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How to play the game: Constructing Australian masculinities in an increasingly mediated world

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How to play the game:
Constructing Australian masculinities in an increasingly
mediated world.

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Due 1st November 2005

Abstract

Increasing research into social constructions of gender, have begun focusing on the study of male behaviour, or masculinity. The study of hegemonic masculinities helps display the dominant forms of socialised acceptable behaviour and expose artificial constructions of gender difference. Concerning trends in destructive masculine behaviour may find relationships with other forms of social disconnection linked with late capitalism. I look at how direct localised contributions to constructing masculinities have been disempowered by the expansion of the Western corporate economy. The culture of popular sport has been transformed to create an individual identification with Australian Rules Football and its masculinities, that are based primarily on a mediated experience. I discuss the methods of visual communication that are undertaken by the media, and attempt to uncover some of the false constructions with identity. The visual arts and other creative media such as film, may be found as a place for critical social dialogue to exist. My own art practice picks up on these concerns and questions the mediated relationships that present hegemonic masculinities. This thesis is an attempt to discuss if, and how that space can be productive in extending positive gender discussion.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Carl Broman.....



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All thanks to Nicola,
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Introduction

Sexual politics in the last forty years has primarily focused on the development of women's social position, however significant change in one gender, motions change in the other. It is well documented that throughout the history of women's liberation there would be radical implications for men, and those implications are more recently being recognised (Connell & Carrigan & Lee, 2001, p.99). It is now understood that shifts in gender dynamics requires the re-evaluation of both sex roles and the flow on effect of women's studies has inevitably caused disruptions to men's societal role and understandings of masculinity. A mounting culture of distress, tension and despair among males has been identified through a wide range of social issues, with increases in male suicides, incidents of domestic violence, anti-feminism, accentuated homophobia and misogynistic behaviour (Buchbinder, 2001). These rising phenomena are being documented with alarming statistics, moving researchers in the field to acknowledge a potential 'masculinity in crisis' and emphasise an increasing need to investigate such concerns. While it has been somewhat slow to establish itself, the relatively emerging discipline of men's studies is realising its importance and gaining momentum globally with increasing significance throughout the developed world.¹ Texts such as Connell's *masculinities* (1995) and Buchbinder's *Masculinities and Identities* (1994) remain pivotal in defining the emergence of fundamental shifts in males social role, and such contemporary discourse contextualises my analysis of Australian culture in this thesis. I attempt to apply such theoretical developments in gender studies to begin understanding Australia's complex relationship with its history and social constructions of masculinity.

To understand gender relationships, the context of this paper must firstly recognise the essential feminist insight that the overall relationship between men and women is one involving domination or oppression (Connell & Carrigan & Lee, 2001, p.100). This fact is extensively documented and while the enormous ramifications to the physical and mental lives of women has been the major concerns of feminism, it remains one of the primary concerns when studying masculinities; that men in general are advantaged through the subordination of women (Connell & Carrigan & Lee, 2001 p.111). A crucial entry into the analysis of power relationships is found by aiming questions

¹ 1998 saw both the appointment of a Scandinavian co-ordinator for men's studies, and a conference in Santiago, Chile, on masculinities in Latin America and the Caribbean. A newly founded 'men's centre' in Japan publishes series of papers and books looking at new forms of Japanese masculinity. In 1997 UNESCO sponsored a conference on the implications of male roles and masculinities for creating a culture of peace worldwide. Australia is about to host an Asia Pacific wide conference in Canberra, entitled *Moving Masculinities*.

at the socially dominant or hegemonic forms of behaviour that lie complicit in maintaining these systems.² The analysis of domineering behaviour helps to highlight the attitudes and pressures that segregate sex roles and create artificial distinctions between men and women. The dynamics of institutionalised hegemonic forms of masculinity result in not only the binary exclusion of women, but also the marginalisation of certain groups of men. Connell, Carrigan and Lee suggest (2001, p.112) that enforcement of separate categories for “men” and “women” is one of the major functions of patriarchal power. In the case of men, the crucial division is between hegemonic masculinity and various subordinated masculinities as explained by Connell, Carrigan and Lee (2001, p.106):

There is variation in masculinity, arising from individual experiences, that produces a range of personalities – ranging in one conception along a dimension from “hard” to “soft,” in another from higher to lower levels of androgyny. Conflict arises when society demands that men try to live up to an impossible standard at the hard or gynephobic ends of the scales; this is “dysfunctional.” The “male role” is unduly restrictive because hegemonic masculinity does *not* reflect the true nature of men. The assumption is of an essential self whose needs would be better met by a more relaxed existence nearer the soft or androgynous poles. In this argument, masculinity is fundamentally the social pressure that, internalised, prevent personal growth.

Their sentiments emphasize the study of hegemonic masculinities as a beneficial tool of investigation in critiquing gender constructions and power relationships. As the authors also suggest however it is important that these methods of social theory go beyond the “dichotomies of structure versus individual, society versus the person, that have plagued the analysis of gender as much as the analysis of class” (Connell & Carrigan & Lee, 2001, p.106). It is important to begin understanding how society participates and helps inform the creation of gender roles and create paths of social interaction. Examining the concept of hegemonic masculinity not only exposes endorsed patterns of dominant behaviour, but also discovers relationship associations with different kinds of masculinity. The need to understand gender politics within masculinity calls for the need to recognise that there is not one ‘masculinity’, but in fact multiple ‘masculinities’, which exist in relations of alliance, dominance and subordination (Connell, 1995, p.37).

² The concept of ‘hegemony’ was conceived from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of social structure and class relations. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” (1995, p.77)

The structures that inform hegemonic masculinity in contemporary Australia are infinitely complex and constructed within multiple facets of the patriarchal society that we live in. In the current environment, the institution of mass media can be identified as being particularly influential in assembling the public's understanding of what it means to be an Australian male. There are of course many concerns that contribute to the world of mediated information and I have struggled between spheres of influence such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, which are each entire worlds of research in their own right. For the purposes of this thesis I have simplified the analysis to look at how the mediation of contemporary sport contributes to people's understanding of Australian masculinity.³ I adopt Stuart Hall's theories from *Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'* to analyse how popular sport influences cultural discussion between society and the power structures that influence hegemonic masculinity.

Sport's contributing role in constructing Australian male identity is extensively identified, and sociological research finds it as one of the most significant sites for defining and elaborating ideologies of male supremacy in Western societies (Rowe & McKay, 2003, p.201). The field of sport epitomizes the production and perpetuation of momentous social influence in Australian culture and can be found directly informing relationships with national identity and understandings of masculinities. Sport in Australia, as in many other nations, has been a prime means of gender-fixing, a way of socialising the populace into sex-based social roles, a method of informing, even dictating to both men and women how they should behave on and off the sports field (Kirk, 2001, p.53). The predominant types of relationships that are encouraged through the presentations of sport play a significant part in forming interactive behaviour amongst men themselves and toward women. Connell's theories support these positions and he confirms sport's significant role in constructing masculinities and gender relations, "The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women." (Connell, 1995, p.54)

In chapter one I refer briefly to Australia's significant historical representations of masculinity, and describe relevant cultural context that has contributed to the development of modern sport. In narrowing these complex structures my research in chapter two uses the case example of Australian Rules Football, focusing on how its integration into systems of contemporary mass

³ I generally refer to those sports that are represented widely in the media as they can be seen more transparently to inform dominant social behaviour and relationships with male hegemonic identity. I bring specific focus to Australian Rules Football in this thesis.

media has influenced societies exposure to the game and the forms of masculinity is reproduces. I look at the absorption of sport into the modern capitalist consumer economy, and how this has constructed a masculinity that is compliant with wider corporate economic demands. Theorists such as Adorno⁴ and Giddens⁵ frame my discussion in deconstructing these current relationships of football within systems of the capitalist economy. These concerns are then related to the focus of my art practice, which significantly references elements of mass media produced information. Images such as the advertisement below taken from a hotel outlet pamphlet, contextualise my research by demonstrating the integrated tools of promotions used in modern marketing that construct cultural relationships with masculinity.



Fig 1. Advertisement from *all bar two*. Issue 4 Aug/Sept 2005

⁴ Theodor Adorno's analysis of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* looks at the expansion of mass media industry, which I apply to my study of modern sports integration into a contemporary context of mediated culture.

⁵ I specifically look at Anthony Giddens work written in *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, which looks at the social reorganisation of institutional forms and the development of associated sociological concerns.

I discuss my use of photography and video mediums and how they connect to the public's existing relationships with media constructed imagery of the Australian sporting male, while questioning how my practice is located in wider social dialogue aimed at extending understandings of masculinity within Australian culture. To conclude the critical analysis I question if the emergence, construction and recognition of multiple masculinities can actually destabilise unproductive social structures and allow broader space for more positive development in gender roles.

Chapter 1: Australia's History with Masculinity

To begin understanding Australian hegemonic masculinities, I use the analysis point of popular culture, as defined by Stuart Hall (2002, p.189) as forms of “activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices.” The main focus of Hall’s methods of deconstructing the popular is to focus attention on the relationships between culture and questions of hegemony.⁶ Within the field of what is commonly understood as the ‘popular’ you may find processes of how certain elements become more dominant than others in the development of a culture’s hegemonic structure. Hall sees this realm as a mutable space that may be used to productively contest and shift hegemonic paradigms. Structures of dominance and subordination can be articulated in the analysis of popular culture, and Hall treats it as a process by means of which some things are actively preferred so that others can be dethroned (2002, p.189). I use this angle of analysis to understand how elements of popular culture have been formalised, and how they influence current Australian hegemonic masculinities. The intention is to destabilise the rigid relationships society has with these structures in the hope that a more complex and nuanced understanding of masculinities can emerge.

To analyse relationships with popular culture and Australian masculinity, it is necessary to acknowledge the celebration of those particular moments in national history that have been galvanised into some form of collective consciousness about identity. The identification of this history recognises the multifaceted systems of masculinity that exist today, and uncovers how ingrained hegemonic masculinities are. There is ample literature critiquing popular history of Australia such as Anne-Marie Willis’ important text deconstructing the nation’s historical imagery; *Illusions of Identity: The art of nation*, and it is now widely acknowledged that records of Australian history are overwhelmingly dominated by representations of men. Some of the popular characters and events that hold significance among the population’s consciousness include, Ned Kelly, the Eureka stockade, the ANZAC and the lifesaver. These moments have been forged into myths that form a collective understanding of the supposed spirit of Australia and the characteristics of its people.

⁶ “Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured.” (Hall, 2002, p.192)



Fig 3. The last ANZAC.



Fig 4. The Lifesaver

They have maintained their position in popular culture through the support of information networks such as film and television.⁷ Representations of such nostalgic forms of masculinity preserve in society as they are continually re-introduced to new generations and re-experienced by old. Without delving into the problem filled discrepancies of facts among all of these pieces of history, more relevant are the popular myths that exist today. In *Ned Kelly* sits the ostensible outlaw, the ultimate egalitarian, defying authority while looking after the poor. The renowned 'ANZAC spirit' is perpetuated deeply to reminded us all of a war far away that supposedly defined the nation of Australia and the true character of its people. These events however, solely represent masculine behaviour of white European Australian males and they are essential in contextualising my thesis, as they still perpetuate in our contemporary culture. While versions of these myths still inform hegemonic constructs existing today, I look to more current dominant forms of popular male representations, within the context of an increasing culture of mass mediation.

⁷ Period films such as *Ned Kelly*, *Gallipoli*, *The Man from Snowy River* and even *Crocodile Dundee*, can be seen to embody and recreate idealised relationships with popular Australian masculinities.

Australia's contemporary popular icons are no longer dominated by lifesavers or outlaws, and most certainly not inventors, scientists, politicians, intellectuals or artists, they are dominated by sportsmen.



Fig 4. Swimmer Ian Thorpe.

Alongside the industrialised nations of the world, Australia has unquestionably developed an infatuation with sports. Over 60% of Australia's population will participate in some form of sport during the year, and the economy will turn over 4 billion dollars related to sports and leisure industries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Sport has become a major progression in defining Australia's people and their history. As early as the 1880s sport was already an integral and pervasive aspect of the Australian way of life (Horton, 2000, p.68). The study and recounting of Australia's sporting history is long and extensive, but becomes most significant with the emergence of international sport. Sport became one of the major unifying vehicles for expression of Australian identity. Australian's are always very proud and eager to celebrate that they belong to one of the greatest sporting nations, competing globally against the superpowers, with the handicap of one of the smallest populations. The first major demonstration of sports affiliation with national identity was the Australian cricket teams victories over an English team in the late 1870s. These historic victories spread a sense of national pride and independence and it is now

accepted that amongst other significant economic factors, sport helped facilitate and reinforce the process of uniting the previously 'separate' colonies of Australia (Horton, 2000, p.69). Sport became a means of antagonism through acts of defiance and dissimilarity against the conservative English colonising system. The heroes of the working class communities embodied the intensity and energy that surrounded Australia's primary sporting passion of beating other nations (Horton, 2000, p.71). Historians often recount periods through specific events in sporting history that are seen as exemplifying the wider social atmosphere and capturing national attention. They use models of social history with attention to class, gender and ethnicity to show how social structures existed through sport and recreation as well as work (Mangan, 2000, p.2). Moments such as the bodyline series in cricket, and Don Bradman are linked with hopes of Australians struggling through the depression. Through the retelling of these sporting events, popular history is signified and the nations identification with sport is embedded.

Australia's relationship with history demonstrates that the realm of sport has long been recognised as legitimate popular culture and therefore plays a significant part in characterising people and producing relationships with hegemonic masculinity. While the informal participation of sport by the population is seen to embody Australian lifestyle and identity, the increasing organization and professionalisation of it transforms its role in terms of producing masculinity. As more sophisticated governing systems of sport organizations and state endorsed programmes are implemented, the realm of sport is increasingly integrated into structures of social control. Significant developments changed when consumer capitalism began building momentum, and the functions of sports role in society became more complex.

Sport in Australia before the 1960s reflected modernist constructions of social order. At the time the institutions of modern life were replicated by modern mentality and ideological focus was on uniformity, rationality, universality, hierarchy, regulation and homogeneity (Stewart & Smith, 2000 p.281). Conformity was encouraged by sporting officials, with an emphasis placed on homogenised dress and 'gentlemanly' behaviour.

New Town Sevens State Premiers 1930.



Fig 5. Australian Rules Football Team from 1930.

Modern sport in Australia during this period was a product of early capitalist development; individuality was sacrificed to the 'good' of the game, team and club (Stewart & Smith, 2000 p.283). Previous economic models through this history have seen the proletariat as only the worker, using their labour without seeing them in their leisure. Sport then underwent a dramatic evolution in the face of wider social change, coinciding with western societies shift away from modernist ideals, toward postmodern conditions. "Bureaucracy and mass production gave way to more fluid and organic ways of managing" (Stewart & Smith, 2000 p.279) Australia followed global trends in the same era and the collective restructuring of sporting institutions could be seen worldwide. The process of becoming a mass consumption industry had begun as the focus shifted from recreational to commercial. Changes signifying these advances were things such as growing professionalism, formal administration and the emergence of sporting monopolies (Stewart & Smith, 2000, p.282). As the expansion of sport intruded into the commodity economy, the worker was further required to participate financially in their leisure to sustain the abundance and production of the commodity. Sport became absorbed into the consumer system and has thus been transformed into an integral part of the economically productive economy. The commodification of both sport and the masculinities contained within it become one, and part of the whole. Stuart and Smith (2000, p.298) describe the process of integration:

Australia, like other advanced Western countries, has been enveloped by a postmodern, consumerized and customized culture which values fashion, image and surface as much as tradition, substance and depth. The commercialisation of activities like the arts and sport began to blur

the lines between culture and commerce. In turn, sport has been integrated into the leisure and entertainment industries.

As the postmodern age set in, the economic environment has allowed the elite of their discipline to elevate into the realm of the popular. The idolisation of sports stars gained significant momentum with the expansion of integrated mass media, transforming the successful athlete into a celebrity. The emphasis has shifted toward individual achievements, launching stars into the public consciousness, and the sportsman overwhelmingly dominates the representation of these heroes. Through the saturation of their imagery, these sportsmen have come to represent a primary example of popular culture that embodies hegemonic archetypes of the Australian male.⁸



Fig 6. The professional sporting male.

This process develops their status to the point where they have become role models in society and examples of masculinity to revere. Professional sportsmen are implicit in maintaining their positions of power, and their iconic status is developed further by penetrating wider spaces in the

⁸ Connell describes the characteristics represented by the hegemonic male as being strong, powerful, in control, confident, reliable, competitive, fearless, and willing to fight (1995). Rowe describes the relevance of questioning the 'whatever it takes' attitude that permeates through sporting cultures players and coaches (1999).

public arena such as advertising, lifestyle programmes, hosting talk shows and even presenting the news. The success of a professional sportsman is celebrated in their own stories of how they have 'made it', while the audience who cannot, are expected to rejoice in their success. The emphasis is not on the journey, but on winning the prize. "Only a tiny minority reach the top as professional athletes; yet the production of masculinity throughout the sports world is marked by the hierarchical, competitive structure of the institution" (Connell, 1995, p.36). This construction of the masculine institution is a key element regarding modern sports position and its part in developing social behaviour.

Among all their representations, sportsmen are rarely seen discussing issues such as the emotional pressures of public life or demands of professional sport. Similarly with other examples of Australian male icons they express little emotion, as to do so would be to show signs of weakness and vulnerability. These emotionally restrictive characteristics centre on physicality as the emphasis of exuding power and the arena for conflict as men compete to gain greater power and wealth. My research attempts to identify how these patterns of male behaviour become normalised by the wider population from a very young age and carried through to adulthood. I look at how the increasing culture of mediated information effects social understandings of what is considered appropriate male behaviour and how it contributes to unproductive binary relationships. Through the analysis of popular culture I question if Australia's emphasis on sport creates exclusionary practices for the majority of society and encourages restrictive hegemonic structures to remain?

Chapter 2: The modern day Australian Rules

To examine further how these systems of modern sport reproduce hegemonic masculinities, I focus on the case study of Australian Rules Football. I use this example as it is the most promoted and economically participated sport in Australia, and certainly in most parts of the country it is the most dominantly represented.⁹ In terms of its contemporary position in representing hegemonic masculinities, the main evolution that has shifted the influence of Australian Football within social life has been the advent of mass media. My discussion about the expansion of the national competition, the Australian Football League (AFL), and the increased emphasis on a nationalised mediated image, looks at its contribution to a more restrictive hegemonic masculinity.

The huge success of Australian Football's modern expansion has relied heavily on its promotion and promulgation through systems of mass media. The style of strong imagery required to capture the attention spans of modern television viewers has suited the AFL, which is a fast paced, aerobic, collision sport. These traits of the game are exploited in modern marketing that collages them into spectacular superhuman physical events.



Fig 7. News Limited Press photograph.

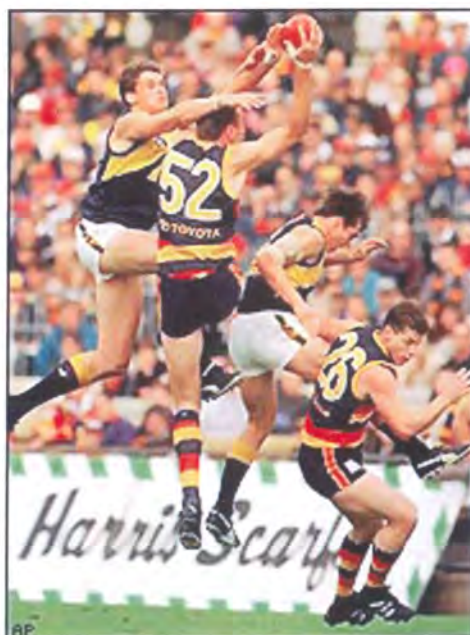


Fig 8 Associated Press photograph.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2002 shows that Australian Football was the most publicly participated sport with 2.5 million people attending a game on at least one occasion during the year.

Boosted broadcasting revenues have influenced the imperatives of the league to incorporate elements of flexibility and innovation to suit the demands of the modern day leisure industry consumer (Stewart & Smith, 2000, p.300). Rules have been changed to speed up play, match times adjusted for television, leagues and structures renamed, player payments dramatically increased, all these elements tailoring the game more attractive to the customer. The changes are the production of increased mediation and have radically evolved how football reproduces hegemonic masculinity. More so than at any other stage in Australian society the construction of masculinity is dictated within the experience of mass entertainment. Sport and the masculinity contained within it, has integrated itself further into the demands of the capitalist economy as it is constantly shaped to suit the purposes of entertainment. Games are converted to Guy Debord's descriptions of the spectacle, pushing them toward a hyper-reality, combining fantasy and technology to produce an eclectic sensory experience, all in the name of maximising appeal (Stewart & Smith, 2000 p.288).

Modern Australian Football has become ever more reliant on outside sources of revenue to sustain its expanding running costs, and as much as it now relies on television networks and corporate sponsorship, insurance companies and advertising have come to rely on football. The system has become dependent on each other and all the branches are economically interwoven (Adorno, 1979 p.122). This has led to the production and control of amusement by the powerful influence of the corporate economy. Systems of control and discipline are created to ensure the participation of the consumer. Football and its representations of masculinity are perpetuated as communal leisure activities and economic necessity has been replaced by fabricated pseudo-needs to ensure the development of the system. In Australia these pseudo-needs are constructed in conjunction with the dominant hegemonic ideal, which are formed into associations with identity. "The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions" (Debord, 1983). These forms of social behaviour and patterns of consuming have been developed through the systems demand for increasing survival. Australian football and its creation of limiting masculinity have been commodified as a representation evolving out of economic reliability. This process of economic development has mirrored its own hegemonic masculine desires and power structures, spreading to all fringes in the form of tangible objects. Inevitably it creates a social dependence on the commodities that encourage only certain forms of masculinity. Australia's restrictive masculinity works beautifully in conjunction with the economy, when put in context with a population that says "yes" to sport. Hegemonic masculinities have become the spectacle in the form of commodified behaviour and imagery that are used to endorse economic growth. Advertisements selling anything from cars to

clothing, alcohol, lifestyle, even dishwashing liquid, use hegemonic masculinity as their pitching ground. The expansion process builds as the broadcasting agenda of live football games increases to larger audiences across the entire country. You can now watch up to five or more national games televised on public channels live from all over the country in one weekend, and despite football being a specifically Australian pastime, the expansion plans of the league reflect wider trends of globalisation with games now reaching all corners of global television networks.¹⁰ Aside from the increased broadcasting and endless expanse of consumable items that strengthen the leagues position, the development of the AFL brand can now be seen spreading through powerful communicative leisure markets, such as pay television, the Internet and video games (Stewart & Smith, 2000 p.290). Further contemporary writings extend Debord's concepts of the spectacle and reapply them within the context of transnational commodity markets. The progressive integration of the spectacle can be found within international saturation of sport and the dramatisation that implodes commerce and advertising into dazzling spectacles, celebrating the products and values of corporate ethos (Best & Kellner, n.d.). Australian Football and the masculinities promoted through it have become part of the 'society of the spectacle'¹¹ and are being transported on a global scale under the banner of developing productivity.

While some significant forms of resistance have been offered to these commercially driven changes¹², by in large the individual's experience and role in production of Australian Football and its masculinities are reduced to nothing as the industry creates the experience for them. Who needs to go to the local football, when you can watch it on television? The encounter is of course socially disparate. When you're actually at a game you are experiencing a local community participated event, with real people surrounding you involved in local affairs. The mediated entertainment event of televised football with its close-ups, its replays, its increasing quality of camera angles, creates a place of isolated visual excitement in the comfort of your own home that you don't want to leave. This process of identification with football and its masculinities are based purely on the mediated experience. I am certainly a result of this mediated generation; having grown up in Darwin that has no team in the national competition, I constructed an

¹⁰ I have been able to watch the Grand Final, the most significant event of the league, in unexpected parts of the world such as Germany, United States and even China, where most people in any of these countries would never have even seen what the game looks like.

¹¹ "The spectacle is the developed modern complement of money where the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the entire society can be and can do." (Debord, 1983)

¹² While the league has experienced radical changes, it has been at times met with much resistance from supporters. One example was the attempted initial introduction of female dance troupes during the 1980s, which was greeted with resentment and disgust. It was seen to undermine the traditions of the game and reflect the crass 'Americanisation' that fans detested.

affiliation through media representations to support the Melbourne Demons, a team based on the other side of the country. My relationship with the club has been completely mediated through mechanisms of mass information.¹³

The evolution of the mediated or re-constructed experience for Australian Rules Football has shifted its priorities and begun overwhelming any social historical lineages. Modern league teams reflect the conditions of late modernity by contributing to what Anthony Giddens describes (1991, p.19) as disrupting social relations from specific locales. Globalised television has created an attachment to the mediated surface of appealing imagery, rather than any affiliation with social community roots. The reorganising of time and space means a new expansion of identity far more complex than the relationships football clubs and leagues originally had with their local demographic origins. Clubs have changed their imagery and identities, as 'branding' has become the emphasis in commodity marketing. Traditional community links based on local and suburban loyalties have been undermined to make way for brand identification marketing with team images and player celebrities (Stewart & Smith, 2000, p.288). The structures increasing emphasis on building mediated relationships reflects the broader disempowerment of localised contribution to versions of masculinity.¹⁴ These phenomena disrupt understanding of self-location and augment human desires for forms of intimacy and self-identity. Structures like the AFL capitalise on these disorders, creating more complex systems of branding by generating false intimate relationships with popular culture. In order to succeed these new forms must still contain some sense of familiar knowledge and language, allowing people to feel part of the decisions and almost owning them, however it actually creates a further power division of people from any real social influence. George Ritzer's analysis of contemporary society in *The McDonaldization of Society*, discusses the increasing uniformity of regulated information that is packaged for efficient public consumption, maximising commercial productivity while minimising the public's role in influencing these systems.

Inside the context of the AFL the manufacturing of mediated relationships may be analysed through the construction of nostalgia. Viewers are increasingly given the opportunity to learn

¹³ I have only actually seen them play twice, live no where near Melbourne, never have since I was 5, their home ground is now a 4 day drive away, yet I feel far more affiliation and identity with them than the local WAFL team of Subiaco whose home ground I can see from my bedroom window. My ability to connect with this identity relies entirely on my participation of the mediated experience and emphasizes my lack of connection with the localised personal experience.

¹⁴ Expansion of the national AFL competition resulted in other local leagues suffering enormously with dramatic losses in attendances and revenue. Leagues such as the Western Australian Football League (WAFL) and the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) have gone from thriving independent leagues to essentially become nurseries for potential players for the AFL. (Andrews, 2000, p.245)

about the history of 'their' team and build a historical relationship with them. The process becomes more intimate and personal for the consumer as they actualise and expand on an inherently distanced relationship. Events such as the 'heritage round'¹⁵ have been well constructed into the spectacle of nostalgic experience, helping consumers further develop a sense of personal identification with teams. In a postmodern sporting world, history and tradition have become only valuable in recapturing an atmosphere to exploit a niche in a competitive and ever shifting recreation market; cultural traditions have been reinvented to produce the most desirable consumer experience and add to its commercial value (Stewart & Smith, 2000, p.291). These desires have been immersed into marketing systems of the corporate economy and are now used to enhance its own survival and success. "Ritual, myth and tribalism have been conflated into an interdependent cultural and commercial system dominated by the hyper-real and mediated television experience" (Stewart & Smith, 2000, p.298).

Adorno argues (1979, p.124) that the synthesis of all technical media dissolves television with radio and film so drastically that "by tomorrow the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into the open." That tomorrow is beginning and media's unashamed integration can already be seen throughout the sporting arena, with increasing corporate sponsors on uniforms, rotating advertising for maximum exposure, promotions of viewer contests during coverage, even printing logo's on the field so they are viewed in appealing perspective via the angle of the broadcasting camera to your television screen. Corporate endorsed songs are distributed through jointly affiliated companies as background music to sports highlights. Subtle advertising slowly creeps further and further onto the screen as the viewers experience is ever increasingly invaded. The mediated experience becomes ever more pervasive in society and the people at the top become no longer interested in concealing the monopoly. An example of the AFL's integration into this monopoly is the Eddie McGuire phenomenon; he is seen in multifaceted influential roles and makes no real concessions to hide his power and influence in Australia's media.

¹⁵ Teams all play in their original uniforms designed roughly one hundred years ago, and play against 'traditional rivals'. While some of the supposed 'traditional rivals' are more historically known, the teams left without any actual social rivalry have been well constructed into the whole event.



Figures 9-16. Eddie McGuire presented in some of his various roles in mass media.

Sport no longer has to pretend to be independent of corporate marketing as football is absorbed into the mechanised space focused on expanding hegemonic masculinities. This becomes part of the larger patriarchal corporate structures intent on its own expansion and dominance, and the representation of football becomes compliant with this system.

Society has developed to such a stage that it is implicit in the systems maintenance and continuation of dominance. Any traces of spontaneity that may threaten the structure of football and masculinity are absorbed and controlled by official programmes of every kind selected by professionals (Adorno, 1979, p.122). The AFL endorses and provides finance to extensive junior development programmes. While they are presented in the guise of promoting health and social development, which of course are in part entirely legitimate, they contain the underlying intention of sustaining and developing its own economic position. Junior leagues around the country discipline children into learning the rules and conforming to the needs of the mediated system, which reflect a hegemonic standard of masculinity.¹⁶

The more intensely media and social structures merge to present certain forms of masculinity, the more it forces people to believe it represents reality. The theatre of illusion leaves no space for imagination as the information is delivered at a pace that allows no time for reflection. How can

¹⁶ My art practice deals directly with these concerns of hegemonic masculinity being reproduced from a very young age within Australian society. The mediums I use of film and video attempt to contest the indoctrinated mediated representations that society has come to associate with limiting forms of masculinity.

people create their own alternative masculinities when they aren't given any space to use their imagination, they are merely given enough options to subdue it. The role of the individual becomes marginalised in the process of producing masculinities as reactions to information about sport and masculinity have been collectively automated. The experience becomes separated from the individual and placed in the control of mass media representations that take careful direction to ensure stability of the system and that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way (Adorno, 1979, p.126). Consciousness is entirely derived from the system that is constructed by its production team, the content only appears to change. These conditions become endemic of Adorno's descriptions (1979, p.144) of the contemporary culture industry; the totalising influence of the dynamic institution grows stronger as it adapts, manipulating media to further discipline and control consumers needs. Masculinities become predetermined and socially bound by the rules of the commercial agents, yet are satisfyingly reproduced in different settings in different colours. As long as people unconsciously participate in the sports industry the system of economic control will negate its own power. As this system expands further the spaces for constructing alternative masculinities and contesting dominant ideologies become smaller. The ultimate control of this space lies within the technologies, which is in the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. (Adorno, 1979, p.121) If alternatives are not presented popular sport could remain abused as a weapon of mass deception.

In the next chapter I will question if emerging spaces for multiple versions of masculinity can be found as a productive reaction against hegemonic forms, or if they become just in fact commodified variations tailored to subdue the consumer and maintain the power structure.

Chapter 3: Producing cultural resistance

The discussion so far outlines the commercial integration of sport, focusing on marketable imagery that translates to the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. However the sports market can be seen evolving into segmented fields, each with their own specific targets, and the production of masculinities becomes varied for the categories of individuals. Multiple forms of masculinity emerge out of economic expansion as the search for diversified consumers takes place. The systems process of expansion is designed to encompass a range of budgets, and as a result varying forms of masculinity become available in a wider selection of products. Products promoting the AFL brand, range from beer coolers, to gold cufflinks, to beanies, to personalised number plates. Catering for varied supporters is also diversified with games being made available to suit all ranges of demographic, from budget seating to private boxes, to extensive home cable television packages covering three exclusive channels.¹⁷ The players themselves also become part of the process and slowly evolve to present themselves in various guises. Their product endorsements reach further into diversified marketing and slowly the system presents various forms of masculinity for each target group. Players can now be found in a wider range of advertisements than ever before, from modelling designer fashion labels to displaying carefully groomed artistry of hairstylists. Gender role challenging may also be found with examples such as women having just entered into the previously forbidden zone of male dominated football commentary. Are these shifting representations of football really beginning to encompass varying forms of acceptable masculinity or are they just reproducing the same hegemonic form in different appearances?

Popular discussion among social analysts has reached the conclusion that the creation of accepted multiple masculinities will indeed challenge the dominant hegemonic position and create space for more diverse gender role existence.¹⁸ Have any changes in masculinity really happened from the destabilisation of power structures, or is the power structure adapting to consolidate its position? In light of commodity cultures encompassing nature and Anthony Giddens description of the dynamic institutions ability to transmutate reflexively, I examine how this critical process can possibly create cracks in the system of popular culture to infiltrate. The emergence of various masculinities may be seen as a façade, much in the way that we are presented with a range of cars,

¹⁷ This expansion of information technologies correlates with Adorno's discussion about the synthesis of all media and the increasing production of the deceptive culture industry.

¹⁸ The social importance of diverse representations is recognised by Connell (1995, p.230) who states that progressing gender relations is a "generalizable interest but not a demand for uniformity. Complex equality is precisely the condition needed for diversity as a real practice, for open-ended explorations of human possibility."

different models, numbers of cylinders, to suit individual tastes, however they all end up serving the same function. Groups of consumers are targeted with various categorized forms of masculinities, which not only increase the institutions audience, but ensure its survival. The diversification of consumption guarantees the systems success, and those who participate to varying degrees become complicit in the process as consumers needs as individuals are tailored to. Complex power structures are simply extending mechanisms that disembed notions of self-identity and social influence. Is the discussion of this whole concern merely a distraction and simply contributing to the illusion of choice?

To find possibilities of change I return to methods of intervention discussed by Stuart Hall in *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*. Hall points out that the consumption of football and masculinities is certainly not passive, their mediated definitions do not have the power to occupy our minds as if we are blank screens. The culture of 'the popular' is a constant struggle that is disorganized then reorganized by the dominant culture. "There are points of resistance; there are also moments of supersession" (Hall, 2002, p.187). While issues of the popular inherently relate to class and gender struggle, there is no fixed defined relationship. However the culturally dominant powers such as the hegemonic male, have the influence to decide what belongs and what doesn't. It becomes essentially the male patriarchal directed economy, reflecting its own interests of domineering masculinity. But the realm of the popular also reflects 'the peoples' potential cultural influence in deciding what is popular through their decisions to participate. The power comes with self reflexivity and building an awareness of how to negotiate and participate within these complex social systems. A position is then created to resist the success of the dominant powers and places the fate of cultural direction potentially in the hands of the people. This process of possible empowerment remains endlessly complex as cultural forms are never contained within themselves, and their relevance and location is never fixed. The battle is endless and the two are in constant struggle, but to have any hope of a potential sphere where social debate might be empowered, there must be constant questioning of the power structures motives (Hall, 2002, p.187). The outcome of these developments is not predetermined, and the expansion of football and hegemonic masculinity is not simply socially popularised by mere saturation.

The protest can be contained within the detail, as a vehicle of tangible resistance against the organization. Hall's encouraging sociological analysis stresses the role of the individual and how they can develop empowering space on a local level. Hegemonic structures such as popular sport, construct relationship boundaries that contribute to increasing tension and confusion among males,

while limiting their ability to productively communicate their emotions. The focus becomes about the communication inadequacies that are enforced culturally and trying to create new forms of dialogue that extend these restrictions. This struggle involves the need to develop productive spaces for men who are increasingly feeling uncertain about their identity, and desiring to question hegemonic representations. A significant contemporary art example that relates to this approach is a recent group exhibition at the state sponsored National Gallery of Victoria, *FAIR GAME art + sport*. Over twenty established artists have contributed to this show that brings attention to Australia's celebration of sport, and places it in a cultural context to be questioned. Much of the work demonstrates the alluring familiar experience with sport, from where the space is then created to open the public to challenging ideas. Tracy Moffatt's series *Fourth* uses moments in popular sporting culture from the Sydney Olympics to highlight the mass media's emphasis on winning that permeates throughout sport.



Figure 17. Tracy Moffatt, from photographic series *Fourth*. Colour print on canvas, 2001.



Figure 18. Tracy Moffatt, from photographic series *Fourth*. Colour print on canvas, 2001.

Blair Threthowan's photographs entitled *Photos by Andy Craig* reflect an interesting dynamic of this relationship with popular culture and art, through the depiction of the artist skating through an infamous Melbourne public art sculpture.



Figure 19. Blair Threthowan, *Photos by Andy Craig*. Lambda print, 1999.

An inherent problem in questioning these systems of social relationships means disrupting the power order of things, to challenge the people themselves in privileged positions who benefit from maintaining the status quo. This means contesting the hegemonic Western European male character that the system in Australia has come to represent. The heart of my practice attempts to deconstruct these hegemonic representations of the Australian male, attempting to present alternatives to those that are viewed in the media. I find there is a social need to adapt to new forms of behaviour and environments, and to develop more complex gender categorisations. I hope to challenge the specific cultural institutions that perpetuate limiting representations of male behaviour and sport is one such player in this paradigm. I understand there are restrictions in my ability to deconstruct these systems, as I am part of the dominant middle class white male demographic that encourages it. One of the persistent difficulties in attempting to destabilise power relationships is that it must result in loss of power for most men, and given men's structuring of personality by power, also a great deal of personal pain (Connell & Carrigan & Lee, 2001, p.107). However it remains a necessary site to expand a critical dialogue, and question the complexities of constructed masculinities from within it.

While I appreciate there are many avenues for challenging social structures in the public sphere, I feel the relevance of my own visual work provides me with a location to access a relatively wide audience. Working with incorporated elements of short film, video and photography presents a platform to potentially access people more publicly than other visual mediums. It creates a different level of contact when the audience already has a complex existing relationship with the technology through systems of mass media. I continually question traditional relationships, and hope to push further in communicating ideas concerning Australian hegemonic masculinities to everyday lives. The mediums I use allow me to consider larger public presentations that challenge limitations of the art gallery context, through such forms as posters or projections. I recently produced a photographic series *Boys and their Toys* using the visual language of popular Australian sports culture. I reference scenes reminiscent of a posed professional sporting portrait, or it may also represent a member of the local suburban team. With the unexpected partial nudity of the adjoining figures, I attempt to disrupt familiar associations made with existing stylised media portraiture.



Figure 20. Carl Broman, *Boys and their Toys*. Digital prints, 2005.



Figure 21. Carl Broman, *Boys and their Toys*. Digital prints, 2005.

In terms of developing accessible content for the public, I consider Bertolt Brecht's opinions in *Emphasis on Sport* productive and find them applicable to the contemporary Australian environment of masculinities. He stresses that use of imagery must be relevant to today and not some distanced encoded discussion about the past or future. More importantly in order for art to appeal to a public that demands entertainment, Brecht considers that by containing elements of fun in the experience, you provide the viewer with a sense of enjoyment or satisfaction. I find that film lends itself to these qualities of appealing to a wider audience, and interestingly an increasing dialogue questioning hegemonic masculinities may be found in contemporary Australian cinema.¹⁹ My art practice uses elements of this medium and I find it quite useful in creating a playful yet critical relationship with the viewer. In my video work *Game Time* I manipulate the motion of change room rituals to try and create new relationships with the footballers actions.



Figure 22. Carl Broman, *Game Time*. 2005. Digital still from video installation.

¹⁹ Films such as *Australian Rules*, *The Boys*, *The Illustrated Family Doctor* and *Somersault* are some among others that can be seen critically dealing with Australian masculinities.

The approach of using subject material appealing to the public reflects my own opinions of pragmatically expanding critical discussion about masculinities. Artworks relevance increases by engaging the audience with something they can relate to such as popular culture, and I believe here you begin to access instead of alienate. Fields of popular masculinity, such as sport, are certainly constructive starting points to introduce new possibilities to a wider public. The examples I have mentioned of other contemporary arts using this productive point of discussion within Australia, signifies the increasing relevance of popular culture within critical social dialogue. Essentially the language of popular culture is being used to subvert and hopefully contest it.

Conclusion

From the research conducted in this thesis I have outlined a brief glimpse into the processes of control and influence that the mediated institution of sport has on reproducing hegemonic masculinities. It is an attempt to discuss an infinitely complex system that really has no fixed definition or meaning. There is no position of either a wholly corrupt or wholly authentic representation of cultural forms, culture is in constant flux and we are relentlessly being moulded by global forces so powerful that can bring political and economic systems down within moments. At best only an attempt can be made to list the forces that collectively spiralled together and interacted to produce the dynamics that created both the concept of Australia, its reality and its masculinity (Horton, 2000, p.87). However I hope that my analysis of dominant forms of behaviour helps to expose the attitudes and pressures that contribute to artificial understandings of sex roles.

Through the analysis of Australian Football I describe how elements of popular culture have been formalised by dynamic institutions and become socially intertwined with the capitalist economy. Mediated systems of control and discipline are expanded to ensure the participation of the consumer in the commodity market and in hegemonic masculinities. Resulting emergences of social disconnections may be found within these conditions, however there is evidence of individual desire to question these alienating positions. The tension is created between societies suspicions of these paradigms and the commodity economies ability to dynamically mutate to diffuse such critical spaces. As this struggle continues there are signs that the deception and absurdity of the system is becoming more apparent. People continue to live with the reality that not everyone will be a lucky sports star someday. They begin to recognize the models of unrealistic masculinity they are presented with as they see them repeated over and over through mediation. The Australian man is always shown as the same version. The mediated world of professional sport begins to leak the sickening extremes of accepted abusive masculine behaviour as the players representing everyday hegemonic positions in Australian society are slowly exposed. News reports in recent years have begun exposing multiple incidents of sexually destructive and violent behaviour commonly accepted in male sporting culture. As these reports are accentuated to the public, social reaction against them takes place and they become less tolerated. The presentation of hegemonic masculinities reaches a critical mass you might say. The process and presentation of alternative masculine behaviours begin to struggle with their

hegemonic counterpart. Small previously unaccepted changes are beginning to appear on the fringes of the dominant patriarchal landscape (Buchbinder, 2001). While these spaces on the fringe may continue to subsist, they must inevitably locate themselves within the institutional paradigm they are dealing with. To sustain any hope of influence it is essential that the complex task of institutional interaction is to develop.

Institutionalised Australian culture is showing increasing signs that the complex issues surrounding masculinities are being dug up. Academically it is being acknowledged as a pivotal theory and cementing its location amongst contemporary critical gender dialogue. Encouraging gradual shifts in masculinities may be found within sociological disciplines such as Nicki Wedgwood's research of high school football students in *Aussie Rules! Schoolboy football and masculine embodiment*. While her findings confirm the constructions of a masculine hierarchy and gender exclusion through sport, there are interesting examples that begin to disrupt the idea of totalising influence on social development. One of the teenage research participants who is a respected footballer, demonstrates that his social acceptance within the group exists with many aspects of his life that certainly do not conform to hegemonic behaviours.²⁰ Popular culture can also be seen challenging hegemonic structures and slowly presenting alternative forms of masculine behaviour. Discussion through film, literature and television has certainly expanded the dialogue about Australian masculinities. The visual arts also further progresses cultural language by challenging the hegemonic, such as the government endorsed *Fair Game*. As these signs of productive development may be pointed out, there remains the unavoidable complex evil that "In general, whether in personal life or in broader social milieux, processes of reappropriation and empowerment intertwine with expropriation and loss" (Giddens, 1991, p.20).

The positive signs of emerging spaces for masculinities appear encouraging, however there are contradictory suggestions that society is moving into a neo-conservative era, working in conjunction with the culture industry to deny any contesting positions of the dominant patriarchy, and alternatives to hegemonic masculinities. This may be found with the support of further restriction of censorship, gay rights, abortion, and increases in religious based law making. The field of alternative masculinities is immersed within these conflicts, indicated by signs of its

²⁰ The boy "refrains from the excesses of hegemonic masculinity like fighting, dominating females, acting superior. He belongs to a Christian youth group, not a very "cool" pastime. His best friend is Aboriginal. He gets along well with his female peers and is particularly close to his ex-girlfriend." (Wegwood, 2003, p.185) While the problem still remains that the boy is primarily accepted because of his participation in hegemonic masculinity of sport, he demonstrates that he can still exist outside many other forms of damaging behaviour.

absorption into the commodity economy at a pace faster than it can possibly take any social hold. The example of the metro-sexual culture²¹ is an occurrence where space for alternative masculinities has been created out of a social desire to reject existing hegemonic conformity. Its recent popularity within Australia may be seen reflecting social urges to offer new forms of male behaviour, however it has been enveloped by the commodity economies intolerance for real diversity, and demonstrates the systems dynamic ability to consume alternatives before they become a threat to its own survival.

Debord sceptically contemplates the process of cultural conflict: "All that is conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unalterable. But once freed, does it not fall to ruins in turn?" (1983, p.50). He asserts that if nothing is done to expose the systems fallacy, it remains unalterable and ever expanding. However he pessimistically wonders if the process of trying to contest consumer driven masculinity, merely wears out to become inevitably assimilated and powerless? An essential tool in the discussion lies within the need to recognise and learn from the past. Despite knowing history is problematic within the context of postmodernism, it is critical to recognise our relationships with identity and place ourselves somewhere in time, before moving consciously into the future. Events in our celebrated history are already coming under scrutiny and this thesis attempts to further contribute to a reflexive dialogue by relating such moments to contemporary conditions. Already the disruption of cultural relationships has destabilised the status of icons such as Ned Kelly. How will the history of the Australian sporting male be viewed in generations to come? This will be an important consideration in constructing acceptable hegemonic forms of masculinity and shape their position in Australia's social future. The fields of popular culture and history become a never ending battlefield, to define and gain control over alternative representations of masculinities. The ultimate fate of how Australian masculinities are constructed lies in the public being able to participate in alternatives and my art practice contributes to this debate.

²¹ Wikipedia: *Metrosexual* is a term coined in 1994 (along with the noun, *metrosexuality*) by British journalist Mark Simpson, who used it to refer to an urban male of any sexual orientation who has a strong aesthetic sense and spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. He is the fashion-conscious target audience of men's style magazines.

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