Rowe, David. "Digital Media, Networking and Executive Fandom." *Global Media Sport: Flows, Forms and Futures*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 62–88. Globalizing Sport Studies. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849661577.ch-004>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 14:30 UTC.

Copyright © David Rowe 2011. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Digital Media, Networking and Executive Fandom

Sports broadcasting under different gods

Chapter 3 was concerned with sports television as the dominant medium of the past half century, establishing itself around the world in the form of public and commercial free-to-air broadcasting and commercial subscription platforms by various means, such as microwave, satellite and cable. It was shown that the global television system is a mixture of nationally contained content combined with selected sports programming circulating into other countries and regions, sometimes regarded as crucially tied to the viewing rights of citizens (both of nations and of the world) and sometimes predominantly ‘filler’ for multi-sports channels that satisfy expansion and status aspirations of sports and sports events of limited international appeal while providing modest broadcast rights revenue. The screening of major sports events can be highly sociable encounters, offering ‘water-cooler moments’ when large numbers of people engage with the screen action, identify with and distinguish themselves from the contestants, organize social events based on them and so, by various means, feel connected to social groups ranging from suburbs to nations. It is for this reason that such collective sporting moments are often – though there are signal exceptions as indicated in Chapter 3 – protected by international sports organizations, regional political unions, national governments, public broadcasters and free-to-air network television corporations from moving beyond the reach of the general citizenry. Indeed, television can enable the simulation of ‘being there’ not just by watching from home but by attending what are called live sites or public viewing sites organized around watching prime sports events on large screens in public spaces (McQuire 2010; Rowe and Stevenson 2006). For example, during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, FIFA established official Fan Fest sites in Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Berlin, Paris and Rome (although, surprisingly, none in Asia) and in nine South African cities, while many others were set up under the aegis of cities and local governments (Rowe and Baker 2011). However, watching sport on screen, even collectively, is qualitatively different from being part of the sport spectacle being screened, a component so important that, as noted in Chapter 3, some television programmers have considered digital crowd simulations to provide atmosphere.

Indeed, there is a broader critique that watching television, even in company, is a rather passive activity. It is my intention here only to acknowledge, rather than to engage deeply in, the debates about ‘active audiences’ and ‘active viewers’ that proliferated in media and cultural studies as a response to

mechanical accounts of helpless readers victimized by media propaganda and disempowered by trivial entertainment (see, for example, Brooker and Jermyn 2003, Part 3; Rowe 2011b). This position, especially where associated with the *oeuvre* of John Fiske (1987), and notably in his key work *Television Culture*, is that audiences actively make meanings out of the culture provided to them by industrial media capitalism, and so they cannot be wholly controlled by – and may be resistive in some respects to – the texts and messages that they receive. This recognition of the complexity of reception is, then, a counter to those who simplify it as simple absorption and acceptance. As Fiske (1989) puts it,

We live in an industrial society, so of course our popular culture is an industrialized culture, as are all our resources; by ‘resources’ I mean both semiotic or cultural ones and material ones – the commodities of both the financial and cultural economies ...

However, the fact that people cannot produce and circulate their own commodities does not mean that popular culture does not exist ... The creativity of popular culture lies not in the production of commodities so much as in the productive use of industrial commodities. The art of the people is the art of ‘making do’. The culture of everyday life lies in the creative, discriminating use of the resources that capitalism provides. (Fiske 1989: 27–8)

In the area of sports television, this combination of audience creativity (e.g. turning the sports commentary that is supposed to determine how viewers interpret events on screen into a source of comedy) and social intercourse (such as using televised sports events for purposes well beyond simple viewing, including the reinforcement of sociocultural identities) produces a very different picture from that of the mythical inert (usually male) sporting ‘couch potato’ (Bryant and Cummins 2010). This is especially so when the users of sports television are also involved in different types of fan community, both place based and ‘de-territorialized’ (Sandvoss 2003), that display a considerable degree of active involvement and organization in the conduct and experience of fan life. Garry Crawford (2004: 159), focusing specifically on sports fans, stresses the everyday social rather than the politically resistive aspects of sports fandom, while recognizing the wider societal constraints imposed on it:

Cultural texts (such as sport) have always played a role in many individuals’ lives, as a source of conversation, recall, individual and collective memories and as a constituent of individuals’ identities. However, we live in a society increasingly based upon social performance and spectacle, where individuals will draw on cultural texts in the construction of their identities and their social performances.

Thus, although there are many ways in which TV sport can be put to use by its viewers, limitations to the structure of orthodox sport television viewing in any context are always present given the one-way flow of images and sounds, and the inability of viewers to ‘speak back’ directly to the spectacle that they are watching. There are, of course, many other modes of communicating about sport other than responding to screen action or to other professional media, such as radio, newspapers and magazines. Sports fans have for some time engaged

in their own mediated sport production, such as through fanzines, the 'cottage industry' alternative to the sports pages of major newspapers (Haynes 1995; Rowe 1995). However, since the highlight of the paper fanzine, the digitization of media technologies has created many more opportunities for interactivity rather than straightforward reception and new ways of exceeding the usual spatial 'footprint' of media use. Here the 'active audience' is more commonly described as the 'active fan' because implicit in the concept of fandom is not just a matter of taste (liking sport) but also of communal identity and even of organized collective action. Without descending into the realm of caricatures of yesterday's and today's sports media, it is undeniable that many new possibilities of mediated sport fandom now exist. At its worst, the old system of (analogue) sport television constituted a rationed menu of fixed alternatives, with a small number of broadcasters and sports organizations determining what could be seen and when (King 1998). Viewers would have to 'make appointments' with televised games shown live, 'as live' (a trick to simulate real-time transmission), by delayed telecast, replays and highlight packages. Surrounding the action would be other programmes involving preview, review and discussion also scheduled by broadcasters. The innovation of, first, video tape recorders and, later, personal or digital video recorders allowed the kind of time shifting that matched the increasing fluidity of everyday lives. Digitization also allowed split-screen simultaneous viewing, information requests and so on, thereby enriching the experience of sport TV viewing as the menu of available sports widened, especially for those who subscribed to dedicated sports channels.

However, these innovations were still spatially restricted to the fixed sites of television reception. The development of mobile and computing devices enabled sport to find its fans in myriad spaces, rather than requiring them to find the limited spaces in which sport was displayed. News Corp's promotional information signals the potential of this shift:

On the ground, the ESPN STAR Sports Event Management Group manages and promotes premier sporting events across Asia. ESPN STAR Sports reaches consumers at any time, any place and through all media platforms. The multilingual, online platforms, espnstar.com, espnstar.com.cn and espnstar.com.tw and footballcrazy.tv interact with millions of users, providing them with in-depth sports news, results and competitions.

Developed for the sports fan who is constantly on the move, *mobile*ESPN and STAR Sports Mobile deliver differentiated mobile content. *mobile*ESPN enables the serious sports fan to follow his or her favorite sports more closely than ever before with a combination of specially produced video news clips, in-depth news coverage and analysis. STAR Sports Mobile provides interactive and entertaining opportunities to engage with sports, delivering exclusive video excerpts from leading football clubs Arsenal and Liverpool, as well as highlights from STAR Sports original programs covering opinions, instructional tips and the latest online game reviews. (News Corp 2010b)

It can be noted here that there is still a careful restriction of access to live sport, without which subscriptions could not be extracted from consumers

(as revealed in the so-called Landlady Case briefly discussed in Chapter 3), but the online platforms operate as global media spaces that direct viewers towards their regional television schedules, while the mobile platforms constantly prime the interest and attract the attention of the ‘serious sports fan’ in ways that serve and foster a consumer-oriented sports culture. The amount of available sports coverage and ‘data’ is extraordinary and could not possibly be embraced comprehensively by even the most dedicated sports fan. For example, clicking on to espnstar.com (8 December 2010) illuminates sundry aspects of cricket, football, motorsport, tennis and golf (all of which featured strongly in the sports television programme schedules presented in Chapter 3) as well as US sports (basketball, baseball and so on) and other sports (such as athletics, boxing, Asian Games, MMA Martial Combat and Kia XGames Asia). There are games such as Maxis Football Manager, Super Selector and Maxis Voice of a Fan (Maxis being a leading Malaysian information and communication technology company), the latter involving a fan video competition: ‘Football transcends all boundaries and the love of soccer is universal. Show your support to a fellow football fan by voting for your favourite BPL [Barclays Premier League] fan video! The video with the most votes will win fantastic prizes so vote now to aid a fellow fan’s victory!’ Here there is a clear interpellation of association football fans in a manner that also recruits them as co-presenters of media sport, although under conditions of standardized formatting, duration and questioning (e.g. ‘You are the manager for the day. What would you change in your favourite team?’) and a requirement that they declare support for a specific team (such as Liverpool, Chelsea, Manchester United, Everton), although not always in the English language. There is an Opinion section with regular columnists and bloggers (the latter described as ‘presenter or journalist, this group are [sic] – like you – fans first’), and others for sports videos and sports widgets, a TV schedule, news feeds, Facebook site, links to sponsored content and substantial advertising (of cars, cameras, sports clothing, beer and so on).

During the Cricket World Cup in 2011, at the same time as the association football season in the Northern hemisphere is in full flow, visitors to the website were offered the choice of two ‘styles’ – one with more football and the other with more cricket. By all these means of guidance, a web of technologies and uses connects sport viewers/fans to sports, media organizations, advertisers and other viewers/fans – although live broadcast television remains the most prized content around which other material pivots. The convergence with computing and telecommunications, though, indicates that what was once regarded as a distinct media sector is now a more complex system of networked media sport (Hutchins, Rowe and Ruddock 2009). Having considered at some length in previous chapters the histories and structures that have mediated sport and increasingly taken its cultural experience beyond the boundaries of nation – Maxis Voice of a Fan from espnstar.com cited earlier being a case in point, with fans from Asia commenting on an English association football competition in a forum sponsored by an Asian information and communication technology company – it is useful now to consider both the politico-cultural consequences

of the intermeshing of broadcast and other technologies and the emergence of the figure of the global sports fan.

Determining sport news and the national interest

It is not so very long since selected live sports events were simply shown on television, heard on radio, reported in newspapers the day after and lavishly covered in magazines some time later. All of these activities still occur but in the context of other media and media combinations. For example, since the early twenty-first century newspapers progressively established an online presence. At first, these were shorter versions of the paper version, then they carried equivalent content and after that used the possibilities of the online medium to add multiple hyperlinks to other texts, advanced photographic and audio-visual material. Furthermore, sports organizations themselves set up substantial websites, while other sport and fan sites, and also telecommunications companies that had secured online and mobile rights to sports content, began to show more sports action and information. These developments provided greater opportunities for seeing mediated sports action (in still and moving forms) but also disturbed the established cultural 'genres' and legal frameworks according to which they were classified and the protocols by which they were handled (Hutchins and Rowe 2012). The 'de-specialized' nature of online technologies also meant that these media sports texts were normally available across the globe and without direct charge to users. As a result, the relatively established order of the media sports cultural complex that had held for several decades (involving a degree of 'strategic chaos' but with a greater degree of predictability when compared with a more converged media environment) has been shaken, especially for broadcast television companies holding expensively acquired sports rights and believing them to be increasingly infringed in the name of frequently updated sports news. The resultant disputation among interest groups has threatened to turn the wide world of media sport (that is almost compulsively described as 'exciting' by its producers and transmitters) into a litigious battleground.

In Chapter 3 it was noted that the Australian federal government, which oversees the most rigorous anti-siphoning sports television regime in the world, had reviewed its scheme in 2009–10 (as it had done periodically over two decades) and had sought to come to terms with the competing demands of media sport interests and the new horizons presented by technological innovations and accompanying audience/user expectations (Australian Government 2010a). Around the same time the Parliament of Australia Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts held an inquiry into, and produced a report on, 'The Reporting of Sports News and the Emergence of Digital Media' (Parliament of Australia 2009) – the first formal inquiry of its kind in the world (Hutchins and Rowe 2010). It, no doubt, seems striking to many that a relatively small country with a population of 22 million should be so active in this area. The explanation lies partially in the

often-noted cultural centrality of sport in Australia, which has been described, a little ironically, as a *Paradise of Sport* (Cashman 2010), afflicted by a *Saturday Afternoon Fever* (Stoddart 1986), wherein, according to Donald Horne's (1964: 37) famous pronouncement, 'sport to many Australians is life and the rest a shadow'. More importantly, in global terms, Australia is something of a 'testing ground' for media sport – a former White colony that inherited much of its institutional structure and societal ethos from Britain, before becoming increasingly influenced by, and politically aligned with, the United States in the twentieth century, belatedly recognizing (but still not entirely reconciled with) its indigenous population, became a major destination for migrants first from Europe and then the Asia-Pacific. It is now one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, and is situated as an English-speaking country on the edge of Asia, the fastest growing continent in population and economic terms and so is regarded as something of a Western 'staging post' for the Orient, caught between East and West (Wiseman 1998). It is for such reasons – predominantly, that it is a country with a developed Western media sport system increasingly economically embedded in the burgeoning Asia-Pacific region – that Australia is a larger force in media sport than might be expected and why, in both aforementioned media sport inquiries, multi- and transnational interests participated and sought to advance specific agenda that could defend current 'entitlements' and promote new, advantageous precedents.

The Australian instance is instructive with regard to how national governments find it difficult not just to adjudicate between competing media sport interest groups but to regulate media sport production and use within its jurisdiction. For example, the 'Sport on Television – Review of the Anti-Siphoning Scheme Discussion Paper' notes,

The sale of sports rights for new media platforms are not currently covered by the anti-siphoning scheme. At present, Internet Protocol television and internet video content of sporting events are not considered a 'broadcasting service' under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* and as such are not regulated by the Act. Sporting content carried on mobile phones is also not specifically regulated by the Act. Further, the provision of sporting content via internet video hosted on international websites is not regulated by Australian law. (Australian Government 2009: 22)

Here is a classic example of a nation state seeking to encompass new media sport technologies within a modified regulatory framework designed for an earlier technology, while also having to grapple with the problem of regulating content from other countries over which it has no direct control or authority. The patrolling of borders is difficult enough with physical cultural objects in the forms of books, compact disks, digital video disks, software disks and video games under so-called parallel importing laws (Rowe 2001), but it becomes even more so when they take on immaterial form via the Internet where they do not, in any case, fit easily into current legislative and regulatory frameworks. Interestingly, the report that followed the review was rather less than apocalyptic about the challenge of new media to the authority of the state, for no other reason that the proliferation of flat-screen televisions in the home and the

resilience of the practice of television viewing as currently understood meant that new media were complementing, supplementing and even stimulating the use of 'protected' broadcast technology rather than supplanting it:

The view of new media as a complementary viewing experience has [also] been noted overseas. In the United Kingdom, the Independent Advisory Panel's November 2009 report into the Listed Events Scheme found that television is likely to remain the first choice for sports coverage.

... the Panel has been convinced that, at least in the foreseeable future, and as far as the biggest sporting events are concerned, most people's first choice of how to view them will be by means of what is still identifiably a television set.

Research conducted by US television network NBC Universal of its 2008 Beijing Olympics coverage revealed that while there were over 75 million streams of its online content, less than 1 per cent of the audience relied solely on the internet to view the Games, seeing internet use as complementary to traditional television viewing. This led NBC executives to declare that new media does not cannibalise television viewing.

The internet hardly cannibalises – it actually fuels interest.

... At present, sports coverage via new media platforms appears to be supplementary to that of traditional television. New media services such as IPTV remain in their infancy in Australia and there are no examples to date of sporting events being siphoned exclusively to these platforms. Submissions to the review commenting on this issue generally opposed extending the anti-siphoning scheme to new platforms. However, there are views that the pace of technology convergence and the ever increasing quality of broadband means that differences between traditional and new media platforms are being eroded and the delivery of robust, high quality audio-visual services via IP-based platforms is increasingly feasible. These submissions conclude it is possible that in the future subscription-based new media services may indeed pose a threat to free access to sport for Australian audiences. (Australian Government 2010a: 30–1)

So, for the 'foreseeable future', it is apparent from the above statement that after extensive consideration little needs to be done because 'traditional television' remains dominant, and in any case, almost all sport and media organizations now use the Internet to promote their 'product' across the globe. But the openness of free-to-air broadcast television may be challenged, ironically, by 'closed' Internet-enabled sport services.

Perhaps, though, there is also a recognition here that it is too onerous – and in some ways contradictory – a task for the state to intervene in the name of citizens at a time when more mediated sports content is being made available to them free of charge. Unless and until this freely circulating material is restricted, there is felt to be little point in intervening on such grounds, but there are other principles on which to stand, especially those concerning national sovereignty (controlling media space), intellectual property (defending copyright) and institutional order (settling debilitating conflicts). The last was

the primary motivation for the second recent state intervention in the media sport sector in Australia, this time on the subject of sport news and digital media. The Senate Committee, in quoting a submission from the Thomson Reuters news agency, demonstrated a keen awareness of the intimate nature of the sport–media nexus and the capacity of media forms to travel freely beyond national contexts:

1.5 It became apparent to the committee during the course of its inquiry that there is much common ground between sporting organizations and the media on this issue. Both sporting and media organizations believe there is a need for news coverage of sport and wish for sports news reporting to continue. News organizations detailed the benefits of news reporting to sports:

There can be no better promotion for any sport than the availability of timely, unbiased information to as many newspapers, websites, broadcasters and magazines as possible ... news agencies have the ability to constantly and consistently deliver this information globally to both developed and emerging economies; to very large and very poor media outlets. (Parliament of Australia 2009: 2)

But it also recognized the increasingly fractious nature of the organizational relationships involved in this ‘delivery’ of sport in a ‘new media environment’ caused by the progressive, digitally inspired breakdown of the established division of labour, responsibility and ownership between sport and media domains:

3.1 The convergence of media technologies and the emergence of new media platforms have created new opportunities for news media organizations, sports broadcasters and sporting organizations alike. These opportunities also bring with them challenges as existing businesses and organizations attempt to adapt to the new media environment.

3.2 Changes to the media landscape have led to some conflict as all stakeholders seek to take advantage of new opportunities as they emerge. This conflict is primarily between some news media organizations and some major professional sporting organizations ...

3.3 There are two related concerns being raised.

3.4 First, news media organizations and large sporting bodies engaged in the debate each believe that the other is encroaching on what has traditionally been their domain. This has been most evident in conflict over Internet use of sports news and images, and also to a lesser degree in respect of mobile digital platforms.

3.5 News media organizations have claimed that sporting organizations are entering into the media domain. Ninemsn described this as sporting organizations ‘trying to provide many of the same services that media companies are, such as up-to-date scores, news reports on matches, images and video’.

3.6 Similarly, sporting organizations have argued that news media organizations have expanded their traditional role to that of providing sports entertainment ...

3.7 Second, some stakeholders are unhappy with the way in which traditional regulatory and contractual mechanisms are coping with the challenges presented by the new media environment.

3.8 During the inquiry, the committee heard evidence of conflict between news media organizations and sporting organizations over accreditation agreements. Some news media organizations claimed that sporting organizations were attempting to use accreditation agreements as a means 'to alter or even displace the fair dealing provisions contained in the Copyright Act, the public policy underlying it and the right of news organizations to exercise their rights as copyright owners in the material they create'. Sporting organizations argued that their accreditation agreements were used 'as a means to ensure that without clear regulation or other guidelines the intellectual property of sport is protected and content is appropriately used in line with fair dealing principles'. (Parliament of Australia 2009: 15–16)

These disputes, which had resulted both in litigation and lockouts of news organizations from sports events and retaliatory media boycotts (Hutchins and Rowe 2010), have arisen out of not just the media convergence (of broadcasting, telephony and computing) but the convergence of media and sport whereby both sides have accused the other of doing the other's traditional job. Thus, some sports (such as cricket and Australian rules football) have accused the media of using their sports news gathering and reporting functions as cover for the commercialization of sports rights that rightfully belong to sports, while media organizations have argued that sports are trying to corral sports information, including legitimate news, so that they can monetize it through their own media outlets. Disagreements between sport and media (especially broadcast) sectors are by no means unprecedented – and to some degree endemic. Before television became pivotal to the economics of sport it was treated with considerable suspicion as a likely tempter of paying spectators to stay at home. When handsome compensation was made available through broadcast rights, their inflation (usually achieved by playing rival broadcasters off against each other) led media companies to complain about a power imbalance and to tactics including purchasing sports clubs (thereby placing themselves on both sides of the bargaining table) and even setting up their own sporting competitions, just as some clubs established their own television stations and, later, virtually all set up websites (Boyle and Haynes 2009; Rowe 2004a). However, as was noted in Chapter 3, the legal cases involving FIFA, Union of European Football Associations (EUFA) and BSkyB demonstrated something of a community of interest between rights sellers and current holders in defence of their intellectual property, although by extension non-rights sellers can be expected to seek to maximize their access to this content (often in the name of news but sometimes through simple piracy). The combination of rapid digital dissemination and the involvement of other communication players, especially telecommunications companies, have created more intense zones of conflict, including over the permissible number and timing of still photographs on websites. With similar conflicts occurring in other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, Australia became towards the end of the first decade

of the twenty-first century the ground for a 'proxy war' between major sport and media organizations, with global implications:

A NEW Senate inquiry might set a global precedent for online sports reporting and result in a digital 'anti-siphoning list' as administrators and media groups feud over where news footage taken at sports events can run ...

'The potential precedents for this are enormous,' the head of a major news agency said.

'This will set a global benchmark – it has been coming to a head for a long time.'

There has been growing tension between news organizations and a number of sports in recent years as the line between traditional newspaper, TV and radio reporting has blurred with the growth of digital media. (Canning 2009)

It is not, then, surprising that submissions to what was officially an inquiry of a national parliament were received from international interests, including Agence France-Presse, Getty Images, News Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of News Corp), the International Olympic Committee, the International Cricket Council, Hutchison Telecommunications and the World Association of Newspapers. Yet, for similar reasons to those concerning the later, rather inconclusive outcomes of the engagement with the new media environment in the anti-siphoning review, the proposals of the Senate Committee were cautious. It recommended no changes to copyright law but that 'stakeholders negotiate media access to sporting events based on the principle that all bona fide journalists, including photojournalists and news agencies, should be able to access sporting events regardless of their technological platform' (Parliament of Australia 2009: 52) and that without such an agreement 'that the Minister consider initiating the process for consideration of a code under Section 51AE of the Trade Practices Act' (Parliament of Australia 2009: 52). In due course, a voluntary 'Code of Practice for Sports News Reporting – Text, Photography and Data' (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy 2010) was framed, an administration committee formed and a dispute resolution process through an appointed mediator agreed, but with no ultimate impediment to legal recourse. The code explicitly does not venture into the most contentious area of all – the online retransmission of audio-visual footage from sports events:

1.1 The object of the Sports News Reporting Code of Practice (the Code) is to ensure that Media Organisations are able to access sporting events for the purposes of gathering News Content for News Reporting.

1.2 This Code applies only to the gathering of News Content for News Reporting as they are each defined in this Code. It does not in any way apply or establish a precedent in relation to the gathering of audio, vision or audio visual content for News Reporting. (Australian Government 2010b)

These closely watched and rather tortuous deliberations in one country reveal considerable anxiety about the trajectory of media sport under globalization and digitization. There is unquestionable change occurring but

no clear direction except, paradoxically, in terms of multidirectional processes accompanied by the substantial 'drag' of a broadcast television sector that continues to wield substantial power and which has shown a capacity to adapt as well as to fret. As Raymond Boyle and Garry Whannel (2010a: 260) have noted, continuity and change are coexistent, not mutually exclusive, and 'the role played by television in the mediation of sport has diminished in the ways often [thought] likely in the 1990s'. In seeing the media sport experience become broader, complex and multi-layered, they argue that it is more useful to think about 'the relationships between screens and sports content' rather than concentrate only on the television screen:

Large flat-screen televisions have spread rapidly since the 1990s into the living rooms of the viewing public. Even bigger screens are now a common and taken-for-granted feature in pubs, bars, stations and shopping malls. Small screens, too, on laptop computers, mobile phones and E-Readers are offering new modes of disseminating sport-related content. One issue of growing significance is how that sports content gets pulled down onto the screen and how it is paid for either as part of public media or commercial media content. The role of big media brands such as the BBC or Sky in organizing this process will remain crucial as we embark on the age that will see the ability to pull down content from the internet onto your living room television becoming a mass market activity over the next decade. (Boyle and Whannel 2010: 260)

Thus, for example, there is no doubt that IPTV will bridge the current space between computer screens and television screens, but the conventions and habits associated with television viewing are likely to display the resilience of cultural habit and domestic design just as they are changing and being supplemented. Similarly, while large media corporations struggle with this dynamic context, so do sports clubs, small to medium enterprises and fans. As Michael Real (2006) notes in drawing on both the medium-focused theory of Marshall McLuhan and the political economic perspectives of Herbert Schiller and Robert McChesney, the content of a new dominant medium (the world wide web) is likely to be that of the previously dominant medium (television), while the six current major transnational media conglomerates have increasingly drawn the web, the 'once unruly youngster' (Real 2006: 177), into their orbit. Therefore, at the very point when 'nightmare arguments about the future of television' were being made by some analysts,

Web sites were successfully exploring webcasting and seeking out partnerships with television networks. Seeing the successful synergy of ESPN and its Web site and CBS and its Web site, SportsLine, the venerable sports publication *The Sporting News* spent years working up a partnership for its Web site, an effort which resulted in it joining forces with Fox television. The benefits shared between Sporting News Online, *Sporting News Magazine*, and Fox Sports included major cross-promotions of each other's offerings and a sharing of columnists/commentators and celebrity features.

At the same time, streaming video technology had forged another bridge uniting television and the Web by making transmission of television over the Web

practical ... without the need to download large files before playback. Also, access-on-demand could be coupled with new miniaturized wireless devices for access everywhere. The move from online to television and back became more seamless, and television and computer screens began to be more interchangeable. (Real 2006: 176–7)

Such notions of seamlessness and interchangeability, across both space and time, have not figured notably in the world of proprietorial media dominated by competitively exclusive mindsets and business plans, whereby one medium's gain must be another's loss. However, cross-media promotion, such as that pertaining to print sports journalism and broadcast television, has been a feature of media sport throughout the analogue era, while conglomerate strategies involving acquisition of different sports media – and even of sports entities themselves – are well established. What is different about the digital context is that sport content in this form can be more rapidly dispersed and adapted, and so is more difficult to control. For example, a new area of concern has emerged over athlete (micro) blogging, especially via Twitter, and social networking, notably through Facebook (Hutchins 2011; Hutchins and Mikosza 2010). It has produced new protocols in tournaments, including the Olympics and the football and cricket World Cups, and a series of controversies, including in 2009 when Minnesota Vikings player Bernard Berrian tweeted a joke about a teammate's injury that 'went viral' and was widely believed, England cricketer Kevin Pietersen announcing in 2010 that he had been dropped from the one-day and Twenty20 teams with words including 'Done for rest of summer!! Man of the World Cup T20 and dropped from the T20 side too ... It's a f—— up!!' and leading Australia swimmer Stephanie Rice, who had seen photographs involving party poses from her unrestricted Facebook page published in newspapers in 2008, tweeting 'suck on that faggots' after Australia narrowly beat South Africa at rugby union in 2010. Apart from matters of protocol and taste, there is particular concern among sport organizations that Twitter can be used by sportspeople to make sensitive political comments (such as during the 2008 Beijing Olympics) or to circumvent sponsorship agreements. Such direct public communication, without recourse to established media outlets or sport body mediation, points to new, unregulated practices that undermine the careful media management that typifies contemporary institutional sport.

Much of the concentration in my discussion to date has been on the ownership, control and organization of media sport production in a global context. This is a crucial analytical area because questions surrounding them remain pivotal – in some ways even more so – when old routines of sender-message-receiver no longer (if they ever truly did) command the field of communication. Thus, the work of contemporary cultural theorists like Henry Jenkins (2006a,b) on 'convergence culture' and 'participatory culture' represents an important advance on our understanding of shifts between and around old/'legacy' and new/'newest' media, and in audience relations that prompt such neologisms as 'produsage' (Bruns 2008) and (following the visionary work of Alvin Toffler) 'prosumption' (Humphreys

and Grayson 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). It calls for a combination of critical scepticism and a close attention to what it now means to engage with media sport culture. Earlier I have discussed how transnational corporations, international and national sports organizations, sports clubs and athletes have negotiated media sport convergence and networking – or tentatively begun to do so. But there is a need for a closer focus on the implications for the sport fans now confronted, depending on their social and spatial location, with an increasing range of media sports experiences and possibilities. This is where heightened interactivity is especially important – the opportunity to talk back and to initiate talk, to get involved not just in watching or commenting on sport but also to help organize it – and from any global site with an online connection.

Executive fandom in a digital world

It was noted earlier that watching sport on television has often been regarded as a rather passive activity and that, even where it is viewed more positively in terms of social engagement and cultural creativity, it can hardly be described in unequivocally ‘liberatory’ terms. Other readings of sports fandom stress the fanaticism dimension and the connections with deviance, violence and other forms of ‘unreason’ (as summarized in various contributions to Brown 1998a; Crawford 2006; Raney 2006, 19 *ff.*). Against such perspectives are celebrations of ‘pro-social’ fandom and attempts to advance ‘fan democracy’ among sports fans, sporting institutions and across the social spectrum (see, for example, Brown 1998b). It is important to recognize the complexity of mediated sports fandom and consumption (Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington 2007; Hermes 2005; Sandvoss 2005). Despite attempts to reduce experiences and relationships to simple taxonomic binaries, they are highly variable not only across social and spatial locations but also with regard to the same human subjects. As Art Raney (2006: 313) notes in his survey of the research on motivation in ‘the use and viewing of mediated sports’, watching sport on television involves affect, cognition and sociality; can be intentional or serendipitous, involve deep engagement or passive distraction; and while it is for some an ‘all-consuming passion’, in most cases it is accommodated among the sundry responsibilities and activities of the diurnal round, so that ‘[w]hile some sport viewers are no doubt addicted to the action, most others have struck a balance between sport and the rest of life’ (Raney 2006: 327).

But striking a balance between different spheres of life is not the same thing as seizing opportunities to change those circumstances. The term ‘fan’ does not connote empowerment – nor, indeed, does Crawford’s (2006: 20–1) once preferred (but since discarded) descriptor ‘supporter’. As sport has become increasingly professionalized, corporatized, mediated and commodified, it has become more difficult for its ‘appreciators’ (another descriptor, alongside

‘supporter’) to have a proactive impact on how it is organized. Sports clubs with member bases have, in general, progressively ceded power to their professionally structured associations, which in turn have traded much of it to media corporations. As a result, fans have become distanced, literally, from the game. This, though, is not a wholly disadvantageous development in that the process of mediation has made distantiated sports fandom possible. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see how a sports fan can wield much influence in sport except in a negative sense by, for example, demonstrating in or outside the stadium or refusing to be a disciplined consumer by declining to purchase tickets, merchandising, television subscriptions and so on, or even to figure in the TV ratings by switching channels. As mentioned previously, digitization can enrich the experience of watching screen sport by enabling multi-screening, online discussion groups, web sites and mobile connectivity. But it is also, perhaps, capable of fostering the development of active sport fan communities who may be able to use converged, networked media in a manner that advances their collective agency. Indeed, the capacity of these technologies to overcome at least some of the privileging of spatial proximity that creates hierarchies of ‘authentic’ sport fandom (Bale 1998) can potentially democratize mediated sport fandom by transforming it into a new mode of sports organization from below. Sports fans disillusioned by what they see as the takeover of their popular culture by capital have formed associations operating as pressure groups to improve the condition of sport in line with their own interests. For example, the UK-based Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF) (2010) has declared ‘The Fans’ Blueprint for the Future of the Beautiful Game’, the introduction of which (below) expresses its unhappiness at what is seen as the neglect by elites of supporters and the deleterious impact of ‘power and money’ on the game of association football:

1.1. Football in Britain is at a crossroads. Financially, the game’s never been better off. It’s never had more committed followers both at home and overseas. Yet never have so many clubs been on the brink of financial extinction, nor has the game been so ridden by short-sightedness and self-interest.

1.2. During last season the chief executives of both the Football League and the Football Association were forced to resign. The root cause of both departures? Power and money. The game’s elite in England, Wales and Scotland seems intent on keeping an ever-increasing proportion of the wealth generated by the game for themselves.

1.3. The Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF), formed on 1 August 2002, unites the former National Federation of Football Supporters’ Clubs (NFFSC) and the Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF). It represents over 100,000 of the game’s most committed supporters in England and Wales grouped in 124 democratic fans’ organizations. They follow teams from the Premiership to the non-League pyramid. They follow the English and Welsh national teams at home and abroad.

1.3. [sic] It’s these supporters who travel thousands of miles throughout Britain and overseas every season. Without FSF members there’d be no game. We pack the grounds, sing the songs, provide the passion.

1.4. Yet supporters are the one group in the game which is most frequently ignored. No more. Football supporters are uniting around a set of principles which they believe are essential to the future of football. We invite all those who love the game and have its best interests at heart to join with us.

1.5. It's time to act before it's too late.

The tone of the Blueprint is familiar, especially for those well acquainted with association football in Britain, with its long-established connection to (especially masculine) working-class sociocultural formations that have undergone profound change in late modernity (Brown 1998a; Sandvoss 2003). It is concerned primarily with football in Britain, but it is not – and cannot be – limited to that national context given that its extensive website is available across national boundaries and its free membership (currently exceeding 180,000) is available to all those who accept the ‘fundamental principles’ of its constitution, which include promoting diversity, opposing discrimination, rejecting violence and promoting ‘a positive culture of fair play and goodwill between all football supporters’ (FSF 2010). The FSF works, within a primarily national framework, to fashion a constituency beyond an individual nation, attracting ‘commercial and government sponsorship and support’, without, it is claimed, ‘ever losing its unique “by fans, for fans” character’. This popular conception of the fan is crucial to the discursive task of asserting the ‘authentic’ identity, interest and agency of sport fans against those that construe them as the disempowered constructs of the aforementioned ‘game’s elite’. Through such initiatives as holding an annual Fans’ Parliament (in UK locations such as Wembley Stadium), providing a FSF Fans’ Embassy service to assist travelling England fans abroad and publishing a paid magazine *The Football Supporter* and a free England print and electronic fanzine, *Free Lions*, ‘complemented by a telephone helpline, website information, and a team of willing volunteers’, the FSF is mainly oriented to English fan concerns, while acknowledging those of Scotland and Wales. This English/British orientation is tempered to a degree by developing links with clubs in Europe and, especially, through Football Supporters International (FSI), a supporters’ network that covers Europe and international campaigns:

Throughout Europe, and increasingly beyond, football fans are campaigning against the same threats to our game – commercialization, poor policing, the power of television, racism and more. The FSF is endeavouring to develop international campaigns around these international issues. (FSF 2010)

This apparent slippage between the national, regional, international and global within football fandom parallels the same movements within the wider sphere of sport, which simultaneously traverses and draws energy from place-based ‘parish pump’ concerns and identifications and much more diffuse and de-specialized phenomena. It is not possible to retreat to the local and pretend that the global can be kept at bay, and indeed, it is increasingly implausible to separate them in any absolute sense, with the globalization of football

and fandom reflecting a complex intermeshing and synthesis of spaces and identifications (Giulianotti 1999; Giulianotti and Robertson 2009; Sandvoss 2003). However, the language and affective discourse of the authentically local, and of resistance to 'power and money', remains salient within 'by fans, for fans' value constructions. As noted earlier, this is not surprising given that, in Raymond Williams's (1977: 121) terms, sport (especially through its long-established manifestations such as association football) is deeply imbued with the cultural complexity that evidences 'dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements' and which he describes as 'dominant, residual and emergent' forms. Thus, it could be conceded that corporate capitalist relations are currently dominant within media sport but that they co-exist with residual (which Williams distinguishes from 'archaic') 'experiences, meanings and values' formed in the past and still alive in the present, despite being at variance with the residual form (such as those elements of fandom that privilege uncommodified exchange within spatially proximate neighbourhoods) and also with emergent values and practices that, in this case, might involve a global cosmopolitanism that negotiates distantiated commodification and topophilic communal identification. This necessarily abstract framework can be given some preliminary shape and texture in considering synthetic or hybridic forms of sport fandom that exploit digital media technologies and protocols while celebrating inherited values and practices.

A case in point is that of MYFC, which, although small scale in relation to major football clubs, has garnered worldwide attention as the most adventurous initiative to date of using online media and communication not only to watch and comment on sport and sport-related issues, but also to intervene directly in its ownership and management. As noted in Chapter 2, clubs in the major leagues of European association football, especially the EPL, are owned by billionaire entrepreneurs and consortia from around the world (Blackburn Rovers, for example, was acquired in November 2010 by the Indian Venkateshwara Hatcheries Group), with some (such as Borussia Dortmund in the German Bundesliga) publicly listed. Some association football clubs (including very prominent ones, such as FC Barcelona, and also in other codes of football, like the Green Bay Packers) are run by members (as opposed to shareholders) but are otherwise quite conventional operationally in terms of divisions of labour between elected board members, paid staff and fans. The innovation of MYFC was to experiment with a democratic structure that sought to use digital technology to, paradoxically, make decisions on the running of the club permeated with a pre- or early modern ethic of community. It is this arrangement of rights, responsibilities, duties and functions that coalesces around the concept I propose of the 'executive fan' which, in the context of networked digital media sport, lends itself well to active participation in sports clubs irrespective of the physical location and origin of the fans in question.

MYFC began in the United Kingdom in 2007 when, initiated by a former football journalist Will Brooks, over 20,000 members (reaching a claimed

peak of 31,000 in late 2008 but falling to only 1,419 financial members by March 2011) formed a society with the aim of purchasing a controlling stake in a football club. The members voted in early 2008 to purchase a 75 per cent stake in a semi-professional football club, Ebbsfleet United, which was then in the fifth tier of English football. Especially audacious was MYFC's propositional motto 'own the club, pick the team' and, later, claim to be the 'world's first football club' and 'the world's first internet community to buy and takeover a real-world football club' (MYFC 2011). Of particular interest to some of the world's most prominent news media (including the BBC, CNN, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Times* of both London and India) was the novel idea that an actual team and its tactics, in something of a reversal of the real-world simulations of games such as FIFA Manager (a game produced by EA Sports, a company that has sponsored the club), would be selected democratically by members by means of a ballot held on the club's website (Hutchins and Rowe 2009a). Instead of the manager/coach making decisions on behalf of the members, the latter would perform this task and instruct the manager/coach. Furthermore, while the purchased team Ebbsfleet United is physically located in Gravesend, Kent on the south-eastern fringe of London and based at its (modest) Stonebridge Road ground, decisions could be made by members in any location across the world. The ambitious sweep of MYFC is enthusiastically stated in the 'About MyFootballClub' section of its website and is worth quoting at some length in constituting almost a manifesto for global executive fandom:

MyFootballClub is a unique internet venture that uses the principle of crowdsourcing and crowdfunding to run a real football club.

Rather than being owned by millionaires with varying interest in the fortunes of a club, Ebbsfleet United is owned by thousands of members, who each contribute small amounts annually, and vote on key management decisions like the budget, transfer deals, kit supplier contracts, kit design, election of Club officials, and even approve the Manager's contract!

This model brings a unique dialogue between the club and the community, with local fans sharing knowledge about the club, and global members contributing their expertise and skills that would otherwise cost the club. Members are able to bring fresh ideas, which are discussed and voted on as a community, for action by the Club.

It also brings a level of transparency into the Club management which is rarely seen, with members even able to discuss line items from the Monthly budget with the Club accountant openly as a community. Can you imagine that at your main club?

MyFootballClub isn't like playing FIFA Soccer, Championship Manager or Hattrick. There's no quick button to buy and sell players, no fast upgrade for the stadium, and certainly no cheat codes!

Every decision we make could affect the fortunes of the club, the players and the staff. As responsible owners, we also have to scrutinise the information that comes

to us, challenge the Board and the Club management and make the decision that we feel is best for the club.

Debates are long and often heated, and it's sometimes hard to remember that we're trying to make a collective decision, but there's nothing like matchday experience as a MYFC owner, whether you're at the game or following at home. That's when we really come together as a *community*.

- *At the ground*, you'll meet other MYFC members, many of whom have travelled to Stonebridge Road from around the UK, Europe, even the World! It's thrilling to know that the contribution you made put those players on the pitch and every goal feels like you scored it!
- *At home*, whilst listening to the radio commentary, you can discuss the progress of the game with your fellow members in the chatroom or the forum.
- Out and about there's a *free text message service*, where your fellow members send updates and goal alerts from the ground.
- And we've partnered with TVMobili to bring you delayed *streaming of the matches* on matchday, as well as an archive of previous games and highlights. (subject to coverage and TVMobili subscription).

All of this makes for an experience that can't be matched anywhere else. So join the MyFootballClub community for only £50 and *make Ebbsfleet United your football club*. (MYFC 2011)

Each paragraph above proposes an organizational politics and ethics of MYFC that combines enduring, collective social concerns of fans with media technologies and uses that fashion new, dispersed community formations. It uses recent business, marketing and organizational concepts like 'crowdsourcing' and 'the wisdom of crowds' (Howe 2009; Surowiecki 2005) that challenge the centralization and elite concentration of knowledge and power, and emphasizes transparency and accountability. It draws on the current of collective sport fan resentment that it has become the plaything of the rich, many of whom have little 'authentic' interest in sport. It references sport gaming but insists on the responsibilities of owner-members to 'flesh and blood' players, support staff and fans. Both the local and the global, and community (undefined, but implicitly in north-east Kent, where Ebbsfleet United is based) and club, are brought together. The diverse, multi-layer means of connectivity are highlighted – physically through ground attendance, listening on the radio, watching on television, exchanging text messages and contributing to online chat rooms and forums. The 'solemn' duty of voting and so making management decisions on budgets, sponsor contracts, player contract, ticket prices, home and away playing kit design, Society Board Membership and so on is also shown to be crucial to shaping the future of the club, although it did not ever extend to the much trumpeted area of player selection, team tactics and structure. This lack of follow through on the club's most audacious claim led to some discontent among members and, as is discussed here, to the formation of a dissident, breakaway fan group, FreeMYFC (2009).

Broadly conceived, then, the MYFC and FreeMYFC phenomena could be said to evidence what David Harvey (1989: 238) sees as a significant aspect of the condition of postmodernity, in which

[m]ovements of opposition to the disruptions of home, community, territory, and nation by the restless flow of capital are legion ... Movements of all sorts – religious, mystical, social, communitarian, humanitarian, etc. – define themselves directly in terms of an antagonism to the power of money and of rationalized conceptions of space and time over daily life. The history of such utopian, religious, and communitarian movements testifies to the vigour of exactly this antagonism. Indeed, much of the colour and ferment of social movements, of street life and culture, as well as artistic and other cultural practices, derives precisely from the infinitely varied texture of oppositions to the materializations of money, space, and time under conditions of capitalist hegemony.

MYFC – which it must be re-emphasized is a small, tenuous but intriguing experiment in an alternative politics and organization-mediated global sport – is, in its own field of popular culture, an expression of resistance to the capital-centric power formation of twenty-first century association football and a manifestation of ‘executive fan power’. However, as Harvey observes of all such movements, they are ‘all too often subject to the power of capital over the coordination of universal fragmented space and the march of capitalism’s global historical time that lies outside of the purview of any particular one of them’ (Harvey 1989: 239). The level of capital investment and professional organizational commitment required at only a modest-level stratum of contemporary sport is considerable, and for this reason the desired concentration on the sporting aspects of the operation is largely subordinated to that of financial management and fund raising (the earlier discussed case of FC United providing a salient example of the stark mismatch between the grass-roots ‘start-up’ and the world’s richest sports club (Manchester United) from which its members had seceded). MYFC, therefore, cannot transform the condition of sports clubs and fans, and is beset with contradictions regarding, for example, its relation to the rationalized structures of sport that it finds unresponsive and its reliance on the corporate media and telecommunications organizations that are integral to the industrial-capitalist complex of which it is in various ways critical. It is not surprising that this is the case, not least because, as noted above with regard to the theoretical framework of Raymond Williams, the coexistence of the dominant, residual and the emergent, and the many ideological inconsistencies and compromises inherent in working within and against a dynamic institutional context, militate against straightforward outcomes of success and failure.

For example, an arrangement in which spatial constraints can be ameliorated, so that MYFC’s members have equal voting rights and access to official information irrespective of their global location, does not mean that space is of no consequence. According to MYFC’s (2010) information for members, as of 16 December 2010 its membership breakdown (3,065 in total, and which was halved a few months later, but at the time of writing was the last available figure) by country in descending order was as follows:

United Kingdom: 1,368 (44.8 per cent)

United States: 236 (7.7 per cent)

Australia: 64 (2.09 per cent)

Ireland: 43 (1.4 per cent)

Norway: 41 (1.34 per cent)

Canada: 41 (1.34 per cent)

Sweden: 32 (1.04 per cent)

Germany: 27 (0.8 per cent)

Italy: 23 (0.75 per cent)

Netherlands: 20 (0.65 per cent)

Finland: 12 (0.39 per cent)

Unknown: 1,013 (33 per cent)

Others: 133 (4.35 per cent)

It can be seen that the United Kingdom has the largest number of members, although the second largest cohort is ‘stateless’, while it might safely be assumed that the majority is UK based and has simply declined to provide a ‘street address’. Membership clusters in the United States, Canada, Scandinavia, Australasia, Ireland and other parts of Europe represent about 18 per cent of the known membership locations, and 26.4 per cent of the unknown category is excluded, with the others (including Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and South America) accounting for less than 5 per cent (4.35) of members (and 6.5 per cent excluding the unknown category). This distribution of members calls into question the global nature of the club, if to be ‘global’ is taken to mean an even spread across the world. However, as has been noted in Chapters 2 and 3, global media sport is patterned and uneven, following, variously, the lines and flows of imperialism, colonialism, technological development, capitalist market development, population movements, cultural traditions (including ‘invented’ ones), language concentrations and so on. These are not immutably fixed, uni-directional ‘passages’, and shift with the tides of history, but they cannot be ‘wished away’ by appeals to the annihilation of hierarchies and borders that are notionally enabled by changes in communications technology, trade liberalization and so on.

Therefore, it is not surprising that all the members of the elected Society Board have (as of late 2010) been based in the United Kingdom, nor that tensions have arisen between the long-term Ebbsfleet United fans who live close to its spatial hub, and the more recent and scattered members who joined MYFC, took part in the purchase of their club, eradicated its debt and so gained the right to vote on its management without, in many cases, ever seeing the team play under co-present conditions or visiting its home ground (Rowe *et al.* 2010). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, such divisions between fans based on posited hierarchies of history, knowledge, proximity and commitment are also a common feature of major professional clubs that have sought to expand their operations and fan base in new spaces – even, in some cases, in

the same country. MYFC's audacious self-proclamation as 'the world's first internet community to buy and takeover a real-world football club' is perhaps sustainable in that its Internet-based governance structure is more 'radical' than most supporters' trust arrangements, but there are comparable initiatives in other places, including the United Kingdom, South America (Brazil), Northern Europe (Denmark, Germany, Poland) and the United States. Indeed, one minor Israeli club, Hapoel Kiryat Shalom, did institute in 2007 a 'pick the team' arrangement (Lewis and Khadder 2007) – subsequently modified after alleged 'sabotage' by rival teams' fans – that was promised but never introduced by MYFC. As noted above, disgruntled MYFC members who did not believe that the club had done what was promised in this respect, and who believed that it was in other ways undemocratic and were critical of its (now departed) founder, established a rival web-based organization, FreeMYFC, which sought (unsuccessfully at time of writing) to establish its own football club (Ruddock *et al.* 2010). The slight absurdity of a fragile experiment such as MYFC being challenged by another one (with only just over 300 members, none of whom are required to provide a subscription fee, and which was largely inactive by 2010) reveals something of the debilitating politics of 'movements of opposition' in materially and politically unpropitious circumstances as outlined earlier by Harvey.

The difficulty of sustaining interest and involvement in a socially networked environment and in online communities is well known (Ang and Pothen 2009), with the frequent incidence of drifts in levels of participation and high levels of 'following' and 'lurking' rather than posting and an over-representation of a small number of posters (Neilsen 2006). For example, a content analysis of the FreeMYFC website discovered that 60 per cent of members said nothing and only intermittently used the site, with most contributions coming from less than 10 per cent of members who were also, predictably, very heavy users of the site (Ruddock *et al.* 2010: 305–60). Indeed, one FreeMYFC member (Alter) who did a seven-day content analysis of MYFC's 'Society' and 'Soapbox' forums noted,

[It] highlights a serious lack of engagement by the members – there appears to be no appetite by the majority of members to contribute anything to the running of the Society. Across two forums, there have been a total of 180 posts over 21 threads by 59 unique posters. This equates to an average of just over 3 posts per posting member and only 1.61% of the membership engaging – although the majority of the unique posters only made a single post. (FreeMYFC 2009)

Furthermore, a recent content analysis of MYFC voting (as noted earlier, with overall membership now below 2,000 from a peak of over 30,000) found, as demonstrated in Table 4.1, that the levels of participation were highly variable in terms of votes, hits and comments. These variations were in part attributable to different levels of importance – for example, negotiations over the coach's contract (540, 1,693 and 47, respectively) engendered much more member activity than whether the club should advertise on Facebook (86, 299 and 1, respectively). The table also reveals the routine nature of the functions of the executive fan, in voting on proposals (from both ordinary members and the

Table 4.1 My football club votes, December 2010–February 2011

Topics	Total votes	Hits	Comments
Donate MYFC T-shirts to the ultimate football pub quiz?	72	194	0
Outstanding loan from Phil Sonsara: a proposal to clear this debt immediately	159	473	10
Should we advertise in <i>The Guardian</i> ?	60	337	7
MYFC Cup pre-season	219	624	14
Should we begin negotiations over the coach's contract?	540	1,693	47
Should the society allow Ebbsfleet United Football Club (EUFC) footage to be used in an amateur movie?	221	623	5
Vote: extending our website maintenance contract	249	722	8
Should we stop using Paypal?	301	926	23
Welcoming members to Stonebridge Road	141	529	4
Permission to approach premiership players to join MYFC	171	672	14
MYFC to buy shirt sponsorships from EUFC?	152	540	14
How should we respond to the VAT rise?	323	927	9
Thurrock 25th January promotional game	92	409	6
Facebook advertising vote	86	299	1
Offer to purchase majority stake in Ebbsfleet United	310	1,377	53
MYFC accounts	281	735	12
Free tickets for fleet in the community youths	288	692	5
Fleet Learning Zone building hire vote	288	727	16
Potential FA Trophy Droylsden Replay prices vote	137	389	2
New membership fee	590	1,656	23
EUFC £5 match promotion v Lewes, New Year's Day	176	552	15
Preparation of MYFC accounts	81	302	2

Society Board) that are normally the province of paid, professional executive staff and directors who are not required to run every decision, major or minor, past a shifting electorate of members, a significant proportion of whom (like this author) are in other countries, continents and hemispheres. Thus the 'real-world' nature of the project, as a variant of volunteering, begins to shift the nature of the activity from leisure to work-like. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that MYFC has been subject to considerable churn and non-participation and that the commitment to its mission has waned after the first flush of enthusiasm.

Despite – or perhaps because of – these difficulties, the idea of supporter-owned clubs and various conflicts over models, fan organizations and fans, and the use of new media technologies, continues to intrigue major media outlets such as *The Guardian* (in whose *Weekend Magazine*, in something of a reversal of interest, MYFC members voted in February, 2011 to purchase a discounted advertisement). For example, the following story refers to a range of aforementioned tensions surrounding MYFC and presents its web-based community status as a liability:

The story-telling machine which is the FA Cup draw has produced an intriguing contest in the first round proper tomorrow afternoon, between the flourishing, supporter-owned AFC Wimbledon, and Ebbsfleet United, the club still forced to bill itself as 'owned by a web-based community'.

Wimbledon, formed by fans in 2002 who refused to see their club purloined into becoming Milton Keynes Dons, are the favourites, having progressed through promotions from their genesis in the Combined Counties League to current second place in the Blue Square Premier.

Ebbsfleet, renamed in 2007 but with a solid non-league history latterly as Gravesend and Northfleet, were purchased in February 2008 by myfootballclub, a website venture which invited people to subscribe for £35 and buy a football club. At its height, 30,000 people were attracted to join by the idea of having a say in owning a club, which was a frustration to Supporters Direct, Wimbledon and others where genuine, lifelong fans work hard to promote democratic supporter ownership of clubs. (Conn 2010a)

Here the familiar distinction between 'genuine, lifelong fans' and those lured to 'buy a football club' is made as well as reference to another UK-based sports fan advocacy group, Supporters Direct, which declares in its Mission Statement that '[o]ur goal is to promote sustainable spectator sports clubs based on supporters' involvement & community ownership' and among its listed activities includes the following: 'campaigns for the wider recognition of the social, cultural and economic value of sports clubs', 'aims to create the conditions in which supporters can secure influence and ownership of sports clubs', 'provides guidance and support to groups in more than 16 countries throughout Europe' and 'promotes the value of supporter ownership to sports fans, empowering them to set up supporters' trusts or become members of existing trusts' (Supporters Direct 2010). With the now mandatory communicative tools of website, blog, Facebook group, Twitter, Delicious, Yahoo Groups, Wiki, RSS

and Keep in Touch, along with member services, academic publications and Social Value Research reports, advocacy organizations like Supporters Direct paint a very different picture of sports clubs, television viewers and fans than that typically represented, as outlined above, of the 'couch potato' and the 'disempowered consumer'.

This does not mean, though, that the global media sports cultural complex is entering a new phase of wholesale retreat from aforementioned driving forces of commodification, mediatization and corporatization that have significantly shaped its expansion – though never in a one-dimensional, uncontested manner. It should also be acknowledged, of course, that not all sport fandom is politically engaged in orientation and experience, often resembling a straightforward leisure consumption framework with little in the way of activism and deep commitment, while sport fans may also drift in and out of political engagement and activism in a manner that defies consistent classification (Crawford 2004; Horne 2006; Richardson 2004; Rowe and Gilmour 2008). Indeed, in cases where the purchase and exchange of sport memorabilia seem to dominate fan priorities, sport fandom appears to be no more explicitly political than train and plane spotting or attending Elvis Presley impersonator and Star Trek conventions.

Although the emphasis in this discussion has been on the 'world game' of association football, and especially in Britain, these questions are by no means confined to one sport or dominated by one country. Control over sport and communication of and about it is always subject to some level of disputation. There is never a neat fit between the blind, inexorable impulse to capitalize on sporting affect and the manifestations of that affect among the human subjects who give life to sport as intensely experienced popular culture. It is evident in unlikely places, for example in the heart of the United States' 'sports biz' in the case of the Green Bay Packers football team, which is located in a comparatively small city and has a strong element of community ownership. Or in the local resistance to franchise relocation in a range of American sports (Josza 2004; Nunn and Rosentraub 1997; Rosentraub 1999). The main point, then, is that discussing the mediation of sport cannot be reduced to technical enhancements of the viewing screen experience or the financial advantages that flow from expanding the reach and range of available media services. The convergence of broadcasting, computing and telephony makes sports consumers more accessible to media sport producers but also to each other as social actors. The networking of media enables many more textual forms and experiences to be made available and targeted more precisely to individual tastes, but it also creates a host of new ways by which media sport followers might be galvanized to defend and extend their collective interests. Finally, the major sports organizations and print and broadcast sports media that once did most of the 'authoritative talking' within the sphere of sport are now in more direct dialogue with alternative voices, many from neglected sporting social spaces and even from points of the globe once believed to be beyond their orbit (as is addressed in Chapter 5).

New prospects for global media sport

Just as television has dominated the mediation of sport for several decades, so media sport scholarship has privileged television. There is, of course, much more to media sport than television, and the media sports cultural complex is, in fact, an intricate global web of media that is constantly being woven and broken in new ways, catching and releasing its 'prey' in ways that are both systematically planned and the outcomes of overt resistance and unpredictable contingency. Sports media range from newspaper articles to the semiotically encoded bodies of athletes and fans, from the dedicated programming of live events to the incidental texts, such as competitively structured 'reality television', that consciously and unconsciously, explicitly and implicitly, evoke meanings that are customarily attached to the world of sport (Rowe 2011b). If the process of 'mediatization' is taken in its widest sense – that there are more media, a greater range of media genres and forms and that the influence of the media can be felt almost everywhere – then sport is unequivocally an integral aspect of it.

But media sport, like sport itself, is never what it used to be. In this chapter we have seen how there has not just been a proliferation of its forms – an extension of a trend that has been evident since radio sports commentators pre-empted the descriptive accounts of the following evening's or day's sports press – but that they are increasingly combined and recombinant, feeding into and off each other using the multi-modal potentialities of the digital. Therefore, media sport no longer consists primarily of a series of distinct forms and genres that can be accepted or rejected but as a nexus of intersecting, interpenetrating sports discourses and practices. It is synthetic rather than unitary and hybridic instead of stylistically coherent. It is also less tethered to place and nation (though these remain important anchor points) and more dynamically global, but not in the straightforward, mechanical and functionalist sense as a 'single, clear and unambiguous "causal" entity' (Urry 2003: 96), whereby, in John Urry's conceptualization via complexity theory,

global complexity is not simply anarchic disorder. There are many pockets of ordering within this overall patterning of disorder, processes involving a particular performing of the global and operating over multiple time-space with various feedback processes. Such pockets of ordering include various networks, fluids and governance mechanisms. These different pockets of order develop *parallel* concepts and processes of what we call the global. At different levels there are what we call 'global fractals', the irregular but strangely similar shapes that are found at very different scales across the world, from the household say to the UN.

And, as such pockets of ordering emerge, so various often very substantial non-linear effects of 'global-local' objects, identities, institutions and social practices develop. These come to form and to elaborate the strange attractor of glocalization. (Urry 2003: 102–3)

The simultaneous ordering and strange occurrences that Urry describes applies conspicuously to global media sport and its flows, forms and futures,

with the synthetic concept of ‘glocalization’ – first developed by the marketers of products and services in territories very different from their point of origin – that seeks to capture the merging of the local and global in ways that deny the possibility of the restoration of their separation. It reveals how

globalization-deepens-localization-deepens-globalization and so on. Both the global and the local are bound together through a dynamic, irreversible relationship, as huge flows of resources are drawn into and move backwards and forwards between the two. Neither the global nor the local can exist without the other. (Urry 2003: 19)

From the marketing strategies of the sports media to the intervention policies of national governments to the attempts by some fans across the world to reclaim ‘their game’, we have seen the constant interplay and infusion of the global and the local in the field of media sport. Networked digital media have been crucial to this process and have required media sport scholars and researchers to engage with them in ways that do not deny the enduring power of sports television but situate and analyse it appropriately within contemporary and future-leaning media ecologies. At the same time, no nation states – or, indeed, national or international sports and/or media organizations – are able now in a digital environment to exercise the degree of control that they once could over sports broadcasting and other capital-intensive forms of media sport communication, including newspaper reporting and radio commentary.

Two special journal issues in 2009 and 2010 have grasped this necessity, exploring such topics as multiple media sport platforms, blogging by athletes and others, video gaming and fan networking and activism (Boyle and Whannel 2010b; Leonard 2009a). But much more work of this nature needs to be done in the face of the rather static prevailing models of old versus new media and the virtual versus the real. As David Leonard (2009b: 12) puts it in programmatic terms,

Scholarship must push beyond the boundaries that see old and new media in opposition and that devalue the knowledge, representations, and identities disseminated through new media technologies as insignificant, kid’s stuff, and the extreme to see, theorize, and analyze the continuities and links ... We must continue to react to the ever-changing nature of sporting landscapes resulting from innovation and technological changes, not simply categorizing metamorphosis as indicative of the new media era of sport but reflecting on the impact and significance of these transformations. In other words, what is new beyond the technology and tools; what remains unchallenged and constant within sporting cultures?

In answering Leonard’s challenge, we turn in Chapter 5 to global media sport flows that both reproduce and problematize familiar theoretical conceptions of imperialism and postcolonialism (Bale and Cronin 2003). As argued above, globalization is not a smooth, even process of homogenization but one in which the flows of people, capital, ideas, technologies and media (Appadurai 2001) ebb and flow, responding and adapting to new environments and creating new

sporting formations in the interplay of history, place, mediation and orders of power. Just as the centres of media sport export their signs and symbols to new territories, the former Empire can also strike back in diverse ways. As Arjan Appadurai (1996: 105) argues with regard to cricket:

At the reception end, decolonization involves the acquisition of cultural literacy in cricket by a mass audience, and this side of decolonization involves the sort of appropriation of competence that we are all inclined to applaud. But there is also a production dimension to decolonization, and here we enter into the complex world of entrepreneurship and spectacle, of state sponsorship and vast private profits.

Analysing these contradictory phenomena can advance a critical understanding of the balance of power within the global media sports cultural complex, where the game is not always in the hands of the West and the Global North; the digital information technology that enhances sport, media and ancillary industries may be developed far from Silicon Valley, and the first language of large cohorts of fans (executive or otherwise) is unlikely to be English.