment, where the players actually spend the majority of their workday. This area is the dressing-room, which serves as a recreational area, exercise area, and treatment area for therapeutic rehabilitation. I decided to approach Al Jones after practice to see if I could get a tour of the facilities in order to document this "sacred" space of the players. Al said that he would happily provide a tour and suggested that I come on Sunday after practice at around two o'clock. The use of the term "sacred" here is an esoteric term that I have heard used on

numerous occasions. In an interview I conducted with a former professional hockey player the year previous to my ethnography with the *Reds*, John Doe expressed these sentiments about the dressing-room:

I know in all the dressing-rooms that we, that I played in we all had T.V.'s and stereo systems in them. I know one thing, after a lot of practices, we used to watch *Cheers* in the dressing-room. And we looked forward to it, you know, watching it all the time as a whole team. And we had a fun time doing that eh. So, uh, the dressing-room was kind of sacred to us as a team. (Doe Interview)

The comfort that John is describing was the first thing I looked for as I began the tour of the dressing-room with Al on the Sunday he suggested. In order to get to the dressing-room one must walk through royal blue drapes that serve as a partition between the public space of the arena and the private space of the *Reds*. Once past the curtain partition I came upon a hallway that was identical to all the other hallways within the stadium. The only difference was that in this hallway there were three red doors: the first door on the right immediately past the curtain read, "*Reds'* Dressing-room" and had the *Reds'* logo situated underneath; the next two doors were also in red but were smaller and did not have anything written on them.

We walked through the first door, which was the main entrance to the *Reds'* dressing-room, and were hit immediately by the stale air and pungent odour of the drying leather and canvas of hockey gear. The stale air and the smell should not have been a surprise since approximately twenty players

had just left the room half an hour previous to my visit, leaving their sweaty equipment and garments to be washed or simply hung to dry in a windowless room. Overhead was the sound of a ventilation system whirring loudly in an attempt to rid the room of odour and damp air; it was necessary to keep the room as dry and warm as possible to allow the equipment to dry quickly. My reaction to the smell of the room was immediately qualified by the condition of the room, which was impeccably clean. The room, which was almost entirely red, was tidy and compartmentalized. The floor was covered with red and white carpet and it was spotless. All the players' equipment was neatly hung up in individual stalls, and each stall possessed a name plate demarcating each player's position within the room. The room was smaller than I imagined but I was impressed by it nonetheless.

Al walked me through all areas of the room and the adjoining rooms providing information about the room's contents and the use of the room along the way. It was apparent that Al was very proud of this room as he told me of the various rules that the players must follow while being there. He equated the dressing-room to a living-room and expected the players to treat the dressing-room as they would their living-rooms at home. In fact, the room did have a living-room feel to it; there was a fine sounding stereo system that was playing rock music; above the east portion of the stalls was a large television with a cable hook-up airing NFL football; and the players' benches were all carpeted for added comfort.

Al took me into the shower area which contained several showers, sinks, toilets and a whirlpool bath that was used therapeutically. Adjacent to the bathroom was a section of the room that had a refrigerator, sink and counter area that appeared to be used for making coffee and keeping sodas and other beverages. Al then took me into the exercise room that was comparable in size to the dressing-room. This room was also carpeted and equipped with a sound system. Another member of the training staff was in this room with us and was engaging in a workout while Al showed me around. The room contained a row of stationary bikes and an assortment of free weights and exercise equipment. The room also contained a coat rack area and a series of small compartments which served as the players' mail boxes. The final room into which Al took me was his office which he shared with the other three members of the training staff. This room was set up with a desk and typical office supplies, but there was also Al's therapy table—the one on which I had seen a player being worked on the night of the *Reds'* game. Al then proceeded to go over his duties with me and what was expected of him as an Athletic Therapist. The only room that he did not show me was the coach's office which could also be reached through the main dressing-room area. This room was private to the coaching staff and Al simply told me about it.

Once Al was finished showing me around, I asked him if I could wander on my own to draw up a floor plan and make observations. He

complied and occupied himself with paperwork while I began to take in the dressing-room specifics. On the wall above the television there was a message painted in large red letters which read, "DON'T JUST PLAY . . . COMPETE" with the *Reds'* logo painted beneath it. Everything about the room expressed efficiency and order, from the stark red and white patterning of the carpeting, to the easy access garbage bins built directly into the benches at every corner of the room. Each player's gear was stored in the exact same manner in his individual stall, with specific equipment on the two top shelves, undergarments in a mesh bag that hung from a hook in his stall, and remaining gear packed into compartments built into his bench. There was nothing sitting on the floor or on the benches except for two sticks of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum that were placed there for the players before and after every practice and game.⁵

The entire room was colour coded to match the colours of the *Reds'* uniforms, and everything was labelled clearly, again stressing the efficiency of the room. For example, by the main entrance of the dressing-room was a rack that held all of the players' hockey sticks. Each rack was labelled with a number, which indicated where players were supposed to place their sticks. Each rack had a minimum of four sticks, but usually there were more, and

⁵ While conducting an interview with *Reds'* captain Darren Feld in the dressing-room after a practice later in the season, he went and got two sticks of this same gum for me to chew while we did the interview.

the sticks were all numbered—with the numbers facing out. In addition to the clear numbering system that was inscribed with magic marker on the taped butt-ends of the sticks, the players' names were actually printed into the upper end of the stick by the manufacturing company that produces the stick. I was amazed at how ordered everything was in the room and the more I observed, the less the room felt like a living-room and more like an institution. The words "Don't just play . . . compete" took on an ominous feel, and the room began to feel oppressive. When I played hockey I loved being in the dressing-room—it was one of my favourite aspects of the game—and yet as I stood there taking notes, the dressing-room disturbed me. The room's efficiency and order were imposing and restricted the players' behaviour and individuality, and I began to wonder if, ironically, this was what made the room sacred.

Over the course of the ethnography the distinctive essence of professional hockey became increasingly apparent. To begin, there was the actual working environment—the arena—which was deliberately removed from reality and/or anything natural (in an environmental sense). It was a sphere, or as John Bale designates it, a "sportscape," that defies its natural surroundings. Bale explains that "the landscape of sport became increasingly artificial" which he attributes to "sport's fixation with neutralising or altering the effects of the physical environment, and producing a landscape given over solely to sport" (39-40). The climate

controlled stadium with its painted, artificial ice surface glowing brightly exemplifies the artificiality of the sport domain, and immediately expresses to those inside the building that they have entered a space that is outside of everyday experience. The behaviour within this constructed space extends further the distinctive nature of the hockey occupational community, as the very framework of the game is situated outside of the natural order—"there is nothing natural about a sports event" (Wagner 94).

The players themselves are both product and architect of this constructed universe and both consciously and unconsciously express themselves as members within it. The participant/spectator division is highly apparent during the actual sporting contest, with fans revelling in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the stands, while the players thrive and struggle in the intensity of skilled competition on the ice; but the division does not end there. As players skate from the ice after games, adoring fans call out to them and ask for autographs but players generally ignore them or respond to them minimally.⁶ The players return to their dressing-room partitioned off from those outside of the community who attempt to look in to see if they can catch a glimpse of a player on his way out. The players then leave through a back door and with the aid of security maintaining a public-free zone, avoid the mass of people.

⁶ Even when players stop to sign autographs or address fans personally, the sheer numbers of fans seeking a response makes it impossible for players to

When I talked to the players they expressed this division clearly through their use of language: typical phrasing consisted of “you feel apart from the *everyday world*”; or “if you compared it to *real life*”; and, “I think that hockey, first of all, is sort of within a *cocoon* that shields him from the *world’s realities*” (Hammer, Feld, Pack Interviews). The players were aware of the constructed universe in which they existed, and whether willingly or not, contact outside of this universe was limited. The task at hand, then, is to consider what makes up this universe and what is being produced as a result. The next chapter will focus on the various initiation or hazing rituals that function as means of incorporating players into this community. An attempt will be made not only to describe the rituals themselves but also to explore what these rituals tell us about the group and how we may then begin to critically consider the occupational community of professional hockey.

address more than a minute percentage of admirers.

Chapter Six

Entering into the Trade of Professional Hockey

Professional hockey is an intricately constructed, and firmly bounded universe to which the players are totally dedicated. Aside from being required to spend the majority of their time within a hockey framework, players are divided from mainstream society. To play hockey professionally is to engage oneself completely in a working environment that is governed by the tenets of play; in other words, it is to work at something that in any other context is:

essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally. . . engaged in with precise limits of time and place. There is a place for play. . . . Nothing that takes place outside of this ideal frontier is relevant. (Caillois 6)

The dictates of play demand that participants comply with the structure (or world) of the game, otherwise the game would not be successfully realized. Of course, in the description of play provided by play theorist Roger Caillois, he is referring to what is intended to be a momentary departure from “the rest of life”; yet individuals who play for a living are forced to abandon themselves to this principle, to the extent that the realm of play becomes their way of life. For the professional hockey player, leaving or entering this “enclosure” functions much more literally, in that the game is not temporary, but rather, their livelihood.

One gains entrance into the realm of professional hockey by abandoning one form of existence in order to assume another: or in symbolic terms, by experiencing a re-birth. The players have established rituals to celebrate this rebirth to help signify the transition from one status to the next. These rituals, which can be understood as communicative acts that serve to “dramatize, enact, materialize, or perform a system of symbols” are not especially elaborate or complex, but are rich with meaning nonetheless (Bell 30). The difficulty for the researcher is to interpret the symbolic behaviour and attempt to make sense out of what appears to be barely understood by the actors themselves. The rituals encountered in hockey are especially problematic in that they are an overt rejection of sociocultural norms, and as researchers approach, decode, and interpret these acts from a vantage point outside of hockey, an authoritative reading is somewhat elusive. Therefore, through this chapter various hockey initiation rituals will be considered and approached as cultural texts,¹ a strategy that Fredric Jameson argues is a

methodological hypothesis whereby the objects of study of the human sciences . . . are considered to constitute so many texts which we decipher and interpret, as distinguished from the older view of those objects as realities or existants or substances which we in one way or another attempt to know (205).

¹ I am employing the same strategies as Clifford Geertz does in “Deep Play,” in that rituals are texts to be interpreted and decoded (414). I am using this approach with caution, however, as Geertz himself warns that approaching rituals as texts is “a thoroughgoing conceptual wrench” (Local Knowledge 30).

By acknowledging that behaviour is multivalent does not reduce it to an imaginary text as Jameson implies, but rather, liberates action from any one specific meaning. If ritual is expression through symbolic behaviour, the actions are mere representations of what is signified, and thus, the onus is on the reader/participant/audience/scholar to impose their own gestalt of what has been performed.

The Initiation

For the players on the Troy *Reds*, there is one set ritual that all rookies must undergo early in the season to indicate their new status as professional hockey players. I say a “professional hockey player” as opposed to a “*Red*,” because the initiation is only performed by players who have not previously played in the AHL, rather than by players simply new to the franchise. In other words, if a player played the year previous with the another AHL team, and was now playing with the *Reds*, he would not be initiated.² The initiation is quite basic in structure and in its performance. It involves a team dinner in a specific dining establishment that has been rented out exclusively to the team. The rookies are required to pay for the meals for themselves, the veterans, and team officials as well. Athletic therapist Al

² For example, Steve Toll who played for the Rochester Americans the year previous to being signed by the *Reds*, was not initiated, because he was not a *League* rookie.

Jones explains:

for the most part the rookie night is a big dinner for the team and for the players and the training staff are invited. And what happens is there are a number of rookies—this year we had, I don't know, seven or eight—we had a lot of rookies. And they have to all give in a sum of money to pay for everyone's meal. And it gets quite expensive some times but the last few years they've been keeping the menu to a reasonable amount so the guys aren't paying thousands of dollars like they do in the NHL. And what happens is each rookie has to give to whoever is the organizing guy. And say it's the captain, it's so many hundred dollars and they collect it all and they've got so much money. And uh in the past we've been going to a certain restaurant in town and we rent the upstairs of it and it's blocked off just for us. And we'll have a bar there and there will be basically eating and drinking for the evening on the rookies. And uh there isn't really a lot of crazy pranks—making them do stuff. At the very worse, it's chug a beer a couple of shots and you know it's fairly harmless fun. For our organization anyway, well us, just the *Troy Reds*. I'm not sure how it goes with the [parent organization]. I know they have higher salaries and so on. But I don't think they try to hurt anybody or anything like that. So basically it's a fun evening and uh some of the rookies get quite drunk because some of the veterans make them do a few extra shots or something like that. It's fairly harmless and the guys are good about it; they make sure the guys get home. (11 July 1997)

I later learned from rookie Lester Dell that the rookies were required to pay one thousand dollars, and despite the fun experienced by some, it is not necessarily an enjoyable experience:

Well I don't know what's worse: like paying a thousand dollars or pay nothing and do a humiliating thing. You know, I don't know, it's kind of your choice—well, it's not whatever you like. There's no real choice, like uh, the standard is a thousand dollars for the meal. And uh, you're making pretty good money, so uh, it is a lot of money obviously, but uh, a thousand dollars and that's it—and you're done. (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997)

Throughout the dinner, the rookies are introduced to rare treats and expensive pleasures that previously have generally been beyond their financial circumstances. The veterans flaunt their knowledge of fine things and revel in the evening's excesses: "guys will say, 'give me a hundred dollars and I'll go out and get some cigars.' And they'll come back and all the veterans will be smoking cigars and stuff like that" (Jones interview, 11 July 1997). It is not a particularly late evening and will typically end around midnight because the players have practice the next morning.

There is much to be learned from this particular behaviour by considering the communicative value of ritual. As has been stated, ritual consists of symbolic behaviour, and thus, as all communicative acts, is the physical manifestation of encoded messages. It is unlikely—especially considering the responses of the players and team staff—that these codes are intellectually deciphered by the participants, which would appear to indicate that meaning is potentially left unrealized. In fact, when I asked Lester why they did these things, his response was,

I really don't know why we do it. . . It's just like uh [*pause*] I don't know. It's just like when it started, it's been going on every year. It's kind of this thing that started. If at the beginning when it started, if it was to put on a million pairs of clothes, that's what we would do." (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997).

It is uncanny how similar his response is to Diane Bell's discussion of the ritual process, when she argues that

Ritualized agents do not see themselves as projecting schemes; they see themselves only acting in a socially instinctive response to how things are. . . . These schemes tend to be experienced as deriving from powers or realities beyond the community and its activities, such as god or tradition . . . (206).

The lack of critical introspection, however, does not mean that the ritual's significance is lost on Lester; instead a later response he provides—"it's kind of just a dumb thing we do"—indicates an unarticulated understanding that Stuart Hall would call "consumption" (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997).

In Hall's general discussion of the meaning making process, he explains that in order for a message to be decoded, it must be physically manifested, otherwise the message, or in this case the ritual, would be completely ineffectual:

the discourse must then be translated—transformed, again—into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective. If no "meaning" is taken, there can be no "consumption". If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect. (90)

In other words, for the symbolic value of the ritual to be realized, it must be acted out, which means, it is the performance of the ritual that achieves meaning: or better still, it is performance that sets meaning into action. It is unnecessary, then, for Lester to know *why* the ritual is done, as long as he consciously participates in its performance. Ritual is essentially a learning process, and through its performance brings about what Peggy Reeves Sanday describes as a learned identity. In Reeves's discussion of male fraternity rituals in American colleges and universities, she argues that by

the pledge “yielding himself to the group in this way” he “gains a new self, complete with a set of goals, values, concerns, visions, and ready-made discourses that are designed to help him negotiate” the complexities and contradictions of the group (135-36). The same premise holds true in the context of hockey initiations, in that the rituals provide “ready-made” discourses which enable rookies to function within the social/cultural framework of the team. What needs to be asked, then, is what makes up these discourses?

While there is likely a variety of responses to this question, much of what is taking place here can be ultimately understood in terms of an engaging negotiation of power relationships. First, and most obviously, the veteran players are celebrating their power over the rookies, and in turn, the rookies are voluntarily succumbing to this power by complying with the demands placed upon them. The rookies do not challenge the tradition—“I mean there’s no real way around it”—which expresses that they acknowledge and accept the hierarchy that is in place (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997). At the same time, the rookies are empowered within the situation by achieving communion with the group and its practices/beliefs. It is through this communion, however, that the players simultaneously become resistive agents; the rookies are required to shun their past experience in order to be born again into a new one. But if we are to truly grasp this rebirth, this relationship of power and resistance, a step backward must be taken to

explore a far more crucial transformation that occurs earlier in the career of a hockey player. The *Reds'* initiation described by Jones and Dell does not appear to embody sufficiently all that is necessary to represent the transformation of self. The overindulgence and excess evidenced in this ritual seems to be more emblematic of a change in economic status as opposed to an actual rebirth. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the standard AHL ritual, it is crucial to acknowledge where the transformation from *non-player* to *player* originally takes place, which Lester Dell claims to occur as players enter Junior hockey.³ I asked Lester what he felt the difference was between Junior rituals and the AHL ritual and he stated that in the AHL "they push to the side . . . the little games and stuff . . . because everyone's been through it" already in Junior. It is necessary, then, to make a brief descent into the world of Junior hockey.

Gaining Entrance into Life as a Hockey Player

An obvious problem presents itself in an attempt to explore ritual behaviour in Junior hockey, when the fieldwork conducted for this project has been done exclusively in a professional context. I had to rely on players'

³ It is worth repeating that Junior Hockey in Canada--the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), which is comprised of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) and the Western Hockey League (WHL)—is the league from which NHL players are drafted. It is here that males from ages sixteen to twenty are conditioned to be professional hockey players.

memories and interpretations of their Junior experience, rather than observe and record initiations. I first asked *Reds'* rookie Lester Dell to discuss his knowledge of initiation practices in Junior, and to describe his experience being initiated into the League. I had also my own experience of being initiated into the same League from which to work, and when I compared my experiences with Lester's, it was apparent that there were two standard initiation rituals that Junior teams followed. Later, reports of the exact same rituals were aired on what turned out to be a timely CBC broadcast of *The Fifth Estate*, documenting initiation practices in Junior hockey. The program, entitled "Thin Ice," consisted of various Junior hockey players discussing initiations in their respective leagues. I base my observations of Junior initiations on this testimony heard on *The Fifth Estate*, along with Lester Dell's and my own experiences.

The importance of the Junior initiation ritual lies in the fact that it is during this period of the players' careers that they actually gain entrance into the realm of hockey: it is here that the initial transition from "civilian" to "hockey player" occurs. Although in theory Junior hockey fits under the rubric of amateur hockey, "Junior hockey is amateur in name only" (Cruise and Griffiths 346). John Barnes explains:

These regional [Junior] leagues operate in professional form: member teams obtain players through territorial rights and by drafting boys of "midget" age[15-16-17]. The players then serve

under a standard league contract; they are paid for their expenses and receive small weekly salaries. (33-34)

Reds' Athletic Therapist Al Jones also equates Junior hockey with professional hockey in a discussion I had with him, in which he stated:

Like I'll see the guys that come to us straight out of Junior, and these guys for the most part are already professional hockey players. Because you've played junior and you understand that they're practising and playing almost every day. (11 July 1997)

Junior then becomes the logical site for initiation for hockey players, and thus, these initiations need full consideration.

In the *Fifth Estate* broadcast, one of the players who shares his experiences with initiation rituals while playing in the Ontario Hockey League is Judd Richards, formerly of the Sault-Ste. Marie Greyhounds. In his interview with host Linden MacIntyre, he attempts to explain what are the generic initiation ceremonies that most hockey players experience at one point in their career. He narrates the first experience as follows:

Richards: It was a hotel that we booked, and uh, we go there and the veterans are already waiting for us. And you know, we basically—what we did was, we all, we took off all our clothes because they would get pretty well messy with the activities we were doing. And uh basically, we just drank.

MacIntyre: Drank naked!?

Richards: Yeah basically.

MacIntyre: What were you drinking? There was a big bowl going around there.

Richards: [*Laughs*] Uhm, well there was a bowl that went around and it was—there was a number of stuff in it. Uh different alcohols, uh different substances. I'm not totally sure.

MacIntyre: What kind of substances?

Richards: Uh, I have no idea. I'd imagine things like—gross things—I'm not exactly sure what. Possibly spit and maybe urine; I'm not sure. (“Thin Ice”)

The second ritual, entitled “the sweat-box” is explained by Richards:

On every team I think in the OHL (Ontario Hockey League), or anywhere, there's one basically set initiation. I mean basically it's when everyone's naked and they pile you into the bathroom at the back of the bus. And we ended up getting, I think, about eight people in there. Basically everyone was just in there; we were sweating buckets. And there was one particular player on my team that was claustrophobic. And uh, we didn't know that until we got in there and uh we were trying to make room for him because he told us. And uh, but I guess he just felt sort of sick and ended up puking all over me. So that was one of my more negative experiences with initiation. (“Thin Ice”)

Both accounts by Richards are told with a certain amount of apprehension and subsequently received by MacIntyre with a mixture of condescension and disbelief. The interview, however, wonderfully captures the disparate worldviews from which both men are speaking.

The two rituals Richards describes have been experienced by virtually every player who plays Junior hockey. In my interview with Lester Dell—who played four seasons in the same Junior League as Richards (he played for the Sarnia Sting of the OHL) I asked him about the initiations he experienced in Junior. His response is identical to Richards:

Well in Junior it wasn't really too bad. In Junior we had to do the thing called [*laughs uncomfortably*] "the sweat-box." You know what that is [knowing that I experienced the same ritual]. And then uh, we had a rookie party, and uh, there was drinking involved. There wasn't uh, it wasn't as bad as other stories I've heard. It was just kind of at your own pace. And the guys were pretty good. And it was just the guys: no one else, no *off-ice* guys or girls or anything like that. So, uh, just sat around and drank. It wasn't too bad. (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997)

Lester made it clear to me that he did not want to talk about any of the rituals in detail because some of "it was bad, it was gross stuff," and therefore I began providing details to which he could simply provide yes or no answers:

Robidoux: When you guys did the "sweat-box"—when we were in Peterborough, when we did the "sweat-box," they would tie up our clothes in knots

Dell: Yeah.

Robidoux: And then we had to untie our clothes. Is that what you guys had to do?

Dell: Yeah exactly. Yeah, you come out when you're dressed.

Robidoux: Right, one at a time basically.

Dell: Yeah it took pretty much three or four hours.

I then asked if many of the rituals "involved nudity," and again Lester responded in the affirmative: "Yeah, it seems like a lot of times it does: right." He was clearly uncomfortable talking to me—"an off-ice guy"—about these behaviours, but I decided to ask one final question: "Have you seen or heard of various forms of masturbation, you know contests and stuff like that" to which he responded, "Yeah." I did not pursue matters further

because, as stated earlier, the events being described are consistent with my own and others' experiences, and that these two rituals are clearly seen to be the predominant initiation practices.

There are, presumably, rituals that are less commonly performed, that neither Lester Dell nor myself have experienced but have only heard of. It is arguable that many of these rituals function more as a threat for rookies as they apprehensively await their initiation, rather than actually coming to pass, moving beyond legendary status. One player from *The Fifth Estate* broadcast stated that he was "told to bring condoms" to his rookie initiation party, which forced him to grapple with a well-fed imagination: "who knows what to expect, whether it be a girl—I heard stories of it being a cat, a cat being there." As it turned out there were no girls or cats present. But according to fifteen year old Scott Macleod—also on *Fifth Estate* broadcast—there are places where these rituals apparently do exist:

Well they brought two boys in at once and made them strip. And all the coaches and managers and that were there, and a lot of the veterans. And there were two beer cups lying there about ten, fifteen feet away from them. And they told us to do push-ups with our genitals to go in the beer cup.

The Captain uh, took a marshmallow—I remember he had rubber gloves on. And he would insert it into the players rectum and the players would have to, well, squat over a cup and get it into that cup. And if the players missed, he'd have to eat it.

The worst part, like what I saw, was the trainer sitting on one of the other rookie's face . . . with nothing on.

I have never witnessed any of these behaviours or talked to anyone who had these things done to them, but a former teammate of mine,⁴ while playing in the OHL, told me about an even more violent act. He explained that during the evening of the initiation of his rookie year—which was taking place in the team's dressing-room—a particular player the veterans did not like resisted being initiated. A few of the veterans responded by grabbing the rookie and taping him up to a squat rack⁵ in the exercise room. One of the veterans applied A5-35 heat ointment to his finger and then inserted his finger up the rectum of the rookie who was suspended helplessly from the rack. The player was left there screaming in agony as the balm quickly began to burn the sensitive skin (Informal conversation with Sean Pack after the interview was conducted, 28 April, 1996).

As far as I know the extreme nature of this last episode is exceptional in hockey initiation rituals because it involves pain. It is uncommon for players to inflict (physical) pain upon the initiates for the simple reason that if a player gets hurt, it prevents him from working/playing, which is a risk coaches and management will not tolerate. *Reds'* veteran defenceman Jim Falk makes it clear that when a player is injured, he is perceived as damaged

⁴ This particular person has been called Sean Pack throughout the thesis. He expressed to me that he wished to remain anonymous because of some of the personal information he provided throughout the interview.

⁵ A squat rack is a piece of exercise equipment used to support large amounts of weight. It consists of a metal frame that stands approximately nine feet in the air.

goods:

you know a team is going to shy away from guys that come up in their first couple of years who are injury prone. They don't want to take the chance and put up the money—and you know the kind of money they put up these days—and have the player only play forty games or thirty-five games. So it's a big gamble for teams. (Falk Interview)

Another aspect of ritual that was once predominant in hockey was to shave the head and various body parts of the initiates; but after seeing games played in Canadian Junior Leagues, the AHL and in the NHL, there was not one player with his head shaved, leaving me to conclude that this practice appears to be virtually non-existent in the specified leagues. One reason for the termination of these behaviours is the recent bad press hockey initiations have received (including the *Fifth Estate* documentary), provoking League officials to look critically at more dubious practices. Lester Dell explained that “since the shows on TV and stuff—there was a couple of instances in Junior B where guys got charged—I think. I know the OHL has really cracked down on initiation” (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997). Therefore if rituals are to persist (which they do), they must do so behind closed doors. Bodily shaving would expose the act not only to coaches and management but to the general public, thereby endangering all initiation practices. Initiation rituals in hockey, then, have largely been reduced to the “sweat-box” and a night of heavy drinking where rookies are often forced into performing humiliating and degrading acts.

Certain themes are evident within these two rudimentary performative situations. The first is the emphasis on nudity; the players are forced to endure the rituals without wearing any clothes. The second is the emphasis on group unity, where players engage in activities collectively.⁶ Also noteworthy, is that although the players do not look forward to it, it is approached in a somewhat pragmatic fashion:

Well at first you're not laughing, but then when you look back, you just say this is once, hopefully you only do it once, so let's have fun with it. At least you can say I've done this, or whatever. It's kind of the approach you take. You have to take it or otherwise, it would be a bad experience. (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997)

The general tolerance expressed by players should not be interpreted as an expression of passivity, however. Despite the fact that players are not often heard scrutinizing their performance within these rituals, there does appear to be a general understanding of the event as a means of group "bonding." As a result, the experience in general is not seen by the players as being negative, but rather as a necessary procedure in the process of achieving group solidarity. To pursue this further, rookie participation in these events can be interpreted as an example of sacrificing oneself for the sake of the team. The group dynamic takes precedence over individual identity. Moreover, team cohesion benefits the team/franchise, and this explains why

⁶ The player who received individual treatment resisted the cohesive strategies imposed upon him by the veterans, and thus suffered alone. This singular treatment will be considered in a section to follow.

officials monitor initiation rituals, but have not abolished them. Therefore it is worthwhile to consider the unifying qualities of these initiation ceremonies that in most other contexts would be deemed unacceptable. Such an analysis will shed light on a community that not only tolerates this behaviour but celebrates itself through these annual rituals.

Coming Together

The players' recognition of the initiation process as a bonding experience is fundamental to their understanding of their new group membership. Those players who go through the ritual claim to be closer to one another and feel a part of what is commonly referred to as a family:

It's kind of your dues, you know. Just breaking in and you know and [*stutters*] I find after, after the party it brings you more closer together. Because it's kind of like a little thing that we do and then afterwards you know, assuming there's no real big problems, we're kind of closer knit. And in hockey, any team, that's what you want. Like guys are like a family, like a big family. So it's kind of like—it's just a little initiation to bring the guys on the team closer together. (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997)

Judd Richards provides commentary that supports the notion of the unique bonds formed through initiation:

Your teammates are all that you have. I mean you don't have anything else. And what it does is gets you bonded with one another quicker than any other method. You're there for six, seven months of the year—I mean you have to start off, you know, you have to be gelled into one. ("Thin Ice")

The process of "gelling into one" suggests that a transformation occurs where

players abandon one form of being in favour of a new collective existence.

This unifying power of ritual makes it a useful tool in achieving a shared identity. For this reason, ritual has been utilized universally for identical purposes throughout history. Anthropologist L. L. Langness's discussion of the initiation tradition of the *nama* cult of the Bena Bena of the New Guinea Highlands applies equally well to hockey culture: "[it] links the members of the *dzuha* with their ancestral past. It symbolizes, on the one hand, the solidarity of males, and, on the other, the common origin and continuity of a particular group of *men*" (200). In a more urban context, James Diego Vigil describes Chicano gang initiations similarly: "Thus, gang baptism jointly marks passage to a new status, enhances social cohesiveness, creates a ceremonial atmosphere, encourages ritualistic behaviour, and serves practical gang goals" (151).

All of these sentiments that describe the unifying capabilities of initiation rituals are in fact re-articulating, directly and indirectly, what Arnold van Gennep has designated a "Rite of Passage." The unity that is being described in each scenario is essentially a rebirth, or change of status made possible through the initiation. Through ceremonies participants engage in "a direct rite of passage by means of which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one" (van Gennep 19). The ritualistic journey does not merely position the participant in this *other* world, but

serves to unify him/her with the new environment: "to cross the threshold, is to unite oneself with a new world" (van Gennep 20). Therefore the process is invaluable in an occupation such as hockey where group cohesion is critical for team success. And, from my own experiences and from comments made by other players, the rituals are generally successful in achieving this end.⁷ But having said this, why do the symbolic expressions take the shape they do? Why do the players express themselves through unconventional acts of nudity and sexual posturing? Alan Morinis asks similar questions about initiation rituals, but instead of focusing on nudity and sexuality, he asks "Why has the painful ordeal been the preferred vehicle to this goal" when pain is "surely not the only stimulus to bonding?" (155).

Although as indicated above, hockey rituals rarely incorporate physical pain, there are parallels with those that do. In effect, Alan Morinis is arguing that many initiation rituals have been discussed for their "social-psychological functions" but the extreme nature of the behaviour manifested rarely presents itself as a concern (155). The fact that in one particular tribal initiation ceremony, the initiate is "beaten with more or less heavy sticks," and his "screams are answered from afar by the lamentations of his mother and other relatives," is not an issue for Arnold van Gennep who simply understands this behaviour as a means for "the novice to recognize that he is

⁷ The rituals also serve to exclude certain players from the group, which will become evident when we consider the effects of ritual behaviour in hockey.

a man" (82). But again, it needs asking, why is a ferocious beating seen as an appropriate way to signify the transition from youth to adulthood—especially considering that the acts are merely *representations* of the signified, and thus can be represented in any way imaginable? To return to a hockey context, squirming naked together in the back of the bus washroom may bring the players closer together, but why achieve this end through such unenviable and compromising behaviour?

The tendency for scholars is to discuss these behaviours—that exceed the restraint and regulatory measure of their social surroundings—as being characteristic of “transitional rites,” or “liminal rites” (van Gennep 11). I too initially found Arnold van Gennep’s, and later, Victor Turner’s theoretical construction of liminality highly useful for discussing expressive behaviour within hockey rituals. I felt the concept of liminality perfectly described the “other worldliness” of the players’ accounts, and similarly shed light on the behaviours themselves. van Gennep argues that while participants are within this liminal stage they find themselves “physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: [they] waver between two worlds” (18). From this stance, Victor Turner developed a fuller definition of liminality: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” and thus, “liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the

wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (95).

The nudity, the "anal and genital games," the excessive drinking, the humiliation and degradation that exist in the narratives provided by the players are consistent with liminality in theory, but, are these in fact liminal behaviours? To answer this question, one needs to address an inherent shortcoming of any structuralist argument—in this case, ritual structure—which is, the natural assumption of a center. Jacques Derrida explains that structure "has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin" (231). He later argues "that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (232). If we consider Derrida's arguments in terms of Turner's discussion of liminality, Turner appears to be limited by ethnocentrism—a danger inherent to all ethnographic research:

Ethnology—like any science—comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he wants to or not—and this does not depend on a decision on his part—the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in denouncing them. (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play. . ." 234)

Accordingly, in order for behaviour to be deemed liminal, there must be an assumed normalcy, which functions as the center. More specifically, behaviours that are considered either inverted or extreme are defined in

terms of some pre-set standard of behaviour; and the standard here is conveniently a western, industrialized, heterosexual construct. Therefore, one might ask if the content of the rituals described by players such as Judd Richards of the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds and Scott Macleod, are in fact liminal. The answer, at least initially, is no. While these behaviours likely appear to those outside of the hockey world as liminal, they are not atypical of the hockey community as a whole. What seems to be a more accurate assessment is that for the players, larger society is “neither here nor there” and is “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom and convention”: and thus, the center needs shifting (Turner 95).

The seemingly disturbing testimony provided by the players regarding their initiation into Junior hockey may seem unacceptable to anyone, whether a hockey player or not. Even Lester Dell would find it hard to understand, *if* he were not a hockey player: “I really don’t know why we do it like that. Because yeah, if I look at it—if I wasn’t a hockey player, I’d say, well that’s ridiculous” (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997). But because he is a hockey player there is not only an understanding of the behaviour but an acceptance of what is taking place. Moreover, if we apply aspects of Judd Richards’s testimony, along with what is narrated by *Fifth Estate* host Linden MacIntyre, to the everyday behaviour of the players, certain insights emerge. At two different points in the interview Richards says that the

rookies were nude; either drinking together or “squished” together in the back of a bus. Despite Linden MacIntyre’s contemptuous response to this information, if we listen to Richards’s narrative, the only difficulty *he* has with either of these situations is that he was forced to sit in vomit; he is apathetic to the fact that he and his teammates were not wearing clothes. From my own experience studying the *Reds*’, it is evident that nudity has a much different significance for the players than it does in larger society.

In the dressing-room—which is not merely a dressing-room, but a lounge and exercise area where the players spend the majority of their working day—players can be found completely naked either standing or sitting, simply interacting with one another. On two separate occasions I conducted interviews with players who were nude at the time, and despite the extensive background I have as a hockey player, the only thing that was going through my mind was, “Keep eye contact Michael!” I quickly learned that since I have not participated in locker-room culture for over five years, I had grown unaccustomed to such overt nudity and was ill at ease with my predicament. Throughout the interview I was attempting to appear casual, and not let the fact that I was holding a tape-recorder to this nude man bother me. At the same time I was bothered by the fact that on one particular occasion when I was playing hockey in Owen Sound, Ontario, I was interviewed by the local sports reporter, and I was not wearing any

clothes at the time. In my particular situation it was done purely out of convenience as the reporter needed the interview just as I was getting into the shower, and I complied by making a right turn to the interview area instead of making a left turn and entering the shower. The fact that I was nude was not an issue for me or my teammates. By way of these examples I do not wish to imply that the players' nudity signifies some unconsciously pure esoteric perception of the body, but rather, nudity is an expressive act that holds different significance for the players than it does for those outside of the community. Exactly what is being expressed will be considered later.

Another crucial aspect of the interview is Judd Richards's description of the contents of the "punch" that he and his teammates drank while being naked on the night of the initiation. He states that the contents contained—in addition to alcohol—a whole "bunch of gross stuff." While consuming bodily fluids and performing various other humiliating acts is simply repugnant, additional context is needed to discuss these behaviours further. Although I have never met Judd Richards, nor spoken to him about this event, different players have informed me of similar concoctions that they drank. But what needs explaining is that the rookies are not aware that the veterans are doing this to the punch. It is very common⁸ to have parties

⁸ I have participated in a variety of these parties. However, one of the more significant parties that I attended annually was what was referred to as a "Christmas Cauldron." In order to enter the house, guests were required to bring, at least, a twenty-six ounce bottle of alcohol to be poured into a large

where each individual pours his alcohol of choice into some kind of container containing juice or another form of mix, creating one large and highly potent beverage. The result is almost immediate intoxication, making those who are most vulnerable susceptible to the worst pranks. Urinating or spitting into the vat is easy, and it serves to humiliate those who learn (more often than not, the next day) that they have just consumed such substances.⁹ But once again, if we were to discuss this behaviour as liminal—exclusive to initiation rituals—it would be an exoteric assumption that used larger social norms as a natural center or locus.

Drinking bodily fluids in the realm of hockey may not be typically practiced, but it is also not completely uncommon. It does not constitute highly exceptional behaviour or “liminal” behaviour. To pursue this further, in Ken Dryden’s book *The Game*, he describes a humorous event with a similar outcome:

Suddenly Shutt goes to the skate room, picks up a plastic cup, fills it with ice, and returns to the room. Then, as we watch with squeamish, open-mouthed glee, he urinates in the cup until it’s almost full, tops it with Coke for color, puts it down beside him, and walks to the shower. . . . Moments later, water dripping from his body . . . Tremblay reappears and sits down. He looks around for Shutt, then, sharing smiles with those around him, grabs the Coke and sips from it—no laugh, no wink, no devil-may-care leap this time. (152)

garbage can placed in the middle of the kitchen floor.

⁹ During one particular “Cauldron,” the “boys” who attended ended up leaving early because a member of the group was *caught* spitting into the can when the rest of the participants were sitting in the living room watching television.

In both Richards's and Dryden's narratives, the prank involves getting dupes to drink urine, yet the latter is not part of a ritual; it is a practical joke no different from loosening the top of a salt shaker prior to someone using it. Within the specific context of hockey such behaviours are not only tolerable but a means of entertaining one another. On a similar note, when host Linden MacIntyre refers to the "degrading" . . . "anal and genital" rituals, he does not take into account a particular sensibility that permits certain physical gestures amongst the players. For example I recorded in my fieldnotes:

- A guy falls on the ice and another guy skates by and gooses him with his stick
- there is no reaction from the guy who was jabbed
- the gesture is as natural as patting a guy on the back (Fieldnotes, 17 Feb. 1997)

The act of jabbing someone (either with a stick or with a hand) in a vulnerable area is common and has multiple signification. In this particular case the player was basically greeting the other player with a gentle poke. There are other more severe gestures of this kind that are used to tease or play maliciously with one another.

There is another example of "rectal play" that is commonly found in North American dressing-rooms that illustrates further the general acceptance of such unconventional behaviour. I am referring to a joke that is executed with certain regularity and which I have witnessed repeatedly

while on each of the four Junior teams that I played on throughout my Junior career. For lack of a better term, the joke can basically be described as a “Where’s the soap routine?” The joke takes place in the shower and involves a player taking a bar of soap and secretly inserting it into his own rectum. He then asks those in the shower area with him, “Where’s the soap?” Again, each time I saw the joke performed, all members of the team had heard the joke many times, and would know exactly where the soap was located. The humour generated by this prank (at least esoterically speaking) lies not in the fact that a player has soap up his rectum, but rather, that a player has decided to perform not only a stupid joke, but one that has been performed far too often. It is important to note here once again that these behaviours rarely generate any kind of response from the victim. Typically laughter or a brief and benign verbal quip follows.

What I have tried to demonstrate through these examples is that the behaviour found within these rituals is not unique to them, but rather is consistently experienced by the players throughout their careers in hockey. Therefore, describing the behaviour that transpires within the rituals as liminal is ultimately calling the entire hockey experience liminal—which from an outsider’s perspective is likely a reasonable assessment. In fact, because liminality is a *temporary* phase, one can argue that the “other worldliness” of life as a hockey player is a liminal phase in an individual’s life (because this period obviously terminates with the conclusion of the

player's career). This assessment suggests that life as a hockey player is a separate existence, and that at one point in the players' lives they underwent a transition that saw them move from one state of being into another: in other words a rite of passage *must* have occurred. And if Junior initiation rituals signal that transformation, van Gennep's theoretical position is validated, and there *is* a transitional period where liminality is evidenced.

The failure to recognize liminality within these rituals derives from relying heavily on Victor Turner's usage of the term. Unlike van Gennep, Turner actually provides descriptive information about what liminal behaviour often entails, such as being "likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality . . ." (95). van Gennep limits his discussion of the term to a period of transition in which the person is wavering between two worlds (Gennep 18). In other words, assessing certain behaviours to be liminal—as Turner, and now I have attempted to do—becomes an exercise in ethnocentrism. It assigns value to behaviour that falls outside a suggested norm, which makes my non-liminal assessment of these behaviours just as ethnocentric as claiming they are. In order to recognize what is liminal about these rituals, it is necessary to move beyond the content, and begin considering the performance itself.

To begin, the examples of nudity and the various degrading and humiliating acts the players go through within the rituals *are* noticeably

different from the examples of nudity provided in everyday contexts. As already illustrated, the difference does not lie in the acts themselves (the content), but rather in the manner in which they are performed, changing the entire dynamic of the situation. The performance context is most significant in the rituals because of the sense of expectancy and apprehension that rookies feel prior to the event taking place. For example, the “sweat-box” ritual is not explained to the rookies before it occurs, but the rookies are made aware that something will take place on the bus-ride home. Once the players are all on the bus, a selected veteran will begin shouting orders and the rookies (generally) comply without knowing what will be asked of them: “I guess both times you’re kind of nervous and anxious. You don’t really know what to expect” (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997). The apprehension and imposed vulnerability establishes a heightened sense of performance which is absent in the everyday examples of nudity provided above. Suddenly, the nudity within the rituals carries with it additional significance, as it is the focus of the players’ actions as opposed to being a routine occurrence.

The removal of the rookies’ clothing is a symbolic act of rejecting the life that is being left in order to become a hockey player: in other words, the players are being stripped of their past lives in order to become invested with qualities necessary for existence as a hockey player. Alan Morinis writes that “the symbolism of nakedness, purification, and birth serve equally well

to make the point about divestiture of status" (157). Through the rookies performing compromising acts without wearing any clothes, the ritual "create[s] a status and a position outside, or in opposition to, existing social forms" (Morinis 157). As the younger players are exposed to these behaviours they are in a vulnerable state—one in which they are forced into making a decision to become one with the team or be rejected and ostracised for not conforming (as was the case with Sean Pack's teammate who was physically tortured). It is this vulnerability that further removes the performance of these rituals from the seemingly perverse acts that occur within the hockey framework, and therefore, constitute a liminal experience. Furthermore, it is within this liminal state that the players willingly reject their lives outside of hockey, and embrace the at times abhorrent behaviour of the group for the sake of gaining union with the team.

But once again, why do the behaviours take the shape they do? How does "the symbolism of nakedness, purification. . . serve equally well to make the point about divestiture of status" (Morinis 157)? Why force the rookies into performing compromising and degrading acts—whether it be crammed naked into a tiny space for hours on end, or drinking saliva or urine? If, as Lester Dell claims, in the "beginning when it started, if it was put on a million pairs of clothes, that's what we would do," would the rituals serve the same purpose as they do now (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997)? The answer is no, and there are two important reasons why. First, the degrading

behaviours are not empty signifiers, but rather, physical articulations of rejected social standards. This collective rejection allows for the divestiture of qualities to take place. According to Peggy Reeves Sanday, the “degrading initiation rituals” in college fraternities

celebrate the bottom line and announce to the world that the fraternity is irreverent towards society’s bottom line of decency, kindness, and fairness. The fraternity determines its own values; the brothers construct a social milieu in which they can be as unkind and as unfair as they wish. (153)

Second, along with divesting the initiates of previous qualities, the rituals also invest the rookies with characteristics necessary for coexisting in this new sphere.

In a discussion of ritual behaviour within a radio broadcasting occupational community, Peter Narváez argues that the investiture of these new qualities is a means for “recognizing the subject’s new status, physically apart from itself, yet still within the CBC corporation, the local CBC group reconstitutes itself in terms of the larger CBC network” (437). A fascinating parallel can be made with A. E. Green’s discussion of initiation rituals within a coal mining community:

The breach of the initiate’s sexual privacy demonstrates the need for him to accept a corporate definition of his humanity and he is prepared—necessarily abruptly because this community cannot afford a lack of consensus—for a life of rough treatment among his workmates. He learns . . . that the values of the surface-world, which involves women, are not the values of the pit, which is exclusively male. Above ground, reticence, delicacy, and tenderness are valued responses; below ground they are disfunctional. (63)

The actual content of these behaviours, then, make up the “ready-made discourses” necessary for workers to become successfully incorporated into the group. It is therefore necessary to explore how particular behaviours found within a hockey context provide younger players with in-group competence and a basic understanding of life within the hockey world. Moreover, the actions will be discussed as a means of legitimizing power as it is perceived within the hockey environment, and as a means of liberating the players from the restraining forces of the greater community.

Legitimization Through Ritual

It needs emphasizing that the rite of passage young men undergo in Junior is a substantial life-changing experience, and not simply a symbolic or figurative transformation. There are visible signs of this alteration as younger players take on characteristics that they did not possess when they first entered the League. One young woman on the *Fifth Estate* television program who befriended many of the players on the Peterborough Petes¹⁰ discusses the transformation:

The rookies always come in really shy, really quiet. And then once the veterans get a hold of them, and they have their initiations and—that’s it! It’s just like, it’s a totally different person. It’s not the same one. (“Thin Ice”)

¹⁰ The Peterborough Petes are a Junior team in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL).

Ritual facilitates this transformation through a legitimization of experience.

Felix M. Berardo and Hernan Vera argue this to be the basis of “rites of passage”:

Rites of passage are not only celebrations of transitions, but are also *rites of initiations* which serve to educate the novice by revealing a body of traditional knowledge that has been previously denied to him or her. (399)

The ritual enacts symbolically what is fundamental to the group, and by its execution becomes accepted by those wishing to access the community; it as an expression of power.

The ability to transform is an exercise of power, but at the same time, ritual allows power to be wielded without overt force or coercion. I say overt force because those wishing to gain entrance into the group willingly place themselves in a position to be initiated. Without undergoing these practices, they do not become part of the desired community. Therefore, ritual expresses power in its truest sense since there is a voluntary submission of will to a predetermined standard of knowledge. The fact that submission is voluntary is crucial here; as Michel Foucault explains, power requires “essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom,” meaning “no relationship of power” is possible “without the means of escape or possible flight” (“The Subject and Power” 225). Ritual for Foucault is a perfect expression of power because it is a performance of strategies necessary to exist within the system at hand. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains

how ritual executions were in effect public displays of power relations:

It was the effect, in the rites of punishment, of a certain mechanism of power: of a power that not only did not hesitate to exert itself directly on bodies, but was exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations; . . . of a power that was recharged in the ritual display of its reality as 'super-power'. (57)

In other words, rituals enact and subsequently suggest a continuous course of action which is symbolically embraced by the participants through their own enactment. Catherine Bell continues in this vein by arguing "how the production of ritualized agents is a strategy for the construction of particular relationships of power effective in particular social situations" (202). Ritual, then, does not magically transform the young hockey players into something other than what they once were, but it shapes identities through actions which are learned through their performance.

The boys leave their families and friends at roughly sixteen years of age and enter into something that is beyond their previous experience. But the question remains, what makes up this new experience? The task at hand is to consider what is actually being learned through what may appear to be nothing more than pubescent acts of perversity. The two works that I have drawn from in order to come to terms with the unconventional behaviours of hockey are Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In both works Nietzsche and Freud present arguments that discuss existence in terms of tenuous binaries: Nietzsche,

through the deities of Apollo and Dionysos; Freud, by examining the states of pleasure and unpleasure. According to Freud, while unpleasure is not in true opposition to pleasure, the apathy that arises out of unpleasure ultimately leads to discontent, and finally misery (33). Significant to us here is the opposition that both authors are exploring: the illusory world of Apollo/civilization versus the instinctual reality of the pleasure driven Dionysian. Although Freud does not use the Apollonian/Dionysian construct, Freud's argument echoes the very nature of their relationship. He argues that

civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct . . . it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts (44);

while Nietzsche explains "that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm" is only made possible through Apollo (35). More important still, both Nietzsche and Freud recognize that the calm provided through Apollo/civilization is an illusion, and in this imposed dreamlike-state the "poor wretches have no idea how corpselike and ghostly their so-called 'healthy-mindedness' looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian revelers roars past them" (Nietzsche 37).

It is precisely this Dionysian movement that applies here, as Nietzsche describes a community of individuals who exist outside of the illusory world of Apollo, of civilization, and thrive in the revelry of

festivals centered in extravagant sexual licentiousness, whose

waves overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions; the most savage natural instincts were unleashed, including even that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty. . . . (39)

In Freudian terms, the Dionysian experiences “happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by the ego” which “is incomparably more intense than that derived from sating an instinct that was tamed” (Freud 26). In other words, although Apollo/civilization serves to protect us from the dangers of reality and the potential chaos of unbridled passions, Apollo/civilization simultaneously deprives individuals from experiencing the joy of instinctual satisfaction, or as Freud designates it, “pleasure.” Therefore in order to satisfy these instinctual desires, one must either break the laws civilization imposes upon us, or function outside of the restraints of civilization. The world of professional hockey, as has already been stated, clearly functions outside of these restraints.

What I am arguing is that the professional hockey community is motivated by these same instinctual desires that Nietzsche and Freud describe, and unlike members of larger society, they are able to fulfill these desires without the consequences of civilizing forces. But, if one is to give oneself up to the passions of pleasure, one must also concede to the passions of pain, of terror, of sorrow, or any other passion, which situates the hockey player in a vulnerable position. The hockey player is left to contend with a reality that “is subject to the arbitrary will of the individual: that is to say, the physically stronger man would decide . . . in the sense of his own

interests and instinctual impulses” (Freud 42). Therefore it is not surprising to hear players talk about their interaction with one another in the same instinctual fashion, as *Reds’* veteran, Darren Feld explains:

Feld: One thing I find about hockey players is, if I got something wrong with somebody, I’ll tell him right to his face. And we’ll go from there. I don’t know how it works in real life. I think, I don’t think there’s so much of that in real life.

Robidoux: Yeah, that’s what I’ve been noticing that, if someone gets pissed off in practice, they’ll turn around and tell the person.

Feld: That’s right. Right in his face and if you want to drop the gloves then drop the gloves, and get it over with. And after the game, or after the practice they’re having a Gatorade together. I think it’s really good too. (Feld Interview)

Just as quickly as the players drop the gloves and fight one another, they are also found laughing and sharing in each other’s banter.

The players discuss the pleasures they receive as hockey players in terms of their playful framework of existence, and as a life without having to face concerns of adulthood. In my discussion with *Reds’* defenceman Steve Toll, he explained to me that the players are

always acting like kids too. So, it’s you know, you have to be grown up and you have to be mature and, at certain levels. But other times, you know, you’re mostly having fun. And you’re mostly being still a kid. And uh, the job is just fun right now. And uh, that’s the way I think everyone tries to look at it. I mean I’m not in a hurry to grow up and uh, get married or whatever. (Toll Interview)

However, in a perpetual state of childishness, the players are as equally

vulnerable to the tantrums and unrestrained anger as they are to the laughter and games that arise out of this explosive occupational atmosphere. It is difficult for someone outside of the group to imagine existing in an environment where on a regular basis one may encounter what is related to us by *Reds'* sophomore Jerry Wall:

Yeah, I think uh—you know the times I did see him fight, he certainly didn't, you know, face the guy, "face-to-face." He would—he always wants to get a jump on the guy, like he did on me the other night. He jumped me totally from behind. And, you know, obviously caught me by surprise. Like I didn't even see the guy coming. I heard he did it a lot in Junior, so, I mean it is something you have to be aware of on the ice. And uh, we certainly got the guys that can stand up to him on this team. And we face him face-to-face because, if he wants to get that kind of game going, it could be a long night. (Wall Interview)

But this volatile environment would not be possible without group members completely surrendering themselves to its uninhibited nature. Therefore the players are forced to contend with the essence of Dionysian philosophy, that being, "pain begets joy, that ecstasy may wring sounds of agony from us" (Nietzsche 40)—or in the contemporary vernacular, "No pain, no gain."

With this insight, it is now possible to return the focus to initiation rituals in hockey. As has already been stressed, initiation rituals in Junior formally incorporate boys into the world of hockey, but it is when they reach the official status of professional that players become incorporated officially into *professional* hockey. The ritual of dining lavishly at the expense of the rookies may not indicate the change of status evident in Junior, but it does

represent a change in status nonetheless. Similarly, the ritual does not involve celebrating nudity and/or sexual excess and lasciviousness, but rather, introduces something to which the Junior players have not yet had access: (sometimes perceived) large quantities of money. I say “perceived amounts” because even if players are making only an average American Hockey League salary of \$50,000 per season, the two-way contract¹¹ they sign indicates the possibility of earning enormous salaries (See “Appendix B” for a list of 1996-97 NHL salaries). Moreover, the majority of players will receive a signing bonus when they first sign with the organization, which pays them a large sum of money whether they make the team or not. These contracts are made public and ultimately serve as a price tag for the players, consequently defining their worth. Therefore money is central to the professional hockey experience (as it is the basis for paid labour in general) and not surprisingly becomes the focus of the professional hockey initiation ritual.

The initiation, as all initiations rituals, is as an expression of power whereby one frame of being is legitimized through its performance. For the first time in their lives these young athletes are exposed to (in addition to large sums of money) a certain level of fame and notoriety. The initiation celebrates this privileged status, disclosing a way of life to the rookies, which through its performance, validates the experience. How this “way of life” is

¹¹ The two-way contract is discussed in detail in “Chapter Eight.”

introduced to the players is significant in that it illustrates the inherent paradox of satisfying desire: *all of it comes at a price*. The players are able to experience the pleasures that money can buy but must suffer the consequence in doing so. The entire ritual consists of costly indulgence and its execution legitimizes the behaviour. There are no pedantic overtones instructing the younger players to be careful with their new found wealth; it is an expression of excess and the price one must pay to have it realized.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the AHL ritual, as in Junior, is a manifestation of this same philosophy, whereby these tenuous binaries are exploited and ultimately deconstructed. Satisfying what is denied by civilizing forces means giving oneself up to passion and instinct. The individual is vulnerable to these same instinctual drives that may be as ferocious as they are blissful. Moreover it is also possible to consider many of the behaviours found within the Junior rituals to be what Freud considers “the irresistibility of perverse instincts, and perhaps the attraction in general of forbidden things” (26). While I do not want to assert totalizing readings of these cultural texts, I do feel that by considering the realm of professional hockey in these terms, the researcher is able to better read particular behaviours—such as displays of nudity. Judd Richards’s testimony about sitting together drinking naked can suddenly be appreciated for its symbolic value, if we acknowledge that the players are in fact being reborn into the world of the Dionysian: a world of excess and instinctual desire. Nudity

becomes a means of establishing a way of life that is quite removed from larger society, which is why nudity is not only found in ritual. By consistently being nude, the players force each other into accepting the vulnerability that nudity entails. Only when they become naked to one another are they able to experience the pleasures of an uninhibited existence and ultimately what Nietzsche labels “the fantastic excess of life” (41).

While this explanation does not make this behaviour any easier to accept for those outside of the community, it does provide the scholar with a means for discussing hockey culture. Drinking saliva or urine is no easier to accept if we recognize the layers of meaning that are present in this expressive act, but the scholar can move beyond simple repulsion and/or condemnation. Instead, drinking another player’s spit or urine is one player taking advantage of another player’s vulnerability, and to experience this humiliation and degradation is the cost of weakness, or the cost of letting one’s guard down. It forces the rookie—or anyone willing to be duped—to recognize their tenuous position within the world of hockey, and ultimately forces them to respond accordingly.

By arguing that the perceived perversity and offensive nature of the behaviour is largely an ethnocentric perception—and not understood as such esoterically—will likely not alter the disdain with which many Canadians view these actions. Yet the Dionysian/Apollonian construct and Freud’s pleasure principle provide insight into this ethnocentric response. Consider

for a moment an arena housed with upwards of twenty thousand fans, screaming as “their” team wins the crucial game, or scores the winning goal. Now imagine the same twenty thousand fans going into a state of frenzy as they witness two or more brawling hockey players severely beating one another in a fight. Can we not see this audience in terms of Apollonian culture responding to the Dionysian revellers as described here by Nietzsche?

We hear nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil, are deified. And so the spectator may stand quite bewildered before this fantastic excess of life, asking himself by virtue of what magic potion these high-spirited men could have found life so enjoyable that, wherever they turned, their eyes beheld the smile of Helen, the ideal picture of their own existence. . . . (41)

The multimillion dollar industry of professional hockey, made possible by these “high-spirited men,” clearly reinforces the voyeuristic role of the masses, who revel in the security of their role as spectators as opposed to participating in this “fantastic excess of life.” A sensation more specifically described as an “identity voyage” by Orrin E. Klapp, whereby an individual vicariously transcends his/her own experience through a “hero figure”:

Much of this is not visible; it is going on within a man who does nothing visibly. This is the ‘Mitty function,’ the compensation of unfulfilled dreams and identity. . . . it may go along with the considerable frustration of unrealized identity: the unfilled person may harbor many dreams of what he might be from psychic mobility; he is sophisticated beyond his lot in life. (238)

Therefore, from the safety of their seats, fans can vicariously celebrate the joys, the pains and the sorrows through what the players experience in the

flesh, without actually paying the price of allowing themselves to become vulnerable to the horrors of unbridled existence.

The question that subsequently arises then is, does this voyeurism remain in the domain of the arena? In other words, spectators virtually deify the instinctual play on the ice, but are the forbidden pleasures off the ice not equally appealing? Is it not possible that the institutionalization of hockey in Canada makes it culturally acceptable to celebrate the physical beating of an individual? One might argue that without a culturally viable vehicle for other more licentious behaviours, there is not the opportunity to celebrate similar voyeuristic tendencies—such as the behaviour described in “Thin Ice” and occasionally through the everyday practices made evident to me as both player and now as a folklorist studying a hockey team. Freud observes that within the “civilized” world “most extra-genital satisfactions are forbidden as perversions” (51), yet, these forces have left “civilized” peoples sexually “impaired” and “frustrated” (52, 55). Like the Greek gazing at the beauty and the horror of the Dionysian revellers, are contemporary spectators also recognizing their own forbidden desires within hockey culture, both on and off the ice:

With what astonishment must the Apollonian Greek have beheld him [the Dionysian]! With an astonishment that was all the greater the more it was mingled with the shuddering suspicion that all this was actually not so very alien to him after all, in fact, that it was only his Apollonian consciousness which, like a veil, hid this Dionysian world from his vision. (Nietzsche 41)

Does the base behaviour described by Judd Richards and Scott Macleod offend and disturb because it also reflects what Freud argues is the “irresistibility of perverse instincts” and “of forbidden things”? (26). And thus are spectators simply applauding one form of instinctual desire and condemning another?

I must concede that at this point I am pursuing matters that exceed this particular study, and I cannot venture further than mere speculation in regard to the query I have raised.¹² But what is certain, however, is that as spectators we are able to exercise the power that comes from being removed from the actual events—the ability to shut our eyes—and dismiss or shun things too horrible to consider. As spectators we can celebrate instinctual drives in the framed (make-believe) context of the game, but outside of these boundaries we consider them ugly and intolerable. Yet for the players, the game is no more made up than an operating room is for a surgeon, or the shop floor is for the industrial worker. The “game” is the hockey player’s occupation, his livelihood, his life. The game then is one of the few windows open for those of us on the outside to view the world of the hockey player, and as more windows are opened by such media productions as “Thin Ice” it is

¹² While the subject of audience response is not pursued here, it has generated a fascinating body of literature, such as Jim Freedman’s “Will the Sheik Use His Blinding Fireball? The Ideology of Professional Wrestling” and Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

apparent that few of us wish to look in.

The process of initiation, however ugly, symbolizes formally a transference of status, as young players embrace a way of life outside of their previous experience. Through the players' participation in the rituals, they perpetuate and legitimize an existing body of knowledge that serves to inform and ultimately socialize the novices to their new environment. But these rituals are much more. Ritual is also a homogenizing process that diminishes certain individual characteristics in order to invest the initiate with qualities that will allow him to become a part of the group. Those who resist these homogenizing forces suffer the consequences, as did the one player who was taped up to the squat rack and physically tortured. One player from the *Fifth Estate* broadcast who refused to participate in a particular initiation ritual was ultimately forced off the team by the players. He explains that

the upside of taking part in this kind of hazing is that the veterans will love you as a rookie. The downside is if you don't take part in what they tell you to do, it can result in getting into fights with the veterans, and basically just quitting hockey.
("Thin Ice")

Once again, the power that lies within ritual stems from the voluntary submission of will, and without this submission, the ritual proves to be ineffective. Players who do not comply with the initiations challenge what the world of hockey entails and are seen as resistant to making the transition. Those individuals who refuse to make the transition often suffer

serious repercussions, and, as was the case with the player from “Thin Ice,” it is a task not worth the effort.

The young men who have dedicated their lives to becoming hockey players are most vulnerable to the pressures being imposed upon them. The younger players generally look up to the older ones and knowing that they have once gone through these same experiences themselves makes the rituals that much more endurable, and even welcomed. There are, however, serious ramifications of conforming to a pre-set standard of behaviour that tends to function outside perceived social norms and conventions. The rituals can be seen as an attempt to strip players of their individuality and immerse them in a collective whole with a belief system, world view, and values that are often counterproductive to personal development. Ironically players find strength and solace in this environment, since it is within this sphere that they are socialized and validated for acting within these “norms.” Serious problems present themselves, however, that will be explored in the next two chapters. Here I will consider the extent to which this occupational group functions as a closed society, and explore the ensuing consequences of existence within this collective identity.

Chapter Seven

Homogenizing Men in Professional Hockey

In a discussion I had with *Reds'* rookie Lester Dell concerning his initiation into hockey, I suggested that initiations are a process of transforming individuals into something other than what they once were. I asked Lester if he could tell me what one became after going through the standard hockey initiation rituals. He paused and then said "It's kind of your dues, maybe." But on further reflection, he elaborated on what has already been discussed as a process of coming together "like a big family," and thus, the players were "knit" or "gelled" into one (Dell Interview, 10 Oct. 1997). The description that Dell, and earlier Judd Richards, provide has become cliché in sport discourse, but the significance has not diminished. For all the young players entering into the professional hockey community, the notion of becoming "one" does not end with sharing team goals and commitments, but includes adopting a collective worldview, that is both narrow and restrictive. The result is a shared identity that is informed by a physically dominant, white, heterosexual male model, which is validated through annual rituals and everyday behaviour. It is this model that is privileged within the community as ultimately the only legitimate masculinity.

The identity that is continuously reaffirmed and re-articulated with each new generation of hockey player has provided the team members with a

means of measuring their worth as professionals and as “men,” and players generally appear to draw solace from the security this rigid structure provides. One player from the *Reds*, veteran defenceman Darren Feld, associates his job with what it means to be male: “it’s a contact sport, and it’s . . . a male thing—maybe a little macho” (Feld Interview). On closer inspection, however, the comfort that the players draw from these pre-existing boundaries is potentially detrimental to their personal development. First, this construction of masculinity privileges only one male experience, and in turn, denies any other expression of masculinity. Second, the constructed image of manliness stems from a patriarchal tradition that already privileges what is male, and thus, the players largely understand it to be the only legitimate experience. In other words, repeated celebration of what it means to be a man through the execution of the trade and through an exclusively male environment creates what, Lois Bryson argues, is a process of “inferiorising femaleness and female activity” (“Sport and the Oppression of Women” 422). Finally, the constructed image does not only discriminate in terms of gender, but also in terms of ethnicity, belief, or skill. The effect is a homogenized workforce achieved at the expense of the individual, leaving us to consider how such a restrictive existence can be the source of what many players claim to be the most desired aspect of the trade.

Expressions of Masculinity

It is undeniable that hockey is a sport that involves intense physical competition. Bodies undergo enormous physical punishment for the common goal of winning: players are consistently dealt bone-crushing body checks; they put their bodies in front of pucks moving at speeds exceeding a hundred miles an hour; and fighting often occurs to establish a solid physical presence. The sheer brutality of the sport is evidenced in both games and practices and has become ingrained in the players as are all aspects of the game. Violence is to be expected and something to which one needs to respond accordingly. I asked *Reds* player Steve Toll if it bothered him seeing one of his teammates receive an injury on the ice, and his response is noteworthy because of the way he rationalizes the experience:

Yeah, definitely. Like say, if a guy gets uh, I mean—it depends. I mean if a guy gets hit, no. I mean, just a regular hit, and he gets hurt, and it wasn't that big of a deal, like where a guy was running him and he intentionally tried to hurt him, you don't feel bad for the guy. You suck it up, and you keep going. But, uh, if it was an attempt to injure or whatever, yeah, you feel for the guy, but you also get angry at the guy that did it. And uh, you got twenty guys on your side, and they're getting pissed off at the one guy that did that to your player. So, I mean there, there's all kind of things like that: revenge and whatever else. I mean you take it—you don't take it that far, but you take it to where you need to stick up for your players, and stick together. (Toll interview)

These intensely physical aspects of the game require the players to assume a certain bravado that is not necessary in most contexts outside of sport.

Therefore, the very existence of sport provides what Ray Raphael calls, in his book *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America*, a “public arena, a ready-made structure, in which we hope to validate our worth” (110). As superficial as these structures appear to be to those on the outside, for the group members who exist in what one player refers to as a “cocoon,” the sense of validation is quite real (Pack Interview). Each day, the players engage in highly demanding physical competition which is celebrated by thousands of screaming fans, reinforcing their successes and failures, and hence, publicly validating their performances as men. By simply fulfilling their occupational demands, the players are embodying the qualities of hegemonic masculinity and ultimately establishing, at least esoterically, their male worth.

The traditional behaviour that is inherited with each new generation of hockey players is structured around ideals of physical superiority and dominance which Michael Messner argues have “played a key role in the construction and stabilization of a male-dominant, heterosexist system of gender relations” (16). This stabilization of gender relations is achieved in a variety of ways, but it was through language that *Reds* players most distinctly stabilized masculine hegemony. The language is one of violence that threatens anything not part of this hegemonic paradigm. It is expressed through the everyday language of the group, which has become mundane

through its perfunctory performances. The words themselves are overt expressions of misogyny and homophobia, but their performances are often more subtle in their meaning. This apparent contradiction presents itself because players, in general, do not assume misogynistic or homophobic positions, at least publicly (misogyny and homophobia are actually downplayed in my discussions with the players),¹ but their informal speech plainly illustrates the contrary. The players' language is riddled with derogatory comments towards women and homosexuals and they are used in playful and serious contexts—such as the constant referral to one another as a “cock-sucker” or “faggot,” which will be considered later—but these epithets are not considered by the players to be referents to either group. However, what are often described as “just words” are in fact violent acts that are injurious at a political/ideological level, and once expressed are physical manifestations of violence and power. Before we consider the locutions themselves, it is critical that we first consider the performative value of speech acts.

In J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*, the performative quality of “the word” is considered and ultimately revolutionized as Austin

¹ When I asked Darren Feld if the dressing room banter often consisted of narratives that reiterated the players sexual exploits, he responded, “No, you know, I think it's uh, I think it's a personal thing, you know. Like, if the guy wants to say it, he'll say it and we'll laugh at the story, but, most of the times, guys keep it to themselves. And you know, we don't want to hear about it (Feld Interview).”

inverts what can be understood as the hierarchy of language. Traditionally, a statement—or as Austin designates it, a “constative”—was only considered a statement if it “describe[d] some state of affairs” or “state[d] some fact”

(1). Sentences that do not perform these functions have been traditionally perceived as superfluous and unnecessary in language; their inability to verifiably describe or state something reduced the status of these utterances to flawed or “pseudo-statements” (Austin 2). These pseudo-statements, or “performatives,” as Austin terms them, are identified by the fact that

- A. they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and
- B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something. (Austin 5)

An example of a performative utterance is, “I promise to watch the hockey game,” while a constative utterance would be, “The game is on television.”

Austin, rejects the privileging of the constative over the performative, however, and calls into question whether “there is no great distinction between statements and performative utterances” (52). The distinction is somewhat slippery, as Jonathan Culler points out:

Instead of saying “I promise to pay you tomorrow,” one can in appropriate circumstances perform the act of promising by saying “I will pay you tomorrow”—a statement whose illocutionary force remains performative. Similarly, one can perform the act of affirming or stating while omitting “I hereby affirm that.” “The cat is on the mat” may be seen as a shortened version of “I hereby state that the cat is on the mat” and thus a performative. “The cat is on the mat” is the classic example of a constative utterance. (218)

The significance of deconstructing this relationship is paramount, since by recognizing the performative within the constative, and vice versa, it implies that any utterance involves stating or describing something, and the *doing* of an action.

Austin pursues this adventurous theoretical premise by asking rhetorically, “Can saying it make it so?” (7). His response is framed by three fundamental principles that locate speech as being inherently active: “to say something *is* to do something, or *in* saying something we do something, and even *by* saying something we do something” (94). Not all speech acts carry with them the same action, however, and thus, he breaks down utterances into three—relatively unstable, but still effective—categories of action: locutionary (“He said to me ‘Shoot her!’”); illocutionary (“He urged me to shoot her”) and perlocutionary (“He persuaded me to shoot her”) (Austin 101). He defines further these three separate speech acts by saying: the locutionary utterance has a definite and identifiable “*meaning*”; the illocutionary has a “*certain force*”; and the “perlocutionary act which is *the achieving* of certain effects by saying something” (120). Notice, what Austin defines as perlocutionary is essentially the result, product or consequence of an illocutionary act. For our purposes, it is the illocutionary force that becomes our primary concern because of *what it can do*.

The ability of a word to “do a thing” is a powerful suggestion that not only takes into account the act of saying, but also the literal performing function of the word itself. Edith Butler considers the performative value of the word:

if a word in this sense might be said to “do” a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting. (198)

This description of the illocutionary act does not, however, reveal to us *how* the word actually performs the action it articulates. The statement “He urged me to shoot her” is quite separate from the act of shooting and similarly will not necessarily produce such an effect simply by its utterance. More specifically, if we are considering injurious speech, we need to ask the question, “how are we to understand the relation between the word and the wound?” (Butler 201). By directing racial slurs towards another individual through language, does the word shape or effect violence upon the individual, or is the speaker responsible for such violence? In other words, does the victim of the abuse receive injury from the actual word itself or is it received from the malicious motivations of the speaker? These queries lead us into the direction of intention, which however significant to Austin, misrepresents the speech act: “intention cannot serve as the decisive determinant or the ultimate foundation of a theory of speech acts” (Culler 223). For example, would the illocutionary force of the word “nigger” be any less injurious if the

speaker does not intend harm—perhaps a child referring to a person of

African descent without the wherewithal to do otherwise?² To address these

² The periodic banning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from certain schools would indicate that innocuous intentions do not necessarily remove the injury of speech. In 1996, the following attempt was made to remove this novel along with William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" because of racist overtones:

In Tempe, objections to the short story, "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner in an anthology, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, both in use in the honors freshman English class, for containing racial slurs. "Why should African American students' and other minority students' right to a fair and equal education always be destroyed for another race of people's educational benefit?" the objector asked. Removal from the required reading list and placement on the optional reading list requested.

OBJECTOR: Parent.

RESOLUTION: On appeal, the school board upheld the recommendation of a review committee to retain the books on the required reading list. "Rather than ignoring words that are offensive and hoping that the words and the evil thoughts behind them will go away, our high school students would be better served by being allowed to explore the historical development of such bigotry and to uncover the ignorance behind it," the principal said. In fact, the objector's child was given the option of choosing an alternate assignment, which she opted to do, and was allowed to pursue independent study in the library during class discussion of *Huckleberry Finn*.

In addition, the school and the school board decided to form a committee to ensure that the materials are taught with cultural sensitivity. Teachers and administrators are also getting a general training to ensure that cultural sensitivity exists all over the school. "As far as the specific complaints, the issue is dead. However, the issue is not dead as a whole. It got people to see that there is always more than meets the eye. In this case we saw that [the school] needed to take a look at its literary choices and we are doing just that," the principal said. For her part, the objector decided to join the curriculum committee, and "be part of the solution," one teacher said.

That notwithstanding, the objector has decided to sue the school

questions, we must turn to Jacques Derrida's concept of "iterability."

If we are to begin to understand the power of the word we must, at least temporarily, remove it from the speaker and consider the network of meanings the word itself carries. The illocutionary force of the speech act must be placed in a larger historical context rather than being seen merely as the product of the will of the speaker. Derrida asks:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable in some way as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a "citation"? ("Signature . . ." 18)

In other words, the effectiveness, or the performative value, of the speech act draws from the possible significations of the word itself; without the recognizable meanings associated with a word, the utterance becomes ineffectual. What can be concluded from this, then, is that what is spoken will not necessarily correspond to what was intended because the historicity of the word exceeds that of the speaker's appropriation of it. The unwitting child uttering racial epithets injures not by will, but by succumbing to the word and its associated meanings. The violence imposed by uttering the word "nigger" is made possible

because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and*

in court to get the books removed from the required reading list. Said one supporter of the objector, "We're going to make you pay." ("Attacks on the Freedom to Learn '96")

authoritative set of practices. It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice. (Butler 205)

Recognizing the illocutionary force of the word does not alleviate the responsibility of the speaker, however, as “the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance (“Signature . . .” Derrida 18). It is here, then, that we can begin looking at the violence of the word in professional hockey.

Examples of violence committed through speech acts are numerous in hockey, but a particular expression stands out because of its frequent usage and menacing signification. I was first introduced to the terminology just as I was concluding my first interview with athletic therapist Al Jones. As I was thanking Al for his time, team captain Darren Feld walked into the trainers’ room with a bag of fast food in his hand. Feld was coming in to receive therapeutic attention for a pulled muscle in his leg, and brought some lunch to Al. Darren deposited the food in front of Al to which Al responded, “Thanks *bitch*” (Fieldnotes, 9 Nov. 1996). The remark did not appear to offend Darren and did not draw a response from him, indicating that the word held regular currency amongst the team. After hearing the term used consistently throughout the season it soon became apparent how it was used

and for what purposes. The word “bitch” was used exclusively in playful contexts but signified power or advantage over another person.

Another example which helps illustrate the performative value of the word “bitch” comes from an instance at practice when Ted Simms prevented the offensive forward Jason Dodd from scoring. Simms asserted his defensive dominance by yelling at the unsuccessful shooter, Dodd, “Not here bitch!” (Fieldnotes 11 Nov. 1997). In this example, and in the one previous, those who employ the term bitch are in positions of privilege over the other, and they accentuate this position by “naming” the other as disadvantaged. In the first example, Feld makes himself vulnerable by performing a voluntary act of service for Al Jones—he puts himself in the service of the other—by buying food for him; and because of this submissive posture receives a name that “not only names a social subject, but constructs that subject in the naming” (Butler 202). Similarly in the second example, one player asserts his physical dominance over the other by proving victorious on an individual scoring play. Simms’s temporary victory allows him to impose himself over the other by defining the players’ temporary subordination with a name. The illocutionary force of the name is made possible through its greater historical context and the meanings it carries with it; therefore, it is important to quickly consider this larger framework.

The term bitch is highly significant because of the network of meanings associated with it. Literally, it is a noun, meaning a female dog,

but in a more vernacular tradition, the term has been anthropomorphized. A “bitch” is “a spiteful woman,” and one who “bitches” is one who takes on a “bitch’s” characteristics: “to speak spitefully” (Hawkins 78). Meanings associated with the term are “woman” and “negativity,” but there are even more vernacular associations that are pertinent here. Referring to someone as a bitch is an act of condemnation—“I hereby claim you to be a bitch”—and in its traditional patriarchal context it is an act of empowerment by debasing the other with the slanderous signification, thus raising the speaker above the baseness of the referent. These associations have been subsequently appropriated into other forms of patriarchal and misogynistic discourse to mean one who assumes (voluntarily or involuntarily) the submissive and tainted role of the traditional “bitch” female model. For example, the term “bitch” is used to describe a male inmate within a penitentiary who is sexually submissive to another male prisoner: “the important corollary of the allegation of the man being a homosexual has been that he is ‘a woman’ in his sexuality too; that is, he will gladly submit sexually to another man and let himself be used “as a woman” (Löfström 22). Thus the term is part of a male tradition, but the associated meanings are still derivative of the illustrated female model.

When players refer to one another as bitch, they are iterating these formulas of signification and contributing to what needs to be understood as a network of violence. For the players, a term such as “bitch” is “just

terminology” found within hockey, devoid of significance, and is likely not expressed with the intention of injury (Murphy interview). Moreover, the players who receive the injurious name do not seem harmed by the act, which prevents the players from seeing the danger in “a word.” What needs to be understood, however, is that the act—in this case calling the person bitch—is a means of “making linguistic community with a history of speakers” and whether intended or not, perpetuates this imposition of violence (Butler 206). It is an act of defining woman or womanly characteristics in terms that are seen as subordinate, conquerable, weak, and/or contemptible. It simultaneously serves as an act of privilege in that it removes the speaker from what has been reduced to mean bitch. It is an act of separating oneself from what is perceived as female while legitimizing one form of masculinity. The expression is part of a reductive process that subordinates all experience that does not fit within this physically dominant, white, heterosexual male construct.

The term bitch is in fact only one term of many within this larger system of meaning that injures through collective condemnation and subordination of experience. The use of verbal quips and verbal attacks are frequent on the ice and play an important role in the intimidation and distraction of opponents, in hope of throwing players off their games. These illocutionary acts (which these expressions clearly are) are thematically consistent, and like the use of the term bitch, the violence of these expressive

acts exceeds the immediate perlocutionary injury, if that injury is even realized at all. For example, during a game the *Reds* were losing, Steve Toll was punched in the face. The referee either did not witness the assault or did not feel it deserving of a penalty. Steve Toll screamed "You fucking faggot!" but it was unclear if he was directing this toward the referee or to the player that punched him (Fieldnotes 17Nov. 1996). The next day, during a *Reds* practice, Sid Zeal attempted to draw teammate Mikel Zakov into a fight by yelling "Fuck-off you cock-sucker!" (Fieldnotes 18 Nov. 1996). In a more playful context in a practice two days earlier, Colin Best goaded Steve Toll into action by yelling "Come on you cock-sucker!" (Fieldnotes 15 Nov. 1996). The players attempted to accost/mock one another by consistently using epithets that use homosexual images as the frame of reference, and this consistency collectively condemns (male) homosexuality.

Darren Feld's comments on the Graham James incident and the repeated molestation of fifteen-year-old hockey player Sheldon Kennedy confirm the prevalent nature of these expressions. The James incident was publicized in the Autumn of 1996 when Kennedy, as a professional hockey player with the Boston Bruins, revealed that he had been sexually molested over 300 times in a span of six years by his former Junior coach, 43-year old, Graham James ("News of the Week"). While Feld did say he regretted what

had occurred, he was critical of Kennedy for not “being a man” about the situation and dealing *properly* with this “fag behaviour”:

I'll say it, if someone would come up to me when I was fifteen years old, sixteen years old, I'm big enough to fucking do something about it. Do something, even if—you know, you go up to the guy—you've got to do something about it eh, you know: this guy's a fucking fag! (Feld Interview)

It is clear that terms such as “fag,” or any other homosexual epithet, associate homosexuality with deviancy, and informally dismiss homosexuality as a viable way of life within the group. In addition, when the players choose to derogate via antigay terminology they are aligning themselves with a greater homophobic tradition. What violence these acts potentially impose upon the players is overshadowed because of what they contribute to a larger history of violence, which has seen gay rights repeatedly denied and attacked. Thus, these utterances not only legitimize and perpetuate the collective homophobia of the hockey community, they contribute to an ongoing homophobic discourse; their utterances carry with them an illocutionary force that marginalizes and violates homosexual experiences.

These violent and derogatory speech acts, as seen here, are littered throughout hockey and are heard from the players, training staff and the coaches. The fact that what is uttered is often not perceived as injurious speech, or not understood as injurious in a larger historical context, does not diminish the effects and affects of language. These words and phrases are

not accidentally maintained within the hockey tradition; the tradition is inherently homophobic and misogynistic and the “word” is instrumental in perpetuating perceptions and beliefs. The word becomes a subordinating act that has been normalized through time and consistent usage, but also serves as a linguistic code of behaviour that contributes to the aforementioned conceptualization of masculinity. Therefore, these illocutionary utterances are not only violent acts on that which is perceived as “other,” but they also naturalize the hockey identity. The power of the word, then, can be understood as furthering the process of homogenization and the diminishing of human experience.

Playing at Being Masculine

The violence of speech within the *Reds*’ community is a vivid articulation of an overbearing masculinity often referred to as hyper-masculinity. This hyper-masculine model becomes intriguing, however, when we consider that much of the players’ behaviour does not fit within this superior, macho male image that is verbally expressed. The players are rarely seen assuming behaviours that appear to validate this masculine image; in fact their behaviour often appears to run counter to the male posturing folklorist Stanley Brandes argues is typical of certain male cultures:

Each man in Monteros, as elsewhere in the world, has to determine in what ways he is different from or similar to women. . . . Men are preoccupied with behaving in a masculine manner and with determining in whatever new situation might arise how their reactions should vary from women's. (6)

In contrast to the men of Monteros, both privately and publicly the players express themselves in a manner that appears to subvert the dominant male image. To explain, it would be useful to consider the experience of Tim Chip, an acquaintance of mine who has played professional hockey for over five years (in both the NHL and AHL).

At one point in his career Tim was labelled by *TSN (The Sport's Network)* as one of the top five scariest men in the NHL. As an "enforcer"³ in professional hockey, he faced the predicament that losing a fight meant potentially losing his value as an intimidating force on the ice. Every night his hyper-masculine role was put to the test, just as his occupation was similarly put on the line. This predicament was later commented upon by emerging enforcer Troy *Reds'* Forward Ted Simms, who listed what was necessary for him to be successful in the League:

to be a physical presence; to have the ability to fight; to have the gift of being able to win [fights] on a consecutive basis; to hit; and to be able to put fear in an opponent's eyes. (Simms Interview)

³ The term "enforcer" is used here to signify a player whose primary role is to intimidate the opposite team while simultaneously protecting the more finesse players on his team.

But as Marc D. Weinstein *et al* point out, this role is precarious:

While demonstrating control over an opponent is a method of earning respect from adversaries, backing down is a way of losing it. A player is expected to fight in order to earn respect. (837)

Tim Chip was well aware that I knew the lore surrounding him as a professional hockey player, and during his interview with me he did not feel he had to establish any more of a masculine identity than he had already through his on-ice performances. Instead, like the other men interviewed, he downplayed the tough, macho exterior he displays on the ice. At one point he stated: “Well, yeah, people who first meet me who don’t know me just think I’m the same person on the ice, but I’m not. So, I guess they expect me to be loud, and aggressive and stuff. But, I’m not” (Chip interview). While it is true that he assumes a different on-ice personality (I have known him for about seven years) the fact that he does not feel the need to perpetuate such an image off the ice is consistent with the behaviour of other players.

Tim, and the other players I interviewed, display an artificial process of emasculation. I use the term “artificial” here because this emasculating process is essentially a paradox: it is a means of maintaining a definitive masculine identity within the group. I asked Tim if he was accorded special status being a hockey player, and he responded, “Yeah a little bit, but nah—I don’t know—if you’re a star, yeah, but if you’re a slug no” (Chip interview). Because this individual has throughout his career played a defensive style of

game that is highly valued on the team, but often overlooked by the public, he comfortably acknowledges his “lunch-bucket” status. The metaphor “slug” connotes both mindlessness and insignificance, yet simultaneously signifies perseverance and durability. What is taking place here is similar to what anthropologist Thomas Dunk observes in his study of male working class culture in Thunder Bay, Ontario. During an annual lob-ball tournament (a modified softball game) Dunk recognizes that the men express their masculinity in paradoxical fashion:

In the context of the lob-ball game, professional baseball players serve as a model; perhaps more than other professional athletes, they exude a casual air which is echoed in the Boys’ [the men from Thunder Bay] style of movement. A great deal of effort is put into appearing casual. One does not want to give the impression of being too eager or of trying too hard. (75)

Like Tim’s manner, this artificial complacency expressed by the “Boys” actually resonates with subtle expressions of esoteric masculine validation. He later stated that “popularity is partly based on being good at a wide range of practical skills and physical activities without *seeming* to work at them” (emphasis added 75). As a result, these men successfully confirm their identities through artificial self-deprecation.

In the same interview Tim explained that professional hockey has stunted his development as an adult. It is interesting to learn later, however, that avoiding adulthood does not seem to pose a problem for him:

You’re playing a game for a living: you’re never serious and you’re with a bunch of guys who think exactly the same as you

do. You never really have to grow up. So I think it makes you regress instead of progress. (Chip interview)

Personal regression does not appear to be of great concern to him, since when I asked what he disliked most about hockey, he was unable to come up with an answer: “What do I dislike most? Uhm [*pause and then laughs*] That’s a tough one. Actually, I like everything about it” (Chip interview). This particular individual was able to assert a level of self-confidence and security by openly directing me to weaknesses that are in fact deemed positive qualities (at least by hockey players). This is a paradoxical pattern that also unfolds through more physical actions.

For example, former professional hockey player John Doe began describing different forms of physical interaction engaged in quite deliberately in the public eye. This exchange of dialogue began when I asked if and how the players behaved differently outside their occupational environment:

Doe: Let’s see, how would I put this? This is kind of weird. You kind of will think like you’re gay sometimes.

Robidoux: [*I laugh and try to put him at ease*] Don’t worry about that.

Doe: You kind of grab the guy’s ass or something like that in public—you didn’t really care kinda thing eh. But we didn’t really care what people thought of us anyway. So I don’t really think it changed too much, no.

Robidoux: Actually that would be something that I didn’t touch on. When you grab a guy’s ass or whatever—

Doe: Or grab a guy's nuts or something like that. You'd always have fun doing shit like that.

Robidoux: And why could behaviour like that happen? I mean, like why could you do that?

Doe: Because you knew the guy so well. Like uh, [pause] I don't think I ever—you talked about this before—but I don't think I have any school boy friends that I could do that with I don't think. I got a couple of very close friends that I never went to school with, as like my brothers or cousins or whatever, but you know, that we used to fool around like that with, but only the other guys I could ever do that with would be guys on the hockey team that you knew so well, and intimately, and uh—intimately like I don't mean like uh—

Robidoux: Yeah, yeah. No that's okay.

Doe: You know, inside-and-out kind of thing. (Doe interview)

All of the players either alluded to or discussed outright the intimacy that was present in their inner group relationships. John relates the high level of intimacy to the players' ability to open up to one another:

But, I think the main thing is just, is just opening up. You know, saying—just speaking about stuff you wouldn't normally speak about to anyone. And as soon as you open yourself up by saying that, you automatically become closer to that person. (Doe interview)

And while this explains how grabbing another man's testicles is allowed, it does not necessarily explain *why* grabbing another individual's genitalia is an accepted form of expression. All the players indicated that they could say and do anything around the "boys," which is what has made their relationships as tight as they are. Why, then, is this specific outlet of expressing intimacy employed as consistently as it is?

It must be stated here that grabbing another male's genitals is a multivalent gesture, capable of withstanding a multiplicity of interpretation. As in reading all cultural texts, we are forced to interpret meaning through our own perceptions:

perception itself is an act of ideation, if by ideation we mean the inferring of a world from a set of assumptions (antecedently held) about what it must be like. To put it another way, mediated access to the world is the only access we ever have. (Fish 10)

The mock sexual interaction evidenced here has been commonly interpreted as an expression of latent homosexuality and/or homophobia (Dundes, "Into the Endzone," Sanday). While I agree that the professional hockey environment is homophobic, I feel it is important to resist reading this behaviour as an expression of sexual desire. It lends itself well to such a reading, and is likely true in individual cases, but this reading refuses to acknowledge the voices of the actual individuals involved. If we believe that the majority of these players, who claim to be heterosexual, are in fact heterosexual, the behaviour being expressed may be (and I would argue is) signifying something other than sexual attraction.

In addition to intimacy being expressed, I feel the players are similarly expressing their desire to fulfil the macho image that is expected of them as hockey players. By employing this tactic, however, the players are once again performing in a manner that undermines the strictly heterosexual notion of masculinity, yet their masculinity remains in check by complying

with this behaviour. In order for a player to grab another male's genitalia, a trust must have already been established regarding not only his status within the group but his "victim's" as well. The fact that they "grab a guy's ass" in public establishes further this idyllic level of security in themselves as men, thus, they fall into the paradox of maintaining masculinity by superficially assuming a role that subverts the tough, macho exterior that is in reality being expressed. As opposed to the men Brandes studied in Monteros, professional hockey players are able to assert a masculine image that is maintained through the very nature of their occupation. The need, then, to maintain a hyper-masculine exterior does not *appear* to be critical to them as men, yet the desire to express "in what ways [they are] different from or similar to women" is still very real (Brandes 6). Therefore, the pattern basically consists of the players *artificially* removing their masculine exteriors to downplay their need to validate their status as men. What is evident is that through these expressive behaviours—whether verbal or kinesic—the players collectively articulate what it means to be male, which serves to perpetuate a pre-existing masculine identity. How, then, does this limited construction affect both individual and group development?

Challenging the Borders of Masculinity

Arguments have been made by certain individuals, such as B. Mark Schoenberg, that it is necessary to reassert a *definitive* masculine identity in

order to correct what, he believes, is responsible for much turmoil and uncertainty in contemporary societies. He argues this despite the fact that the definite boundaries to which he is referring were only established at the turn of the twentieth century by what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues was a process of “world-mapping,” where “every given person . . . was necessarily assignable to a male or female gender” (2). Schoenberg writes that traditional “concepts of maleness and masculinity provided men with a set of behavioural guidelines as well as an explicit code of ethics that formed a foundation for personal construct development” (5). Without these “traditional concepts of maleness” he claims that the opportunity for “a boy” to “identify with a male from his own family unit” or “outside the family unit” is currently jeopardized, consequently denying boys the ability to take on a “role model” (7). He continues by stressing that in order to remove these *perceived* dangers of blurring gender division, societies need to return to a more codified experience of gender, where definitive boundaries are maintained to guarantee the roles and behaviour of the sexes. Through the establishment of these unique boundaries, society will supposedly be freed from any uncertainty and/or psychological turmoil.

To establish these divisions, Ray Raphael suggests similarly that we reincorporate the formal rituals that tribal peoples used to signify the

transition from boyhood to manhood, to once again re-establish two⁴ distinct gender orders. According to Raphael, the absence of these formal “rites of passage”⁵ in contemporary societies has profound negative effects upon the male population:

Even if traditional initiations no longer appear to be objectively necessary, the psychological function they once served is still very real. The psychic needs of contemporary males have not always been able to keep pace with sex-role liberation and a computerized economy and nuclear warfare, all of which contribute to the obsolescence of traditional initiations. (xii)

If, however, contemporary societies were to incorporate these formal rituals to signify the transition from childhood to manhood, what would be the successful product of the transition? In other words, what qualities would this “man” have to be properly called a man?

In effect, Raphael, and in turn Schoenberg, are calling for males to assume highly competitive qualities that can be carried out primarily through intense physical interaction. Males should be defined by their ability to conquer and lead, and fulfil the qualities Marc Feigen Fasteau assigns to the ideal male:

The male machine is a special kind of being, different from women, children, and men who don’t measure up. . . He has armour plating which is virtually impregnable. His circuits are

⁴ There is room for only two possible gender orders in this model: Raphael does not recognize anyone other than male/female heterosexuals.

⁵ Raphael claims that there is an absence of rites of passage in larger North American society, but recognizes that they exist in various subcultures, such as the realm of sport (Raphael 110).

never scrambled or overrun by irrelevant personal signals. He dominates and outperforms his fellows (2)

There should be no confusion when it comes to the sexes, and men should reassert themselves in their *proper* patriarchal position:

It is not normal for a male to be in submission to a female and like it These so-called males are in submission to the warped standards of females who like to set the dress and grooming standards for their mousy husbands, their pantywaist boyfriends or their feminine sons. (Simpson 262)

The complete absurdity of these positions is noteworthy because of their unfortunate appeal for many North American men; and more importantly here, they are defining what is understood within the “male-preserve” of hockey to be the aforementioned, definitive male. Therefore the “male-preserve” of hockey needs to be fully explored, and in doing so, I have implemented a basic paradigm developed by David Whitson.

In his essay “Sport in the Social Construction of Masculinity,” Whitson proposes two basic concepts: first, those in sport who establish themselves in “forceful and space-occupying ways” learn “to associate such behaviour with being a man”; and second, that “sport as a ‘male preserve’ has served as an important site in the construction of male solidarity” that encourages “men to identify with other men and provides for the regular rehearsal of such identifications” (21). What was quickly evident from my study of the *Reds* was that the construction of male solidarity is an act of power that attempts to reduce the status of all other experience; or, as Lois Bryson states, sporting

“events have a ritual element which continually strengthens the hegemony and dimension of male solidarity” (“Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony” 357). The extent to which the male preserve attempts to remain intact, and how it occupies all facets of the players’ lives, needs emphasizing. For example, time spent together as a team versus time spent with the players’ families illustrates clearly the imposition of team unity. Even married team members are expected by their coaches to spend long periods of time with the team, as former professional hockey player John Doe indicates in the following discussion:

Robidoux: Okay, would even the married guys, though, spend most of their time with the guys, do you think? Or would it be more with their family do you think?

Doe: Uh I think *[pause]*—

Robidoux: Like throughout that twenty-four hour time span?

Doe: Probably more with the guys on the team. Predominantly—I bet you eighty percent of the time would be spent with the guys on the team. (Doe interview)

In effect, the family at home is replaced by the family that is provided through the hockey organization, as *Reds’* goaltender Jack Hammer states:

You know the guys in the dressing-room are your, you know, your family almost. It’s kind of overused, but it is. It’s, it’s, you know it’s who you’re with all the time, and you go through ups and downs with them. (Hammer interview)

Hammer, who is currently contemplating retirement after playing in the NHL for fifteen years later said to me, “I have two daughters that live in

Atlantis all the time. And you know, last season I didn't see them for eight straight months." He was still having difficulty, however, deciding who he was going to place first in his life, his family or his team:

And you know, it comes to a point, do I still want to [pause] put it, you know, [pause] do I still want to put hockey before my family, or do I want to put my family before my hockey career? (Interview 6)

The commitment these players are required to make to their teams is profound, yet instead of resisting these demands, the players generally appear to revel in this "homosocial" environment.

Looking Critically at the Homosocial Environment

The concept of homosociality is especially useful for considering the male preserve of professional hockey. The term signifies same-sex interaction, but as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts, it does not connote homosexual relations:

"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." (*Between Men* 1)

The distinction between "homosocial" and "homosexual" is an important one which directs us to the inherently separative experience of homosociality.

Sharon R. Bird points out that not only does it "promote segregation between women and men," but it also "promotes clear distinctions between hegemonic

masculinities and nonhegemonic masculinities by the segregation of social groups" (121). As a result, the tightly woven infrastructure of professional hockey legitimizes its own existence by "supporting meanings associated with identities that fit [its own] hegemonic ideals" while "suppressing meanings associated with nonhegemonic masculine identities" (Bird 121). But what are the ramifications of existing within this limiting environment? Is there any credence to Ray Raphael's argument which states that a well defined structure that definitely reaffirms a male identity will produce highly functional men who escape the fate of other modern males who are "consumed by childish narcissism and troubled by sex-role conflict . . . condemn[ing] themselves to the Never-Never Land of perpetual adolescence" (16)?

While Raphael's own "masculine-intact wonderland" sounds disturbingly idealistic, when listening to the players describe their existence within their exclusively male environment a similarly Utopian tone resonates. Sean Pack, with whom I played Junior hockey and Varsity hockey, explained to me that:

Oh yeah! I mean, I was by far the closest to John Doe when I played for the _____ simply because, I also lived with the guy. So I mean he was almost, you know, he was two years older, and I know I am sort of straying off your questioning here Mike, but I mean he was almost a brotherly figure so to speak. So I mean, it was almost, you know, it almost transcended the fact that we played hockey together. He was almost, you know, a brother. (Pack interview)

In an interview I conducted with NHL veteran Don Maxwell, he informed me that “there certainly is” a special bond between players:

You know I’ve played with guys in the past, that for two or three years, and sure, you know, I might be lucky to see them for two or three days a year on a good year. But they’ll always, you know, for that one or two years, they were someone that you just hang out with constantly. That you could speak, you know about anything, and freely. And you know, not worry about it going any farther than that. And it was just like a place where you could release. And, vice versa for, you know, other guys. You know, it seems like, it seems like every player—or pretty well every player—has someone on a team that they’re a little bit more tighter to than the other guys. And you know, maybe there’s two or three guys, but there’s always a little bit tighter of a group that would do anything, whether it was on the ice or off the ice. (Maxwell interview)

All the players clearly indicated that through hockey they experienced personal relationships that exceeded mere friendship to become more of a brotherly kind of bond. And while these relationships appear on the surface to be both genuine and appealing, an inherent problem exists that potentially poses a serious danger to a player’s personal development.

To begin, the intimacy and bonding found within this community is somewhat dubious as the players are coerced into these special relationships. Success in hockey is highly dependent on the players coming together and working/playing as one, and measures—such as rituals—are used to ensure this unified dynamic. But at the same time, the competitive nature of professional hockey means that players are constantly competing against one another. This competition could be simply to work oneself up onto the top

line, it could be to become the starting goaltender, or in the case of the *Reds*, the players are competing to work themselves up into the NHL. If players do not maintain this competitive edge within what is clearly a precarious environment, someone else will come in and take their job, or steal their opportunity for advancement. Thus, listening to the players talk about this “dog-eat-dog” world, the special bonds between players quickly appear to be much more superficial than originally suggested. For example, Darren Feld, who has been with the *Reds* longer than any other current *Reds* player, and who has been passed up by the parent club for younger and more skilled players, has a pragmatic outlook about his relationship with the rest of the team:

when you play hockey for a living, you get very competitive, and you see it in everything that you do. You go out shoot pool; there is always a little bet on the go. Like chess, there's a little bet on the go. You want to win—very proud. Guys play cribbage, they lose, they get pissed off, you know. I think you have to have that to be a professional athlete. If you don't want to take buddy's job beside you, you're the one that is in trouble. And uh, if you're waiting to let the guy take your job, you know, you're out. So you can't have it. Even if it's a team sport, I want buddy's job right beside me. You know what I mean. (Feld interview)

Feld's comments call into question how real these inscrutable bonds in professional hockey are; in fact, his comments suggest that players are seen as obstacles to success as opposed to intimate relations.

The struggle for success in hockey appears to overwhelm any notion of fraternity, making the profession much more individualistic than it is generally portrayed. Jack Hammer is a veteran goaltender who has been forced into a position of contemplating retirement, and he articulates further the need for players to put themselves first:

I mean because that's what it all depends on. You have to be better than the other goalie, you have to be better than the shooter in all the games. I mean that's how I grew up; that's why I made it to where I am today. Because I have just striven for that all the time. But some point in your life, you have to put that aside; you can't live everyday like that you know (Hammer interview).

Instead of a harmonious atmosphere that is portrayed with familial metaphors, the players describe behaviour that is more typical of vultures. Just as a wounded animal becomes victim of prey, so too does the hockey player:

You know when I was first breaking into the NHL, there would be games where, you know, my hand was so sore from fighting I couldn't even close or open it, but I'd still play. I wasn't going to say I couldn't play because sometimes, you know, you sit out one game, and somebody steps in and does your job: and then you're out of a job! (Falk interview)

The basis of relations in hockey is built on competitiveness which exemplifies the capitalist framework in which it is housed. Performance and production are actually an alienating process that pit one person against another in the struggle to succeed. Karl Marx writes: "It is the right of self-interest. This individual liberty, and its application, form the basis of civil society. It leads

every man to see in other men, not the *realization*, but rather the *limitation* of his own liberty" ("On the Jewish Question" 25). The foundation of this system of relations promotes individualism, and thus, the possibility for intimate relations is seriously reduced. Therefore, what is deemed most positive about the homosocial environment is largely superficial. With few redeemable qualities, the failings of this homogeneous existence become that much more profound.

Challenging Ethnic Distinction

The well-defined structure that the professional hockey community provides needs to be recognized as the inherently discriminatory⁶ environment that it is. We have already located how it discriminates in terms of gender, but its limitations encroach on all aspects of life. More specifically, the hockey identity does not only draw from a "definitively male model," it is also definitively North American and Caucasian. These discriminatory measures, however, are more subtle as they are deeply ingrained in the development of hockey players. In fact, when asked how they respond to teammates of different ethnicity, players indicated that it really does not make a difference. The players truly seem to be accepting of both African Canadian/American players and the increasing number of

⁶ I use the term "discriminatory" here which has taken on much greater significance for me since reading Pauline Greenhill's book *Ethnicity in the*

European players who are coming to North America to play professionally.

But after closer inspection, the players' responses indicate that their acceptance is conditional. In one interview I asked Tim Chip how he felt about playing with European born players, and he replied:

Chip: Good. Good, I lived with one this year: a Russian.

Robidoux: Oh really eh?

Chip: Yeah, they're good guys. Guys are guys, no matter where they are. (Chip interview)

I do not question Tim's sincerity, here, nor do I doubt that he had an enjoyable experience with the Russian player. But what does present itself as being problematic is the length to which the Russian player had to extend himself to become a "guy," just like everyone else.

What I am arguing here is that ethnicity—and as already discussed, masculinity—is accepted if it is expressed within the pre-existing homogeneous framework. A Russian is a "good guy" if he abandons cultural traits that make him distinct from the group and conforms to the model of behaviour of which he has been made aware through such things as rituals and language. I asked Czech-Republic born player Mikel Zakov to discuss his experiences coming to Canada to play hockey, and as expected, he indicated that the transition was tremendously difficult. He explained that in his "first year, I was unhappy and like, I didn't want to be here. I just

wanted to go home all the time because I couldn't speak English; I was going to school with little kids to learn" (Zakov interview). He continued by saying that he disliked the pressures that were placed on him to become more like a North American player, when ironically it was his distinctly European style (highly skilled) that made him a valuable asset to teams in North America:

they're telling us that we're not tough enough, or we're not hitting enough, but that's not really what I came to do here. You know, they have thousands of people who can hit and who can fight and who can you know, do all those things, but they only have few people who score and who can make good passes so you can win the game.

These demands to be more like a North American player do not stop on the ice, however, as he continues to struggle with having to reconcile the pressures of assimilation with the desire to remain true to himself and his ethnicity:

Like with uh, [pause] I think with my closer friends I'm really just myself—really European style and whatever you know. But, but between people who I uh don't really know as well I just try—not pretend—but try to be more like Canadian. And I don't know why I'm doing it. Because, and, I don't even like that, but I'm doing it. You know, I just—probably to be a bit closer. I don't know, I don't really know why I'm doing it.

As he was explaining this to me he became visibly upset, and understandably, his command of the English language quickly began to deteriorate. I was taken a back by this sudden outburst of information and simply sat there as Zakov continued to express painfully what was the result of homogenization in hockey. As he spoke I grew increasingly incensed at the

thought that his resistance to assimilation would only jeopardize his career as a hockey player in North America.

There was actually a point in the interview where Mikel Zakov discussed the futility of counteracting forces that served to reduce his, and other European, identities. He was specifically referring to Don Cherry's weekly attacks on European players on *Hockey Night in Canada*, and Cherry's call for fellow Canadians to keep the game Canadian.⁷ Zakov says that

it hurts when you see him [Cherry] on TV. But you can't really make a big deal of it because if you go up and say something against him, there's 10 million people behind him too, you know, saying, "Well you're not right, he's right" because I know how Canadians just love him. (Zakov interview)

Instead of resisting this North American model, European players seek acceptance and subsequent (North American) praise for abandoning this "weaker" style of play and appropriating a tougher, more violent brand of hockey. In a recent article in the *Troy Examiner*, Russian rookie Reds' defenceman Nicolas Yeltsin is profiled, and both the author and players interviewed legitimize Yeltsin's worth because of his ability to conform to a North American style of play. In the article Jim Falk states that "A lot of European defencemen like to play a controlled game, let the puck do the

⁷ On an episode of *Life and Times* that aired on the CBC February 9, 1997, host Gary Pinsent says that Don Cherry's "outrageous style seems to be working. Every Saturday night during the hockey season, about two million

work” but “Nicky is a throwback to the old defencemen. He does anything to win. He’ll block a shot, take a hit, give a hit. . . anything” (1 Nov. 1997, 33).

The article begins with the author setting the tone with a vignette intended to capture the heart of North American readers:

Nicolas Yeltsin extends his right hand, fingers curling to form a fist. He shows off a battle scar, a half-inch wound on the large knuckle.

He smiles as I inquire about the condition of the person on the receiving end of the blow.

The Troy *Reds*’ rookie rearguard didn’t mash his hand swatting hockey helmets. Instead, an unsuspecting Moscow car thief learned the hard way Yeltsin is one *hombre* you don’t mess with. (33)

The framework has been laid out for “Nicky” and his ability to succeed within it has quickly made him one of the franchise’s top prospects. It is evident, then, that the pressures to conform are enormous as players not only contend with becoming “one of the guys” off the ice, but they must also become a *true player* on the ice: otherwise, players will suffer the consequences of social and professional ostracism.

What needs to be understood here, however, is that the difficulties that European players face attempting to make their way into professional hockey are not limited to ethnic minorities, or to women or to homosexuals; rather, all experience that does not fit within this hegemonic paradigm is discriminated against. In fact, discrimination in the hockey community

people tune in to hear what he has to say.”

exceeds ethnicity, gender, or class, as coach of the Philadelphia Phantoms of the AHL, and former hockey star Bill Barber, explains the basic principles of hockey:

it's like black and white players: we have Bruce Coles, a black player on our hockey team who I admire, who I think is a good hockey player. He works very very hard. And uh, it's a very simple philosophy, you know if you look at it. If the players work hard—if we had a woman who could get the job done, you know, and she earned it, she would play. (Barber interview)

In other words, if someone can simply *just be a guy* he will not have any problems adjusting to life as a hockey player and will be well received within the community. What has historically not been understood, however, is that while some players may take pleasure in fulfilling these traditional expectations, others do not fit into this mould and suffer terribly, either forcing themselves to assume this normalized behaviour, or, rejecting it and facing the scrutiny of an intolerant group. Sociologist Jackson Katz explains:

there is evidence that many men are uncomfortable with other men's bragging about sexual exploits, dislike men's preoccupation with commenting on women's bodies, and misperceive the extent of other men's sexual activity. These men may belong to a "silent majority" who keep their discomfort to themselves rather than express disagreement or intervene in an environment which they perceive as unsympathetic. (166)

Therefore, players outside of this framework are forced to suffer silently, while those within it exist in a constructed universe that is removed from larger society.

Throughout this chapter I have explored the manner in which gender identities are constructed in the homosocial realm of professional hockey. Unlike Ray Raphael, who looks to a single, absolute image of masculinity to alleviate many of the difficulties men go through in this era where perceptions of gender have become increasingly ambiguous, it becomes apparent that *absolute* constructions of identity limit human interaction and subsequent experience. As a result, the security a particular group receives from perceiving itself as homogeneous makes involvement outside of the group not only unnecessary, but potentially threatening. Therefore, when Tim Chip, a professional hockey player and personal acquaintance of mine, claims that “Guys are guys, no matter where they are” and, “I find it’s always easier to deal with guys than with women [*quietly chuckles*]” he evokes the comfort some players find dwelling within these rigid boundaries (Chip interview). These statements—however misleading—illustrate the severe limitations the players face immersed in their own closed environment.

Moreover, these statements are, in fact, erroneous as the environment is not as “intact” as it initially appears; the competitive nature of the occupation pits players against one another. In order to survive within the league players must be opportunists, placing their own welfare above others or another player will soon replace them. The players are constantly reminded of this threat, as when coach Hal Murphy verbally accosts the

players for their “gutless” performances the night previous: “Lots of guys want your fucking jobs, so just think of that next time you step onto the ice!” (Fieldnotes, 18 Nov. 1996). Therefore, any comfort the players are able to draw from this brutally competitive environment is cherished and paradoxically serves as the only real sense of stability in the players’ lives. More specifically, the ability to perform within a team dynamic is crucial for individual success, and if team success is dependent upon team unity, forming special bonds within the group (as superficial as they may be) is a means to an end for player empowerment. As a result, the group is the primary source of power, thus dictating the manner in which players respond within it and how they articulate its significance. The homogenized male, then, needs to be understood as a product of the process of player empowerment, as players attach themselves to this predefined team/group identity. But the question then becomes, is power truly achievable within this closed and discriminatory environment? In the next chapter we shall explore how expressions of power are manifested through group solidarity, while simultaneously contributing to group and individual powerlessness.

Chapter Eight

Male Bonding

Once I loved other sons as though I found my brother again: the years of their growing muscles and tanned skin, the evening excursions to the arcades downtown where our faces were reflected in the games the way someone standing in the living room is on TV when it is off. I thought I could never leave. The traded player says, I cannot go, I belong here on the shared ice; these are the men I've learned to skate with, take a pass, shoot, share the jubilation of the goal. But he goes, and he puts on another uniform, and he loves his old team from a great distance, loving like men around their loss. (Harrison 13)

Power, Play and Powerlessness

The celebrated status of professional hockey players in Canada is a phenomenon experienced by the players in virtually all aspects of their lives. In addition to adoring fans cheering and holding up signs, expressing their admiration for the players during the games, the players also receive privileged treatment away from the arena. In *The Game*, Ken Dryden considers this preferential handling of hockey players by the public:

It is this kind of special treatment we have grown accustomed to, and enjoy. We have been *special* for most of our lives. It began with hockey, with names and faces in local papers as teenagers, with hockey jackets that only the best players on the best teams wore, with parents who competed not so quietly on the side. . . . On the street, in restaurants and theatres, you are pointed out, pointed at, talked about like the weather. Your picture is hung from a boy's bedroom wall, appears in magazines and newspapers, on radio and TV; hockey cards, posters, T-shirts, and curios, as everywhere, anywhere, name, face thousands of times, flashed to an audience that waves into TV cameras, that writes to editors to have proud and yellowed clippings in their wallets. (158-59)

The players are international celebrities and are treated as such by the public. In an interview with *Reds'* athletic therapist Al Jones, he explained to me that

they're [the players] professional athletes, and everyone wants to be associated with a professional athlete. So you make friends pretty quickly. And the guys, they get a lot of stuff, and they want to give you stuff. Because they want to be with you. You know, free meal, to fifty percent discount on clothing; they want to give you this that and the other thing. And the guys eat it up. (Jones Interview, 9 Nov. 1996)

The public's privileging of professional hockey players naturally provides the players with a sense of importance and a sense of power. They see themselves as being highly fortunate, as *Reds'* forward Jerry Wall one day asked me rhetorically: "What would you rather be doing on a Tuesday night than playing a hockey game in front of thousands of people?" (Wall Interview, 11 Nov 1996). Yet this privileged position does not guarantee power; in fact, the celebrated status of professional hockey players ironically contributes to their vulnerability in the labour process.

The game of professional hockey is riddled with paradox, in that it is fundamentally the product of big business, yet the business aspect of the game is perceived by the media, the public and many players and coaches to be the bane of hockey's existence. The players are praised for playing for "the love of the game" and scorned and considered selfish if money takes precedence in their career decisions. As a result players have generally

avoided the business aspect of the game and have focused their energies on the game itself, leaving themselves ignorant of League and franchise operations. The fortune of being a professional hockey player and the special status that comes along with it have seriously prevented the players from scrutinizing their role within the labour process. When I asked veteran *Reds'* goaltender Paul Proux if he resented any of the demands placed upon him by this franchise, such as curfews or the general monopolization of his time,¹ he responded indignantly:

You're paid—you're expected that you're being paid to do that job and it's a great job. And uh, you realize that there's a lot of other people that are trying to get your job. So, uh, no, I think that somebody who would not respect that would be a fool. Because it's such a great job. (Proux Interview)

Unfavourable labour circumstances are rationalized by the players and interpreted merely as occupational hazards which are quickly dismissed. Within this chapter we shall consider professional hockey as the disempowering process it is, as opposed to the occupation of privilege that it is perceived to be. Moreover, the players' responses to the demands of labour will be explored in hope of elucidating what can be best understood as a disadvantaged negotiation of power.

¹ The hockey player's schedule, both on and off the ice, is dictated largely by the team, as Tim Chip explained earlier: "you're told when to get up, when to go to bed. Your travel plans are always made for you. You never have to make any decisions" (Chip Interview).

From Childhood Dream to Labour

There have been great strides made by the National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) and the Professional Hockey Players' Association (PHPA)² to inform the players and the public of the injustices done to professional hockey players over the years by the Leagues and by team owners. The two associations have also been instrumental in raising the minimum league salaries and providing suitable benefits, i.e. health plan and pensions.³ Yet with this said, from my discussions with Reds' players, and other players around the League, it seems possible that the majority are barely cognizant of their rights as professional hockey players. I spoke to Bob Tucker, a player representative⁴ for one of the visiting AHL teams during the *Reds'* season, and he explained to me that "It's a really funny situation, because I don't think players really realize their rights until something negative happens to them" (Tucker Interview). Furthermore, it appears that the players have no real interest in ascertaining what these

² The NHLPA (1957) and PHPA (1967) are the two players' associations that have been organized to address the working needs of professional hockey players and to collectively represent the players in their dealings with management and their respective professional leagues.

³ There have been two strikes within the past five years of the NHL which have been the only strikes in the League's history. The strikes are indicative of both the players' increased involvement in hockey as a business and the growing power of the NHLPA.

⁴ Each professional hockey team elects a player representative (player rep) who provides representation for the players if there are any individual or collective grievances that arise throughout the season.

rights may be. In a discussion I had with the *Reds'* player representative Jerry Wall, I asked if the players were concerned about what their union offered them in terms of protection or bargaining power. He responded:

No, well I mean it's not something that we worry about. I mean we're here to play hockey. I think it's nice to have that [the player's association] but as far as you say, concern, I mean you know, we know it's there, so it's just a comfort I guess. (Wall Interview, 11 Nov 1996)

Being given the opportunity to play professional hockey for most players is the fulfilment of a childhood dream, and thus, few scrutinize their job and/or working environment. The fortunate position in which the players perceive themselves to be prevents them from looking critically at their role within the labour process, and subsequently leaves them highly vulnerable in an already disadvantaged employer-employee relationship.

Yet despite the apparent complacency of the players, they are quick to point out that what they are doing is in fact labour intensive, and their experiences playing hockey have been quite different from what they expected when first entering the league. A year previous to conducting my ethnography of the *Reds* I had a discussion with a former hockey acquaintance of mine who is currently playing in the National Hockey League. I asked him about his experiences playing pro hockey and he responded by saying that those "outside" of hockey may perceive it as a game

that grown men are paid to play, but it is seen quite differently from the “inside”:

You know, it's been something when you're a kid you always watch—you never think it can happen—there's a chance. And when you do get a chance, you just want to play that one game, just to say that you did it. And then once you did it, then you just want to—okay I want to play a year. And then it just snowballs and snowballs. And you know what it is, it's an accomplishment, and it's a job, and it's a living. And what I found out after, after the novelty of making the NHL wore off, you know, you can look at it, and being on the inside, it's not a game like what people see on the outside, it's a job. And there's good days, there's bad days. There's days you just don't want to go. And then there's days where you couldn't have imagined doing anything else. But people look at it, and you know, you can talk to anyone, I'm sure, and they would say, but you're in the NHL; I would do anything to play in the NHL. And it's easy for them to say that. And it's also easy for me to say that it's not all that it's cracked up to be. Because it is great. You know, its premier, but, it is, it's a hard go. It's—you got to take the good with the bad. (Maxwell Interview)

The public perceptions of professional sport are generally based on the glimpses provided by the media either through live game telecasts or interviews conducted before, during and/or after the actual games played. These brief and often skewed images of professional sport, along with the seemingly recreational language used to discuss the experience—‘games,’ ‘played’—represent poorly the nature of life as a professional hockey player. In an interview I conducted with *Reds'* goaltender Paul Proux, he responded

angrily to my comments about the potential fun a hockey player experiences while living on the road:⁵

Robidoux: I noticed just now in the practice that this was probably one of the most playful practices you guys have had in awhile. And I'm wondering if it's because you guys are going together as a team on this road-trip. Do you guys generally have fun taking these road trips?

Proux: Fun! You know, they're not always fun. You know they're hard—a lot of times they're hard. Today we are starting in Troy and tomorrow night we travel for five or six hours on the bus. The next morning we get up and then we play that night. I don't know how you would call [*laughing*] that fun! It's hard; it's not easy when you finish a game and you are just drenched, and you are tired and stuff, and you have to go sit on the bus two-by-two, in a bus for six hours. I'm not too sure guys would rather be at home and just go back to their place. So, no, I don't think so. (Proux Interview)

Despite the players' claims that playing hockey is a propitious situations, it was evident early on that they were consistently expressing sentiments that undermined this apparent contentment. While the players all spoke highly of their trade, there often appeared to be a conscious and unconscious struggle with their predicament.

Examples of this conflicting dialogue are numerous, but I will focus on two that are especially revealing. The first centres on one individual, Jack Hammer, who was sent down from the *Reds'* parent club in November—

⁵ I made this assessment because of numerous comments made by players that described hockey road trips as pleasurable, male-bonding experiences. *Mustangs'* goaltender Sam Boland stated "that it's [life on the road] fun, because we're always with the players, uh hanging around. . . . And , it's just

meaning he was demoted—after playing in the NHL for over fifteen years.

As an older player in the league (thirty-eight) his skills were not as sharp as they once were, and his services became redundant. In order to demote Jack the parent organization was required to place him on waivers, meaning that any other team was free to pick up his contract if they desired his services.

Jack had signed a large contract three years earlier, however, and this prevented teams from selecting him. In other words, Jack was now a financial burden who easily cleared waivers, thus forcing the demotion upon him. As a result he had two options: continue to play for the Troy *Reds* and hope to be traded by the *Reds*' parent club: or, retire. I truly felt sorry for Jack, as I had watched and admired him throughout his career and was curious to find out what his intentions were.

We met for an interview after a mid-week practice, for which Jack brought me into the dressing-room once the rest of the players had departed. He had just finished undergoing therapy for a shoulder injury and while being interviewed he was wired to a device that he said was sending electric pulses throughout his shoulder in hope of healing damaged muscle tissues. I did not waste any time in my questioning and began asking him what his response was to this demotion; I asked him if he had any ill feelings towards management:

fun being around with the boys. And it's a great part of hockey I think"

Well, I can't complain about the way they treated me and my family. And I think they do respect the fact that I put in a lot of time. But, you know it's results, and if there is no results they have to make a change. And you know I respect that. And just like the fact that if I'm playing well I want to play more often. So you know, I can't complain about the organization at all. I mean they're first class. . . . it all depends on your, you know, on results and I wasn't getting results when I played so they had to do something. (Hammer Interview)

As the interview progressed, however, Jack's positive articulations of his experience in professional hockey were slowly being overshadowed by brief and somewhat awkward expressions of bitterness:

Well, you know, to be quite frank, it [hockey] probably cost me one marriage. I mean I'm re-married again. And you know I'm willing to accept that my first wife couldn't handle what hockey brought. Because once I got traded, from Atlantis, where I was living, things seemed to fall apart. So you know, it probably cost me that. So you know—yes, there is no doubt that it puts a lot of strain on being away all the time, and on your kids. I mean I have two daughters that live in Atlantis all the time. And you know, last season I didn't see them for eight straight months. You know, from the start of the season I went to training camp until the season was over; I went back there in the summer. And when I talk to them it's not the same. You know when they're young like that, so it does put a strain on your family. (Hammer Interview)

Later, Jack began talking about the inevitable end of his career which furthered this critical introspection:

If you're good at one thing, then that's pretty good. . . . But once hockey's put aside, you know—when I don't have hockey I don't have anything else really. But, but once hockey's put aside and I'm done playing, is there something else that will give me that same gratification? I think that's where a lot of guys have trouble when they're done their pro-careers is making that

(Boland Interview).

adjustment to something else to get that satisfaction from everyday like you do in hockey. There may not be anything, there may not be anything and there hasn't been anything for a lot of guys. . . . it's like I have to find something else that I'm good at, and well, this is all I know.

Despite Jack's self-acknowledged troublesome situation (and Jack is better off, both financially and in terms of career longevity, than the majority of players who have played professional hockey) he does not abandon his positive stance towards the League and the way he has been treated. It is this desire to remain a part of the game that keeps Jack Hammer in Troy working furiously in hope of becoming, once again, desirable to an NHL franchise; it is his desire that makes him that much more vulnerable to exploitation, and thus, virtually powerless.⁶

Jack Hammer's commentary is especially illuminating if we consider remarks such as, "I can't complain" (which he says twice in the opening passage) and "you know, I respect that" (Hammer Interview). Even after a broken marriage and being alienated from his children, and with no practical life skills to help him make the transition out of hockey, he publicly supports the League and its ideology. But Jack's puzzling stance is less troubling when we hear his teammate, Peter Copper, naturalize the exploitative

⁶ Jack Hammer played brilliantly for the *Reds* throughout the season, but despite his efforts was not picked up by an NHL club and was eventually shipped to an independent (without NHL affiliation) International Hockey League (IHL) franchise in the southern United States. This move to the IHL highly reduces Hammer's chances of returning to the NHL.

situation of professional hockey. My discussion with Peter began when I

asked him to explain the “waiver” rule in pro-hockey, to which he responded:

guys that have played over three years are eligible to be picked up by other teams if they want to before being sent right down to the minors—the minor league system. But now-a-days, not many players are really touched. It’s very rare that a guy gets picked up. Except for the waiver draft, and that’s a different example where guys do get picked up because it is an official day. In other words, I think that the GM’s [general managers] just say, don’t touch my guy and we won’t touch yours. And leave it at that kind of thing. So that’s basically how the waivers go. And there’s two weeks conditioning too, where guys get sent down just for two weeks, but they don’t have to clear waivers. (Copper Interview)

When I sought clarification by asking Peter if “the waiver system [is] supposed to free up players,” he answered:

It’s supposed to be good for the player, but it hasn’t really worked out to the benefit of us. It pretty much came in about two years ago when they [NHLPA] signed the new agreement with the NHL owners. Unfortunately we figured as players it would work a little better where guys would get picked up—go on other teams and get opportunities elsewhere. Or maybe another team needed a player; the type of player that’s being sent down by another club.

Again I asked, “So it seems like management and ownership seem to be able to keep their stranglehold on where players are playing?”

Yeah, kind of, kind of. Yeah. I mean, we as players have got a little more lee-way than we used to. Before they pretty well controlled everything, but we got a little bit more out of our last agreement that could benefit us as players.

The fact that Peter was clearly aware of what was happening to him, yet resisted being critical of his situation, fascinated me.

I pursued the matter further by asking Peter how he felt about being sent down to the minors⁷ after spending so much time playing in the NHL. His response is noteworthy as he not only accepts his situation, but actually commends the team for treating him accordingly:

Well, it's part of the business of hockey. Right now for me, I'm injured and I haven't played in a month. So, as a matter of getting healthy I'm coming to play some games. And you know if I was running a team, that's what I would do with the players too. Cause it's the business side. You don't want your people sitting around when they can be getting better or, improving their skills by playing elsewhere. And that's pretty much how the teams deal with them now-a-days. And as players it's our job to accept that and, you know, work our way back to where we want to be. (Copper Interview)

What Peter does not reveal here, however, is that “getting better” or “improving their skills” comes at an enormous price for the players because the vast majority of players have signed “two-way” contracts. What this means is that players will receive a certain sum of money playing in one league and another sum if they are demoted to a lesser league. In the AHL/PHPA bargaining agreement, a two-way contract is described as follows:

A Player on an AHL contract which contains specific provision for assignment to lesser leagues shall receive only those benefits which are provided to players in such a league, during period of assignment. (16)

⁷ Peter, like Jack Hammer, was previously up with the *Reds*' parent club but had recently been demoted and was currently playing with the *Reds*.

NHL contracts are also fashioned around the two-way clause, and thus, players may sign an enormous contract to play in the NHL, but they must actually play in the NHL to receive the money for which they initially signed. Moreover, the discrepancy between the two salaries is considerable, meaning substantial financial losses for time not spent in the NHL.

A concrete example of the two-way payment system can be seen with *Reds'* goaltender Paul Proux. In an article in the *Troy Examiner*⁸ it reads that "Proux will earn \$400,000 Cdn if he remains in the NHL, and only \$55,000 if he's relegated to the minors" (31). Therefore for the time Paul Proux spends playing with the *Troy Reds* as opposed to the parent organization, he will be losing approximately eighty-six percent of his salary. There are players who have managed to sign one-way contracts, but those players with the bargaining power to make such a deal—the exceptionally skilled players—will likely not be demoted, and thus, the one-way contract is of little to no consequence to management or to these few fortunate individuals. Hence, the significance of Peter's rationalization of his predicament becomes that much more difficult to comprehend if we consider the huge financial consequences of his perceived opportunity to work his "way back to where he wants to be." To make matters worse, aside from a few brief stints up with the parent organization, Peter remained in Troy to

⁸ A fictitious title has been substituted for the actual name of the paper for

finish up the season, and consequently, never did get to move back to where he wanted to be. As opposed to expressing any resentment of his situation, Peter accepts it as “part of the game” because “that’s just the way it works” (Copper Interview).

The players’ description of their situation within professional sport is often paradoxical; it is filled with love and pride in their work, countered by expressions of maltreatment. Both Jack and Peter are cognizant of their precarious position within the labour process yet both refrain from directly criticizing the league or speaking against the way the league has treated them. Instead, difficulties encountered are rationalized as being “part of the job,” and most often articulated as a positive experience:

You knew which way the game was going when Wayne Gretzky got traded. I mean there’s the greatest hockey player ever, and a guy can look at him and say—still with great years left in him—we’re going to trade him, because for some reason it’s going to be better for the team. So, if he can get traded, anybody in the league can get traded. And that’s what happens you know, they look at you as a commodity or as a piece of meat, and they say we got to move you on because we want this guy here. You know, it happens a lot. It’s a lot harder for people with families and kids who are in school and they have to move them out. So I guess in that way I’m a little lucky and got no one travelling. You know in my younger years I didn’t mind it. It was a lot of fun, single guy, travelling all over North America. (Falk Interview)

Despite the fact that Jim Falk is describing professional hockey as a corporate structure that treats players as chattels to secure franchise

the sake of anonymity.

prosperity, he accepts it as part of the trade, and turns it into an opportunity to see parts of the world that he would not have seen otherwise. Jim and I went on to discuss the various injuries that he incurred over the years playing in over sixteen cities and again, the same thinking process is disturbingly evident:

Falk: There's always the minor injuries that keep you out for a couple of games here and there. But they add up over the years.

Robidoux: What kind of injuries would they be?

Falk: Uh, broken knuckles, broken fingers, *[pause]* uh pulled muscles *[pause]* minor separated shoulder; all kinds of stuff like that.

Robidoux: Cuts and stuff like that?

Falk: Yeah, cuts. I had one of my testicles split in half in Junior with a slapshot *[we burst out laughing]*. So I was out for a couple of games.

Robidoux: So these injuries are quite common for hockey players?

Falk: Yeah, I—you know, I think uh, depending on what you do, injuries are going to be there. You know, I guess they say now it's people who sit in front of a computer all day are coming up with these problems, these health problems and stuff. So, my point of view is that uh, you know hockey's a rough fast game and there's going to be a greater chance of more serious injuries, but, you also have a chance to get injured just walking down the street and stuff. So, that's about it.

Robidoux: Do you feel any chronic pain at all?

Falk: Uh, mostly my hands, I feel a little, I guess it would be a little arthritis. Each morning I get up and I can hardly tighten my skates up. I mean, but then again that's—everyone gets

arthritis don't they? I mean I'm turning thirty-one next week, next month, so I'm getting up there in age. It feels like some mornings I wake up and, my whole body is sore: muscles and everything, shoulders and that. You know its probably got something to do with my age and playing the game. (Falk Interview)

Jim equates "split testicles," the "inability to tie his skates" and chronic muscle and joint pain to natural ageing processes and the potential danger of "walking down the street." His response is typical, as few players challenge their predicament within the labour process, which makes Ken Dryden's response to his situation especially significant:

It has never seemed right to me that someone should have that power over me, or over anyone. . . I simply find it demeaning. And whenever I've lingered with the thought long enough to confront myself, I've always come to the same conclusion—that if I were ever traded, no matter where, I couldn't accept the helpless, shabby sense of manipulation I would feel and retire.⁹ (147)

Dryden is aware of his powerless position within the Montreal Canadians' organization and sees retirement as the only escape from his predicament. But without the education or any real formal training in anything but hockey, retirement for most players is not a real option. Reds' athletic therapist Al Jones once told me in an interview that the majority of Reds' players

⁹ These comments now seem ironic since Ken Dryden was hired in 1997 by the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL to be their General Manager. As General Manager Dryden's duties will involve, among other things, making *player trades* in order to improve a Leafs' team that is currently one of the weakest in the League.

don't even know how to go to a bank and open up an account. They've never done this before because their *Mommies* have done it for them or their hockey team's have done it for them. They haven't been exposed to these things that they have to do like renting homes, going and buying food, getting car insurance. All these things: getting a telephone installed; getting cable installed" (11 July, 1997).

Do players, then articulate a response to their subordinate roles in the labour process, or do they passively accept the "business" of hockey and try their best to function within the system in place?

Crucial here, however, is that despite this apparent passivity the players *are* aware that the labour process has at its core a conflicting relationship, whereby the demands of one group involve the exploitation of another. And it is through this fundamental acknowledgement that the conflict arises; although the players are rarely seen challenging the existing hegemony, they resist the demands of labour both consciously and unconsciously to create their own relevant work world. What perhaps is most difficult to conceive is behaviour that is oppositional, yet not intellectually motivated or perhaps even understood by the individuals involved. In other words, how real can this antagonistic relationship be, if the players are not fully cognizant of their own role within this power/manipulation dynamic?

But in fact, resistance does exist as players enter this relationship with the dominant managerial corporate culture, where labour is typically

exploited for the financial success of ownership. The players' resistance is simply achieved most often without the means or desire to rationalize their experience within the labour process, and often in a form not easily identifiable. For *Reds'* players, it was manifested through play. The greatest difficulty which players face while playing professional hockey is the pressure placed on them to perform flawlessly on every occasion. This emphasis on success and winning, however, undermines the nature of sport, since losing is experienced far more often than winning.¹⁰ Hence the "winning is everything" sensibility of professional hockey is purely illogical. By refusing to acknowledge the value of losing, ownership has altered the dynamic of the performance to the degree that "play" is no longer possible. The players are not engaged in play, but rather, they are working at producing "victories." Without winning, the game is *lost* in both senses of the word: the "losers" who have failed to produce, lose whatever points that were available to them through victory; moreover, what is presented as a game is also lost, as the process of playing is inconsequential if victory is not achieved.

Thus, the players struggle to regain control of the labour process by turning back into play what management has turned into work,. While the

¹⁰ A professional hockey league season is inherently a series of competitions where *one* team becomes champion through a process of defeats. Teams play off against one another until only one team is left remaining. This *one* team

business of hockey has and continues to be seen as being outside of the players' control, the game itself becomes contested by the players.

During the games you know, you basically can control what happens out there, because you're out there playing. It's not the management, it's not the coach or anything. And you know, you can control what's happening during the game. But it's the things that happen after the game, or outside the game, or different moves, or different moves the organization makes that you can't control, or things like that. But during the game, as long as you're playing—as long as you're on the ice—you have control of what happens. . . . so, basically when you're on the ice, you pretty much control your own destiny. I mean there's five guys out there, but, your job—everyone else has a job with a role and you can pretty much control it. (Jackson Interview)

Thus, the players discuss hockey as a dichotomous experience:

There are two things here: one is the business part of it; and two, is the love of the game. And you always have to keep that love of the game there. If you take it too far, where I mean the game is coming into a lot of money and you don't have that love of the game, you're not going to succeed. And it's just, you just have to make sure you keep the game fun, and just keep going out there and working hard every day. (Toll Interview)

The occupation of professional hockey can be seen, then, in terms of any capitalist labour institution; and just as the labourer in any other work culture attempts to "gain informal control of the workplace," the player "transforms work into a game" where "the intensity of exploitation in the labour process" is informally resisted (Dunk 7). As a result, play within the workplace can be a cultural signifier that communicates individual and group empowerment.

is the champion; the rest are losers.

Playing for Power

I appreciated the importance of play for the *Reds'* players at the conclusion of every practice when they “played” at hockey as opposed to working at the game. In Chapter Five, where I alluded to aspects of the games the players played and the enthusiasm with which they played, I made the comparison to children at play. I wrote in my fieldnotes during an especially playful time, “These guys are also ‘pros’ at play,” (15 Nov 1996). My comment was made in response to the fact that the players’ behaviour was not simply random moments of horseplay, but rather a variety of games with definite structure and purpose. There were two primary games that made up the players’ repertoire of play which were orally constructed and reconstructed over the season. As I watched the players make rules and instruct and reprimand those who either did not know the rules or intentionally tried to break them, it was evident that the game-making process was just as important as play itself. The players were relatively loyal to the game framework they designed, which suggested that the game was important and something meaningful to them as a group. The first game was called “Juice-Boy”; the second was the “Rebound game.”

The first game—“Juice-boy”—is better known as the game “Showdown” and is one of the first forms of hockey players learn when they come to the sport. Although players play the game during informal practice

times, the game has been traditionally played as a form of road hockey.

Quite simply, the game involves one player approaching the net in an attempt to score a goal, while another player is in net trying to prevent the goal from occurring. The game can be played with a minimum of two players and does not have a maximum number of players who are able to play. The point of the game is to score, and if someone fails to score he is out; the last remaining player to score wins the game. If there is only one shooter the point of the game is to score more goals than the goaltender can stop, and vice versa for the goaltender: the goaltender must stop more goals than the shooter scores. The game's appeal is threefold: first, it is simple; second, its structure allows for as many people to play as there are available to play; and third, the game captures the most exciting moment of hockey: the breakaway. Moreover, it is a time where players can put their skills on display, unfettered by the constant checking that would occur in an actual game. Similarly, it provides goaltenders the opportunity to make the spectacular save without worrying about the repercussions of letting in a goal. As a result, the game is filled with flair and excitement which proves to be exciting for those participating and those watching as they await their turn.

During the *Reds'* practices the game "Show-down" was renamed "Juice-boy" and was also slightly modified. The game still maintained the same principle of moving in one-on-one with the goaltender and attempting

to score, but additional stipulations had been added to make the game more interesting. First, as opposed to one shot, the shooter was given two opportunities to score. If he did not score he was placed into the non-scoring group; if he was the only one in the non-scoring group he automatically lost. Second, the players were required to start from approximately ten feet from the goal and they had the option of shooting from a standstill or moving in on the goalie in breakaway-like fashion. Third, after the first attempt, the player had to come to a complete stop at the place of origin before taking his second shot. If the player did not come to a complete stop and scored on his attempt, his goal would be disqualified and he would end up losing his turn. Finally, those players who scored on either their first or second attempt were removed from the competition and were safe from becoming losers, which is where the game distinguishes itself from the typical showdown format. Instead of looking for a winner in "Juice-boy," the game is designed so that there is only one loser who appropriately assumes the title of "juice-boy."

As I watched the players engage enthusiastically in their game, those players who already scored would tease those who had not been able to score and who were now shooting to avoid losing and becoming "juice-boy." The players who did not score on their first attempt would play-off against one another until one person was left goal-less. For example, if there were only two players remaining and the first person scored on his first attempt, the next player would get two shots to try and get a goal to stay alive. If he was

successful, they would repeat the process again until only one player remained who was scoreless. I did not know the significance of the term

“Juice-boy” until I spoke with *Reds’* forward Peter Jackson, who explained:

That’s [“Juice-boy”] where everybody gets two shots at about the hash-mark. And you can deek¹¹ or shoot. And whoever doesn’t score just keeps playing. And whoever doesn’t score goes again until there is one guy left, and he’s “juice-boy.” And he gets the Gatorade for all the guys who played the game after in the dressing-room. He kind of serves them like a waiter, so, we call him “Juice-boy.” (Jackson Interview)

The game, then, can be seen as a highly playful contest with players humiliating and admiring one another along the way. The players playfully mocked those who failed and at times those who succeeded, but always remained faithful to the game itself. When veteran and infamous tough-guy Jim Falk failed to score one particular practice and was tauntingly acclaimed “Juice-boy,” Falk cursed and scowled at his hecklers, but fulfilled his duties and served drinks to the younger and weaker players after practice. By abiding by the tenets of play, this seemingly insignificant frivolity becomes a highly valued time where players construct their own system of meanings, where they are able to set their own standards of excellence and/or failure. Ironically, then, as opposed to the winning ideology that preoccupies professional hockey, “juice-boy” relies on a *loser* for the game to be completed—the premise is based on locating a loser not a winner—therefore

¹¹ “Deek” is a term used to mean maneuvering around an opponent.

providing an antithetical discourse to the “winning is everything” sensibility imposed upon the players from above. Moreover, the ideological value of play helps us to understand the enthusiastic manner in which players engage in these, at times, outrageous playful episodes.

The other game in which the *Reds*’ players eagerly participated throughout the season was the “Rebound game.” In this game, the players worked together as a team as opposed to the individual challenges of “Juice-boy.” The only team member who provided opposition in this game was the goaltender who tried to prevent the players from scoring. In this respect, the goaltender’s position is uni-dimensional, in that stopping pucks becomes his only task. The goaltender’s unique position on the team places him at odds with the remainder of the team during games and scrimmages, and thus, competition for the goalie is generally individual and functions outside of the constructed framework of play. In this particular game, the goaltender is pitted against at least five forwards who, together, try to score within the game’s boundaries.

The game itself, was quite simple. There was one forward who stood approximately fifteen feet away from the goal who was the initial shooter. His role was to shoot the puck on net in hope of either scoring or generating a rebound (off the goaltender) to allow the remaining players to enter into the game. The remaining players—generally four—stood in pairs on either side of the goaltender, forming a horseshoe shape with the initial shooter (See

Figure B). After the initial shot was taken, a rebound predominantly occurred and the players that were alongside of the goaltender had to gather up the puck and attempt to score before the puck came to a standstill. The players had options in their attempt to score, which were to either pass the puck to one of the other three players; shoot the puck themselves; or fake the pass and shoot.

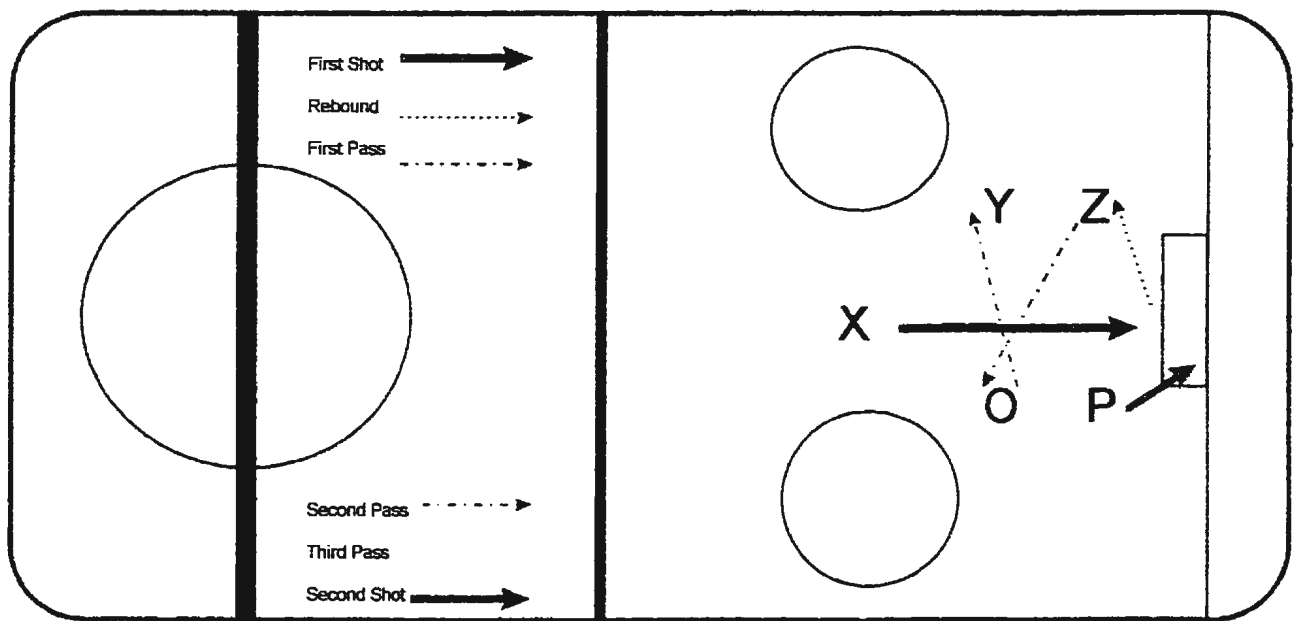


Figure B. The “Rebound Game.”

If the players were not able to gather the puck before it stopped the puck was “dead,” and a point went to the goaltender. If the goaltender was able to corral the puck and smother it, not giving up a rebound, he was also awarded a point. Therefore the players had to be somewhat selective in their shooting and not allow the goaltender the opportunity to stop and cover the puck.

The “Rebound-game” allowed the players opportunities for much amusement and horseplay, and while I watched them, I often found myself laughing at their antics. On one particular day I wrote in my fieldnotes:

- Much laughter and joking is going on here.
- It is funny watching the guys make the rules to suit their needs.
- The guys keep score and after each play, Czech-Republic born player Mikel Zakov calls out the score.

- When the puck nearly dies [puck comes to a standstill] the initial shooter yells “Go Stevenson!! He got it!! He got it!! No, it’s not ‘out’!!!”

The fact that the puck was “not out” kept the puck “alive” and allowed the play to continue to develop, indicated that the players willingly let the rules of play govern their actions. By making this allowance, the players were able to operate completely within the play framework, and thus, draw pleasure from these puerile behaviours. One player’s plea to the others that the puck had been kept “alive” was not done in jest, but rather, with every intention of allowing his team to get another chance to score. Day in and day out the players were found engaging in these playful scenarios—some more intense than others—making it apparent that the concept of play was highly valued: the games themselves were the articulation of this ideal. Thirty-one year old *Reds’* defenceman Jim Falk stated:

I think there’s always going to be the “game” in it: the fun. You know, we’re just a bunch of kids. A lot of these guys are still twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three years old. And we’re, like you said, playing a game. And, it’s fun to me. And I mean, but if I was a plumber on the other hand, if it wouldn’t be fun to me, I wouldn’t be doing it. You know, I definitely wouldn’t be doing anything that I’m not having fun at. And anybody out there not having fun at what they’re doing, then they should move on, because life is too short to be worrying in misery over a job.
(Falk Interview)

Thus, play is ultimately seen by the players as a direct means of achieving ownership of their trade; and conversely, once play and fun is lost, so too is their occupation: “Well it’s [play] important I think. You have to have fun to

do real well, and you know I have to admit, of late it hasn't been a lot of fun. And I don't think I've played as well as I can play" (Hammer Interview). By establishing play as a vital component of the labour process—through games such as “Juice-boy” and the “Rebound-game—players re-order their work world, and in turn subvert the “work-behaviour” dynamic imposed upon them by management.

Creatively Resisting Systemization

In addition to players recognizing play as a valuable means of resistance to the business of hockey, they also understand play to be a means of returning to the essence of the sport: to return to the game itself. As I stressed earlier in Chapter Five, the game of professional hockey has become systematized to the extent that the “game” has been arguably removed from the sport. In a lengthy but informative passage from Ken Dryden's book *The Game*, Dryden states:

The Italians have a phrase, *invent la partita*. Translated, it means to “invent the game.” A phrase often used by soccer coaches and journalists, it is now, more often than not, used as a lament. . . .

It is a loss they explain many ways. In the name of team play, there is no time or place for individual virtuosity, they say; it is a game now taken over by coaches, by technocrats and autocrats who empty player's minds to control their bodies, reprogramming them with X's and O's, driving them to greater *efficiency* and *work rate*, to move *systems* faster, to move games faster, until achieving mindless pace Still others argue it is the professional sports culture itself which says that games are not won on good plays, but by others' mistakes, where the

safe and sure survive, and the creative and not-so-sure may not.
(132)

In a Canadian context, what journalists and fans (and Dryden himself) are “lamenting” is the apparent loss of the “Canadian game of hockey” that “was weaned on long northern winters uncluttered by things to do” (Dryden 134). A game that was “once played on rivers and ponds, later on streets and driveways and in backyards” is now played in “arenas, in full team uniform, with coaches and referees, or to an ever-increasing extent we don’t play at all” (Dryden 134). The romantic sentiments expressed here are instrumental for establishing and perpetuating the mythological dimensions of hockey in Canada. Typical of these is the concern that what has made hockey—and in mythological terms, what has played a part in the making of a nation—has been put in jeopardy by technology and corporate greed. The lament is that hockey has been removed from the ponds and the streets to become a booming corporate enterprise which is destroying the heart and soul of the game, and ultimately the heart and soul of the players.

The truth is, the game of hockey has not been removed from frozen ponds and backyards, as people of all ages are still seen playing “pond hockey” and “road hockey” across Canada. More importantly here, however, is that hockey was never a game exclusively played in these more informal settings, or for that matter, it was never solely the property of the folk.¹² In

¹² By “folk” I mean simply the people.

fact, the earliest forms of hockey in its vernacular sense were played by “upward striving businessmen and professionals committed to the values of individual achievement through commerce and public service” as opposed to the masses that romanticists would like to believe (Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada* 41). The irony is that it was through the professionalization of hockey that underprivileged classes (whether economically or ethnically defined) were allowed access into the game, which played a significant role in its popularization, and its ultimate status as Canada’s national pastime:

This struggle was particularly evident in those groups which suffered discrimination from the amateurs (francophone, black, native Canadian, women) and the struggles varied from one group to another. But for the males, the struggle was manifested in the gradual but steady legitimation of professionalized lacrosse, ice hockey and football. From 1914 on, professional sportsmen and state-supported amateurs were appropriated as the legitimate example of Canadian sport. (Metcalf “Growth of Organized Sport” 49)

What needs stressing here is that by opening the sport up to those outside of dominant culture, the game itself was transformed from an amateur/bourgeois game to one that reflected the commercial interests of the working class culture that consumed it:

its [hockey] popularization and incorporation into a commodity form for mass consumption occurred when the game was taken over by industrial entrepreneurs, was stripped of its amateur trappings, and was reconstituted as a violent spectator sport in the mining towns of Cobalt, Haileybury, Timmins, Sault Ste.

Marie, and Houghton, Michigan. (Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development* 120)

Gradually as the game moved from the petit bourgeoisie to larger corporate enterprises, “working-class athletes generally became transformed from journeyman players to contractually bound laborers,” (Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development* 121).

It is not surprising, then, that in the contemporary hockey era, the division between players and owners/management continues to exist. The game continues to function as a highly successful capitalist institution, and, it continues to be played by contracted athletes who live largely outside of the business of the sport. The players openly admit to staying outside of business decisions and finances that surround the game—“I don’t like to get involved in that [finances]. I just like to have someone deal with that so I can just deal with my hockey” (Jackson Interview). However, the game itself provides players with a means of asserting themselves as owners, as *Reds’* defenceman Darren Feld claims: “I think once everyone puts their skates on and helmet on, they go out there: we play the game you know. And it doesn’t matter how much money you make, everybody wants to play hard. And everybody is proud” (Feld Interview). It is on the ice that performance is achieved, and as Richard Gruneau writes, for “most players, performances of physical excellence are an expression of self, a side of themselves they miss when they leave the game” (*Hockey Night in Canada* 114). Thus through the

players' comments about success on the ice, it is evident that in order for performance to be fully realized, play/fun is essential. Therefore incorporating into and maintaining elements of play in the labour process (both formally and informally) are critical for individual and group success, and subsequently a means for creativity in the potentially oppressive systems of play that Dryden and others believe to be the root of the "game's" demise.

Granted, the systems in hockey are increasingly becoming more scientific and mechanized in their design and in their execution, yet as was stated earlier, in order for players to produce within these systems, players must find ways of circumventing the systems. Within the passage I quoted from *The Game* there is a statement, "games are not won on good plays, but by others' mistakes, where the safe and sure survive, and the creative and not-so-sure may not," which is inherently nonsensical (132). In order to capitalize on one's mistakes a player (or players) must, in turn, do something creative with the puck not only to create a scoring opportunity, but actually to score. The statement assumes illogically that once a mistake is committed, a goal is an inevitable outcome, which simply is not the case. Players are constantly forced to imagine and to be creative on the ice within the systems in place, to either compensate for human error or intangible misfortunes that occur throughout the game, or, to overcome systems of defence that, in

theory, are infallible.¹³ More importantly, the players themselves discuss creativity and heightened behaviour on the ice as being something outside of what is taught or learned, and in some cases beyond articulation.

There was one particular player on the *Reds*, Jason Dodd, who astounded me throughout the year—in practices and in games—for the magic he was able to perform on the ice. I use the term magic here deliberately to suggest behaviour that defies natural law and human limitations. During one particular practice, Dodd performed a series of moves to go around a defender that left the other player standing still with his mouth open, and in utter disbelief; I wrote in my fieldbook: “The pure talent of Jason Dodd is amazing to watch. He turns the mechanical into an art form” (Dodd Interview). Three days later I asked Jason to talk about this elevated form of performance:

I think, you know it's something tough to teach you know, uh creativity on the ice—anticipation on the ice. I think I just have a knack for anticipating where my players are: maybe where the puck's going to go ahead of other guys. . . . And I think that's probably why I've had some success, you know, because of that. Uh, how to explain it, it's [*pause*—you know, like I said before, I don't really think you can teach things like that. It's just something probably that I developed over the years, uh, playing with other creative guys. I've watched Wayne Gretzky growing up: I think he plays a lot like that. Or Stevie Yzerman, guys like that. They've just got that instinct. . . . I think probably a

¹³ A zero-zero outcome is virtually non-existent in professional hockey, thus thwarting any notion of perfectly executed hockey games. Moreover, fans would not pay to see games that were perfectly neutral in their performance: the unpredictability of North American sport is its appeal, and literally anything can happen on any given night.

high percentage of it is just instinct. You know just for example, if I'm not on my game, if I'm really not concentrating, you know I have a bad game. Or I don't do as well, because I'm not focused on what I have to do. And I think it's more instinctual than probably anything else. (Dodd Interview)

Dodd accredits his success to this instinctual level of play that simply defies explication. It is common for players to discuss this level of play with clichés and exoteric language for the simple reason that it is performed outside of everyday experience:

I, I actually uh—when I'm having a good game, like a really good game—one of my better games—uhm, you know guys call it that in you're in the *zone* or whatever, I guess. I don't know if it's that, but I feel that I can go out there and do things, and I know that I'm not going to mess up. I'm going to do the right play all the time. Or, you know, ninety-eight percent of the times; you're still going to have mistakes, but I'm going to make the right play, the right decision when my total mind set is focused, and I'm totally prepared for that shift or that game. (Dodd Interview)

Similar sentiments are expressed by goaltender Jack Hammer in a conversation I had with him earlier in the season:

Robidoux: I'm wondering about those times during a game when you make a really great save or something, or you really feel yourself in sync with the game; can you reflect on those moments? Or is the play so intense you can't really think about it?

Hammer: No, you know. I mean it's real, you're real conscious of that, and uh, you kind of play in sub—you know, unconscious, but you're really conscious of it when you feel great. And, I think over time when you learn about yourself, you know when you're heading into—I guess the *zone* it's called—and uh, and uh, you realize that you're in the middle of it. But you get to know, you know, how to get there. And uh, and uh, when you're approaching it. And you know, it's a great feeling to know that.

And so when you're not in that *zone*, you know you're working to get that. You know it's frustrating some times when you can't get there. Sometimes you just can't get there for whatever reason, you know, and you—but you're always striving to get there.

Robidoux: You can feel yourself in it though?

Hammer: Yeah! Oh yeah you know! I mean you know when you're not going to get scored on. You know you're right on top of things, yeah! I mean for me anyway, you know it's, it's real conscious.

Robidoux: Is it totally mental or is it physical as well?

Hammer: Oh it's physical! Because all of a sudden you're just so energized! And uh, you know you just I mean *[pause]* the game's easier, but you don't realize that you're working that hard. It's just your energy level gets up so high, and uh, you know you put everything else aside. You just play the game, and uh, you know you just seem to make all the right moves. I mean it's a great feeling you know; you just feel you can't do anything wrong. (Hammer Interview)

Within this state—the *zone*—the players are performing at a level that is beyond comprehension, and thus, beyond what Dryden believes is “taught and learned” (133). While systems and scientific approaches to the game tend to over-intellectualize hockey and challenge player creativity and individuality, it simultaneously forces players to respond with higher levels of artistic performance, ultimately perpetuating player ownership and the intellectual/moral superiority of their trade.

Furthermore, the players are conscious of the fact that in order to enter the “zone” they must resist all that surrounds the game and simply

play—"You just play the game" (Hammer Interview). This zone-experience/phenomenon is considered in detail by play theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. Instead of a zone Csikszentmihalyi describes individuals entering a "flow state" which he define as follows:

From here on, we shall refer to this peculiar dynamic state—the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement—as *flow*. In the flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future. (36)

For professional hockey players, this state is realized through "playing," which makes it a fundamental means of resistance; it is only while "playing" that players escape the oppressive forces (at least temporarily) that dictate virtually every other aspect of their lives:

Everything is—you're told when to get up, when to go to bed. You're travel plans are always made for you. You never have to make any decisions. So, [*laughing*] you come out of hockey without having ever made a decision in your life. (Chip Interview)

It is not surprising, then, that play not only manifests itself on the ice, but also during informal periods where players are together. The intense schedules and long hours the players are required to spend in some capacity serving the team (whether it be collectively on buses, or times engaged in off-

ice training) makes hockey an often gruelling and unenviable occupation.

Players revealed to me that it is “hard to get going every night. Sometimes

you don’t feel like doing it; even if you don’t care about the fans and

everything, you got to do it because someone is chasing your job you know”

(Feld Interview). Others have stated that it is “a big sacrifice to play

professional hockey. There’s no givens; it’s not an easy profession by right”

(Barber¹⁴ Interview). In an interview I conducted with a former professional

hockey player before my research with the *Reds*, the individual not only

described certain difficulties he faced as a player, but also expressed outright

resentment towards the way he was treated by those who ran the

organization:

. . . the way you get treated. Like people, or the team owners, or you know—you’re out there to perform. If you didn’t perform they’d ship you right out to somewhere else. So, you kind of get basically treated like a piece of meat. If you did well you stayed; if you didn’t, you’re playing somewhere else. (Doe Interview)

As a result the daily difficulties of playing professional hockey seriously

challenge what players love about the game and force players to re-insert

their own meaning back into the profession.

¹⁴ Bill Barber is the actual name of the individual interviewed here. He is a former NHL hockey player and the current coach of the Philadelphia Phantoms.

“Acting Stupid Together”

Play once again becomes a response to the players’ predicament in the labour process, and just as the seemingly frivolous acts of play on the ice can be read as acts of empowerment, play in more informal periods is also imbued with meaning. Pranking and verbal jabbing that take place behind closed doors are typical of these behaviours. Jim Falk explains that

the guys go around and play little pranks and fill shoes up with shaving cream and skates and everything—and Vaseline in the gloves. And when Wally [referring to teammate Jerry Wall] says something stupid we got to [*we both laugh*] we got to jump on it. [*He laughs harder*] It’s all in good humour and everyone gets a good laugh out of it. (Falk Interview)

Athletic therapist Al Jones, who oversees and overhears much of the players during these informal periods, states that the players spend much of their time playing through story telling and other forms of oral humour:

Guys like to tell stories. Guys like to have other guys listen to their stories. You know, so you get a lot of that. You know “last night I did this, this and this”; “I was with this person,” whether it was male or female or whatever. And there’s a little bit of—you know the guys want to shock the other guy. They want to be, they want to be king for a minute or something. They want to have a good story because they have all heard great stories; and they want to be the one telling great stories. So, you do get a lot of socializing before practice. And uh, I think it’s good: it lightens things up. (Jones Interview 9 Nov. 1996)

It is important to note that in both Jones’ and Falk’s accounts, there is immediate recognition of how this behaviour benefits the players by raising their spirits and relaxing them. However, the significance of these moments

of jocularity and playfulness remains unarticulated. In fact, these forms of play are often discussed derisively by the players, such as former hockey player Pete Mahovolich who referred to these moments as times to “act stupid together” (Dryden 92). Attempts by players to articulate these informal experiences tend to trivialize the behaviour, rather than reveal with any degree of illumination what many players indicate to be the most cherished aspects of their occupation. The exception is Ken Dryden’s account, which reads:

With no appointments to keep, no agents, no lawyers or accountants to interrupt us, it is our chance to rediscover the team. It happens over a meal, at a table of empty beer bottles, on planes or buses, in card games or golf games, wearing clothes that seem right, but laughingly are not, in the awful outrageous stories we tell that we’ve told too often before; it is our time, as Pete Mahovolich once put it, to “act stupid together.” (Dryden 92)

The difficulty in recognizing the significance of these expressive acts, however, is that their performance appears highly trivial and often absurd. Yet it is precisely the silliness of the acts that imbues them with value and meaning.

One of the few works that seriously approaches the presence of “humour” in professional hockey is Richard Gruneau’s and David Whitson’s *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics*. Gruneau and Whitson discuss these informal periods of play as an integral aspect of the professional hockey experience, but their conclusions do not move beyond

recognizing the entertaining, socially interactive qualities of expressive behaviour. While they are certainly correct in saying that these humorous episodes within the dressing-rooms are part “of what is remembered most warmly” by players reflecting on their past hockey experiences (120), lacking is an adequate analytical discussion of the behaviour itself. They argue:

Jock humour in these circumstances is a zany flow of quips and digs and practical jokes . . . It is a way of sparring and making fun that is characteristic of many male subcultures; and it is something that many men miss when they leave sports for work environments where humorous bantering—which is funniest and has the most meaning in groups whose members know each other very well—is less likely or possible. (120)

Humour does perform a unifying function within this culture, and is a highly valued form of entertainment, but Gruneau’s and Whitson’s conclusions are slightly erroneous. The flaw in their argument stems from not fully considering the dynamics of working-class culture, and not realizing that this “jock humour” is not unique to sport, as it serves as a vital function in most (male) occupational groups. Looking at parallel behaviour within male culture in southeastern Spain, we are informed by Stanley Brandes that “jokes and joking are so important, in fact, that they can be said to provide the main fabric by which men are bound to each other on a daily basis” (97-98). Brandes explains in *Metaphors of Masculinity* that humour is one of the more profound expressive outlets for a group whose members are generally unwilling to express themselves to one another. He continues by saying that the men of this particular region are able to “reveal and share their most

deeply buried anxieties with one another” through jokes, because they are “a safe, jocular release” (98). Without running the risk of being taken *seriously*, men in Spain—as men in a North American culture—are able to open themselves up to one another in a non-threatening fashion. The cathartic value humour provides would understandably make it not only a favourite form of expression, but a cherished one. A. E. Green affirms this position by discussing the value of humour in a coal mining context:

money and beer can be repaid, the saving of a life probably cannot; therefore, in a community which sets great store by reciprocity and co-operation yet mistrusts ceremonious behaviour, formal release from the debt through the informal mechanism of *kidding* is the logical answer. (emphasis added 58)

It is an outlet that allows individuals to express those concerns that would be otherwise left unsaid because of the uncertainty or sensitive nature surrounding the information. According to Brandes, humour that is generated in this particular group is a product of sexual anxiety, which may be true to a certain extent of male working-class culture in North America. There are, however, as Green rightfully indicates, other anxieties and other manifestations of humour that need exploring which are in direct response to the individual’s position within the labour process.

In his investigation of mill workers in Northwestern Ontario, Thomas Dunk argues the notion that workers enter the workforce with a general understanding that the “social and cultural needs and wants of workers are

generally seen as antithetical to the efficient execution of the labour process”

(65). As a result there is a certain level of antagonism among the workers who express their discontent in ways that run counter to the models of efficiency provided by management and ownership. Peter Narváez makes similar observations about resistance within the broadcasting community when he states that “trivial, non-productive behaviors such as joking, kidding, and partying are indispensable to a reporter’s work” (340).

Professional hockey players are no different in this regard, as it has been stressed that athletes entering the pro-ranks face a level of disillusionment with what ownership has done to *their game*, and thus, respond accordingly with their own counter-productive leisurely pursuits. Not surprisingly, then, if we compare responses generated by mill-workers with those generated by professional hockey players, there are similarities:

The Boys [the mill workers] have a variety of leisure pursuits. In terms of the number of hours spent on a given activity, watching television may be the most important. As in many modern homes, the Boys’ living-rooms are arranged around the television, symbolizing its importance in the household. (Dunk 67)

The everyday activity of watching television is highly valued by this work group, just as one professional hockey player informed me that watching *Cheers* on television was cherished in his work environment. While Dunk describes a series of other pastimes, they involve equally mundane activities, i.e. shopping (predominantly a female activity), social drinking and camping

(69-70). The behaviour that Dunk locates here is mentioned by players when they discuss their time away from the formal demands of the job:

we try to hang out as much as we can, outside of practice and stuff like that. Because, you know, we don't know a lot of people from the town and stuff like that. So guys, like me, we do hang out quite a bit. The same guys get together after practice, go out for dinner and stuff like that. On the road we get to hang out more as a team. We do a lot of things: we go out for dinner and when we get a chance after the game, you know stuff like that, we go out together as a group. (Jackson Interview)

Steve Toll states similarly:

you know you're always together; you're always doing something. So, I mean there's not too many times when you're lonely right now it's a lot of fun. Guys go out, and we do what we want. (Toll Interview, 11 Nov. 1996)

What is common to all of these leisure activities is that they are politically and symbolically charged, and hence, these mundane acts need to be interpreted as occasions that are rich with meaning—more than simply the product of men playing a game for a living.

It needs to be stressed that the players are not only able to re-insert play back into their occupation through this time of “just hanging out,” but they also liberate themselves further by openly defying the seriousness and efficiency of professionalization. The demands of labour are subverted by engaging in activities that signify something other than productivity or toil, allowing labourers to, at least temporarily, feel in control of the labour process. Thus, players/workers are able to resist the existing hegemony, and express themselves within their own meaningful occupational reality. As a

result, these informal periods are invaluable to the players, despite the seemingly commonplace appearance of the activities during these times. But, certain questions remain to be asked: how real is this resistance? and are the players truly empowered in the labour process?

Illusion of Power

Unfortunately, the “power” that workers (players) experience is often illusory. Hegemony consists of a “give-and-take” relationship between the dominant and dominated classes, and thus, it is inevitable that minimal victories will be occasionally conceded by those in power, in order to secure their own dominant position. In the case of professional sport, the athletes’ resistance to their subordinate roles has gradually served to contribute to their own subordination. The decision to contest the “game” as the site for worker control has meant that players commit themselves totally to the team and to the overall concept of teamwork. Mastering their trade has meant players dedicating themselves—not only during the season, but during the off-season (their “holidays”)—to arduous training routines which help in their strengthening and conditioning, and developing specific skills. Peter Jackson explained to me that,

For me, it [hockey] consumes all my time and all my energies. And that’s all I think about. Even in the summer basically, I take the summer and I work on off-ice training, working out and weightlifting to try and build up my strength for the upcoming year. And it’s basically a year round job for me, and that’s all

that's on my mind. . . for me, it's a hundred percent hockey and that's—I live hockey basically. That's my life. (Jackson Interview)

In Peter's situation with the *Reds*, his admirable dedication was highly beneficial as his status changed from being a marginal player on the team to one of the top offensive forwards. His achievement was equally felt by the team and the franchise, since a franchise is dependent on team success. Generating surplus capital in professional sport is achieved by producing a winning product, and Jackson's devotion to the game helps ensure corporate revenue.

Therefore turning the game that has been systematized by game strategists back into play is a resistive act by the players, but their resistance simultaneously complies with the mandate owners and game strategists initially set out to accomplish in the first place: that is, to win. And while this relationship first appears to be complementary, in that success is achieved by both players and owners respectively, the relationship is highly exploitative. Dedication to a team sport requires players to dedicate themselves to a "team" philosophy, which in its most basic sense, places the team first and individual second. The players who are seen taking refuge in the comfort of the team dynamic, and utilizing team dynamism as a response to the oppressive forces that surround the game, end up celebrating their

subordinate positions through this same philosophy. To “be a team-player”¹⁵ requires a selfless approach to the game, and for players to be subservient to the structures in place. In fact, subservience is celebrated by the players, as it becomes a marker for individual commitment and dedication to the “game.”

What I mean by “celebrated subservience” can be illustrated through various situations where the players willingly subject themselves to positions of subservience in highly expressive manners. For example, during practice, when a coach blows his whistle, it means that players must immediately stop what they are doing and turn their attention to their coach(es). If the coach signifies that he wants his players to gather around him for more detailed instruction, there will be a second command—either vocal or kinesic—that draws the players towards him. It has been stated earlier that formal practice-time is carried out efficiently and players are constantly moving through their drills, or assembling for the next one to be performed. Therefore, when the coach signals for players to gather around him, the coach does not want players to casually convene, but to rush over and stand or kneel in front of him, waiting for the next bit of instruction to be dispatched. The expectation is already perpetuating subordinate behaviour, but the manner in which the Troy *Reds* carry out the behaviour celebrates

¹⁵ *Be a Player* is ironically the title of the NHLPA’s television program that airs weekly on The Sports Network (TSN). The program, which consists of game highlights and the occasional interview, is essentially a marketing tool for professional hockey.

the premise by turning it into a race. Instead of players simply complying with the command and gathering around the coach, the *Reds'* players race one another to the coach, and the last person who arrives is forced to sprint one lap of the ice. Interestingly, this game's structure is similar to that of Juice-boy where there are no winners, only a *loser*.

Once again, the race needs to be recognized as the multivalent act that it is, in that the players have turned their subordinate roles into a game, and hence the act serves as means of subversion. However, the act simultaneously expresses the utmost compliance, and the player who complies least—finishes last—must suffer the consequence of conditioning himself further by skating the extra lap, and hence, contributes further to his own subservience to the demands of labour. By racing towards Murphy, the players articulate what sociologists Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Jones describe to be the inherent goal of management: to attain maximum control over activities, while at the same time achieving a measure of voluntary compliance (226). In effect, the players are racing towards their own subordination through their efforts to reassert some level of control back into the labour process. The paradoxical reality that presents itself is typical of any hegemonic relationship; as Thomas Dunk explains, “given the tools the working class have to work with, their response sometimes is ineffectual and

generates further complications” (153). Therefore the working class may

“resist it and react against it” but they

are trapped in a veritable hall of mirrors. The commoditization of all aspects of life gives rise to appearances which mask or distort reality. In their attempt to escape this hall of mirrors and find a world where things are what they seem, they must use the images reflected in the mirrors. . . . The sole reward for their effort is, often, to become further embedded in the world they were trying to escape. (Dunk 160)

Much of the resistive behaviour that transpires both formally and informally within professional hockey is a manifestation of the “subordination and impotence” of “the thousands of boys and men who played the game” (Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* 228). There was one particular episode during a *Reds*’ practice that I found especially revealing. The situation involved veteran NHL goaltender Jack Hammer—after being demoted to the *Reds*—attempting to express himself as an equally subordinate member of the *Reds*’ team. Hammer is one of the few players signed to a one-way NHL contract who is having to play in the AHL because of circumstances that were elucidated earlier in this chapter. He had one more year to his contract this particular season, which was paying him \$962,500 (American), which is \$912,000 more than the average salary of an American Hockey League player, and thus, of his *Reds*’ teammates (“NHLPA Compensation”). During one of the races described above, where the players raced to the coach after he called them, Hammer finished last. Because

goaltenders have the disadvantage of wearing heavier and bulkier equipment than their teammates, they are exempt from the contest. Despite this, and the fact that Hammer was a star player within the franchise, he willingly accepted the loser's fate. In my fieldnotes I wrote:

- Hammer, a recognized star finishes last and skates the symbolic lap around the ice.
- This says much as Hammer equalizes himself among players by willingly accepting the punishment. He is a star but wants to illustrate he is no better than anyone, which really endears himself to the rest of the team. (5 March 1997)

The qualities of selflessness expressed by Hammer are noble, and for this “sacrifice” (and many others Hammer performed throughout the season) Hammer is a favourite among the players and team personnel. I overheard the Team and Media Relations Co-ordinator say about Hammer's demotion “He's really got a good attitude about it” (Personal Fieldnotes, 10 Dec. 1997).

There is a plethora of scenarios that illustrate further these imposed acts of subordination: such as Ted Simms taking on more work by skating exceptionally hard and long in order to avoid another player losing his turn in a drill (Personal Fieldnotes 16 Nov, 1996); or simply players going on the ice early or staying late to take extra practice. The greater the act of subservience, the greater the dedication and commitment to becoming “a player,” and without hyperbole, becoming Canadian heroes. Thus, the illusion of power is twofold, as players appear to maintain control over their work space, and are celebrated by a nation for their dedication. But once

again, their acts are actually empowering those they are attempting to resist, which magnifies the futility of their actions. Sport historian Bruce Kidd captures poetically the inherent irony of the labourer in professional hockey: “hockey players became Canadian Prometheus, imprisoned by the gods of capital and guarded by vultures for the temerity of exciting our national ambition and pride” (228). The heroic status of the players contributes to the illusion of power and as long as they continue to be masters of their trade, they will receive the acclaim that perpetuates the illusion.

Consequently players often express themselves as powerful and secure individuals, and are often perceived as such by an adoring public. Veteran defenceman Jim Falk discusses the manner in which players respond to their privileged status:

I honestly think that hockey players are a little egotistical. I mean, when I played in the NHL and just watching some of the guys and, you know maybe even myself, when we're a group going out to dinner or something, we kind of take on the “big-shot” role or something. I think that's just the way hockey is. It's just the way any sport would be. You know they put you on a different level and then they take your privacy away when it's your time-off and stuff. So, you know sometimes guys get a little, they think they're big shots and stuff. (Falk Interview)

The success the players achieve on the ice extends into their daily lives, and players are “put on a different level.” But, as success on the ice is fleeting, so too is their public appeal. Power, then, is also short-lived and the players seem to feel cheated by this: “I think people forget about you pretty quick, you know. I think people forget about you big-time” (Feld Interview). It is

not surprising, then, that the attachment the players make to hockey is profound, as it serves as a life-support system. Moreover, time away from hockey or from the group reduces any feelings of power or security:

I mean a lot of guys that finish hockey, they find their way back into it somehow, either as a scout, because they just want to be around the guys they play with; or that atmosphere where they can walk into the dressing-room and say "Hey guys how ya doing," and stuff like that. I mean a lot of people, maybe hockey players are insecure too. They like the group—they feel the "big-shot" when they're in the group, but when they're by themselves, you know it's a whole different story. I definitely think that's the situation. (Falk Interview)

The players quickly become dependent on hockey, making them highly vulnerable to the exploitative forces of labour, and ultimately individuals with little power. Therefore the significance of the group and time spent within the group becomes that much more apparent, yet paradoxically increases player vulnerability.

The players consistently resort to a group mentality which is not only tolerated by management, but somewhat cynically encouraged. It is not accidental that dressing-rooms throughout the professional leagues are now furnished with the luxuries of game rooms, whirlpools, televisions and sophisticated sound systems:

Like the new dressing-room has got a big place with a T.V. room and weight room. Like it would be very easy to spend half a day there. And that's done most times now. You know, just hanging around, and talking, and what not. (Maxwell Interview)

The meaningful reality which players have constructed in response to their occupational demands is actually furnished by ownership, which ultimately circumvents the intended process of deliberate subversion. The power which the players believe to exist through creating their own meaningful work world has resulted in a closed social group, where outside influence is generally not welcome. Any bridges formed with those outside of the group potentially threaten group cohesion and unity, thus contact is minimal. As a result the “team” dynamic found within professional sport culture is obviously of great value for the players, but for managers and the ownership it is even more beneficial, for the simple reason that a team’s success directly corresponds to its ability to function as a whole: the closer the team dynamic the better the team.

More specifically, the closed social environment of professional hockey has retarded the players’ ability to grow in almost every capacity—except as hockey players. It has already been shown that the players refer to themselves as “boys” and as people “who do not want to grow up,” which once again, increases their dependency on the team (Toll Interview, 11 Nov. 1996). In response to the players assuming “perpetual boyhood,” team officials treat the players as children both on and off the ice. It starts from the moment the players enter the dressing-room, where their lives are not only ordered by their physical surroundings—from labeled seating to the two sticks of gum placed on their seats before and after games/practices—to the rules and

procedures that players must follow, or suffer monetary fines. Athletic

therapist Al Jones explains the *Reds'* fine system:

Actually it works on three or four different levels. The players issue their own fines to themselves for certain infractions. There are certain infractions that are issued by the coach in terms of on-ice violations—if you take this type of a penalty it's this kind of money. If it causes a goal, it's even more: things like that. There's also fines for penalties, like a stick violation: if you get caught with an illegal stick, that's so much money. If they score on it, it's so much more. And Joe Sell [equipment manager] will have certain fines. Like, it's more common sense things to remind them [the players] to keep the place clean: to respect the place that you work in because if you respect it, it will respect you back type of thing. And the people that work for you, like myself, Jonesy and Selly, then we'll have respect in return. And things like, throwing your jersey on the floor: that's a fine. I mean that's disrespectful to your jersey. You put the jersey on, you wear it proudly. If you take it off and throw it on the floor, what does that mean? It's not a lot of respect for the team you play for and so on. There's a place that Joe wants them put , and if you don't put them there, that's a fine. You know, intentionally breaking a stick in practice—slamming it against the glass because you are mad for some reason, well that's a fine. And that's issued by Joe. I have one or two fines: if you miss any kind of a doctor's appointment that was made by me, it's a twenty-five dollar fine. You do it again, it's a fifty dollar fine. I take the time to make these, and the doctors take the time to see you; you should have enough respect to go and meet those commitments. And I have other little ones too which are not as strict as those things are. If you miss treatment, that is considered missing an appointment. If I told you to be here at 8:30 and you miss it completely, and without a good reason it's twenty five dollars. You come late, and expect me to treat you right now, you go to the end of the line. I take care of the next person. That's the way I have usually done it, and that's the way it's worked. (Jones Interview, 9 Nov. 1996)

It is evident from this fine system that management treats the players as if they were incapable of making any responsible decisions. At the same time,

the fine system contributes to the players' inability to take control of the decision making process and assume proper control of their lives, thus perpetuating player dependency:

I mean every guy on the ice with you, and every guy in that dressing-room, is like family to you. I mean, we're away from home, and we're—a lot of us are young kids. And you know, we stick together. (Toll Interview, 11 Nov, 1996)

The players have little opportunity to mature within the profession and often leave hockey with the same social skills they possessed on entering the game.

There are players who recognize the limitations of this closed environment and attempt to connect themselves to life outside of hockey. However, these efforts are often unproductive because of occupational demands. For example, Lester Dell explained to me that he found the endless hours of hanging out with the team tedious and often found himself without anything to do. Yet despite all this time on his hands, he was informed by his new team that continuing his post-secondary education throughout the season would be too difficult:

I went to school last year. I went to college and I did sign up for university here, but our scheduling—I wasn't able to fit it in, because I'd be there for a class, I'd miss two. I'd be there for two—there's so much travelling. So I was kind of disappointed about that. So there's a lot of free time here. I found it the biggest key; there's so much free time on your hands after practice you know. (Dell Interview, 10 Feb. 1997)

For whatever reason, catching up on classes he would have missed was not an option during all of his “free time,” and as a result, Lester was denied (at least temporarily) access to a world outside of hockey:

last year, I was in a small town and I was living with my billets and going to school; I found it easier to meet people. I mean, besides the guys on the team here, I haven't really had the opportunity to meet too many people. . . it's tough to meet people. (Dell Interview, 10 Feb. 1997)

Moreover, Lester was denied the opportunity to develop himself socially and intellectually, which two areas in which the players are most deficient. Al Jones makes a similar assessment:

the guys that come to us straight out of Junior for the most part are already professional hockey players. You've played junior and you understand that they're practising and playing almost every day. And its hard for them to do school at the same time—some do but some don't. And basically all they've done then is finish high school maybe; some guys haven't even finished high school. And they're concentrating on their hockey as it's going to be their livelihood. . . and they're very limited in their knowledge of all these day to day things that they have to do. So I find that the guys from junior have problems.

Then you have guys that are coming from American colleges and these guys are older. These guys may have gone one, two, three, four, years and may have even finished college. And they're coming here, and they've done a lot of stuff for themselves. But at the same time, these American college kids are treated like gold. Like they don't have to do anything, buy anything; they get everything. Especially from the big schools like a Michigan. . . . they come from these universities, and they didn't have to do a thing. They get housing, they get food they get vehicles—they get all this shit. They get it all free as an incentive to play there. So they don't have to do a lot of things for themselves as well. But they have a better idea of what they have to do in terms of outside stuff.

When the Europeans come over, they're just fucking lost. I mean, we have to lead them by the hand, and it can be

difficult. But for the most part they're just good kids and they just want to play hockey; and they get a lot of help from the front office. (Jones Interview, 11 July 1997)

With limited life-skills and education, players seldom seek contact with those outside of their occupational community, and on the limited occasions where contact is necessary, it is done with a certain degree of trepidation.

Accordingly, the constructed universe of the game has actually consumed the players, to the extent that leaving the game is not only undesired but feared:

once the season starts it's either a game-day or it's an off-day. I mean it all revolves around the game itself: what time the game is; and then preparing for the game right from the start of the season right to the end. That's the way it is, and I really find that only after a few months—by the end of the summer I'm just starting to get comfortable in everyday life: like away from hockey and dealing with that kind of stuff. So I mean the dressing-room is where your whole life is focused for eight or nine months of the year. And that's a little space—I mean you don't get out. (Hammer Interview)

The players are truly in a precarious situation within the labour process, and thus, acquiring control of the workplace may appear to be an act of empowerment, but actually contributes to the players' vulnerability and subsequent exploitation.

The hockey players' status within the labour process has not been presented positively in this chapter, as players are seen to be virtually powerless. The illusion of power, however, is actually increasing for both the players and the general public who are witnessing an enormous increase in the players' salaries and prestige. In fact, gains are being made by the

players and they are increasingly developing awareness of their worth within the billion dollar industry of professional hockey. Most recently, hockey superstar Eric Lindros has successfully resisted NHL hegemony by refusing to play with the organization to which he was drafted and eventually signed with a team in a more lucrative American market. His decision was made possible because "Eric Lindros is one of the few hockey players ever to understand that when the NHL does something for *the good of the game* it really means for the *good of the owners*. And he's determined to turn that understanding to his advantage" (*Net Worth* 356). Lindros has remained steadfast in his decisions to ensure his own financial well-being, and to the chagrin of the League, owners, and many fans, *he*¹⁶ dictates his own future within the League. And as long as Lindros continues to be a dominant force on the ice, he will be in a position to make such demands.

With this said, however, there are significant shortcomings in the players' struggle for power within the labour process. First, and perhaps most importantly, the players see compensatory measures almost exclusively in terms of dollars. Victory is being sought through financial successes, and with the players' sky-rocketing salaries, tremendous gains have been achieved. Yet despite their enormous salaries, the players remain men who are intellectually and socially challenged, but who now are simply more

¹⁶ Or at least his agent (formerly Rick Curran, now Eric Lindros's father Carl

wealthy. The players, in general, still voluntarily position themselves outside of their financial and business affairs, leaving them largely oblivious to the decisions that are made around them. Even players who are making relatively little within the standards of the profession—approximately \$50,000—hand over their financial concerns to experts:

Yeah I have an agent and I have to give him a percentage. Like, whatever I make, I give him a percentage. And then I've invested a little bit; my agent introduced to me, uh, he works in the bank or whatever. So, I kind of uh, save my money because I have to think about a future and that (Dell Interview, 10 Feb. 1997);

and,

Yeah, everyone's got an agent; I do myself. And uh, they pretty much take care of all of that. So that you don't have to worry about it as much as you might think. I know a lot of guys—some guys don't like, their agent—having problems with them. But I haven't had any problems with mine yet. And uh, you know, they take care of all of that kind of stuff. I just like to have someone deal with and just deal with my hockey. (Jackson Interview)

Moreover, the players continue to receive little to no education, and as Jack Hammer states, the players end up being “behind a few years than the guys coming out of college; you probably don't have a college education—a lot of guys don't” (Hammer Interview). Therefore the players remain disadvantaged in every aspect of their lives except in terms of capital. Yet within capitalist discourse, the players are seen to be victorious —“The goal

Lindros) directs career decision-making.

of the capitalist is to maintain, and if possible to increase that part of the value created that goes into his pocket" (McAll 14).

The flaws of capitalist motivated bargaining strategies become evident, however, as the players are gradually forced out of the game early in their lives and left to consider life outside hockey. In spite of their accumulated wealth, the players often know nothing other than the game and have invested everything in an occupation that quickly finds their services obsolete. Moreover, their sense of worth and self-esteem is directly related to their identities as hockey players, and thus, players are seen clinging to a career that will discard them for younger and more desirable prospects. In a book called *Life After Hockey*, author Michael Smith presents the results of twenty-two interviews he conducted with various professional hockey players about their careers and the transition periods they encountered as they left the game. While there were players who were able to make a smooth transition from the game, more typical responses read as follows:

I think that maybe my [Tom Williams] last year in Washington I had a feeling. . . . I probably wasn't going to sign another contract. I was just kind of like a big wave rolling along having a great time and enjoying it and not really thinking about paying attention to what's going on around me (47-48);

and,

It has been difficult. Not financially, nothing like that. Just trying to find a part of me [Ron Ellis] that enjoys doing something other than playing hockey. I need to find that same thing that's going to give me that same amount of satisfaction, the same drive and willingness to get up each morning and work at it. (274)

It is often years before players are able to disassociate themselves from the game, and many simply return in some other capacity: whether as a scout, coach, sport broadcaster or as team executive.

The players' situations only get worse when one considers that most will not have the opportunity to acquire the financial security made possible by playing multiple years in the NHL, signed to a lucrative contract. Statistics show that in the late 1980s, the "average age of players in the NHL is twenty-five and careers there last an average of five years" (Staudohar 148). Players who spend the average time playing in the league will receive an average salary of approximately \$300,000 a season. The \$300,000 figure is a rough figure I have calculated by considering the salaries—provided by the National Hockey Players' Association—of the 835 players signed to NHL contracts over the course of the 1996-97 hockey season ("NHLPA Compensation"). From the listed figures provided by the NHLPA, (see "Appendix B" for listed salaries and calculations) the average salary is actually approximately \$800,000 per season, but this \$800,000 figure is distorted because a minority of players are making upwards of six million dollars a year. Salary parity increases dramatically as we move down the list of players. For example the fifth highest paid player was making \$1,400,000 less than the top paid player; however, the 456th player on the list is making only \$200,000 more than the 797th player on the list, meaning a difference of

only \$200,000 over a span of 341 players. Therefore the salary median would be a more accurate representation of the average players' salary, which works out approximately to \$500,000.

The figure of \$500,000, however, also needs qualifying since the majority of the players on this list are on two-way contracts, such as previously mentioned *Reds'* goaltender Paul Proux. Paul is listed as making \$400,000 a year, but because he spent half of the season with the *Reds* making \$55,000 instead, his yearly salary works out approximately to \$225,000, as opposed to the listed \$400,000. It can then be concluded that average and marginal players are making substantially less than the \$500,000 median. Thus, a high percentage of players are, for perhaps five years, making, on average, \$300,000 a season, and are forced out of the game before the age of thirty. And unless the players are investing their money wisely and/or living below their means, the players not only retire from the game socially and educationally delayed, but without the capital gains that initially appeared to be the only real compensatory measure. The limited power achieved through monetary gain is therefore often non-existent, which illustrates further that professional hockey players are generally disadvantaged individuals. The illusions of power made possible through large salaries, group cohesion, group self-sufficiency and the celebrity status of the players contribute ironically to their powerlessness, as players

subsequently choose not to venture outside of this dynamic. However, their inevitable exit from the group—too often before they are prepared to do so—forces the players to cope with life “in the real world” with little to no formal education, job prospects or life-skills.

Conclusions

I have attempted throughout this discussion of a professional hockey community to illustrate the exclusive nature of the occupation. The players spend vast amounts of time working, playing and living within this closed environment, which ultimately contributes to their personal and professional development. The question remains, however, what the product is of this personal/professional development; or in other words, what is the ultimate product of the trade? It has been illustrated that as players enter the life of hockey they undergo a rite of passage and emerge as something “other” than what they once were on entering. What, then, are the affects of being “gelled into one” for the sake of group unity and overall team success?

To begin, the players are forced to contend with the homogenizing forces that shape them as hockey players, and as men. The physically dominant male construct is articulated repeatedly through occupational demands and through the informal behaviours in the workplace. The limited perception of what it means to be male denies the multiplicity of masculine associations and achieves what Sharon Bird locates as the perpetuation of a legitimized masculine identity:

The presumption that hegemonic masculinity meanings are the only mutually accepted and legitimate masculinity meanings helps to reify hegemonic norms while suppressing meanings that might otherwise create a foundation for the subversion of the existing hegemony. This presumption is especially prevalent in male homosocial interactions, which are critical to

both the conceptualization of masculinity identity and the maintenance of gender norms. (122)

In order to assume what it means to be male within this context, the players are forced to reduce that which does not fit within this limited model, and ultimately deny all other experience. The result is debilitating, as players are not only denied their own personal development but through expressive behaviours contribute to the reductive forces inherent in a univalent masculine identity.

This particular construction of masculinity is deeply rooted in the history of modern sport. Early in the Victorian era the bourgeoisie were able to realize the socializing potential of sporting pastimes and cleverly used it to their advantage. Privileged males were introduced to sport at a young age when they were expected to develop qualities suitable for men wishing to assume leadership roles in society. The sporting arena became the site where virtues associated with manliness—physical strength, courage, aggression and the incessant will to win—were displayed by participants attempting to prove their worth not only as athletes, but as men.

But as the modern sporting climate evolved from being the sole property of the bourgeoisie to being a pursuit available to the greater able-bodied, male population, the sporting arena expanded, thus broadening who would be shaped by this hegemonic masculinity. Instead of one's class dictating who could participate in sport, it was skill and adeptness which

separated the competitors. Consequently, physical qualities were emphasized even further as what distinguished *real men* from those who did not fit within this model. These perceptions of masculinity were ultimately marketed as part of the professional sport sensibility, as Richard Gruneau and David Whitson indicate:

as soon as teams began to represent their communities the ideal of masculine honour was quickly bonded to the need to win and dominate the opposition. Incidents of domination became the stuff of reputation and legends, and tough guys became widely celebrated in fan gossip and in the sporting news. Almost certainly these tough guys helped sell the game as an entertainment commodity to primarily male (rather than family) audiences. (*Hockey Night in Canada* 193-94)

These *manly* qualities soon came to be expected of the players by a paying public, and consequently became inherent to the sports themselves. In a sport as highly physical as hockey, aggressive and violent behaviours are customary, which means players' livelihoods depend on their ability to cope with these physically intimidating strategies. As a result, what it means to be a hockey player is generally indistinguishable from being a *man*.

The distinction, then, between hockey player and non-hockey player is significant, and to address this distinction initiation rituals have been established to celebrate collectively a young player's change of status. The initiation rituals are not only symbolic representations of the transformation players undergo once entering professional hockey, but are also a means of divesting young players of undesirable (unmanly) qualities to ensure their

new status within the group. The rituals expose the rookies to behaviours suitable to them as hockey players, while at the same time exploiting and mocking inferior qualities—i.e., vulnerability and individualism—that are seen essentially as counterproductive to them as players, and to the team as a whole. The value of the rituals is further evidenced by the fact that they are performed indirectly under the supervision of team officials who are appreciative of their unifying potential. The more willing younger players are to accept the traditional behaviours expressed before them through these cultural performances, the more likely the group is to achieve the cohesive structure necessary for success. The pressures players face in conforming to these entrenched attitudes and beliefs are enormous, as their own personal professional status is dependent upon assimilating to the group, contributing once again to the construction of a hockey identity.

But this reduction of experience is significant for another reason. In addition to understanding hockey players in terms of this homogenized male construct, the product of the trade is something else: the hockey player is a *commodity*. The players dedicate themselves entirely to achieving success in the workplace, and the more they are able to achieve this goal, the more they satisfy the essence of capitalist production:

there is one commodity on the market that, in being used, creates new value, such that its purchaser can then realise the value thus created in the form of profit. That commodity is labour-power, or the capacity of an individual to work for an

agreed period of time and in return for the receipt of a money payment. (McAll 13)

The power and privilege professional hockey players receive from achieving excellence in their sport only increases their commodity-status further, generating greater revenues and profits for those exploiting labour-power for capital gain. Despite the lucrative monetary rewards high-profile players are finally receiving for their services, their high-profile status contributes to the economic growth of the industry, meaning that their work is, in part, surplus labour: “Workers thus work partly to acquire the means of their own subsistence and partly to produce surplus value for the capitalist. Their working day is made up of . . . necessary labour on the one hand and surplus labour on the other” (McAll 14).

The players’ commodity status within the workplace is manifested consistently throughout the daily operations of the sport, as players are purchased, sold, drafted and traded just as any other commodity in the market place. The distinction the American Hockey League (AHL) holds as being a “farm system”¹ for the National Hockey League (NHL) could not be a more profound illustration of the capitalist mode of production. The players are literally cultivated “on the farm,”² and only those with suitable qualities

¹ “Farm teams” are not exclusive to professional hockey. The word “farm” is a generic term used in the sport industry to describe developmental leagues/teams—whether they be baseball, hockey, rugby . . .

² A common expression used to express that a player has been sent down to the AHL is, “He’s been sent to the farm.”

are “picked” to be used in the NHL market. Moreover, the cultivation period is limited and those who do not develop sufficiently will eventually be replaced with new “stock.” *Reds*’ captain Darren Feld explained to me that his time to make it into the NHL was running out:

I’d like to go the next level [*the NHL*], but, I’m twenty-five years old, and it’s getting a little hard. But I still want to play until they uh—until they take the skates away from me. (Feld personal interview)

“Until they take the skates away” from a person has also been phrased more crudely as, “Being left to rot on the farm.”³ The agricultural metaphor encapsulates wonderfully the manner in which players are developed within the hockey system; it also captures the temporary nature of the commodity being produced. The player’s body, like a finely-tuned engine, is driven to exhaustion, and once the body expires the player becomes superfluous. After playing more than fifteen years as an exceptional goaltender in the NHL, Jack Hammer was suddenly forced to consider the possibility that his time in the NHL was finished:

The only thing that bothers me about the whole thing [*about being sent down to the Reds*] is that it’s because I didn’t play, which is the biggest reason why I’m here. I mean I sat a whole month without starting—over a month—without starting a

³ Approximately half way through the season, a player who had been repeatedly called up to the *Reds*’ parent organization and repeatedly sent down was returned to the *Reds* for what looked like the last time in his career. Long time *Reds*’ supporter and fan Ted Right looked at me when this particular player skated onto the ice for practice, and said to me: “That’s it for him; he’s here to rot for good” (Personal Fieldnotes 5 Dec. 1996)

game. And you know, you know my track record: I've never played well under those circumstances. And uh, I never played my best when I did get in there; and you know what followed [*he is referring to being sent down*]. I was trying to stay positive and was thinking that, oh, I can handle this, I can play well: but it didn't happen. . . . I mean I tried it and it didn't work, and because of that I'm in the minors because I didn't get any starts. And that's probably the only thing I resent about it. (Hammer interview)

Hammer's career, however, was longer than most, and players generally learn of their "expiration date" earlier in their careers, if the chance is made available to them at all.⁴

The situation is even more disheartening if we consider that since my research began with the *Reds* almost two years ago, I have seen only one *Reds'* player successfully make the transition from the AHL to the NHL. It initially appeared as though two players were going to have permanent jobs with the parent organization, but because of a trade the NHL team made during the off-season, the first *Reds'* player's position became redundant, and he was subsequently returned to the *Reds*. The absence of job mobility evident here cannot be accredited to a dearth in positions available to upcoming *Reds'* players; in fact, there are five rookies in the parent club's 1997/98 roster, but only one of these positions is occupied by a former *Reds'* player. The pool from which NHL franchises select hockey players has increasingly globalized in recent years, which is in part due to the

⁴ I am basing this on Paul D. Staudohar's generous estimation of an average

availability of players from Eastern bloc countries who were denied access to the League prior to the collapse of communism. Hockey has also grown in popularity in the United States, and thus the American presence in the game has also developed considerably. As a result, there are more leagues—both professional and amateur—that are producing highly skilled players, and thus, increasing job competition.⁵ Therefore it should not come as a surprise that only twenty percent of the vacant positions on the *Reds'* parent club were filled by *Reds'* players, the other eighty percent being players from : (40%) U.S. Colleges; (20%) Canadian Junior Leagues; and (20%) the European Hockey League (“1997-98 *Parent Club* ROSTER”).

Tenure for players playing in the AHL is generally precarious as there are enormous odds against them ever acquiring a permanent position in an NHL line-up. Moreover, their situation becomes even more volatile since a new crop of players is drafted every year, who not only have the potential to steal a spot on the NHL club's roster, but those new players—no longer eligible to play Junior—who are not successful making the NHL team, are

NHL career to be five years (148).

⁵ In addition to the previously existing areas for hockey development in North America, such as the Canadian Junior League (CHL), the International Hockey League (IHL) and American College hockey system, there are Elite Leagues throughout Europe, such as the European Hockey League, that provide players from Europe the necessary exposure to gain entrance into the NHL. The European Hockey League is made up of teams from Finland, Germany, Sweden, Slovakia, Austria, Norway, Switzerland, Russia, France, Italy and Great Britain (*European Hockey League*).

consequently required to fight for a position on “the farm” (whether the farm system be located in the AHL or IHL). For example, the *Reds*’ line-up for 1997/98 season had eleven new players on a twenty-one man roster, and only one of the players missing from the line-up is currently playing in the NHL. This does not suggest that the other ten absentees were demoted, as certain players such as former team captain Darren Feld and *Reds*’ leading scorer Jason Dodd opted to pursue an alternate route to the NHL by signing contracts with IHL teams.⁶ What this does suggest, however, is that stability in the AHL is virtually non-existent and labour turnover is enormous. Therefore player vulnerability is excessive in this volatile industry, as a surplus labour pool guarantees worker productivity, which means that players are forced to produce or face the consequence of being replaced by ten other men willing to do the same job—“because sometimes, you know, you sit out one game, somebody steps in and does your job; and then you’re out of a job!” (Falk interview).

The ultimate realization that professional hockey thrives on a capitalist system of production should hardly be a surprise on account of the capitalist framework in which the industry is based. What is somewhat difficult to accept is the lack of effective resistance the players are able to

⁶ Both players’ contracts terminated with the *Reds* at the conclusion of 1996/97 season, which meant that they were “free” to sign with whatever team appealed to them.

generate within this exploitative system of production. It has been already stated that within any hegemonic relationship there is an inherent struggle between resistive and controlling agents; thus, power is never static. The struggle in professional hockey, however, is unfortunately subdued as resistive acts only secure owner/League hegemony. In few other occupations is worker dedication more apparent than it is in hockey, as players commit themselves entirely to achieving their goal of playing professional hockey. This does not necessarily mean that players feel a sense of loyalty to individual franchises or even to the League, but their loyalty to themselves to achieve professional success requires them to be subservient to the dynamics of professionalism. In return, teams demand total commitment from *their* players, giving those organizations complete autonomy over almost all aspects of the players' lives.

The limited signs of resistance expressed by the players are largely manifested in the form of avoidance, whereby players remain as far removed from the business of hockey as possible. By staying outside of the business operations of hockey, the players see themselves as being true to themselves and to the game, and this attitude tends to be seen as the recipe for achieving success in the sport. This form of resistance comes at a price, however, as the players ultimately deny other forms of experience in the process of dedicating themselves to the game. *Reds'* forward Peter Jackson explained to me that

he shuts out life's concerns in order to focus entirely on hockey. His comments are even more profound when we take into account his belief that these other components of life—such as a future outside of hockey—will be rectified once success in hockey is realized:

If I start worrying about that now [life outside of hockey] it's going to take away from my game and my focus. And I think for me, if I can work you know maybe the next day on how I can improve myself and how I can better, and how I can just play as hard as I can, I think that later on in life, that uh—that will just take care of itself. If I can extend my career and play hockey at the highest level I can go, and for as long as I can, well then I think that uh maybe, you know, I can last ten years in this game; and uh, make a living at it. And then once I'm done, you know, I think you can make a certain amount of connections along the way. Or have an idea, or have uh, have uh, you know, in the back of your mind thinking what you might want to do. But you know, for me, if I can prolong this career as long as I can, well that will take care of itself, and then I can worry about life after hockey when I come to it. (Jackson Interview)

Considering that Peter Jackson was only twenty-three years old at the time of this interview, his career would terminate at thirty-three if he were to meet the ten year objective. Keeping in mind the average *NHL* career is only five years, and Peter Jackson's status as a professional *AHL* hockey player is mediocre at best, the chances of an extended career are minimal. However, even if he did beat the odds and achieve the desired level of success, he would leave the game a young man, without a post-secondary education, without any real life-skills, and only an "idea in the back of his mind" what he "might want to do."

The reality of the situation is that professional hockey hegemony in Canada is overwhelming and there is yet to be any real significant challenge to its authority. Any gains the players have made have been exclusively monetary, which in certain cases, have been substantial. The price players have to pay in order to achieve such lucrative financial compensation, however, is enormous, as players deprive themselves of experience outside of their occupational domain. Players often refer to family that is forsaken playing hockey; they often endure chronic ailments; they are generally devoid of a formal education; they lack confidence in performing basic life skills; and they are often unable to pursue meaningful relationships outside of hockey. Furthermore once players face the inevitable end to their careers they are generally left struggling with questions about life outside of the game, such as the ones posed by *Reds'* goaltender, Jack Hammer: "Well, is this what I'm going to do? And is this what I'm going to be good at now because I don't know if that's what I'm going to think when I'm out there? What's going to be important?" (Hammer Interview). Perhaps an even greater concern is that the majority of the players will never achieve the success that would warrant a huge salary, and thus are left potentially devoid of all these qualities without the financial security that would be most beneficial as players struggle through the transition that they will ultimately be forced to make. Finally, by seeking empowerment through the resistive measures described

above, players further compromise their positions within the labour force, consequently securing professional hockey industry hegemony.

Benefiting from a Folkloristic Understanding of the Workplace

In Jack Santino's Afterword in the special issue of *New York Folklore* dedicated to "Folklore in Industry," he writes: "Studies of occupational groups *are* different, of course, from folklore studies of other groups, but only in that all groups, all people are different from one another" (105). The perspective that occupational folklore is simply folklore scholarship that is limited to an occupational context is an important one, because as Santino points out, there has been a level of uncertainty for those folklorists approaching the workplace as their field of study (105). To compensate for exploring what oddly has remained an unconventional sphere of scholarship, there is a tendency for folklorists to engage in more traditionally accepted forms of folklore scholarship once they enter the occupational arena: that is, searching for more recognizable folklore texts, such as song, narrative, jokes or custom. Santino rightly observes, however, that it is contemporary folkloristic approaches—the "study of the expressive, artistic, and communal aspects"—that "are the best models for" accessing "occupationally-based identity groups" (105). It is this *folkloristic* approach that has enabled me to explore the realm of professional hockey without the restrictions of a study based on a "body of material" only legitimized "because of the attention paid to it by

early investigators” (McCarl “Occupational Folklife,” 12). It is also this *folkloristic* approach that has provided me with the insights necessary for discussing this complex industry. By approaching hockey in such a manner, the *processes* of labour become paramount, as it is here that workers define their worth in their environment, and who they are as individuals.

The result, then, of entering the field with the intention of studying this particular community through its expressive behaviour, was to orient my attention towards the players/workers’ definition of themselves within the workplace. I was able to recognize their actions, whether they were jocular banter or intense physical conditioning, as a palimpsest, whereby significance increased with the discovery of each new layer of meaning. The opportunities to observe the players in their occupational environment became limitless, thus forcing me to decipher which behaviours most aptly represented the group and their work. What became apparent quickly once involved in the project was that there are severe limitations with which the players are forced to contend daily. Much of my focus, then, was directed towards the players as they responded to these occupational demands, and how the players attempted to acquire a certain level of control in their lives. It is for this reason that the final product of the research has been framed around the segregated culture that has been constructed by the players, which serves as a solace for the controlling forces that surround them, but at

the same time, imprisons them further, denying the players opportunities to achieve in their own personal development.

Finally, the information acquired for this project has opened up other avenues for those wishing to pursue further the study of hockey in Canada. There is still much to be said about the professional hockey industry and about professional sport in general; but there is also an interesting parallel to be made between the learned behaviours evident in this occupational environment and those behaviours learned by younger hockey players ultimately emulating what is expressed by their favourite hockey players. The players' influence over the younger generation is truly remarkable and I was able to observe aspects of this on several occasions throughout my research. There was one morning in particular when the *Reds* held a practice on what was designated "Family Day." Parents were invited to bring their children to the rink to watch the *Reds* practice and share in an autograph signing session to follow.

I sat and watched the children interact with the players and then come running back to their parents laughing telling them how the players teased them. One of the *Reds* players kept referring to the children as "George," which generated much laughter from all of the boys and girls (Personal Fieldnotes, 27 Oct. 1996). Children who were a few years older could be seen watching the players practice and comparing themselves to what they

witnessed on the ice. There was one group of boys who were all wearing the same hockey-team jacket indicating that they played minor hockey together. Their discussion was led by one boy who seemed to be quite familiar with the names and statistics of the *Reds* players. At one point, a boy from the group looked up and saw me taking notes, thinking I was part of the team. He quickly asked his friend if he knew who I was, and the boy who was providing all of the information about the *Reds* responded, "Yes." The boy then turned away avoiding any further questions that might expose the fact that he had no idea who I was (Personal Fieldnotes, 27 Oct. 1996).

The impact the *Reds'* players have on the hundreds of children who watch and cheer for them, as they did on this particular Sunday, is substantial. There is no other sport in Canada that is as highly regarded as hockey, and the players (are intended to) embody publicly what the sport is supposed to represent. It is not surprising then that aspiring hockey players take on characteristics that are expressed by professionals in the sport, which include total team commitment and a general subservience to the League, team officials and to the sport in general. These learned behaviours make up what can be understood as the Canadian hockey tradition; a more political interpretation of the same process is that these behaviours are, in fact, a perpetuation of hockey hegemony. Thus, moving to a grass-roots level of the sport may be an excellent site to observe the processes that help shape

a Canadian hockey identity. Would this not be the logical starting point for a developmental system that manufactures talent to supply leagues, such as the AHL and the NHL, with labour power? Is the minor hockey system in Canada not an elitist system that encourages more skilled players to play on select teams which receive additional practice time and financial sponsorship? Are these young players, who show signs of promise, not privileged over their less-skilled companions? What roles do the parents and the community in general play in this developmental process? These are questions that need addressing since it is *this* system that feeds the professional hockey leagues in North America with a continuous surplus of labour. It is also this system that produces talented hockey players capable of playing professional hockey, but who are devoid of the skills necessary to successfully contend with the exploitative forces of the hockey industry.

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Appendix A:

Personal Profiles of Individuals Mentioned Throughout the Thesis

Troy Reds Players:

- **Goaltender:** Paul Proux
- **Born:** Quebec, Canada, 1973
- **Previous Amateur Association (PAA):** Quebec Major Junior Hockey League
- **Previous professional experience (PPE):** 3 years

- **Goaltender:** John Dent
- **Born:** Washington, USA, 1976
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League¹
- **(PPE):** 0

- **Goaltender:** Jack Hammer
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1961
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 17 years

- **Defence:** Darren Feld
- **Born:** Quebec, Canada, 1971
- **(PAA):** Quebec Major Junior Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 5 years

- **Defence:** Falk, Jim
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1966
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 10 years

- **Defence:** Steve, Toll
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1973
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 2 years

¹ For purposes of clarification, it should be stated the Western Hockey League (WHL) and the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) are Junior Leagues, as is the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL). These three Leagues make up what is called the Canadian Hockey League (CHL).

- **Left Wing:** Ted Simms
- **Born:** British Columbia, Canada, 1971
- **(PAA):** ?
- **(PPE):** 1 year

- **Centre:** Pat Smith
- **Born:** Saskatchewan, Canada, 1976
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 0

- **Right Wing:** Jerry Wall
- **Born:** Saskatchewan, Canada, 1975
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 1 year

- **Left Wing:** Frank Vest
- **Born:** Saskatchewan, Canada, 1975
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 1 year

- **Left Wing:** Todd Jones
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1974
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 2 years

- **Defence:** Sid Zeal
- **Born:** Alberta, Canada, 1975
- **(PAA):** Western Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 1 year

- **Defence:** Colin Best
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1973
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 2 years

- **Centre:** Jason Dodd
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1971
- **(PAA):** American College
- **(PPE):** 4 years

- **Centre:** Peter Jackson
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1973

- **(PAA): American College**
- **(PPE): 2 years**

- **Defence: Bill Smith**
- **Born: Saskatchewan, Canada, 1971**
- **(PAA): Western Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 5 years**

- **Right Wing: Chris Coles**
- **Born: Manitoba, Canada, 1971**
- **(PAA): Western Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 2 years**

- **Centre: Woody Stevenson**
- **Born: Minnesota, USA, 1973**
- **(PAA): American College**
- **(PPE): 4 years**

- **Right Wing: Mikel Zakov**
- **Born: Czech Republic, 1975**
- **(PAA): Ontario Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 1 year**

- **Left Wing: Lester Dell**
- **Born: Ontario, Canada, 1975**
- **(PAA): Ontario Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 0**

- **Left Wing: Peter Copper**
- **Born: Ontario, Canada, 1969**
- **(PAA): Ontario Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 11years**

AHL Players Playing from Teams Other than the Troy Reds:

- **Goaltender: Sam Boland**
- **Born: Quebec, Canada, 1976**
- **(PAA): Quebec Major Junior Hockey League**
- **(PPE): 1 year**

- **Defence: Marc Belanger**
- **Born: Quebec, Canada, 1971**

- **(PAA):** Quebec Major Junior Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 6 years

- **Defence:** Tucker, Bob.
- **Born:** Manitoba, Canada, 1965
- **(PAA):** American College
- **(PPE):** 12 years

Players Mentioned Outside of the Immediate Ethnographic Framework—Oct. 1996-April 1997:

- **Defence:** Tim Chip
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1968
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 6 years
- **Current Hockey Status:** Professional Hockey Player

- **Centre:** Don Maxwell
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1970
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 5 years
- **Current Hockey Status:** Professional Hockey Player

- **Defence:** John Doe
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1968
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 1year
- **Current Hockey Status:** Retired

- **Defence:** Sean Pack
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada, 1970
- **(PAA):** Ontario Hockey League
- **(PPE):** 0
- **Current Hockey Status:** Retired

Non-Players Mentioned:

- **Troy *Reds* Head Coach:** Hal Murphy
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada
- **Professional Coaching Experience:** 0

- **Troy *Reds* Assistant Coach:** Sam Dig

- **Born:** Ontario, Canada
- **Professional Coaching Experience:** 0

- **Troy *Reds* Athletic Therapist:** Al Jones
- **Born:** United Kingdom
- **Professional Experience:** 3 years

- **Troy *Reds* Equipment Manager:** Joe Sell
- **Born:** Ontario, Canada
- **Professional Experience:** 5 years

- **Troy *Reds* Assistant Trainer:** Lou Penn
- **Born:** Newfoundland, Canada
- **Professional Experience:** five years

- **Philadelphia Phantoms Head Coach:** Bill Barber²
- **Born:** Canada
- **Professional Coaching Experience:** 1 year
- **Prior Professional Playing Experience:** 11 years

² Bill Barber is the only individual cited here without using a pseudonym.

Appendix B:

Summary of Players' Salaries and Calculations for the 1996-1997 NHL Hockey Season¹

<u>Salary Bracket</u>	<u># of Players in Salary Bracket</u>	<u>% of Players in Salary Bracket</u>
\$6 - 3 million	25	3%
\$2.998 - 1 million	160	19%
\$995,000 - 500,000	248	30%
\$490,000 - 125,000	405	48%

Totals:

Salary Sum = \$668,752,831

Salary Average = \$807,576

Salary Median = \$500,000

¹ National Hockey Player Salaries were acquired from "NHLPA Compensation in Descending Order - All Players."



