Anthropologists on Home Turf: How Green is the Grass?

Yngve Georg Lithman *University of Bergen, Norway*

Abstract: When embarking upon studies of "our own" societies, anthropologists face strong competition from other disciplines. However, the value of the anthropological contribution to the study of sport will derive from cultivating traditional anthropological strengths. Methodologically, the anthropological toolbox will need some re-tooling The anthropological "grass-root" perspective is important, also as a distinguishing disciplinary feature, as will be attention to ritual, bodies and embodiment, and aesthetics. Hereby anthropologists can get at the cultural meaning-creation in sports, and why and how sport is a significant social phenomenon. The anthropological study of sports has a clear potential to let small matters speak loudly to large issues in our societies.

Keywords: sport, aesthetics, ritual, holism, anthropology at home

Résumé : En entreprenant l'étude de notre propre société, les anthropologues font face à une forte compétition des autres disciplines. Cependant, la contribution de l'anthropologie à l'étude du sport sera d'autant plus valable qu'elle s'appuiera sur les points forts de l'anthropologie traditionnelle. Méthodologiquement, la boîte à outils de l'anthropologie aura besoin d'être renouvelée. La perspective «populaire» de l'anthropologie est importante en tant que caractéristique disciplinaire particulière, aussi bien que l'attention aux rituels, aux corps et à leur image autant qu'à l'esthétique. De cette façon, les anthropologues peuvent atteindre la signification culturelle créatrice dans le sport, et montrer comment et pourquoi le sport est un phénomène social significatif. L'étude anthropologique des sports a clairement le potentiel pour permettre à des phénomènes minimes de parler fort sur des questions importantes pour notre société.

Mots-clés : sport, esthétique, rites, holisme, anthropologie chez soi

Introduction

Sport can be seen as a prism through which major social and cultural tendencies in our own societies manifest themselves. Yet through features such as its collectivistic rituals and embodiment practices, it also serves as a field of meaning-creation. Sport, thus, is both reflective of society and a force in society. From such a perspective, sport has similarities with many themes in traditional anthropology, where "small stuff" is made to speak to big issues, and should be able to constitute itself as one important gateway to anthropological studies of "our own" societies.[1]

Notwithstanding a substantially growing interest, especially during the last couple of decades, anthropologists have barely started exploring "our own" societies. As the case of sport shows, the competition we have from other disciplines to explain contemporary issues in what were their 'traditional' fields should be met head on, and anthropologists should make handy use of their specific areas of expertise. Rituals, bodies and embodiment, aesthetics, the creation of meaning—these are some of the classical anthropological concerns, and these provide a crucial orientation that allows a deeper understanding of what sport "is." At the same time, if the pursuit of long-term fieldwork and the study of small-scale societies represent the core of an anthropological identity, inquiries into sport and other general phenomena in our societies, will force some changes. Our fieldwork techniques will continue to bring us close to people, but we will also have to change our ambitions.

An optimistic assessment of the powers of anthropology must be seen in the context of present epistemological and methodological concerns within the discipline. Anthropology, perhaps like many other social sciences, seems to produce an endless series of statements about the crisis of the discipline, or even about its end. In anthropology, a contemporary challenge is the dislodging of the anthropological notion of "culture" as one of or the central concept of the discipline. Attacks both from within and

outside the discipline (i.e., from cultural studies and adherents of post-modernism) seem to suggest that the anthropological use of culture, as a more holistic notion, has to give way to flux, fractured identities, human life as a semiotic bazaar—"railway station studies," to give a label to this kind of anthropology, referring to James (1997) who quite literally deals also with railway stations. Difference is no longer geographically represented, but the Other is juxtaposed with us, and the perspectives from globalization put us on the same arena. Hence, it is argued, the integrative features of culture, tying people together in shared understandings of their societies and the world, can no longer be a basis for our studies. Culture, with this emphasis, loses some of its significance. Anthropology as a discipline has thus become characterized by attempts to redefine its essence. By the same token, the importance of the researcher is aggrandized,—s/he is now the author not just of the order of writer, but supposedly the very authorship is in itself a denial of an external standpoint of judgment/truth. While these observations may reflect the American situation more directly than British/European continental orientations, this distinction should not be exaggerated. Even if American anthropology has a tradition of according issues related to culture (including its dissolution as a fundamental analytical concept) more weight, it appears that anthropology there as a whole is in large measure in a phase of reducing culture with its anthropological connotations as a fundamental analytical tool. In Europe, the influences from cultural studies, media studies, as well as post-modern perspectives more generally, have obviously been important influences in a similar development.

The Holistic Tradition

If, however, we would like to remain in the holistic anthropological tradition, what is the holistic to mean when we do studies in our own societies? The anthropological structuralist and functionalist paradigms (and in spite of all the criticism, who can do without functionalism and structure in an analysis?) which molded together economics, religion, politics, kinship, and whatever the various 'institutions' in society were called, is untenable to take as an unqualified starting point in the study of our own societies. The production and distribution of yams, uncles and nephews, housing patterns, canoe-building—what at first must have appeared as a chaotic mess all hangs wonderfully together once Malinowski in the 1920s had sorted out their relationships in the Trobriand Islands. But how is Malinowski's prescription to be applied to the local suburban youth sports club? To what goes on in the Saddledome ice hockey arena in Calgary? To children's "leisure pursuits?"

The holistic perspective in anthropology is perhaps best understood as a set of questions. This is not to say that anthropologists would ever agree upon exactly which questions to pursue. Nevertheless, the questions that might be asked include how people transcend themselves, how is value produced, and through which processes is the social produced? Such questions, rather than specific paradigms or methodologies, characterizes the disciplinary history. The prime accompanying method, whatever it has been called, has been a focus on actual people's actual doings, when, how, and why. This starting point is also what makes it possible for anthropology to have a radical humanistic stance—the anthropological interest is not directed to how any particular features/institutions in a society function together, how any particular set of ideas have been managed in the scholars' chambers, or how any particular media—films, TV, books—cuts into society. Instead, people are the focus, and in a dual sense. On the one hand, people are seen as cultural beings, as the creators and carriers of notions, meanings, interpretations, and, on the other, simultaneously also as members of the social relations' orchestration of the rhythm and beat of social life.

With the holistic anthropological ambition, what is the anthropological object in our own societies? What is there to study and how can it be suitably explained with recourse to the anthropological tradition? Introductory textbooks in the discipline have indeed come to include any number of illustrations of anthropological reasoning with empirical material from our societies. However, their character of apt illustrations of an anthropological argument or of why anthropology is an important tool in the study of our own societies, make them just that—illustrations. Rarely do they attempt to provide a more systematic argument about what and how anthropology can help us understand general features of our own societies.

A significant impetus to this writer's own reflections over these questions relates to a personal experience. My interest in sports as a cultural phenomenon was aroused by what I met through my oldest son's sports activities. For example, when he was 10 years old, playing ice hockey and participating in competitive gymnastics, I realized that children's sports were no childish matter. He was supposed to be with his hockey team 18 times during the month of February, and 11 times with his gymnastics troupe. Why the emotional engagement, among the children, among coaches, among the parents, during competitions, or even, for that matter, during practices? What made hundreds of thousands of Swedish kids participate in sports, although, of course, relatively few as intensely as described above? What made coaches invest incredible

amounts of time in a children's activity? What made parents organize their holidays around their children's sports camps?

Searching for What Sport "Is"

The logical step in coming to grips with these questions was of course to go to the literature, and see what answers that could be found there. A first issue was to what extent sport is a reasonable analytical tool or just too imprecise a term. Is sport a blanket label, where such a variety of things can get thrown in that the term in fact is of limited utility? There is, at least to this author, a resounding answer to this in a partly wonderfully rich literature. That there is a specific historical development of sports, where sports can be seen as an outgrowth of or a specifically constituted part of industrial/capitalist society, is demonstrated in several arguments.[2] There are somewhat different elaborations of this thesis. Sport, with all its measurements and rankings can be seen as the "rationalization of the romantic," (of the same kind as the Apollo moon landings) where the romantic (another realm than the humdrum of everyday life) is dressed up in the idiom of the scientific world-view (Guttman, 1978). The romantic, "marked by the imaginative or emotional appeal of what is heroic, adventurous, remote, mysterious, or idealized" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2003), gets measured, ranked, and precisely remembered. To others, the relationship between general features of our societies and sports is that sports expresses the capitalistic ethos more brutally than capitalism itself—sport is the "by capitalism twisted" variety of play (cf. Prokop, 1971). Gruneau's (1983) as well as Hargreave's (1986) more Foucaultian-inspired views also show the intertwining of modern sports and modern society. So, although the argument is presented in several shapes by different authors, it is clear that sport can be sufficiently analytically situated to be useful as a topic of scholarly inquiry.

It is also noteworthy, that the anthropological contributions to the study of sports are fairly limited, and limited in a double sense. On the one hand, there are relatively few anthropologists who have made sports a major topic in their professional activities. These include Joseph Alter, Eduardo Archetti, Susan Brownell, Noel Dyck, and Alan Klein, and it also appears that there is a significantly growing interest in this field.[3] On the other hand, in most anthropological studies of sports, sport "itself" is hardly the major topic, but rather how social or cultural features in a society express themselves through sports. Such studies, whether about sports and masculinity, the social position of women, neo-colonialism or the socialization of children, can of course be highly interesting. However, sport as a topic per se somehow often seems to get lost. Put differently, is there something in the social science treatment of sport, which thus far to a significant degree is missing? And can anthropology play a role in expanding our understanding of sport as a phenomenon with somewhat specific characteristics? In shorthand, one may perhaps suggest that most social science treatment of sports has not set out to explain "sport," but how sport intersects some particular dimension of society. To give some examples, and these are certainly not exhaustive, political scientists have written about how political ideology expresses itself through sports, sociologists and educators about how sports contribute to the socialization of children and youth, economists about how big-league sports affect local economies, historically oriented social scientists about how sports have contributed to the disciplining (a la Foucault) or "civilizing process" (a la Elias) in society. With such orientations, however, whatever is special about sport, perhaps most clearly evident in the passions it can arouse, is not necessarily at the fore.[4]

Anthropology as a Social Science

The role of anthropology in the social sciences is somewhat peculiar, at least in a historical perspective, and this may help in explaining why it can make a specific contribution to the study of sports. As disciplinary, institutionalized activities, the social sciences were one issue in a twin birth of modernity, where the other delivery was the nation-state.[5] The social sciences were meant to be the creators and repositories of the knowledge needed for the proper and well-functioning nation-states. This gave the social sciences an orientation towards social problem issues, such as the "functioning" of societies, the reduction of conflict, how to achieve well integrated societies. If this was largely the "social location" of the social science disciplines, there was also always another somewhat competing perspective present, a perspective rooted in wonderment over how society is possible. In spite of debates over anthropology as a colonial exercise (and there is no doubt that this was to some extent the case), one may well argue that anthropology was the social science most shaped by a wonderment over how society is possible, and least tangled up in issues of managing states. It was, and is, in large measure liberated from having to be "useful" in a narrow sense. The anthropological focus was on the general human condition in all its variety, how people constructed meaning and the social. From this perspective, anthropology has a vantage point in understanding what sport "is." If something matters to people, it matters to the anthropologist—especially something that is so obviously engaging as sport.

Another related feature of anthropology is that it by and large, for the vast part of its history, confined itself to methods of study where a face-to-face contact with people was the main data collection method. Anthropologists (usually) did not use or even have access to census data, large-scale questionnaires, focus groups, polling, and so on. Instead, they involved themselves in the everyday lives of people. If one should talk today about a shared anthropological perspective, maybe Goffman (1982: ix-x), the social anthropologist turned sociologist, early on had the best formulation:

> "Any group of persons...develops a life of their own which becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and...a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject."

Maybe most anthropologists would agree that this is the anthropological subject—*homo vivans*. But the anthropological project also has to do with the character of explanation. Simply put, perhaps almost too simply, the anthropological ambition is to explain through contextualization; around that which one wants to explain, the anthropologist seeks to bring to light that which is not immediately seen, that which underpins social and cultural processes, to make evident the logic upon which these rest. And always on the basis of data created in the interaction with actual people.

There is a curious and superficially paradoxical situation here, and one that is certainly important when reflecting upon what anthropology can contribute to our understanding of our own societies. As anthropology is a discipline that programmatically has its foundation in the interaction between the researcher and actual, living people, this also means that what is important for people is also important to the anthropologist. But the ambition is not an individuating, psychologizing approach, quite the contrary. In a sense, the anthropological craft is to show something of the totality of how a society hangs together, to show those patterns, interconnections and processes which constitutes the society in question—the anthropological commitment to a holistic perspective, as it used to be called. So here, then, is the apparent paradox: through an attention to persons, their statements and their activities, as the by far most important sources of data, anthropology has a strong commitment to say something about the principles that structure social and cultural life in society.

Towards New Holisms

While still limited in terms of the total anthropological output, a significant body of anthropological studies of Western societies has emerged over the past few decades. From this, it is obvious that anthropologists have tackled the issue of doing "anthropology at home" in different ways. One has been, in effect, to turn our objects of study into virtual Trobriand Islands. Neighborhood and immigrant studies are often illustrations of this. The object (the neighborhood, the immigrant group) is seen as an entity with a boundary between it and the rest of the world (and across this boundary flow "influences from the surrounding society"). Another approach, frequently combined with "Trobriandization," has been to limit the study to often Goffman-inspired, almost sociological small-group studies. Network studies, often with a pronounced transactional (as opposed to "cultural") analytical bias have their success, perhaps most prominently in the genre of studies of transnational communities. All in all, however, the ambition to provide holistic treatment is fairly reduced, either in terms of scale (small-scale cutouts) or analytically (restricting the scope of the study to some particular feature).

In studies of our own societies, then, anthropologists still have work to do to recalibrate and redefine what will better realize their holistic ambitions. Instead of showing how all institutions in a society hang together, a first step in a new holism can be seen as comprised of a focus on actual people and upon the explanation of thinking and actions. This explanation would be derived from a social and cultural contextualization driven by an attempt to explain not "the whole society" (as in many classical anthropological studies), but, more modestly, with a starting point in what drives people in specific contexts in terms of their participation in these contexts. In such an endeavor, anthropologists would be greatly assisted by their commitment to a focus on people. Here, some of the things that are important to people, but seldom or ever to other social sciences, can be incorporated into the anthropological analysis. What is characteristic of sports—passion, rituals, emotional engagement, aesthetic expression—is certainly outside much social science, but are classical anthropological themes. This is in contrast to the social sciences generally, where with some wonderful exceptions sports have in large measure been relegated to a non-concern, not seen as belonging in the realm of that which is really important in a society. It is noteworthy that much of the current sport literature (and this is not a statement about its quality) derives out of what are basically social order concerns.[6] These have provided the inspiration behind many studies of soccer hooliganism, as well as of the

socialization effects of children's sports. But if we want to know something about sports, it seems that the social order approach is not necessarily the best one to help us along. To people, after all, sport "in itself" may be of overriding importance. If so, why not also treat it as important in its own right?

Due to its non-state-centred approach, its tradition of not focussing on "social problems," and its engagement with and focus on real people, anthropology has a particular advantage for the study of sports; this advantage is expressed and enhanced through its classical focus on what people themselves find important.

Anthropology and Methods

The differences between working in a "traditional" society of the kind in which most anthropological studies have been done, and of doing anthropologically oriented studies in our own societies, will of course force some radical re-tooling. Some of the challenges are fairly easy to observe, while others will emerge as we increasingly pursue such studies.

It is obvious that the analytical relationship between the biography of the individual and the constitution of society is very different "at home" compared to the case in more "traditional societies." If Malinowski had followed an individual Trobriand Islander from cradle to grave, he would in all likelihood have had spectacularly rich material about the social, economic, political, ritual and other conditions in Trobriand society—each member of the society participated in virtually all the significant activities of Trobriand life (gender dimensions aside). Malinowski would however have offered a strange picture of the present author's country of birth, Sweden, if he had just followed him around, and used this as his material to depict all aspects of Swedish social and cultural life.

Another, and related concern, has to do with how an individual in "our" societies is a part of a large number of networks, all with their own characteristics. A teenage hockey player can in the course of a day be in school, at home, with his school mates, with the hockey team, watch a video with his girlfriend, and then go to a disco. To postulate a wholeness, an integration, between these different contexts, over and above what the teenager himself constructs, is problematic, to say the least. A Trobriandization, whether it is called youth culture or something else, may in fact gloss over that the wholeness is not there. That an individual is tied into a plurality of social networks must be at the base of inquiries into our own societies.[7]

However, any anthropologist who is interested in sports knows that the Calgary Saddledome is not a Trobriand island, and our sons are unlikely to have uncles to whom they have to carry the bounties of harvests. Nevertheless, it is also true that posters of Lemieux and Gretzky on bedroom doors and the youth ice hockey games on thousands of arenas show that social anchorages, tied to principles of ceremonial exchange, are as present to our sons as they ever were to some kids on coral islands some 90 years ago.

So how to deal with the methodological issues entailed in conducting anthropology "at home," and especially in studying sports? With reference to those studies of sports which anthropologists have presented and also to what seems like exciting and largely unexplored areas of inquiry, it is possible to draw some conclusions and make some suggestions.

Anthropological fieldwork, which has helped so much to distinguish anthropology from the other social sciences, should of course be maintained. Further, there is no doubt that an anthropology of sport has to have a starting focus on the sporting event. Most scholars would probably accept that sport is a meta-commentary on society. However, the anthropological study of sport will show that it is more than that—through its ritual dimensions, expressed in the sporting event, sport is also the creation of meaning. As parts of the ritual, performing bodies, the aesthetics, and the structure of the event, are all perceived through acts of interpretation, and the summation of the event, its significance, its total meaning, is also arrived at through acts of interpretation. Different participants may well interpret differently, and various groups in a society, or the state itself, may want to impress a particular interpretation upon the spectators. All this testifies to the meaning-creation potential of the sports event, and the foundation it lays for the contestation of meaning. Further, as a ritual, the sport event also claims to express transcendent values (and this point will be further touched upon when discussing aesthetics), and this also argues for the fruitfulness of an anthropologically based analysis. Even if not every particular anthropological study of sport has to deal with the sporting event, it may well be argued that an anthropology of sports which is not informed by reference to the main formative occasion in sports, the sporting events, will somehow lack an appreciation of the dynamics and energies that these release by virtue of the fact that they are not defined within the humdrum of everyday life. They are, in an anthropological sense, rituals—they somehow touch on a deeper level of participation in social and cultural life.

An anthropology of sports cannot, however, restrict itself to the sport events and the people involved in it. Sport, it may be argued, has become a major field for vir-

tually all sorts of attempts at symbolic elaboration. The sport event itself can thus in a sense be seen as "empty," and being filled in continuous acts of creation of meaning.[8] Fifty years ago, Swedish soccer was expressive of regional and local identities, and every team had a clear and significant geographical reference. Transcending these distinctions, the national team was a kind of encompassing symbol both for the nation, its regional and local soccer teams, and also for the "seriousness" of soccer. This was after World War II, and the war period had pretty well finished off the battle between workers' clubs and other clubs.[9] Today, Swedish soccer has in large measure lost its regional/local determinants, and players move around in a market without being regarded as traitors if switching clubs. The heroes today are players much more than clubs. (Still, there is for instance a club such as Hammarby that manages to maintain its image of being both working class and also tied to a specific Stockholm suburb.) What this cursory exposé shows is that although the sports event in many ways may look the same over this period, its interpretation has changed dramatically.[10] The openness of interpretation of course makes sports a field of activity both for politics and for the market. The uses of sports for political purposes or in political contexts have been well documented in many presentations and here, in fact, anthropologists have made some very significant contributions, especially when dealing with sports in developing countries (cf., among others, Alter, 2000; Brownell, 1995; Cronin and Mayall, 1998; MacClancy, 1996). The market and its influence on sports is a subject that is largely untouched as far as anthropological treatments are concerned (also other social sciences have not produced much on this). With respect to both politics and to the market, anthropologists will find fascinating topics. These include studies of the Scandinavian "sports high schools," the Marlboro Formula One team off-season exhibitions with any number of chain-smoking young hostesses (overarching message to young men: live dangerously—in pleasant company) and, for that matter, what makes political propagandistic self-glorification possible (for politicians, for places, for states) through the involvement of athletes. Even if these last examples deal with topics rather than methods, they illustrate that the anthropological toolbox may have to be somewhat restocked. Fundamentally, as thematics they are within the realm of what anthropologists deal with—how cultural logic is shaped and expressed. Anthropology is not political science, nor economics, so the anthropological purpose will not be to imitate what is being done in those fields. The creation and management of meaning, however, is a field where anthropologists excel, and this is where their important contribution can be in terms of studies depicting the relationship between sports, politics and economics.

Anthropological studies of our own societies will undoubtedly often contain a stronger biographical orientation that what is usual in anthropological fare. In my fieldnotes about children's elite sports, I have the case of a 10 year old who was prohibited to change his gymnastics club "during the season." He had originally belonged to the club to which he wanted to move back to, but this club had had to cease operations for some time due to a lack of coaches. As this club resumed operations, the child wanted to move back since this club was much closer to his home, but he was denied permission to do so during the season. This case, to an anthropologist, is something that immediately brings to mind issues about the constitution of personhood, the shape of agency in different societies and the cultural construction of childhood. Further, the creation of sports heroes, and the athlete's own role in this, provide other examples of studies where the biographical dimension will be significant. In between these two poles, we have the whole slew of youth and young adults who have a relationship to sports. Much of the sports literature deals with children and youth in a socialization perspective, primarily as issues related to the transmission and internalization of values. This is in fact a problematic approach, and does not necessarily provide a far-reaching understanding of children's sports (cf. Lithman, 2000). Here is also a field where we need anthropological studies with a biographical bent, informed by cross-cultural understandings of the shape of personhood, "life career" perspectives (focussing on the various social personae an individual may or may not assume depending upon context) applied to children and others active within sports.

Anthropological Issues in Sports

Above, a claim was presented to the effect that sports is an activity intimately tied to and part of industrialization and capitalism[11]—that sport is a child of modernity. This is a point which has been made with admirable theoretical distinction (see above), but not necessarily by anthropologists. To see sports only as this, however, is too restricted. If sport is "simply" reflective of some themes in modernity, we deny ourselves the opportunity to understand its passions, its emotional engagement, its rituals, and its fascination. And this is where the anthropological argument becomes important. If others, including sociologists, political scientists, and even anthropologists, have been able to describe the reflective dimension of sports, how features of the society where sports are practiced are expressed in sports, the anthropological study of

sports should have at least additional ambitions manifesting its disciplinary strengths. For one thing, studies of sports which go beyond the reflective character of sports, which are attuned to the creative dimension of the sport event and peoples' engagement with it, have to have a basis in data related to actual experiences of actual people, an anthropological forte. For another, anthropology has a long and rich history of developing ways of analyzing collective events, rituals, emotional displays, passions—all those things which people think are important but which do not really provide the empirical substance to most social science.

The distinctive features of our societies have to be evident in anthropological studies of sport. Which distinctive features will of course be related to the particular inquiry, but some general observations can also be made. It seems hard to imagine that studies of sports, implicitly or explicitly, do not have to have a foundation in what Dumont (1971: 32; 1986) calls "the individualism revolution": that is, how individualism as an ideology shapes and penetrates (Western) thinking. The valorization of the individual is also a denial of the significance of the individual's social anchorages as determining who the individual is. The individual, in this ideology, is a biographical self, writing his or her own story. The individual is not preinscribed and predetermined—so the ideology goes—in his or her social station, the individual life is open to change, and the individual has the ability to change and direct the individual biography.

Given this, there is an immediate relationship between biography and "moral fiber"—the ability to change one's destiny is interpreted as being related to moral qualities, to values, to intelligence, to having "drive." It is amazing, or amusing, to read sports pages, where over and over again supreme sport achievements are attributed to factors such as these. Sport, thus, becomes a clear example of how physical abilities, the bodily achievement and moral (in a wide sense) qualities are fused in contemporary versions of the individualism ideology.

The relationship between on the one hand the human body, body management and bodily rituals, and on the other cultural notions embracing these as well as extending into society at large, is, of course, a classic anthropological theme.[12] This a fine example of how small matters speak to large issues—what the anthropologist observes can be elongated into general propositions about how a society, its social relationships and dominant cultural themes, has constructed itself. This is also what the anthropological study of sports in our own societies should provide. Through the intensive fieldwork based studies of the management of the body in sport, and the ideas which are linked to it, we should be able to say something significant about general principles upon which our societies are built.

There is an important point to note here. In a large number of works, some also by anthropologists, sport is treated as reflective of society. It is shown that what is in society, such as ethnic strife, class distinctions, notions about personhood, gender constructions and distinctions, and nationalistic fervor, to name but a few, will of course finds their way into sport. It is important to remember, however, that sport is more than reflexive. A ritual, to cut the anthropological argument short, is not just reflective, but also has other qualities. It draws attention to something, it (may) provide an "explanation" for something, it may energize a particular constellation of factors so that their importance is stressed, it (may) provide statements about what is important in life or society, and what is not. What ritual thus deals with is not just reflective of something else—the ritual itself has power to engage, to collectivize an experience, and to mold understandings. And, not to be forgotten, the interpretation of its meaningfulness, the imputation of meaning to it, is open to discussion, to debate, to contestation. As opposed to the stylized form of the sporting event, its at least relative openness in terms of meaning and interpretation makes it an instrument for meaning-creation. The idea that sports, seen as a ritual, is to be understood as "reflective" must certainly be true in some sense—everything in a society will of course be reflective of that society—but this must then not be construed as something passive, as the ritual as a mirror. Instead, sport provides a wonderful mine of opportunities to see a ritualized activity where there is an ongoing struggle over what meanings to impute to this activity. The meanings so constructed will also have the ability to be exported from the sporting event to interpretations of society more generally.

The argument about sport as reflecting or not reflecting what is in the rest of society should in fact be carried even further. In its reflecting sense, giving expression to what is in the rest of society, sport is a kind of virtual representation. However, it is a kind of virtual representation which can be acted upon, its inherent truth-values manifested and confirmed in public rituals. It is something which to the participants (athletes, coaches and spectators) is as authentic and as real as anything else in society. In this sense, sport has its own autonomy. This also means that what takes place in sports may have as formative an impact upon the participants as their participation in any other part of society. The meaning continuously created in sport must therefore be taken as seriously as that created elsewhere, and will reflect back upon the meaning-creation taking place in the rest of society.[13]

Anthropology, with its holistic orientation, has no epistemological or other barriers that prevent the according of serious attention to sport. Much other social science, such as political science or economics, is strongly attached to the governmental, justice or social order aspects of society. With respect to these disciplines, anthropology should be able to show its special contribution. Where the lines become more blurred is with respect to the field of cultural studies and a sociology oriented towards cultural issues. Some of the work in this vein has a pronounced anthropological bent, while others are—to an anthropological reader—less disciplined (in a dual sense). The only reasonable way to deal with the challenges from these disciplines is to do "the anthropological thing," with holistic orientation and a focus on actual people. Nothing else is required.

Sport as Meaning-Creation

Sport has sometimes been one of the foremost arenas for a kind of blatant battle over ideas. Hoberman (1984, 1997) has provided two fascinating texts about this. One concerns how political ideologies have related to sports and another about racism and sports. The first of these texts was very much an attempt to show how political ideologies are reflected in sports. But in the second, about black athletes in the U.S., there is a greater appreciation that sport as a field of inquiry can have specific qualities. This book, *Darwin's Athletes*, created uproar by pointing to a racist conjunction between biologistic thinking, blackness and sports. This is a book that could not have existed if sport was just a reflection of society. Racism in the U.S. did certainly not originate in sports, and its existence in sports is of course reflective of its existence in U.S. society generally. But Hoberman' s argument is much more interesting than that—he shows how sport is an arena where racist presumptions are worked upon, elaborated, given specific interpretations and institutionalizations (such as in sports scholarships), energized, confirmed and acted upon. Even more, sport not only becomes a major vehicle for these racialized notions to develop, but also energizes their way into being generally accepted truths in society. To understand this process requires that sport is seen in its own right, not just as a mirror of society. Hoberman's discussions are lodged in political ideology and the history of ideas, and the value of adding an anthropological contribution to the thematic he brings forth is obvious. A society is not just ideas, but also people in networks of social relationships. If one significant dimension of anthropological work is the simultaneous and integrated treatment of people, relationships and meaning-creation, this is what makes possible a processual analysis, as opposed to an historical or philosophical presentation. The processual, in this instance, means that the dialectic over time between social relationships and the meanings people create in interaction are dealt with simultaneously. The everyday struggles over interpretation, to make sense of what people encounter, their interactional strategies, all come together in depictions of actual people dealing with "the petty contingencies" of everyday life. What would the insights from such an approach add to what scholars such as Hoberman provide? Several things, and important ones. To get at these, one has to give attention to features of sports which are significantly missing in sports literature. The sport event, its ritual and aesthetics should be the starting point.

The Sport Event and Aesthetics

Sport is certainly defined by the sporting event—without it, there are no sports. However, little of the literature, anthropological or otherwise, seem to be amazed at how 60 000 people can participate in a soccer match, or 15 000 in a hockey game. The accidental visitor would probably be surprised at both the number of spectators at a hockey game for 11-year olds (many of whom are parents) and the levels of their emotional commitment. Going to a sports event is not like going to the movies or reading a book. This comparison is not without purpose: given what happens at a sports event, it must have some qualities that set it off from other activities. Fromm (1965) noted something significant when he claimed that "all this fascination with competitive sports, crime and passion, shows the need for breaking through the routine surface." This is what clearly gives sports its peculiar character—it breaks through "the routine surface."

An anthropologist will of course immediately see that the ritual dimension is crucial. The ritual juxtaposes different levels of culturally given understandings, and it brings to expressivity the more formative streaks underpinning these. Concepts such as Ortner's (1973) "key symbols" and Kapferer's (1998) use of the "ontology" concept are relevant in this context. For a moment reverting back to the example of soccer in Sweden during the post-war era, the force of the local identities manifested by the spectators during the games was not the result of a one-dimensional attachment to a specific locality. Instead, the local belonging and identity manifested trans-generational familism, class-based loyalties, and, with only slight exaggeration, in fact the universe of an individual's life. In terms of structuring the individual's life chances, both the options to choose as well as the social ligatures supporting or negating choice, were contained within this universe. The locality was, in a sense, the individual writ

large. Hence, the fate of the soccer team was, for those spectators who invested in this symbolism, emblematic for the "worth" of the spectator. With an analytical perspective such as this—no wonder if there was passion in the stands!

The ritual dimension being discussed here can be seen as "the cultural" on the level below surface expressivity, the creation and manipulation in ritual life of that which ties together on a deeper, mostly non-verbal level of understanding. This also means, that the anthropologist will always have to operate at a level of analysis that "makes sense," that explains rather than proves.

Another important feature of the sporting event that has received fairly scant attention is the aesthetic dimension. Aesthetics is of course the type of issue about which mainstream social science is not very concerned. Nevertheless, in spite of how little attention that has been devoted to this in the sports literature, an appreciation of a sporting event without dealing with aesthetics is impossible.

Aesthetics represents a kind of time-space collapse in sports. Athletic achievements widely separated in space and time are notionally tied together in a common frame of appreciation, where the transcendence is lodged in the perceived beauty in the achievement.[14] The beautiful here represents an ultimate truth—a transcendent statement dissociated from time and place. This kind of issue of course ties closely to anthropological studies of ritual generally. As a kind of micro-example of what this time and space collapse is all about at the level of data, the following incident may suffice. During one hockey game with 12 year olds, one kid (actually on the losing team) did a remarkably beautiful thing. He almost lost the puck, was able to retrieve it through a combination of skate and stick work, and eventually scored a beautiful goal. After the game, the fact that a defenseman on the other team had scored several goals was not what everybody was talking about. Even the coach joined in (which he usually did not) and volunteered: "that's the kind of stuff the Rat used to do." The Rat, Rolf Edberg, was a famous hockey player who as a juvenile had scored 37 goals in one game; he went on to a NHL career, and was then often referred to as "Magic Hands." The defenseman who scored did his job, but the one who let the spectator have a "glimpse of God" was the one with the beautiful moves. It is impossible to understand this without realizing that sports is built on a kind of aesthetic imperative. The supremely beautiful transcends time and place, makes a statement to the fact that the sport act has a "truth" to it that is independent of the specific of time or place. The reference to The Rat wonderfully ties together kids sport and the highest elite sport, Sweden and Canada, then and now, and demonstrates that excellence transcends time and place. Sport, through its aesthetics, thus constructs its own particular realities, of which space-time collapse is one. These realities serve as a confirmation that what happens in sport for some is much more real or true than ordinary life. Sport, indeed, breaks through the "routine surface." And its major vehicle in so doing relates to aesthetics. The aesthetic dimension, expressed in ritual, is what gives sports its amazing power to excite.

Concluding Remarks

If the sine qua non in sports is a culturally constructed ritual, with hugely important aesthetic dimensions, it follows that to appreciate sports, one has to become a member of a collective where the qualities of sports are known, discussed, acted upon and internalized. The conscious "interpretation" of a soccer game in Sweden 40 years ago was quite different from what is the case today. To "see" the beautiful requires training and shared assumptions about what the beautiful is. At the same time, sports is also an activity which engages dimensions of the cultural which are best analyzed at the level of the non-conscious and non-verbal, the level where different dimensions of being are brought together. This is the kind of work anthropologists regularly do in their study of "far-away" peoples. In our studies of sport, the performing, expressive body manifests this bringing together. If in sports we only saw bodies, sports would be boring. What we see is embodiment—the body manifesting, testifying, providing a vehicle, an idiom, permeating all dimensions of being, from that which is immediately known to the non-conscious and non-verbal. The sporting body thus actuates us in a manifold way, hence its power.

Here we end with another seeming paradox. Through the focus on "small things," such as sporting events, we will in fact be able to say something significant about "big issues." In sporting events, in their rituals, in the performing bodies, we should see fundamental issues of our existence being dealt with. It may be misleading to suggest that sports is a religion (cf. Novak, 1976), but there is no doubt that sports manifest notions about what a person is, what is important in life and society, how collaboration between people should be constructed, about technology, about passion (Lithman, 2000). The "performing body" (Dyck, 2000) is indeed the vehicle through which all this expresses itself, and aesthetics provide the validation. If so, it seems that anthropological studies of sports will be able to provide a "great coral reef exploration" of our own societies. Only a bit of what is there is above the surface—and there is a lot of that determining

the shape of what is above the surface that is not immediately seen. To explore sports, anthropologists will in large measure have to do what they have always been doing, and to some extent they will have to innovate. But keeping the focus on living people actually doing things, athletically or as spectators, will be the basis of it all.

Yngve Georg Lithman, IMER and Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway. E-mail: yngve.lithman@sfu.uib.no

Notes

1 "Our own" societies is of course an increasingly dubious term. However, reflecting common usage, it is used here to denote modern, large-scale, industrialized (Western) societies. Also with regard to "anthropologists," a terminological comment is in order. In this article, "anthropologist" is used as a label for those authors arguing in an anthropological vein, regardless of institutional affiliation. In the case of sports, anthropologically informed arguments are presented by persons affiliated to departments of human kinetics, cultural studies, sociology and elsewhere. This dispersion of the anthropological argument over departmental affiliations is probably to be encountered for most themes related to studies in "our own" societies.

2 There are historic-developmental treatments of sports, where sport is seen as a continuous human activity with somewhat changing forms and expressions through history. This perspective negates the proposition that sports should be seen as historically concomitant to modernity, industrialization and capitalism. That there has been ritualized bodily expressivity, some with competitive dimensions, through history, and across cultures, is of course a given, but to subsume all this under the label of sports seems arbitrary.

3 For a discussion of anthropologists' contributions to sport studies, see Dyck, 2000.

4 While hardly a proof of this statement in the strict sense, the Heysel tragedy in 1985, when 43 persons were killed on live TV in advance of a soccer game between an English and an Italian team, will have left no viewer insensitive to the passions that sport can generate.

5 This term is used somewhat loosely—many states to be included here were not really "of one nation"—but this should not lead to any confusion in this context. For a more extended argument about the epistemological roots of the social sciences, see Lithman, 2004.

6 Social order concerns refers to that large body of literature in which sports is treated either as a vehicle for the convergence of social values, or which deals with social problems within sports. Prominent examples of the first kind are to be found in the sport-as-socialization literature, to the second kind belongs many studies of British soccer hooliganism.

7 This should not be construed as an attempt to invalidate youth culture studies. On the contrary, these have many times shown themselves to be very fruitful. The argument is that in studies of our own societies we have to be careful to avoid a "Trobriandization." Nor shall the argument be taken to mean that youth in our societies live in some kind of post-modern anomie—the argument is just that the degree of "cultural" integration is a topic of inquiry.

8 This argument about the changing interpretations is sports is somewhat reminiscent of MacAloon's (1984) discussion, but is meant to be even more general. Contestations about interpretations of sports can be studied in the stand during a sports event as well as over the longer turn, as exemplified in the main text.

9 In several parts of Europe, including Scandinavia, the distinction between workers' and bourgeois sport was of significance for a good part of the 20th century. Different clubs, associations and leagues openly catered to different classes in society, and some sports were more associated with certain classes than others. Sport was openly declared to be one permitted arena for the battle between the classes. Given how remote this reasoning about sport now feels, this is of course an illustrative example of how sport can be given different interpretations during different times and circumstances.

10 This story is not without relevance. A sportscaster told me that he was the youngest member of the sports section in a major Swedish paper a few years after World War II. As such, it was his job to check the Teletype machine. One night the message came that the first Swedish soccer player to turn professional, in Italy, had had tremendous success in his first game, and had scored goals. The journalist stormed up to the editor to show him the great news. The editor shook his head and declared: "We don't write about such people." To turn professional abroad, then, was virtually to be a traitor—today Swedish fans, and not least Swedish politicians, revel in the success of Swedish athletes abroad. They are used as examples of what a good country Sweden is that it can produce such athletes.

11 There is hardly reason to revisit the debate about sports and its relationship to the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. The strong relationship between the "socialist" states of the U.S.S.R. and the D.D.R. and sports has by some been seen to negate the "capitalist" nature of sports. That these self-professed "socialist" states used sports in an effort at achieving international gains for self-glorification, and as a vehicle of internal social control, is hardly a sufficient argument to deny the tie of cultural logic between sports and capitalism.

12 One foundational anthropological text about the metaphorical relationship between notions of the body and notions of society is Douglas (1966). This text uncovers how remarkably close this relationship can be. Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1987) offer another important contribution, noting that the body is "simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, both naturally and culturally produced, and securely anchored in a particular historical moment" (1987: 7). Not surprisingly, several scholars with a postmodern orientation are also interested in this relationship (cf. Rail, 1998).

13 This argument is illustrated in Lithman, 2000.

14 In fact, the massive attention to history in sports can also be seen as a confirmation of this point. Everything from television commentators (especially during events such as the Olympics, season-ending cup games, etc.) to huge printed baseball digests provides the sport fan with com-

parative historical material. Briefly, however, the point of this historical referencing is not to show development or distance in time, but the very contrary. This historical referencing is in fact meant to provide simultaneity—to show the timelessness of the aesthetic.

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