



Sport and Neoliberalism: An Affective-Ideological Articulation

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Imagine if the people of the Soviet Union had never heard of communism. The ideology that dominates our lives has, for most of us, no name. Mention it in conversation and you'll be rewarded with a shrug. Even if your listeners have heard the term before, they will struggle to define it. Neoliberalism: do you know what it is?

—Monbiot

Neoliberal Structures of *Sporting* Feeling

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT MONBIOT WRITES SO CONVINCINGLY about the seeming imperceptibility of a phenomenon that Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant have described as a “planetary vulgate?” The answer to this question speaks to the very nature of neoliberalism itself. In the broadest terms, neoliberalism is an amorphous, complex, variegated, and oftentimes contradictory formation encompassing new economic rationalities, associated political logics, and corroborating cultural sensibilities (Williams; Davies, “Limits”). In concert, these constitutive elements of the neoliberal condition have redefined, among other things, the contract between the contemporary state and its citizens and, crucially, the understanding of the nature and role of individual citizens living within the neoliberal state (Hall, “Neoliberal”). As Catherine Rottenburg summarizes, “Neoliberalism, in other words, is a dominant political

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rationality that moves to and from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing and interpellating individuals as entrepreneurial actors" (420). Of course, neoliberal policies or initiatives are rarely, if ever, signposted as such. Rather, neoliberal hegemony functions within contemporary democratic societies, neoliberalism exists and operates at the virtually subliminal level of the taken-for-granted or common sense (Hall and O'Shea). Pace Monbiot, is it any wonder, therefore, why we struggle to define or even recognize it?

Raymond Williams's understanding of a "structure of feeling" provides a conceptual mechanism for attending to Monbiot's neoliberal conundrum: those contingent "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone" that constitute a pattern of common experiences, perceptions, and affective responses—identifiable within, and across, cultural forms—which speak to the contingent forces and relations operating within a given moment (132). Applying Williams's theorizing to the neoliberal present, Jim McGuigan continues, "The neoliberal structure of feeling is not just a matter of ideas and emotions. It is inscribed into habitual modes of conduct and routine practices governing everyday life in a largely unexamined and semi-conscious manner" (23). So, the pervasiveness and the invasiveness of neoliberalism as a structure of feeling has contributed to the semiconscious encroachment of particular values, strategies, and outcomes into the nature and experience of everyday life, including the highly commercialized and spectacularized domain of elite and professional sport sometimes referred to as corporate sport (Andrews, *Sport-Commerce-Culture*). Sport is an important part of contemporary popular culture through which neoliberal structures of feeling and, hence, the neoliberal project more broadly become enthusiastically experienced and normalized by sport consuming masses. Corporate sport culture may not be explicitly political (other than obligatory expressions of nationalism and/or militarism as part of the sport spectacle). However, corporate sport is implicitly politicized: it has been articulated to neoliberal sensibilities, and it simultaneously articulates those same sensibilities, in a way that covertly reproduces the neoliberal order through the seemingly benign experience of sport consumption. It is for this reason that Monbiot, quite rightly, highlighted the invasiveness yet abstruseness

of neoliberalism: it is a hegemonic political project (or perhaps more accurately, sensibility) that is lived, felt, yet all too rarely considered.

Updating Williams's notion of the structure of feeling, Jeremy Gilbert suggests the term "affective regime" as a descriptor of the terrain upon which contemporary populist politics is waged ("Anticapitalism" 90). Lawrence Grossberg's notion in "We Gotta Get out of This Place" of "affective epidemic" is equally instructive in this regard. Both point to the ability of hegemonic political formations to co-opt popular cultural practices, including sport, and render them sites for the expressive re-enactment of normalized, highly politicized, affective investments. Regarding neoliberal politics, this process is characterized by, among other things, positive affective orientations toward the nation, the free market, and the expression of individualism; and, negative affective orientations toward the state, public institutions, and expressions of nonmajority collectivism (Anderson). As Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea identify, the disjunctive—and at times contradictory—nature of this compendium of neoliberal "common-sense" is attenuated by its affective dispositions, which provide a sense of intuitive coherence guiding one's experience of the world. Not that such hegemonic affective orientations are somehow postideological, despite being experienced as such. Rather, normalized affective investments in popular cultural forms and practices, such as sport, tend to veil the ideological assumptions with which they are inextricably bound (Grossberg, "Cultural Studies").

In the context of the United States (although similarly in other variants of neoliberalism and corporate sport worldwide), contemporary popular sport culture is articulated to and through, and thereby normalizes, the affective-ideological presumptions of the prevailing neoliberal consensus (Slack). Sport is one of a "range of significant cultural phenomena" that "share and work to reproduce the basic presuppositions of neoliberal thought and the long-term social objectives of neoliberal policy" (Gilbert, "What Kind of Thing" 12). Hence, excavating the neoliberal nature and neoliberalizing function of corporate sport demonstrates some of the ways it acts as an affect orienting agent of neoliberal public pedagogy that further popularizes—if in a semiconscious manner—neoliberal maxims, subjects, and psyches (Newman and Giardina).

Corporate Sport and Neoliberalism as Abstract Machines

To anyone interested in the critical analysis of popular culture, sport's co-optation by the hegemonic neoliberal project should come as no surprise. As Hall famously noted, "there is *no whole*, authentic, autonomous 'popular culture' which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination" (Hall, "Notes" 232). From a cultural materialist perspective, sport—as with any other form of popular culture—is what Marx called "a rich aggregate of many determinations and relations" (qtd. in McLellan 351) that simply cannot "exist apart from the forces of the context that constitute it as what it is" (Grossberg, "Cultural Studies" 255). In this moment of normalized neoliberalism, there is little alternative but for popular cultural practices and events to become sutured to the "basic presuppositions of neoliberal thought" (Gilbert, "What Kind of Thing" 12). Nonetheless, the politicization of popular culture simply does not operate in a uniform manner, and it would be remiss to assert a blanket neoliberalization of contemporary sport culture. Rather, like manifestations of neoliberalism more broadly (Ong), the neoliberalization of sport renders it a complex, sociospatially contingent, and, at times, contradictory technology of governance. In this vein, it is instructive to turn to Gilbert's suggestive utilization of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's understanding of neoliberalism as an "abstract machine":

An abstract machine is a functional diagram of the forces animating a concrete assemblage. Conceiving neoliberalism as an abstract machine allows us to avoid any charge of ignoring the unevenness and relative failures of the various policies and programmes which are generally grouped together under that name, perhaps even better than does conceiving it as a hegemonic project. *Neoliberalism does not manifest itself everywhere in the same way, or anywhere in it absolutely pure form.* Nonetheless, it has a discernible identity precisely by virtue of the similarity of the operations which it attempts across a range of spheres which offer varying degrees of resistance to its "cutting edges."

("What kind of Thing" 174, emphasis added)

Through reference to neoliberalism as abstract machine, Gilbert provides a framework for understanding the (nonnecessary) uniformity of

neoliberalism as articulated to, and through, various aspects of contemporary culture, including sport. Differently put, the various affective commitments associated with neoliberalism are experienced at a “certain level of abstraction” which ascribes it (neoliberalism) a sense of coherence and consistency not necessarily manifest in all of “concrete instantiations,” sporting or otherwise (Gilbert “What Kind of Thing” 21). Similarly, contemporary corporate sport’s relationship with the abstract machine of neoliberalism is uneven and, at times, inconsistent. Nonetheless, the cultural weight of normalized neoliberalism’s forces and vectors of effect act upon sport, in a manner that disarms—by rendering inconsequential—any contradictions of or inconsistencies with neoliberal ideology evident within the sporting landscape.

Corporate sport could itself be described as an abstract machine. It is a functional model of the hegemonic sport formation that bears the indelible imprint of contemporary late capitalism (Jameson, “Post-modernism”; “Cultural Turn”); specifically, the conjoined processes pertaining to the commercialization of culture and culturalization of the economy (Andrews, *Sport-Commerce-Culture*). As an abstract machine of late capitalism, corporate sport (typified by the institutionalization, bureaucratization, commercialization, and spectacularization of elite sport as a mass entertainment product designed to generate maximum surplus value across myriad revenue streams), is now the accepted structural and ideological blueprint for commercial sport organizations:

Today, virtually all aspects of the global sport institutions (governing bodies, leagues, teams, events, and individual athletes) are now un-selfconsciously driven and defined by the inter-related processes of: corporatization (the management and marketing of sporting entities according to profit motives); spectacularization (the primacy of producing of entertainment-driven [mediated] experiences); and, commodification (the generation of multiple sport-related revenue streams).

(Andrews and Ritzer 140)

Despite this, the abstract mechanical nature of corporate sport does not result in it being manifest “everywhere in the same way, or anywhere in it absolutely pure form” (Gilbert, “What Kind of Thing” 21). Corporate sport is a variegated phenomenon, the precise

manifestation of which depends upon the contingent forces and relations of the context in question. As with the process of neoliberalization, so corporate sport can be “*highly variegated in its features, impact and outcomes*” (Fine and Saad-Filho 11, emphasis original). Indeed, even sports located within the same setting are oftentimes corporatized in markedly different ways, even if such variations become obfuscated by the functional diagrammatic of corporate sport as an abstract machine.

While the corporate commercialization of sport long predated the prevalence of neoliberalism’s ideological and affective norms, the coexistence of these two abstract machines (neoliberalism and corporate sport) resulted in their unavoidable mutual implication and convergence. Thus, corporate sport became modulated through the neoliberal abstract machine and an exemplar of how “pre-existing technologies and cultural practices have been enlisted in the service of the process of neoliberalisation” (Hayward 270). Manufactured by the various interlocking armatures of the contemporary culture industries, high-profile sport spectacles are the centrifugal force of corporate sport: their cultural, economic, and, indeed, political influence emanates to the constituent elements of the complex corporate sport assemblage. These sport spectacles are not produced as political functionaries *per se*, rather they become politicized (agents of political conformity) through their conspicuous appeal to the populist sensibilities thought necessary to generate a mass audience. The populist dictates of the contemporary culture industries—preoccupied with the desire to produce texts that resonate with, as opposed to contravert, mainstream views and values—generate popular representations of the sporting world that incorporate and covertly normalize key elements of the neoliberal agenda. Hence, both the sport spectacle *in toto* and its composite substrands (the performative, embodied, promotional, pernicious, delivery, spatial, ceremonial, and social spectacles) are efficient propagators of the prevailing neoliberal consensus (Andrews, “Sport, Spectacle”). In Hall’s terms, the late-capitalist sport spectacle thus represents a form of “canned and neutralised demotic populism” that covertly seduces the consuming audience to the neoliberal state of play in political, economic, and social relations (“Notes” 233). As such, corporate sport becomes a subliminal paean to the prevailing neoliberal order.

Neoliberal Economics of Corporate Sport

Although neoliberalism should never be completely reduced to economics, the form and function of economic ideas and institutions are arguably neoliberalism's most discernible excrescences. Percolating over a number of decades following the end of the second World War—and informed by the pronouncements of Chicago School economists (including Ludwig von Mises, Frederick Hayek, George Stigler, and Milton Friedman) and other members of the Mont Pelerin Society (Mirowski and Piehwe; Peck)—by the beginning of the 1970s, an emergent neoliberal economic orthodoxy came to challenge the social welfare consensus that dominated the political economies of many western democracies in the immediate postwar world. Thus ensued the “great reversal” (Palley 6), which saw the Keynesian demand-side and socially redistributive economic approach systematically dismantled and subsequently replaced by a monetarist supply side approach, focused on stimulating the money supply within the economy. According to Richard Robison, this neoliberal economic revolution was forged by ideas pertaining to the advantages accrued by cultivating a largely unregulated (ideally self-regulating) and highly competitive economy in countering the perceived excesses and inefficiencies of Keynesian interventionism. This thinking rested on the notion that nurturing free trade and a concomitantly competitive market would lead to greater economic efficiencies and innovations, as well as the consequent stimulation of the money supply within the economy (the money supply previously drained by the perceived excesses of Keynesian demand-side redistributive investments). Continuous increases in productivity should, according to trickle-down neoliberal economic theory, deliver higher living standards to everyone from the thriving corporate capitalist to the manual worker now in full employment, meaning that the elimination of poverty can best be secured through the establishment and protection of free markets and free trade (Harvey, *Brief History* 64–65).

According to neoliberal doctrine, private corporations, for the benefit of the greater good, should be encouraged to compete within a putatively unregulated marketplace in a manner that ensures the structural rationality of the economy: productive, efficient, and profitable corporations thrive, while unproductive, inefficient, and unprofitable corporations fall by the wayside. Given these

assumptions, it is wholly understandable why neoliberal states actively nurture legal, regulatory, and economic climates conducive to the interests of private corporate capital. Measures such as individual and corporate tax concessions, property and development tax initiatives, and financial industry deregulation—in addition to the concerted dismantling of labor unions—all combine to create the type of “business-friendly climate” exalted by monetarists (Brodie 56). Within such a climate, the for-profit corporation (either privately or shareholder owned) takes on a defining and determining role within the neoliberal economy. It is the “state-endorsed norm” of neoliberal institutional organization that simultaneously normalizes “market-based principles and techniques of evaluation” throughout society as a whole (Davies, *Limits of Neoliberalism* 6). Hence, the neoliberalization of society is coterminous with its conclusive corporatization and the intensifying suffusion of the privately owned corporate model and profit-driven rational efficiencies across all sectors of society, including public service sector institutions that previously operated somewhat removed from commercial exigencies (i.e., schools, universities, museums, libraries, hospitals, sanitation services, the police, and even the military). As Mark Fisher notes, invoking Deleuze’s understanding of the “new” control societies, “all institutions are embedded in a dispersed corporation” (22). Or, in Deleuze’s terms, “the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation” (5, 7). The universal deformed modulation being that of the corporation: the “new system of domination.”

As an abstract machine, contemporary corporate sport would appear to evince Deleuze’s notion of the corporation as the axial formation within a pervasive and invasive system of (neoliberal) social control. The magnification (in scale and scope) of corporatization associated with the dominant neoliberal order is certainly evident within the realm of professional and/or elite sport. Given that popular cultural forms, such as sport, are intrinsically linked to the contextual forces and relations into “which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate” such a relationship between sport and neoliberalism proves inevitable (Hall, “Notes” 235). Corporate sport formations unselfconsciously acknowledge their corporatized institutional structure, management hierarchies,

profit-driven focus, and economically driven rational efficiency. Moreover, the sport industry has become a self-sustaining and regulating phenomenon, constituted by undergraduate and graduate programs, professional conferences and organizations, and a thriving publications sector, all of which reproduce what are tantamount to neoliberal corporate sport orthodoxies (Newman). Even the Olympic Games, not so long ago the heavily guarded (if covertly compromised) bastion of athletic amateurism has become transformed by the influence of neoliberal corporatism (Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*). Nowhere was this more apparent than at the main entrance to the London 2012 Olympic Park. Following a guided passage through the Westfield Stratford City shopping center, the largest of its kind in Europe, the expectant spectator was confronted with a massive advertising billboard upon entering the Olympic Park. One side read: "There would be no: GOOSEBUMPS, GASPS, POUNDING HEARTS, TEARS OF JOY, RECORDS SMASHED, STRANGERS HUGGED, OR A WHOLE WORLD BROUGHT TOGETHER. without . . ." Panning to the right, the other side of the billboard identified those to whom spectators should apparently be grateful for the staging of the visceral and exhilarating Olympic spectacle: the myriad Olympic corporate sponsors, including Coca-Cola, Dow, GE, McDonalds, Panasonic, Samsung, and Visa. Given the Olympics spectators' immediate experience of the event, one commentator characterized London 2012 as "a strange new hybrid of sports appreciation and consumerism gone wild. Or worse, the Mall Olympics" (Segal).

Of course, the commercial corporatization of sport predated the ultimately successful struggle for a neoliberal corporatist hegemony which commenced in the early 1980s (Gorn and Goldstein; Hardy). Nonetheless, contemporary late-capitalist corporate sport has reached an unprecedented level of private commercialization and popular acceptance, such that it has become a normalized and normalizing agent of society's overarching economic neoliberalization. Spectators are conditioned to expect the mall-ing of the Olympics and not to disavow it. In Francis Fukuyama's oft-repeated terms, the infusion of a corporate sport model into the hearts and minds of both sport producers and consumers alike means there has been a "total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives" (3). The corporate sport model has thus become an expresser and reproducer of neoliberal "common-sense" (Hall and O'Shea), a popular cultural form surreptitiously

guiding and shaping the understanding, feelings, and experiences of the neoliberal world.

Spaces of Actually Existing *Sporting* Neoliberalism

Many commentators (such as Jay Coakley, Hall C. M., Douglas Hartmann, Samantha King, Jay Scherer, and Kimberly Schimmel) point out that contemporary sport culture acts—through myriad institutions, intermediaries, and agents (both of the playing and nonplaying varieties)—as key sites of public pedagogy, which re-inscribe, represent, and effectively reproduce the hegemonic practices, values, and affective orientations of the neoliberal moment (Hall). Thus, the corporatization of sport is coterminous with its neoliberalization. Corporate sport is full of examples of what Niel Brenner and Nick Theodore refer to as “actually existing neoliberalism”: the ongoing process of neoliberalization manifest within specific sporting sites. Brenner and Theodore’s focus on the “role of urban spaces within the contradictory and chronically unstable geographies of actually existing neoliberalism” helps reveal how, in corporate sport, the position and role of elite/professional sport events realizes spatially bound neoliberal development initiatives (351).

Within many developed economies (and for various reasons, not least of which being the compounding factors of deindustrialization, suburbanization, decreasing tax bases, and diminishing state and federal support), entrepreneurial (neoliberal) approaches to urban economic development have largely replaced managerial (social welfare) commitments to serving a city’s population (Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*; Peck and Tickell). In short, within the neoliberal conjuncture, the city and its various resources (spaces, attributes, services, and populace) are engaged as potential motors of economic growth as opposed to sites requiring significant levels of public investment. Accordingly, entrepreneurial regimes of urban governance develop strategies and redirect public resources toward redeveloping the city as a space of capital accumulation by supporting the building of consumption-generating retail, festival, leisure, hotel, heritage, and sport spaces (Silk). The rationale behind the shift from managerial to entrepreneurial governance is rooted in core neoliberal assumptions regarding the direction of travel of the capital accumulated within these

commercial spaces. The widely anticipated, and much vaunted, trickle-down of capital to city residents (in the form of expanded employment opportunities) and to city government (in the form of increased commercial tax revenues), as well as the concomitant bolstering of city finances, provision for public services, and hence the quality of life within a neoliberalized city is regularly used to justify embedding “the logics, threads, and assumptions of capital accumulation more deeply than ever in the urban landscape” (Smith xxi). Certainly, this has been the case with the neoliberal appropriation of sport spectacles as a mechanism for abetting capital accumulation within the contemporary city (Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*).

Arguably the most high-profile manifestations of actual existing sporting neoliberalism (although the same neoliberal logics are discernible lower down the sporting food chain, with regard to the hosting of smaller events, building of sport stadia, or the pursuit of professional sport franchises), global sporting mega-events, such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games, have been co-opted into the urban/regional/national development strategies of many places around the world (Hall). In his work, Jules Boykoff describes the Olympic Games as an expression of celebration capitalism. For Jonathan Grix and Barrie Houlihan, mega-events represent a regime of capital accumulation which looks to harness the “feelgood factor” associated with hosting the event to guide the affective orientation of the general public toward the bidding for the event and, if successful, its eventual hosting (573). Much of this affective politics depends on the multifarious benefits widely trumpeted as accruing to a host city/region/nation (these include stimulating sport participation, tourism, consumption, job creation, and urban development), regardless of whether there is solid empirical evidence supporting any such claims (Coates and Humphreys, Weed et al.). For instance, Sir Digby Jones, head of the Confederation of British Industry, enthused on the occasion of London securing the bid for the 2012 games:

The Games will lift our international profile, attract inward investment and boost profits and jobs for everyone. They will help raise our competitive game around the world, and highlight to young people the fantastic rewards and exhilaration of competition.

(qtd. in Boykoff, “Celebration Capitalism” 2)

Doubtless speaking to the exhilaration of sporting competition, Jones's words simultaneously lauded the familiar neoliberal economic mantra regarding the trickle-down economic benefits that the host nation can expect to experience. In a similar, if more measured vein, Jerome Frost, director of Arup (a leading global engineering, design, and planning firm contracted to prepare the infrastructure for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games), explained that Arup's previous Olympic involvements (including Beijing 2008 and London 2012) were "responsible for much of the urban renewal of the host cities, ensuring the events serve as a catalyst for long-term investment and development" (Hayman).

Highlighting one of the core contradictions of neoliberal economics in its most developed democratic economy variant (Davies, *Limits of Neoliberalism*; Fine and Saad-Filho), sport-focused development initiatives routinely pivot on the establishment of public-private partnerships (PPP), whereby public funds are used (either directly in terms of investment in building facilities and infrastructure, etc. or indirectly through various tax-breaks or real estate incentives) to fund the structure and delivery of the event (Long). This approach reveals neoliberalism to be a less intractable project than it is sometimes positioned. PPPs, by their very nature, represent a collusion between public and private interests, so neoliberalism is not solely a privatized and privatizing project. Rather, public revenues often play a key role in neoliberal strategies, as long as they are used to create business (private capital) friendly conditions. PPPs are a key aspect of neoliberal urban development strategies, since they offer private investors relatively low risk (in terms of reduced capital outlays) for potential high rewards (Brenner and Theodore; Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*). However, such partnerships are also potentially contentious as the scale of investment required means they almost unavoidably lead to the redirection of sizeable amounts of public monies away from essential public services (i.e., education, library, recreation, policing, and sanitation). As Boykoff neatly summarizes, "these public-private partnership are lop-sided: the public pays and the private profits. In a smiley-faced bait and switch, the public takes the risks and private groups scoop up the reward" (*Celebration Capitalism* 3).

The drive to secure high-profile sporting spaces (major events, stadia, or franchises) as part of contemporary urban development initiatives, further advances the neoliberal primacies of the private sector

and the free market as normalized means of realizing efficient and effective strategies of urban governance (Silk and Andrews). Albeit with differing theoretical emphases, Dave Zirin (*Brazil's Dance*) and Boykoff (*Celebration Capitalism*) illustrate how the co-optation of mega-sport events by neoliberal development initiatives creates a space of sporting exception. This exception justifies the imposition of a tranche of neoliberal policies and initiatives (i.e., the retrenchment of public service provision for underserved populations; the lessening of individual and corporate tax burdens and hence the reduction of the tax base; the compulsory purchasing of strategically located properties; and the imposition of policing initiatives designed to socially cleanse key consumption spaces) (Giroux) on the basis of their necessity for delivering conditions conducive to the successful delivery of the sport mega-event. Hence, both directly and indirectly—and whether or not the sport consumer is aware or at all troubled by this arrangement—the very act of mega-event spectatorship implicates the viewer in the complex and convergent mechanical systems of corporate sport and neoliberalism. As the intended subject of such initiatives, the sport consumer's investment in the sporting mega-event is tantamount to an affective-ideological endorsement and, furthermore, a normalization of the prevailing neoliberal order.

Sporting Individualism as Inescapable Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be considered both a macro- and micropolitical formation. In the macro sense, neoliberalism's mythos foregrounds the role of the state in encouraging the creation of an unregulated and privatized free market. Therein, corporations are forced to compete in order to be productive, efficient, and profitable to flourish and, by doing so, ensure growth within the economy more generally (Steger and Roy). In the micro sense, neoliberalism provides a political rationality that operates at the level of the individual human agent. As much a political technology for governing economic institutions, neoliberalism operates as a mechanism for constituting and disciplining economic actors: it is "not just a manner of governing states or economies, but is intimately tied to the government of the individual" (Read 27). The cultivation of competitive individualism is evidently a core dimension of the neoliberal project. In the terms

of Ayn Rand, to develop a productive society, the neoliberal individual, like the neoliberal corporation, must exhibit rational egoism or selfishness (Rand), the central preoccupation of which being the cultivation of the self and the individual's self-interest as the primary determinant of social and economic advancement. Neoliberalism's idealized individual is thus an "entrepreneur of the self" (Foucault 58): a competitive, determined, responsible, and rational individual driven to maximize neoliberalism's increased freedoms (realized through reduced personal tax burdens) and opportunities (offered by the expanding privatized marketplace) in crafting individual life experiences and outcomes. Moreover, since individual lives are now crafted through an array of individualized market offerings, opportunities, and solutions, an inability to provide sufficiently for ones "own needs . . . and ambitions" becomes a marker of a lack of moral responsibility or a sign of pathological inferiority rather than a statement on the structural inadequacies or inequalities implicit within the social formation (Brown 694). Hence, through the normative construction and interpellation of individual subjects as entrepreneurial actors (Rottenburg), neoliberalism governs, or responsabilizes, the individual "to a particular manner of living" (Read 27).

As a spectacle pitting individuals or collections of individuals against each other in contest-based, zero-sum, and highly competitive physical performances, it is clear that sport serves as an almost unavoidable emissary of neoliberal common sense within a political conjuncture steeped in the normalized notions of competitive individualism. Neoliberal thinking rests on the notion of a neoliberalized society as a meritocracy (an egalitarian social formation in which individuals achieve, solely due to a combination of ability and effort) (Littler). So, the pervasive myth of elite sport as a meritocracy (a playing field in which only the most able, strongest, and most determined succeed) (Newman and Falcous) nurtures, as it further normalizes, neoliberalism's discourse of competitive individualism. The populist media routinely constitutes elite athletes as the ultimate entrepreneurs of the self. Their celebrated personas literally embody the competitiveness, determination, responsibility, and rationality underpinning neoliberalism's base individualism, and they are lauded for reaping their just rewards in the form of success on the playing field and (oftentimes) bounteous wealth.

Nowhere is the spectacular neoliberalization/competitive individualization of elite athletes better illustrated than in popular representations of superstar African-American athletes. The commercially expedient, intertextually constituted public personas of contemporary figures such as LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony, Serena Williams, and, of course, the enduring specter of Michael Jordan (Carrington), have all been incorporated by neoliberalism's ideological and affective orientations such that they are compelling agents of the United States' racialized neoliberalism (Goldberg). According to David J. Roberts and Minelle Mahtani, race is an "organizing principle of society that neoliberalism reinforces and modifies" (254). Perhaps more accurately, under the influence of its all-consuming individualism, neoliberalism exhibits a "tendency to potentiate individuals *qua* individuals while simultaneously inhibiting the emergence of all forms of potent collectivity" (Gilbert, "What Kind of Thing" 21). Within America's neoliberal racial formation, race is simultaneously renounced and reinforced as a politically prescient category:

Within this potential erasure neoliberalism plays a perverted race card, in that by rejecting race, formerly racialized "others" can be fully incorporated as consumptive citizens with no racial barriers to their participation in the economy. Neoliberalism, then, willfully misconstrues and dismisses the reality of racism as a powerful explanatory factor in analyzing persistent racial inequities.

(Davis 354)

Highly successful, high-profile African-American athletes are thus captured by the mainstreaming popular culture industries. Using myriad strands of intertextual, promotional, and presentational discourse, they are cast as idealized raced neoliberal subjects for the consuming public. Their very success disavows the continued existence of racial difference and hence points to the irrelevance of race. The carefully managed, marketized identities of prominent black athletes are thus made to resonate with neoliberalism's color-blind ethos, which neuters racial difference as a political, if not an aesthetic, category (Bonilla-Silva; Gallagher). Through the widespread promotion of their non-normative, raced personas, celebrated black athletes become discursive figures against which demonized notions of the black populace (as nonproductive, pathologically degenerate, and/or disposable) are constructed and effectively normalized (Giroux). These

athletes' carefully choreographed racial atypicality thus essentializes urban black populations and cultures, casting them as effects of a pathological indolence and criminality as opposed to subject to historically wrought, systemic forms of race-based discrimination (Andrews and Mower; Andrews, Mower, and Silk).

Celebrated athletes such as James, Anthony, Williams, and Jordan, thus act as persuasive public pedagogues, becoming seductive agents of neoliberal microgovernance which idealize particular ways of being in the world while demonizing others. Such populist strategies of public representation naturalize and normalize neoliberal agendas and ideologies, allowing them to stealthily inhabit the popular consciousness and bolster popular affective investments in, among other things, common sense neoliberal notions of competitive individualism. Hence, the (racially coded) neoliberalized athlete becomes a compelling, if covert, agent that normalizes the affective-ideological presumptions of the prevailing neoliberal consensus.

Sporting (Dis)Affections?

On July 28, the bid to bring the summer Olympics to Boston was laid to rest . . . the public pressure and opposition to the neoliberal and gentrification plans of big developers and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) triumphed! Boston joins a growing list of cities such as Munich, Oslo, and Stockholm that have rejected bids for the Olympics. These victories show that it is possible to push neoliberalism back and can give strength to other cities in the U.S. and around the world.

—Moxley

Corporate sport is a vehicle that inscribes neoliberal structures of feeling into everyday conduct and consciousness (McGuigan). However, the interpellation of individual subjects is far from guaranteed. Writing in *Socialist Alternative*, Andy Moxley described the defeat of Boston's bid for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games as an example of "working people's victory over neoliberalism." He points to Boston as only the latest in a "growing list of cities such as Munich, Oslo, and Stockholm that have rejected bids for the Olympics" (a list to which Budapest, the latest city to reject bidding for the Olympic circus, can

be added). Moxley concludes, "This fightback is an inspiration to all who want to organize against neoliberalism and gentrification, and all who want sports games for the people, not for profit." The most prominent sport mega-events, such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, are by no means the sole sporting targets for antineoliberal sentiment and activism (Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*; Gaffney; Horne; Lauermaann). David Webber outlines the amorphous, yet discernible, "Against Modern Football" movement, of which the FC Sankt Paul fan organization Mick Totten examines is a noted exemplar. In addition, Scherer highlights grassroots community opposition to the use of public funds to finance the building of an ice hockey arena and entertainment district in Edmonton, Canada.

The opposition to sporting neoliberalism is by no means surprising, since the power and authority of any hegemonic formation incorporates the conditions of opposition to it within its very ascendancy (Williams). Nevertheless, mutually reinforcing neoliberal and corporate sport hegemonies defuse meaningful opposition to their respective positions of authority. Activist movements periodically agitate against both neoliberalism, in general, and its corporate sport offspring, in particular, yet both abstract machines plough on largely unaffected. So, despite examples of evident disaffection with various actually existing/actively proposed sporting neoliberalisms, corporate sport continues to act as a covert corroborator of neoliberalism's privatizing, marketizing, and individualizing logics. As an armature and outgrowth of neoliberal states preoccupied with market structures, forces, and outcomes (Davies, "When is a Market"), the constituent components of corporate sport effectively normalize, as they guide, popular affective investment in the belief system underpinning common sense neoliberalism (Hall and O'Shea). So, while, as a popular cultural practice, sport is always already politicized, corporate sport is inextricably neoliberalized and neoliberalizing. Somehow rooting for the home team has never seemed less appealing.

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