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Gary Armstrong ; Malcolm Young

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Fanatical Football Chants: Creating and Controlling the Carnival

GARY ARMSTRONG and MALCOLM YOUNG

The link between verse and football is as old as the game itself. How else could fans of dull or failing teams while away another tedious 90 minutes without a decent verse or two! Or luckier fans celebrate their triumphs. Blank verse and heroic couplets are chanted from Carlisle to Plymouth.

Ian McMillan, Poet in Residence to Barnsley FC, 1997

Poetry, as Ian McMillan recounts, has its roots in the spoken and the sung language, and that is why he loves the spontaneity of the match. That is what attracts McMillan’s participation as a football fan; that is why it is important to explore how and why football fans chant, sing, gesticulate and dance out their obsessional support: or, just as importantly, understand when they indulge in wholesome derision of the opposition. As a dynamic part of this ebb and flow, fans create an amazing and seemingly instantaneous rhyming verse, which is set to tunes drawn from some bottomless repertoire of melodies, many of which date back 70, 80 or more years. What the social analyst is faced with in the world of chanting fandom is this problematic task of defining the emotional abstractions of a pride and a passion, and the analysis of anguish or indifference. As McMillan reminds us, language and the poetry of song is one way of moving into the analysis of the social event of football support, for the world of chanting fans pitches us into a universe which is:

• filled with a passion and a love;
• with a parallel and coexisting set of hatreds;
• with the crucial aspects of a narrow and ferociously demonstrated cultural identity;
• with an emotional commitment to events that at other times and in other circumstances would be laughable or even ridiculous.
These are not attributes to be easily measured, for they flow and circle and surface conterminously to each other, appearing and disappearing like the songs that surround them. The analysis must also encompass aspects of carnival, which – as with all carnivalesque behaviour – continuously teases and threatens the forces of authority at every turn; and is therefore always possessed of the potential for social chaos.¹

What the researcher witnesses is obviously ritualistically embodied. Everything from the display of club favours to the choreographed method of clapping and arm waving – to the tunes used and words and songs employed, is all part of a clear ritual of support and cultural identity. Ritual demands a detailed understanding and discipline by those performing the actions, and is necessarily a repetitive construct² for it is in its consistent repetition that its strength lies. In the songs, dances and chants we have a dramatic social process occurring and re-occurring, consistently re-emphasizing the seriousness of play.³

In addition, there are aspects of a discourse of power encapsulated in what occurs. For power itself, as M. Foucault argues,⁴ is an effect of the operation of social relationships between groups and individuals, and is not a unitary thing, for truly it has no essence. Moreover, there are as many forms of power as there are types of relationship, so that every group exercises power and is subjected to it. Power in the domain of football fandom is thus not simply repressive, but is also productive and reproductive. Any consideration of the fan’s role, vis-à-vis the authorities or club officials, or police who survey fan behaviour, is therefore imbued with aspects of this exercise of power. It is in this display of power that the role of the body becomes crucial. For the exercise of power subjects bodies not simply to render them passive, but to render them active. The power of the body thus corresponds to the exercise of power over it; and in this lies the possibility of an ultimate reversal of that power. When, as in this instance, this is allied with the omnipresent potential of carnival to dislodge social norms, we can begin to see why chanting fandom always threatens the forces of social control.

Football fandom can involve such practices as painting of the body, bodily adornment with scarfs and other cultural symbols, as well as the use of the body to signify a status and position as fans chant and clap or gesture in unison. All of these kinds of practices are simply links in this melange of syntagmatic chains.⁵ One link depends on and is strengthened by its adjacency to the next, such as the swaying or wave formations that sweep the grounds, even as the songs and chants tell
narrative stories about events as they occur. These social processes, then, are all about the constructive and productive use of the body by those who, at other times, might well see their bodies subdued, subject to surveillance and suppressed. For at these times and in these instances power lies with them. In trying to pin down and analyse the social processes which occur when fans chant, we need also to consider the affinities between football and the masculinity of warfare; and where, once again, everyday language presents us with a way into a semantic understanding. The compulsive nature to the act of following a team permits various antagonisms to well up in ways that are similar to a ‘ritualized warfare’. Sport and support are many things to many people but the emotional nature of intense ‘fandom’ can produce people, who, for the duration of the spectacle, are neither totally rational in their thinking, nor polite in their expressions.

‘Fandom’ activities are essentially a male domain, where male cohesion and an attributed masculinity to events are a much lauded state of affairs. Many recent moves by politicians and those authorities disturbed by such practices as chanting and singing have aimed at ‘civilizing’ this ritual warfare, and denying those aspects of male aggression that the drama of football has patently encompassed across the decades. The vociferously pursued route to such has been to enhance a ‘family atmosphere’, and encourage women and children to the ground. Yet, as Katharine Viner noted in the Guardian (18 March 1997), the male–female ratios at the game still deny any true gender equality in the crowd make-up:

Last week I went to see Tottenham vs Leeds, a dreary mid-table clash resulting in a sad 1–0 loss for the Yorkshire side. It would have been a miserable day out, had it not been for the half-time entertainment provided by the Leeds supporters: they took their tops off, they danced a tribal war dance, they marked their territory on the stands. We could spot only one woman in the throng, who kept her Leeds top on, but danced with the best of them. In the old days, football fans made their macho-ness known by fighting each other; today they dance topless ...

What we have to consider, then, is a collective enterprise which still offers up an identity to thousands of young men, the majority of whom gain no financial or material benefit from their obsession. Indeed, they are an audience solely seduced by an unscripted drama in which every
move and countermove is open to appreciation, denial, question or ridicule. If anything is to be gained, it is in the emotional intensity; and this can frequently end in deep disappointment.\textsuperscript{9}

MEN BEHAVING MADLY BUT LESS BADLY

Football support in Britain has long been one of the most obvious activities at which men have exhibited those emotions they would be reluctant to demonstrate elsewhere. In their shared enthusiasms of the match day, men can hug each other, dance together, and unashamedly sing, shriek or cry in each other's company – activities largely avoided elsewhere in their daily lives. The commentary they pursue on such occasions has not always been pure and virtuous. Grounds have therefore long reverberated to a witty, ribald and often abusive narrative directed not only at the opposing players, but often at their own team, as well as the match officials and rival fans. Throughout the history of the game 'supporters [have] never accepted the notion that the contests should be confined to the pitch'.\textsuperscript{10} This has generated a form of what could well be described as symbolic power during which, because of their chants and skirmishes, the fans gained: 'the power to legitimate pronouncement; a power to diagnose, classify, authorize, and represent, and have this power of legitimate naming ... taken seriously ...'.\textsuperscript{11}

The result was that across these decades fights between rival fans became part of the match occasion.\textsuperscript{12} Meanwhile, the forces of control and social order were working to their own vision of symbolic power, and had their own areas of legitimization to sustain. In their deliberations they believed that the fans who fought were also those doing most of the singing and chanting; so that almost inevitably the 'hooligan' label became related to words as well as actions. An involvement in the songs, chants, and the ribald and witty badinage thus became sufficient to generate arrests and help classify and sustain the idea of a hooligan problem.\textsuperscript{13}

From the late 1980s, and because of a range of complex and interacting reasons – including instantaneous outside television broadcasting – football started to become de rigueur for middle-class pundits. Multi-nationals became increasingly keen to be associated with the game for reasons of image and profit. The result has been that football, as an event, has become impossible to avoid on television, and its ubiquity now ranges from the quiz or chat show, to the quasi-
sociological documentary focusing on the game and its culture and history. In essence, the market economy and the bourgeois corporate culture that drives football, with its socially engineered need for the sanitizing influence of the all-seater stadiums, saw the game become an integral part of a style culture. This generated a proliferation of fanzines and articles in broadsheet colour supplements, and influenced a range of other strands of the media; so that mainstream publishing has looked to the ‘laddish’ magazine and the football novel, while cinema dabbled with the football film. Such a commercially minded world inevitably demanded that the authorities and the police combine to erase the unacceptable violence which had gone before. A blitz of surveillance and other controlling and legalistic measures, combined with the participants ‘moving the goalposts’ for hooligan confrontation to other arenas, more or less eradicated two decades of fighting between opposing fans inside the ground. However, this left the residue of chants and choreographed gestures that had accompanied the skirmishes, for you cannot remove overnight such a highly symbolic aspect of cultural identity by wishing it away. Moreover, because of its previous identification as part of the hooligan problem, the chanting, singing and choreographed gesticulation was still seen as something needing to be addressed and prevented. The ‘blandification’ of the game thus seems set to continue, as global pressure to commercialize and sanitize Premier league football institutes such innovations, epitomized *par excellence* by the friendly ‘family stand’ sponsored by the McDonald’s burger empire.

In setting out to deny these dualities, and the bias, the masculinity, and the singing and dancing, these multi-national corporations have inevitably and quickly learnt – as anthropologists doing fieldwork have also learned – that almost all peoples loathe, fear and despise the ‘people next door’. This inherent binary dualism uncloaked over three decades ago, when Levi-Strauss analysed aspects of the totemic mind, and argued that across all cultures ‘hell is in the others’. Such social differentiation is an aspect of human experience which holds huge symbolic power, and generates ‘structures of feeling’. These are something from which ‘people evince a deep emotional commitment to and which is closely integrated with their sense of self [to] give order to their world ... [and which helps sustain] an ontological security’.

Corporate success requires the avoidance of real emotional commitment or the possibility of risk or any organizational hiccup. So, it becomes crucial to eliminate the potential mayhem, but harness the
vibrancy of the carnivalesque discourse at the increasingly lucrative Premier League and cup programmes (sponsored by Coca Cola and the like). Even ‘approved’ song sheets and ‘chanting areas’ have been tried as a means to remove the strong.

Yet, ‘communitas’ is generated during these ‘anti-structural’ periods in which chanting, singing and gesticulating are essentially lodged. For in this setting the subversive character of the betwixt and between state of ‘liminality’ allows spaces for some of the drives, the inversions and the paradigms of a counter-cultural form, and helps illuminate the postures and pedagogic reactions of the dominant structural ideology. As Victor Turner explains: ‘we often find social relationships simplified, while myth and ritual are elaborated ... [and where] if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs’. Turner suggests that liminality, and the marginality it produces, create a setting which generates ‘an emphasis on spontaneity, immediacy, [where] the “existence” throws into relief one of the senses in which communitas contrasts with structure. Communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in past and extends into the future through language, law and custom.”

The chanting, dancing fan, then, is essentially a young male who lives through a series of liminal periods within a community of like-minded others, all of whom are involved in chaotic and cascading activities which incorporate extreme elements of the carnivalesque and ritual warfare. In this the fan reaches a depth of emotion that flows from a polarity of joy on the one hand, to the alternative misery which accompanies defeat; and all the while is incorporated into a complex communal identity sustained by binary expressions of symbolic power which defines ‘us’ – our lads, in our favour – against ‘the others’ whose defeat is a priority.

The game of football and the spectator loyalties that it attracts and which sustain it provokes a spectrum of aggression and violence. As G. Finn argues on this issue, the range of potential social meanings allows considerable scope for difference and deviation. Learned via a complex socialization process supporting is a milieu of quasi-violence which exists in and through an ambiguous and ambivalent moral code. At times of high intensity, Finn speaks of ‘flow’ experiences that make demands upon the participants. This Turnerian idea can lead to the transcendence of an individual’s sense of self which makes the spectator central to the event itself. Refuting the idea of a correlation that
postulates that events on the pitch determine actions off it, Finn argues instead for a whole variety of cultural meanings which can act as a guide for action. As he persuasively argues, an understanding of fandom this way may help an outsider see that what is considered ‘hooliganism’ is ‘not dissimilar to the concerns of other supporters or of humanity at large’.22

Football is thus about social differentiation. It is about us against them, and their defeat. It denies egalitarian ideals, and revels in our superiority, which it sings and dances on its way to success. It denies the Christian ethic that would turn the other cheek, and rather re-emphasizes danger, victory and domination in battles against some clearly identified ‘other’. In effect it is a celebration of ritual warfare that will claim victory in ecstatic song,23 the ritual discourses of any society filter perception and dramatize reality. As an adjunct to this, we can argue that for the fan:

the ritual process has to become a way of life, for it is made up of those cultural metaphors which persuade and project a state of being by presenting the ‘truth’ as already accomplished. In other words, the ‘doing’ or better performing of the ritual is what is critical to the accomplishment of the desired state. In a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, for example, we know the rite itself does not cause the maturation that follows – this would occur naturally without the rite. The rite, however, is a cultural construction considered to be naturally necessary to bring about the event for which it is performed ... In doing this it carries its own justification for itself in that it ‘sings its own songs’; and as the anthropologist Maurice Blok has pointed out, you cannot argue with a song!24

Singing, dancing and chanting is therefore a self-empowering social process; for it becomes self-justifying, self-perpetuating and then succeeds, as it does, simply by deploying a ritualized control over the idea of interpreting what is true.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD: THE CHANTS AND SONGS OF THE PARTISAN FAN

This essay is the outcome of an anthropological study of one particular group of football fans, nicknamed ‘The Blades’. The sinister-sounding
name of these supporters of Sheffield United FC derives from the founding of the club in 1889 in a city renowned for its steel industry. Borrowing from this heritage the club is nicknamed ‘The Blades’ and all United supports call themselves and each other ‘Blades’. Those considered ‘hooligans’ also use the term ‘Blades’ to define themselves. When the term ‘Blades’ is used in this study it will refer either to all United fans or to the hooligan element – the crucial element is context. To complicate matters further, those who chant may well do so in support of their hooligan colleagues but would not consider themselves hooligans. The hooligans meanwhile will frequently join in the whole repertoire of chants sung by non-hooligans. Context is everything. Whatever their propensity to aggression or violence, all Blades share a mutual antipathy towards city rivals Sheffield Wednesday whose fans have themselves adopted the club nickname of ‘The Owls’. Blades prefer the derisory firm ‘Pigs’ to ‘Owls’ and ‘Owls’ prefer ‘Pigs’ to ‘Blades’. This hostility is enacted weekly at the clubs’ Bramall Lane and Hillsborough grounds, respectively; it can extend beyond words and rivalry, engendering what has become, since the late 1960s, a frequently violent affair.\textsuperscript{25}

As a public collective expression of social and cultural identity, football chants have no other modern-day equivalent. For although football crowds have chanted since the 1920s, albeit with a small and infrequent repertoire, no other sport generates behaviour parallel to that seen and heard on the terraces across the length and breadth of Britain. By the 1960s chants had become identified as an integral part of football, and had become synonymous in the public mind with the game and its younger male supporters.\textsuperscript{26}

One suggestion for its growth in the 1960s was the evolution of a youth culture. The resulting loss of status of brass bands as a pre-match entertainment saw them replaced by a public announcement system playing pop records. These new anthems were quickly taken up on the basis of an old football cliché that ‘such vocal support is worth a goal start’. Whilst footballing success has always depended on the ability of the players, the luck of the game and the run of the ball create a large measure of uncertainty and thus the chants can be said to link to these unknown yet potentially crucial factors. In such a world of latent ambiguity, singing and chanting are perfect tools to argue that influence can be created; for their veracity can never be objectively tested. However, there is no doubt that fans play a considerable part in creating
the spectacle of the game, and many players have attested to the part the enthusiasm of the fans plays in sustaining team morale.

Nevertheless, measures to control the cascading nature of the metaphoric battles that football team support encompasses have long been employed. As early as 1907, Sheffield United’s directors published a list of ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ in a match programme. These requested spectators ‘not to shout instructions to players, boo the referee, call for the dismissal of rival players, argue, show bad temper, or shout and be rowdy’.27 Almost a century later things had not changed much, for the 1992 list of Ground Regulations published by the Football Association is so constraining that had these been rigorously enforced perhaps 90 per cent of any crowd would have had to be ejected or arrested. For example, regulation 15 relates that punishment will follow ‘behaviour likely to cause confusion or annoyance’; while Regulation 22 promises the same for those who are a ‘source of danger, nuisance or annoyance’. These, of course, are so loosely defined as to give easily stewards and the police the power to eject or arrest those they would define as being ‘in breach of ground regulations’. No doubt this could encompass activity accompanying the singing, chanting and choreographed gesticulating that the partisan fan has made into something which is almost an art-form in its own right.

**SINGING TO THE TEAM**

Players are always seen as employees of the fans, and consequently the fans always understood it to be their duty to instruct them. So, even though they were playing for ‘us’, United footballers were often abused and ridiculed for their actions, which could well be influenced by the vagaries of that ambivalent thing called ‘form’. However, the home fans at Bramall Lane were generally sympathetic to newcomers to the first team; and every player would have a period of around two months to win over the fans. This could be achieved in a variety of ways; by brilliant display, by an obvious innate ability, or by being a crowd-pleaser – namely through building rapport and acknowledging the fans, and showing unrestrained delight when the home team scored. The quality desired in these newcomers can be summed up by that vague entity – ‘commitment’, and could even be demonstrated by a player simply effecting a lot of encouraging clapping towards his team-mates, urging them on with these gestures all the while accompanied by clenching of
the teeth. Any player showing this intimation of commitment was halfway to becoming popular with the fans. In the 1970s chants and songs towards individual players became increasingly popular. Some other chants to certain players centred on those vaguely defined attributes of ‘character’ and ‘talent’, and related not only to the skills of a player, but to his perceived empathy with the fans.

Songs and chants always presented the chance to dabble in a degree of poetic licence following the true spirit and form of a carnivalesque style. A player’s reputation could well be constructed to suit the occasion. Thus, in the mid-1970s the words of ‘Has Anybody Seen My Girl’, a 1920s jazz song, were amended in what was a deeply ironic paean of praise to a somewhat average centre-forward:

Six foot two, eyes of blue
Big Chris Guthrie’s after you
na na na na na, etc.

The fact that Guthrie was two inches shorter, had brown eyes and was said by the fans to ‘have the menace of a kitten’ was essential to the inverted meaning that the chant encompassed.

Certain names were chanted because their simplicity easily facilitated affective rhythms, while other players with multi-syllabic names could create a problem for the songsters. At times a player might inspire a chant simply because of an inadvertent public comment. So when, in January 1985, the United goalkeeper made a remark to the press after United lost 5–0 to a team which included three black forwards, and declared that ‘keeping goal was like defending Rorke’s Drift’ – an allusion to the defence of a stronghold of that name in the Zulu Wars, the following Saturday saw the Blades behind his goal make repeated chants of ‘Zulu, Zulu’.

Chants could be positive and encouraging, or could voice disapproval of the players. If the team was doing well, the manager’s name might be introduced. If the team was consistently losing games, then chants would call for the manager to go. This was the only way fans had of commenting on his signings or his team selection prowess. Yet, as in all carnivals and liminal occasions, there are different foci and intentions. Fans had to be careful when voicing such opinions, for one strongly expressed could easily result in a punch from neighbouring United fans given to a different view. In these situations the ‘debate’ could escalate, the police might intervene; and once again these ‘hooligan arrests’ could
be cited as proof of a growing social problem that needed further surveillance and control.\textsuperscript{32}

**CHANTS AGAINST RIVAL CLUBS AND AUTHORITY FIGURES**

There is a line of thought, from those who are engaged in the exercise of socio-political control, that football should be an occasion for mutual enjoyment and appreciation between rival fans. Such a vision is unrealistic. The game and its metaphoric language is all about aggressively defeating an enemy – an ‘other’ – who must be shown to be inept, bungling, untalented and certain to be thrashed. The fans – pursuing a ‘habitus of belief and practice’\textsuperscript{33} – believe they have a major input in this task. The social process has always required them to be antagonistic, offensive and abusive – not only to those of their own team who fail to meet expectations but to all the opposing players. Football support is not an egalitarian spectacle, but one that demands partisan involvement; for its demands for success are such that it is fast becoming a business in which even modest failure cannot be tolerated.\textsuperscript{34}

The way to display overt disparagement is to boo the opposition as they take the field – a normal practice at Sheffield since the 1960s. Following a calamitous decline in footballing fortunes when the club dropped from Division One to Division Four in the space of five years, opposition teams were usually considered to be ‘minnows’ and would receive the derisory accolade of: ‘What the fuckin’ hell is that?’ In 1991, in an attempt to curtail this long-instituted animosity, the Football Association ordered teams to enter the pitch together, and this was often accompanied by the match disc jockey using the public address system to call fans to ‘put their hands together in appreciation of both sides’.

This was easily subverted, however, for the fans simply waited until half time to boo, when the teams would reappear but never together.

Since the 1970s the main body of partisan fans at the game have clearly enjoyed and been sustained by the rituals of swearing, snarling, and bellowing the cynically aggressive abuse which denies humanity to the opposition on the field, to those in an unsuccessful manager’s den, and to those in power in the directors’ box. Authorities at club and association level, always mindful that carnival can easily slide into chaos, have set out to defuse this abuse. One tactic they have used has been to instruct players to play down their own jubilation and celebratory rituals when a goal is scored, and thus to set an example to the crowd.\textsuperscript{35} Players
themselves, however, inevitably take a central role in this ritual warfare, and their own success at the highest level is clearly determined by an ability to humiliate the opposition both by scoring and winning, and then publicly celebrating their actions in achieving this. Thus their own interventions can incite the crowd to ecstasy or anguish. At both ends of this spectrum of elation or dejection, the fan response can cause the authorities to intervene and arrest those involved, and again swell the image of a ‘hooligan’ body.

Fandom is a cultural performance. This drama demands a continuous narrative of opposition that should be witty, clever, parodic, sharp, incisive, quick, and sardonically funny. A large part of the attraction of spectating is in this skilful act of denigrating others with an immediacy that draws on a Levi-Straussian *bricolage* (or cultural baggage) which assembles whatever is available to include in the abuse and ridicule. This performance is made up of observations about physical appearance, about footballing abilities, and past history which is constructed into a variety of opinions that need be neither accurate or logical. The ability to manoeuvre any material into a suitable framework is part of the skill of the creativity of support or denigration. In consequence, all the immediacies of social differentiation are taken almost as stereotypes in order to create this classificatory ‘otherness’; and physical features such as weight, height, lack of hair, a perceived ‘foreignness’, or skin colour have all been used in the process. In such a world, the instantaneous vocalization of some oppositional derision means that the more distinctive the rival player’s physical appearance, the easier the chant is to sustain: ‘Have you ever seen your dick?’ and ‘Fat Bastard’ were obvious responses to observed rotundness, while long-haired players would receive chants of ‘Gyppo’ (Gypsy), and ‘Where’s your Caravan?’

Certain chants asked questions which the fans knew could not be answered, nor had much evidential legitimacy. However, innuendo and rumour would be enough to sustain a derisory calling, and managers and chairmen of rival teams were often accused of a variety of sexual misdemeanours based on such material. In January 1984 a Birmingham footballer was allegedly involved in a punch-up with his own manager, Ron Saunders, over a relationship with Saunders’ daughter. A week later at Birmingham the Blades repeatedly chanted at the player:

Shaggin’ Saunders’ daughter
You should be shaggin’ Saunders’ daughter.
When the well-known manager Tommy Docherty saw his love life come under media scrutiny in 1984 at his Woverhampton team base, thousands of Sheffield away fans chanted: ‘Who’re you shaggin’ Docherty?’ Five months later, in January 1985, Elton John, the gay pop star and chairman of Watford FC, was asked by hundreds of visiting Blades: ‘What’s it like to be a puff?’

Again and again opposing players would be chanted at for any incident or sexual exploit that had been usually reported in the tabloids. And as the act of denying humanity to the opposition was so intrinsic to the role of fandom, that public claim to an exemplary life would be similarly disparaged, especially if the player was known to be one who pulled strokes on the field of play. In essence they all faced abuse because they were not ‘us’, and our cultural identity based on this social differentiation demanded they be castigated for being of ‘the other’. Being more talented and famous than those who were less able and less fit, but who could chant, was sufficient to make them the focus of the singing.

Early in the 1980s chants denigrating black players for simply being black had become increasingly associated in the public mind with football support, and earned partisan fans a status synonymous with the extremes of racism. At this time, certain grounds could indeed swell to a collective denigration based on a denial of humanity to black players, with ‘Sieg Heil’ cries and Nazi salutes emanating from those with right-wing political sympathies. Though these occasions have loomed large in the collective consciousness, to the extent that fandom and racism are often seen to be synonymous, we would argue that what is occurring here is a spectrum of opposition ranging from the racist and politically motivated to the less thought out but still indefensible ritual process of differentiation between ‘us’ (our boys, our players, our locus and sense of place) and ‘them’ (their boys, their players and their origins in other places). This differentiation, well known to the participants, has been taken by those ignorant of events or wishing to impose their own morality on the football audience, to be a single overriding referent of events.

Yet the ‘negative’ condition of blackness like being Irish, or Scots, or Geordie, bald, hairy or overweight, and so on, can more usefully be seen as just one of a classificatory range of ways of supporting ‘our’ collective against whoever ‘they’, the other, might be. As they fleetingly employ these derisory attributions, the fans momentarily enjoy a taste of the
power that comes from the linguistic intimidation of an imagined and created 'other', even as their own identities are worked on. This binary situation exists in films, on television, on radio, in business (for example, the Stock Exchange in London has recently [1997] made linguistic abuse actionable); and of course is part and parcel of political life.

Prolonged participant observation at Bramall Lane suggests Blades had little or no connection with overtly racial political activities. Indeed, in 1985, on one occasion when some 30 young men in a group of some 400 Blades chanted 'Nigger, nigger, lick my boots' at a winger from Barnsley, a core group of Blades (including a dozen West Indians) threatened the instigators, and in the subsequent decade such racist chanting had no part in the recorded cacophony of chanting. Politicians and certain lobbyists, of course, are not as adept as the chanters at sorting this out. And in the drift to a more authoritarian stance, the definition of racism seems set to expand even further, and become referential to everything – so that any opposition will be defined as provocative, offensive, and thus actionable. In January 1999 the Home Secretary loudly proclaimed the creation of some 29 points in yet another plan to sanitize support at the game, and to define further offences committed when fans urge on their teams, or deride any opposition.

This association in the wider public mind of football fans with hooliganism and racist behaviour has been termed by one group of researchers as the 'racist-hooligan couplet'. They sensibly explain with examples how in many instances abuse is: 'Taking place within a context where racial meanings do not "stand for" what they would outside the context of the game and the stands.' The meanings of race, as the authors argue, are filtered through a discourse of being white. Their research found that racial abuse was not specific nor reserved to certain areas of the ground. Such abuse was also contextual and satisfied a variety of circumstances. The evidence of such comments forces many onlookers to express outrage which satisfies the football authorities' perception that such language and opinion are the preserve of the racist hooligan couplet. As the authors argue, the variety of schemes that have applied anti-racist missionary zeal to the ground rely 'on a morality that does little to understand the social configurations of racism'.

In this world of antagonism, a fan soon realizes that certain symbolic figures, such as the police, or referee and his linesmen (or assistant referees), can be abused or denigrated without fear that fellow fans or
visitors will take offence. Indeed, the situation here was similar to any carnival, where traditional authority figures often take on or are given a role reversal that denies power to those normally in charge. In this reversible world those without power on the terraces could thus make a scapegoat enemy of those visiting what is always a social drama, one that of necessity always stands apart and aside from the normal social process.

In the 1960s and 1970s chants directed at some dubious refereeing decision included:

Who’s your father, who’s your father, who’s your father, referee?  
You ain’t got one ...you’re a BASTARD  
You’re a BASTARD referee.  
(to the tune of ‘My Darling Clementine’)

and:

The referee’s a BASTARD (repeated three times)  
And so say all of us.  
(to the tune of ‘For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow’)

Physical attributes would always be called into use; so referees were derided as ‘bald-headed bastards’ or ‘long-legged bastards’, but were always ‘bastards’. By the 1980s these constant accusations (apart from an occasional rendition of ‘who’s the bastard in the black’) were becoming increasingly rare; the monitored visibility of fans in the electronically surveilled stadiums was increasingly allied to the keenness of the police to arrest those chanting such mantras. As a result, fans amended the script and chanted the short and staccato word ‘cheat’ as they reduced the risk of arrest, but managed succinctly to present those in power with the same dismissive message.

Prior to electronic surveillance, anonymity had served the packed terraces well across the 1960s, and allowed one of the earliest anti-police chants sung with gusto:

Bramall Lane Coppers,  
Turn to the Kop of fear,  
With Guinness bottles whizzing  
Past your ear
You listen to the chanting far behind
The first thing that comes into your mind...
Kill the bastards! Kill the bastards!
(to the tune of ‘Night of Fear’ by The Move)

This was superseded when the tune became unfashionable, and in the 1970s followed by a children’s rhyme was sung whenever the police (the pigs) arrested (nicked) a Blade:

Old MacDonald had a farm, ee-ih-ee-ih-oh
And on that farm he had some Pigs, ee-ih-ee-ih-oh
With a nick-nick here and a nick-nick-there, etc.

At times this would be abbreviated to a single, repetitive ee-ih-ee-ih-oh, for the Blades realized the police knew what was being implied. In the late 1970s, as the police were making arrests, a chant suggesting their incompetence in the pursuit of what many considered to be a much more serious matter than their over-zealous dealings with the fans, again took its theme tune from the Latin American Anthem ‘Guantanamera’:

Ten thousand Coppers...
And only one Yorkshire Ripper.

This reference to a killer of some 13 women also saw the fans chant: ‘You’ll never catch the Ripper’; and was used as a serious indictment on outside events that the fans knew contrasted strongly with their own minor misdemeanours. In the mid-1960s the imagery had been less strident, for whenever a line of officers walked in unison along the perimeter of the pitch to take up positions, the theme tune of the 1930s ‘Laurel and Hardy’ comedy films – then being shown on television – would be whistled by hundreds of fans. This tune has no words, but has become an acknowledged indicator of the pomposity and incompetence that the two slapstick heroes personified; and which the fans now transferred to their enemies in the police.

OVER THERE: CHANTS ACROSS THE DIVIDES

Narration and exchange between rival factions are issues which anthropologists have examined the world over.42 Chants recorded in the
early 1970s reflected this polarization and focused on the location of the
distantly positioned rival fans, and their ‘otherness’. Using a Second
World War tune and imagery, one popular chant was:

Over there, over there
And do they smell... (clapping rhythm)

Like fuckin’ hell
Over there, over there.
(to the tune of ‘Distant Drums’)

In this era, when fans stood in physically distant ‘kops’ or terraces, the
action of ‘taking’ a rival kop would always draw responses so that
opposing fans who deliberately entered the ‘home’ terracing – the
Shoreham End – would receive taunts and threats of:

– Come and have a go at the Shoreham Aggro
– You’ll never take the Shoreham
– The Shoreham run from no-one.

Structural alterations in the 1970s and 1980s forced the more voluble
and physical ‘hooligan’ element to move from favoured situations; the
aim of standing or sitting close to away fans took on new import. Chants
were created to respond to the fact that opposing fans now were visible
and therefore individualized. Some portly rival might thus be singled
out and greeted by the choir, who would taunt him:

You’ve never seen a salad.

or: He’s fat, he’s round
He bounces on the ground
Fat Bastard, Fat Bastard.

The accusers of this obese target, however, could well face arrest from
one of the phalanx of police officers arraigned on three sides around the
home fans. The ferocity of these arrests often contradicted the assertion
that words do not break bones and in consequence, gestures became
more discreet, so that rivals began quietly mimicking each other across a
police-generated no-man’s land. Using a variety of actions to mock and
imply stupidity, the fans would wave their arms above their heads, all the while dancing, jabbing pointed fingers in the air, and slapping the top of the forehead in a gesture implying an imbecility in the opposition. Sexual innuendo was also an integral part of this performance, with each side accusing the other of being 'wankers', by using a masturbatory wrist movement at head height or in the vicinity of the groin. Occasionally, a two-handed motion would be used on an imaginary exaggerated phallus. At other times the masturbatory gesture began at the front of the forehead, signifying that the target of the abuse was a 'knobhead' – a popular insult of the moment. Perhaps the biggest insult in this exchange, however, was the double negative of purporting not to respond. Contemptuous of rivals from specific oppositional fan groups, one side would show an exaggerated disdain by ignoring their rivals' calls, or occasionally would look towards them with blank expressions accompanied by a mock-disgust shake of the head, implying an infinite sadness and superiority.

Despite these quiet gestures, the opportunity for dialogue remained a constant part of the social encounter. And if a rival team scored their fans would almost invariably break into a chant of '1–0, to which Blades (depending on the proximity of the police presence) would use the same tune to reply 'Fuck off'. These exchanges employed the tune of 'Amazing Grace' to repeat the message over and again. If, perchance, United were then to score two goals, Blades would chant '2–1', and taunt their opponents with: 'You're not singing anymore.' This, in turn, could provoke a response by the now despondent rivals, again using the tune to Guantanamera: 'Sing when you're winning ... you only sing when you're winning.'

Not all messages to rival fans offered room for such a well-matched and almost egalitarian dialogue, and some 1970s one-line chants were menacingly violent in their content:

- We'll see you all outside
- On the pitch (accompanied by a surge to the front of the terracing)
- There's gonna be a nasty accident
- There won't be many going home tonight
- If it wasn't for the coppers you'd be dead
- You're gonna get your fuckin' heads kicked in
- You're goin' home in a Sheffield ambulance
- Hello, Hello, Shoreham Aggro, Shoreham Aggro.
Until the increase in surveillance in seated stadiums, and the extra legalistic control practices of the mid-1980s, away games also provided a specific opportunity to taunt the home fans. One constant theme was to remind them of their alleged non-appearance at Sheffield, or a non-combativeness in those who had made the journey:

- Where were you at Bramall Lane?
- Have you ever been away?

In the early 1970s the fans of teams yet to visit Bramall Lane would be warned:

Will you come to Bramall Lane, no-oh, no-oh *(repeated 3 times)*
... get a hatchet in your brain, no-ho.
(to the tune of ‘Marching Through Georgia’)

By the early 1980s, for reasons outlined above, any actual physical contest usually took place hours before, or again after the match. Chants inside the ground thus became more direct in context, and increasingly made sarcastic reference to prior events:

- We thought you were hard ... we were wrong, we were wrong.
- What’s it like to run at home?
- Smallest [hooligan] crew we’ve ever seen.
- You’re just a bunch of wankers.

The jeers, whistles and gestures, such as the masturbator’s wrist-jerk action of the 1970s, were added to in the 1980s, with the chant of ‘You what?’, and ‘Do what?’ being common parlance for a couple of seasons. A collective rising ‘Aaaargh!’ sound was also deployed to imply derision, while wolf-whistles and an effeminate high-pitched ‘Oooooh!’ accompanied by a limp-wristed motion was used to deny masculinity to the rivals. Ridicule was always an essential part of the verbal armoury, and meant that certain songs of the 1970s could still be used 15 years later to denigrate the opposition:

Sing something simple, you simple TWATS.
(using the tune for the 1970s BBC radio series ‘Sing Something Simple’)

Back to school on Monday
Does your mother know you’re here?

An occasional reply in the 1970s to any threat shouted across the safety of the fences separating the fans, was chanted in an exaggerated upper-class accent and asked the sardonic question: ‘You’re Hard?’ While ‘Cheerio, cheerio’ was used to signify that opposition fans were leaving the ground before full time. This might be alternated with the mocking and contemptuous cry of: ‘We can see you sneaking out.’

A SENSE OF PLACE: CHANTING A REGIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

Though the game itself and the players provided rich material for a continuous scatological dialogue, there were other themes to draw on. A sense of regional identity, for example, which might seem insignificant in life away from and outside the realms of football, could well be given an enhanced significance; so that fans from market towns in rural areas would be greeted with chants from big city Blades:

I can’t read, I can’t write ... but I can drive a tractor.

or: Sing when you’re farming, you only sing when you’re farming.

Fans from the nearby coal town of Barnsley were accused of ‘Singing only when mining.’ If a team lacked any easily identifiable regional label, Blades would use any referential crumb to make their point of opposition, and in 1994 at Tottenham – a club with a perceived Jewish following – they sang: ‘Where’s your foreskins gone?’

In 1997 a BBC television documentary on the notoriety of Millwall supporters had included material on an individual known as ‘Harry the Dog’. On their next two visits to London, Blades chanted: ‘Harry the Dog is a Mongrel,’ adding ‘You can shove your reputation up your arse.’ Then, because of the alleged association of Millwall fans with right-wing political causes, the London opposition was further advised to ‘shove the National Front party’ up the same place.

In 1982 fans from Chesterfield, a town immediately to the south of Sheffield, were recommended a similar course of action, but the reference to a ‘reputation’ and the ‘National Front’ was replaced by
reference to the town’s famous landmark of a ‘crooked spire’. This same anal location was where West Ham supporters were advised to shove their fictitious supporter, the television comedy character Alf Garnett. In return, Blades were advised by various rivals as to where to shove their Yorkshire puddings and the stainless steel implements which had given the fans their name. When Derby fans – nicknamed ‘The Rams’ and drawn mostly from a small town in a predominantly rural county – were in opposition, a chant of ‘sheep-shaggers’ predominated; while a chant of ‘Who hung the Monkey?’ was hurled at home supporters when Blades visited Hartlepool, in remembrance of the fanciful story that during the Napoleonic wars the natives of that town had hung a shipwrecked monkey in the belief the unfortunate animal was a Frenchmen. In the 1970s Blades would chant ‘Yorkshire’ when playing any team from Lancashire, and ‘South Yorkshire’ when playing Leeds, their West Yorkshire rivals. With any opposition from London, the cry was ‘We hate Cockneys,’ and ‘You’re the shit of London town.’ Again this use of geography to define and differentiate homed in on those age-old divides of location and sense of place to make points about a cultural identity. This mode of thought provided an identical means for southerners to define themselves when they visited Sheffield, and they would use the socio-economic decline of this previously successful heavy industrial area as a way of defining their own superiority and cultural identity, to chant repetitively:

On the Dole, On the dole
What’s it like to have no jobs?

and: One job in Sheffield, there’s only one job in Sheffield.
(to the tune of ‘Guantanamera’)

During the 1984 Miners’ Strike, Blades would reply to these taunts by expressing support for the strikers and the miners’ union leader:

Yorkshire Miners, we’ll support you evermore.
(to the tune of the Welsh anthem, ‘Men of Harlech’)

Arthur Scargill’s red and white army.

and: I’d rather be a picket than a scab.
In return the southern or Lancastrian fans would respond with:

Arthur Scargill ... is a wanker, is a wanker.

Margaret Thatcher we'll support you evermore.

and: Get back to work you idle TWATS.

Messages with political overtones and especially those sympathetic to the miners’ cause proved liable to provoke an arrest, and Blades would chant support for miners, well knowing the watching police might react to the sentiments. Many fans were ejected or arrested and charged with 'threatening behaviour' when chants of 'scabs' were directed at fans from the non-striking mining districts of Stoke, Derby and Nottingham. And even ten years after the strike, Blades visiting Nottingham for a match might still resort to the cry of 'Scabs’ as the ultimate derogatory chant to aim at the opposition. Though support for Scargill might suggest an immutable political stance only two years before the strike, Blades had chanted: ‘You can shove Arthur Scargill up your arse’ at his home town fans in Barnsley. In essence, then, the chants were concerned with using material aspects of the cultural baggage or bricolage to assert the presence of 'the other', and deny them humanity and superiority.

ABSENT ENEMIES: PIGS AND ANCESTORS

The transitory element of the above chants was absent from the material used in anti-Sheffield Wednesday songs. An intra-city rivalry was the focus of an opposition that was lived and worked at throughout a fan’s life; and pervaded the daily round. Derogatory songs, chants and calls were thus performed ritualistically on every occasion, even when Wednesday teams and supporters were not present.

And though United and Wednesday did not meet in a league match between 1979 and 1991 because they were in different divisions, fans of both clubs continued to chant in absentia against their rivals. In particular, songs were chanted at away fixtures as a means of impressing the listening home supporters with the venom the Blades could sustain towards the Owls (Sheffield Wednesday). Such chants had two recurrent themes: first, to express a desire to inflict violence on or humiliate their fans; and second, to rejoice in any misfortune to Wednesday’s team and
its players. In the 1960s a song reflected on the choices a Sheffield lad faced in deciding his loyalties, and allied this to a nostalgia for the ideals of childhood:

When I was just a little lad  
I asked my mother what shall it be  
Shall it be Wednesday? Shall it be Leeds?  
Here’s what she said to me  
Tha’ll go down to Bramall Lane  
Tha’ll watch Sheff United play  
They’re the best team in the land  
And you’ll think they’re grand.  
(to the tune of ‘Que Sera, Sera’, a Doris Day pop song)

Choosing to be a fan of United was commonly seen as making an immediate commitment of hostility to Wednesday, and to an antagonism which had been passed down from the ancestors; as with many other tribal rites. Such a generational demand was included in the fan adaptation of ‘Walk Tall’, a pop song recorded by Val Doonican:

Walk tall, walk straight, and poke a pig fan in the eye  
That’s what my mother told me when I was about knee-high  
She said ‘Son, be a proud man and hold your head up high  
Walk tall, walk straight, and poke a pig fan in the eye’.

Every nuance of social difference was grist to the symbolic mill in this dichotomous life of antagonism to the other Sheffield team, and even those advantages in ancillary equipment that Wednesday enjoyed were ridiculed. In this view a mid-1960s pop song was adapted to denigrate their acquisition of an electronic scoreboard and a new cantilever stand:

Your scoreboard is crap  
Your stand’s made of tin  
We’ll crown all you bastards  
With bottles of gin.  
(to the tune of ‘Death of a Clown’ by The Kinks)

However, many of the more staccato chants were merely aimed at the whole general entity of being allied to the named opposition, and a
nearly 1970s expression of contempt was the simple repetitive chant of: 'Wednesday Wednesday Wednesday ... shit, shit, shit,' while those with a more poetic bent or creative flair tended to favour:

If I had the wings of an eagle
If I had the arse of a crow
I'd fly over Hillsboro' tomorrow
And shit on the bastards below.
(to the tune of 'My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean')

By the late 1970s, and into the early 1980s, chants contained a greater verbal menace which was often related to events outside the ground. Anticipating those confrontations, when fights between Owls and Blades became increasingly common place in the evenings after the match, Blades would sing:

Shit on Wednesday
Shit on the Wednesday tonight/in town.
(to the tune of 'Roll Out the Barrel')

This tendency to be violent towards and physically humiliate Wednesday was celebrated both in the 'boot boy' fashion of the day, and the association of group identity with social space:

Walking down Shoreham Street swinging my chain
Along came a Pig fan and asks my name
I kicked him in the bollocks and I kicked him in the head
Now that Pig fan ... is Dead.
(to the tune of 'Just One of Those Songs')

Other violent images were vocalized to the tune of a late 1950s favourite, and suggested what might occur following a chance meeting:

I'd love to go a wandering
Along the cliffs of Dover
And if I saw a Wednesdayite
I'd push the bastard over
Valderee, Valdera, Valderee, Valderhaa, ha, ha, ha, ha...
(to the tune of 'The Happy Wanderer')
In the 1980s the anthem 'The Red Flag' was appropriated for a celebration of loyalties which might well have shocked those early socialists who saw it as a visionary statement of a more equal and caring society.

At the first league match between the two sides in eight and a half years at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough stadium on Boxing Day 1979, Wednesday trounced United 4–0. As a result of a media headline the occasion subsequently became known as 'The Boxing Day Massacre'. Blades took consolation claiming to have 'run' Owls from outside the ground; although a more accurate assessment is that there was some scuffling, and neither side could honestly claim to have 'run' their rivals. However, a week later a chant originated which was sung at almost every home or away game for the next 15 years:

Hark! Now hear, United sing  
The Wednesday ran away  
And we will fight for evermore  
Because of Boxing Day.  
(to part of the tune of 'Mary's Boy Child')

The Owls, for their part, sang the same song across the years, extolling their own ability to 'run' United, and, moreover, adopted a 1950s pop tune to remind their rivals of the 4–0 scoreline:

I've never felt more like singing the Blues  
The Wednesday win ... United lose  
Oh! Wednesday ... You've got me singing the Blues.  
(to the tune of 'Singing the Blues' – the Owl colours)

The Blades' response was to throw the tune back at the Owls, with the words amended to encompass a violent image based on local knowledge of the particularities of support in two Sheffield districts:

I've never felt more like swingin' a pig  
From Hyde Park flats to Wadsley Bridge  
Oh! Wednesday ... you've got me swingin' a pig ...  
As you do, As you do.

With the advent of microtechnology and 15-minute reports on radio
from the early 1970s, the fortunes of the Wednesday team would be announced at United matches by anyone with a small portable. News of their fate would ripple through the Blades’ contingent, and whenever the score favoured their opposition there would be immediate cheers and communal chants of ‘Sheffield Wednesday fucked it up again.’ Former Wednesday players, now playing for other clubs, who appeared before the United fans, would not be allowed to forget their past sins. And whenever they received the ball, or drifted close to the Blades, they would be greeted by whistles, boos and chants of ‘Pig, Pig, Pig, [or] Hello, Hello ... Wednesday reject.’

The problem for analysts of this apparently divisive and deeply inculcated hatred is to realize that, regardless of the venom and violence inherent in the chants, the whole thing was socially contrived and always specifically contextual. Indeed, the record of a consistent participant observation shows that, across the years, the United fans would weekly deride Wednesday and their fans, but thousands would then go out drinking with them, or sometimes visit the homes of their rivals, because football loyalties cut across family, work-place and residence. For the vast majority, such chants, in effect, changed nothing, and meant nothing other than to reaffirm the collectivity of the Blades, who needed the Owls to define and redefine themselves and reassert their social identity in the way that secular rituals always do. When fights did occur over football loyalties as a consequence of chanting the location was more likely to be city centre bars when rival fans could and frequently would escalate hostilities.

CELEBRATING BLADES: TOTEMIC PARODY

A final category of chants celebrated the existence and the place of the Blades in working-class Sheffield society, and were drawn from a variety of sources. It seems that in their form and content they were important simply because the words and gestures were a means of showing to others that you could claim inclusion into a society that was supportive and encouraging. Knowledge thus was a part of the power of inclusion. However, we would argue that an unacknowledged element of these chants was that such chanting and performing was part of a public demonstration which made reference to the concept of fan-hooligan. For a clear knowledge of these chants and gestures confirmed the prejudices of an uncomprehending audience; and, consequently, they
were used to bind the Blades together further in a cohesive social identity which presented the outside world with an incomprehensible drama of apparent violence and threat. The 1970s reflected the way this social drama was proceeding, so that, although chants of ‘Sheffield ... Boot Boys’ were a weekly occurrence, there were also elaborations – one of which created a mythic conversation between two famous club managers of the moment:

Bertie Mee says to Bill Shankly
Have you heard of the North Bank, Highbury?
He says, ‘No, I don’t think so
But I’ve heard of the Shoreham boot boys’.
(to the tune of ‘Just One of Those Songs’)

To offset this, and to illuminate the fact that the singers understood the pretensions lying behind much of their braggardly performance, the Blades would ridicule the idealized masculinity that pervaded a large part of these macho dialogues:

I’m a bow-legged chicken
I’m a knock-kneed hen
I haven’t had a wank since I don’t know when
I walk with a wiggle and I talk with a squawk
Doing the Shoreham boot walk.
(to the tune of the 1950s pop song ‘Tenessee Wig Walk’)

Again the fact that the fans used any suitable material for chants was confirmed when those Blades who began following the pursuit of ‘taking ends’ and ‘running their boys’ borrowed from socio-political events in the early 1970s, and set themselves up in a chanted (but pale) reflection of the IRA, by giving birth to an SRA (the Shoreham Republican Army).44

Other songs with no obvious football connection were also used to these ends of showing knowledge and partisan membership of the group. A version of ‘Falling in Love with You’, an early 1970s Andy Williams ballad, was taken up on the terraces.45 Another more up-tempo chant even crossed over from the 1940s, when an old Bing Crosby number – ‘You Are My Sunshine’ – appeared on packed terraces.46 Despite their universality and American origins, these two tunes were appropriated by
the United fans as being *theirs*, as if to say they had made them football relevant and brought them into the ground. As a result they would boo any other fans who tried to use them.

Other activities used to create a spectacle and to confuse rival fans were employed, and explained away in a deprecating manner as ‘acting daft’. Celebration of a United goal, although always a matter for jubilation, would sometimes be acclaimed with a level of euphoria that was over-done simply because it was understood that rival fans would be further cowed and subdued by the spectacle. This ecstatic demonstration was known as ‘Going Barmy’, or doing ‘the Headless Chicken’, or the ‘Dip’, or the vividly metaphorlic ‘doing t’ can o’maggots’ – a close parallel of what the thousands packed together must have resembled during these chaotic celebrations.

Other chants were almost a self-parody of stereotypical attributes that were allegedly the province of the northern, working-class male. Throughout the 1970s one regular anthem was sung by hundreds of very young men, most of whom had hardly tasted beer, nor had yet dated a woman:

Shoreham Boys we are here wo-oh, wo-oh *(repeated 3 times)*
... shag your women and drink your beer
wo-oh oh oh oh oh oh.
*(to the tune of ‘Marching Through Georgia’)*

Another parodic chant took its imagery from a television advert for ‘Hovis’ bread. This had used a pre-war industrial setting, with a young boy speaking in a strong regional accent about the virtues of the product and his home town, somewhere in deepest Yorkshire; and accompanied by a brass band playing the slow movement from the Dvorak’s ‘New World Symphony’. Southern team supporters seized on this imagery and would hum the tune in mockery. Blades, anticipating such mockery, adopted the tune as their own, and thus prevented their rivals from gaining a slight advantage in the totemic rites that were the games of social one-upmanship.

An alleged capacity for strong beer consumption by Northern working-class males also became the subject for self-ridicule and parody. And, the heterosexual attractions said to be on offer in Sheffield were also expounded in song. Indeed, in this male collectivity the appearance of women was always worthy of comment, and sexist
comments would be shouted at women employed to promote the match sponsor's product and at the occasional policewoman. The solitary repetitive chant sung to the old hymn tune, 'Bread of Heaven' of 'Get your tits out for the lads' might also incorporate wolf whistles.

In complex ways, then, chants fed a sense of identity to fans, and those songs and chants with no overt message about the club or the game were as much a part of providing an identity to 'the lads' as the most virulent anti-Owl message. What the noise and the emotion helped create was a simple paradigm of social endeavour that varied on the mood of the moment. At away games the chanting was dictated by the numbers who travelled. On 'derby' occasions against Wednesday the chants tended to be single-minded and aimed at the rivals. On the last away game of the season the match was always an occasion for 'a good sing', and the carnival atmosphere was often enhanced and encouraged by fans in fancy dress 'acting daft' in ways described above. That said, there was no critical density required to initiate a chant. Eight Blades might sing with as much fervour as 800, but location was important. A low roof and an enclosure which packed fans together produced more concentrated noise than those occasions when the fans were loosely collected on some open-air terrace. No two matches ever saw the same repertoire used, and away fixtures often produced more chanting with fewer numbers, simply because regular followers were the most devout fans, and the most knowledgeable. Moreover, the result of the game did not always affect the chanting. Blades usually would go quiet if the team was losing, but on many occasions they would chant non-stop to signify strength in a hopeless defeat. As with all Blade activity, inside and outside the ground, chanting was an action accomplished without high-level organization and leadership.

CARNIVAL CURTAILED AND CRIMINALIZED:
SEATING AND SURVEILLANCE

By the early 1990s what we have identified as a carnivalesque activity had been the norm at football grounds for over 25 years. In the 1980s certain songs and chants began to be accompanied by the waving of a range of inflatable artefacts whose use swept the English grounds. These huge bananas, inflatable fish and the like were quickly deemed inappropriate by the authorities, and banned by some clubs, with their use being proscribed by certain police forces. Stalks of celery waved at Chelsea in
the 1980s reappeared at Gillingham and the authorities reacted by subjecting supporters to turnstile celery searches. Five fans, aged between 16 and 19, were banned from the ground after being caught on CCTV for 'chucking celery'. The club's Safety Officer revealed the new corporate desire of these football family occasions to be one in which 'docile bodies' reigned supreme, for as he answered a media enquiry: 'We've still got 4,900 standing at the ground and I was beginning to see a lot of undue movement in the crowd as people were jumping around while singing this [celery] song.'

Large inflatables never took off at Bramall Lane, but red balloons were the rage for a couple of seasons (1991–94), and began when a United fan bought 5,000 and gave them to turnstile operators to hand to the fans before the 1991 Sheffield derby. Fans then brought red balloons to matches over the next three years, although the police tried to prevent this by searching and confiscating them at turnstiles. Police also prevented fans entering the ground with, or displaying, banners and union flags with the club name or the word 'Blades' written on. Those market-driven forces that were fast propelling the game towards a homogenized, family affair argued that such items could obstruct the view of other 'customers', or could obstruct the advertising hoardings so essential to the corporate mind if they were draped around the ground. Business was thus setting out to dictate what favours the fans or customers could or should not carry.

Powerful marketing corporations which have now made football such a huge business and extended its impact well beyond the match day and into the clothes shops, the clubs stores, the video retailers and the like, together with surveillance and controls operated by the police and the football authorities have largely achieved what we would term 'the enslaving violence of the agreeable'. Their product is now to be presented to the 'customer', with a consistency and an unquestioned conformity being the order of the day – as if the 'McDonaldization' of wider society must continue to gallop unquestioned across British society. Today the match-day customer must be protected from social pollution as he/she consumes the commodified leisure experience, and be controlled by panoptical CCTV surveillance whose aim is to standardize behaviour and make the audience react in predictable and in preordained ways. As stated persuasively by anthropologist Mary Douglas:
institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel perceptions into forms compatible with the relations they authorize. They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and rouse our emotions to a standardized pitch. Add to this that they endow themselves with rightness and send their mutual corroboration cascading through all levels of our information system.\(^53\)

In other words, football decrees that those who are now allowed to attend its functions display the institutional mind necessary to overcome individual thought, to straitjacket intellects and bodies. A purified community of compliant customers is thus considered essential to sustain this multi-million pound business, and holding that image is more important than its fans. For its ultimate aim is to create mutually appreciative consumers, who display no trace or hint of social differentiation or prejudice towards some socially-created opposition.\(^54\)

Clearly there is a cost to this process. For though the authorities tinker with some of the links in these complex syntagmatic chains which have been built around football support over decades, events do not always follow the market prediction. The symbolic world that football fandom is all about is not one that will always react in ways the market might decree. On match day Bramall Lane may now be more silent than it has ever been, but things are not always as clean and neat as they appear. The price of admission in comparison to income has made the game unavailable to many previous fans – and those who can afford entry are told where to sit even when space is available elsewhere; and are then stewarded, disciplined and punished if they do not. Yet, already in this brave new clean and antiseptic world the clubs have found they are having to orchestrate chanting, or even play chants over the tannoy to provide the passion and atmosphere that has all but vanished from these all-seater customer castles.

As Umberto Eco might argue 'we are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer face any need for the original'.\(^55\) However, cultural forms are not so easily created, nor existing ones subdued or proscribed, and at Bramall Lane in January 1997 the DJ’s tannoyed urgings to ‘Come on you fans, and sing; and not just when there’s a goal’ saw his demands subverted. As true commentators on the bizarre socio-economic process that football has become, the Blades easily moved into their liminal role as the street-wise court jesters of society who comment
on the antics of those in power. Their response denied the pristine purity of the corporate image which, since 1981, has seen the club logo incorporate the message of being ‘The Family Club’, for on hearing that rivals Wednesday were losing, they reminded everyone that: ‘Sheffield Wednesday’s fucked it up again.’ This was not a message the authorities wanted to hear. And, we would argue you deny such symbolic logic and symbolic power at your peril, for this may well contradict some official version of reality.

Academic analyses of football chants have tended to suggest these subverting chants are vehicles for expressing nationalism, regionalism and socio-political antagonism; and at times there are traces of such concepts in the songs. However, chants are more than that. For we believe they can be read as vehicles to dramatize and exaggerate a cultural identification that uses gender and social differentiation to create tension, to provoke nostalgia, to show endurance in the face of defeat, to provoke ridicule, and to provide intimacy. These are cascading social processes that use and intertwine themes of sex, death, gender, a sense of place, social history, group identity, love and hate; and in which a constructed world of ‘real’ men is contrasted with ambiguous and weak ones. We can therefore argue that spectators turn into true social participants in the game by becoming narrators encompassed in these transgressions of etiquette. But this freedom is being curtailed as the consumer-led world of football seeks to deny the consumer a say in the past.

Thus, we face a future of conflict because carnival can consist of the pleasures achieved by subordinates who oppose the established. Carnival combines elements of excess, laughter, degradation and offensiveness, to produce an ‘egalitarian second world’ lying outside and beyond that preferred by officialdom. Carnival produces disrespect, and with this a ‘Radical opposition to the illegitimately powerful, to the morose and the monological.’ Thus, with their chants directed at players and powerful officialdoms, football fans ridicule the self-important and self-regarding guardians of propriety. Such performances therefore reproduce notions of ‘Plaisir and Jouissance’ where ‘Plaisir’ is the cultural enjoyment which enforces the ego, whilst ‘Jouissance’ is a violent pleasure that dissipates cultural identity to the point of discomfort, and which unsettles the subject’s relationship to language and representation; ‘our pleasures then come from both experiencing the consistency of self-hood and its collapse’. Such fan participants are involved in the ‘guerrilla activity’ of
resistance. Exhibiting ‘tenacity, trickery, and guileful ruse’, they consistently resist the authoritarian forces of the media, the judiciary, and the police by small incursions that continuously deploy ways of cheating the social constraint.60

From the 1960s social attitudes have become increasingly liberal towards sexuality, the body and language. The exception, it would seem, is when words are used by football fans. Whilst some chants may contain obscenities, they constituted, arguably, the only point at which ordinary spectators could at times exert opinion and perhaps influence the club. Others contain words which are meant to be offensive by attributing feminine characteristics and general incompetence to men. Such accusations dressed up in imagery and metaphor are part of a decades-old ideology, a collective conscience, which will not disappear simply because politicians pass new laws to criminalize such opinions. The demonization of such fandom occurred in parallel with Thatcherism, with its denial of the concept of society and disdain for any form of display of collective working-class culture. Since the 1980s successive administrations have pursued the idea of an individualized, privatized, bourgeois mentality and seem to find collective displays of cultural solidarity to be incomprehensible and threatening. It is not coincidental that the police have pursued all-seater stadiums and encouraged family unit participation, so that the traditional macho football supporter is confined to individual seating that destroys the old terrace culture. This mirrors the political denial of any collective activity which has the potential to represent an alternative vision of how things might be. Today the paying match-day consumer is promised a commodified leisure experience for the family that will not require him or her to think or worry about any form of ‘pollution’ from the unsightly.61 Controlled by panoptical CCTV surveillance, the aim is to make discipline automatic, behaviour is normalized, with the audience reacting in a manner predictable to the point of docility. That seen as detracting from the norm produces a ranked and separated hierarchy of individuals, as the body itself becomes the site where power is exercised and the ‘deviant’ arrested and criminalized. All the time, the authorities assure us of their righteousness in defeating the icon of evil – The Hooligan.
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NOTES

The authors are extremely grateful for the helpful comments on an earlier draft that were offered by Gerry Finn and other referees. The authors are, respectively, a partisan follower of Sheffield United ('The Blades') (GA), and an uncommitted native of Newcastle who occasionally reads newspaper reports on Newcastle United ('The Magpies' or 'Toon Army' (MY). The data on chants and songs are mostly taken from the fieldwork records of GA, and, except where mentioned, relate to events at Bramall Lane, the home of Sheffield United.

5. C. Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (London, 1966). Perhaps Edwin Ardener has shown most complete potential of the terms 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' chains, taken from the Saussurian school of linguistics, and from Jakobson. These chains have what Ardener describes as a 'transactional' quality, allowing semantic or metaphorical understandings that have an ascriptioned programme of meaning or value to the user. These, he argues, are socially apprehended, having been generated in a multi-dimensional space. In the circumstances here, the passion and the joy, or the pain and despondency of the game, are linked and encompassed by the transactional nature of the wearing of the favours, the body paint, the gestures, the songs, and the whole gamut of being at the match with others who are singing and chanting in unison; and this generates a linear syntagmatic chain of such events that creates paradigmatic meanings and values for those who are socially involved with them. See E. Ardener, 'The New Anthropology and its Critics', Man 6, 3 (1971), 449-67. H. Chapman (ed.), Edwin Ardener, The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays (Oxford, 1989).
8. The Football Association, in conjunction with private business sponsorship and senior police officers, began a campaign to attract more women into football grounds from the mid-1980s. The government-commissioned Popplewell Report published in 1986 considered that women's role in football crowds was 'essential' but did not explain which women or why. Later, in 1990, the Taylor Report after the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster recommended that women be encouraged to football grounds as a means of altering the behaviour of some of the men therein. The fairer sex was idealized in terms that defined them as the opposite of brutish men, and a process was begun which saw the promotion of virtue epitomized by femininity and motherhood attempt to cleanse the polluted site that was the working-class, male-dominated football ground.
9. As Bromberger points out, the 'dramatic qualities' of the game equate with those 'genres of theatrical production' which provide a unity of time, space and action. This favours a communion between spectators and players. But of course in a theatrical production we always know the tragedy will end in tragedy, and that the love story will have a happy ending. At the match, however, the anguish of never actually knowing how it will end is what gives the whole drama an extra emotional dimension. C. Bromberger, 'Fireworks and the Ass', p.117.
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22. Ibid., p.114.


26. This has been noted by P. Marsh, E. Rosser and R. Harré, The Rules of Disorder (London, 1978). In recent years compilations of football songs have proved a commercial success, see L. Bulmer and R. Merrills, Dicks Out! The Unique Guide to British Football Chants (Kent, 1992); A. Thrills, You’re Not Signing Anymore (London, 1998).

27. T. Mason, Association Football.

28. The favourite of the decade repeated some two decades later, in a nostalgic recall of earlier times:

Well we ain’t got a barrel of money
But we’ve got Woodward and Currie
And wi’ Eddie Colquhoun
Promotion is soon – U-ni-ted
(sung to the tune of ‘Side-by-Side’, a pop song of the early 1950s).

29. Perhaps the most frequent chant heard in many grounds in the 1980s was one borrowed from the Latin American pop song ‘Guantanamera’, with a player’s name being repeated after an opening line. For example:

One Tony Currie
There’s only one Tony Currie
One Tony Curieee...
There’s only one Tony Currieee.

In the 1984–85 season one team member received the continually repeated chant of ‘Joe, Joe, Joe, Joe...’ whenever he scored or flattened a rival; especially if he then ran close to groups of Blades in the crowd and acknowledged them with a wave or a wink.

30. One message – in which the more polite in the crowd substituted the word ‘damn’ for the word ‘fuck’ – went:

We’re on the march wi’ Basset’s Army
We’re not going to Wembley
But the Blades don’t give a fuck
Cos’ we know we’re staying up
Cos’ United are the greatest football team
(to the tune of ‘Ally’s Dream’ – the Scottish World Cup Squad Song, 1978).
(The reference here to 'staying up' relates to the constant relegation problem United faced between 1990 and 1994.)

31. In 1986 the constant chant of 'Porterfield Out' was believed to have achieved the desired result when the chairman sacked manager Ian Porterfield.

32. How 'big' a problem football hooliganism is will always provide a careful analyst with a phenomenological problem. However, for those who wish to avoid deeper reasoning and debate, comfort can be drawn from the annual release of arrest and ejection figures from the Football Intelligence Unit. This public relations exercise always guarantees a lot of media coverage based on the numbers presented compared to the previous year. Nobody seemingly asks for a breakdown of what changes are proffered (if any) or how many defendants are subsequently found guilty. Nobody to our knowledge has even analysed such figures in the light of the expansion of the 'hooligan-related' legislation or as a consequence of a new morality imposed on football in the past 15 years.

Between 1996 and 1998 the Metropolitan Police pioneered in two London football grounds a technique that combined covert video surveillance with covert listening devices with a view to arresting those suspected of using 'foul and racist' language. Selecting individuals beforehand, the police placed tiny microphones adjacent to their seat and focused the camera on them, thereby recording sound and vision. The stated aim of police was to gain evidence to prosecute 'racist' football fans (Evening Standard, 6 October 1997). One technique not publicized by the Met. saw them locating an undercover police officer wired with listening devices adjacent to suspected racist fans. The failure of this operation at a North London ground was not made public.


34. One third of the league management were sacked or had their contracts terminated because they were unable to provide a winning formula in season 1997-98.

35. Instruction in the form of edicts to players to be modest in the goal-scoring celebration has come from the European governing body UEFA since 1974; the English FA since 1980, and from the world governing body FIFA since 1984.

36. M. Young, In The Sticks, p.112.

37. The famous Tommy Docherty, when manager of Manchester United in the late 1970s, attained a notoriety beyond his tactical prowess when it was discovered he was having an affair with the wife of the club’s physiotherapist. At many away games the home fans would use this fact in their chants in an attempt to embarrass the visiting manager. Years later, when managing other teams, the affair still provided rival fans with ammunition.


39. In July 1996 one of the top traders in the Futures and Options Exchange of the London Stock Exchange was fined £500 by the Exchange for 'foul, abusive and embarrassing language' directed towards another member of staff. The trader’s racist abuse towards a black 'floor observer' was considered severe by colleagues and therefore brought a reprimand. In an informative article covering the case, a reader learned that fines of around £50 were levied each month to traders for various transgressions, ranging from swearing to fighting on 'the pit' of the floor's trading area. Various interviewees spoke of a racist and aggressive work culture fostered by the needs of acquisitive capitalism. Fellow traders spoke of how dealing in millions of pounds created a stressful situation in which aggression and racism were manifested. The Independent, Business Section, 15 August 1996.


42. Bailey, for example, describes verbal contests amongst the Doludoi of Bisipora: '... words, unlike sticks and stones, do not break bones. The contest was conducted through an endless series of confrontation ... encounter, challenge, and assertion [and these] were met by counter-
challenge and counter-assertion ... Points are scored by the quality of the gauntlet and the
dexterity and style with which it is flung down.' F. Bailey, *Strategies and Spoils: A Social

43. The anthem of socialism had a most uncomradely message:

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Forever and ever
We'll follow our team
Sheffield United, they are supreme
We'll never be master'd
By the Wednesday bastards
We'll keep the red flag flying high.
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44. With the pseudo-creation of a paramilitary organization came a song of celebration:

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Aye Aye Aye Aye
Shoreham Republican Army
Wherever we go, we fear no foe
'Cos we are the S.R.A.
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This was sung to the melody of a Mexican folk song from around the 1930s called 'Ceilito
Lindo' (beautiful little heaven), and which was translated into an American popular song some
20 years later. Now it was to become a chanted song in Sheffield some 20 years further on. One
aspect of this is worthy of comment, for the fact remains that Latin American melodies are
consistently used in these carnivalesque proceedings; and perhaps thus make some sort of
oblique comment on the understanding of the Latin American tendency to equate football and
its spectacle with music and the carnival. Around the mid-1980s, for example, Newcastle fans
took the music of the Conga, and allied it to a paean of praise to a newly acquired Brazilian
player, all the while making another oblique comment on the recently fought Falklands War;
and all in a few lines:

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Oh we've got Mirhandina
He's not from Argentina
He's from Brazil
He's fucking brill... (repeated ad infinitum, just as in the Conga).
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45. The ballad was meant to show the depths of love a man had for a woman. It was appropriated
here to declare an individual's love for the entity called Sheffield United FC:

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Wise men say
Only fools rush in
But I can't help
Falling in love with you
Take my heart
Take my whole life too
But I can't help falling in love with you...
United...United...
(to the tune of 'Falling in Love with You').
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46. Why any specific tune appears is hard to say, but one consistently puzzling factor is how these
young men suddenly present a verse to a tune that to all intents and purposes has drifted from
the airwaves and the public consciousness some decades earlier. Thus, generations of Blades
sang a song which was played on the airwaves decades before they were born. This fact did not
matter because the words were part of an oral tradition:

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You are my sunshine
My only sunshine
You make me happy
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When skies are grey
You'll never know just
How much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away.

47. A chant surviving from the 1970s, and sung in pubs before the match a dozen years later by the older Blades, ran:

All the Blade Men love their gravy [beer]
All the Blade Men love to spew
'Cos when you've had a triple gallon [24 pints]
It's the natural thing to do
Nice 'n greasy, goes down easy
And it comes up just the same
So if you see a fellow spew, it's the natural thing to do
Call him a 'Blademan' – 'cos that's his name
(to the tune of 'All the Nice Girls Love A Sailor').

Another chant with similar sentiments was the most popular for over 18 years beginning in 1982:

You fill up my senses
Like a gallon of Magnet [local beer]
Like a packet of Woodbine’s [strong cigarettes]
Like a good pinch of snuff
Like a night out in Sheffield
Like a greasy chip butty
Like Sheffield United, come fill me again
(to the tune of John Denver’s ‘Annie’s Song’).

48. One ditty the Sheffield Tourist Board did not use went:

Sheffield is wonderful
Oh Sheffield is wonderful
It's full of tits, fanny and United
Oh Sheffield is wonderful
(to the tune of ‘When the Saints Go Marching In’).


50. In 1987–88 Chelsea fans began waving sticks of celery, singing a bizarre sexual chant that had little or nothing to do with the game:

Cel-er-y, Cel-er-y...
If she don't come
I'll tickle her bum
With a stick of celery
(Guardian, 11 February 1986).

54. And yet, when the police denied Sunderland fans a presence at a Newcastle derby game in the 1996 season, it was not the match that was reported on in the media the next day, but the unbalanced support of 36,000 Newcastle fans, which meant any Sunderland effort went unrewarded by crowd participation. As the match reports concluded, the game became an irrelevancy in the light of the long periods of utter silence and the strange one-sided lack of conflict and apposition engendered.
December 1995 when the Arsenal club were so concerned their multi-million pound all-seater stadium was lacking in atmosphere, that, in the absence of fans singing, they introduced a 'singing section' to the former North Bank terracing. Ideally, this becomes authorized singing, with chants and songs the authorities approve and provide in their song sheets.

61. In 1997 Bristol Rovers FC implemented a 'no swearing' terrace at their Memorial Ground. Citing complaints about bad language from the occupants in the newly-built corporate hospitality boxes, the club threatened to ban language miscreants from the ground if found guilty of using expletives. This new morality was not just reserved for spectators. In November 1998 the assistant manager of Sheffield United FC was arrested in the middle of a match by a WPC policing a game at Queens Park Rangers. His crime was to use swear words when shouting at his own players. Held in custody for six hours he was bailed to return to the police station a month later whereupon he was cautioned but not charged with any offence.

The ludicrous impositions at times crossed national frontiers. In June 1998, shortly before the World Cup began in France, police in the North London district of Camden issued a warning to those who would be watching the matches live on televisions in pubs. In what was termed a 'zero tolerance' campaign aimed at stamping out any racist or 'xenophobic' chants, plain-clothed police officers were to be deployed in licensed premises to seek out breaches of the Race Relations Act. In what must rank as one of the most surreal acts of policing in the history of the Metropolitan Police, undercover officers watched groups of young men shouting at television screens following football events up to 900 miles away in the anticipation that they would in their chants offend foreign nationals who may happen to be in, or passing, the premises.