

British Football Culture and Nationalist Dramaturgy:  
Understanding Spectator Sports as Mass Ornaments

by

Julia Hart  
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## **PART I-Decoding The Mass Ornament: Live Sports Entertainment as Ritual Theater**

*"We live in a time when man believes himself fabulously capable of creation, but does not know what to create. Lord of all things, he is not lord of himself. He feels lost in his own abundance."*-Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*<sup>1</sup>

The cultural ethos of the neoliberal, capitalist consumer era is most clearly articulated in its forms of popular entertainment, the most iconic of which, arguably, is the mass spectacle. These cultural artifacts of the modern age are typified as mass stadium displays of film, sport, theater, music and dance. Joseph Roach, a prominent performance studies scholar, writes that these mass spectacles are the "open secrets of our waking dreams,"<sup>2</sup> which aim to re-enchant an impoverished world. As an extension of this statement, the stadium or arena is understood as a cryptic cultural invention that actually expresses something other than its overt function as a zone for the commercial consumption of entertainment. The idea of the mass spectacle as a conduit for the re-entry of myth into society is thus inextricable from the contemporary mass arena. This is what leads Siegfried Kracauer, theorist of the "mass ornament", to assert that all "spatial structures are the dreams of society."<sup>3</sup>

The European football match is one of the more intriguing crowd spectacles that modern culture has to offer. As in all mass ornaments, the sporting spectacle is a surface reproduction of the social world that is likewise Janus-faced. It is

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<sup>1</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1957), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 29.

both a form of ritualized pageantry that does the work of re-infusing myth into the world, and a reflection of the contemporary economic, social and political realities marking the landscape of postwar neoliberal Europe. In “The Myth of the Multitude,” William Mazzarella begins his discussion of the relevance of the early twentieth century crowd concept for post liberal politics with the statement, “in the postwar period the crowd, that monogram of mass society, seems outmoded as a social theoretical construct, as both liberal politics and consumer markets become ever more diversified.”<sup>4</sup> In the place of the crowd, the virtual, amorphous networks of “the multitude” emerge as “a post liberal alternative,” in which the collective becomes a site of freedom for the subject versus its undoing, as is the case with the irrational crowd. Mazzarella counters contemporary notions of the crowd as a bygone phenomenon of 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal democracy. Although the multitude is now interpreted as the locus for the vital energies of the mass, the crowd mentality still finds its regimes of articulation alongside, or perhaps within, the multitude.

One example of the continued relevance of the crowd image is the popularity of spectatorship in live sporting matches. In this late phase of neo-liberal capitalism, the character and structure of collective participation in mass entertainment is nevertheless analogous to the crowd experience of 20<sup>th</sup> century mass dramaturgy. The modern day sporting crowd directly counters the notion that “public life [has] supposedly become ever more virtual, that is to say,

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<sup>4</sup> William Mazzarella, “The Myth of The Multitude, Or Who’s Afraid of the Crowd?” *Critical Inquiry* 36.4 (2010): 669.

organized less around a mass extension of the public square.”<sup>5</sup> Matches are precisely this extension of the public square, in which mass meetings of citizens (supporters) physically come together to ecstatically worship the nation (the team) in a popular forum (the arena). The sporting spectacle is but one example of the myriad ways in which nationalist pageantry and displays of social drama are utilized in service of the ritual continuity of the body politic.<sup>6</sup> Despite dismissals of the sporting spectacle as a form of non-serious play, it is a cultural activity that, as Randall Collins writes, is “eminently successful in providing high points of ritual experience, and for many people...are preferred to participating in religious rituals.”<sup>7</sup>

Roach argues that the theater, the stadium and the arena are only significant spaces insofar as they create a “public intimacy” by harnessing the well of psychic energy that is unleashed during a mass meeting of bodies and minds. Within these zones of aggregation, “psyche and soma intertwine” to cohere in a “mass hallucination that gives us back the image of our mind, but never exactly as itself.”<sup>8</sup> The double image that is the mass spectacle offers an “illusion of proximity...synthetic experience, the consumption of it...”<sup>9</sup> The spatio-temporal double life that unfolds in the mass spectacle is craved with such intensity because it is a mimetic abstraction of real life that doubles back on itself; it actively constructs the “real world” through symbolic distortion. The idea of the

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<sup>5</sup> Mazzarella, “The Myth of the Multitude,” 669.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 58-59.

<sup>8</sup> Roach, *It*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

spectacle as a mirror that does not reflect as much as it refracts, and its multi-real quality and its ability to show truth through distortion speak to the situation of the (post/neo) liberal, secular subject, who finds himself straddling two worlds, “caught in the here but in need of the beyond.”<sup>10</sup> Participation in a mass spectacle is one way that this bifurcated subject is able to reorient his life in the direction of the beyond “where everything in the here and now would find its meaning and conclusion.”<sup>11</sup> Immersion in the mass spectacle is the paramount opportunity to forget oneself as a historical being in time through dissolution into the magnetized spectator crowd. The activation of the crowd is the moment in which the rational spectacle is transfigured from a secular display of contrived humanity into a rarified experience of the eternal return. The mimetic capabilities of the mass entertainment moment transform it into a kind of boundary zone, in which an eternal past and the contingent present are one and the same, and the contours of the sacred realm are made visible in the profane world.

Victor Turner’s formative scholarship on ritual process accurately locates post-industrial symbolic action and liminality in the non-productive realm of leisure time and entertainment genres. Roger Caillois further elaborates upon this religious potential inherent in the play action of games. Spectator sports are but one incarnation of the ever-changing face of totemism, which has found its outlet in the most accessible of collective gatherings, i.e. the crowd spectacles of

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<sup>10</sup> Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 68.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

popular culture.<sup>12</sup> While the domains of religiosity and play are often constructed as schematically oppositional, Caillois shows them to be almost overtly complementary, for in both “an enclosed space is delimited, separated from the world and life. In this enclosure, for a given time, regulated and symbolic movements are executed, which represent or reincarnate mysterious realities...in which...the opposing qualities of exuberance and regimentation, of ecstasy and prudence, and of enthusiastic delirium and minute precision, are present at the same time. At last, one transcends ordinary existence.”<sup>13</sup> If properly activated by the crowd, the football match becomes a magnetic field of symbolic opposition, a social domain that is both within and without. The live match is an event that is everywhere marked by tension, paradox, and the ineffable. Just as the intention and outcome of the game are rarely aligned, the outward façade of the stadium betrays nothing of its inner life. It is both a locus for dangerous transgression and a banal commodity of capitalist consumerism, a sacred ground apart and a manufactured chaos punctuating the mundane. To put it more succinctly, what is clear is that nothing about the experience lends itself to clear explanation.

The arena of spectacle in contemporary society takes the place of the festival as the primary site for mass transgression and crowd behavior. In Turnerian terms, the sporting arena can be seen as a manufactured space for the display of

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander Riley, "The Theory Of Play/Games And Sacrality In Popular Culture: The Relevance Of Roger Caillois For Contemporary Neo-Durkheimian Cultural Theory" in *Durkheimian Studies* 11.1 (2005): 3.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Caillois and Meyer Barash, *Man and the Sacred* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 207-208.

constructed episodes of social drama. Within these performances of social drama, a symbolic crisis that threatens the collective identity of a group is resolved, resulting in mass catharsis and social regeneration. The primary goal of ritual performance is the retelling of collective memory in and of action. Sport can thus be understood as a theatrical medium that channels “the eternal experience” through mass convergence. Successful theater engenders collaboration and identification between the spectators and players in a moment of ritual communion made manifest by an atmosphere of heightened social arousal, significant in its “multi-real quality that reveals the glory and abyss of human freedom.”<sup>14</sup> Turner would classify sport as a ritual performance because it requires the participating individual to enter a social field separate from mundane time and space. The football pitch, then, can be understood as a spatio-temporal “embodiment of the potential, the virtual, the imaginative, the fictive, the negative, the not not.”<sup>15</sup>

The significance of the crowd experience during a live sporting match cannot be underestimated. Joseph Roach quotes the British novelist Elinor Glyn, who writes, “I am convinced that pageantry is an important part of the life of a nation...the subconscious mind is always impressed by fine ceremonial, just as it is by the dignity of complete simplicity.”<sup>16</sup> Although she was referring to the theatrical symbolism of royalty, her understanding of public ceremony as a reworking of religious rites extends to the sphere of sports as well. Fan worship

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, *Between Theater & Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 123.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Roach, *It*, 35.



of a team can also be understood as a regenerative process, in which the emotional and spiritual life of a community is cultivated and reconstituted in moments of collective experience. The crowd experience is a vital component in the maintenance of football culture, its corresponding masculine narrative and the imagined nation, for it constitutes a rare moment in which the atomized, isolated individual feels resolve and is reintegrated into a larger body in the heightened atmosphere of social unity and emotionally satisfying, masculine camaraderie.

If the football match is a commodity of global capitalist commercialism, it can be argued that it creates a different kind of consumer subject than the prototypical liberal individual. Football is a genre of popular entertainment that exemplifies a fundamental paradox within the hard won cult of western individualism, which is the desire to seek immersion in the collective. Michel Maffesoli, a French-Italian sociologist whose work explores the influence of collective imagination on the social life of a community, perfectly describes this inclination towards an embodied collectivity as “the erotic body, which with more or less discretion, intends to escape the productivist imposition.”<sup>17</sup> Within the crowd, the potential for an emancipatory moment coexists with the potential for autocratic repression. One may say that optimistic notions that crowd life is “an alternative to the fate of petrified individualism”<sup>18</sup> have proven to be false

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Maffesoli, *The Shadow of Dionysus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>18</sup> Hansjakob Werlen, “Destiny’s Herald: Elias Canetti’s Crowds and Power and it’s Continuing Influence” in *Critical Essays on Elias Canetti*, ed. David Darby (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000), 171.

throughout the trajectory of history. The idea of the crowd as an attractive vision of freedom from dissatisfied liberal individuality has been a powerful one to fuel the imagination of an alternative society, and yet, the irrational character of the mass psyche and the aesthetic means by which it expresses itself as a unity also align with the totalitarian impulse as embodied in the nationalist and neo-fascist revivals in the contemporary world, which is everywhere defined by globalization and the transnational.

Canetti identifies the crowd experience as the element of public life that showcases the fractured subjectivity of the liberal democratic individual embedded in capitalist culture. The crowd collective complicates this version of individual subjectivity by bringing it into conversation with other suspended minds in an irrational celebration that transforms and joins individuals into a single entity whose chaotic tendencies threaten utilitarian production. For Canetti, the dark energies generated by the collective unconscious as embodied in the crowd is not an aberration or the harbinger of regression and cultural decay; rather, it is one of the pillars of the entire rational, liberal and capitalist ethos. The crowd image is deeply connected to liberal ideals of popular justice and democracy. The leveling experience that the crowd provides, its atmosphere of equality and sameness is always reenacted during the formulation of any democratic polity. However, as the liberatory possibility embodied by the democratic crowd comes to fruition, so too does its reactionary and deadly potential flourish. The crowd is thus a morphing entity; it is the shape-shifter of popular myth brought to life. It is an aggregation of citizens that can be

triggered into deadly action by the slightest and most inconsequential of cues. It is both the paramount symbol of rational, cultivated, democracy, and the mobilizing force that turns individual energy into an irrational mass mind bent on destruction and susceptible to coercion.

In many ways, soccer has become the global sport for the neo-liberal world audience. Corporate capital, for example, draws on football's universal appeal and on the transnational adoption of the sport, which supports a main premise of globalization discourse: the purportedly obsolete and outdated nation-state order in the increasingly borderless and transnational world market. However, the cultural attitude surrounding football and the embodied practice of spectatorship in contemporary Europe does not corroborate this globalizing vision. In fact, European soccer illuminates how the idea of the "nation" has actually become more entrenched as one of the most salient identity categories available to individuals. In a contextual analysis of football in post war Europe, Anthony King discusses how, in the current global climate, identity formation is an ever more fractured and locally embedded process, as regional and urban centers take precedent over their wider national contexts in the formation of an imagined national community. In the deregulated, post- Fordist era, major European cities are semi -independent economic and political units that generate their own internal stratifications, political cultures, and social milieus. The point, then, isn't that nationalism is an outdated form of identity politics; rather, the concept of nationalism is constantly being renegotiated and repurposed in the globalized, transnational world, as individuals become

embedded within a constantly shifting nexus of overlapping and contesting allegiances and sovereignties.<sup>19</sup> In Europe, the football arena is one such space of negotiation. The space is a popular symbol of unity through which the contours of the nation are constantly being re-articulated through the language of tribal nationalism.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey notes that nationalism has become mobilized in the global, transnational market through international sport competition. Nowhere is this more obvious than in European football, where free market incentives, European integration, and deregulation in the 1990s contributed to intensified competition between European cities as played out on the field. During the match, teams and players impartially decided the “ephemeral winners and losers in the global struggle,” and the match became “a source of national pride or of national soul searching.”<sup>20</sup> It is as if international competitive football resulted in the abstraction of the team as the exalted nation-state and the spectators as the body politic. In the new Europe, state sponsored athletics can be understood as a form of ritualized warfare that neutralizes hostility and aggression by resituating national hierarchies and national memory in the play action of games. The sporting arena is the domesticated battlefield that facilitates group experiences of ecstatic victory or crushing defeat, which construct the nation in the image of the aggressive, confrontational masculine fantasy that is enacted and materialized in the game.

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony King, *The European Ritual: Football in the New Europe* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), 27-30.

<sup>20</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 85.

The soldier-athlete masculine ideal is an almost uniform feature of nationalist discourse that is worthy of extended analysis in its own right; however, from this initial focus on Europe, I want to turn to the specific cultural ethos of football support in Great Britain. British football fan membership is an embodied, performative identity that is embedded within specific locales and micro-histories, but it also significantly intervenes upon more universal, masculine narratives of nationhood and citizenship.

## **PART II-British Football Culture: The Hooligan Unmasked**

*“Ritual and its progeny, notably the performance arts, derive from the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of social drama, where the structures of group experience are replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned...and made meaningful-even when, as is so often the case in declining cultures, ‘the meaning is that there is no meaning.’ ” –Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Experience*<sup>21</sup>*

Football culture can be understood as a mirror that refracts onto society a distorted image of its own mind. The evolution of a subset of English football fandom, known as hooliganism, from the 1960s to the present day, is a crystallization of the mythic proportions of the sport and its role as the primary public ritual that produces the imagined nation as a cohesive entity. In his essay, “Sport and the Repudiation of the Global,” David Rowe examines English media discourse during the 2002 World Cup to show how football “compulsively

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<sup>21</sup> Victor Turner et al., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 43.

reactivates and re-circulates long-standing and emergent myths of the nation.”<sup>22</sup>

Some of the examples that Rowe provides are reproduced below:

‘The whole of England has been brought together with a dream of victory. We want it, we need it, and we crave it. The country is speaking with one voice: DO IT FOR US!’ (World Cup Mirror, 2002: 1).<sup>23</sup>

“On the day of the game, the front page of the Daily Mirror (2002b: 1) consisted of white space, a small flag of St George and the small, centered headline, “This page is cancelled. Nothing else matters.”<sup>24</sup>

“Inside stories included ‘One Flies Flag for the Lads’ carrying a fake internet photograph of the Queen in an England shirt with her face painted with the flag of St George (The Sun, 2002c: 3).<sup>25</sup>

Rowe includes these media snapshots to show how the mythic discourse of British news coverage of the World Cup, with its “constant homages... paid to ‘our lads’ and ‘our heroes’”<sup>26</sup> curiously reflected a “cultural atmosphere in early 21st-century England [that] was close to the kind of discourse reflected in much earlier representations of sport and nationhood, such as Geoffrey Green’s famous reflections...on the significance of the English national team’s first home defeat ....by ‘communist’ Hungary in 1953: ‘England at last [were] beaten by the

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<sup>22</sup> David Rowe, “Sport and the Repudiation of the Global,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38 no. 3 (2003): 290, accessed November 21, 2013, doi: 10.1177/10126902030383002.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

foreign invader on solid English soil'.<sup>27</sup> The British popular media coverage of the 2002 World Cup illustrates how, even in a globalized world, nostalgic and celebratory myths of nationhood are re-inscribed in the public imagination through sport. The stadium is an "it" zone that harnesses what one could call the forces of mystical attraction in order to create that kind of public intimacy.<sup>28</sup> The symbols of a national culture are channeled through the crowd in order to remodel the space in the image of a mythic, national unity, embodied through the "folk," or the spectators. Examples of such expressions of national culture at football matches include English supporters who paint the St. George cross on their face, those who hold banners decorated with the royal coat of arms and other iconic English insignia, and fans who dress up as crusading knights. Julie Gottlieb situates this element of fan culture as clear invocation of a glorious Anglo-Saxon past, which is one example of the ways in which the aesthetics of football display "images of sublime transcendence through which the worship of national symbols"<sup>29</sup> becomes central in the formulation of an aggressively masculine, nation-state ideal that also informs a postwar British fascist aesthetic. Football can thus be understood as a site of mythic engagement that relies on a cultic fraternity who worship a sacred past by evoking it in the present. This masculine cohort embodies an ethos of tribal nationalism structured by the conditions of collective spectatorship. Spectatorship can be understood as a sort of religious practice in which an imagined national community is legitimized for

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<sup>27</sup> Rowe, "Sport and the Repudiation of the Global," 291.

<sup>28</sup> Roach, *It*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan, eds., *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 98-99.

its members (i.e. male spectators) through ecstatic worship of its “totem,” the nation expressed through the team.

Some insight into the unique character of the subculture erected around football spectatorship in England would be helpful at this point. Outside of the mainstream sporting culture, there exists an important subset of individuals who engage in a lifestyle centered on football. This mode of engagement relates to what is commonly called “hooliganism” because of its characteristic recourse to violence, which is mobilized through the group tactics of the football club, or “firm.” In Great Britain, football -related hooliganism, in the terraces and the streets, before, during, and after matches, has been an organic component of the sport since its rise to national prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>30</sup> Like mainstream fandom, the hooligan subculture is an emphatically male dominated social sphere that offers access into a world of masculine credibility.<sup>31</sup> The ethos of football hooliganism is one of mass convergence and ritual transgression, including bodily displays of aggression, intoxication, chanting and singing, marching, and organized street violence and chaos. The football firm is a cohesive, martial unit that takes advantage of the carnivalesque atmosphere of the match as catalysis for violence and destruction. Although these groups are formulated around a shared investment in the sport and group solidarity is expressed through a variety of different social scenarios other than a mass meeting at the live match, the intense, embodied crowd experience in the terraces is the origin point from which the vital energies generated by the

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<sup>30</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*,56.



invested spectator cohort are discharged through explosive moments of violence and aggression.

Bill Buford's 1991 creative ethnography *Among the Thugs* attempts to capture why football spectatorship is such a meaningful and commemorated activity in the performance of British masculinity, and why it so often devolves into frenzied mass violence and chaos. Attempting to describe the kind of loss of self members of the crowd seek, he writes, "It is there--on the edge of an experience which is by its nature antisocial, anti civilized, anti-civilizing--that you find...exalted experiences that by their intensity, their risk, their threat of self immolation exclude the possibility of all other thought except the experience itself, incinerate self consciousness, transcend (or obliterate?) our sense of the personal, of individuality, of being an individual in any way."<sup>32</sup> This narrative of ecstatic transcendence as accessed in the moment of imminent self-destruction, or risk of total loss, is part of a larger discourse on football-related violence as "one of the most intensely lived experiences"<sup>33</sup> of transgression available in a society that everywhere seeks to control the body through disciplinary power. Acts of violence, displays of aggression and irrational destruction of property are embodied experiences that culminate in a physical state of exhilaration, terror, and, often, intense pleasure. Both in Buford's account and in other hooligan memoirs, supporters consistently describe their experiences of violence in the terraces and in the streets through a set of related metaphors of intoxication: the

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<sup>32</sup>Bill Buford, *Among The Thugs* (New York: Vintage Departures, 1993), 193.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

buzz, the fix, the roar, the crack.<sup>34</sup> All of these terms refer to the moment in which individual consciousness ceases to be, when there is no longer a multiplicity of selves informing ones relation to the scene. It is the moment in which the instinct towards death and the animal will to survive act in tandem.<sup>35</sup> While supporters don't describe their motivations in this kind of language, the way that they justify their commitment towards the hooligan lifestyle maps onto the theoretical schema that situates the spectator crowd as the point of discharge for the vital energies of the masses.

The violence surrounding the game of football is partly constituted by the brutal physicality of the conditions of spectatorship itself. The terraces are appallingly confining and almost dehumanizing in their effort to cram and trap as many bodies as possible into a small space.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the proximity and bodily discomfort induced by the space is essential for the creation of the conditions that make the crowd experience so attractive. As Canetti explains in his mammoth work, *Crowds and Power*, individuals in a crowd experience a reversal of their fear of being touched. It is only within a crowd, he writes, that "such fear "changes into its opposite"; that is, into a desire for physical closeness that leads to an experience of equality. Canetti elaborates upon this key feature of the crowd further: "The crowd [man] needs is a dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body...the man pressed against him is the same man as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were happening

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<sup>34</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 204.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

in one and the same body. This is perhaps one of the reasons why a crowd seeks to close in on itself: it wants to rid each individual completely of the fear of being touched. The more fiercely people press together, the more certain they feel that they do not fear each other.”<sup>37</sup>

Canetti perfectly encapsulates the mood of the spectator crowd in a sporting match in his description of what he calls the *closed* crowd, a crowd that “has a boundary and....establishes itself by accepting this limitation.”<sup>38</sup> The closed crowd “creates a space for itself which it will fill. This space can be compared to a vessel into which liquid is being poured and whose capacity is known...The boundary is respected whether it consists of.... solid wall, or of some special act of acceptance, or entrance fee.”<sup>39</sup> This type of crowd experience is so entrenched in social life because of its ability to make and unmake itself. The congregation that is the closed crowd has an “expectation of reassembly which enables its members to accept each dispersal. The building is waiting for them; it exists for their sake, and so long as it is there, they will be able to meet in the same manner. The space is theirs, even during the ebb, and in its emptiness it reminds them of the flood.”<sup>40</sup> The spatial dimension of the stadium allows the spectator crowd its precise regimes of articulation. The recurrence of sporting performances at regular and expected intervals “supplant [the] need for

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<sup>37</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984),16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

something harsher and more violent,"<sup>41</sup> for the sporting match has become an secular institution of society that allows for a controlled moment of mass ecstasy for the purposes of sanctifying the state.<sup>42</sup> In the case of the sporting spectator crowd, the stadium as an area for licensed transgression does not occlude the possibility of eruption. The crowd always wants to push the limit further; to break entirely free of the impoverished spirituality of these secularized rites to access a more intense moment of immanence through riot, violence and chaotic fury. Violence in the streets and on transport routes and acts of public vandalism and destruction illustrate a common tendency of the crowd, which is that it "often seems to overflow from some well-guarded space into the squares and streets of a town where it can move about freely, exposed to everything and attracting everyone....it wants to experience for itself the strongest possible feeling of its own animal force and passion."<sup>43</sup>

There are countless media images and videos showing the spectator horde as they swarm the streets, wearing ski masks, armed with Molotov cocktails and other weapons, doing battle with riot police or rival fans. These images have cemented the British hooligan as the figure of destruction and chaos haunting orderly, European society. The British firm is a mass of fans whose quickness of movement is its most dangerous quality. It can be found stalking the streets of any European city, chanting and singing as it looks for windows to smash, fires to set, civilians to make bloody. The firm is what Canetti calls the "baiting crowd"

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<sup>41</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

brought to life in modern society. It is the crowd whose “speed, elation and conviction... is something uncanny.”<sup>44</sup> The baiting crowd is fixated on hunting an enemy and exacting swift revenge, and Canetti perfectly describes the feverish atmosphere that surrounds the firm in their relentless drive towards violence as “the excitement of blind men who are blindest when they suddenly think they can see.”<sup>45</sup>

But who exactly is this football hooligan, this so -called “parasite crippling England from within?”<sup>46</sup> In the summer of 1998, an Irish journalist named Donal MacIntyre was the subject of a harrowing BBC documentary, entitled *Macintyre Undercover: Headhunters*,<sup>47</sup> which attempted to answer this very query. MacIntyre spent a year undercover in the company of the Chelsea Headhunters, a firm that is notorious for its connection to the right wing terrorist organization, Combat-18. The men that he found to be at the center of the action largely conformed to the image of the British hooligan conjured up by the popular imagination. He is a white, adolescent to middle aged male with limited formal education, hailing from a tight knit and insular neighborhood that is generally working class but not necessarily. When he is not traveling to matches, he and his cohort frequent the neighborhood pubs, singing, drinking and watching televised matches. He identifies the depth of his allegiance by the variety and

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<sup>44</sup>Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>46</sup> *Macintyre Undercover: Headhunters*, Directed by Donal Macintyre (1999; [London, U.K.] BBC1, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> The entire narrative of the Chelsea Headhunters in the subsequent pages is based on Macintyre’s documentary film, cited above. All quotes and anecdotes reproduced in the text are from this one primary source.

number of team insignias and English national symbols tattooed on his body. Although this is certainly not true of some of the younger and more flashy “lads” in the firm, the committed hooligan knows to dress in a non-discriminate manner: his standard uniform is a skullcap or baseball hat, a plain jacket and trousers and non -descript trainers. This cultivated appearance of blandness and non-affiliation is carefully preformed in order to avoid police identification and detainment to and from matches. Getting past the turn-style is the experienced hooligans primary concern, for inside of the stadium, an entirely different world unfolds. The stadium as an architectural structure glosses over the tendency of the sporting event to veer into abandon and lawlessness. Canetti writes of this dual aspect of the arena, whose lifeless façade masks the seething life within. The inside wall of the stadium is constructed not of mute stone, but of bodies. Inside this tiered structure, the crowd is everywhere and at once confronted by itself; “every spectator has a thousand in front of him... there is no break in a crowd which sits like this, exhibiting itself to itself. It forms a closed ring from which nothing can escape...there is no gap; the crowd is doubly closed, to the world outside and to itself.”<sup>48</sup> The team in this moment can be seen as a kind of crystallized, limited crowd that precipitates the formulation of the corresponding open, spectator crowd. The team is like a “crystal,” in that it is the clear, isolated symbol of constant unity that “forms an uncanny contrast with the excited flux of the surrounding crowd”<sup>49</sup> by virtue of its bounded, unchanging consistency. This concept of the crystal is Canetti’s reinterpretation of the totem,

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<sup>48</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 74.

the constant element that the crowd converges around in order to reconstruct belonging with every mass meeting.

Throughout his year as a football lad, MacIntyre managed to infiltrate and secretly videotape the Chelsea Headhunters in action. The Headhunters had a level of organization and relied on sophisticated methods of communication that are characteristic of these firms. MacIntyre was surprised to find that many of members have jobs in the formal economy, and that the demographic encapsulates a wide cross section of British society. Two of the men he came into contact with were Andy Frain and Jason Marnier, extreme nationalists who occupy top leadership positions in the firm. The third subject that MacIntyre focuses on is 21-year-old Danny Wolford, who eventually became MacIntyre's drinking buddy.

For Danny, violence is the most thrilling thing in his life, a sentiment that he communicated whilst sitting in a pub with MacIntyre. He told the journalist about the man he beat with a rail screw: "I love it man. I do. I love it." Danny was not afraid of the prospect of incarceration because he thought of it as a rite of passage that would earn him credibility in the firm. Danny believed that "its good to get a bit of time" and expressed his belief that "Nightmare" (Frain), who has "done about 10 years of time all together...would look after him." Danny clearly idolized Frain and thought of himself as a younger version of the notorious Headhunter. He recounted with some amusement that both he and Frain were encouraged, to no avail, to undergo counseling for drinking and anger management.

Danny Wolford was also involved in a separate firm, Redding Youth, which would sometimes link up with the Headhunters for pre-planned battles against other groups of firms. This kind of organized mass violence was only considered legitimate if each side had a fairly equal amount of “soldiers” and if specific rules of conduct were observed. Indeed, Frain and Mariner had a conversation with MacIntyre where they told him about having coordinated 150 hooligans into several buses, each of which would take a different route along the M1 to avoid police detection for an organized fight against Leicester fans. This narrative illuminates the mutual interest and premeditation that structures football violence, as this fight was initiated to make up for a previous appointment that had to be called off because Leicester brought too few “soldiers.” Once at the coordinated battle ground, the Leicester fans never came, and the film shows a disappointed Frain ditching the match, as his intentions for the trip were wholly concentrated on engaging in violent confrontation.

The life and times of Andy Frain, alias “Nightmare,” figures centrally in Headhunter lore. Frain, a middle aged man of short stature, has achieved a cult-like status in the firm and is one of the Britain’s most feared hooligans. His elevated, mythical status in hooligan culture makes him strikingly similar to the authoritarian demagogue, and many of the young hooligans model themselves in his image as a way to embody some of his power. Despite, or perhaps because of, the mythical aura surrounding Frain, he is not as central to the documentary as the figure of Jason Marnier is. MacIntyre’s success in embedding himself within the Headhunters was contingent upon latching onto Marnier, and MacIntyre



successfully does this by staging his belonging to the subculture by participating in its various practices and activities.

The first thing that MacIntyre did to perform the identity of a “lad” was to get a Chelsea tattoo. He makes a point of showing Mariner his tattoo, but the later seems less than impressed, as he himself has a huge amount of tattoos all over his body, the most notable of which is the motto on his leg: “when we’re good they never remember, when we’re bad they never forget.” One particularly captivating scene in the documentary is when McIntyre uncovers that Jason still plays football despite being out of shape and middle aged. The story goes that he had been offered trials to play professionally in his youth, and the seriousness with which he plays an informal game of pickup evokes this former glory. MacIntyre narrates over a sequence of goalie Jason letting the ball in and losing the match for his team: “Jason believes that he can recapture the magic of his younger years still.”

Among other things, Jason’s actions in the film illustrate the ways in which football culture can be used as a vehicle to mobilize extreme nationalist fervor into terrorist action. The documentary uncovers Frain and Marnier as the link between the Chelsea Headhunter firm and the extreme right wing faction known as Combat-18. A small group of Headhunters are affiliated with Combat-18, and the documentary mentions their joint involvement in a series of violent attacks upon civilians. In perhaps the most disturbing scene of the film, MacIntyre captures Jason recounting his trip to Auschwitz with Frain and other Headhunter lads. These Headhunters make a point to visit concentration camps,

such as Dachau, whenever they travel to different parts of Europe for matches. Marnier recounts how he did the Seig Heil! salute during a tour of the camp and laughed as an elderly polish man burst into tears. He concludes his story with the statement, "I think I put the nail in the coffin when I tried to get in the oven," referring to the gas ovens where victims were mass murdered. Later footage shows Jason unfurling an inflammatory banner during a match in Copenhagen to incite trouble in the terraces. The police do not arrest him during this episode, as they recognize his detainment would cause more riotous behavior from the Headhunters, and the invincibility he feels in this brief moment transforms Jason into the king of the terraces. The racism and virulent nationalism that McIntyre uncovered is not an isolated case within hooligan culture. However, football culture is not and has never been a monolithic entity. There were and are still many non-white men involved in the scene, and race seems to be more of a non-issue in smaller communities, where displays of loyalty and social solidarity suffice as the criteria for inclusion. This may seem strange considering prevalent media images of virulent nationalism and racism espoused by N.F. (National Front) affiliated supporters, but football culture in Great Britain is very much locally informed and is defined by sets of practices that are embedded in the specific micro-histories of individual football clubs and communities. One aspect that seems non-negotiable, however, is that the football firm is a singularly male space for the construction of affective group ties outside of the domestic sphere.

While football firms are indisputably considered a part of "lad culture" in which women have little to no visibility, there are many accounts that challenge

the assumption that spectatorship is an emphatically white practice. The various football memoirs penned by Cass Pennant, a black member of the notorious Inner City Firm (I.C.F.) and a central figure in 1980s lad culture directly address the racial aspects of English football culture. Like other narratives of the ex-hooligan memoir genre, Pennant's book features endlessly repetitive anecdotes of disjointed acts of violence and descriptions of hooligan versus police encounters. Nevertheless, Pennant's account of the evolution of football over his years with the I.C.F. offers an insightful, if overly nostalgic, look into the nuances of the subculture, including issues of race and racism and ties to National Socialism.

Pennant was an avid member of the notorious West Ham United firm. On the subject of race and football, he writes about the experience of talking with other I.C.F. members as he gathered information for his book: "Everyone I interviewed felt uncomfortable even talking about the question of being black and supporting West Ham. Clearly, black is not part of the club colours."<sup>50</sup> Pennant's frank statement about race illustrates his understanding of his outlier status as a prominent, black member of the West Ham Inner City Firm. While black membership in football firms is rarely explicitly banned, hooligan culture has never been an overtly inclusive or hospitable environment. Pennant describes the climate in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a period of far right politics when the British National Front recruited inner city white, skinhead youth, many of who were also involved West Ham supporters. In the late seventies, the

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<sup>50</sup> Cass Pennant, *Congratulations, You Have Just Met the I.C.F.* (London: John Blake Ltd, 2003), 374.

skinhead presence in the terraces established the far right perspective as a tangible part of the stadium. Members of the N.F. would stand outside the stadium giving out nationalist propaganda, and their affiliated supporters came to occupy a portion of the interior ground. Pennant writes that, “the Lower West Side was the focal point for Seig Heil! chants. This was also the area from which bananas, aimed at black players on rival teams, were chucked.”<sup>51</sup>

Pennant also interviews his comrade, Bill Gardner, a former I.C.F. lad and “West Ham’s terrace legend.”<sup>52</sup> Although most hooligans emphasize that there are no official leaders of firms, certain men come to establish themselves as “generals” around whom the lieutenants and soldiers can rally. Gardener is one such person; he has become something of a legend in West Ham tradition and is perhaps one of the most famous names in the history of the football terraces. His almost insane fearlessness in street battles and his refusal to back down during police confrontation established Bill as “a leader among men; a rock of a man who absolutely lives West Ham.”<sup>53</sup>

Bill himself is a shy and unassuming man who shrugs off the legendary status given to his name: “People who know me know I can hardly walk, never mind run, and I’ve never been good on my toes anyway. Perhaps that’s one of the reasons why I used to stand and have it, because I could never run.”<sup>54</sup> Bill then goes on to narrate a specific taking of an opponent’s end that took place during a match in the 1970s. He describes the magnetism generated by the crowd: “The

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 377.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>53</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*, 53.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 55.

buzz was brilliant...there'd be that look of surprise and shock, then hatred. You knew what would be coming next: taking your opponent's end...It was done in the name of your team, to force respect; whether the team could achieve the same on the pitch didn't matter."<sup>55</sup> He further illustrates the affect of the moment using the typical language that constructs the experience of mass spectatorship: "[The] best way of describing it is the roar, to experience the roar of the crowd...the roar of the crowd got the adrenaline growing. When the roar went up, that was the moment everyone would go steaming in."<sup>56</sup>

Pennant's account of the hooligan lifestyle is quite detailed and covers many practices of the subculture. One emblematic and universal hooligan practice described by Pennant is "the taking of ends," in which the visiting fans would storm the area of the terraces directly behind the home team's goal post. The attempted taking of an end is a task not to be taken lightly: "These are terrifying minutes" Pennant states, "because you've disturbed the Holy Grail. Nobody is going to allow you to just walk in and take the home end. To do that is to rob the pride of a complete community...The taking of an end is mentally recorded and remembered always. The home supporters' morale and pride are badly shattered; it means suffering total humiliation...Everything depends on defending your end and your territory."<sup>57</sup>

The territorial language of this account and the emphasis on the ultimate satisfaction of robbing a community of its pride through public humiliation,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>57</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*, 24-25.

which then adds to the power and prestige of ones own communal identity is indicative of the ways in which the spectator mass relies on an ethos of tribal nationalism. This ethos is articulated through locally specific loyalties to certain firms and teams within the larger nation. The example above communicates how British nationalism is a fragmented concept that is formulated within the nation in reference to more important identity categories determined by locality.

Football support in England is not characterized by a singular allegiance to the British national team; rather, the culture as a whole is more defined by its regional specificity and the plurality of clubs that express belonging to a certain location within England. The prevalence of the regional football club over the national team as the locus for identity formation is reflective of the ways in which the European nation state has taken on a diffuse meaning in order to survive within the neoliberal, global world order.

Unlike Cass Pennant and Bill Gardner's auto-ethnographic accounts of intimate involvement with hooliganism in the late 1970s and 1980s, Bill Buford and Donal Macintyre's explorations into the declining scene of the 1990s examine the hooligan lifestyle from the outsider perspective of the investigative journalist looking in. McIntyre sheds light on the organized center from which a cultivated atmosphere of chaos and violence unfurls. He focuses on Frain, Marnier, and Wolford as living examples of the impulse and drive towards violence and lack of conscious that defines the Headhunter ethos. Furthermore, he shows the dangerous potential of the spectator crowd to be a conduit for the re-emergence of the totalitarian impulse into democratic society, as the firm

constitutes a mobile unit through which extreme nationalist factions, such as Combat-18, are able to disseminate their message and swell their ranks. Buford's analysis of the "lad culture" comes to similar conclusions, for he sees it as a crystallization of the type of irrational, violent, and nihilistic ethos associated with the crowd. Participation in hooligan activity is an embodied process that communicates belonging, both to the firm and to an imagined English nation that is briefly recalled from the mythical past within the stadium. Supporters frequently say that football is like a religion, that camaraderie and violent expressions of solidarity make them feel as if they are acting in the name of a greater cause, that it is what gives their lives a sense of meaning above all else.<sup>58</sup> Violence reorients the individual as an isolated, atomized being into a martial unit; it brings to fruition a subject who is willing to sacrifice himself for "his lads" and, most importantly, for "England."<sup>59</sup> This England, in whose name they chant and fight for, is an imagined abstract nation; it is a dreamed idol. The grandiose distortion of England within football culture can be understood as a coping mechanism that attempts to deal with the decline of empire by resituating the British nation into its World War II context as the center of industrial, Western world.

Anthony King analyzes the cultural shifts within British football fandom from the 1950s to the 1990s through the lens of "the decline of mass manufacture and fragmentation in the post -Fordist era,"<sup>60</sup> which brought about

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<sup>58</sup> Buford, *Among The Thugs*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 301.

<sup>60</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 176.

the “embourgeoisement”<sup>61</sup> of working class culture in general. Although British football has been characterized as a fundamentally working class, masculine activity by both its outside observers and its intimate participants, this is a somewhat misleading classification that gives currency to a powerful fantasy of a timeless, masculine working class culture at the core of British traditionalism. It is an archetype, mobilized through the popular imagination, which in turn sustains a pre- 1947 worldview of the British Empire as the multi-centered nucleus of the Western world. However, in tandem with the nation itself, British football terrace culture has undergone significant changes since the 1960s, and it would be reductive to state working class affiliation as the necessary pre-condition for the formation of this kind of masculine social group.<sup>62</sup> The work of Rex Nash, a sociologist who compiled data about English football fan groups in the 1990s, indicates that within the leadership demographic of ISAs (Independent Supporters Associations), there is in fact no essential unity of membership based on class affiliation.<sup>63</sup> Rather, as King asserts, the particularities of British football fan culture, “do not embody traditional working class values but are the expression of new identities and new solidarities which are themselves the product of a transformed society.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the reconfiguration of the British economy and social strata in the post –Fordist era

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.,176.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,177.

<sup>63</sup> Rex Nash, “English Football Fan Groups in The 1990s: Class, Representation, and Fan Power,” *Soccer & Society* 2 no. 1 (2001): 39-58.

<sup>64</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 180.



calls into question the relevance of the term “working class” as a social category.<sup>65</sup>

The commercialization of the sport led to the financial dominance of some clubs in the 1990s, such as Manchester United,<sup>66</sup> and the outsider hatred that the club incurred emphatically demonstrates that British football culture from the 1960s onward has been defined by ultra-rivalries between clubs in their national leagues.<sup>67</sup> The hostile and vitriolic atmosphere of football fandom indicates the ways in which fan participation came to be centered more around staking ones allegiance to a regional team versus staging unified identification with the national team. This is not to say that the rejection of the national team in favor of regional or urban clubs amounted to the rejection of England as a whole, but rather, that the meaning of the English identity had become fractured and reconfigured through a new set of criterion, which perfectly demonstrates how nationalism is constituted locally in a transnational world.<sup>68</sup> Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “imagined community” and his notion that “consumer fetishism refers to an illusion created by contemporary transnational production loci, which masks translocal capital, transnational earning flows-in the idiom and spectacle of the local”<sup>69</sup> is a particularly apt framework through which to explore the importance of the regional and the local within the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.,180.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.,191.

<sup>68</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 210.

<sup>69</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. M. Featherstone, (London: Sage, 1994), 306.

transnational business that is European football. Expanding upon Appadurai's thesis, King elucidates the ways in which the diverse world of British football fandom articulates nationalism in the global world order, as "Locale's should not be thought of as self evident places...the locale is not prior. Rather, a geographical space becomes a locale when members of a particular social network invest that place with significance. The locale becomes the symbol of the social network."<sup>70</sup>

### **PART III- Some Brief Thoughts on The Curious Connection between Neo-Fascism and Football Hooliganism in England**

*"It is sufficient to say that the dense heap of living bodies, intentionally and violently brought into being, is no less important than the heap of the dead... It must often seem that only when dead, are human beings really close to each other in large numbers. But the heap of the living is in fact equally familiar to us. A crowd, in its core, is nothing else."* –Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*<sup>71</sup>

Theodore Adorno argues that the continued existence of National Socialism within liberal democracies is embedded in the fabric of mass consumer culture, which creates a weak subjectivity that is susceptible to manipulation by a demagogue.<sup>72</sup> Neo-fascism has been able to thrive in globalized, neoliberal capitalism because the competitive structure of the system precipitates social atomization and segmentation and rapidly accelerates diffuse processes of social anomie. As social solidarity becomes more theoretical under the leveling gaze of globalization discourse, the individual everywhere is struck by a "concomitant

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<sup>70</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 200.

<sup>71</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 121.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1997),391.

loneliness"<sup>73</sup> and feeling of disillusionment within his specific location. Thus, the Neo-fascist revivals of the modern era are not indicative of a return to barbarism or a state of regression; rather, the resurgence of the totalitarian impulse was only successfully actualized in a moment of global capitalism's triumph.<sup>74</sup> The unstoppable tide that is neoliberal capitalist doctrine has washed over the entire globe, and it has been the harbinger of a collective and pervasive sense of insecurity, manifested in the resurgence of the crowd, today a highly emotional aggregate that finds expression through self-effacement, rootless radicalism and explosive nihilism.<sup>75</sup> In keeping with Adorno's notion that fascism's rational authoritarian edict is a particular product of the modern age, Hannah Ardent asserts that the chief characteristics of "mass man" are not brutality and backwardness, but the isolation and lack of normal social relationships that occurred with the breakdown of a fragmented, highly atomized society in which class membership is increasingly meaningless.<sup>76</sup>

The status of the liberal democratic nation state as the ideal unit of political organization was dramatically challenged during the immediate post war period. As a reaction to the horrifying capabilities of the nation state evinced in World War II and to alleviate the autocratic threat posed by a European Union, the architects of the new Europe called for the establishment of a kind of "European supranationalism" that would supersede the divisiveness of particular European

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<sup>73</sup> A. James Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 99.

<sup>74</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. (London: Routledge, 2001), 121.

<sup>75</sup> Gregor, *Interpretations*, 90.

<sup>76</sup> Gregor, *Interpretations*, 102.

nationalisms.<sup>77</sup> By institutionalizing a European demos in the Union through the establishment of a mythic tradition, a climate of widespread identification, solidarity, and democracy across the continent would theoretically follow. However, the notion of a pan- European demos and its implications of cultural homogeneity contained some seriously threatening implications, the crux of which are succinctly illustrated by Gerard Delanty's statement that, "there is a direct continuity in the idea of Europe from the crusading genocides of medieval Christendom to the systematic extermination of other civilizations of Europe to the gas chambers of the Nazis and the pogroms of ethnic cleansing of the new nationalisms in the post-cold war period."<sup>78</sup> In some senses, the fear that the widespread dissemination of a pan-European nationalism would ultimately lead to the persecution of those who did not fit into a homogenous, white "European" culture was an alarmist critique that "anachronistically impose[d] rapidly superseded understandings from the past onto the future."<sup>79</sup> This type of cultural homogeneity across Europe seems an unlikely prospect in the face of globalization and transnational flows of people, labor and capital, which have actually solidified the role of the regional and urban locality in the mobilization of group identity. Although warnings of the dangers posed by European cultural homogeneity were dismissed because they relied on an outdated definition of the nation- state, such critiques accurately recognized the specter of authoritarianism underlying the neoliberal agenda of European integration.

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<sup>77</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>79</sup> King, *The European Ritual*, 31.

A surface inquiry into the nature of the relationship between football and the resurgence of extreme nationalist sentiments in postwar Europe finds the connection to be arbitrary and incoherent; however, it is precisely the opposite. The association of football hooliganism with neo-fascist revivals across Europe is not incidental. The culture of football hooliganism is especially striking in its mimetic quality, for within the ritualized drama of the sporting mass, the fascist aesthetic flourishes. The aesthetics of fascism are parodied in the ritual dramaturgy of football hooliganism to the extent that the latter almost veers into absurdist theater, grotesque in its exaltation of blood and farcical in its nationalist fervor. The situation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian subject participating in fascist public theater and the conditions of 21<sup>st</sup> century live sport spectatorship are intimately connected because they are both manifestations of the mass mind through the crowd collective. Despite its performative dimension, the moment in which the contours of an unspeakable past erupt in the present strikes a nerve within the collective mind, and the resonance is as disturbing as the dissonance is perplexing. The connection lies within the atmosphere engendered both by fascist public dramaturgy and contemporary football, both of which are so adept at providing what Durkheim and Callois would describe as moments of collective effervescence. Unlike the liberal democracies of the past and current century, the Fascist and totalitarian regimes of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century understood how to effectively channel the energies of the mass to further their political projects. Thus the redemption that the crowd symbolizes for the democratic, liberal individual is a misplaced ideal, for underlying the behavior of

the mass aggregate of the football terraces, an image of the fascist public takes shape.

Pan-European nationalism has served as the platform for the re-entry of fascist politics and aesthetics into the modern, neoliberal state. Across Europe, neo-fascist and extreme nationalist factions of marginalized white men accepted European integration during the postwar era as a strategic “extension of patriotism”<sup>80</sup> that would, according to fascist leader Oswald Mosley, ultimately allow “European culture [to] free itself from the Great Negation and achieve regeneration and ‘rebirth.’”<sup>81</sup> These subcultures took up the vanguard of National Socialism, neo-fascism and neo-Nazism to protest the specific, localized troubles brought about by globalization, such as immigration, economic instability, and social anomie. David Harvey asserts that “the rise of right-wing fascist parties expressive of strong anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe” is evidence of the fact that “the neoliberal state needs nationalism of a certain sort to survive.”<sup>82</sup> In some senses, these groups operating on the margins of democratic society were merely capitalizing on the obvious thread of authoritarianism that lies at the heart of the neoliberal project.<sup>83</sup> However, the revival of nationalist sentiment can also be seen as a reaction to the dissolution of former bonds of social solidarity that came with the reconfiguration of state and civil society under neoliberal doctrine.

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<sup>80</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 133.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>82</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 85.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

The political strategy of Margaret Thatcher in Britain is an example of the ways in which an English cultural nationalism was invoked in order to garner support for the neoliberal agenda. Thatcher's nationalist stance took up the program of the National Front by invoking England and St. George as the symbols of an authentic national character versus the concept of the United Kingdom.<sup>84</sup> In her 1995 book, *The Path to Power*, Thatcher articulates her astute understanding of the need to keep the illusion of British sovereignty intact, even in a post Fordist, neoliberal and transnational economy that demanded an integrated European demos. She writes, "The nation (like the family) has also a profound and positive social value... Nationhood provides us with that most essential psychological anchor against the disorienting storms of change-- an identity which gives us a sense of continuous existence. Consequently the man who shrugs off his nationality... is a potential danger to society for he is apt to become the victim of every half-baked ideology or passion he encounters."<sup>85</sup>

Margaret Thatcher became the leader of the conservative party in 1975, and her election as Prime Minister in 1979 effectively quelled the significant amount of political clout that the National Front had managed to gather prior to that time. Her political legacy came to be known as Thatcherism, or the British translation of American Reaganism. The directives of Thatcherism included the revival of nationalist sentiment and Victorian era values, free market incentives, privatization and strict control of public expenditure. In an essay entitled "Thatcher's Dead Souls," Cambridge historian Dr. Nicholas Boyle presents a

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>85</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995),143.

nuanced argument in which he posits that “Thatcherism represent[ed] an unknowing attempt to come to terms with the loss of Empire.”<sup>86</sup> Unlike many other European polities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British nation state ideal was forged not through revolution, but through imperialism and expansion. The absence of internal conflict and the sheer vastness of the empire in contrast with the isolation and security of the isle had a stabilizing effect on the British political system and on British civil society, which adapted to the industrial age with many of its traditional institutions intact. The imperial culture “reinforced, if it did not actually create, a uniquely British phenomenon: the class system.”<sup>87</sup> However, as Boyle writes, the postwar years saw the destruction of “the political, economic and military base for this entire structure.”<sup>88</sup> In order to maintain the illusion of an unchanged society despite “Britain’s decision in 1945 to collaborate with the forces of mid-twentieth century modernity,”<sup>89</sup> the nation became “an imperial society without the burden of empire, and a modern society without the controls of the modern state.”<sup>90</sup> This vision had all but collapsed by the time that Thatcher came to power in 1979, amidst rising inflation, taxation, growing authoritarian populist sentiment and the growth of the labor movement. Ultimately, Thatcher’s rise to power signaled Great Britain’s inclusion into the new world order of neoliberal democracy and globalization, in which flexibility and segmentation of labor was the cardinal rule. British society

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<sup>86</sup> Nicholas Boyle, “Thatchers Dead Souls,” *New Statesman & Society* 1, no. 19 (1988): 28.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> Boyle, “Dead Souls,” 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



transformed into “an undifferentiated mass of individual workers who work in order to meet the needs of the same.”<sup>91</sup> All citizens were thus only connected to the nation insofar as they existed as individual workers who produced for individual consumers, i.e. themselves; previously entrenched networks based on community, location and kinship were found to be incompatible with the demands of the global market. Boyle’s post Fordist critique perfectly pinpoints Thatcherism as “simply the local British form taken by the global process of the flexibilization of human material.”<sup>92</sup> As Boyle so eloquently writes, “the freedom that the Thatcherist state protects is the only freedom it knows: the freedom to have what I want, not the freedom to be what I choose.”<sup>93</sup>

Despite an atmosphere of disillusionment following the decline of the Empire, British neo-fascist movements of the postwar era ultimately failed to gain enough traction to constitute a serious political threat because the British state was fairly stable and the majority of nationalist sentiment aligned with an ethos of liberal democracy.<sup>94</sup> However, the British far right revival can be understood as more of a cultural movement than a political one, and the impact of these right wing factions have been pervasive in the post -Thatcher era. The continued resonance of the ideology of National Socialism within a sector of the British population is a consequence of a number of factors, and British football culture vividly demonstrates this ongoing relationship. Much of the rhetoric of the movement references Spengler’s prognosis of the death of Western

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>94</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 49.

civilization.<sup>95</sup> British neo-fascists prescribed to a view of history as a cycle of decay and regeneration, and the general consensus was that the sorry state of British culture signaled the end of a phase of Western civilization. The death throes of decadence echoed everywhere in contemporary culture, whose symptoms of disease were “urbanization, entitled individualism, degrading materialism, feeble intellectualism, and rationalism.”<sup>96</sup> These perceptions of cultural decadence were directly tied to the influx of immigration in the U.K. in the 1970s and 1980s, which the far right used as an internal explanation for national decline, as “British culture was being infiltrated by alien forces and destroyed within.”<sup>97</sup> This version of history prescribed a fascist cultural revival as the antidote that would rekindle the life force of the nation and put its glorious destiny back on track by rectifying “the sorry mess of egotism and greed”<sup>98</sup> that comes about “when man ceases to be an individual and becomes a democrat, that is, when he forgets the soil.”<sup>99</sup>

The proponents arguing for a fascist reversal of cultural decline understood the project as a transnational European endeavor, in which the spiritual and creative revival of the Continent enlisted all those who could lay claim to a mythical and eternal European culture, whose high points included classical Greece, Imperial Rome, and the Renaissance.<sup>100</sup> Thus, in a new Europe struggling to emerge from the ruins of World War II, British patriotism and national pride

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>97</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 49.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 134.

took on a diffuse and complex meaning that relied heavily on the establishment of “an illusory social political community...capable of achieving power.”<sup>101</sup>

Gottlieb writes, “The British Far right in the postwar period was determined to link cultural activity with national and racial identity”<sup>102</sup> in order to formulate a “true, legitimate and authentically British culture”<sup>103</sup> which merged the glory of the British Empire with the artistic achievements of the Renaissance and the German Age of Enlightenment. This “eternal culture” fused together the cultural capital of diverse European nations with the Nazi dictate of racial purity in order to construct a monolithic, “European” race, which could trace its lineage back to the three thousand year old Greek spirit that spawned Western civilization.<sup>104</sup>

In the postwar era, British fascist groups’ chief aim was to accelerate the rise of a new man, *Homo Fasciitis*, who would spearhead a cultural renaissance in England. The promotion of this new fascist man was the active construction of a distinct identity that elevated masculinity to new heights, in which a certain kind of manliness was projected as the nation incarnate.<sup>105</sup> Gottlieb’s analysis of British cultural fascism in the postwar period includes a detailed discussion of the ideal character of the new fascist man. She quotes the historian George Mosse, who identifies this man as “a warrior crusader in the service of a faith.”<sup>106</sup> Mosse writes “This new man must be disciplined, at one in spirit with like-minded men through a way perceiving the world, of acting, of behaving, based

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<sup>101</sup> Roger Griffith, *The Nature of Fascism*, 193.

<sup>102</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 130.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 139.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

upon sober acceptance of the new speed of time and a love of combat and confrontation.”<sup>107</sup> The ideal nation would be comprised of “young men living like athletes,”<sup>108</sup> who must construct themselves in the image of health and vitality, for the sound body was the reflection of the sound mind.<sup>109</sup> The British National Front (N.F.) and the British Union of Fascists (B.U.F.) attempted to accelerate the rise of this new man by organizing recruits into paramilitary gangs who would internalize political doctrine through group activities such as sports, which were seen as rehearsals for more serious violent confrontation. The spectacle of sporting events was an integral aspect of the British fascist aesthetic because the arena was a male -defined space that established homosocial relationships, and the game was the ultimate representation of “the new movement of fascist bodies in time and space.”<sup>110</sup>

At the height of their recruiting powers in the late 1970s and 1980s, the N.F. and the B.U.F recognized within the football masses a whole demographic of potential converts for their revolutionary project. The climate of xenophobia and racism in the late 1970s and 1980s mobilized these groups, who rallied around the persecution of immigrants and blacks, mirroring the vilification of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Groups like the N.F. astutely realized that the crowd collective was a body of enormous political potential, and they attempted to re-appropriate the political technology of the mass meeting as a way to gain converts. The types of men that the N.F. attracted were a demographic of British

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>110</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 88.

society that gravitated towards nationalist ideology because of feelings of displacement in an increasingly multicultural and multi-racial Britain, which seemed to no longer have a place for those who had built it, i.e. white, male industrial workers. Even though this masculine archetype of the working class white male who sacrificed for the Empire is largely a fantasy of the nationalist imagination, it is one that nevertheless informs contemporary scripts of English masculinity, which are activated through football culture. The fantasy of aggressive masculinity displayed by the actions of the football firm and that of the fascist martial unit both communicate an “unambiguous message of camaraderie, classless brotherhood, [and] unity in sacrifice.”<sup>111</sup>

With its glorification of force and strength and its code of stylized masculine aggression and ritual violence, the collective culture of the football firm is evocative of the fascist aesthetic. The mimetic elements of British football culture vis-à-vis fascism are somewhat perplexing, but the attempt to re-infuse a metaphysical sense of the world by mobilizing myth through ritual is a present theme in both. In *The Nature of Fascism*, Roger Griffith writes, “the threat that modern man faces is the erosion of his ability to escape the terror of history.”<sup>112</sup> The only way that he is able to achieve transcendence is by immersing himself in the spatial-temporal moments that go beyond the sensations of the historical being in time. In a modern, anomic society that has no discernable center, the individual is always looking for a way to infuse a sense of meaning into his world; he desperately wants a reason to engage. The collective experience

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<sup>111</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 91.

<sup>112</sup> Roger Griffith, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 190.

provided by entertainment genres of the mass age is the mode through which emotional responses are harnessed in “the manufacture of myth,” which is, as Griffith notes, “as important to cohesion as the manufacture of consensus”<sup>113</sup> in the liberal democratic imagination.

One way that the National Front attempted to indoctrinate British youth was by giving recruits neo-fascist journals and other propaganda in order to transform them into ideal political soldiers for the revolution. The masculine ideal espoused in this right wing propaganda was that of the shining Aryan youth of a mythic, pre-industrial golden age.<sup>114</sup> The promotion of this archetype was ironic given the actual membership base of the N.F. in the 1980s, which was comprised mostly of a motley crew of skinhead youths.<sup>115</sup> As the electoral base of the N.F. dwindled with the rise of Thatcher, they took to recruiting skinhead youths as fodder for street violence, but the interests of these adolescents were rarely in tune with the high cultural values and political agenda espoused by National Socialism.<sup>116</sup> Thus, in the 1980s, the neo-fascist cultural movement in Britain ultimately unraveled from within because its leaders could not capture the interests of its youthful membership, who engaged in their own forms of popular entertainment, such as football, fashion, rock music, and alcohol and drugs, all of which drew heavily on the decadent materialism of liberal, capitalist consumer culture that was so denigrated by neo-fascist ideology.<sup>117</sup> However,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>114</sup> Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, 207.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>117</sup> Gottlieb and Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism*, 143.

despite the basic incompatibility of the far right political agenda with the self indulgent and stylized commercialism of football hooliganism, the connection between the two remains salient. The aesthetics of fascist dramaturgy and the mood engendered by participation in the mass spectacle of totalitarian regimes are rearticulated in the football spectator mass of contemporary Europe, which promote a specific cultural indoctrination that continues the proliferation of the mythic, nationalist discourse that formulated the ideological basis of the failed fascist cultural movements in Britain.

## EPILOGUE

*“Sport mocks the sterile seriousness of society. In mocking that seriousness, sport is able to pierce the instrumental shell of our social experience. As a model of rational action, it foreshadows ... a society beyond the compass of the exchange principle. In so doing, it gives lie to the notion that the real is the rational. In Adorno’s own words, ‘the unreality of games gives notice that reality is not yet real. Unconsciously they rehearse the right life.’”-William J. Morgan, “Adorno on Sport: The case of the fractured dialectic”<sup>118</sup>*

In his creative ethnography *Among the Thugs*, Bill Buford condemns the hooligan culture of the 1990s as nothing more than “a lad culture without mystery, so deadened that it uses violence to wake itself up.”<sup>119</sup> The implication of this statement is that the nihilistic rage and isolation of the British football hooligan is suspended only in the moment of violent rampage. Violence is an embodied, mind-altering experience that engenders a feeling of individual agency in a way that cannot be replicated within normative society because it is

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<sup>118</sup> William J. Morgan, “Adorno on Sport: The case of the fractured dialectic,” *Theory and Society* 17 (1988): 826.

<sup>119</sup> Buford, *Among the Thugs*, 262.

the expression of the anti-social and destructive impulses that lie in wait behind the profane, secular façade of mass, consumer culture. Buford's analysis of the crowd as an anti-social collectivity is informed by traditional crowd theory, which posits the 20<sup>th</sup> century urban mass as the paramount example of how the "fallen individual" becomes incorporated into the irrational crowd. This crowd, in turn, becomes the precursor to the unspeakable horrors exacted by the mid-century's totalitarian regimes.

While the notion that the crowd is the province of the weak willed and the mindless is quite entrenched in crowd theory, another interpretation of the crowd collective might suggest that the mass moment has the potential to be an experience not of loss, but, rather, of a different kind of becoming. Like many sacred transactions, this process of becoming is negatively achieved in the sense that it is predicated not on gain, but on the ability to lose, on the willingness to engage in potentially destructive violence and to risk one's life. Framed this way, the surface elements of irrational destruction and chaos that define the culture of hooliganism are not empty gestures that are purely self-referential. What is actually being communicated through these anti-social activities is the desire for collective experience and a different kind of social world. By tapping into a vast well that is the mass unconscious, individuals who participate in crowd life show the fragility of the veneer of individuality that structures mundane existence.

The crowd collectivity is a social identity that deviates from the democratic liberal individual of Western tradition, but the crowd moment is not an anomaly or an outlier of capitalist consumer culture; it exists wholly within it and of it. At



the same time as it is a commercial product of capitalism; the crowd experience during the arena spectacle is similar to the fascist mass meeting because it too is an expression of discontentment with liberal individuality, and a highly stylized rehearsal of its relinquishment.<sup>120</sup> As Adorno writes, “sport... is the expression of a readiness for self surrender, in which one senses the only guarantee of self preservation.”<sup>121</sup> The mass ornaments of modern society exalt the death of the individual and reaffirm the sanctity of the nation, but, ultimately, they are impoverished rituals, mimetic outbursts that unintentionally parody the more absurd elements of fascist mass dramaturgy and merge two dissonant political cultures as one entity in the collective national psyche. The football match communicates the impulses that lie behind the rational façade of capitalist consumer culture, and the aesthetics and ideals of fascism are expressed through diverse entertainment modes and leisure practices produced within the neoliberal democracies of the current era, including fashion, music, and of course, professional sports.<sup>122</sup> The contemporary sporting event has many of the elements of fascist artistic expression, which, according to Susan Sontag, “glorifies surrender, exalts mindlessness and glamorizes death.”<sup>123</sup>

With the continuation of the body politic no longer taking place in and of religious rites, the symbolic apparatus of a national culture belongs to the realm of mass entertainment. Mass athletic demonstrations display violent, masculine

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<sup>120</sup> Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), 99-100.

<sup>121</sup> Morgan, “Adorno on sport,” 819.

<sup>122</sup> Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” 96.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 91.

bodies in confrontation as the mythical nation come to life, and the dramatic, choreographed display of bodies in time and space is the aesthetic manifestation of the unity of the body politic.<sup>124</sup> Within the mass spectator crowd, the temporary suspension of man as a contingent being- in- time is made possible. The modern crowd of today is so prone to mass moments of abandon, violence, and chaos because it is forever seeking the moment in which to release the vital energies generated by mass convergence. The crowd can thus be seen as an anachronistic space that is punctured by acts of violence that occur in real time. The crowd is always pushing the limit, for it is only on the edge of socially sanctioned modes of behavior that the mass ornament transforms into a boundary zone, a liminal arena in which the spectator aggregate is able to identify with its totem for the purposes of communal regeneration.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.,” 91.

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