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BASEBALL'S BISEXUALITY¹

Abstract: In this essay I explore the function of sports in general and baseball in particular as a powerful element in the social construction and maintenance of masculinity within American culture. Sport's function as an element in ideology is explored. I suggest that some of the key elements in baseball as a mass-audience sport make masculinity a complex and ultimately unstable construction through the medium and media production of baseball. I explore baseball's relation to time and to language as aspects of complex gender assembly.

Keywords: ideology, time, masculinity, social construction, narrative, bisexuality.

THIS ESSAY IS PART PSYCHOANALYSIS, part social theory, part feminism, and part autobiography. It is an attempt to look, very locally, at the production and interpenetration of gender in cultural and intrapsychic life, specifically, in the experience of watching and following baseball. To write this paper, I had to remember and think about a lot of my history, but also about the history of how sports function in and comment on social life and culture. At this point, 20 years after I began to work on this project, how I think about "Women, Baseball, and Words," (my original title) is the outcome of my history with psychoanalytic feminism, and with gender studies, and gender theory. But this essay is also an outcome of my history as a daughter, as a wife, as a buddy, and most recently as a grandmother, somehow always someone rooted and vitalized in the intense pleasures of baseball. Only recently have I had a psychoanalytic

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language to think about the pleasures of baseball fandom and the experience of looking at and being at a baseball game. To my surprise, the language comes from the Hungarian émigré analyst Michael Balint, who brought much of Ferenczian thought to London in the 1930s.

Balint (1959) took a wonderful journey to teach his readers about two key concepts in his theories of regression and primitive object relations. *Philobats* and *ocnophils* constitute two distinct types, or perhaps two modes, of functioning. Philobats seek stimulation and love the energy and motion of flight and action (directly or vicariously). The sensible, perhaps more delicate, ocnophils luxuriate in clinging, in a sensual hold, in security, in sensory and acoustic baths. Baseball fans, one might say, integrate both these modes of being. But Balint had more to say about regression.

Balint illustrated these modes of relating, and also of fantasy, in a wonderful essay, "Funfares and Thrills." Here I apply his terminology and his taxonomies to sports, in particular to baseball, with its unique properties of timelessness and sensuality. Regarding the funfare, Balint identified three kinds of experiences, which are available to us through the social and individual experience of the funfare. These experiences define our pleasures, our internal representations, and our longings.

First is catering, the pleasure of eating, being fed, finding drinks and wonderful things to eat, which have to have, Balint suggested, two characteristics: sweetness and cheapness. These are perhaps different versions of characterizing excess or *jouissance*. The second kind of pleasure involves aggression and a variety of forms of violence: fantastical, actual, and vicarious. The third pleasure has to do with something that alters your state: dizziness, flight, the deliberate encounter of vertigo or giddiness. Linking these concepts to baseball, I found these concepts to be wonderful. There are the regressive pleasures of eating, watching, and, simultaneously, mimetically linking oneself to flight, to physical mastery, and to a multidimensional, multimedia experience of meaning and discourse as core aspects of watching and following baseball. In the very structure and experience of baseball, there are many features that make regression a particularly inspired idea to explore.

The first paper I wrote on this subject was very much embedded in the work of psychoanalytic and cultural feminism, which came into prominence in the 1980s, particularly Kristeva (1980, 1982) and Irigaray (1985, 1990). This perspective took an often monolithic view of gender and of patriarchy. It was a seemingly simple translation and reversal of Lacanian

theory: language requires of its users a *position* in relation to desire and authority. Entering the world of language or acquiring speech constitutes subjectivity and genderedness for each individual. Not much space for bisexuality, for resistance, or for ambivalence.

In my initial ideas about baseball, women, and words, I was very much aware of baseball as a particular male space. I looked at several nested problems: How does baseball as a part of mass culture reflect and produce masculinist ideology? How do language and the intricate glossing practices through which baseball is interpreted ensure it as male preserve? How is baseball appropriated as male space? How—and why—are women kept out?

Baseball certainly has been situated primarily and historically as a male world. Moreover, it is a male world whose magic depends on the absence of women. Baseball is impenetrable by women. Women have been read out of baseball as subjective actors. Even having sued their way into locker rooms, having been drawn into major league status as part of the war effort, or having cajoled their way into the stands, women as subjects in baseball are marginal. Ann Ardour, a Toronto sportswriter traveling with the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team in the 1970s, remembers buckling her seat belt on an airplane while flying with the team and having a flight attendant lean over her to inquire, “Are you somebody’s mother?” (personal communication).

If not someone’s mother, she might have been somebody’s daughter. For me, getting to baseball came through my father and as a way to find my father. I was taught to play baseball virtually the day after my father returned from the Second World War. There is a picture of me, dated August 1945. My father, standing behind me, has a catcher’s mitt. I am wearing a red coat with a velvet collar. Batting left-handed, I am, as my father had instructed, leaning into the pitch. In the same era he and I went to see the International League games in Toronto in the 1940s and 50s, and, most deliciously, my father took me to the Polo Grounds to see Stan Musial play in a double header. The St. Louis Cardinals had been my father’s team since his boyhood and Musial² his favorite modern player. There is a vague hint in this memory of trouble to come, as Musial, very unusually, went hitless in both games, and I left the Polo Grounds feeling inexplicably implicated in this disaster. But there were other gains. I have

²Stan Musial, a star for the St. Louis Cardinals for over 20 years, retired in 1963. He was an all-round consummate player, with many baseball records in his time.

a personally autographed picture of Ducky Medwick.³ From my husband's point of view, this is the really crucial part of my dowry. My father took no interest in my formal education but had one requirement for a fully furnished mind: I should be acquainted with baseball, at least with its history for the 30 years prior to my birth. Dutifully, as a little girl, I immersed myself in back issues of *Baseball Register*, read books about the great teams of the 20s and 30s, and as a 13-year-old spent one summer writing and rewriting the opening paragraph of a novel I intended to base on the 1919 Black Sox scandal,⁴ a key line naturally being, "Say it ain't so."

For over a decade, in the 1980s, I lived on the edge of my husband's group of baseball buddies, a collection of men, many of them writers, who invented Rotisserie baseball.⁵ They took me along to spring training and initiated me in an exhausting, engrossing attention to all the litter and minutiae of box scores. Every season could be a seamless experience of watching, attending, listening to, reading about, and talking baseball. Twenty-five years after these men had invented fantasy baseball, we all went to a "seminar" at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, where a young writer gave a pitying analysis of the phenomenon of fantasy sports. He pointed out that the now grizzled guys who made up fantasy baseball somehow had contrived to make no money from it, despite having developed an enterprise whose ancillary income is now over a billion dollars a year. But even that horror could not quite evaporate the sweet moment of sitting in the Hall of Fame, being a part of baseball's strange and beautiful history. Inevitably, as the years rolled along, a patient appeared whose principal symptom was a serious addiction to fantasy baseball. So you can be someone's mother, someone's daughter, or someone's analyst.

But this entree to baseball through men captures the problem. If baseball is a social and material space appropriated by and for men, how can

³Joe Medwick was a famous player on the St. Louis Cardinals. He began his career in the 1930s, when the Cardinals were known as the Gas House gang.

⁴The 1919 scandal in which the White Sox fixed the World Series and were renamed the Black Sox by the press of that era is one of the totemic moments in baseball. The purified national pastime was spoiled with corruption and gambling. It was a moment when the ideological impact of sport was threatened, its mythic work undermined.

⁵Rotisserie baseball, the Ur-version of fantasy baseball, was the collective invention of this group of men around 1980. See Walker (2007) for the history and the evolution of this phenomenon.

I speak? Or, if I speak, who am I? Clearly a tomboy voice and spirit is part of my baseball persona, but that sidesteps the question of a gendered, female voice.

When I began to work on this project, I thought it would be easy. But speaking from a position of love *and* disenfranchisement is a problem. Maybe, as an analyst, I should have known that. Writing about baseball immediately raises the problem of legitimacy and authority. A voice from the margins can be insightful and free, or that voice can be subversive. But it is often a voice tinged with envy, tortured with fear of being judged incompetent or inauthentic. To speak as a woman about baseball is to be immediately entangled in its discursive practices and in its ideological functions and to be at odds with its rules, its regulations, and its history.

When I gave a version of this paper as a talk at Rutgers University in the 1980's, one of my graduate students, a man, said, with a rather pained look, that the talk was "interesting" (he seemed to use the word gingerly) but that really he didn't actually like to hear a woman speaking about baseball. The whole point of the game, the obsessions with the cards and the stats, is that these are perfect latency-stage devices, designed to exclude the sound of your mother's voice. The experience of hearing the paper had made him feel a little dizzy, perhaps even, he ventured, a little queasy.

However, a friend offers a different take on this matter of baseball and women. A serious and productive clergyman, with a lifetime of activism and social service behind him, he tells me quite simply that his adult life is still measured against his failure to play for the New York Yankees. For him, playing baseball was all about the hope of attracting the attention of a beautiful woman. I forbear mentioning Bernard Malamud's (1952) novel, *The Natural*. The woman in white, whose loving gaze you long for, can in another, angry, disappointed mood, shoot you. But, of course, these personal and literary examples of linking love of baseball to love of women doesn't actually help my problem. Loving or killing, the woman watches a man play baseball, and it is this structure's discursive tropes and conventions that I become tangled in.

Now, more than 20 years after I began this preoccupation with writing about baseball, I can see that this paper has become an account of my own trajectory in psychoanalytic feminism. I began this work with an analysis of language and speech practices as exclusionary and an analysis of the difficulty women have in speaking as subjects. I was interested in the more general problematic of female desire and agency and felt

indebted to Kristeva (1982) and the French feminist tradition influenced by Lacanian conceptions of the subject, language, and sexual difference. I wrote myself into a *cul de sac*.

Now I can write myself out of that dead end through the more contesting systems of postmodern feminism, in particular Butler's (1977a, b, 2005), as well as the work in culture studies in which the singular and monolithic power of patriarchy or ideology or male gaze is contested, a perspective in which hybridity and multiple points of enunciation are possible (Bhabha, 1994). My views now are more consistently psychoanalytic, in the sense that I view gender and its cultural constitution and maintenance as unstable, constructed scenes and sites. I see baseball now as a more fragile male space, more contested ground, more bisexual, and, in Balint's (1959) sense, more primitive and regressed. At this point in my thinking, I would stress the centrality in baseball of the pre-oedipal father/mother/parent as much as the oedipal scene in thinking about who inhabits baseball space. My argument is about sports in general and baseball in particular as elements in mass culture, implicated in and powerful in the individual's construction of self. This self may be national, gendered, or embodied. Baseball, as it is played but, most crucially, as it is narrated, is one cultural site for the structuring and elaborating of masculinity and American-ness. By deconstructing the argument, I claim that baseball is more accurately a site where gender is fragile and complex and potentially contestable.

Sports and Ideology

There are many intriguing ways to think about sports in society and in psychic life, ideas that draw from psychoanalysis, from critical theory, and, in particular, Foucault (1966), who would see sports as a site or a spectacle in which key interests and power within a society create and maintain norms and cultural ideals.

Sports generally, and baseball in particular, are crucial elements in the construction of self, national or civic self, often presented in the guise of pure spectacle. The power of these structures and scenes to shape and constrain personhood and identity, both gendered and national identity, is often masked. C.L.R. James (1963) wrote a wonderful book on cricket, in the context of colonialism and British imperialism. He was a superb cricketer from Trinidad, a fact often trumped by his powerful career as a political theorist and Trotskyist in a period when that designation meant

something interesting. He was fascinated by a national game stressing fair play, rules, and sportsmanship in a country from which he had direct evidence of that culture's history of exploitation and imperialism. Sports, fairness, amateurism is, in this guise, the perfect mask for capitalism, taming conflict into play. There has been very interesting writing on the Olympics in this regard (Brohm, 1978). The work of Harry Edwards (1973), the American sociologist, is another example of these ideological treatments of sports. In his critique of sports as a supposed path to upward mobility for poor, and particularly black, athletes and athletes of color, he argues that professional team sports create a gladiator class and considerable underdevelopment of large groups of second-tier athletes. College football supports the illusion of class mobility. But, as we now see, the onset of Parkinson's disease and dementia, as an aftermath to football careers, makes some sports writers think of football in the same spirit as dog fighting. Michael Vick⁶ is the link to both settings.

Another argument maps the character of sports to the character of labor, particularly industrial labor. The public performance of a sport orchestrates management of impulse, a disciplining of the body, a theater for submission and masochism from which desire seems to have been almost drained. Most modern sports, at least in some aspects, are antipleasure, devoid of playfulness. The ravages done to the body and spirit by modern work can be masked if we take this assault and turn it into high art, and creative effort. (Brohm, 1978)

In the 1996 Olympics, the spectacle of miniature young women gymnasts engaged in fracturing, splintering, and bruising their bodies while exhorted by elderly, violent, male coaches, on the sidelines, was a topic of great public debate. The spectacle, as child abuse and child labor law violation, was not lost on many. The positioning of women in that spectacle was quite remarkable. Official coaches of the team, both women, were reduced to caretaking, escorting functions while the media constructed the real psychodrama between the little mechanical girls, whose only powerful, authentic affect came with the horror of misstep and the bellowing and embracing men directing this spectacle from seats above it.

⁶Michael Vick, a star quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, served an 18-month prison sentence for his role in a dog fighting ring. It is interesting that there is a universal horror at dog fighting but a billion dollar industry in professional football and, in an earlier era, boxing, although these two sports are now widely understood as inducing major brain trauma and injury in the sports' participants. The best modern voice undertaking this kind of analysis is Dave Zirin, whose blog is a must read.

What is true of modern work, modern education, modern testing, and most modern sports is that they are all done to an increasingly speedy tempo. Many sports, like track, football, soccer, and basketball, position men against time as well as against each other. From the most grueling marathon to the split-second track event, athletes are held to the regulatory judgment of the clock, punitively calibrated to the millisecond. The athlete's body is held in an intense and masochistic relationship to the clock, a metaphor for technological machinery. Racing against the clock, fighting to the bell, playing out a last period, pits man against time with the implicit threat that the body can be broken in this struggle, depleted and wrecked in a battle with an implacable, relentless machine—time. We will see later how baseball, uniquely in modern North American sports, disrupts this facet of sports, particularly its masochism.

Because sporting experience is so much in the realm of spectacle and physical action, ways of being and looking are interpreted as normal and natural. So the constitutive and constructive aspects of baseball's work on masculinity become masked by the focus on natural talents and physical acumen. This is yet another ideological move, setting the ideals of the body and of play and fairness in the world of physical action. This strategy (which is both political and cultural) naturalizes, idealizes, and essentializes ways of being collective and ways of having a body.

An argument advanced by Cary Goodman (1979) would have it that Eros, playfulness, desire, and youth are removed from the social body through organized sports. His work examined the eradication of street games from the Lower East Side, an eradication he saw as the cooptation of immigrant energy and working-class spirit in the early years of the 20th century. Assimilation was in part accomplished by moving a sense of collectivity from the streets into the playgrounds, organized games, and sports leagues, arranged and maintained by bourgeois reformers and even the police (Police Athletic Leagues). Some of that type of critical analysis feels too behaviorist. It makes sports like prison, nothing but cooptation and management of body and desire. Perhaps we need to remember Balint's (1959) interest in the funfare as a site of vertigo and dizziness, as well as aggression. But also we need to be suspicious of what fun and play may be masking. In the production of modern sports activity—both at the amateur and at the professional level—many transfers are effected. The body is a site of transfer, and standards of normativity in matters of race, ethnicity, and class might be seen to be part of the powerful conflicts around baseball personnel from the 1940s onward.

Note how absolutely gender has been excluded from these evolutions of the baseball body.

There is the additional ideological operation through which ideas about the functioning of the state are subtly conveyed. The glorification of the “game,” the taming of struggle into “fair competition,” the very notion of “fairness” and rule-governed behavior in the context of lawless capital development and imperialism, all created a false vision of social life. Recall that the period of baseball’s development overlaps and coincides with great movements of capitalism and industrialization from the late 19th century onward. Brohm (1978) evokes some of these questions of ideological and political masking in a startling insight in which he connects sports and social repression in the use of the soccer stadium in Chile as the site for mass torture and murder during the coup.

I am treating sports as a theatrical space for the display of bodies and bodies in motion. Inevitably gender is involved. As psychoanalysts, we could, it seems to me, be very interested in the creation, on a mass and public level, of highly elaborated fantasy material, which becomes available for the very stuff of intrapsychic life and subjectivity. Sports figures and their play are part of the social practices or social material through which the self is created and maintained at an individual and at a social level. Popular sports are part of the process through which male subjectivity is elaborated, and, in relation to masculinity, female objectivity is similarly installed.

Approaching sports from a more dynamic psychoanalytic perspective, we might see an arena of conflict and resistance in which the liberatory impulses still remain alive. There is in many athletic events (whether we watch or play) a longing to break through, to transcend, a fierce determination to be better, higher, stronger that speaks to the ineluctable aspect of human desire and against a simple notion of blind conditioning. This is what Balint (1959), I believe, was trying to conceptualize when he wrote of the experiences of vertigo at the funfare, that is, the impulse to fly free, to soar.

Psychoanalytic theory is written in as different and more subtle a register than the often mechanistic pitch in much of the standard forms of ideology critique. The control of individuals by the state is not a simple cause and effect. From Althusser (1971) onward, we are increasingly interested (influenced by psychoanalysis) in the forces of interpellation. Put in a simpler way, how does the state, the dominant culture, get us to *want* to do what we *have* to do? Sports provides an interesting way to answer

that question. Approaching sports from a more dynamic perspective, we might see an area of conflict and resistance in which the liberatory impulses remain alive. In the race against the clock, there is masochism but also desire, longing, and activity. There is, in many athletic events engaged in or watched, a longing to break through, to transcend, to step outside the quotidian or bounded time and space. But, if we think dialectically, this potent feeling of transcendence systematically masks or disguises a lot of gamy economic realities: the ubiquity of gambling, the money that underwrites most so-called amateur sports, and so forth. But fairness and equality are ideals worth promoting. Utopian dreams may well be manipulated in public sports spectacles but remain as potential, perhaps as dreams. These transcendent aspects of sports, and the powerful celebration of activity and, in some cases, collaborative play, always makes me feel acutely the loss to women of this cultural and social practice (as spectators and as players).

Baseball and Time

Baseball specifically is unique as a social mirror. Baseball has its effects on us in unusual and idiosyncratic forms. First in its relation to time, and second in its relation to words and narratives, baseball works its magic on the psyche in specific ways. It is a spectacle certainly, a site of cultural practice, but more than most other sports, baseball is always interpreted, its narratives inseparable from its images and spectacles.

Baseball is a place without time, or, rather, a place preserved from measured metronomic temporality. Baseball is a place without women as agents. It provides men with the connected luxuries of no stopwatch, no schedule, and no women. Baseball also carries and maintains a false, made-up Disneyland history, a utopian vision of preindustrial America, idyllic, and problem free. It inhabits and produces an imaginary past. It is less obviously enmeshed than football or basketball in the economy of gambling, in the traffic of commerce. Baseball is more heavily symbolized, more drenched in liturgy than almost any other mass sport. It has a much tighter fit with art forms, novels, poetry, and narrative than do most other popular mass-audience sports.

One primary interpretive production is its birth myth, that is, the imaginary origins of baseball. The myth of baseball's beginnings is that it originated in a pretimed, preindustrial America, America before the stopwatch, that technological invention of industrial labor. Mythically, also, baseball

evokes an America before feminism and suffrage. Baseball actually grew out of two social sites—gentlemen's' athletic clubs and industrial teams. The industrial teams were probably a manipulative effort to counteract the impulse around union organizing by tapping the spirit of collectivity and loyalty for management, rather than collective bargaining. This exploitation of class solidarity by corporate owners, is, at the professional level, the transfer that Goodman (1979) noted in amateur youth sports, where human youthful energy was put to the use of regulation and body/mind management via organized sports such as the Police Athletic League. Now the link between baseball and corporate America is more revealed in the names of new minor and major league parks: Pacbell, Busch Stadium, Citi Field, and the like. Team names themselves still retain the preoccupations of latency boys: birds, animals, clothing: the Red Sox, the Cardinals, the Tigers, the Cubs, the White Sox.

During the baseball strike in 1981, a joke passed among baseball writers. When Lincoln was shot and lay dying, he summoned Abner Doubleday⁷ to his bedside. "Don't let baseball die," he said. The joke masks a sanctified American fiction, the narrative of baseball's link to the heroes of the Civil War. The "national pastime" in this apocryphal story was thus invented by the victorious Civil War general, its virgin birth occurring in a perfectly pastoral village in upstate New York. Baseball is a game for lads after work, for gentlemen on the village green. This is its timeless birth image, the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, its basilica.

Here is Roger Angell (1962), the main modern poet of baseball, describing being at a game: "The players below us—Mays, DiMaggio, Ruth, Snodgrass, swim and blur in memory, the ball floats over to Terry Turner and the end of this game may never come" (p. 303). We are in a world suspended, timeless. We are in an environment of lovely men, of movement and flight, of balls floating, men sliding. This is Balint's (1959) fun-fare. Competition, it seems, is less potent here. This is preoedipal life, as we see, as much potentially the province of women as of men, yet still lived as endless boyhood.

Baseball is a liturgical experience; its forms preserve and yet also construct historic memory, keeping alive a newly invented and reinvented timeless tradition. The foregoing quote was from the high priest writing

⁷This figure, a Civil War general (1819–1893) was named the father of baseball, again part of the mythologizing apparatus. There is no evidence for his part in inventing baseball, but some inventor of heroic status in America was required.

in this religion, Roger Angell. A younger writer, W. P. Kinsella (1982) produced a short story, "Shoeless Joe Goes to Iowa," later a film called *Field of Dreams* (1989), in which a hero, patiently watched by a luscious wife (whose images in the novel virtually always involve food), builds an imaginary ballpark in a cornfield where he replays the crucial games in a futile evocation of lost desire and hope, a repetition before the trauma, the splitting of baseball's goodness, before the Black Sox scandal. The repair of that trauma involved the establishment of a commissioner, a benign but autocratic and omnipotent judge, in fact, a man whose earlier activities on the bench included the persecution of the early twentieth century radicals.⁸

Baseball lives in an imaginary history, an endless present, always imbued with its own past. Baseball lives in a time warp without a second hand on the clock. It could get late, it could rain. Or it could get dark. Until very recently, one major league team played in a field with no lights, preserving the history of afternoon ball and its lyrical sunny setting. Baseball is radically different from other mass-consumer sports in its relation to time. It is both outside time and also continuous. You get two hits of football a week. Baseball is daily, hourly, weaving through one's day. Morning box scores, later editions for the West Coast games, afternoon TV. The radio chattering through the summer night air. There are also the endless secondary productions—books, cards, magazines, statistical analyses, editorials on the relation of baseball to life and manhood. And in the modern era, the Internet and a horde of bloggers keep baseball in an eternal present.

When the football strike threatened in the late 1980's, novelist Frederick Exely (1987) feared an upsurge in domestic violence in the absence of these hurtful struggles. Around the time of the baseball strike, different fears emerged. It was the loss of purity; the intrusion of money; worst of all, the intrusion of all the grit and clang of unions and labor struggles and economic and class conflict, the very social features baseball was organized to override and deny. It was (and Roger Angell, (1978) related to the league expansions in the same way) a threatened loss of the past and therefore of identity, of the known constructed and seemingly "remembered" world of men's childhood. Preenatal, sublimated, phallic.

⁸ This first commissioner, W.K.M Landis, son of a Civil War surgeon, was august and conservative. He purified baseball after the 1919 scandal, but he also kept it white.

Baseball and Words

Baseball is played and displayed in the mass media, but always it is glossed, interpreted, spoken. Familiar to relational or social constructivist analysts, baseball is a place where reality is constructed and made meaningful through narratives and discourse. So my thinking about baseball took me to words, writings, broadcasting, and linguistic practices as crucial elements in the production and internalization of baseball.

Baseball is talked as it is played or watched—color commentary by announcers, you sitting in the stands with a buddy, talking to a stranger sitting behind you, yelling. Baseball is all about words. Marbled through the visual jewel of baseball, its green geometry, its stately pacing, and its arcing, irregular movements, there is speech. Men talk when they do baseball. Unlike the tempo of hockey or basketball, where speech skates across the stream of continuous, timed play, baseball, because freed from the stopwatch, displays itself more amply and spaciously, opens large spaces and long moments into which words and fantasies can arch and curl. “Our afternoon slid by in a distraction of baseball and memory. I almost felt myself at some dreamlike doubleheader, merging the then and the now” (Angell, 1962, p. 302). It is impossible to experience this complex living in an endlessly present past and not think of Freud’s (1914) meditation on remembering and repeating and the both regressive and narcissistic dreaminess of this experience, which Balint (1959), among others, so richly described. And to feel how seldom this collective and potentially healing experience exists, at the public level, for women.

In this endless moment of congealing memory, men talk. There is in-field chatter; the laconic, reassuring voice of the old announcers; counterpointing and bitter remonstrance from fans. A sheet flaps down from the railing of a top deck, a hand-lettered love note to some player or team. Diamond Vision (the giant TV screen in most big baseball parks) writes and blinks on scores, and pitching changes all over the leagues. Each modality—electronic, visual, auditory, literary—has its own style and syntax, its own particular orthography or graphics or register. But all these dialects of baseball, these language worlds are in the male register.

Baseball talk has evolved as hip, low key, laid back, not too heavy handed or earnest. Nothing “bush,” to use some old baseball slang (as in “bush league,” the minor leagues). Now, that’s a curious term to decode psychoanalytically. It indicates a mode of representation that is both

marginalized and sexually charged. Baseball is the only literary domain I know of where the word nonchalant is used as a verb, as in "He nonchalanted it to first base," an apt description of a slow but timely throw to keep the batter from getting on base; an "easy" out. Sweetly, slowly, sensually timeless, and yet perfectly timed.

The style and talk of baseball writers is a ticket to the locker room and to the inside stories. Wilfred Sheed (1993), in an ambivalent review of sportswriter Red Smith's collected essays, complained, somewhat enviously, that Smith's material could only have come from a lifetime of hard-drinking, hard-talking bouts with the guys, with the heavy demand to be able to keep your mind and wits clear, manage your drinks, and keep playing in the funny, jiving chatter of men talking sport.

I have on many occasions sat mute, envious, and wildly appreciative amidst my husband's baseball cronies. They are sportswriters, writers, and academics, but, more important, they are men lolling back in stadium seats or bleachers, who have been talking at and with and for other men, all their lives. Once, at spring training, at Al Lang Stadium in Florida, they all got press passes. I watched these same men move into the field and suddenly hang back, mute, adult postures changed into the slack, respectful body stance of eight-year-olds. I saw these men, now transformed into boys, as they watched beefy young 18-year-olds (those men, so "cruelly young," in Angell's (1978) phrase, take batting practice. Back in the stands, speech and adulthood returned to them, and they chatted and dissed players and each other. Al Lang Stadium—indeed many small Florida ballparks—are wonderful places to watch baseball as the March Florida sun hits the water behind the park. Someone has found a barbecue joint near the park and brings in boxes of ribs, beer, nachos dripping cheese, ice cream, the elements Balint (1959) so warmly evoked: cheap, tasty food. But, although the food and the cold beer fill our senses, the overwhelming impression I am left with is words, male words, and male wit, men's talk binding this afternoon together. Even the voices hawking food are male. I had no voice in this lyrical moment.

One could say that these men have the authority drawn from a lifetime with the stats, the lore, and the stuff of baseball. But talking is also a way of making authority, not merely drawing from it. The function of this talk is not only to make meaning, to gloss the game, but also to make self and self-in-relation. These words, the talking of baseball, bind men across generations and time, building up complex layers of experience, creating

a thick piece of culture and ideology in which men act, coming into subjective and relational being.

Baseball's time is seamless and invisible, a bubble within which players move at exactly the same pace and rhythm as their predecessors. This is the way the game was played in our youth, and in our father's youth and even back then, back in the country days—there must have been the same feeling, that time could be stopped [Angell, 1962, p. 303].

Baseball talk comes in several registers, not just the heart-stopping prose of Angell. There is the ironic ear of Gilbert Sorrentino (1971):

Telling you on the phone what Joe Chooch said about what Gil Hodges said down in St. Petersburg after Tommie Agee said something to somebody about something. So that was the final batting order, man. Your mouth open, what to say to him, Leo. Leo leave me alone. We are not friends anymore. Tell it to the marines. Tell it to Pete Hamill [p. 127].

Phil Rizzutto, while announcing Yankee games, lived out some remnant of the games he played as a Yankee shortstop in the 1940s. He could go several innings with no mention of the game in progress. He talked about the difficulties getting to the game, the devotion to baseball. "I spend more time at Yankee stadium than I do in my own home," articulating perhaps the wish of many of his male listeners. He sent birthday greetings to cronies, chatted and squabbled with coannouncers, and occasionally commented on the game he was watching. These glossing practices brought the men who listened and watched into an intricate experience of themselves and other men at a game played over time and outside it.

Talk, banter, analysis, taunting, pontificating—all the work of baseball talk creates and distributes a complex, deeply connected male world. It is 1948. It is 1984. The man who speaks is a 28-year-old shortstop, a 60-year-old announcer. This voice over the airwaves, spooling out a million statistics and chatter and a whole background to all the players and teams, links Rizzutto and his listeners to a whole genealogy of men in baseball. The man listening connects to his eight-year-old self, falling asleep with a radio cupped to his ear, or to the 25-year-old pitcher warming up in the bullpen. This is an imaginative and imaginary experience of becoming an American male, made "real" in the matrix of words and images and action. The function of this talk, whether aural or written, is to bind men across generations, building up a thick layer of experience,

creating a thick piece of culture, and embedding in it various matters of ideology and normativity—make that heteronormativity. This is the particular and special contribution baseball and its discourse makes to the reproduction of social life. Rereading this essay now, I feel either that I am becoming the Margaret Mead of baseball, investigating hidden tribal rituals, or that I am the envious outsider, wanting in.

The pure form, the standard dialect of baseball, is a reedy, soft-timbered male voice, ambiguously adult, never harsh, and never seductive. It is a voice for the radio, for listening on a summer night as you drive home from the cottage or the beach. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, that market researchers discovered that older fans preferred the radio as it was possible to assimilate the play-by-play to their imagination, remembering a game where all the players were white. The code for race is complex. There is a tough, black street style that has replaced the decorous, highly controlled, calm black voice of the Jackie Robinson era. There is Manny-talk,⁹ perhaps outside the code. There are assorted versions of good-old-boy talk, Stengelese.¹⁰ The sportscaster Red Barber spoke in a soft, androgynous, Southern voice. Each of the famous baseball announcers had a unique and recognizable cadence, until very recently almost exclusively male.

Dan Rosenheck (2004), a journalist with the *Economist*, wrote his senior thesis at Harvard on the representations of Latin masculinity in the major leagues. His title, “Hot Dogs, Hotheads and Hypochondriacs,” speaks volumes. Looking both at the modern game, with its increasingly heavy Latin presence, and at the first Latin American baseball stars of the 1960s, Rosenheck finds, in a wide range of sports writing, the characterization of the Latin player as volatile, sensuous, lively. Masculinity is slipping, even as ethnic stereotyping is not.

Woman as Witnessing Object

I originally worked on this material from a Kristeva- esque, cultural feminist head. Briefly, what that approach permitted me to see was that the

⁹Manny Ramirez, while playing for the Boston Red Sox, was known for bizarre locutions, drift play, and what seemed like a genuinely dope-addled speech style, leading to the sportwriters' coded description in many sentences beginning or ending with the phrase, “Manny being Manny.”

¹⁰Casey Stengel, the Yankee manager known for much tough talk and mangled grammar, added to the myth of good old boys, codgers as the wise geniuses of the game.

problem of a woman's entry into the experience of baseball was a version of her problem with relation to language: what is generally seen as a problem of authorship, of speaking as a subject. There is no female subject "I" in baseball, neither an authentic subject nor even the subject of enunciation, since the language of baseball is so male coded. How to enter this both symbolic and imaginary space as a subject, a desiring subject?

To illustrate the problem, let me conjure up a historical figure (well known in Brooklyn Dodger lore). "Hilda"¹¹ is a famous Dodger fan of the 1950s, pictured often in news photos howling and shouting in Ebbets Field and passing notes to Leo Durocher, then the Dodgers' manager (and, coincidentally, another mad wordsmith). She is, in the iconic photos of the day, a woman with her mouth wide open, yelling, a figure of some anxious amusement, some contempt, even some irritation. Tough shouting is not a performance that can easily cross gender lines. Yet the biographical details of Hilda's life tell a particular story. She was an athlete turned into fan, one of those women, passionate about sports and, of course, disenfranchised and then subsequently rendered oddly, androgynously, outside gender.

But to continue the feminist trope on this problem of the feminine voice: a woman is a necessary actor but only, finally, as a mirror, a reactor. Women cannot enter baseball as actors, but they need to be near it as mirroring and admiring others. Theresa Wright looks supportively at Gary Cooper in the film, *Pride of the Yankees* (1942). Young women, packed into their jeans and cutoffs, hang out, leaning over the infield fences at spring training, waiting in the players' parking lot, waiting to be chosen. Women wait for men to be finished with play. I can be the *other* (necessary but marginalized), the "you" sent to the kitchen, the "you" standing in front of those flinty mirrors at Shea Stadium in New York, backcombing my hair, my head filled with fantasy. Susan Sarandon, in the film *Bull Durham* (1988), created the platonic form and ideal of Baseball Annie: mother, worshipper, groupie, one who knows in the service of male action, the perfect lover waiting for the season to begin.

¹¹The most famous Dodger fan—perhaps the most famous fan in baseball history—was Hilda Chester, a plump, pink-faced woman with a mop of stringy gray hair (so she is described in her Wikipedia note). Hilda began her 30-year love affair with the Dodgers in the 1920s. She had been a softball star as a kid, or so she said, and she once told a reporter that her dream was to play in the big leagues or to start a softball league for women. Thwarted as an athlete, she turned to rooting.

If you don't want to enter as the object, you can as a woman enter as a kind of constructed boy, a tomboy—but being a tomboy is quite developmentally constrained, perhaps briefly, before adolescence, a last free space in which a female phallic style or sensibility is uncontested and unpathologized. You get a feeling for this restriction on the active female body in reading the commentary around female athletics from the early years of the twentieth century and around the women's professional baseball leagues during World War II. As women began to do sports, at both an amateur and a professional level, many of the surrounding social concerns were couched in terms of gender appropriateness. As women's professional baseball teams developed, the concern was to maintain images of femininity. The chaperones and lessons were officially to uphold social priorities and to offset loose morals. The film, *A League of Their Own* (1992), which I always mistakenly misspeak as “A League of One's Own” (*pace* Virginia Woolf), appeared to stress the need to control female heterosexual desire, but the implicit worry was lesbianism and masculinity. Too often in the 30s and 40s, as these teams were developing both before and during the war, the anxiety was over some freakish androgyny. Joan Joyce, arguably the best woman softball pitcher and later a touring golf pro, struck out Ted Williams¹² four times in an exhibition. The operative word here is exhibition. Her skill was displayed as a sideshow, not legitimated. The name of the team of touring women players in the 1930s was Slapsie Maxie's Curvaceous Cuties. The Chicago baseball owner Charles Wrigley's wartime team was called the American Girls' League. Babe Derdrickson, a three-sport Olympian, was treated in the press first as a freak; there was a lot of worry over her androgynous appearance. When she married a wrestling promoter, the reconstruction of her image in the press was a stunning piece of gender conformity—the tomboy tamed. Her gigantic successes were matched by a giant husband, and often the couple were photographed or described in or near their giant bed.

Women, as in so much cultural space, cannot be fully subject in baseball. Siren or groupie, faithful wife or foolish fan, tomboy eunuch or androgen, woman as object is marginalized, locked hopelessly in the oscillating categories of good and bad girl. No “I” that can write or talk

¹²Williams is arguably one of the greatest hitters in the game, and also a war hero, a veteran, carrying the wonderful nickname, by virtue of his slender frame, the Splendid Splinter. Striking out Williams has almost the status of one of the Hercules myths, the slaying of a giant.

with comfort, no "I" in the right easy register, none of the dialect to produce and reproduce the social practices of baseball. And the problem heightens in my attempting to be a critic, writing a feminist critique of baseball and trying to make a connection between ideology, psychoanalysis and mass culture. A woman speaking about baseball sounds more than usually performative. A woman talking baseball could be a case of sour grapes or like somebody's mother telling the boys to stop fooling around, and forget all that phallic business with bats and balls. If the Rutgers graduate student I mentioned earlier is right, that is the hectoring female voice that sports was supposed to get boys away from. And, mostly bleakly, there is no way to speak with love; for a woman who loves baseball is too easily transformed into the one looking to be loved, into any of the varying forms of Baseball Annie, or as the one employing some odd, preoedipal strategy to be or stay the little boy, AKA tomboy (Harris, 2005).

More complex social management strategies emerge when a woman owns (usually because she has inherited) a sports team. Georgianne Frontiere, who owned a football team, was pictured in popular magazines while taking exercise practice with the team and lying on the field with her legs spread. We get her imputed relation to the team. The other famous women owners are the Cincinnati Reds' Marge Schott, mostly disparaged in the press as eccentric, ill equipped for executive decision, and rather foolish. There is also Joan Payson, who owned and reputedly loved the Mets. Her era coincided with the tenure of Casey Stengel as the Mets' manager. Payson and Stengel appear in the narrative spaces of baseball rather like Margaret Dumont and Groucho Marx: ludicrous, comic figures. Payson's ownership of a baseball team was depicted as lovable, but silly, an old woman's slightly embarrassing fancy.

As an absolute requirement of maintaining its image and its ideological work, women are read out of baseball, excluded from its action and its discourse. Baseball is a gender performance by men for other men to watch and talk about. This was my gloomy conclusion 20 years ago when I began to write about baseball. Now I think of the problem with a slightly different spin. The shift in me is primarily due to the shift in feminist and postmodern thinking, in more complex models of identity (Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1997b). I think of this linguistic, material, social world of baseball as a place where words and images and actions are

coded in the male register and that women—as actors, as voyeurs, as scopophilic agents—are problematized.

Postmodern Gender Theory and Baseball's Bisexuality

I think, though, that baseball as male preserve is less secure and monolithic than I once did. I now think more psychoanalytically and more in terms of contemporary gender theory, particularly Judith Butler's (2005) ongoing work on gender and identification as performance.

All the descriptions of baseball—its timelessness, its rhythmic, leisured flow, its visual sensuality—could easily describe or metaphorize preoedipal, pregenital, polymorphously sensual and maternal and feminine experience. My husband holds the memory of the smell of the grass as he first walked onto a big league field. My clergyman friend, the erstwhile Yankee hopeful, brings to mind the curve of the field like a large soft breast. Bart Giamatti¹³ had a great idea about baseball: that it's the only game where you start from home and try as hard as possible to return. The nostalgia, the longing for a suspended past endlessly repeated—this is evocative of the thinking of Chasseguet Smirgel's (1985), of her work on the ego ideal and the longing for reunion. Regression within male space, or ungendered space, spaces like the ballpark, and like the fun-fare, are delicious sites of food and play and company. How interesting that this regression is coded as male preserve.

The baseball body also presents an interesting quandary in respect to masculine ideals. Baseball seems to me to lie in the domain of latency—its suspended sexuality, its sublimated energy with the time for calculation and preoccupation. Baseball imprints for most men somewhere between the ages of seven and twelve years. Baseball's mythic heroes often have a boyish quality. Whatever the reality, there is the image of the childlike Babe Ruth, the polite, well-mannered, (now one sees) over-controlled Jackie Robinson. There is a Boys Own annual aspect to these great players, the hard-pressing Thurman Munson (a scrappy New York Yankee in the 1970s), and his modern counterpart, Len Dykstra (nicknamed Nails), the proud and dignified Bob Gibson, an echo of Jackie Robinson, or the rapscallion Dean brothers, players of the 1940s. Whether

¹³Bart Giamatti, a former president of Yale, was the Commissioner of Baseball in the 1980s.

hard-playing youth, earnest, serious schoolboy, or errant rascal, the screen of boyhood slips over these men. In the annual *Baseball Register*, each player listed among other things, his hobbies—that latency-loaded, atavistic term. Rusty Staub (an outfielder slugger for the Mets in the 1970s) was reported as favoring that ultimately old-fashioned boys' pastime, stamp collecting. He is, in fact a well-known and sophisticated wine collector and chef.

The body imago of the modern baseball player is probably one of the major sites of change. There is a more fetishized relation to the body and to injuries than in an earlier era. Sore arms are now rotator cuff injuries, and knees, shoulders, and other parts are tinkered with arthroscopically. Drugs, rehab, and confessions, as well as agents and corporate identities for the players, now dominate the media coverage of baseball. Handsome former players Lee Mazilli and Jim Palmer appeared in underwear ads. And on the contemporary scene, stellar Yankee players A-rod (Alex Rodriguez) and Derek Jeter both date models, actresses, and (historically) Madonna and now her contemporary equivalents. The more usual and traditional baseball body was considerably less sculpted, more old fashioned, less sexualized. Thurman Munson's (former Yankee catcher) nickname was the Pillsbury Doughboy. Two outstanding pitchers of the 1970s, Goose Gossage and Tommy John, men with mustaches, tobacco stains, and draped, baggy-kneed uniforms, looked like baseball players from the early years of the 20th century. There is none of the homoerotic and highly fetishized character of the football body.

Steroids changed much of this perception. Phallic power trumps delicacy and skill. Steroids and the MTV quality of large, modern, stadiums drown out some of this old vision of male space and male bodies. Michael Kimmelman (2009) looks with nostalgia (in its masculine form, let us note) at the great old ballparks. The quiet, the ivy, the absence of electronic spectacle: these are the particular and now unique features of Wrigley Field (Chicago) or Fenway Park (Boston). These parks seem like lost Edens. The steroid-riddled body, with its connotation of corruption, disease, and wreckage, links baseball to other sports: football, boxing, sports that exhaust the body as surely as any industrial machine would. This more digitalized, ad-driven MTV look to baseball may speak to the instability and anxiety in regard to the phallic ideal, even as these new forms of imagery shore up that ideal (Corbett, 2009).

If we follow contemporary gender theory and also trace what is always an impulse in psychoanalytic theory, we come to a view of gender as

much less monolithic, more fragile, more tenuous, more constructed than in the standard psychoanalytic canon (Harris, 2005). In current terminology, gender is more performed than natural, even in baseball, that idealized essentially male sport. And since masculine gender ideals are built on repudiation and disavowal of the other feminine ideals, masculinity must be continually reasserted, maintained, reiterated, repaired, and replenished.

If we look at baseball in this light, its structures are ambiguous, easily contested. Baseball could be reread for its femininity, its androgyny, its evocation of regressed, luscious maternal space. If this sport is an important social site for the structuring of male identity, the gate keeping has to be fiercer. Baseball is probably a sport that could be integrated at all levels whereas tennis, football, and (except for goalkeeping) hockey cannot. Football is much more immune from femininity than baseball is, so the job of maintaining baseball as a male preserve is both more anxiety laden and more fragile. For this reason its language, and its narrative practices are more necessary than in other sports.

If we permit baseball's femininity to emerge, a much more complex structure comes into view, marbled with oedipal and preoedipal dimensions, potentially a place of postambivalence. My clergyman friend who speaks (seriously) of the green-mounded playing field as breast also reminds me of the astonishing effort and will of the player, the delight at display, the wish to be admired not by mother but by a contemporary girl. Hitting a major league fastball is the most difficult event of any sport. So prowess and energy and activity live in this sport, satisfying the philobat and the ocnophil. The desiring female subject in baseball has not fared so well as a site for identification with action and ambition. But the female desiring voyeur, hidden in the graffiti in the ladies room, is defiantly, even if politically incorrect from various points of view, an absent "presence." We might even hear in the howling fandom of Hilda Chester, the raging grief at the consignment to passive mirror, the longing of the mirror to spring into action (Golenbeck, 1984).

Baseball now has some women announcers. Bigendered voices and faces begin to be present, at least in some of the narrative spaces of baseball. Women apparently can talk about baseball. And I have insisted in this essay on writing about baseball. Last summer, at the Staten Island Yankees' minor league ballpark, as I was looking for french fries and some playground space for a four-year-old grandchild, I came across five or six Muslim women wearing head scarves and modest dress. On these

scarves were perched Yankee caps. I wanted to weep and to shout with happiness

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