

The fulfillment of man's needs and the abolition of poverty cannot be attained unless the present system of social hierarchy undergoes thorough revolutionary changes. And if a revolutionary change comes to exist, no one will be able to predict the necessity of an aesthetic perspective after the revolution.

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CULT AND SPORT: THE CASE OF BIG RED

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This paper explores the importance of sport in our society. Several metaphors for sports are presented, including the military and religion. It is argued that for some fans, sport takes on the quality of a secular religion which serves to offer continuity in life, an institutionalized agency for catharsis, a transcendent experience giving followers an escape from the mundane, and a sense of belonging. Using football at the University of Nebraska as an example, empirical support is given for the notion of sport as civil religion.

Though it is certainly conceivable that there are countless persons for whom the name Nebraska elicits absolutely no associations, it is more doubtful that anyone who has heard of the state is not aware of "Big Red" football: the only game in town. It is an activity of sufficient impact to have attracted the attention of television (a special), magazines (*Sports Illustrated*, *National Geographic*), and has been noted by "legitimate" authors (e.g., James Michener). It is also felt to be worthy of attention by sociologists. The theoretical frame of this paper revolves around the concept of cult. That is, the "complex of gesture, word and symbolic vehicle which is the central role of this phenomenon . . ." (O'Dea, 1966:p. 39). Further, the cultic act "is a social or congregational act in which the group re-enacts its relationship to sacred objects . . . and in so doing reinforces its own values" (O'Dea 1966:p. 40).

As Klapp (1964) has suggested, cults may take on a variety of interests and forms including that of recreation. Certainly, sports in general, football in particular, and University of Nebraska football specifically, can rest comfortably under the rubric of a "recreational" cult. It is hoped, however, that this paper will be suggestive of more than mere recreation.¹ Of course *tradition*

seems endemic to college football, and though this in itself lends credence to the notion of a recreational cult, it paradoxically has "establishment" connotations which would seem to imply some category other than cult. It is here asserted that tradition sets the stage—provides the backdrop of scenery, as it were—on which this "little world" is enacted. "The transcending power of drama works even when the drama itself is part of the [larger] social structure . . ." (Klapp 1964:p. 254).

There is, then, an element of drama, a theatrical flair, that is part of this tradition which begins to suggest something more going on than "just a game". Specifically, it is felt that *fanatism* coupled with unique "local" rituals lend Nebraska football a (possibly latent) "centering function",² suggestive of a cult. As such, there is an assumption concerning a "civil" or secular religion, and consequently, the metaphor of religion is given some consideration in another part of this paper. The use of metaphors in sport suggests it represents more than a mere contest. By employing a religious metaphor we are suggesting that sport (like religion) may be a source of identity and belonging (i.e., a sense of community), transcendence, and catharsis.

Before turning to "Big Red" football in particular, however, it would do well to briefly consider spectator sports generally in our culture, as this is the context from which the phenomenon arose.

There is no lack of evidence, in all kinds of odd places, of the overwhelming importance of sports in American life. In many American newspapers the sports page constitutes the largest specialized daily section. One-tenth of *The World Almanac* is devoted to sports. In both newspapers and the Almanac, the sports sections are greater in volume than the sections about politics, business, entertainment, or science (Beisser, 1967:p. 2).

In addition to the presentation of sport via the printed word, it is further "validated" by omnipresent television coverage and, of course, massive live audiences. It should be emphasized that the "goodness," "badness," or danger of this consumption of sport is not the concern of this paper.³ Instead, it is wished only to

acknowledge the rather impressive mark of sports on culture, and, incidentally, the ironic reticence of sociology to more fully examine the area.

Such an examination offers advantages as a result of sport's permeation of our society. "Sport often provides a means of uncovering major social value themes (which) in turn channelize behavior" (Snyder, 1974:p.359). In addition, sport is also "interrelated with social institutions, values, and social change; indeed via sport we may traverse much of the social landscape" (Snyder 1974:p. 359). As Ball and Loy have noted, "sport is an especially useful substantive area within which to do sociological analysis" (Ball and Loy 1975:p. 40). Such analysis could easily be quantitative in nature given sports' meticulous and easily accessible records and statistics. For the purpose of this paper, however, concern is given to the symbolism and imagery of sport in an attempt to grasp the meaning it has for its adherents. For as Stone notes, man "imbues his play with meanings and affect, arranges it, stylizes it" (Stone, 1955:p. 84). It is thus maintained that we bring meaning to sport and it, in turn, gives its fans something more than the mere contest.

It was suggested in the introduction that sport possesses a dramaturgical quality, and as a consequence it is appropriate to consider the metaphors of sport. By doing so, one may begin to understand the motivation of the fan. Perhaps the most apparent metaphor for sports in general, and football in particular, is that of the military. "Many games and athletic contests have a function similar to the military, and in more or less evident form exhibit something of war's relentless insistence on victory"⁴ (Weiss, 1969:p. 32). This has been made abundantly clear in some of the imagery employed by our two most recent Presidents. "In some ways football more than any other sport in America seems to evoke local pride, patriotism, love and 'fight for the team'" (Miller and Russell, 1971:p. 57). Terms such as "blitz" and "in the trenches," and "the bomb" are common to both football and the military.

Besides the military, many see football as a microcosm of our own society. "Football is a modern invention that metaphors the modern business world—specialization, division of labor and

efficiency" (Snyder, 1974:p.360). If this is the case, fans' "worship" of football may represent the worship of society, a thought that strongly suggests football as a modern variant of the totem. Durkheim (1954) in his classic study of religion, asserted that the worship of God (through the totem) was a worship of society. Through the rites of the cult "society reaffirmed itself in a symbolic acting-out of its attitudes, which by strengthening the commonly-held attitudes, strengthened society itself" (O'Dea, 1966:p. 12). For Durkheim, then, "... before all, rites are means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically" (Durkheim, 1954:p. 387).

This brief discussion of Durkheim nicely serves as an introduction to the last and most germane metaphor to be considered in this paper: religion.

Many previous functions once carried out by the church were, of course, usurped by the creation of other autonomous institutions. The separation of church and state is the most obvious example. With less influence in matters of state, education, and the family, religion's province is firmly entrenched in "spiritual" concerns. This ultimately is taken to mean those issues that revolve around order, meaning, and purpose in one's life. An important corollary of this is that the religious experience offers transcendence, a rising above the more mundane prosaic features of "everyday life," i.e., the profane in Durkheim's analysis. As a consequence, religion is filled with rituals that are at once transcendent and offer the worshipper a sense of belonging. Through industrialization and rationalization our society has become much more secular in orientation, yet the need for ritual has not diminished but rather has been displaced in secular activity.⁵

The evolution of man has demonstrated a constant and prevailing need for ritual . . .

. . . With the reduction of ritual in religion, it is not surprising man turns to other "rites" to again see some form of quasi-order to his life. For many, sport fulfills this function (Slusher, 1967:p. 130).

It is therefore suggested that for some followers of the "home team," sport takes on the quality of a secular religion. There exist some intriguing parallels. "Both sport and religion employ intricate rituals which attempt to place events in a traditional and orderly view" (Slusher, 1967:p. 121). To place events in an orderly view is to give one a sense of meaning. "Sport, as religion, is a form of symbolic representation of meaningful realities" (Slusher, 1967:p. 129). It is through these symbols and rituals that sport is transformed into something much more than the contest itself.

If the metaphor of religion and sport holds, one would then expect the functions of each to be somewhat similar. At various times religion has served to offer continuity in life, an institutionalized agency for catharsis, a transcendent experience giving followers an escape from the mundane, and to foster a sense of belonging, of community. With the secularization of religion these functions are sought elsewhere, many times with a cultic flair.

It has been noted elsewhere that sports is digested (directly and indirectly) with ferocity by its fans. A partial explanation may lie in the fact that sport, as a "little world," offers its followers an island of continuity amidst a sea of chaos.

We suspect, for example, that the sports pages in the daily newspaper are important for many consumers primarily because they provide some confirmation that there is a continuity in the events and affairs of the larger society (Stone, 1955:p. 89).

An additional attraction for the fan is the opportunity to "blow off steam" in a setting that is appropriate for such behavior. "Another function sport has often been said to perform for its consumers is the legitimate outlet it provides for cathartic-expressive behavior and for the pent-up frustrations which would otherwise lead to serious violence"⁶ (Kando, 1975:p. 234).

Closely aligned with this cathartic function is that of transcendence. It was elsewhere noted that sports may be approached dramaturgically. "A central fact about all drama, as

opposed to daily life, is that the role one gets is not part of his regular routine and structure" (Klapp, 1964:p. 254). The "big game" then represents a brief hiatus from the ordinary mundane routine of the "everyday world", a movement, as it were, from the profane. Thus, the *event* of the game is approached, by many, with the intensity that a revival has for others. The fan "performs his weekly tasks in perfunctory manner, but when it comes time for sports he comes alive and is transformed by his enthusiasm" (Beisser, 1967:p. 226). The "houses" of this transformation, the gathering place for worshippers, are great, grey, concrete and steel cathedrals. Stadiums "are little more than shrines for spiritual activity. They allow man to escape the boredom of everyday life and reach out to a larger existence" (Slusher, 1967:p. 127).

Perhaps the most poignant attraction sport-as-religion has for its followers is the sense of "belonging" and "community" it elicits.⁷ "The fan in relationship to his team is like the member of a family or tribe. He can share intense feelings in victory or defeat" (Beisser, 1967:p. 129). Viewed thusly, sport coupled with such variables as a winning tradition, lack of "competition" from other sources, and a vociferous following, can offer a sense of *identity* and belonging.⁸ In short, "sport has become a function of communal involvement" (Slusher, 1967:p. 136). In terms of Football at the University of Nebraska, this communal involvement extends over the entire state and at times beyond.

GO BIG RED: The Case of Nebraska's Civil Religion

For an initial appreciation of the extent to which University of Nebraska football "Cornhuskers" offer their followers an identity, one need only consider the number of faithful. Beginning with the 1967 season, Nebraska has played before 87 consecutive sellout crowds. This record streak will continue as the entire 1977 home season is again sold out. Even with continual stadium expansion from 1964 through 1972, which raised the seating capacity to 73,000 plus, demand has always exceeded supply. Last year, the mere *suggestion* of an additional 8,000 seats resulted in over 20,000 ticket requests in less than a month.

At the university, an extraordinarily high proportion of students (roughly 90%) buy season tickets, which in some instances are sold to the highest bidder (read: "more faithful"). During their first general registration, graduate students, as a matter of course, are checked for full-time status, "so you can be eligible for football tickets."⁹ As if these numbers were not impressive in themselves, they become extraordinary when considered in relation to the state's small, and in most places, sparse, population. On a football Saturday, Memorial Stadium is not only by far the third largest "city" in the state, but the third largest county as well. This devotion on the part of the fans begins to suggest "Big Red" as a source of identification, and it is important to note that this is not exclusive to the more populous eastern quarter of Nebraska. Fans stream into Lincoln from all areas of the state, including the western panhandle, a pilgrimage of over 900 miles roundtrip for some faithful. Indeed, this sense of identification stretches beyond the borders of Nebraska. Former in-state fans now living in such places as California and Texas make an annual voyage to attend at least one home game. In addition, many followers trek to "away" games in large enough numbers at times to constitute half the crowd (the 1975 Kansas State game for example). The 1976 Hawaii game (a travel agent's dream) sent 20,000 fans to Honolulu.

As previously mentioned, many thousands wishing to attend Nebraska games cannot do so, owing to the large demand for tickets. Yet these people may share vicariously in this seasonal celebration: highlights of all Husker games can be watched on "The Tom Osborne Show" each Sunday night, and radio coverage is massive. The broadcast network carrying Nebraska games consists of 54 stations located in all areas of the state. It is difficult to be in a public place during a game and not be in earshot of a radio broadcast. For those wishing to attend the game in person, listen to the broadcast *and* keep their hands free and ears warm, "earmuff" radios may be purchased.

Likewise, newspaper coverage is impressive. The Lincoln papers begin daily features of Nebraska football news in mid-August with their annual football review. From this point to the start of the season, the front page of the sports section will

daily feature a story on some aspects of Nebraska football fortunes (i.e., returning stars, new players, coaches, etc.). Once the season begins in September, coverage becomes even more expansive, of course, including scouting reports ("Know the Foe" appears each Thursday), and Nebraska depth charts. The Sunday paper quite naturally devotes several pages to the preceeding game. This generally includes two pages consisting entirely of photographs of key plays, interviews with both winning and losing coaches and players, and various commentaries on the game. Though this coverage decreases markedly after bowl games have been completed, one may still find occasional stories throughout the year. This would include notes on former Huskers now playing in the professional ranks, and speculations on the previous or forthcoming season. In addition, rather extensive coverage is given to the annual intersquad scrimmage played in the Spring. This event, incidentally, generally draws over 10,000 fans.

The favorite gathering place of the faithful, of course, is Memorial Stadium, looming large on the campus of the University of Nebraska. We have suggested that for the football fan the stadium may be likened to a house of worship. This cathedral metaphor received strong support on December 11, 1976, when a Husker football player was married in the south end-zone of Memorial Stadium. A news photo of the story fairly dominated the front page of "The Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star".

In addition to a large and faithful congregation, "tithings" are offered which (along with a continual packed house) assist in keeping Nebraska football, and consequently the entire athletic program, "in the black" without the aid of tax dollars. These donations are given by various auxiliary organizations and include the "Extra-Point" and "Touch-Down" clubs. Members' contributions range from one to one thousand dollars a year. The "Wheel Club" consists of auto dealers who supply coaching and scouting staffs with cars. Members of the "Beef Club" supply training tables with Nebraska-raised steak.

With such a large number of followers (be it in person or via radio), Nebraska football serves a (cultic) "centering function" in that it is a common ground of interest and passion for the state: it offers a source of pride and sense of identity.

The reason football has taken on this identity function for Nebraskans is a source for speculation. From 1962 to 1972 the "Cornhuskers" were coached by Bob Devaney (currently athletic director and deity) who established a winning tradition. From the time of his arrival, Nebraska has been a consistent "top ten" finisher, including consecutive national championships in 1970 and 1971. The 1971 team was voted "team of the century" by sports scribes. This winning tradition, coupled with a total lack of competition from other university level or professional teams, and a dearth of scenic wonders, undoubtedly helps fuel the mystique.

The impact of this seasonal rite can be further assessed by other sources. Artifacts celebrating Big Red football are ubiquitous. They range from humble matchbook covers to oil paintings. Phone booths around campus and the adjacent downtown Lincoln are topped with a powerful-looking, rosy-cheeked, straw-hatted Cornhusker. Many stores offer a variety of Cornhusker glasswear and assorted knick-knacks. For those more thoroughly smitten, a toilet paper dispenser with radio pre-tuned to the Nebraska game is reported by Michener (1976:p. 221).

Nearly all the artifacts (those listed above are only intended to suggest a range) share a common quality: redness. Red is the color of "true believers" and can be seen everywhere, most conspicuously in the attire of the faithful. Entire ensembles are unveiled with the arrival of fall fashions. One may simply wear a red scarf or jewelry, or abandon all restraint and purchase a complete wardrobe, including shoes, socks, pants, shirts, sweater, coat and hat. Perhaps the quintessence of the Big Red follower was described by author James Michener. As reported, a couple lived in a house in which "everything on the ground floor, including carpets, furniture, wall paper, decorations, and a three-wall bulletin board dominating the living room was shattering red, including [the couple], two attractive people in their mid-forties who during the football season dress only in red" (Michener, 1976:pp. 219). For the true aficionado, there is an additional artifact which takes on the quality of a religious relic. Local businessmen have purchased the old astroturf and are selling the historic carpet in small, Nebraska-shaped pieces.

Customs of coverage and clothing aside, one may further gauge the impact of Nebraska football by the "suspension of ordinary rules" during home games. Indeed, because a sell-out is assured, many teams stand to gain more financially by travelling to Lincoln each time they play the Cornhuskers. As a consequence, Nebraska nearly always plays more games at home during a season than on the road. 1975 for instance, found Nebraska playing the first five games, and seven out of eleven regular season games, at home. The 1977 season finds six of the first seven games at Memorial Stadium.

As so many people do attend the games, "ordinary" parking rules are suspended in favor of those reflecting the amount of financial commitment. University lots near the stadium, normally allowing only cars with a proper parking sticker, are cleared the night before a game, to make space for "special" ticket holders. One lot, directly behind the stadium, is reserved for campers and larger recreation vehicles, many of which have travelled hundreds of miles. On returning home, those taking the Interstate are warned during the game that certain "normal" access routes are closed to interstate traffic. In fact, Big Red even indirectly influences governmental agencies, as the following front-page article in the Lincoln Journal of July 28, 1977 suggests:

By The Associated Press: Nothing, absolutely nothing, is allowed to get in the way of Big Red football.

The Nebraska Roads Dept. has vowed to halt any construction projects on Interstate 80 that might delay Big Red football traffic en route from Omaha to Lincoln.

Don Cook, district construction engineer, said Wednesday that five bridges near Lincoln on I-80 and 180 leading to Memorial Stadium are being resurfaced this summer.

If they're not finished by Sept. 10, the date of Nebraska's first home game, the construction companies will have to pack up and leave.

Cook said *all construction contracts in the Lincoln area carry a stipulation that they must be completed by the first Big Red game.*

"If the construction isn't done, the company has to quit, clean everything up and finish it next year," he said.

From what has been completed so far, Cook figures all construction should be finished by the first week in September.

There is no choice.

The onslaught of many fans begins on a Friday afternoon immediately preceding the Saturday game. It thus takes on the quality of an event, spilling into activities prior to and following the game itself. Motel rooms in Lincoln are filled on football weekends, and are the scene of countless celebrations. This indicates another loosening (if not suspension) of ordinary rules, as the consumption of alcohol is seen by many as an appropriate pre-game and post-game ritual. The author personally rode to one game in a city-owned "mini bus" rented by a private club. The bus was packed far beyond its legal capacity. Countless six-packs of beer were sold and consumed en route to the stadium.

The central focus of the event, of course, is the game itself, and a football Saturday finds Lincoln streaming with fans resplendent in red, winding their way to the stadium. If one of the many ads requesting tickets has been left unanswered, the fan may still purchase a ticket from scalpers who line the periphery of the stadium. Informal norms have established the distance from the stadium scalpers may stand. The mode of advertising (other than ads) consists of holding the tickets or fingers in the air. The price asked depends on the importance of the game and/or the devotion of the fan. Though sub-freezing temperatures may keep some at home, the stadium is always filled and blazing in red by game time.

The game itself must simply be experience to be believed. Certain rituals occur during the game that serve not only to identify the faithful, but also "localize" the cultic flair of college football. Dressing in red is the most conspicuous of such behavior. Then, too, one could add the "ritual of red balloons," in which thousands of these spheres are released by the faithful upon the first Nebraska score. For many this is followed by the "ceremony of oranges," in which the fruit is hurled onto the field after each

score, symbolically indicating the faithful's desire to see the Cornhuskers in the post-season Orange Bowl. At times (including last season) these "magic rites" fail, and Nebraska finds itself playing bowl games of lesser prestige.

Regardless of the season's outcome, however, there is "always next year," and starting in January the faithful await eagerly the annual Spring game in April and the August "football review" in the Lincoln papers. These two events (and the anticipation of them) serve to titillate and remind the faithful that Nebraska football *remains* the only game in town.

NOTES

1. This is not to imply that "mere" recreation is not a worthy endeavor for sociologists. The author acknowledges the importance of recreation in social life (especially with the increase of leisure time).
2. See Orin E. Klapp, *Collective Search for Identity*. New York: 1969 Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
3. Vanderswagg (1972) considers a phenomenological approach, suggesting "not to regard experience with suspicion, but to accept it as a valid and meaningful aspect of being or existing in the world" (p. 220). See *Toward a Philosophy of Sport* cited in the bibliography.
4. This insistence on victory is particularly acute for Nebraska football, whose fans have been somewhat jaded by recent (1970 and 1971) national championships, and a decade of being in the final "top ten." Losing has become tantamount to "sacrilege."
5. See O'Dea.
6. In terms of institutionalized religion, festivals such as Mardi Gras once served the same purpose.
7. Any reader interested in the forms "community" has taken in impersonal society is directed to Ralph Keyes' *We the Lonely People*, a wise and perceptive introduction to the topic.

8. Variables such as "big time" football and a winning tradition may be crucial in differentiating Nebraska (cultic) football from other schools (e.g., South Dakota).
9. Based on the author's personal experience.

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BEYOND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS IN THE
SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIOLOGY: THE CASE OF
BEHAVIORISM AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

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The paper focuses on an analysis of the potential impact that the behaviorist and ethnomethodological paradigms may have on academic sociology. Structural analysis in the sociology of sociology (Friedrichs, 1974; Mullins, 1973) is criticized and countered with an analysis which stresses the subjective process of theory acceptance and rejection exploiting Gouldner's concept of "domain assumptions" (1970). Utilizing data from a large survey of sociologists queried during the mid-sixties (Sprehe, 1967), the fit between various groupings of sociologists' "domain assumptions" and the "background assumptions" of each theory are analyzed. The results of such an analysis suggest that ethnomethodology may be more attractive to certain groupings of sociologists than behaviorism, thus contradicting in part the argument advanced on the basis of a structural analysis. The paper calls for a recognition of the dialectical interplay between "structural conditions" and "subjective forces" in the adoption and rejection of theory.

INTRODUCTION

During the latter half of the sixties there emerged a discussion over which theoretical paradigm would replace sociology's fallen prince, functionalism (Gouldner, 1970; Friedrichs, 1970). This paper explores that question further by

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