

INTERPRETING HUIZINGA THROUGH
BOURDIEU:
A NEW LENS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE
COMMODIFICATION OF THE PLAY ELEMENT IN
SOCIETY AND ITS EFFECTS ON GENUINE
COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the transformation of play in the sport field by combining Johan Huizinga's historical observations of play with Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus, using Australian football in the Australian Football League (AFL) as a case study. By developing this theory, this analysis provides a means of understating how the economic and media fields have transformed play, which has ultimately weakened the community. Furthermore, by interpreting Huizinga's observations using Bourdieu's concepts, I have provided Huizinga's observations with a theoretical framework and structure that ensures his observations can be applied to today's society to understand how and why the play element has changed and what the consequences of such change are for the community.

KEYWORDS: Huizinga; Bourdieu; Play; Sport; Community

Play is at the heart of any society, informing and defining its community and culture. In its most autonomous sense, play allows citizens to express themselves freely and come together for common and enjoyed activities. Through these play experiences, citizens create a culture that ultimately stimulates and binds the community. Community, in turn allows citizens to share with each other and participate actively together for the common good. Play is foundational to community, culture, individual

development and freedom. Therefore, any change in the play element can have profound effects on society as we know it.¹

Over the last three decades, play has undergone significant change as the dominance of neoliberalism has stretched well beyond the fields of economics, politics, and business to cultural fields, including sport. Neoliberalism, which is often referred to as economic rationalism in Australia, says that ‘money and markets can always do everything better than governments, bureaucracies and the law.’²

Play has become display and communities have become markets. To understand the commodification of play and community resulting from the influences of neoliberalism requires a new lens through which to view the play element in the twenty-first century. Interpreting the historical observations of Johan Huizinga through Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of fields, capital, and habitus provides such a lens.

To examine this new lens, we first review Huizinga’s observations concerning the play element and community and Bourdieu’s concepts of fields, capital, and habitus, followed by a brief examination of the criticisms directed toward Huizinga’s work. We then apply this new lens in a case study of the Australian Football League to see the effects of neoliberalism and the economic and media fields on the play element and community within the league.

HUIZINGA AND THE PLAY ELEMENT

In its purest and original form, Huizinga believes play is based on enjoyment and fun. Play is being free and spontaneous, ‘a discharge of superabundant vital energy’ to seek the satisfaction of some imitative instinct (HL 2). Having fun is at the core of the play element, although Huizinga acknowledges that when one is engaged in the act of playing—and only when playing—play can be serious. When players are no longer having fun or enjoying themselves when playing or no longer feel free when doing so, they have ceased playing. Thus, four characteristics define play for Huizinga:

1. Play is free; in fact, it is freedom (HL 8).
2. Play is not ordinary or real (HL 8).
3. Play is secluded and limited (HL 9).
4. Play ‘creates order, is order’ (HL 10).

¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949. Multiple citations of this book may be rendered textually as (HL 30).

² Michael Pusey, *Economic rationalism in Canberra: a nation-building state changes its mind*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1991

Huizinga assumes that players feel free when they are playing; therefore, play is freedom. The only restrictions players should have are their abilities to carry out the required skills for the game and appropriate levels of fitness to play at their desired levels of intensity. Play is also voluntary; no player should feel forced or obligated to participate. Play occurs during free time when players are not constricted by boundaries or time constraints. In addition to not being forced or obligated to play, freedom means that players do not have to pay to play and do not receive financial reward for playing. Play is free. For Huizinga, then, the freedom that characterises culture, community, and democracy spawns from the play element.

Play is distinctly separate from real life. For Huizinga, play is inferior to real life; thus, while play can be serious, it may only be so during the play contest. No matter how intense, passionate, or serious a battle is when playing, its importance in real life is minimal: ‘The contest is largely devoid of purpose—that the action begins and ends in itself and the outcome does not contribute to the necessary life processes of the group’ (HL 49). Fundamental to this characteristic is the assumption that play is autonomous from the rest of society and that players are acting autonomously from the roles, responsibilities, or power they may have in other parts of their lives. Because play is autonomous, play is separate from the ordinary or real; indeed, it is inferior to the ordinary or real. The players are only playing.

Play is also limited in its locality and duration. Play, especially within games, can neither go on forever nor be played wherever. Games, such as Australian football, are played on particular types of fields for particular lengths of time. These restrictions of locality enhance the distinction between play and real or ordinary life. Because play is limited in its duration and locality, it also creates a sense of certainty, not of what is going to happen when play commences, for that is based on spontaneity and creativity, but of when and where one may play.

Because of its limited and secluded environment, play creates order within the play contest. Although play itself is spontaneous and free, knowledge of what game one is playing and how to play that game brings a sense of order to the activity. The rules of a game, the playing area on which it is played, and the duration of play give predictability to the play element, allowing players to play with some sense of order. This sense of order is further reflected in the various sporting clubs formed around play, which, through their secrets, rules, and sense of belonging, separate play from the outside world. Thus, Huizinga defines the play element as

a free activity standing quite consciously outside ordinary life, as being ‘not serious’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space and according to

fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It creates the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (HL 13)

The social groupings Huizinga describes are the sporting clubs of today. He believes such organisations are vitally important in enabling citizens to take active, meaningful roles, even if they are not physically able to play. Such engagement within sporting clubs helps to bind communities together and enables citizens to engage actively with others in something in which they feel ownership, thus assisting them in reaching their full potential.

Of key importance in Huizinga's definition and characteristics of play is the complete autonomy of play from society. For Huizinga, this autonomy is the fundamental cornerstone of building and establishing the culture and community of a society. Through play, citizens come together to express themselves in participating in a common, shared experience. Play allows citizens to bond and to work together for a common goal or pursuit. Citizens begin to define their relationships through play and feel ownership of the principles, values, and virtues that determine the spirit in which they play. Thus, the games they play are essentially games of the people, the result of the people expressing their common will and desire to come together to enjoy an activity in common. From this, Huizinga argues, comes community and culture.

Play, culture, and commodification: In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the play element and its relationship with culture changed as it began losing its autonomy to the all-encompassing economic market and, subsequently, to the media and entertainment industries. As people began using play to make money, play was no longer free and no longer separate from real, ordinary life. Therefore, according to Huizinga, play no longer determined culture but was commodified merely to be part of the culture industry, a tool to produce economic capital.

Huizinga traces the origins of this transformation to the Roman Empire when play became as much about the people watching play as about those participating in it. The Romans recognised that they could organize play and treat it as a tool to entertain the people. Spectators packed the Coliseum and other such stadiums to watch contests or performances. At this moment, Huizinga argues, play lost its innocence and effectively became an item of entertainment. This move from 'play' to 'display' was also a deliberate attempt by the ruling class to distract the proletariat from their otherwise subordinated and dull existence (HL 13). Play was a form of escapism to keep the masses at bay and to engrain the ruling class's position at the top of the social hierarchy.

As such, play became a commodity, an organized product of entertainment with the crowd becoming its consumers. Huizinga argues that at the heart of this transformation was the loss of play's autonomy to the burgeoning bureaucratic business model that gained momentum during Britain's industrial revolution and has continued to flourish into the twenty-first century. According to Huizinga, from the time of the Industrial Revolution, material interest and economic capital have determined the course of the world, with play becoming more and more organised, structured, and influenced by economics (i.e., money).

The emergence of organised sport: Play and games have been a part of society since the beginning of humankind. However, the notion of organised sport as we know it today is a far more recent phenomenon. Sport as a recognizable, structured organisation emerged in Britain during early industrialisation.³ At that time, the ruling elites considered games that included rough play or physicality to be too unstructured in both rules and time, often leading to injury and even death. Because these individuals believed that able-bodied men should compete in purposeful sports during their leisure time, they made a more conscious effort to structure and organize play.

A 'moral panic' over the leisure time activities of the working class emerged about the same time, leading to pressure to exert greater control over working class activities and to remove unhealthy urges from among them. Workers were expected to arrive at work fit, healthy, and ready for demanding, arduous, and sometimes demanding shifts, which resulted in the banning of some 'unorganised' games and their replacement with healthy physical activities. If a nation's citizens were healthy, they were likely to be more productive and efficient in the work place. Thus, the beginnings of organized sport were the result of the ruling class ensuring control over their workers' leisure time activities. In doing so, they offered workers 'escapes' that kept them fit and healthy; and, at the end of their leisure time, the workers returned to their jobs content and ready to work.⁴

Money also played an important role in the emergence of organised sport. For the emergent entrepreneurial capitalist class who accumulated wealth by making and selling goods and services and for the working class who had no means of support other than their own labour power, professionalising sport and 'playing for pay' held great attraction. Thus, pure amateurism in sport quickly died as entrepreneurs, capitalists, and workers all meshed to transform sport into a business in which all involved could generate profits and income.

³ David Rowe, 'Understanding Sport and Media: A Socio-Historical Approach', in *Sport, Culture and the Media*, Berkshire, Open University Press, 2004, p. 11.

⁴ Rowe, *Sport, Culture and Media*, p. 11

The business of sport: Throughout the nineteenth century, the lives of the world's inhabitants were restructured. Capitalist, urban, industrial, and political revolutions unfolded with the circulation of popular and radical political movements. From these upheavals emerged a dominant, all-encompassing bureaucratic business model of living that placed the objectives of structure, organisation, regimentation, efficiency, and money at the forefront of society. This model completely transformed the play element and its role in developing culture and stimulating active participation in society.

With organisation and structure, play became sport and increasingly took on the characteristics of business, transforming from 'occasional amusement to [a] system of organized clubs and matches' (HL 196). Huizinga stresses that the increasing seriousness of sport was due largely to the play element losing its autonomy to the economic market as play was used for various secondary purposes: making money, distracting the masses, keeping workers fit and healthy, and providing workers with an escape.

Thus, play had become a commodity, a skill, a form of labour, a shadow of what it was at its origin. Play had become serious, incorporated into the economic market as sport, which imitated play and imitated business. No longer did play forms stimulate and create civilisation; instead, civilisation through the dominant bureaucratic business model determined play. Thus, for Huizinga, sport was 'false play': 'Civilisation today is no longer played and even where it seems to be play, it is false play . . . it becomes increasingly difficult to tell where play ends and non-play begins' (HL 206).

Christopher Lasch enriches Huizinga's ideas in arguing that sport and play can no longer be discussed as something 'beyond' the real and ordinary life.⁵ All play forms, both in leisure time and at work, have been corrupted by money, superseded by individualism and the necessary calculation, prudence, analysis, and efficiency to accumulate capital. Because the dominant bureaucratic business model that shapes modern society does not allow for pure play, citizens must increasingly turn to modern sport for their nourishment of play. Devoid of such activity at work, they seek forms of freedom and spontaneity outside of their ordinary lives through the leisure industry.

According to Lasch, however, people do not realise that sport, like business, is now restricted by structure, analysis, and a desire to succeed or not to fail.⁶ It is careful and concerned with image. It is hierarchical, with management and coaches instead of

⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, London, Abacus, 1980.

⁶ Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*.

players calling the shots. It mirrors the very thing citizens seek to escape: the bureaucratic business model. Because it mirrors the neoliberal makeup of the rest of society, citizens cannot see that sport, and within that play, is no longer free and no longer completely spontaneous or separate from the ordinary or the real. It is a business, a part of the entertainment industry.

The consequences of the commodification of play: In its purest form, the play element is a driving force behind citizens coming together to develop the values, principles, spirit, and relationships that determine their culture. Untouched and autonomous from the rest of society, play enables citizens to act freely outside the ordinary and real, having no purpose other than one specific to play. The loss of its autonomy has changed all of that. No longer does the community own play and the prevailing values of playing. Instead, the culture industry owns play and sells it to consumers. The values of play now mirror those of the dominant business model in the capitalist world. The relationships between consumers and play and among themselves are increasingly determined by their consumption of sport and, therefore, are based on the ideals, values, and principles imposed by the culture industry. No longer is the culture of society founded in the spontaneous, carefree, fun, autonomous element of play (HL).

To understand this more completely requires an exploration of Jean Baudrillard's theories, particularly his theory of *simulacra*. Baudrillard, a social theorist influenced by poststructuralism, constantly draws upon the notions of semiotics, arguing that signification and meaning are both only understandable in terms of how signs interrelate. In *The Precession of the Simulacra*, Baudrillard writes that society has replaced all reality with symbols and signs and that all human experience is a simulation of reality, the *simulacra*. In some way, everything is an imitation of something else. Because one part of life simulates another, all meaning of the 'real' is meaningless; for the real only exists in the form of the signs that represent its existence.

According to Baudrillard, 'It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double . . . which provides all the signs of the real and short circuits all its vicissitudes'.⁷

Sport is the operational double of play. We view it as play because it has similar characteristics, but it is not real play. Sport is merely a model of what play was. It feigns to have the same characteristics but only has the symbols and signs of play. However, because organised sport mirrors the neoliberal business model that encapsulates most, if not all, popular culture, citizens do not recognise that play on the

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*, New York, Semiotexte, 1983, p. 4.

sport field is not real or what it was at its origin. Thus, Baudrillard argues that ‘simulation threatens the difference between “true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary”’.⁸ Because moments of carelessness, spontaneity, and bursts of energy occur in sport, we can easily believe that play still exists in its original form. However, because money now underlies play and its consumption, play is no longer free, no longer autonomous, and no longer real. The signs of play that are still present only attest to the play that once existed.

BOURDIEU’S THEORIES OF FIELDS, CAPITAL, AND HABITUS

French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu has pioneered investigative frameworks and terminologies to understand the dynamics of power relations in social life. Through his theoretical concepts of field, capital, and habitus, he effectively unites social phenomenology and structuralism and provides a means to understanding the interactions of citizens within a given setting to gain power or recognition.⁹

Bourdieu’s theories have grown from his background in genetic structuralism, critical sociology, and traditional sociology theory. Drawing upon the theories of Max Weber, Karl Marerx, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Claude Levi-Strauss regarding the importance of domination, symbolic systems in social life, and social orders, Bourdieu argues that social relations constrain citizens to recognize each other and to compete with each other for socially recognised forms of power.¹⁰ Integral to his theories of field, capital, and habitus is Bourdieu’s claim that social structures tend to reproduce themselves. In these theories, Bourdieu attempts to reconcile the contrasting objective–subjective antinomy of the social sciences. However, the influence of phenomenological theories, especially those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is evident in Bourdieu’s focus on the body, action, and practical disposition as manifested in his theory of habitus.¹¹ Thus, understanding these theories enables us to understand the broader political and commercial transformation of society within the last thirty years. It also provides us with a means of describing not only how citizens relate to each other today but also how they can or ought to relate to each other.

Bourdieu also writes about sport, revealing similar views to Huizinga’s about the transformation of play into a branch of the entertainment industry. He does not discuss the play element or the transformation of play into sport. Instead, he recognises

⁸ Baudrillard, ‘The Precession of Simulacra’, p. 5.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241–258.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

¹¹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

the sports field as an arm of the entertainment industry with an economic function and market-based characteristics. He even refers to the relationship between sport and spectators as one of supply and demand. He further claims that 'sport as a spectacle would appear more clearly as a mass commodity, and the organisation of sporting entertainments as one branch among others of show business'.¹²

Although Bourdieu speaks generally about sport without first considering how play became first display and then an arm of the entertainment industry, his primary claim about the sports field is that, through the entertainment industry, it has developed into an entertainment package aimed at attracting more and more spectators. These spectators then become consumers of sport, television, and all associated sports products. Thus, the relationship the fan has with sport mirrors a market transaction of supply and demand. This becomes clearer when we apply Bourdieu's own terms of field, capital, and habitus to both the sport field and to Huizinga's cultural and historical insights concerning play.

Bourdieu develops his theories of field, capital, and habitus as a means of understanding how citizens relate to each other. His theory of field concerns the reasons people behave as they do at certain times and in certain environments. His notions of capital and habitus concern how citizens within the same field seek to gain power from each other within the limitations of that field. He concludes that the behaviour of citizens and the relationships they share with each other reflect their environment and simply serve to legitimise and reinforce the existing structure of their surroundings.¹³

Bourdieu argues that what appear to be autonomous individuals acting according to their own interests are actually products of an emergent historical system of social relations that constrain them to recognise each other and compete with each other for socially recognised forms of power or capital. Capital is any form of power that allows actors to participate in a given field of society to gain further capital, thereby augmenting their positions in the field.

Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital. Social capital consists of resources based on group membership, relationships, and networks or influence and support. It is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'.¹⁴ Cultural capital consists of nonfinancial social assets that promote social

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice, London, Sage, 1993, p. 124.

¹³ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.

¹⁴ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', p. 249.

mobility beyond economic means, including the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages people have that give them higher status in society. Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system. Symbolic capital refers to the resources available to individuals on the basis of honour, prestige, or recognition. Economic capital is one's command over economic resources (e.g., cash and financial assets).

For Bourdieu, the modern social world is broken into various fields. A field is any structure of social relations in which citizens compete for capital and, in doing so, struggle against each other to establish their positions within that space. Among the main fields in modern society, Bourdieu cites the arts, education, law, politics, and the economy. Particularly important is Bourdieu's belief that the different actors within each field tend to strive for capital specific to that field independent of the capital in any other field. Thus, each field of society is autonomous and independent of the influences and characteristics of other fields. However, Bourdieu also holds that because the economic field is the most dominant, powerful, and increasingly influential field, maintaining the autonomy of other fields is essential to limiting the power of those with economic capital.¹⁵

Bourdieu also believes that the struggle between citizens for power is constrained by the limited characteristics of the field in which they participate and serves to augment and reproduce the existing, dominant structure of the field. If a field loses its autonomy to other, more dominant fields, the struggle for capital changes to reflect the limitations of the dominant field. Thus, citizens increasingly battle for the most dominant forms of capital thereby augmenting and changing the structure and characteristics of the field. Of most importance, however, is Bourdieu's belief that if the economic field merges with any other field, that field and the struggle within it will begin to mirror the economic field. Thus, as the economic field merges with other fields, all the fields will mirror each other.¹⁶

To clarify further, we must examine Bourdieu's notion of habitus, defined as a system of dispositions individuals develop in response to the objective conditions of the field in which they are participating.¹⁷ The actors within that field gain capital and power as a result of those dispositions or habitus. In other words, individuals' 'feel for the game' and struggles for capital are constrained by the dominant characteristics of their surroundings. However, Bourdieu also argues that an individual's habitus

¹⁵ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structures, Habitus, Practices', in *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.

augments and reproduces the characteristics of the field: Having absorbed objective social structures into a personal set of dispositions, the subjective nature of an individual's actions reinforces the characteristics of the field and the relationships within it.

HUIZINGA'S OBSERVATIONS AS SEEN THROUGH BOURDIEU'S THEORIES

Although Huizinga's work is often proclaimed as the classical theory of the play element, many theorists have criticized his definition of play and his discussion of the relationship between play and real life, particularly in regard to its seriousness. Structural theorists have been particularly critical of Huizinga's method of analysing human behaviour based on cultural observation and the study of play phenomena, arguing that he pays little to no attention to social laws and societal structures such as politics, economics, and law, which Huizinga sees as secondary features of society, consequences and by-products of human behaviour.

However, applying Bourdieu's theories and key terms of field, capital and habitus to interpret Huizinga's observations provides them with a theoretical structure and rigour that may be lacking in Huizinga's work. Both men believe that something fundamentally important to the relationships formed between citizens, their cultures, and their communities was lost when economics began to dominate other areas of society. Thus, we can utilise this theoretical framework to examine modern sport to illuminate the modern characteristics of play, sport, and their relationship with the sport community.

Huizinga argues that when the sport field is autonomous, play is foundational to the culture, relationships, and habitus of the field and shapes the characteristics, culture, and spirit of its communities. For example, in an autonomous sport field, play creates sports clubs and their cultures and spirit. In other words, the cultures of these clubs are founded in the way their members play. When the sport field loses its autonomy to another field (i.e., the economic field), this process is disrupted. When this happens, the pursuit of economic capital begins to dominate the actions of those participating within the field. Their pursuit of, and struggle for, economic capital, characterises their culture, spirit, and relationships within the field. Ultimately, play is corrupted and the community weakened. At this point, play is no longer foundational to the culture and spirit of the club. Instead, the dominant neoliberal business characteristics of the club determine play.

The influence of the economic field: Bourdieu claims that the economic field has undermined the autonomy of most of the other fields in society, limiting the habitus of the actors in each field to the structure and characteristics of the economic field and to

each individual's desire to accumulate economic capital. The struggle for economic capital begins to define the relationships citizens share with each other, as well as to reaffirm the dominant influence of economic ideals across most fields of society. Indeed, the influence of the economic field is so prevalent that all fields have begun to reflect the economic field and, as such, look the same.¹⁸

Huizinga argues that the sport field has lost its autonomy to the economic field and that their merger has resulted in the characteristics of play being subversive to economics. As such, the habitus of the players and their struggles for capital have begun to reflect those commonly associated with the economic field. Measurements of statistics, structures of sporting clubs, team tactics, and player instructions—all in the pursuit of success—now characterise the sport field. According to Huizinga, this reflects business and, in today's world, mirrors neoliberalism, which characterises most fields in the Western capitalist world.

For Huizinga, the merger between the economic and sport fields and the subsequent dominance of economic capital changes the very definition of the play element, which, in turn, affects community, culture, and even democracy. Play is no longer autonomous or separate from the ordinary or real. Players have effectively stopped playing with as much flair, freedom, and spontaneity to perform in accordance with the team rules, tactics, plans, and structures outlined by coaches and managers. Performance is analysed for efficiency, effectiveness, and a range of statistics reflective of any business performance review.

Thus, the constraints of economics and neoliberalism now define the disposition of players, clubs, and supporters. The relationships players have with their clubs are now based on financial contracts. The support provided by fans to their clubs is now defined by financial memberships. The performance of individual players and teams is, to some extent, determined by economic capital. Thus, as Huizinga believes, something fundamentally significant has been lost with the defining of relationships through the market.

The influence of the media field: The role and influence of the media are also important in understanding the change in the play element and its subsequent effects on community. According to Huizinga, influenced by the economic field, the media field has also merged with the sport field. As a result of this merger, the characteristics of the play element have changed, transforming play into display and subsequently into a product. The media market and sell this product for profit to mass consumer

¹⁸ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.

audiences as entertainment. By becoming consumers of this product, fans have effectively begun to define their relationship with play through the market.

Conclusion: Interpreting Huizinga through Bourdieu's concepts clearly reveals Huizinga's belief that the economic and sport fields have merged. As the sport field mirrors the economic field, it constrains the actions and operations within the field to a process of developing, packaging, and selling play as display. Individuals within the sport field develop relationships with the play element through the dominant principles of neoliberalism. Thus, the key stakeholders in the field use the play product as a tool to accumulate economic capital, reinforcing the dominant economic characteristics of the field.

Of fundamental importance is the subsequent transformation of the relationship between the participants within the sport field and with the play element. When play is autonomous, citizens may freely come together to enjoy something in common with others and to strive towards a common and shared goal. They feel ownership of the play element, the games they play, and the clubs that spawn from the grass roots. When the play element is transformed by the influence of the economic field and subsequently consumed as display, the play element is effectively taken from those who once owned it and is sold back to them in the form of a commercial product. Furthermore, the relationship individuals share with play as defined through the market is not real, weakening community.

CRITICISM AND RESPONSE

Since the publication of *Homo Ludens* in 1938, many theorists have expanded on Huizinga's observations to develop their own definitions of play. Some of these individuals deviate significantly from Huizinga's characteristics of play; however, many do not do so. In fact, after more than seventy years, Huizinga's key characteristics endure and resonate in modern studies of play.

Although theorists may study the notion of play in different ways, within different disciplines, and in different forms, Huizinga's study is relatively uncomplicated. Huizinga is a cultural historian who is primarily concerned with the link between play, culture, and community.

Caillois, Hans, Millar, Sutton-Smith, and others have critiqued Huizinga's study of play and have utilised *Homo Ludens* as a starting point for developing the play concept further, introducing the notions of play forms, games, and rhetoric.¹⁹ However, most

¹⁹ Roger Caillois, 'The Definition of Play: The Classification of Games', in K. Salen and E. Zimmerman (eds.), *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, Boston, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006, pp. 122–155. Multiple citations of this book may be rendered textually as (DP 30). See also James S.

play theorists appear united in the belief that play has a number of fundamental characteristics at the core of its existence, regardless of form or discipline. These are the same fundamental characteristics that arise in Huizinga's study.

Millar writes that at the core of play is 'attitude of throwing off constraint'.²⁰ Whether emotional, social, or physical, once individuals break free of the constraints of real and ordinary work and play within an autonomous sport field, they can be spontaneous, instinctive, and free. Playing involves shifting to a new, separate, autonomous field with its own rules and procedures.²¹ The link between the detachment of play from real life and its ability to produce spontaneous, creative, impulsive, free actions is fundamental to understanding Huizinga, play, and its corruption. When free from objectives or outcomes concerned with real life outcomes or inhibited by them, play can be spontaneous and creative because the outcome only matters within the sport field. When the boundaries between the sport field and other fields of society blur, the outcome of play can have real-life consequences. Thus, the play element is no longer completely free from real-life constraint; and play participants are no longer completely free.

Individuals who throw off the constraints and burdens of real life leave behind their real life roles, responsibilities, and limitations and fully embrace the autonomous sport field. Because they are unrestricted or uninhibited, these individuals are free to be spontaneous and to give their full selves when playing, as Spolin writes: 'In spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually, and intuitively, is awakened. This causes enough excitation for the student to transcend himself or herself—he or she is freed to go out into the environment, to explore, adventure and face all dangers unafraid . . . Every part of the person functions together as a working unit, one small organic whole within the larger organic whole of the agreed environment which is the game structure'.²²

The notions of fun, freedom, spontaneity, and separation from the ordinary and real are also largely embraced and enriched by French writer and philosopher Roger Caillois. Although Caillois adopts most of Huizinga's characteristics of play in his own definition, he is also critical of Huizinga for not expanding his study beyond the contest orientation of play (DP). Caillois argues that Huizinga failed to extend the

Hans, *The Play of the World*, Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 1981; Susanna Millar, *The Psychology of Play*, Oxford, Penguin Books, 1968; B. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997.

²⁰ Millar, *The Psychology of Play*, p. 21.

²¹ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Worcester, Chandler, 1972; Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, London, John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

²² Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, 3rd ed, Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1963, p. 11.

discussion of play to its various forms. In response, therefore, Caillois has developed four fundamental categories of games and two types of play to illuminate the complexity of play. His *agon* (competition) category most resembles Huizinga's contest orientation.

According to Caillois, *agon* is a group of seemingly competitive games in which equality of chances is artificially created so that adversaries confront each other under real conditions. *Agon* presupposes substantial attention, training, application, and a will to win. Its rules and aim are not to antagonise or cause injury but to demonstrate superiority. Thus, who wins hinges on qualities such as speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, and ingenuity within the defined limits of the play environment and without outside assistance. Thus, the winner appears to be better than the loser in this certain category of exploits (DP).

Huizinga's study of play is, in fact, a study of *agon*. Of most interest, however, is Caillois's claim that within *agon*, winning hinges on qualities exhibited within the confines of the contest and without outside assistance. Huizinga argues that if outside influences (e.g., the media, economic capital) begin to influence the play element, it is corrupted (DP).

The two types of play expanded upon by Caillois also assist in understanding Huizinga's observations: *paidia* and *ludus*. Caillois places play on an evolving continuum between these two types. *Paidia* refers to play that is unstructured and spontaneous, associated with the notions of instinct and impulsive exuberance. *Ludus* refers to play that is structured and associated with rules, regulations, and discipline. According to Caillois, all play is founded in *paidia*. However, because humans instinctively move toward rules, objectives, goals, and desired outcomes, they ensure the transformation of *paidia* into *ludus*. This transformation, then, aids in the institutionalisation of play into sport (DP).

In terms of Huizinga's observations, however, the transformation from *paidia* to *ludus* may be due to play losing its autonomy to external influences, thus corrupting it. When play remains separate from ordinary and real life, implementing rules and discipline with the play element does not jeopardise its authenticity. When they are the result of outside influences, the play element is corrupted. Although we may reasonably assume that all contest-oriented games fit into the category of *ludus*, those at the extreme end of the continuum—the most structured, the most regulated, the ones with the most serious outcomes—are likely to be professional sports whose play element has been corrupted by economic capital.

Despite embracing many of Huizinga's observations of play, Caillois is also critical of him for ignoring the role and influence money can have in play: "The part of

Huizinga's definition, which views play as action denuded of all material interests, simply excludes bets and games of chance—for example, gambling houses, casinos, racetracks, and lotteries—which, for better or worse, occupy an important part of the economy and daily life for various cultures. It is true that the kinds of games are infinitely varied, but the constant relationship between chance and profit is very striking. Games of chance played for money have practically no place in Huizinga's work. Such an omission is not without consequences' (DP 124). Thus, while Huizinga believes playing for money or profit corrupts play, Caillois does not see that doing so changes the play element because play is still unproductive: 'the sum of the winnings at best would only equal the losses of the other players. Nearly always, the winnings are less' (DP 124).

For Huizinga, however, play must be free: One must not play for pay. Individuals playing for the reward of profit are playing for pay. Furthermore, play must be separate from the ordinary and real. Using Bourdieu's terms, if players are playing to win economic capital, then the economic field has clearly merged with the sport field, ensuring that play is no longer separate from the ordinary and real. These individuals are no longer simply playing; they are also winning or losing money, profiting or incurring losses. Such consequences transcend into real life. Thus, Huizinga's determination for when play is corrupted is simple: Once money influences play, play is corrupted.

Caillois, among others, also criticizes Huizinga for overlooking the importance of politics and economics in the study of human behaviour and interaction.²³ Critics proclaim this is of particular interest because the time of Huizinga's writing was a politically volatile period of Nazi domination, oppression, and war. According to Caillois, Huizinga fails to understand that cultural historians, by virtue of the subjective nature of their findings, are themselves political beings. Their interests, enquiries, principles, ideals, life experiences, and views often determine the type of research they conduct and the meaning they give to their findings. They are not, therefore, without political prejudice.²⁴

However, Huizinga does not dismiss politics or the economy as unimportant or irrelevant. He merely rejects the argument that they create human behavioural characteristics or that they are the essence of human life. He sees the political field as a secondary part of human life, a result of the dominant ideals and principles of the time

²³ Roger Caillois, 'Johan Huizinga and the Task of Cultural History', *American Historical Review*, vol. 69, 1964, p. 607

²⁴ Caillois, 'Johan Huizinga and the Task of Cultural History'; Pieter Geyl, 'Huizinga as Accuser of His Age', *History and Theory*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1963, pp. 231–262. DOI. 10.2307/2504105.

and the culture of the community. He dismisses the argument that community and culture arise in or through politics (HL 206).

More enlightening is Antoni's beliefs, which he expounds in *From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking*, published in 1937, a year before *Homo Ludens*. Antoni dismisses historiography as being 'a legitimate method of understanding human behaviour in any age', believing it 'lacked conceptual rigor and structure'.²⁵ Both Antoni and Huizinga describe and define reality with characteristics underlined by the notion of seriousness. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga argues that play does not exclude seriousness but that seriousness should be restricted to the contest or battle within play (HL 13). Fundamental to this claim is the autonomy of the sport field. When the sport field is autonomous, play may indeed be serious but only during the contest.

That is not to say that play does not have serious outcomes. Ideas, relationships, traditions, and culture arise from play, all of which may be considered serious. Antonio finds this confusing, suggesting that if both reality and play can be serious, perhaps they are the same.²⁶ Thus, when using Huizinga's concepts of play and reality, one may find it difficult to know when play begins and when play ends because the boundaries of the sport field are blurred. For Huizinga, however, play must always be separate from the ordinary and the real. Play may be serious but only in the act of playing. If the play field loses its autonomy, the seriousness of the contest is no longer autonomous to other fields and knowing when play begins and ends is indeed difficult. Reality contains seriousness that affects all aspects of life; play does not. If this changes, then play has been corrupted and the lines between reality and play are blurred. Interestingly, Antonio's criticism is one that Huizinga levels at the modern world in discussing his belief that the play element has been undermined by economics and characterised through business ideals (HL).

Huizinga's distinction between play and the ordinary and real is based on the assumption that play is autonomous. However, he recognises that their relationship changes when play is influenced by other fields. When play loses its autonomy to these fields, it is no longer separate from the ordinary or the real, which has serious implications for those playing. Play is transformed into a form of entertainment and a tool to make money. As the sport field is increasingly analysed as a business, determining when play finishes and nonplay begins becomes more difficult.

²⁵ Carlo Antoni, *From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking*, Stafford, Wiley, 1959, p.

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²⁶ Antoni, *From History to Sociology*.

However, Huizinga is less concerned with the clarity of the line between play and the ordinary and real than with understanding that any influence on the play element from any other field of society corrupts play. Play is no longer separate from the real and ordinary under such influences, and money underlies the outcomes generated from play. Thus, economic capital, not play, has the greater influence on relationships, ideals, culture, and community, which Huizinga refers to as the ‘corruption of society’ (HL 52). Furthermore, becoming increasingly hostile towards the influence the economic field exerts on the sport field, Huizinga believes that citizens recognize neither that the play element has adopted business-like characteristics nor that the sport field they are escaping *to* mirrors what they wish to escape *from* (HL 200).

Also critical of Huizinga’s view of the relationship between play and seriousness is linguist Emile Benveniste, who argues that play is seriousness minus any rational or empirical motivation.²⁷ Thus, play is a lower form or order of reality. To support his claim, Benveniste uses examples of sacred and religious rituals to highlight his differences with Huizinga, claiming that a sacred or religious ceremony becomes play when one removes any form of reason (e.g., religious rite, tradition, myth). According to Huizinga, however, play is part of all religious and sacred ceremonies because, like play, they are separate from the ordinary and real and are ordered by a specific duration of time. Furthermore, the outcomes of these ceremonies are not meaningless; nor are they without rational motivation. On the contrary, they are born from the characteristics of play, such as nobility, chivalry, and honour. As such, they are of fundamental importance to the culture, community, and human behaviour of the time.

However, the criticisms of Jacques Ehrmann best challenge Huizinga’s theory of the relationship between play and the rest of social reality.²⁸ Ehrmann argues that play does not take place in isolation from social reality or in opposition to it but that it exists within reality and can never be separated from the real world. Thus, he sees play as an accompaniment or a complement of ‘serious[ness]’ and disputes Huizinga’s argument that ‘the breakdown of the distinction between play and seriousness eventually contaminate[s] both spheres’ (HL 201). For Ehrmann, Huizinga’s inability to see play as part of the ordinary and, in particular, as an economic function exposes his weakness. Ehrmann argues that the economic function of play makes it part of reality: It *consumes* time, energy, and space in *exchange* for power, prestige, glory, superiority,

²⁷ Emile Benveniste, ‘Le Jeu comme structure’, *Deucalion*, vol. 2, 1947, p. 166.

²⁸ Jacques Ehrmann, ‘Homo Ludens Revisited’, in Jacques Ehrmann (ed.), *Game, Play, Literature*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p. 31.

and even revenge. This exchange reflects the same characteristics and function of the market, which is an integral and obvious part of real life.

Play does consume energy, time, and space just as it provides an outcome, feeling, status, or product. However, Huizinga is hostile towards the exchange of *money*. It is one thing to *mirror* economics or the operation of the market; it is quite another to operate *as* a business or market does. Huizinga claims that economic capital and commercialisation have corrupted play as it now reflects reality because of its economic function. With its loss of autonomy to the economic field, the sport field has become a business, a source of profit making. Although Ehrmann speaks of the exchange of time, energy, and space in play for glory, prestige, power, and revenge as a form of economics, the exchange he outlines does not include the production of profit; nor does he account for play producing profit. Rather than speak in idealistic terms, Huizinga explores the transformation of play when commerce defines the exchange, concluding that it leads to corruption of the play element.

The relationship of play and reality is also the subject of Eugene Fink's writings. Fink agrees with Huizinga that play is a unique phenomenon but denies that play is the only such phenomenon or that it is unique because it stands apart from, or in opposition to, the rest of reality. According to Fink, the 'symbolic function and quality' of play gives it a double character: Man plays in the real world and knows himself to be playing; yet, when man is playing within the play sphere, the play sphere appears autonomous and unrelated to the real world.²⁹ Thus, the player simultaneously exists in two spheres: the real and the play. Fink also argues that the objects of reality, transformed by the imagination in the play sphere, align the two spheres. Thus, the relationship between reality and play is not antithetical but symbiotic. The play sphere is not separate from the ordinary or the real because it always has a real setting and real objects, which players transform when they are playing. Therefore, *play is a mirror of reality*.

According to Huizinga, however, reality should mirror play. In other words, play develops culture. When the reverse is true, the dominant economic and commercial characteristics of reality dominate play, which merely serves to enhance and reproduce the dominant ideals of society. Players no longer transform real objects and settings. Instead, the play sphere is transformed to mirror reality. Thus, the economic field corrupts the symbiotic relationship between play and reality.³⁰

²⁹ Eugen Fink, 'The Oasis of Happiness: Towards an Ontology of Play', in Jacques Ehrmann (ed.), *Game, Play, Literature*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p. 19.

³⁰ Also see Hans, *The Play of the World*.

LOOKING THROUGH A NEW LENS

An examination of the Australian Football League (AFL) serves to illustrate the use of Bourdieu's concepts as a theoretical framework for Huizinga's observations concerning the corruption of the play element and its consequent effect on community. The AFL is now, more than ever, dominated by neoliberal criteria. As a result, the interests of the communities within the AFL have become subordinate to the commercial interests of the league and its eighteen clubs. Undermined by economic capital, these communities have become substantially weaker than at the time of their founding.

Australian citizens have always shared a special relationship with sport. What is now almost a national obsession began as a pastime for men and women who wanted to maintain their fitness levels and who enjoyed coming together with other citizens to participate in free and vigorous activity. Sport and sporting clubs spawned in the early days of Australian settlement, developing into cornerstones of their local communities. Citizens found a form of identity through the games they played, the teams they followed, and the clubs to which they belonged. Indeed, these clubs were created by the people as an expression of their passion and, as such, were considered the spiritual home of the community.

No form of play, game, or sport has helped create, shape, and bind Australian communities and culture quite like Australian football. While there is much debate about the exact origins of Australian Football, the first match identified as a direct precursor to the codification of the game occurred in 1858, with some historians arguing it was developed as a combination of English school football (rugby), Irish Football and the Indigenous game of marngrook. The rules developed for 'the people's game' in the 1850s reflected the character of the Australian people. According to Murray, the game maintained a greater degree of spontaneity than most other football codes, enabling players to play with a flair and freedom not seen in games with more restrictive rules.³¹

As with all folk culture, Australian football games stimulated great joy both for those who played and for those who watched. Thus, the football community quickly swelled to include thousands of Victorians, creating a culture that became engrained in Melbourne. Clubs spawned across the city, arising from community passion, spirit, and interest. By the 1870s, the Melbourne Football Club was attracting as many as 10,000 supporters to matches against other Australian football teams. In 1877, the Victorian Football Association (VFA) was formed.

³¹ Bill Murray, 'Introduction', in *Football: A History of the World Game*, Hampshire, Scolar Press, 1994, pp. xiii-xiv.

Eight teams broke away from the VFA in 1896 to form the Victorian Football League (VFL), taking with them a huge following that ensured the continued growth of the game. The very fact that eight teams left the city's amateur competition to form a professional league suggests that money has always been part of the play element in Australian football and therefore has been at the heart of the decisions, structure, and formula of the game for a long time.³² Furthermore, growing quickly to twelve teams, the VFL included some emphasis on economic capital and business objectives. Players received money to play and supporters paid a small fee to attend matches. Monies raised were used to maintain and upgrade club training facilities, home grounds, clubrooms, and social club facilities and to recruit the most talented players and administrators to the clubs. Each of the clubs also relied upon generous donations from wealthy businessmen in its community.

However, although economic capital was certainly a part of the game, it was not a dominating feature. Players did not receive enough money to live on and therefore worked in other jobs to support themselves. Even at the elite level, players played football more as a hobby or recreational pursuit than as full-time employment.³³ Business entrepreneurs used neither the league nor the clubs to generate profits. Media involvement was minimal because it had yet to discover the potential of football attracting large numbers of consumers for hungry advertisers.

Because the VFL was largely separate from the business world within the economic field, it stimulated community culture. Within the clubs, people of diverse backgrounds gathered as one outside the hierarchical structure of the bureaucratic business model. Each club brought with it a sense of tribalism and community based on the loyalty of its supporters and players, entrenched through generations of family support. Each club also reflected its community, from the players, coaches, and administrators to the supporters. Teams trained and played in their communities on their own grounds, creating strong attachments to their grounds and their supporters. As Huizinga notes in *Homo Ludens*, these clubs were sacred places, separate from the ordinary and real, having their own rules and regulations by which members of the

³² For an historical account of the development of the VFL/AFL see the following: AFL, 'History of Australian Football', September 10, 2015, <http://www.afl.com.au/afl-hq/the-afl-explained/history>; G. Atkinson, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Five Mile Press, 1982; G. Blainey, *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Melbourne, Information Australia, 1990; T. Grant, 'A Nation Stirs,' *Herald Sun: Our Game: 150 Years of Footy*, May 5, 2008, p. 4; S. Orive, *Victorian Rules: Populi Ludos Populo—The Game of the People for the People*, Melbourne, State Library of Victoria, 1996; G. Slattery, *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands, Geoff Slattery, 2008.

³³ T. Grant, 'Battle Grounds', *Herald Sun: Our Game: 150 Years of Footy*, May 5, 2008, p. 20.

broader community could come together and connect. Thus, money was not the dominant emphasis that it is today.

The influence of the economic field and economic capital was heightened in the 1980s and the 1990s with the growth of the VFL into new, nontraditional markets that resulted in the renaming of the elite competition as the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1990.³⁴ In 1982, the VFL moved out of Victoria, taking its first step towards the national stage with the relocation of the South Melbourne Football Club to Sydney. The relocation came after South Melbourne was declared financially unviable. Five years later, the VFL expanded to Western Australia and Queensland with the introduction of the West Coast Eagles and Brisbane Bears. The introduction of a team into Queensland, a nontraditional football state, was particularly bold, proving the determination of the VFL to reach new markets in which to sell its brand. As the AFL, the league added the Adelaide Crows in 1991 and the Fremantle Dockers, a second Western Australia club, in 1995.

In 1996, the force of the economic field was felt once again with the merger of the Fitzroy Football Club and the Brisbane Bears. Because of continued financial difficulties, Fitzroy was no longer viable as a stand-alone club. Port Adelaide Power joined the league in 1997. However, the boldest moves came in 2011 and 2012 with the introduction of the seventeenth and eighteenth clubs into the AFL: the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney (GSW) Giants. As with the Brisbane and Sydney clubs, Gold Coast and GSW were fundamentally different in their make-up in comparison with the foundation clubs in Victoria. These two teams were created to tap new markets with fresh consumers. Neither club was the result of grassroots efforts of their communities. Neither reflected the uprising of passion and spirit of supporters or players or the collective will and desire of their communities. Rather they were created as businesses to generate economic capital for the AFL.³⁵ Indeed, these clubs were to sell play as entertainment; and the club community was first and foremost to be composed of consumers viewing the game as entertainment. Thus, the push into the northern states of Australia ensured new markets of millions of consumers who would be touched in some way by the AFL brand, giving the AFL additional opportunities to attract more consumers and advertisers, otherwise known as new sources of economic capital.

In many ways, the shift towards neoliberalism in the AFL has merely been a reflection of the economic landscape in Australia and, indeed, in most of the Western world. Although Huizinga argues that the sport field should be separate from the

³⁴ AFL, 'History of Australian Football'.

³⁵ AFL, 'History of Australian Football'.

ordinary and real, the reality today is that it is very much part of the economic field. Thus, the rapid emergence of economic capital and commercialism in the game since the early 1980s mirrors the dominant economic policies in Australian politics, economics, and business. As O'Regan writes in *The Rise and Fall of Entrepreneurial Television*, the deregulation of the finance sector resulted in an increase in competition within the finance field, ultimately leading to an entrepreneurial boom that most definitely included the media and sport fields.³⁶

As banks and other financial institutions became eager to lend and obtain new clients, they turned to media advertising, even sport, to sell their products. The media had at its disposal a growing group of advertisers wanting to use their services to reach consumers. Because advertisers were willing to pay millions of dollars to various media outlets to reach mass audiences, the media increasingly looked towards sport to grow audiences and ensure continued advertising revenue. Thus, the relationship between sport, advertisers, and the media resulted from the influence of the economic and media fields within the sport field.³⁷

Indeed, the AFL today is a multibillion dollar industry that reaches all states and territories in the nation and mirrors the capitalist bureaucratic business model of Western civilization. For example, in 2014, the AFL had total revenues of \$458 million, an increase of \$12 million, and assets valued at \$123.431 million. That year, the AFL had an operating surplus of \$315.710 million and a net profit of \$12.5 million.³⁸

The AFL currently consists of eighteen teams. The structure of each club is based on the bureaucratic business model. Although some variations in the hierarchical structure exist, each club is governed by a board of directors charged with ensuring the club is financially viable. This board is now commonly composed of businessmen rather than leaders and supporters from within the local community. Each club has a chief executive officer and relevant department managers to operate the club with the goal of achieving success both on and off the field.

According to Andrew Demetriou, former AFL chief executive officer, the AFL is a brand, a business and a form of entertainment that has to compete for the hearts and minds of Australians, just as all other forms of entertainment do.³⁹ The relationship between the AFL and the media is mutually beneficial, one that aids both in their

³⁶ T. O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture*, St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1993.

³⁷ O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture*.

³⁸ Ian Anderson, 'Financial Report', in *Australian Football League Annual Report 2013*, pp. 145–149, September 9, 2015, [http://s.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Annual %20Report/2014-AFL-Annual-Report.pdf](http://s.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Annual%20Report/2014-AFL-Annual-Report.pdf)

³⁹ Andrew Demetriou, 'An Ongoing Challenge', in *Australian Football League Annual Report 2005*, September 10, 2015, http://s.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/afl_annual_report_2005.pdf

quests for profits. Therefore, almost all decisions within the AFL and its clubs are based on financial outcomes it offers for all relevant stakeholders.

Play is now a commodity and product within the sporting and entertainment industries. Players are entertainers, celebrities marketed and sold to consumers to attract audiences. Media coverage of the AFL and its clubs, both on and off the field, occurs 365 days a year and reaches, quite literally, every corner of the nation, with television being the medium most engaged in providing coverage. Its impact is easily seen in the amounts paid for broadcast rights. For example, in 2007, the consortium of Seven Network, Network Ten, and Foxtel purchased exclusive rights to broadcast AFL games for five years for \$780 million.⁴⁰ In 2011, the amount agreed upon for the same broadcast rights was \$1.253 billion.⁴¹ In 2015, the AFL more than doubled this figure when they sold their TV and digital media rights to the Seven Network, Foxtel and Telstra for \$2.508 billion.⁴² Media coverage by radio, newspapers, magazines, Web sites, blogs, and other forms of electronic media has also increased significantly.

The popularity of the AFL is undeniable. It has been at the forefront of the hearts and minds of Australians for more than a century, and media saturation of the modern game has contributed to it remaining so. However, to maintain this level of popularity and to increase it, the game itself must be entertaining. Therefore, the AFL has assisted the media by ensuring on-field contests are as close, unpredictable, enthralling, and entertaining as possible through various league policies, including its equalisation policy and its total player payments (salary cap) policy. Through the equalisation policy, the AFL distributes monies generated from broadcasting, corporate sponsorship, and other revenue streams to all the clubs equally. Through the salary cap policy, no club may expend more than the other clubs for total player pay. Thus, no club may 'buy' a championship by outspending the other clubs.⁴³

These policies also highlight the influence of the economic and media fields on the sport field because they are essentially tools the AFL uses to package play as entertainment. They limit the power of the rich and distribute wealth to the poor to

⁴⁰ Gillon McLachlan and Simon Lethlean, 'Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure', in *Australian Football League Annual Report 2013*, pp. 33–44, March 6, 2014, <http://www.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Annual%20Report/2013%20AFL%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

⁴¹ AFL, 'AFL Television Broadcasting Rights 2012–2016', April 28, 2011, <http://resources.news.com.au/files/2011/04/28/1226046/391336-hs-file-afl-tv-rights-deal.pdf>,

⁴² Gillon McLachlan, 'AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan's Statement on New Broadcast Deal,' August 18, 2015, <http://www.afl.com.au/news/2015-08-18/afl-ceo-gillon-mclachlans-statement-on-new-broadcast-deal>

⁴³ AFL, 'Full Statement: Equalisation Deliberations', March 4, 2014, <http://www.afl.com.au/news/2014-03-04/full-statement-competitive-balance-deliberations-and-agm>

ensure on-field contests are truly competitive. By doing this, the AFL maintains support from every club's supporter base because fans genuinely believe their team can win or compete against all opposition. This, in turn, translates into television, radio, and online audiences, ultimately increasing broadcasting rights revenues and steady streams of gate receipts, membership fees, and corporate sponsorships, which all help enhance the AFL brand.

Thus, play in the AFL no longer manifests Huizinga's characteristics: It is no longer separate from ordinary and real life; it is no longer without serious outcomes that are limited only to the field of play; it is no longer free; and it is no longer a grassroots item of folk culture stimulated by communal passion, spirit, and action. Instead, play has been corrupted by the economic and media fields, transformed into display, and sold to consumers as entertainment. Ultimately, it is a tool for making money.

The commodification of play has also transformed communities. What began as groups of people coming together to enjoy the game together and subsequently to work together toward shared goals that affect their community has become a membership-driven organisation. Support has changed from active participation within the club to monetary support through paying membership fees, buying tickets to matches, and purchasing branded merchandise, effectively turning supporters into advertisements for their team. Players who once came from the local community now come from many locales and thus are not representative of the community for which they play. Trading and enticing players from other teams, even other sports, through offering huge salaries have diminished the player loyalty that was once expected. Fans watch games on television from the comfort of their homes or in stadiums outside their local communities instead of meeting at their clubs or watching from their home grounds. After the game, fans meet with friends at restaurants or pubs to talk about the game rather than at their clubs; and little exchange occurs concerning issues of importance to their local communities that do not concern the game. Yet in the early days, these clubs were where communities gathered precisely to deal with such issues.⁴⁴

Supporters have also seen the changes in the AFL and its clubs discussed here. During interviews conducted as part of my research, AFL fans clearly recognized the AFL as a business and the increasing influence of money and media in the game.⁴⁵ They noted that the growing influence of coaches and management have affected the

⁴⁴ T. Grant, 'Battle Grounds,' *Herald Sun: Our Game: 150 Years of Footy*, May 5, 2008, p. 20

⁴⁵ Interviews were conducted between May 15 and June 13, 2013. See Samuel Keith Duncan, *How the Play Element Has Changed in Australian Football and the Consequences of This Change on the Community*, Doctoral thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Victoria, 2015.

level of player spontaneity and flair that marked the early days of Australian football. Now teams have set plays, game plans, specific structures and instructions players are to follow, all of which reduce the creativity and inventiveness of players. Their observations also illustrated the decreased level of interaction between supporters and clubs. Where once members were intricately involved in making decisions and running their clubs, now their support is essentially monetary. Communication is one way through e-mails, Web sites, and social media geared to motivate fans to renew memberships, buy tickets, and promote the team. Interviewees seldom identified any of the characteristics of genuine community: an autonomous setting in which people (a) come together to enjoy something in common with others; (b) feel a sense of belonging and meaning; (c) form strong emotional ties with other members of the community; (d) feel a sense of loyalty, obligation, or responsibility to each other; and (e) influence and actively contribute to the shared and common goals of the community.⁴⁶

Although the AFL is not devoid of creating some sense of community, it is substantially weaker than it was at the game's founding. Certainly, compared with the interviewees' accounts of the personal connections they felt towards their local, grassroots football clubs, the inability of the AFL to stimulate the same sense of belonging, empowerment, freedom, active engagement, and sense of obligation and responsibility appears stark.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Although the concept of play clearly remains difficult to define, Huizinga's contribution to the study of play undoubtedly endures. His key characteristics of play are the starting point for almost all theorists beginning their quests to understand play. His critics, however, while making valid contributions to the discussion, appear confused about Huizinga's insightful observations on the influence of the economic field in the sport field. By interpreting Huizinga's cultural observations and insights through Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus, we can understand better

⁴⁶ The following are key contributors to the concept of social community: David Charvis and G. Pretty, 'Sense of Community: Advances in Measurement and Application', *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 6, 1999, pp. 635-642; J. R. Gusfield, *The Community: A Critical Response*, New York, Harper Colophon Books, 1975; David McMillan and David Charvis, 'Sense of Community, a Definition and Theory', *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1986, pp. 6-23; Stephanie Riger and Paul J. Lavrakas, 'Community Ties: Patterns of Attachment and Social Interaction in Urban Neighbourhoods', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1981, pp. 55-66; S. Sarason, *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1974.

⁴⁷ Duncan, 'How the Play Element Has Changed in Australian Football'.

the transformation of play that is occurring in sport today. Even though more up-to-date theories of human behaviour and culture now exist, Bourdieu's concepts allow us to gain a fresh perspective. His theories provide a more meaningful framework against which to examine Huizinga's work. This is especially important in terms of the relationship between play and ordinary and real life and the notion of seriousness, for the conceptual relationship between them is fundamental to Huizinga's entire argument about the play element.

As seen in the case study of the AFL, by applying this new lens to the sport field, we clearly see that professional sport has lost its autonomy and is now influenced by money more than it has ever been. The influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL has transformed play, weakened the relationship fans share with the game, and weakened community. The analysis also shows that Huizinga's observations about play can indeed be applied to modern professional sport. Of more importance, however, is the potential to use Bourdieu's concepts as a theoretical framework to analyse most of the other fields in society as well. Not only is this new lens appropriate for interpreting Huizinga, but it may also be used singly or in combination with other theories to examine play within other sports, music, politics, or education to determine the effects of neoliberalism and the influence of the economic and media fields within these realms.

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