

1-1-2012

Reading between the numbers: the colonial rhetorics of fantasy football and the illusion of control

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**READING BETWEEN THE NUMBERS: THE COLONIAL RHETORICS OF
FANTASY FOOTBALL AND THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL**

by

ROBERT KYLE KELLAM

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2012

MAJOR: COMMUNICATION

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to any “C” student who never thought they would go to college, let alone get a Ph.D. As I have learned, life will always present you with moments to start believing in yourself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I have to thank my advisor, Dr. Kelly Young, for his incredible work and dedication in helping me write this dissertation. Every time my energy toward this project waned or my focus went awry, he was always available to rejuvenate my ideas and keep me on track. Plus, he patiently answered the hundreds of annoying phone calls I made to him at various hours of the day when I was mentally blocked or firmly lodged in confusion. Ultimately, I have to thank Dr. Young for continually making me better.

I also have to show my extensive gratitude to the members of my committee: Dr. Jim Cherney, Dr. Mary Garrett and Dr. Jim Brown. Dr. Cherney was always willing to sit down with me and hash out tough theoretical issues within this project, which were usually scheduled as brief 15-minute sessions that turned easily into an hour or more. Many of the ideas in this dissertation came out of those discussions. Dr. Garrett, as the only member of the committee who has never played fantasy football, was always prepared to ask me tough questions about aspects of the game I took for granted, which of course was instrumental in improving this project. Oddly enough, she was the only member of my committee to seem concerned as to how my fantasy teams were doing throughout the year. Dr. Brown, my outside member, was a constant asset in providing theoretical material and ideas about realms of academia I was largely unfamiliar with, new media and gaming, which became such an integral part of this dissertation. I appreciate him choosing to stay on with the project, despite moving on to a new position, university and state.

I also want to recognize and thank my wonderful girlfriend Anna Zimmerman, who was loving, supportive and insightful during the course of this project. She was there for me when I needed her most, to make me some soothing herbal tea when I was stressed, to listen to me while I sorted out ideas over and over (and over) and to celebrate with me when I finished. Whether she knows it or not, her relentless curiosity for learning and sheer brilliance in critique were inspirational in my writing and finishing this dissertation.

I need to also thank a few friends of mine who played a role in this project. First, my friend Ryan Alvis, who was the first person to ever invite me to join a fantasy football league and got me interested in the NFL in the first place, and my friend Christian Norman, who keeps me interested to play every year with incessant phone calls and conversations about the upcoming NFL season. Also, I need to thank my friend and fellow graduate student Anthony Cavaiani, who would meet with me at various places around the Detroit metro area as we held each other accountable to work on our respective dissertations.

Finally, I would be remiss at this point if I did not acknowledge my friend, colleague and mentor, the Reverend Dr. George LaMaster. Not only was George the first person to ever believe in this project back in November of 2009, he is also ironically the person waiting on me to finish it as I move on to Marian University to work under his guidance. What started as a random observation regarding slavery and fantasy football turned into this dissertation thanks to George's encouragement and wisdom.

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CHAPTER 1 JOINING THE LEAGUE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When Barack Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008, it caused many pundits to question whether or not racism had finally ended in America (McWhorter). While a black¹ individual had finally been elected to the highest office of the country, anyone could examine the social, economic, and material conditions of blacks in the United States and easily conclude that Obama's election did not end racism. Just as the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation and the rise of the civil rights movement did much to earn blacks certain policy level changes in the American legal system, neither action actually ended racism. Indeed, colonial practices still persist in the United States and the current material conditions of many blacks are evidence of that oppression. As Claud Anderson explains, "One of the first lessons that free blacks learned was that without money and power, freedom for a black-skinned person was freedom in theory only. They were still bound by their conditions and non-white skin color" (11). Anderson further explicates that the current conditions of black Americans is comparable to those of a developing nation, possessing a marginal percentage of the wealth, power, and resources in comparison to their white counterparts. Thus, while Obama's election was a symbolic achievement for black citizens of the United States, it still remains that one act of empowerment cannot effectively remove an assemblage of

¹ I use the term "black" here instead of "African-American" for two main reasons. First, it aligns with many of the theorists that I use in this study to support my arguments about colonialism and race relations in the United States. Second, I believe the term "black," as opposed to "African-American," is more inclusive of non-African-American black peoples (such as African or Caribbean immigrants) who are subject to the same oppression as their self-identifying African-American counterparts.

racism that is much more systemic and built on hundreds of years of colonial cultural logics.

Part of the reason for blacks' continued struggle, despite legal emancipation, has to do with the way ideology functions in the United States. Ideology is difficult to locate, name, and see because it operates as and within normalized discourses. Douglas Kellner defines ideology this way:

Ideology is thus part of a system of domination which serves to further oppression by legitimizing forces and institutions that repress and oppress people. Ideology itself forms a system of abstractions and distinctions within such domains as gender, race, and class, so as to construct ideological divisions between men and women, the "better classes" and the "lower classes," whites and peoples of color, "us" and "them," and so on. (*Media Culture* 61)

Thus, while we can say that the colonial practices of the United States have been predominately removed from its legal discourses, it still manages to function in everyday cultural logics. As Kent Ono argues, "The United States might properly be termed Neocolonial, where the colonial infrastructure, if at times critiqued, was never entirely dismantled, where quasi-colonial practices continue to be practiced, and where evidence of the continuation of colonialism litters media culture" (7). In particular, media culture is a primary place where colonial ideology operates because what we see is not necessarily the overt representations of American colonial practices, but residual sorts of depictions that maintain power relations between black and white people in the United States and harbor our racist views that have survived through slavery, emancipation, civil rights, and even the election of Barack Obama.

However, it is not just that certain problematic textual and visual representations of blacks passively exist in our media culture; rather, white media and a white populace have found uses for these representations, transforming black culture and black identity

into a commodity. As scholar bell hooks notes, “Images of race and representation have become a contemporary obsession. Commodification of blackness has created a social context where appropriation by non-black people of the black image knows no bounds” (7). When understanding the prolific nature of black commodification and the continued social, economic, and material struggles for blacks in the United States, it seems fitting to draw a connection between the ways that these representations may not cause black marginalization but certainly help reassert and maintain the ideological system that has led to these conditions.

In this project, I explore how fantasy football, a gaming byproduct of the National Football League (NFL), may be one such apparatus of media culture that utilizes these representations and recontextualizes these logics. Extending an already colonial ideology of the NFL, fantasy football may represent an ideal place to study the commodification of bodies in our contemporary media landscape because of the way that the game almost exclusively reduces NFL players to their textual-numeric representation and statistical production, giving players their “fantasy value.” In this project, I will interrogate fantasy football because I am suspicious of the way the game otherizes, commodifies and dehumanizes NFL players through its discourses, procedures and visual rhetorics, which position the players solely as a means to production. Further, I am interested in understanding the ways its digitalized representations affect the way we come to see, know, and interact with race. With this in mind, I analyze how fantasy football utilizes these colonial representations and as a consequence rhetorically influences black and white race relations in the United States. For these reasons, fantasy football is a critical intersection and entry point to explore American colonial ideology and racial logics.

In this chapter, I open with a brief explanation of fantasy football so that readers have a cursory understanding of what it is and its significance and then justify popular culture, like fantasy football, as an area of study. Next, I review the literature relevant to critically reading fantasy football, exploring the way commodification and racial tensions have emerged in contemporary sporting culture. Finally, I outline the chapters of this dissertation and discuss each chapter's contribution to the overall project.

What is Fantasy Football?

Fantasy football originated in a New York hotel room in 1962 when Oakland Raiders part owner Bill Winkenbach figured out a way to take player game statistics and use them as a competitive scoring system for fans following certain players (Dickey). Specifically, the game is played when players, acting as fantasy team owners, join a league, usually consisting of anywhere from 8 to 16 teams operated by each respective person in the league. Each team then participates in a fantasy draft where owners select NFL players from a pool predominately consisting of skill positions such as quarterback, half back, or wide receiver in order to fulfill the requirements for a starting lineup that might be a reflection of the real NFL game. Once the desired NFL players are drafted and owned by their respective fantasy teams, the players' statistical production is monitored each week to determine the amount of points scored for the owner. Owners then use this scoring system to compete head to head each week against other owners by a predetermined schedule within their fantasy leagues to decide winners and losers, much like the actual game. Also in the spirit of NFL football, the teams with the best records by the end of the season participate in the playoffs to determine the league champion. Often times, this prize results in not only the pride of ousting fellow fantasy owners, but

also large cash sums derived from payments to join the league.

In the time before the Internet, fantasy football was managed the “old-fashioned” way, following stat lines by watching television, hearing it on the radio, or reading the newspaper. Fantasy owners were responsible for arduously tallying scores with pencil and paper. However, the spread of the Internet in the mid-1990s has morphed Winkenbach’s creation from a simple hobby into a booming industry used to market the NFL and increase fan participation. Sports writer Mark Yost explains:

Current estimates put the number of people playing fantasy football each year at 20 to 30 million. Over 3 million fantasy football magazines are sold before each season. Every major sports network has added fantasy football components to their broadcasts: Web sites, newspapers, and television shows. (101)

There is little doubt that media outlets have capitalized on the fantasy football craze. For the NFL, this popularity translates into more brand awareness and branding opportunities. According to Yost, fantasy football “has made everyone care a lot more about the NFL and pay strict attention to what’s going on in football. By any marketer’s measure, that’s never a bad thing” (102). There are multiple websites that provide an outlet for fans to participate in fantasy football, with some of the most trafficked sites being nfl.com, espn.com, and Yahoo! Sports. These hosting sites exponentially enhance the fantasy experience by not only taking the difficult task of calculating the scores out of the equation, but by providing a centralized location for player statistics, NFL news, and league communication.

With this rise in popularity and connection to the real game comes the potential for fantasy football to transfer and mask the colonial power relations of the NFL, and as a result, rearticulate this ideology to millions. However, while it is modeled to the real game and fueled by its game play, fantasy football is *not* the NFL. While it is intertwined

with fan participation of the NFL, following fantasy football is not necessarily the same as following the NFL, despite flowing through similar mediums and documenting the results of the same games. Thus, in reading fantasy football with this critical perspective, I will explore how fantasy football is still connected to the colonial ideology of the NFL game and sports at large and how its rhetorics resituate the ideology established through the practices of colonization.

The Particular Significance of Popular Culture

Considering that fantasy football is a mediated artifact played by 20 to 30 million people worldwide, I want to further discuss how its popular cultural appeal gives the game a particular significance for study. After all, through the emergence and popularity of cultural studies, the critique of popular culture has moved from a discipline concerned with the banal representations of culture to a meaningful nexus where power relations are contested and attitudes, affect, and identity are formed. Kellner writes, “Media culture spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not” (*MC 2*). Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge that popular culture plays an integral part in not just our entertainment but also our social relations of power. Popular culture is particularly important to study because it serves as a rich portal into a centrifuge of multiple layers of meaning and social practices that other purely political approaches do not have access to. Additionally, Grossberg contends that as the political sector continues to appropriate mass culture into its practice, the popular becomes a gateway into studying politics and daily life (*We Gotta Get Out of This Place*). Used as a tool of ideology, popular culture is an artifact of dangerous significance

because of its ability to have widespread dissemination and appeal, but also remain seemingly innocuous.

Also, media culture enables us to examine old forms of oppression in contemporary ways. Kent Ono claims, “Despite apparent innovations to ... contemporary media culture, much of what we see on our TV screens ... is really a face-lift of life from a previous era, rather than a thoroughgoing social transformation” (20). Ono argues that, while progressive technologically, contemporary media culture is backwardly filled with impressions of a colonial past that perpetuates neocolonial oppression. However, this applies to more than just television. I want to examine how fantasy football may operate as a deliberately colonial form of domination that is also a complex, multi-mediated phenomenon. Hence, the mediated nature of texts like fantasy football allows us to examine new ways that old forms of dominance can propagate in multiple trajectories.

Finally, the specific theoretical significance of studying the popular lies in the epistemological value it has in our current society. As mediated culture becomes a ubiquitous phenomenon, so has the multiplicity of its reproduction as consumers use media and reinforce the cultural norms it teaches. Kellner argues that media culture “has become a dominant force of socialization, with media images and celebrities replacing families, schools, and churches as arbiters of taste, value, and thought, producing new models of identification and resonant images of style, fashion, and behaviour” (*MC* 17). By studying and critiquing media culture, we tap directly into our most prevalent mode of cultural reproduction. For early cultural studies theorists like Raymond Williams, being able to study popular culture meant finally getting a pulse on the locality of a particular

place and time, something he called the “structure of feeling” (qtd. in Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* 12). Therefore, to study a popular culture artifact like fantasy football means getting access to a politicized and local knowledge whose availability will become increasingly smaller with the passage of time, placing its theoretical and political value of the utmost importance.

While approaches in cultural studies like Williams and Grossberg have demonstrated the value of using popular culture as an entry point to study the complex power relations that flow through the social fabric, they also tend to focus too much on the conjuncture or the context, ignoring the peculiarity of specific rhetorics that demonstrate how power and ideology function in particular ways. Context is certainly important to consider as it assists in tracing the emergence of cultural artifacts and their particular meanings or affects to various audiences of consumption. However, specific rhetorics of time and place are equally valuable because they show how ideology manifests in particular locations and operates in differing ways within these specified contexts. As Rosteck explains, the deliberate separation between cultural studies and rhetorical criticism is not one with productive ends, as both approaches are equally committed to understanding the ways that power emerges discursively and influences social relations. As a result, understanding their intersection is the most effective way to reach our goal as critical scholars and bring about positive change (21). Thus, my project is not meant to be essentially cultural studies or rhetorical, as I find cultural context and specific rhetorics equally important to interrogating artifacts of media culture, but rather an intersectional approach that attempts to connect specific rhetorics with broader

contexts of their emergence, while also understanding the ways that ideology functions uniquely within these rhetorics.

Therefore, in this project, I analyze the discursive, procedural and visual rhetorics of fantasy football and show how these specific rhetorics rearticulate and recontextualize the colonial ideology within the NFL and sports at large through differing rhetorical modes. This approach is appropriate because it examines how these various colonial rhetorics of fantasy football operate differently while also acknowledging the broader sporting context in which they emerge, placing my study at the intersection of both cultural studies and rhetorical criticism. Through this approach, I am able to use the rhetoric of popular culture an entry point to study broader contexts of power relations and ideology even as I investigate how this artifact of media culture recontextualizes this colonial ideology in specified and diverse manners. Throughout this project, I hope to demonstrate how both approaches can aid rhetorical and cultural critics and I will provide suggestions for future scholars' work in the critical study of popular culture and rhetoric. With the significance of fantasy football and popular culture in place, I begin this assessment of fantasy football and colonial ideology with a survey of relevant academic literature.

Literature Review

Colonialism, Slavery, and Civil Rights

To explore how fantasy football may be read as an apparatus of colonial ideology, it is first prudent to begin with an examination of United States colonialism. After all, it is brutal colonial practices that established the black and white relationship in the United States that still exists today. To begin, French anthropologist Georges Balandier defines

the colonial situation as, “the domination imposed by a foreign minority, ‘racially’ and culturally different, over a materially weaker indigenous majority in the name of a racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority” (qtd in Spurr 5-6). Spurr further defines the concept as “a set of relations is put into place between two different cultures; one fast-moving, technologically advanced, and economically powerful; the other slow-moving, and without advanced technology or a complex economy” (6). In the United States, this separation materially manifested itself most directly through the act of slavery. Slavery is not an inherently black-white racial issue as there was enslavement of many non-black civilizations historically and black-on-black enslavement as well (Anderson). However, in the United States, the term “slavery” has an almost exclusive connotation to the white enslavement of black people brought to the United States through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The act of slavery is the epitome of the United States’ colonial situation and it continues to serve as the primary frame in discussions of civil rights still today. As Anderson explains, “Both the disparity between white and black living conditions and inequitable allocation of resources are centuries-old problems. They are a major legacy of the ‘peculiar institution’ called slavery” (10).

The system of slavery in the United States indeed created the disparity between blacks and whites living within its borders, but more specifically through slavery, we can point to the cultural and discursive practices that played a role in subjugating the black body as an object. Through slavery, the black body no longer belonged to his or her own person, but instead it became the property of a white plantation owner. When whites acted under the assumption that they own blacks, black people lost their autonomy as individuals and humans. They merely became an object to be owned, never the owner.

Law professor Patricia Williams speaks to the denying and privileged nature of ownership when she compares her great-great grandmother, a slave in the 1800s, to a small fox hunted by two different men. She concludes that both “were either owned or unowned, never the owner. And whether owned or unowned, rights over them never filtered down to them; rights to their persons were never vested in them” (156). The institution of slavery in the United States put body ownership into its public policy and guaranteed that black bodies were the possessions of whites. This process denied blacks their human rights and personal freedom.

The public policy of ownership is not the only result of slavery. After all, whites did not seek to own blacks simply to strip them of their human rights. Rather, the ownership of blacks was the means by which whites cultivated black labor. As Anderson notes, “A slave’s life was committed to producing wealth and comfort for white masters” (11). Thus, the black body became an important possession for whites because of its ability to increase economic growth. For example, as white plantation owners possessed more black slaves, plantation labor production and financial growth increased. Essentially, the black person was reduced to a commodity to be bought, sold, and valued based upon their ability for labor. In fact, in the slavery marketplaces, this is exactly how the bodies of slaves were coded and as a result, the black body was reduced to a commodity because of its subsequent importance in white wealth. It is precisely what perpetuated the obsession and desire of black bodies for white consumption. As Johnson adds, “Gazing, touching, stripping, and analyzing aloud, the buyers read slaves’ bodies as if they were coded versions of their own imagined needs” (149). Therefore, slavery not only played an integral role in creating the public, legal discourse of ownership that is so

prevalent in the black-white racial tensions in the United States, but it also established the institution by which black bodies became an object of commodity and desire for whites.

White colonization and slavery practices did not merely take away black peoples' rights or freedoms; in addition, through the process of ownership and appropriation, black culture and identity were stripped as well. As Frantz Fanon contends, "White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact" (14). Fanon is alluding to the idea of myth, that what is seemingly black culture is actually white ideology. Sandoval further explains, "Fanon's chiasmic metaphor reproduces the violent and sickening vertigo called up in the process of masking as survival under colonization by race, a disguise that, as dominant powers have it, conceals, represses, denies, deforms, or erases" (83). Additionally, Fanon draws upon the issue of autonomy for black peoples in an ownership paradigm. He argues that ontologically, black people have no existence of their own; they have no definition besides that of being situated relative to whites. As Fanon explains:

Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man ... The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him. (90)

Written in 1957, Fanon's comments do not assume the progress made in the country with the rise of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which fought to restore black ontology, autonomy, and identity, at least in the United States. On the surface, it is easy to assume that the tensions have dissipated. However, Robert K. Merton argues

otherwise:

Racial antagonisms are so deeply embedded in our society that ... they seem to hang on forever, appearing in new contexts year in and year out ... Race relations in America are the way they seem. At the outset, relationships between the races were very open, if contradictory. Whites were slave masters, and African Americans were slaves. Power and freedom accrued only to Whites. This relationship lasted for centuries, despite the espousal of democratic ideals as the guiding principles of American society. After emancipation, these relationships were hidden, very often mean-spirited and evil, but no less a part of everyday life. (qtd in Smith 8-9)

Put differently, slavery set up a system where blacks were desired, owned, marginalized, and commodified. Further, black culture was appropriated and black identity was stripped by white domination. Thus, while the civil rights movement attempted to change the public policy of black citizenship and the culture of racism in the United States, these changes did little for black empowerment due to the overwhelming impact of colonialism. As Anderson maintains, “The Emancipation Proclamation and subsequent Constitutional Amendments legally freed all blacks and granted them citizenship, but without social and economic resources these newly granted rights amounted to little more than paper rights” (12). And, as Anderson further notes, “The socioeconomic inequalities that existed between whites and blacks during and shortly after slavery are now structural” (13).

One of the ways that these inequalities manifest in a contemporary and ideological way is through the area of representation. As Douglas Kellner elucidates:

The politics of representation thus probes the ideological images and figures, as well as its discourses, which transcode dominant and competing political positions in a society. In a mass-mediated image culture, it is representations that help constitute an individual’s view of the world, sense of personal identity and gender, playing out style and lifestyle, and socio-political thought and action. Ideology is thus as much a process of representation, figure, image and rhetoric as it is of discourse and ideas. (*MC* 60)

Thus, while the traditional methods of colonization may have subsided in United States, at least in its historical forms, contemporary media and cultural representations allow colonial desires and practices to persist. Ono contends that these can be found, “in the form of film and television fantasies and other products of media culture, even though they so often indirectly refer to it” (3-4). Through our media culture, we still find ways to ideologically own, possess, and commodify black bodies and culture. As hooks writes, “It was this black body that was most ‘desired’ for its labor in slavery, and it is this body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed” (34).

While colonial ideology is prolific in multiple media outlets, one specific area where this issue has become the most problematic is in the area of sport, which has historically been identified as a place for colonized bodies to gain social status, economic growth, and political economy (Smith). However, as I will detail in the next section, sports are a primary way that slavery practices and colonizing discourses have been able to stay subversive and integrated in American culture. As a result of this persistence, greater economic, political and social power imbalances in black and white relations remain.

Colonialism in Sports, the NFL and Fantasy Football

Sport is an arena where it seems that larger colonial struggles have ended. Yet, black athletes must continue to contend with issues of power, ownership, and representation. According to Smith, “The sports realm, though viewed by so many as a realm of equal opportunity, is just as riddled with loopholes and false hopes as so many other structures in America” (9). Specially, sports become a critical place to explore

issues such as representation and power because of their epistemological role in understanding our own culture. Kellner argues, “Sports today are a major part of the consumer society whereby individuals learn the values and behavior of a competitive and success-driven society” (“The Sports Spectacle” 306). This power is partially maintained through the use of myth. As Miller contends, “National mythmaking through sport is common as a means of generating new habits amongst the citizenry. Myths encourage active participation at the physical as well as ideological level” (*Globalization of Sport* 3).

In particular, the American sports complex has been generating many myths that work in the service of colonial logics and the marginalization of blacks. One such myth is the idea that whites are “intelligent students” and blacks are “natural athletes” (Powell 249). This common myth used in sports media is a marker of the same trope used in the Antebellum South in which blacks were believed to be not as intelligent as whites, but their bodies are strong, fast, and durable. Furthermore, the myth points to the continued media’s obsession and desire for black bodies in our culture. Thus, rather than becoming an area of empowerment for black athletes, the American sports complex engages in the same rhetorics of ownership, commodity, appropriation and misrepresentation of the black body that was established and popularized during slavery. As Rhoden maintains, “Even in 2005, with African American athletes making up a so-called majority in professional football and basketball ... access to power and control has been choked off. The power relationship that had been established on the plantation has not changed, even if the circumstances around it have” (x). As a result, sports are an ideal realm to study the ideological persistence of slavery and segregation rhetorics because it is an arena

where it is so pervasive and harmful and yet also so “ideologically innocent, popularly understood as ‘just a game’ or ‘natural [*sic*]” to audiences (Gilliard 3).

Specifically, the body is a site where we see the struggle over power manifest so clearly in sports. As Miller suggests, “Sports have become governed not by administrators *tout court*, but by venture capitalists, with the body their target” (*Sportsex* 9). After all, the body is the “content” of sport. For instance, sport pushes the body to its physical limits, controls it in particular ways, measures its production, and utilizes it as the central core of its spectacle. Additionally, the body is what defines athleticism and separates sport from other forms of entertainment. When considering the role that the black body has played in popularizing and developing sport, as well as the historical relationship maintained between white owners and black bodies, a connection can be made to the critical role that sport plays in our cultural positioning of black bodies. According to Alexander, “Black bodies in pain for public consumption have been an American national spectacle for centuries” (78). Sports media not only portray black bodies in particular ways through the sporting spectacle, but also describe them through a language that harkens back to the colonial discourse of the 19th century. As DuCille argues, “It’s interesting to note how professional sports repeats the language, though not the economic conditions of slavery: owners, players—sometimes called properties—buying, selling, trading” (qtd. in Oates, “Erotic Gaze” 85). This discourse of ownership, commodity, and marginalization is most evident in the NFL, as it is often referred to as the “Old Plantation South” (Rhoden).

From practices of team ownership to the discourse surrounding the April draft for new players, black oppression is prevalent and sustained in the NFL. For example, over

two-thirds of the players in the NFL are black, as compared to less than one-fourth head coaches and zero owners (Oriard; Smith). Although blacks are the majority of players, their marginal status keeps many of them off the sidelines or in the front office in positions of power. According to Smith, “Marginality can explain why numeric dominance does not lead to power or economic or political domination. This concept is very useful when analyzing why African American athletes do not own or control playing privileges” (42). Additionally, Michael Oriard, former NFL offensive lineman, makes a similar argument in his book, *Brand NFL*:

From such evidence it would seem obvious that the National Football League ... represents the absolute triumph of merit over racial prejudice. The reality, of course, is more complicated, not just because the men with the headsets on the sideline remain disproportionately white and those in the owners’ suites exclusively so, but also because race itself is so burdened with loaded significance in the United States. (210-211)

Moreover, Smith argues, “Fewer than ten African Americans hold head coaching positions in professional football, a sport which over 65 percent of players are African American” (36). Additional progress stalled when, according to Oriard, “The NFL almost acquired its first black majority owner in 2005, until Reggie Fowler failed to qualify financially and had to settle for a minority partnership in the Minnesota Vikings” (244). Because of these disparities, Oriard further maintains that the NFL, “could not yet escape its perverse resemblance to an Old South plantation with millionaire field hands” (245).

However, it is not simply that blacks are left out of the owning rights. Much like Williams’ notion of “always owned or unowned, never the owner,” black athletes are in a perpetual state of possession, whether it is by NFL owners or fans. This ownership is again evidenced and contested through the commodification of the black body. For

instance, Thomas Oates argues that the NFL draft, in its obsessive and sexualized desire for black bodies, puts black players in the same owned position that was present before Emancipation. He writes, “The draft ... creates a sadly familiar white fantasy in which black men are cast as primitives who are identified primarily with their bodies, while white men take their accustomed place at the top of the constructed hierarchy.” (“The Erotic Gaze” 86). Thus, black men, by way of their subject position and black bodies, become commodities for the NFL and its fans. Oates further explains that the draft “serves to reassert the white male power structure by positioning increasingly non-white athletic bodies as commodities and encouraging fans to imagine themselves as potential possessors of these bodies” (“The Erotic Gaze” 88). In part, these bodies are deeply commodified through the process of enumeration, which itself reduces the athletes and their bodies merely to measurements and numbers, stripping them of their corporeal humanity (Oates and Durham). With the pervasive avenues of power in the NFL moving from white persons to black bodies, black athletes cannot avoid being owned or commodified, barring advancement for blacks in the NFL and maintaining it as a site where remnants of colonial ideology persist.

As a gaming byproduct of the NFL, fantasy football may utilize the same colonial logics and discourses present in the NFL. Fantasy football, in its almost exclusive numerical representation of NFL players, participates in the extended practices of enumeration. Furthermore, because it is the fantasy of being an NFL owner, not an NFL player, it may also take part in allowing a space for predominately white owners to control predominately black players through a lens of ownership. As an innocuous form of play boasting over 30 million users (Yost), it may be read as more subversive and

ideological and thus more widespread and harmful in the perpetuation of these colonial logics and discourses.

Despite its popularity and linkage to professional football, not much critical research has been done in the area of fantasy football. Some limited research exists about the societal role of fantasy sports at large. Davis and Duncan did a critical, qualitative study of fantasy sport participants to inquire about the game's appeals, experiences, and intended audiences. Using textual analysis, personal observations, and focus group, Davis and Duncan uncovered that "feelings of control, the necessity and importance of sports knowledge, the role of competition, and the opportunity for male bonding are important ways of reinforcing masculinity in fantasy sport participation" (260). These characteristics of fantasy sport participants and its culture are helpful to my analysis because they indicate the central position that ownership and control take in reaffirming a white, masculine ideology in fantasy football. Additionally, Davis and Duncan argue, "by allowing participants the opportunity to control rosters and trades, fantasy sport allows participants to experience the unique social power that predominately White, male owners of professional sports teams possess on a daily basis" (260). In later chapters of this project, I explore some of the specific ways that this relationship functions rhetorically and its effects.

Utilizing a Q-methodology, Farquhar and Meeds established a typology for fantasy sport users and their motivations. Five factors, or types, emerged out of their study: casual players, skilled players, isolationist thrill-seekers, trash-talkers, and formatives. Their findings echo similar results to that of previous research from Davis and Duncan in that most fantasy sport users are primarily interested in statistics, control, competition,

and trash-talking other participants. However, what is unique about the results in Farquhar and Meeds' study is that the need for community involvement was relatively low among all participants (1224). The finding that an interest in statistics and control is higher than an involvement in community building among other members may help explain the functionality of the colonial discourses and enumeration in fantasy football that will be explored more in this project.

In her dissertation, Hill argues that fantasy football is “the commodification of athletes, expressly black males, which I presume is moderated by both conscious and unconscious racism” (6). A large part of Hill’s commodification argument has to do with the hyper-masculinity of football and sports in general. She argues that fantasy sports reveal “the socio-cultural dogma of racialized masculinity with psychosocial links to fetish” (7-8). She goes on to argue that fantasy football is, “a site where black men are both situated in the body and simultaneously stripped of their masculine humanity” (8). Using Critical Race Theory to frame her analysis, Hill specifically utilizes a bricolage technique to uncover the multiple cultural layers involved within fantasy sports. She identifies six layers, or what she calls “transparencies”: (a) fantasy sports as a cultural transmitter of hegemonic ideologies; (b) the binary relationship between black/white masculine identity; (c) the permanence of racism and its emergence as aversive on the World Wide Web; (d) fantasy sports as a virtual dystopia; (e) pop cultural/media references to fantasy sports; and (f) the position of Critical Race Theory in fantasy sports research. Through uncovering and making sense of these layers, Hill attempts to identify the ways that the fetishization of black masculinity, combined with the whiteness present on the internet, contributes to the commodification and subsequent forms of conscious

and unconscious racism from the fantasy owner. In the end, she concludes:

The black male body is not only commodified through [fantasy sports], it is fetishized as [fantasy sports] participants become infatuated with players and obsess about their value and performance. [Fantasy sports] is a contemporary site of white privilege and domination. (111)

While I am indebted to Hill's analysis about the commodification of black bodies, I depart from her conclusions. For instance, I have doubts that fantasy football is the result of conscious racist practices by fantasy football users; this sort of conclusion is better left to psychological and social scientific methods. Rather, my study is concerned with how the logics and discourses of American colonial practices can be read in fantasy football because of the way that the game's language, procedures and visual rhetorics utilize this same logic. Thus, it may not be that users' racism makes fantasy football potentially racist; rather, it is that United States racial history and the overlap and rearticulation of contemporary colonial ideology may make fantasy football operate with a systemic colonial ideology found in its representations and game play. Fantasy football may utilize similar myths of race and the body and engages in the process of enumeration that Oates warns us about in the NFL. Thus, while Hill engages an important discussion on racism and fantasy football, I believe her conclusions and approach do not appreciate the rhetorical nature of fantasy football located in its discursive, procedural, and visual rhetorics.

Additionally, I am not concerned with how fantasy football makes one racist, but rather how it might serve as a cultural production of how we come to construct, view, and understand race. Thus, while I am studying fantasy football as a cultural artifact, it is only through fantasy football's culture that I am attempting to interrogate American race logics and the rhetorical maintenance and rearticulation of these ideologies. It is likely

that fantasy football functions within these logics through its own and an imported discourse of ownership. Further, I want to interrogate the ideological persistence of colonial metaphors in United States sporting and gaming culture as a means to expose in part our failure to truly empower black people in America. In doing so, I intend to explore how fantasy football may do this in several important ways.

Oates takes a similar approach in his work on new media and fandom in the NFL. Using a conjunctural approach outlined by Grossberg, Oates examines the cultural, economic, and socio-political factors that have contributed to the emergence of what he calls “vicarious management,” the ways that a mostly white NFL fan base is invited to use various forms of new media to control predominately black NFL players through a context of “racialized androcentrism” (“New Media” 33). Examining the NFL draft, the *Madden NFL* video game franchise, and fantasy football, Oates argues, “Vicarious management invites audiences to identify with the institutional regimes of the NFL (and the authorities who conduct them) rather than with the athletes” (32). He goes on to add that “athletes framed by this mode of fandom are positioned as property, often valuable, but ultimately disposable” (Oates, “New Media” 32).

While there is a great of overlap in Oates’ project and my own, there are some important differences between his work and mine. First, Oates very broadly notes the contours of vicarious management techniques in order to demonstrate how that discourse interacts with broader social, political, and economic contexts such as neoliberalism’s assault on the welfare state and marketplace value. However, he does not examine how vicarious management operates as a particular form that takes on different discursive, procedural, and visual forms with very different yet intersecting rhetorical effects.

Specifically, I am interested in how these particular discourses naturalize and mask colonial and racist ideology within the technical and visual elements of fantasy football. This remains unexplored by Oates and has important implications on our understanding of why vicarious management techniques, marketplace logic, and racist ideologies are accepted and remain unchallenged despite their problematic effects. Second, Oates scrutinizes the NFL, videogames like *Madden NFL*, and fantasy football as one broad text without examining the particularities of each type of rhetorical text. The differences between these three texts are important because the NFL and videogames like *Madden NFL* operate within the media spectacle that is professional football and, more importantly to my work, overly invested in the physical display of the body. Because the displayed body plays such an important role in the NFL and videogames, it is rather easy to make conclusions about the racial ideology of these texts. However, fantasy football as a text is very different; it goes to great lengths to obscure and de-emphasize the visual display of bodies. After all, the game only presents statistical representations of players and provides no easy means to discern the appearance or race of its players. Yet, the rhetoric about and surrounding fantasy football appears to operate through a number of colonial and racist logics. If this is true, then it is important for us to separately examine fantasy football in order to understand how this game becomes so invested with the body and race when the game takes such strides to avoid displaying the body and race. Examining why this happens might offer us a new understanding of how procedures and visual rhetoric operate to make us attend to race even when it is not obviously present.

One important reservation to note is that fantasy football is not purely white owners and black NFL players. Naturally, there are also white NFL players and black owners, black NFL players and black owners, white NFL players and white owners. However, according to an online survey conducted by Levy in 2005, fantasy sport users were roughly 98% male, 94% white, and 69% college graduates (qtd. in Davis and Duncan 247). As Davis and Duncan conclude, “the typical profile for a [fantasy sport] participant is a young, well-educated, White, and relatively affluent man; in short, fantasy sport participants occupy the most privileged rung on the social ladder” (247). This is rather similar to the NFL, whose administrative positions are almost entirely occupied by white men and almost two-thirds of NFL players are black. Thus, it would seem that there is a clear issue between black bodies and white ownership in fantasy football.

However, even though fantasy football owners are almost entirely white and a majority of NFL players are black, it still remains that a small margin of fantasy owners are black and one third of NFL players are white, making the colonial ideology of fantasy football seem contradictory or perhaps easily dismissed. Yet, this contradictory reality does not resolve the representational issue that exists between white fantasy football participants and black NFL players because it is the space where ideology functions so effectively. As Nakayama and Krizek argue in their study of whiteness:

As Foucault observed, discursive formations are replete with contradictions. In the assemblage of whiteness, we find that these contradictions are an important element in the construction of whiteness, as it is by these contradictions that whiteness is able to maneuver through and around challenges to its space. The dynamic element of whiteness is a crucial aspect of the persuasive power of this strategic rhetoric. (302)

If fantasy football consisted of entirely white fantasy owners and black athletes, then it

would be much easier to spot a clear issue of ownership. However, it is within the marginal contradiction of black owners and white players as well as the strong presence of both black and white players in the NFL that fantasy football is able to persist as a subversive kind of cultural practice. Using the work of Bonilla-Silva, Oates further reminds us that within a context of “new racism” that emerged after the civil rights era, racism often comes in the most hidden of forms and more importantly does not come in “straightforward terms” (“New Media” 46). He argues that this is the case with fantasy football and vicarious management. Considering the overpoweringly white profile of fantasy football users and black players outnumbering white players almost 2:1 in the NFL (Oates, “New Media”), this problematic relationship in fantasy football seems difficult, if not irresponsible, to ignore.

With this literature review in mind, I proceed with this study attempting to answer the following questions: In what ways do the cultural discourses surrounding fantasy football rhetorically function to sustain American colonial ideology? In turn, how does fantasy football rhetorically articulate the black and white relations that exist in the United States today? In analyzing fantasy football as a game, how do the procedures of fantasy football serve to rearticulate the colonial ways we still view bodies as commodities in the United States? Finally, how do we digitally perceive race in fantasy football when it is not actually represented through the traditional visual markers of race?

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation consists of six chapters. In chapter two, I lay out the method where I detail my three main theoretical approaches to studying fantasy football. I utilize postcolonial theory in conjunction with Grossberg’s method of articulation and Marxist

theory of commodification to dissect the colonial metaphors utilized in fantasy football discourse, connecting them to broader cultural articulations. I employ Bogost's procedural method to explore what the processes of fantasy football argue about commodification and ownership of NFL players. I use theories of visual rhetoric to analyze how fantasy football participants visualize race in the game. Furthermore, as power is central to my project, I define it in this chapter. The chapter ends with a discussion of the texts that will be used as the object of analysis of my study.

In chapter three, I use postcolonial theory to critically read the colonial metaphors used to describe NFL players in fantasy football. In combination with postcolonial theory, I use Grossberg's theory of reading articulations, as well as Marxist theory, to interrogate how fantasy football subjects may be articulated as commodities and provide a vocabulary to explore these connections. This chapter seeks to examine the connection between colonial ideology and the contemporary modes of representation that are so crucial to my project.

Chapter four examines the procedural rhetoric of fantasy football. Using Bogost's model, I analyze specifically the way that fantasy football may maintain a colonial ideology through its gaming procedures. In other words, I analyze how fantasy football's unit operations may limit the range of choices for its players and how this range of choices argues something in regards to player commodification and ownership. Critiquing fantasy football as an interactive game, rather than just a set of images, may potentially allow for new conclusions on how colonial logics continue to function as play.

Chapter five will be dedicated to study the visual rhetoric of fantasy football. To do so, I analyze the ways that the visual rhetoric of fantasy football might involve

processes of enumerating and obscuring bodies, which affect how we see and construct race in American sporting culture. In doing so, this chapter hopes to contribute to a larger discussion on how we perceive race and how the visual aspect of race is critical to understanding the perpetuation of colonial ideology in the United States.

Finally, chapter six lays out the conclusions discovered in the previous three chapters to answer the questions I raise in this chapter about the relationship between fantasy football, colonial ideology, and race. In doing so, I will examine the broader interaction between the discursive, procedural and visual rhetorics of fantasy football explored in the previous analysis chapters. I also offer limitations of my own study and offer forth suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2 METHOD: LEARNING THE RULES OF THE GAME

To read fantasy football from a critical perspective, my method consists of three main theoretical approaches. First, I use postcolonial theory to examine the discourses of fantasy football, examining the ways that this discourse serves to otherize NFL players in its descriptive language. In conjunction with postcolonial theory, I use Grossberg's method of reading articulations to describe how the NFL player has been constituted as a particular type of colonial subject. Also, I employ a Marxist vocabulary to assist me in describing how NFL players are commodified within fantasy football, through both the language and logic of the marketplace. Second, using Bogost's theory of procedural rhetoric, I examine the processes of fantasy football and how the relevant choices offered to participants within the game make arguments about the commodification and ownership of NFL players. Third, using visual rhetoric theories, I examine the visual aspects of fantasy football to show how prior knowledge affects how fantasy owners perceive race within the game. In this way, my method is multi-dimensional because I examine how the three approaches identify unique rhetorics of fantasy football that work together to rearticulate colonial relations in the larger American social order.

Therefore, in this chapter I will first preview my three main theoretical approaches that I use in the project, highlighting how each perspective allows me to study a specific aspect of fantasy football that is relevant to its peculiarity as a type of colonial rhetoric. Next, I will discuss power and resistance, explaining how power operates and functions through a critical logic. Finally, I will briefly define the texts that I use here in this project to study fantasy football from my three different theoretical approaches, detailing the significance of each artifact.

Theoretical Approaches

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is the guiding lens I use to begin my critical read of fantasy football and the discourses that otherize and dehumanize NFL players. This is done because the theory broadly responds to the lasting ideological effects of colonial oppression on disenfranchised peoples. For instance, postcolonial theory has effectively explored the way the French colonized parts of Africa, the British colonized India, and more central to my discussion, the U.S. brought African and Caribbean slaves to the U.S. to colonize them through slavery and thus participating in the African Diaspora. In the process of colonization, force, violence, and socialization are used to put the colonizer in a dominant position. Once in the authoritative position, the colonizer maintains this oppression through either violent means—which today are typically suppressed through global policing—or more likely through symbolic and ideological venues which perpetuate a logic of dominance that is accepted by both oppressed and oppressor. As Ono argues, “Since colonialism is generally not apparent, because it is repressed, colonialism persists through traces, markers, or symptoms, all of which register colonialism’s continuing presence” (12). Consequently, postcolonial theory helps identify and interrogate the subversive modes of this insidious and sustained oppression. In order to understand how I use postcolonial theory to read fantasy football, I begin by outlining some of the area’s defining concepts.

At its core, postcolonial theory interrogates the rhetorical construction of the other through colonial actions and discourse. The other is groups of people, typically nonwhite, who have been subjected to some kind of imperial power. The process of

colonization works to create the other usually through physically violent means but then transforms into a form of symbolic violence. Colonial oppression serves to sustain this othering process, even in the face of social, political, or legal gains made in the struggle for civil or human rights and equality. As Fanon notes, “I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality” (78). Aime Cesaire describes this devaluing process as the “thingification” of the colonized (42). With this in vocabulary in mind, postcolonialism can be considered the continuing process of “thingifying” colonized subjects in order to reduce their economic, political, and social status while simultaneously denying, masking, or naturalizing this process. Postcolonial theory can be used to probe how the “thingification” of subjugated groups is maintained through ideological means. While ideological in operation, colonial rhetoric is not a monolithic and consistent discourse. Rather, as Spurr argues, colonial discourse “makes for a rich profusion of rhetorical forms which often clash with one another, and yet which all enter equally into the matrix of relations of power that characterizes the colonial situation” (7). The instability and contradictions found in the logic of colonialism are important because these flaws, when exposed, offer sources for criticism and resistance to colonialism.

Part of the process of “thingifying” or othering the colonized subject is what post-colonial scholars refer to as “the gaze.” Fanon writes, “The black man is unaware of [his skin] as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin” (128). The gaze is not the way one looks, but rather the way one *sees*; it is the way we respond to what we see. In the context of the historical relationship between whites and blacks in the United States, the gaze has been used to create

difference, separation, and value in the social order. With the introduction of the mass media, the gaze proliferated and took on a form different than that of historic colonization. Although media representations allowed for increased exposure of black subjects, it did not necessarily lead to black empowerment. bell hooks argues:

There is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of black people. (2)

The gaze has less to do with the specific content or medium in which it operates, but more to do with the social codes of *who* is allowed to look and the socialization of *how* to look. Thus, these codes operate even if the image or content changes.

As mass media technologies proliferate and the colonial gaze adapts to these new circumstances, how the colonial subject is commodified has also changed. As media representations become more normalized and accepted, these racial depictions serve as a form of commodity for whites. As a result, “blackness” is manufactured and sold by mass media institutions to white audiences who buy and consume its contents largely for the purposes of entertainment. Furthermore, white consumers are encouraged to also take part in appropriating blackness and black culture, distancing the colonized subjects from their own practices and values. hooks calls this “eating the other” as the majority becomes obsessed in devouring what is produced and maintained by black culture. This “eating the other” and subsequent appropriation is just one manifestation of the symbolic violence created by the process of colonization. These concepts of otherization, gazing, and commodification will inform my reading of fantasy football rhetoric.

Drawing from Spurr, I use the phrase “colonial discourse” to specifically “designate a space within language that exists both as a series of historical instances and

as a series of rhetorical functions” (7). These rhetorical functions of colonial discourse include, but are not limited to: surveillance, appropriation, debasement, negation, and eroticization of the colonial other (Spurr). For instance, Oates’ work on the erotic gaze of the televised NFL draft operates in this way because the visual and discursive focus on the bodies of NFL players within the draft serve white audiences’ colonizing and eroticizing desires for black bodies. This process did not originate with the invention of American football, but rather with the introduction of the African slave trade; it is only perpetuated and rearticulated in the modern practices of the NFL. Another example is Grossberg’s work on how the United States’ political right in the late 1980s appropriated rhythm and blues music characteristic of black musicians to appeal to the affect of broader non-white audiences. Thus, colonial ideology is a logic that normalizes and sustains these various functions so that the colonial discourse rooted in historical practice continues to make sense. While much of the physical violence characteristic of any given colonial situation has subsided, the symbolic violence manifest in the colonial rhetorics of a specific time and place maintain the colonial ideology of appropriation, debasement, eroticization, etc. enacted historically by the oppressive colonial regime. In this way, colonial ideology is different than similar structures of oppression such as racist ideology or capitalist logic because it is characterized by a history of violent conquest and domination of people, land, and resources. As a product of this dominance, racist ideology developed as a system of racial classification of inferiority that can exist within and outside a colonial context, although it is highly enhanced within colonialism. Additionally, colonial ideology is different than capitalist ideology because it is grounded in manifest destiny and global expansion, which in part was concerned with resource

development. In comparison, capitalist logic is mostly centered in class and labor struggles. However, due to U.S. history with slavery and the development of its current race relations, these three ideologies operate very tightly together in many instances.

Grossberg's Cultural Studies

Following Grossberg, I use a cultural studies approach to help connect the language of fantasy football to broader postcolonial discourses and understand how the metaphors used within the game to describe NFL players articulate them as colonial subjects. In doing so, I read “text” in a rather broad sense through this lens. Rather than defining a text by its static and presupposed effects within a singular location, Grossberg proposes a more constitutive read that “locates cultural practices in complex relations with other practices which determine, enable and constrain the possibilities and effects of culture, even as they are determined, enabled and constrained by culture” (*WGGOTP* 21). In other words, Grossberg encourages critics to locate articulations of specific contexts that allow for the emergence of individual cultural practices. He defines articulation this way:

Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc. (*WGGOTP* 54)

These articulations lead to ways of interpreting the meanings of such cultural practices or sensibilities. A sensibility is “a principle of articulation which defines the planes and intersections of effects on which the practices of the formation operate” (Grossberg, *WGGOTP* 73). By identifying and reading sensibilities, we can determine how articulations interact with and enable our cultural practices and, in turn, link to other

cultural and political structures. For example, there is a general sensibility surrounding what constitutes the ideal family structure in the United States, which is a heterosexual unit assembled through the institution of marriage. This sensibility also includes the notion of men and women having straight sex for the purposes of procreation. It is through this sensibility then that the gay couple becomes articulated not as an ideal family, but rather a deviant one because they fall outside the ideal subjectivity made intelligible by this general sensibility.

While I deploy some of Grossberg's terms and method of cultural analysis, I will not be conducting a full analysis in the sense that Grossberg has mapped in his multiple writings on cultural studies. Oates, in his valuable work on vicarious management, has already undertaken such a project, connecting fantasy football to the emergence of new media and "white backlash" politics through the more economic, historical, and political connections in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I am thus indebted to Oates' project in that his critical work will inform much of my own. Where I depart from Oates is in examining the specific discourses of fantasy football through what Grossberg would call a "radical contextuality" and how those discourses are connected to existing structures of American colonial thought (*CSFT* 17). Following Birrell and McDonald, I read fantasy football critically, to "connect seemingly discrete events, incidents and events that are generated within the world of sport, to the larger social world" (283). Thus, I use Oates' project to inform my analysis and Grossberg simply as a way to read how the overlap between the two discourses may articulate the NFL player as a subject across multiple planes in fantasy football.

A Nod to Marxism

Marxist theory assists me in examining the ways that the statistical production of NFL players may be converted into commodity through fantasy football and then used by fantasy owners for their labor and production. Generally, Marxist theory critiques class distinctions established through the exploitation of labor in a capitalist society. This exploitation of labor is sustained by not only the class struggles of the upper and middle class bourgeoisie against the working class proletariat, but also by the use value of goods being converted into exchange values through capital, creating commodities. Under capitalism, these commodities play a valuable role in maintaining the class distinctions and continued exploitation and alienation of the workers to their labor. Because Marxist theory is not the primary guiding lens of the project, I will not provide a full description and historical review of Marxism here. However, I will explain how I understand the relevant concepts I will deploy from Marx's *Capital* here.

First is the creation of the commodity form from the transition of "use value" to "exchange value." Before capitalism, goods were worth their utility. For example, as Marx explains, linen would be worth its utility in making clothes; it would not be worth anything in its ability to till land. This is considered a good's use value. Before the days of capital, people produced their own goods through their own labor for their specific uses. Use values of goods kept workers tied to their labor and their products. However, once capitalism emerged and there was a division of labor among classes where workers produced goods for the ruling class, the worker was no longer producing goods for his or her own use. Rather, labor was used to produce goods that were then sold in exchange for a monetary form. This gave rise to exchange value, or that x amount of a good is

worth x amount of another good. Marx gives the example that 2 ounces of gold would be equal to 2 tons of iron. This exchange value is measured by the quantity of labor used to produce a commodity. Because it is difficult to always exchange goods for other goods, however, the monetary form was created as a representative mediator within this exchange. Thus, the monetary form became a means to weigh all commodities against one single unit of measurement based on its exchange value or the relative value of the labor used to produce it. As Marx explains, the shift from use value to exchange value created the division of labor between the ruling class and the working class, thus alienating the worker from his or her labor and the products he or she produces. This in turn gave rise to the commodity form or the abstract value of goods outside their use.

A second important concept for my project is the notion of commodity fetishism. The exchange value of a given commodity is developed by the labor expended in producing it, but people do not seek or characterize goods for their labor. Rather, as Marx explains, a good is valued for the product itself, which distances the worker's labor from the exchange of the product. This social process of distancing a good from its production is what characterizes commodity fetishism. According to Marx, despite a product being valued by its labor, the fetishism of a commodity by the consumer distances the worker's labor from the product and puts the emphasis on the exchange and the consumption of the product itself. This entire process gives rise to the specific alienation of the worker, or the distancing process of the worker from his or her labor and the product he or she produces in the name of capital.

This summary by no means describes all the nuances of Marxism and its approach. However, it does give a cursory understanding of some of the concepts I use to

read fantasy football critically. In each analysis chapter of this project, I deploy these concepts to help illuminate different aspects of fantasy football, especially in examining the labor of NFL players' labor represented as statistical production, the fetishism that may be involved in the consumption of NFL players through the game play, the buying, selling, and trading of these same players as commodities, and the language used to position them as commodities.

Since publication of Marx's *Capital* in the late nineteenth century, capitalism has changed form with the rise of proliferated mass and social media, informatization, and globalization, morphing into what many Marxists scholars have referred to as "late capitalism" (Braverman 175). In light of these developments, I see some difficulty in using Marx's concepts in *Capital* to read fantasy football without some slippage in the analysis. After all, the level of technological advancement in Marx's era would have made it difficult for Marx to theorize around the complex relations in today's marketplace. Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is a seminal work in updating Marx's theories in the age of late capitalism, addressing developments of the scientific-technical revolution, the rise in clerical or service labor, and a modern take on surplus labor and surplus value. Braverman's assessment of these developments helps me bridge Marx to my analysis of rather recent technologies. Thus, I will also use theories from Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* as a way to mediate some of the slippage I recognize in applying Marx's concepts in *Capital* to my texts.

Gaming Studies and Bogost's Procedural Rhetoric

Using theories of gaming studies, I examine how the procedures of fantasy football make arguments about its content and concepts. According to Dyer-Witheford

and de Peuter, gaming studies have largely interrogated gaming in three chronological phases: condemnatory, celebratory, and critical (xxiv). The first phase is characterized by scholars vilifying games for their impact mostly on youth violence. The second phase is characterized by scholars praising games for their narrative and aesthetic presence as rich cultural artifacts. Also within this phase, scholars became either “narratologists” who want to study games just like they would television, books, or film or “ludologists” who see games as cultural practices guiding by specific rules and codes (xxvi). The third phase represents the emergence of a moderate position between the two where scholars are neither condemnatory nor celebratory. Rather, these scholars are interested in discovering what is unique about games that allow them to sometimes have both positive and negative material and ideological effects on our social landscape. In particular, I draw from Bogost’s writing on procedural rhetoric to study fantasy football, which comes from this third tradition.

Bogost argues that procedural rhetoric is “the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular” (3). Traditionally, games have been studied using a surface type analysis, where the researcher asks questions about a game’s behavioral effects, technological function, or representational impact. However, these approaches do not allow for examination of how videogames *uniquely* argue through interactive process with the user. Instead, a procedural analysis operates within all of these surface effects, accounting for the uniqueness of the videogame that each approach ignores. This analysis puts a critical bent on the nature of each surface analysis type, with the game’s exceptional properties specifically in mind. It is not a pure form of any of the three, nor is it all three at once. Using procedural analysis, a critic can

analytically read a videogame for its distinctive properties and material impact, not just condemning or exuberating its effects, function, or rhetoric.

While a videogame does representationally argue an ideology through its images or narratives, it does so differently than a film or a book because a videogame utilizes processes in its rhetoric, which make claims about the actual processes of the real life scenario it is modeled after (sometimes only metaphorically). Gamers do not passively absorb video game rhetoric; they *play* it. Hence, its images and words become only part of the way that the videogame argues. The procedures of the game frame, contextualize and give life to the images; they are inextricably linked to one another through the procedural form. As one interacts with images of a game they are also interacting with the procedures of playing that game. Thus, the images of a medium must also always include its function or the unique properties that define how one interacts with the media. Additionally, the function of the game, while directly speaking to the nature of the media, also illuminates the procedural rhetoric of a videogame. The function of the videogame is part of the process by which the game's procedures are carried out, making the function not only important to media literacy, but also how the game makes claims about its representational content. When a gamer plays a game, the unique processes of playing the game and the representations within the game influence how the gamer receives its messages.

Furthermore, while there may be strong correlations or causal relationships between a videogame's content and human behavior, it is also important to account for the way that the game's procedure (read here as content and function) produces not only those same behavioral changes but also ideological ones. While a superficial approach

aimed at behavioral effects focuses on causality, a procedural approach is directed more at the potential for creating consciousness. For instance, it may be difficult to uncover if fantasy football really makes us follow the NFL more closely, as this could be attributed to several conflating factors. However, a critic can make reasonable claims about the ideology a game carries by reading its unique procedural texts. When a gamer absorbs the videogame's content through its function, he or she learns about the way these processes actually occur through choice (Salen and Zimmerman). Here, the procedural analysis makes the behavioral effects approach critical by focusing on the ideology that one might learn from the game. It is important to note here that both approaches study phenomenon with material effects, as false consciousness is tied to material conditions. However, procedural rhetoric takes the critical route to uncover how those material effects are linked with power and marginality.

My arguments should not be read as condemning work that examines surface effects. I believe that these studies are important for understanding a partial view of new media, specifically videogames. However, these studies, while foundational in many ways, do not take us far enough in understanding videogames. No longer marginal forms of technology or rhetoric, videogames are pervasive forms of expression. Thus, it is productive to move past superficial approaches that only highlight certain aspects of the games' use. Rather, as Bogost and Murray contend, we have to start accounting for the ways that games, in their procedural rhetoric, make claims about the world in which we live. A procedural approach gets us away from seeing audiences as passive receptors of mediated messages. In a hyper-mediated environment where videogames are ubiquitous, we need to account for the rhetorical "doing" of a game, not just its "being." As

McKenzie Wark theorizes, we have entered a world where real space and “gamespace” have merged. Games are no longer our escape from the world, but a way we have come to see it. They are “the very form of life, death, and time itself” (6). Thus, having a way to examine a videogame’s uniqueness critically opens up a way for us to analyze our world itself, not just the surface effects.

To perform a procedural analysis of fantasy football, I focus on the “doing” of the game, or the actions that are relevant and integral to game play. Then, in understanding each process, I examine how the game provides a restricted amount of relevant choices to play the game. These choices help me more specifically examine the procedures of the game that make arguments about its concepts, practices, and representations. In doing so, I make arguments about how the procedural rhetoric of fantasy football reinforces the commodification of NFL players and ideology of ownership within the game.

Visual Rhetoric and Racial Representation

The third main approach of my method involves critiquing the numerical representation of the game through visual theories of communication and rhetoric. In particular, I examine the role that fantasy football and its visual elements may have in relation to contemporary notions of race. Because skin color is such a defining visual marker of how we come to understand racial tensions in the United States and the NFL is a place where that tension manifests, I am interested in exploring how fantasy football mediates those racial depictions as a digital, interactive, and visual space that extends the play of the NFL beyond the competition on the field.

In order to approach fantasy football with a visual lens, a few visual rhetoric principles guide my work. The first is that visual rhetorics are inherently ideologically

charged because they allow for multiple interpretations without eventually providing clarity. For example, Hariman and Lucaites argue that iconic photographs are an effective way of reproducing ideology within a social order because of their ability to remain “relatively inarticulate,” yet depict “the dynamic negotiations that are the rich, embodied play of societal power relations in everyday life” (9). In short, pictures represent concepts that resonate with us, but because there is always room for interpretation, we can never quite identify exactly what it communicates. This gap in meaning is the space in which ideology is able to function effectively. As images are able to remain ambiguous, they leave space for multiple interpretations that may suite the needs of each individually viewer.

If the image is ambiguous and as a result ideological, then the image relies on our mental schema, or social knowledge, to make sense of what we see. In terms of Barthes’ semiotics, despite the existence of a shared signifier between multiple people, the status of the signified is always left to the experiences, knowledge, and ultimately the will of the receiver. Hariman and Lucaites claim that photographs, for example, are “storehouses of the classifications, economies, wisdom, and gestural artistry that make up social interaction” (10). However, how we access that knowledge or what we choose to see is dependent upon each individual viewer. Zelizer calls this the “as if” dimension of a photograph, where there is always space for the audience to fill in the context and make meaning. Prelli further writes, “There is, to put it directly, no way to see that which is displayed as it really is, unencumbered by our own partial points of view” (10).

Moreover, the visual is never isolated from other forms of representation or media. In other words, all media are mixed media. Mitchell reminds us that just as

senses are not isolated in everyday interaction, so it is true that we confront media that utilize varying ratios of senses and sign-types. These media require us to implement varying configurations of technological literacy as we make sense of the rhetoric we encounter; images are accompanied by captions, moving images are layered with voice over, and we use cell phones to both talk and text. Both the NFL and fantasy football are mixed media structures, as fans might watch NFL broadcasts on television, check their fantasy updates on computers, and can use their cell phones to monitor both. Furthermore, these practices become integrated as NFL broadcasts will provide fantasy updates and the results of NFL games are posted in news links on fantasy sites.

These principles of visual rhetoric allow me to question how the mixed mediated rhetoric of fantasy football constructs race in visually ideological ways. In doing so, I also can explore how visual representations in fantasy football reflect the ways we rhetorically construct race within our social relations. Likewise, these principles allow me to investigate the visual nature of digitized commodities. For example, in fantasy football, NFL players are represented in the game digitally by names, positions, and statistical production, which function to obscure race and the body from the owner. Besides a picture of the player's face embedded deep into a hyperlink, we do not ever see the physical characteristics of the player. This raises a number of important questions: If race is a visual construct, but not actually represented in the game by visual means, then how does the relationship between the player, their ways of seeing, and the game affect fantasy owners' understanding of race? More simply, I ask, how do we *see* race in fantasy football? Moreover, why is it that we see race in fantasy football at all?

Power and Resistance

Considering that power is an integral part of my study, as I am examining the ways that ideology functions within, around, and throughout sporting culture, I should take a moment to discuss how I define power. I understand and use the terms “power” and “resistance” very much in the same way that Grossberg has defined them in his conception of cultural studies, as a complex set of relations, borrowing specifically from Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari’s explorations of power and resistance. With this perspective, power is not a tangible thing one can possess or hold; rather, power *does*. It is purely relational and symbolic as a social construction that is created through the interactions of people, but its effects are often material. Some of the effects of power might include material conditions such as poverty and, on the other hand, includes the given range of agency one has in the broader social order. For instance, Grossberg argues that structures, one particular effect of power, “not only constrain and oppress, they also enable and empower” (Grossberg, *WGGOTP* 94). However, both power and its effects, as they are relevant to this discussion, only exist in the human relations between institutions, structures, or subjects. That is to say, power did not exist prior to humanity. Foucault tells us that “power is everywhere” (*The History of Sexuality* 93) because it is constantly recreated and reinforced through every social relation, constituting the entire social fabric.

Power is different from hierarchy. While hierarchy is created from relations of power as an effect, it is not synonymous with power, because hierarchy is predominately vertical in its organization and its influence moves from the top down. Power, on the other hand, exists among the relations between all agents and can move multi-

directionally (Foucault, *HS* 94). Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, power actually works more like a rhizomatic network, always moving between any given set of nodes. In this way, it is a neutral “technology of production” (Jasinski 449) that is inherent to the process of resistance, which I detail later. Even though power and resistance are not inherently negative relations, critical theorists should explore how power relations create oppression due to its connection to larger historical articulations of knowledge that shape the exchange of influence. While everyone is a part of power relations and resistance, the way those relations operate can dictate the level of agency one has in resisting it. As a result, agency is an effect of power relations.

Another discursive effect of power is the articulation of identity. Because people are bound up in multiple relations, they also occupy several different subjectivities and identities. As Grossberg states, “People are never only Black or female or working-class; people’s identities are defined precisely by the complex articulations between their different positions in a variety of systems of social difference” (*WGGOTP* 99). Furthermore, because people inhabit many different identities (via subjectivity) they are also often unaware of the power relations in which they are located. As a result, people who are oppressed are often unaware of their subjugation or its source. Likewise, oppressors are sometimes unaware of their oppressive practices and whom they are subjugating. Also confounding this matter is that power relations sometimes lead to overt effects such as slavery, but other times lead to much more subversive and ideological productions like stereotypical media representations. For example, blacks had to deal with colonial forms of oppression through slavery practices in the Antebellum South, but their agency is further limited by black characters being portrayed in popular television

shows as obedient suburbanites with no racial interests.

Finally, with power comes resistance. These two concepts are intricately intertwined because they work together to keep the status of power constantly changing. Foucault writes that the existence of power relationships “depends solely on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle” (*HS* 95). This statement points to the fragmented nature of resistance; it comes from a variety of places, is always a struggle, and never takes on a unified form. Grossberg adds, “Empowerment is never total, never available to everyone, never manifested in exactly the same way; moreover, its success is never guaranteed” (*WGGOTP* 95). Thus, when we talk of power, we are also talking of resistance, which takes many different forms, such as organized protest, language adaptation (e.g. womyn vs. women), and, as Stuart Hall theorizes, reading an oppositional code in the media.

However, Baudrillard argues that power “comes to reside in codes, simulations, media and the like, rather than in institutional forces and relations” (Kellner, *JB* 133). Moreover, Baudrillard claims that global and local communities are populated with a “dead power” produced by a simulated reality that has no real effects (Kellner, *JB* 132). Because the role of the media is very important in my project, it seems appropriate to consider Baudrillard’s critique since he wrote the seminal work on the simulated nature of society and politics. While I agree with Baudrillard’s critique of Foucault when he argues that Foucault failed to address the media as an institution that decenters and shifts power relations, I side more with Kittler’s discussion of media and power as a response to Baudrillard’s critique as it maintains the relational notion of power.

Kittler argues that “media determine our situation,” which indicates that media

play a defining role in deciding our relationality to one another, assuming that our human relations are one of the primary consequences of our situation (xxxix). Borrowing from Foucault's notion of discursive regimes, Kittler maintains that our technology and its effects function through discourse networks, which consist of "the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and produce relevant data" (xxiii). Winthrop-Young and Wutz write, "In Kittler's usage, [the term 'discourse network'] is very extensive: it attempts to link physical, discursive, and social systems in order to provide epistemic snapshots of a culture's administration of power and knowledge" (xxii-xxiv). For Kittler, it is not that the media pulverizes power to the point of complete fragmentation and thus becomes untraceable but rather media are a part of the institutions that dictate discourse, modes of processing and thus relations. A good example of this is the way that fantasy football, as a digitally mediated process, establishes a space permitting ownership discourse as a way to accurately describe the relationship between NFL players and its fans, despite that relationship not existing prior.

Thus, my definition of power is one that is defined by symbolic human relations that are complex and constantly negotiated. These relations constitute a multitude of effects, such as subjectivities, identities, agencies, and rhetorics and create conditions for oppression, hegemony, and ideology. While these negative effects are the primary focus of my research, I align with Foucault in including resistance as intricately tied to power and maintaining that power is always flowing through networks and relations, not simply in a vertical, top-down hierarchy. The advantage of this perspective is that it opens space for marginalized peoples to overcome the negative effects of current power distributions, because power is ontologically different than hierarchy and oppression. Furthermore,

power shapes and is shaped by the media as it plays a role in establishing discourse and constituting relations. Consequently, Foucault's understanding of power/resistance, Grossberg's method of cultural studies (i.e. identifying articulations that allow for the emergence of a rhetorical conjuncture in a problem-space), and Kittler's discourse networks are all central to my methodology. Taking the best parts from each theorist is appropriate, because as Kellner writes, "While one should certainly avoid sole use of any one perspective ... on complex and social phenomenon, a variety of critical perspectives, by contrast, enriches one's critical arsenal" (*JB* 131).

Defining Texts for Study

Fantasy football is more than just the construct of the game itself. It is played on numerous different websites in a variety of formats and it is talked about through a host of media outlets such as NFL broadcasts, magazines of multiple orientations, sports websites, and blogs. It is also an extension of professional football itself and their discourses and practices are naturally intertwined. Thus, to study the ideology of fantasy football rhetorically is, to some extent, to also study the culture of the NFL at large. However, in order to exercise some precision and validity in studying fantasy football rhetorically, I identify a number of specific texts which I use to examine its discourse, play, and, visibility.

My two main artifacts for dissecting discourse about NFL players in chapter three will be the *Fantasy Football Index* of 2010 and *ESPN Fantasy Football 2010*. Both magazines are industry leaders and *Fantasy Football Index* is the oldest and best-selling fantasy magazine (Caple). I will also use these two magazines in chapter four, my procedural analysis, to show how experts both experience the effects of the fantasy

football's processes and give advice to fantasy football participants on making decisions within the game that will improve the owner's fantasy success. While using these two magazines in various ways for chapters three and four, I also turn to various websites and blogs to show more examples of both the language of the game and how the procedures work. These websites and blogs allow me to show how the millions of fantasy football players replicate the discourse and ideology of the fantasy football establishment.

I chose fantasy football magazines from 2010 in particular over other potential media for a couple of reasons. First, I chose magazines instead of websites because I wanted to deal with a static amount of information that was not subject to edit or change. Thus, my reader could grab both issues here and reference them if desired. Also, with these two artifacts I was looking for a smaller, finite representative sample to primarily pull the discourse from and then use websites to supplement the information I found in the print sources. Also, I chose magazines from 2010 specifically because I wanted the most current issues of these publications I could find. At the time of this writing, the 2012 issues have not been released for the upcoming fantasy football season. Furthermore, because of the NFL lockout and labor dispute in 2011, these two magazines, like many other fantasy football magazines, did not publish an issue that year due to a fear of inaccurate information. The magazine companies predicted that after the labor dispute was settled, or if it was to be at all, there would be a great deal of moves in the NFL that would make their publications unhelpful for fantasy football players (Cagle). Thus, I turn to the 2010 issues as the most current print examples of fantasy football discourse.

For my general frame of reference in talking about the actual procedures of fantasy football, I will turn to one of the oldest and largest gaming outlets for fantasy football, Yahoo! Sports online (Fleming). Yahoo! Sports has boasted the largest share of fantasy football players since 2004 (La Monica). While there are other prevalent hosting sites like espn.com and nfl.com that have their own form of game play, Yahoo! Sports will provide me a large representative sample through which I can make broader generalizations and conclusions about fantasy game play in general, as Yahoo! Sports is similar in format to these other sites and still represents a substantial amount of fantasy players (La Monica). I also have access and experience with the gameplay of Yahoo! Sports as someone who has used its services for the past eight years and this insider knowledge will allow me a nuanced perspective. This same hosting site will be the case study by which I examine the visual elements of fantasy football as well, as its visual representation is an appropriate example of most fantasy hosting sites and game play at large.

Moreover, I also provide examples of the procedures from the television show *The League*, an FX sitcom focusing on a group of friends in a fantasy football league. *The League* debuted on October 29, 2009 and has been one of FX's most successful sitcoms, with each show averaging 1.7 million viewers (Harnick). The large viewership of *The League* demonstrates not only the extensive audience of fantasy football-related media, but that those who play fantasy football are drawn to other media outside the game as a means to engage in its culture. This show provides excellent exemplarity of fantasy football procedures in a medium outside of the game itself.

Within this range of sources, I examine the cultural elements of fantasy football that may be indicative of the colonial relationship between NFL players and its audiences. This collection of artifacts will help me make a stronger argument about the nature, function, and pervasiveness of this ideology and the way it may be utilized by those who are agents and subjects within its culture. Additionally, it allows me to explore in a comprehensive sense of how this discourse may not be generated in one unified space, but rather emerges as a type of rhetoric, created and recreated through popular media outlets like blogs and the show *The League*.

CHAPTER 3 MONEY, MONSTERS AND MACHINES: THE COLONIAL DISCOURSES OF FANTASY FOOTBALL

In Mark St. Amant's book, *Committed: Confessions of a Fantasy Football Junkie*, he laments his first ever fantasy draft in 1998, where “within a few rounds, [he] had single handedly turned [his] first fantasy draft into a fucking Gallagher concert—comedy so bad it's good” (58). He was ridiculed by other league members for his seemingly ridiculous choices and even had beers tossed at his head with each awful pick. However, in the 13th round, Amant redeemed himself by selecting now retired running back Fred Taylor, a rookie at the time, to shore up his list of running backs. The pick was met with a different reaction from his fellow league members. He recalls:

Sure they tried to pretend it didn't make a difference ... But this Taylor pick alerted them that, hey, maybe this guy isn't such a moron after all. Maybe he knows something about picking high-upside sleepers in the late rounds. Was it dumb luck? Perhaps. Did I just close my eyes and throw the dart at the board? Probably. Were the terms *high upside* or *sleeper* even in my lexicon at that point? Hell no... but they didn't need to know that. (St. Amant 60)

While this example is poignant in identifying what drafting is like for fantasy football owners, it also demonstrates how fantasy football has its own specific lexicon for describing NFL players as they relate to different aspects of the game.

In this chapter, I explore some of the primary fantasy football rhetoric used to describe and discuss NFL players. At face value, it could be said that this discourse is simply a colorful or even pragmatic vehicle to transfer the actions, physical embodiment, and statistical capacity of each relevant NFL player to the fantasy game for easy digest by the fantasy multitude. However, fantasy football discourse does more than just describe players or detail their achievements within statistical language. Instead, this language performs a colonial function of othering NFL players, maintaining a discourse that

positions them as a commodity to be owned, monitored, and consumed by fantasy football participants. As hooks argues, colonial practices “prevail by courageous consumption. It is by eating the Other ... that one asserts power and privilege” (36). Thus, when I label fantasy football specifically as a *colonial* discourse, I am referring to a type of discourse that is designed by colonizing whites to distance the non-white subject as a colonial other for the purposes of dehumanization, objectification and commodification. Within a traditional system of colonization, this type of discourse functions to normalize these otherizing colonial logics, which allows the space for violent colonial practices, like slavery, to make sense to both the colonizer and colonized. I am certainly not declaring that the discourses or ideology of fantasy football result in slavery, but rather arguing that the language used to describe players operates in a colonial logic where the objectification, commodification and consumption of NFL players for the purposes of entertainment is normalized and makes sense to those who participate in the game. Furthermore, within this particular definition of colonial discourse, theorists I use in this chapter like Braverman, Kant and Brummett, who are not necessarily postcolonial theorists, become useful in understanding how the colonial discourse operates in fantasy football because they address particularities of the discourse, like marketplace logic, the sublime, and machine aesthetics, that can be read as otherizing and dehumanizing rhetorics. Thus, while not necessarily intended for postcolonial use, these theories are helpful in understanding this colonial discourse of fantasy football because they attend to the same unified principles of commodification, objectification or dehumanization central to my definition of colonial rhetoric.

Oates, in his “vicarious management” study, which includes fantasy football as one such form, identifies “the preferred readings that corporate interests offer to media audiences” and “examines how the experience of vicarious management is constructed for fans” (“New Media” 33). Building on Oates’ work, I turn to two leading fantasy magazines—the 2010 issues of *Fantasy Football Index* and *ESPN Fantasy Football*—and sports blogs to examine how the fantasy football industry and its fans utilize specific colonial metaphors. Three dominant metaphors emerge out of this discourse that serve to otherize the NFL player: player as money, player as monster, and player as machine. While Oates discusses the role of fantasy football as an element of vicarious management within a broader context that led to its emergence, I approach this management rhetoric differently by analyze how the colonial discourse like these metaphors functions differently and uniquely within fantasy football. As I will demonstrate, all three of these metaphors position the NFL player as a colonial other because they invite audiences to see the NFL player as something other than human, whether as money, monster or machine, thus stripping him of his human subjectivity. Rather, the dehumanized NFL players are framed as precious commodities in fantasy football, valuable because of their tremendous bodies, athletic ability, and potential production.

The metaphors of money, monsters and machines are not necessarily unique to fantasy football. These descriptions of NFL players can be found in various discourses of the NFL and they more broadly can be found in other non-sporting contexts. However, what is important about these metaphors is not necessarily their origin or prolific use, but rather how these metaphors function in particularly colonizing ways in the context of fantasy football. While all three metaphors maintain unique colonial characteristics in

their language and various incantations, the money, monster and machine metaphors are also unified by the same deliberate colonial principles of othering and commodification. This makes them especially useful metaphors in a logic of colonization. Furthermore, I also chose to focus on the metaphors of money, monster and machine because when examining fantasy football discourse these three metaphors emerged as the most ubiquitous. While many other metaphors can be found in fantasy football, these three are used with alarming regularity across all of the various media outlets that I used to gather examples.

As stated, these metaphors found in fantasy football discourse are also found in the discourse of the NFL because fantasy football not only attempts to create the fantasy of being an NFL owner, but the content of fantasy football also comes from actual NFL games. Many scholars, as well as players, have identified the NFL as being a racist league, where black players are treated differently than their white counterparts on the field and in front offices, but also in the way that slavery metaphors enter NFL discourse (Rhoden; Oriard). Thus, because the NFL is racist and fantasy football is so closely connected to professional football, my inclination is to assume that fantasy football is not only colonial in its discourse, but more specifically *racist*. However, there is an important distinction between the NFL and fantasy football. In live NFL games and broadcasts, players are raced by the visual markers of their skin color. In fantasy football, however, there are no bodies of players depicted in the game to make such overt assumptions about race as players are depicted in the game by statistics. Furthermore, the metaphors that I analyze in this chapter do not explicitly evoke race in their usage, but somehow, as I will argue later in chapter five, racism is still there. I do not argue that

those who play fantasy football necessarily have racist intentions toward playing fantasy football, but rather that it functions ideologically within the various rhetorics of the game and how fantasy football owners interact with these colonial rhetorics. In order to build to this argument in chapter five, I will first detail the metaphors of money, monster, and machine that operate in fantasy football discourse.

Besides postcolonial theory, my analysis of these metaphors is also informed by Grossberg's understanding of articulation which "offers a theory of contexts. It dictates that one can only deal with, and from within, specific contexts, for it is only there that practices have specific effects, that identities and relations exist" (*WGGOTP* 55). With this theory in mind, I start my analysis at the level of specific language used in fantasy football and then connect that discourse to broader colonial discourses about NFL players as a kind of commodified colonial subjects.

Player as Money: Merchandise and the Marketplace

The first and most prevalent metaphor in fantasy football discourse positions the NFL player as money, or more frequently read here as *commodity*. As one fantasy football player commented, "I think I have to sit on Tomlinson for now as his trade value isn't what it used to be in previous leagues. If I wait a few weeks, maybe [he] starts playing well then I have a commodity everyone will want" (VegasInsider). Oates explains that fantasy football is one of the many types of vicarious management, in which its mediated practices and discourses "produce a market for productive, relentlessly commodified bodies by constructing a set of disciplinary techniques designed to predict athletic and statistical success" ("New Media" 41). For example, Tyler Brayton, defensive end for the Carolina Panthers, is described by the experts at *ESPN Fantasy*

Football as “a proven commodity capable of posting 50 tackles and five sacks” (95). Furthermore, Oates claims that in linguistic terms, fantasy football “establishes the contemporary marketplace as the preferred metaphor” (“New Media” 40). Quite literally, players are described using the language of the marketplace. For instance, a snapshot of Denver Broncos quarterback Kyle Orton claims, “With the arrival of Brady Quinn, Orton’s stock took a hit” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 30).

Other terms of the marketplace such as “booms,” “busts,” and “sleepers” are also used in fantasy football discourse. For example, one headline in *Fantasy Football Index* reads, “Hallelujah for sleepers & unknown gems (and boo to likely busts)” (16-17). This language is used to describe the potential success of actual NFL players much like financial investors playing the stock market. For instance, Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall “appeared closer to ‘bust’ status than stardom, but after rushing for 1,108 yards last season, Mendenhall is listed in the top 9” (*Fantasy Football Index* 44). Furthermore, one fantasy football participant blogged, “I actually avoid Eli [Manning] in this league because he's boom/bust” (BassNBrew). So the language of “boom” or “bust” points to a player’s potential to either have a great or poor statistical season, which directly impacts the fantasy owner who invested a draft pick in selecting him.

Much like hidden investments in the stock market, unknown NFL players who have the potential to produce a lot of statistics are called “sleepers.” These players are touted with great potential, but considered less risky because fantasy owners will be able to attain them for little value. For example, Arizona Cardinals defensive end Calais Campbell “makes the All-Ambien team as a top sleeper” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 95).

Just as reducing risk is important in the stock market, is it also important to keep risk low when investing in fantasy football prospects. After an auction draft recounted in *Fantasy Football Index*, fantasy expert David Dodds assesses, “Cadillac Williams is not a sexy pick, but tremendous value at just \$5. On the other hand, Ryan Mathews at \$32 was too much money when better proven commodities were available. Way too risky for my liking” (69). The more guaranteed a player is to produce a large amount of statistical output, the greater the player is valued in fantasy football because the risk in selecting or buying the player is lower. For example, one fantasy football participant commented, “I want a proven commodity, I want a Roy Williams or a Chad Johnson, but you can't count on those things happening” (Tex McBadass).

To then reduce the risk on other higher-valued commodities, some players even become “insurance.” For example, Alan Satterlee from *Dynasty Rogues* comments, “Bernard Scott (17th round) was cheap insurance for Cedric Benson” (*Fantasy Football Index* 63). The concept of player insurance for fantasy football may seem like a stretch, considering the lack of tangible property involved, but it makes sense in the context of the fantasy marketplace. Because, as Oates contends, fantasy football uses the language and logic of the marketplace as its preferred metaphor, these other market terms such as insurance become relevant to the game. As a result, commodity value within it is “the ultimate foundation upon which all forms of value—money, credit instruments, insurance policies, shares, etc., etc.—depend” (Braverman 86). So having an inexpensive player to back up a highly valued commodity provides good insurance if that commodity cannot produce.

Similar to “sleepers” are players who might produce a tremendous amount of wealth while investing very little. These players are usually selected at the very end of the draft and are called “lottery tickets,” partly because in auction style drafts, these players only cost the fantasy owner one dollar. Chris Liss from Rotowire.com comments, “I wanted some lottery tickets and I think I got some those in Steve Slaton, Arrelious Benn and Jermaine Gresham” (*Fantasy Football Index* 62). The term “lottery ticket” points to the notion that these players offer very little risk, but could have a very high reward, much like winning the lottery.

In conjunction with the language of the marketplace, NFL players are also described as merchandise, promoted as “steals,” “bargains,” “cheap” or “discounts.” For example, Minnesota Vikings quarterback Brett Favre is “the steal of the draft without question ... if he plays” (*Fantasy Football Index* 59). Further, drafting Minnesota Vikings tight end Visanthe Shiancoe in Round 14 of a draft is described by fantasy writer Eddie Matz as “Sheer larceny, I say” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 23). Fantasy football magazines’ language puts a premium on value, so experts encourage fantasy owners to become bargain shoppers for NFL players. Thus, fantasy owners are told of New York Giants running back Brandon Jacobs, “There’s some buy-low value here, as he’ll cost a fraction of what he once did and could produce a big TD season” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 41). Also, for Houston Texans quarterback Matt Schaub, “It’s too late to draft [him] at a discount, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t nab him” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 26). Often players even come detailed in terms of “price tags,” which makes a direct and literal connection to shopping for merchandise. For example, the experts in *ESPN Fantasy Football* write of Jermichael Finley, Green Bay Packers tight end, “With

Donald Lee, Spencer Havner, and now Andrew Quarless all in the tight end mix, Finley's price tag is too high" (7). This specific kind of market language argues that owners are looking for the best purchase scenarios or, as larger capitalists, they are trying to maximize value over cost. As Braverman argues, "For the capitalist who is in the business of producing commodity values, the aim is always to capture as great a margin over his costs as possible. But, in order to do this, he must realize the commodity values, transforming them into money form" (286).

Sometimes the language evokes the metaphor of merchandise within the actual context of the marketplace. Fantasy writer Eddie Matz writes, "Buzz drives price. In last year's mock, It Boy Greg Olsen was an eighth-rounder. This year, despite finishing as a top-10 tight end, he's a 15th-rounder. Enjoy the discount, shoppers" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 23). Also, fantasy football participants are advised the following about Glenn Dorsey, a defensive end for the Kansas City Chiefs: "If he can ever become the force he's been hyped up to be, he'll afford his investors great dividends, considering his late-round price tag" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 95). In both of these examples, the merchandise metaphor is not isolated but combined with the larger language of the marketplace such as "buzz drives price" and "great dividends" for "investors."

Also, a player's value might change from year to year within this marketplace. Thus, his "price tag" changes with the "market." For example, Chicago Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher, a well-known and dominant defensive player, comes with this description: "Reputations and names don't always equal huge numbers, but he's transitioned from a once-overrated asset into a low-risk, upside commodity" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 97). Like previous examples, the player is directly referred to as a

“commodity,” with his production being linked to his value and the language of the marketplace being used. After all, the more a player is able to produce in terms of statistics, the higher his value grows. Or, in the Marxist terms of Braverman, “Labor power has become [itself] a commodity” (57).

The Urlacher example, however, shows an interesting aspect in the relationship between the NFL player, production, and commodity: production disconnects a player’s “name value” and his “fantasy value.” While some players like Urlacher become celebrated for their long history in the NFL or because they are fan-favorites, the language of fantasy football deemphasizes those characteristics, like reputation or character, which do not support the marketplace. This could be said of New York Jets running back LaDainian Tomlinson, who is one of the most productive and successful players in NFL history. Tomlinson also does a great deal of outreach in the community and is loved by NFL fans. However, *ESPN Fantasy Football* warns, “The years have taken a toll on our 2005 cover guy, as Tomlinson was a shadow of his former self in 2008 and much worse in ’09. With his legendary burst gone, he can’t make anyone miss” (43). It is no surprise then that *ESPN Fantasy Football* also has Tomlinson listed as a top “falling off” candidate. Oates echoes that this discourse “celebrates the language and logic of the market, while positioning elite athletes in ways that emphasize their directability and usefulness” (“New Media” 43). This relationship is also evident in a comment made by one of the experts at *Fantasy Football Index* on completing his “mock draft,” or an experimental draft used to prepare for an actual league draft: “Our goal was to populate our lineup with players we were confident would produce each week” (*Fantasy Football Index* 62). Here, the emphasis is placed solely on production, which in

the logic of the marketplace, exclusively creates commodity value (Braverman 86). By owner's explicitly claiming that they were looking for production as their main criteria for selecting players, it shows how this marketplace logic is rearticulated in fantasy football discourse.

Therefore, the language of fantasy football, which utilizes the various metaphors of the marketplace, is most clearly designed as a way to describe all aspects of an NFL player in direct relation to his production, not his personhood or character, which are irrelevant to commodity value. Players like Urlacher or Tomlinson might be valuable to NFL teams for their ability to improve public relations or lead; however, in the logic of fantasy football, they become differently valuable. Their human or personality qualities that are useful for NFL teams have no value in fantasy football because these qualities cannot be converted into statistics. Human production is only valuable in fantasy football once it has been converted and commodified into something nonhuman, like statistics. The marketplace discourse of fantasy football helps maintain this logic for fantasy owners. The "player as money" metaphor posits the NFL player as a nonhuman other in the commodity form, alienating him from his production and perpetuating his position as a colonial subject.

Player as Monster: Big Bodies and Beasts

The second metaphor evident in fantasy football discourse is "the player as monster." Fantasy football discourse makes repeated use of the monster metaphor in differing ways. Similar to the "player as money" metaphor, the concept of the "monster" is used to put an emphasis on the production or labor value of the player as a commodity. For instance, when Marques Colston, wide receiver for the New Orleans Saints, "put up

monster numbers in 2007, catching 98 passes and 11 TDs, he was featured far more heavily” (*Fantasy Football Index* 89). Further, Saints quarterback Drew Brees “had a monster season in 2011, throwing for 5,476 yards and 46 touchdowns as he led the New Orleans Saints to a 13-3 and a playoff win over the Detroit Lions” (Michael89156). Also, when referring to Tennessee Titans running back Chris Johnson, the experts advise, “After his monster season, he knows that now is the time to parlay that production into cash” (*Fantasy Football Index* 77). In all of these examples, the monster metaphor is tied to the notion of monstrosity itself, that the statistics the player is able to produce is “monstrous,” much like how increased production on the field increased the value of the commodity.

However, the “player as monster” metaphor is different than the “player as money” metaphor because whereas “player as money” seems to strip the signifier of the body out of its usage, the “player as monster” metaphor seems to bring the body to the forefront of its application. One way this difference manifests is by calling NFL players “monsters” directly. For example, Chicago Bears defensive end Julius Peppers “should be a monster of the Midway” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 94). Or, Cincinnati Bengals tight end Jermaine Gresham “was a mobile, pass-catching monster at Oklahoma” (*Fantasy Football Index* 131). The Dallas Cowboys’ running back configuration is described as “three-headed monster situation” (*Fantasy Football Index* 61). Here, the players are directly (or in the Dallas case more indirectly) referred to as “monsters,” where the player’s body and athletic ability asserts dominance and presumably fear but also a sense of sublime awe.

This difference is one way that the monster is more unique than just another version of the other. It functions differently in that the body is meant to signify both a sense of fear and desire and amazement. Cohen contends that “the monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy” (Cohen 4). Thus, the athletic bodies of NFL players function through the monster metaphor as a sublime object. Kant theorizes that the sublime is what we experience when we become overwhelmed with the great magnitude of an object; we are fearful of its monstrosity yet also enchanted with its greatness. He argues “since the mind is not merely attracted to the object, but it is also reciprocally repelled by it, the satisfaction of the sublime does not so much contain positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect” (Kant 129). Thus, the Kantian sublime presents us with a paradox: One experiences both displeasure at the monstrosity and pleasure through admiration of an object’s magnitude. Also, the sublime operates to distance us from the sublime object. It is within this space, where we recognize the safety to experience the sublime, that we can see it as the distant other (Kant 144-145).

Likewise, the language of fantasy football utilizes the monster metaphor as a way to embody the potential fear produced by the bodies of the athletes while also praising them for their accomplishments and abilities on the field. For example, here is the scouting report on Denver Broncos rookie wide receiver Demaryius Thomas: “Eventually, the 6’3” Thomas will replace the departed Brandon Marshall in the flanker role and be the same kind of big-bodied terror” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 8). Also, New York Giants wide receiver Hakeem Nicks “weighs 212 pounds so his 4.5 speed makes him a rumbling terror to tackle” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 59). Even more menacing, Haloti Ngata, defensive tackle for the Baltimore Ravens, is depicted in this way: “If

there's a terrific metric that showed how amazing he is at consuming linemen, he's be higher on this list. Since there isn't, he's merely a scary force vs. the run" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 95). In all cases here, the monstrosity of the player's body creates the anxiety and fear for defenders but also allows the fan to admire his monstrous athletic feats. On occasion, the player's production, while not explicitly evoking monstrosity, still brings in a horror element typically associated with monsters. For example, Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver/running back Dexter McCluster is a "matchup nightmare" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 64).

Sometimes, the monster metaphors focus specifically on the notion of ghosts or zombies as a way to dehumanize the colonized other. Punter explains how monstrosity is used in this way in postcolonial discourse:

On the postcolonial terrain we confront a bifurcation of monstrosity. We are in a sense accustomed already to this bifurcation: in a traditional terms we might think of, on the one hand, the ghost as a spirit without a body and, on the other, of the zombie as a body without a spirit. (125)

In fantasy football, these descriptions typically serve as a way to actually *marginalize* rather than *praise* the production of the NFL player. As the term "monster" was used to describe tremendous statistical success, the ghost or zombie description points to an evaporation of production, like an ephemeral spirit that is barely visible or a zombie that moves sluggishly. Here, the "monster" quality actually limits the value of the commodity. As fantasy expert Jeffrey Kamys states, "I would rather have two top receivers that can give me consistent production every week. If you get stiff at the position, you will have some tough lineup decisions" (*Fantasy Football Index* 56). In another example, 2010 free agent wide receiver Laveranues Coles is described as "a ghost of his former self during his brief time in Ohio. His long speed is gone, and he

dropped enough passes to warrant Cincy's cutting him. He'll latch on as a No. 3 at some point, but we don't pay much attention to apparitions" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 69). Furthermore, San Francisco 49ers tight end Vernon Davis "woke up last season and joined the land of the living" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 79). In the Coles example, his loss of production made him a "ghost of his former self" which warranted the experts to ignore him as a fantasy commodity because they "don't pay much attention to apparitions." Also, Kamys advises against "stiffs," a common term for a corpse, because he would rather have "consistent production." The Davis example brings forth the idea that Davis was previously a zombie or in the land of the dead/undead. Once he "woke up" from his zombie-like trance, he then joined the land of the living, which is read here as productive.

What is key, however, to all of these examples is that the large, capable, monstrous body is associated with statistical success, whereas, in the case of the ghost, the absence of the body points to a reduction in value. In the zombie or stiff examples, while the body is present, it is a sluggish or altogether inactive body, one that is not valuable because of its inability to *produce*. Thus, in the monster metaphor, the powerful, monstrous, and capable body is central to NFL players' commodity value. A monster body or a body that can do monstrous things is valuable, whereas the represented absence of this body and its absent abilities are not. Either way, the body becomes the mediator for the NFL player's value when viewed through the "player as monster" metaphor.

While the monster metaphor can evoke a sense of fright, terror, or awe, like the "monsters" we see in horror and fantasy films, sometimes the monster comes in the form

of the “beast,” or the part human-part animal monster that is portrayed as more savage than civilized (Bellin). In fact, Punter argues that “many early monstrous forms, as we know, take the literal form of hybrids, mixtures of man and animal” (Punter 111). As sublime monsters, these man-animal hybrids are as incredible to us as they are fearful. Just as the sublimity of any object distances us from that object in some way, the making of the human into the animal has a “dehumanising function” that, in postcolonial work, is “always and everywhere, functional; it serves the purpose of extending dominion” (Punter 146). It is, as Punter continues, “ubiquitous in the postcolonial” (Punter 147). Thus, it stands that animism is an exertion of power that serves to other, it “represents a culminative turning of the face away from power, an abjection into the world of the animal *as it has been reformulated by the colonizers*” (Punter 149).

In fantasy football discourse there is a great deal of evidence to show the use of the beast metaphor. For example, Houston Texans wide receiver Andre Johnson, a very valuable fantasy commodity according to experts, is a “mild-mannered man-beast on whom defenses focus most of their attention, yet he still had the NFL’s most catches of 20-plus yards” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 56). Kansas City Chiefs strong safety Eric Berry has the “immediate value as a depth DB with the upside to be a full-fledged beast” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 99). Additionally, Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton is a “fantasy football beast, so don’t let him slide” (Mariah). BeasstorBust.com, which exemplifies this metaphor in its name, echoes in their 2012 quarterback rankings, “Beastly QB's have the longest shelf life and on this list you'll see that valued highly. Someone like Cam Newton has the potential to be producing stud numbers long after a young RB or even WR has retired.” In these examples, the “beastly” quality of the player

describes his massive production or presence on the field, which point to his ability to score a great deal of points. This last excerpt, while containing the language of “beast” directly, also alludes to another common use of the “beast” metaphor, a description of players as specific animals. Newton here is described as a “stud,” which is a word specifically used to describe a horse.

The horse is perhaps the most common animal metaphor alluded to in the language of fantasy football and it comes in many different forms. Of course, there is the “stud” player, as mentioned above, whose extreme athletic prowess allows for a tremendous amount of statistical success. For instance, the experts at *Fantasy Football Index* think Denver Broncos wide receiver Demaryius Thomas should have a great season for fantasy football owners because “his coach is fixated on having a stud wideout, and Thomas is big and fast” (56). Also, Miami Dolphins fullback Lex Hilliard “showed some serious ‘flash’ when given a chance in 2009” and the experts think “he’s closer to a fantasy stud than he is a nobody” (*Fantasy Football Index* 60). In both cases, the player is considered a “stud” because of his powerful body or abilities allow for success.

But the term “stud” is certainly not isolated to sport of football. Men who are talented in all sports or have great success in attracting women are often referred to as “studs” in our American popular culture. Perhaps then this example could be innocently brushed off as signification of that same masculine discourse and not necessarily colonial. However, in fantasy football language, the “stud” is hard to ignore because the horse metaphor is used so consistently and in a unique way. For example, San Francisco 49ers running back Frank Gore is “still the workhorse in San Francisco” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 8). Also, Cincinnati Bengals running back Cedric Benson “isn’t much of a

receiver; he caught only 17 passes last year. But he's a workhorse runner and should score more touchdowns this season" (*Fantasy Football Index* 80). Here the players are not merely horses, but *workhorses*, guys who will give a lot of production for an individual fantasy team if drafted. Because of their potential to produce, experts advise that teams will "ride" these players. For example, DeAngelo Williams and Jonathan Stewart are running backs for the Carolina Panthers, a team that the experts advise will "rest assured ... ride this duo for all it's worth" (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 40). Also, Titans running back Johnson is "the No. 1 guy due to his explosiveness" and "the Titans will ride him hard once again in 2010" (*Fantasy Football Index* 44). To extend the metaphor even further, these players, when grouped together on the same NFL or fantasy team are "stabled." The Cleveland Browns, for example, "will revert to using a whole stable of running backs, with Peyton Hillis, Montario Hardesty and James Davis all involved at some point" (*Fantasy Football Index* 82). Also, as one fantasy owner blogged about his fantasy team, "Picked up Brandon Jackson, but I have a stable of running backs. I've got three offers for him now" (Adam).

In all of these examples, the beast or horse metaphor is used in multiple ways. The NFL player is a "workhorse" or part of a whole "stable" that will be "rode hard." It is no coincidence that the horse is specifically a *work* animal, valuable for its ability to make labor easy. This again ties the NFL player specifically to his production, more broadly through the discourse of professional football and then more specifically in fantasy football as a means to promise pedestrian owners fantasy success. The horse's labor value is what makes it such a precious commodity. In a similar fashion, fantasy football language uses another animal commodified in part for its labor value, the cow.

Highlighted yet again, Titans running back Johnson “made it out from under the yoke of LenDale White’s [touchdown] thievery last year” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 38). Also, Bengals running back Benson, earlier described as a “workhorse,” should also be “a productive, bell-cow back” (*Fantasy Football Index* 130). Panthers running back Stewart is also labeled as “bullish” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 105). Here, the same players who were earlier described using horse metaphors are now tied to the cow or the bull, both of which hearken back to the value of these animals as productive work beasts.

While animals of labor are the prevalent examples found in fantasy football discourse, not all allusions to the beast metaphor are animals of labor. Players are also characterized by other animals, most notably dogs, birds, or insects. Buffalo Bills running back Marshawn Lynch “went from Beast Mode to, well, adorable puppy mode last season” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 45). Additionally, if Pittsburgh Steelers starting running back Rashard Mendenhall gets injured, the experts at *ESPN Fantasy Football* are betting “the table scraps would be thrown to a few different dogs” (47). In a similar way, these same experts predict that in the Carolina Panthers roster of running backs, “There won’t be a lot of leftovers with Williams and Stewart gobbling up carries” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 51). In these last two examples, the usage of “scraps” or “leftovers” points to possible fantasy production, which the players as “dogs” are fighting over for value.

In terms of birds or insects, New York Giants running back Gartrell Johnson is “trapped behind a gaggle of running backs on the Giants roster” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 49) and San Diego running back Mike Tolbert “could emerge as a touchdown hawk” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 127). Atlanta Falcons wide receivers Harry Douglas and Eric

Weems are “similar players—small elusive gnats who also return kicks and run end-arounds” (*Fantasy Football Index* 121). In both of these last two excerpts, the dominant feature of the animal characterizes the NFL player’s primary value to fantasy football. Tolbert, like a hawk snatching prey, will grab touchdowns away from other players who might serve a similar function on his NFL team, increasing his commodity value. Douglas and Weems are both “gnats” because their “pesky” quality gives them potential to score points on the field, which could translate into points for fantasy owners.

Cohen writes that the monster in postcolonial thought serves as the “dialectical Other,” where “any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but ... tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual” (7). As a result, the metaphor of the monster becomes representative of the colonial other as a way to make sense of and rationalize difference to a predominately white and Western audience. Thus, the use of the monster metaphor can be read as way to invoke or describe racial and cultural difference. However, as shown in fantasy football discourse, the monstrous athletic body is also a sublime body, which invokes terror but also invites admiration. The sublimity also otherizes and dehumanizes NFL players because it distances audiences from the player in order to recognize both the magnitude and the might of their behemoth bodies and monstrous abilities. Therefore, in the process of dehumanizing, the monster metaphor converts the human to the sublime terror or beast and serves as a way to turn NFL players into commodity, as the metaphor is tied in some way or another to that player’s ability, body, and labor value.

What then becomes evident in the “player as monster” metaphor, similar to the “player as money” metaphor, is that the colonizing of the NFL player is directly tied in

some fashion to his body being able to produce for fantasy owners. The direct connection between these two metaphors is easily documented in fantasy discourse, as experts in the magazines will combine both metaphors in their advice or descriptions. After their fantasy football mock auction, the participants were quoted as utilizing both the “player as money” and the “player as monster” metaphors to evaluate their draft. For instance, KFFL expert Cory Bonini laments, “I should have spent the \$15 for Jay Cutler since this format doesn’t take away points for interceptions. I don’t expect a monster season, but for \$15 the return on my investment would have been well worth it” (*Fantasy Football Index* 69). Furthermore, Jeffrey Kamys from *Dr. Stats Fantasy Sports* expresses, “I bid on some key players early and landed a few studs at big money prices, but I wanted to keep a decent amount of money in my pocket for later in the draft so I could land some \$5 and \$6 bargains” (*Fantasy Football Index* 68). Christopher Harris from *ESPN* argues:

The temptation is to say don’t buy studs (or perceived studs) for big dollars early. But honestly, in this league format, where boom-or-bust types are encouraged because they’ll win you games when they boom and won’t count against you when they bust, I think guys like Chris Johnson and Jamaal Charles are just perfect together. (*Fantasy Football Index* 69)

From all of these excerpts, the NFL players are labeled *as* monsters, but are also talked *about* using the language of the marketplace. So while each metaphor functions in a unique way, they are not used in isolation as both are tied intimately through production.

Player as Machine: Tools, Transportation and Technological Warfare

Punter argues that there are two main kinds of postcolonial hybridity, “human/animal crossovers” and “man/machine chimeras” (125). Having already addressed the first kind of hybrid in the previous section, I now turn my attention to the

second: the combination of man and machine. Just as the “player as money” and “player as monster” metaphors perform a colonial othering function, so does the “player as machine” metaphor because, in becoming machine, NFL players are again objectified, dehumanized and more technological or mechanical than flesh. In fact, it is the machine-like qualities that the players subsequently become praised and valued upon, not their “humanness.”

In order to make clearer sense of the way this metaphor plays out in the fantasy football discourse, I turn to Brummett’s work, *Rhetoric of Machine Aesthetics*. In this work, Brummett analyzes the way that objects with a machine-like quality can be both indicative of and have influence over culture. By the term “machine-like” quality, Brummett means that “the object has qualities that facilitate the experience of machine aesthetics. Therefore, the object *shares* aesthetic qualities with whatever a culture takes to be its ‘benchmark’ machines” (11). In fantasy football discourse, the “player as machine” metaphor typically comes in the form of tools, weapons, or transportation vehicles—cars, trucks, bulldozers, etc.—which are all machines that are key technological developments integral to United States’ industrialized culture. Brummett identifies three primary types of machine aesthetics: mechtech, electrotech, and chaotech. For the purposes of this analysis, I am concerned with the mechtech aesthetic of machines because it most closely describes the type of machines alluded to in fantasy football and thus best illuminates the “player as machine” metaphor. Brummett defines mechtech as “a machine aesthetic keyed to gears, clockwork, lawnmowers, revolvers, pistons, hard shiny metal, oiled hot steel, thrumming rhythms, the intricately choreographed blue of a spinning camshaft, and the utilitarian shafts and pipes running

through the steel box of a factory” (29). Thus, with tools, weapons, and transportation vehicles being the primary types of machines present in the fantasy football discourse, a mechtech aesthetic seems appropriate. Brummett also identifies different dimensions that characterize each aesthetic. I will use some of these dimensions as a guiding principle to show how the “player as machine” metaphor uses a mechtech aesthetic. While not a postcolonial theory per se, Brummett’s mechtech aesthetic is a useful way to illuminate elements of machine language in fantasy football because just like other socio-political or cultural elements of human life, “machines, too, suggest ways of living and relating to others” (Brummett 21).

In fantasy football discourse, NFL players are often directly referred to as some form of “machine,” which usually highlights an incredible athletic ability or their routine production of a particular statistic. For example, Jacksonville Jaguars running back Maurice Jones-Drew and Indianapolis Colts tight end Dallas Clark are both labeled as “touchdown machines” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 38; *Fantasy Football Index* 48). Additionally, Seattle Seahawks running back Leon Washington is potentially “the most dangerous man in the Seahawks’ backfield, a big-play machine opposing [defenses] will hate to see with the ball” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 44). Miami Dolphins wide receiver Brandon Marshall “is a pass-catching machine” (*Fantasy Football Index* 69).

Sometimes, however, NFL players are described as more specific types of machines such as tools. One common metaphor is that of the hammer. For instance, San Diego Chargers’ Eric Weddle “is a hammer at safety” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 89), the New Orleans Saints “need a new short-yardage hammer” (40) and Indianapolis Colts running back Delone Carter might end up being “the goal-line ‘hammer’ [head coach]

Jim Caldwell thinks he is” (The Football Guru). Just like tools, these players are characterized by their ability to perform a particular function. As Brummett explains, a mechtech machine is objectified or commodified in part for its functionality (37). This becomes evident as other tool metaphors surface. For example, Tennessee Titans running back Chris Johnson “can inject 1.21 gigawatts of energy into the Titans” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 28). Also, the experts at *ESPN Fantasy Football* “love [Defense Tackles] Haloti Ngata and Kelly Gregg (plus rookie Terrence Cody) anchoring the middle” (88). Thus, Johnson as the charger and Ngata, Gregg and Cody as anchors become valuable in fantasy football for their ability to energize their team’s offense or fortify the middle of the defense.

Brummett argues that mechtech aesthetic is also characterized by a dimension of violence. He writes:

The mechtech machine is not gentle, nor does it work on material cooperatively. The drill tears violently into wood, the piston slams up and down at great speed, gears and cogs lock in tight combat as their wheels turn ...

The seemingly peaceful screwdriver grips the screw head and forces it to twist against the resisting wood. (Brummett 46)

So, while NFL players are described as tools, lending to their sense of functionality, as mechtech machines, they have violent interactions. Brummett also argues that “the aesthetic attributes of mechtech machines have allowed the machine to become an image that may express what patriarchy wants to say about *males*” (43). Thus, it makes sense that fantasy football, a game that exclusively uses the action of men, would be a mechtech aesthetic that turns men directly into violent machines, as athletic masculinity is often associated with violence. The violence of mechtech aesthetics is subsequently easily recognized in the language of fantasy football, which is evident in the violence

associated with different types of tools. For example, New York Giants running back Brandon Jacobs is a valuable fantasy commodity according to *Fantasy Football Index*, but “with his road-grader running style, Jacobs takes more punishment than anyone, so he never stays healthy for long” (82). Arizona Cardinals running back Beanie Wells comes with the following advice:

Given how good an impersonation Wells did of a bulldozer toward the end of 2009 ... we find it hard to believe Arizona will feature the league’s second-most pass-heavy offense again. In his rookie season, Beanie shrugged off durability concerns and scored six touchdowns in the season’s final eight games, using his wide frame to crush defenders. (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 40)

Here, violence is portrayed when the “bulldozer” Wells, who has “durability concerns,” uses his “wide frame to crush defenders.” However, it is his specific function as the “bulldozer” and his violent action of “crushing defenders” that makes Wells a valuable machine to the fantasy football world. In the case of Jacobs, being a “road grader” causes him to “take way too much punishment,” read here as violence, and decreases his value.

Brummet also argues that a mechtech aesthetic “suggests the image of a warrior. Warriors stand as uniform copies row upon row, yet each soldier is capable of individual heroics in action” (45). When combining the characteristic of the warrior with the already evident dimension of violence and the styling of “hard shiny metal” common to mechtech machines, it is not surprising that often NFL players are depicted using machine metaphors pertaining specifically to elements of law enforcement and war. For example, NFL players who are drafted in fantasy football to back up higher priced commodities in case of injury are called “handcuffs.” This description is attached to Pittsburgh Steelers running back Mewelde Moore: “If ever there was a valuable handcuff, this guy is it, right?” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 47). Also, “for those who select

[Knowshon] Moreno,” Denver Broncos running back Correll Buckhalter is “a mandatory handcuff” (*Fantasy Football Index* 85). In these applications, the handcuff becomes representative of the warrior and the mechtech aesthetic because not only does it “protect” in its function, it also is a shiny metallic tool of those who are there to “protect and serve,” law enforcement.

More often than the allusion to law enforcement, however, is the language of war. Maybe more frequently occurring than any other machine language is the description of players as “weapons.” For instance, the Seattle Seahawks have “imported a bunch of new weapons” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 25). The Minnesota Vikings, on the other hand, are already “loaded with weapons. Adrian Peterson keeps defenses off balance, Visanthe Shiancoe is a solid tight end, and few teams have a better trifecta of receivers—Sidney Rice, Percy Harvin, and Bernard Berrian” (*Fantasy Football Index* 74). Rice specifically is “a great weapon near the goal line, thanks to his 6’4” frame” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 118). Before his jail term, according to *ESPN Fantasy Football*, Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Michael Vick was “one of the NFL’s scariest dual threat weapons” (30). Baltimore Ravens running back Willis McGahee “isn’t exactly a power back, but his instincts and lower-body strength make him a go-to goal-line weapon” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 103). In these examples, the NFL players are referred to either directly or indirectly as weapons, which is indicative of their ability to score points with precision and force.

Now, the term “weapons” could evoke various kinds of combat tools, from something as technologically simplistic as a spear or as advanced as a missile. A spear would not exactly portray Brummett’s notion of a mechtech aesthetic, but a missile

would, as it is sleek, high tech, and metal. For instance, Vikings wide receiver Rice “is the Vikes’ primary target, and he easily received most of Brett Favre’s heat-seeking missiles” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 62). Or, Arizona Cardinals running back Tim Hightower is “a missile behind big blockers, scoring seven times on 12 carries inside the 5” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 101). Also, *ESPN Fantasy Football* advises fantasy football owners to not expect Miami Dolphins quarterback Chad Henne to “suddenly be a downfield bomber” (28). In these examples, the NFL players are described as “targets,” “missiles” and “bombers,” all of which allude to more modern conceptions of war and function as a frame for interpreting the use of “weapon” to describe players more broadly. These mechtech aesthetic metaphors constitute NFL players as machines of war, valuable for their ability to “strike” or “explode” with fantasy football production.

Just like the “player as money” and “player as monster” metaphors, the “player as machine” metaphor is intimately tied to production. Brummett claims that a mechtech machine takes upon itself the aesthetic of production, the “aesthetic of the machine as it does its work” (Brummett 39). Thus, as NFL players are described as machines, their work or, more importantly here, labor is tied to commodity value. For example, Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis is a “high-motor 35-year-old” who will have “one more season of solid production” (*Fantasy Football Index* 110). Also, Washington Redskins linebacker London Fletcher is “35 years old, but his non-stop motor makes him a good bet to lead the team in tackles yet again” (*Fantasy Football Index* 115). With both players, it is their “motors” that contribute directly to their ability to produce or give them value in fantasy football.

Also like the monster metaphor, the “player as machine” metaphor calls for a stronger presence of the physical body. Brummett contends that the desire dimension of the mechtech aesthetic uses the body as its main emphasis. He writes:

Mechtech erotic is the desire to exert power by extending the body through machines ... One desires to move that boulder, and so uses a bulldozer. One wants to destroy that target over there, and so fires a gun. One wants to propel one’s body faster, and pushes the accelerator of the car. In each case, desire to extend the body powerfully is expressed through a machine. (Brummett 46-47)

While some examples have already pointed to this connection, the body seems to become more central to the machine aesthetic when players are characterized with the features of automobiles. Some of these examples listed here by Brummett have been used to describe other aspects of mechtech aesthetics, such as the bulldozer and the weapon. However, these multiple connections provide further evidence of the tight nexus between fantasy football, machines, and mechtech aesthetics. For example, the automobile specifically draws one of the best connections between machine and body because when the players are depicted in this way in fantasy football they do not drive the “body” or “motor” of the car; they begin to literally take on the features of the car and, thus, become it. One fantasy football participant praised St. Louis Rams running back Steven Jackson in stating, “This guy is a truck who has deceptive speed. Last year he had 314 fantasy points and remains one of the best that there is” (Patriot NC). Further, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Dennis Dixon “has terrific wheels and a big arm” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 31).

Just as automobiles need fuel to stay running, NFL players are measured based on their fuel quantity as well. Jacksonville Jaguars linebacker Kirk Morrison and Arizona Cardinals strong safety Adrian Wilson both have “plenty left in the tank” (*ESPN Fantasy*

Football 96; 98). Cars are also machines that need repairs or break down and, consequently, so do the bodies of NFL players. Broncos wide receiver Thomas could be “slowed by his bum wheel” (*Fantasy Football Index* 29). Also, “the wear-and-tear of full-time work could cost [Titans running back] Johnson some speed” (*Fantasy Football Index* 78). As NFL players’ bodies become machines within fantasy football discourse, their performance, ability, and maintenance also becomes machine-like, referred to using the language of machines and taking upon a mechtech aesthetic. Through these player descriptions, it becomes clear how the body is central to the machine aesthetic because it is the body itself that must become the machine.

Earlier, I illuminated how neither the “player as money” nor the “player as monster” metaphors were used solely in isolation. The same is true for the “player as machine,” which is often integrated with the other metaphors. For example, San Francisco 49ers running back Anthony Dixon is highlighted this way:

You’d expect a 233-pound monster who led the SEC in rushing yards per game to exit the NFL draft greenroom early, but Dixon fell into the sixth round this April because scouts were concerned about his slow feet... But [Glen] Coffee is still on hand, so Dixon isn’t an auto-handcuff just yet. (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 45)

Also, Dixon’s teammate, 49ers running back Frank Gore:

has some wear and tear on his tires, but he’s still the centerpiece of his offense, and he’s just 27 years old. The 49ers not only utilize Gore as a workhorse running back (they don’t really have a quality backup), but they also feature him extensively as a pass catcher. (*Fantasy Football Index* 78)

Rams running back Jackson is “an absolute beast, but how much longer can he carry this offense without breaking down completely?” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 7). In these three examples, the monster and machine metaphors are integrated to dehumanize the player in multiple variations. While they are rooted in different concepts, they work together to

send a cohesive meaning because both metaphors are rooted in production and commodity value, which are prolific and widely accepted in fantasy football discourse.

The “player as machine” metaphor also works in conjunction with the “player as money” metaphor. Writer for *ESPN Fantasy Football*, Pierre Becquey, gives this advice when drafting:

While it’s considered good form to roster your star’s backup in case disaster strikes, that logic has one major downside at an auction draft: You’re essentially committing resources to a player that you hope you never have to use. Consider instead bidding up every other team’s backups. You’ll make them pay a premium for their insurance policies. Or, if you actually win the bidding, you’ve multiplied your chances of striking it rich if those handcuffs become starters as LeSean McCoy did last year. Either way, you win. (12)

Furthermore, one fantasy football owner blogged that Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers “was such a great steal for me last year in my draft because this guy is a touchdown machine.” Additionally, a headline on *Sports of Boston* read, “Peyton Hillis: Bust or Bulldozer?” (Peal). Here the machine-like quality of the player, whether that is as a “handcuff,” “touchdown machine” or “bulldozer,” is juxtaposed with the language of money, joining together explicitly the idea that the machine has direct commodity value within the fantasy football marketplace. Since fantasy football utilizes the language and logic of the marketplace to commodify and otherize NFL players, the machine metaphor works within the money metaphor to objectify players like Wells or Hillis as commodities. Braverman argues that in a capitalist system, the “attempt to conceive of the worker as a general-purpose machine operated by management is one of many paths taken toward the same goal: the displacement of labor as the subjective element of the labor process and its transformation into an object” (124). In all of these examples, it becomes evident how interrelated and almost interchangeable the language becomes

between all three metaphors because they all have the unifying principles of production and commodity value. Through this reading, the metaphors of money, monster, and machine that are prolific in the specific context of fantasy football discourse are connected to larger colonial structures of the marketplace, dehumanization, and alienation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that fantasy football discourse utilizes three dominant colonial metaphors in its descriptions of NFL players: the player as money, the player as monster and the player as machine. In the first metaphor, player as money, NFL players are described using the language of the marketplace, like “sleepers,” “insurance” and “discounts” that point directly to the way their production is tied to their commodity value. In the second metaphor, player as monster, NFL players become sublime objects because their large athletic bodies fill others with “terror” and awe at their sight, but also their “monstrous” athletic feats are to be feared yet admired. Furthermore, NFL players are described as “beasts” where they take on the role of “studs,” “bell cows” and “hawks,” using animism to show their value in producing a great deal of points at their position. In the third metaphor, player as machine, NFL players are described as various types of machines, whether it is a “hammer,” “weapon” or “bulldozer” that illustrate the violence and functionality of the player and his value to fantasy football to perform as effectively and efficiently as a machine.

Also, these metaphors are used in conjunction with one another, showing how they are unified by the same essential principles: commodity and production. Likewise, I argued that these metaphors are colonial metaphors because, as they do focus on

commodity and production, they also serve to otherize and dehumanize NFL players by distancing audiences from their humanity and personhood, which are not relevant in fantasy football. Moreover, through the player as monster and player as machine metaphors, I argued that the body becomes a critical element for the meaning of the metaphor, as it is the physical body of the NFL player that actually does the labor on the field or performs the athletic feat.

However, as I mentioned in the opening of this chapter, what is interesting about the notion of the body that is unique to fantasy football is that the actual physical body is never present in game play. When fans watch the NFL games live in stadiums or through televised broadcasts, the body of the player is central to the viewing experience. In fantasy football, on the other hand, the physical body is obscured by the numerical representation of the players. Therefore, within fantasy football, these player descriptions discursively stand in for the bodies of players, commodified as money, monsters, or machines. This leads me to ask: What would fantasy football owners think of NFL players if they did not have visual access to NFL games? What would the discourse alone say about the bodies of NFL players? Would the NFL still be considered racist? While the discourse of fantasy football certainly argues colonial notions about the relationship between NFL players and fantasy owners, it seems that this is only part of the way that the players are rhetorically constructed in the game. In fantasy football, there is an interactivity that goes beyond the discourse that must be accounted for. After all, fantasy football is not a magazine or a billboard; it is a game. Thus, in the next chapter, I seek to answer these questions and address how playing fantasy football makes its own claims about the relationship between fantasy owners and NFL players.

CHAPTER 4 PLAYING WITH COMMODITIES: FANTASY FOOTBALL AND THE PROCEDURES OF OWNERSHIP

In their 2006 book, *Why Fantasy Football Matters (And Our Lives Do Not)*, Erik Barmack and Max Handelman offer this insight about a disappointing start to a fantasy football season:

Even the best-laid plans can go awry. Good managers can still start the season 0-3. All it takes is an injury, a meddling offensive coordinator, or an insidious burst of Mike “Skeletor” Shanahan double-speak to change your season.

Still, starting 0-3 hurts, and hurts badly. How managers react to this adversary is a sign of their character ...

Some managers panic, engineering a series of complicated trades that only succeed in making bad teams worse. Others believe that they can overcome tough starts by turning to their reserves; so they bench their struggling kicker and insert Martin “Automatica” Grammatica. Finally, certain managers take the ‘long view’ of the season. They convince themselves that their AWOL studs will ‘get their numbers’ over time, setting aside lingering fears that Eddie George and Stephen Davis are merely washed up. Most 0-3 managers embrace all three views. (106-107)

What Barmack and Handelman describe here is what it is like to actually *play* the game of fantasy football, which involves far more than just reading stacks of fantasy magazines, drafting players, and watching what happens. While preparing for the draft and selecting a team are parts of playing the game, there is much more to actually playing fantasy football and taking on the role of an NFL owner. Namely, the game is filled with a host of procedures that ask fantasy owners to make choices about their own fantasy teams and NFL players. However, what specifically do these procedures say to owners about the nature of the game?

In this chapter, I outline the processes of playing fantasy football which further position the NFL players as commodities and invite the fantasy football participant to think more like an NFL owner. Fantasy football does not attempt to create the same

virtual experience as a videogame like the *Madden NFL* franchise which, at its most basic level of game play, asks the audience to become the NFL player and control his actions on the field in simulated contests. Also, fantasy football operates differently than other similar videogames like *NFL Head Coach*, because in this game, users are asked to simulate the role of the head coach specifically, making detailed decisions that NFL head coaches make during the off-season, preseason, and regular season games. While the player is the owner of the team, the players and statistics are artificially generated and are not connected to the actual NFL. In fantasy football, participants are invited to become the *owner* of actual NFL players but have no control over what these players do on the field in real-time. Their only form of control comes directly through whom they choose to own, field in their lineup, place on the bench or disown entirely. From this position of ownership, the fantasy football owners assess NFL players based on their relative value to other players, making them a kind of commodity.

Thus, I explore how the procedures of fantasy football, which restrict the relative choices available to fantasy football participants within the playing of the game, argue that those who play fantasy football are owners and those NFL players that they own on their respective teams are valued solely as commodities. While I argue how NFL players are otherized and commodified in chapter three, in this chapter, I intend to show how the procedures of fantasy football argue this point in a distinctly different way. The discourse of fantasy football positions the NFL player as a colonial or nonhuman other through its various linguistic metaphors. However, in playing fantasy football, participants see the personalized effect that the commodification of players has on their own fantasy team through the processes offered within the game. Furthermore, since

fantasy football is labeled as a game, it is possible that this colonial rhetoric is more ideological and hidden because it is guised as just an entertaining function of NFL fandom, an innocent form of play.

To proceed with this analysis, I turn to Ian Bogost's work on procedural rhetoric. Bogost claims that just as visual scholars argue that verbal or written rhetorics are unable to explain the unique expression of images (e.g. an image argues "all at once"), visual rhetoric is not fully equipped to explore the procedural and expressive nature of videogames (29). Even digital rhetorics (i.e. email, blogs, web pages, etc.) do not fully account for how videogames make arguments through programmed processes. Thus, to demonstrate that games such as fantasy football are argumentative, it is necessary to expose how the procedures or the relative choices offered to the player of the game makes arguments about the subject or object being acted upon with the game.

While Bogost's work focuses specifically on *videogames*, fantasy football is not exactly a videogame. While it occurs predominately online and makes use of programming language that assists in its functional game play, it takes on procedural qualities that are otherwise different than traditional videogames. Bogost contends, "Despite my preference for videogames, I should stress that I intend the reader to see procedural rhetoric as a domain much broader than that of videogames, encompassing any medium—computational or not—that accomplishes its inscription via processes" (46). Hence, what I focus on here is not necessarily the procedures that are central to the way the game is programmed for online interactivity, but rather the primary practices, rules, and processes of the game that existed long before fantasy football was ever an online or "programmed" game. These core rules and steps primarily teach participants

how to be owners and how to view players as commodities. As Bogost suggests, “procedural rhetorics do not necessarily demand sophisticated interactivity” (42). Thus, the procedures I will be dealing with here are socially interactive practices such as drafting and trading players to other league members and online interactivity like choosing a lineup for the website.

To highlight the functionality of these procedures, I examine the two fantasy football magazines used in chapter three, the 2010 issues of *Fantasy Football Index* and *ESPN Fantasy Football*, as well as fan and expert testimony from the internet. I explore the discourse of the television show *The League* because, while fictional and intended for comedic entertainment, the narratives that play out in the show attempt to provide a mediated representation of how people in fantasy leagues might act. Additionally, I use my experience with the Yahoo! Sports fantasy football website as a frame of reference for how these procedures might work in the context of fantasy football’s online environment. The Yahoo! Sports fantasy football site, one of the largest fantasy sports hosting sites, provides a representative sample of how these procedures operate in the context of a specific hosting site. Thus, I proceed by detailing the most relevant procedures in the games space of fantasy football, which I have divided into three major phases of play: draft preparation, drafting, and season management. To be fair, I do not believe that I can truly extrapolate all the nuances of fantasy football procedure here in this project, but I will try to detail a few of these major processes occurring in fantasy football play that encompass the nature or spirit of the game. Once I have done so, I will then outline what claims fantasy football’s procedures make about NFL players.

Draft Preparation: Evaluating Commodities

Before any official fantasy football league draft even occurs, fantasy football participants are encouraged to prepare for their respective drafts by doing research on the current stock of players active within the NFL. This encouragement can come from many different sources, such as the fantasy football industry, other members of respective fantasy leagues, or from the personal aspiration of any fantasy football owner wanting to be as competitive as possible. Just like any other game, by playing fantasy football, one learns what leads to success or failure from previous seasons played or by talking to other players. For instance, one owner states the following on a fantasy advice forum with other fantasy football players:

I'd rather take my chances on a sleeper RB or WR, then pick up someone during my QB's bye week. And if my QB ends up being Cutler, just gotta pray last year was a fluke and he won't get hurt. If I end up with Rodgers/Brady/Brees, those guys are pretty reliable. Only way I'm taking two QBs, is if there is literally nothing left at RB and WR worth scooping and Andrew Luck is staring me in the face. I'll take a flier. And of course I'm trying to learn from last season where Charles/Britt injuries killed me in two leagues. (CP)

While this sort of on-line conversation can be found all over the internet on various blogs, it is in the pages of on-line fantasy football websites and fantasy football magazines where teams of fantasy experts take all of the traceable data from previous seasons in the NFL and convert that information into useable data that can help predict fantasy football success for fantasy owners. These fantasy "experts" are not often considered experts about the NFL, but are valued solely for their fantasy football knowledge. For instance, ESPN's Matthew Berry's entire job on a rather popular ESPN blog, weekly podcasts, and fantasy football television show is dedicated to the fantasy game. Furthermore, networks like ESPN and the NFL Network have hour-long shows

dedicated to only covering fantasy football. The information from these various sources comes in the form of statistical histories and predictions on every relevant NFL player to the fantasy game, evaluations and rankings of these players against other players at their respective positions and detailed advice on who, when, how, and why players should be drafted and owned. There are fantasy football specific tips offered that are not even relevant to the NFL, such as drafting too many players with the same bye week and taking a kicker or defense too early. As Andy Richardson from *Fantasy Football Index* laments about his first fantasy draft:

Early on, it was a challenge. People try to help you out—there are even books about this stuff!—but you have to make you end up having to make your own mistakes anyway. I drafted a defensive player ridiculously early, took two kickers, reached for a second quarterback (with the same bye as [his starting quarterback] to boot)” (194).

As Richardson alludes to here, playing fantasy football is a socialization process where an owner learns to not make these “rookie” mistakes by participating in the processes of the game. The experts in the magazine offer this information, but learning it through experience is a different process.

Besides the obvious marketing implications of such a system, this entire aspect of the fantasy football industry is designed to transmit fantasy advice from experts to participants so that these owners within fantasy leagues have a greater chance at success. For example, *ESPN Fantasy Football 2010* offers an article called “Knowledge is Power: The inquisitive 12-step guide to fantasy enlightenment” which gives 12 different pieces of advice that lead to success in fantasy football (11). Furthermore, KC Joyner’s *Metricmania* is “based on comprehensive game-tape breakdown” and reveals “hidden

truths.” Joyner professes, “These truths can give you a big edge at your draft table” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 136). Joyner describes his Metricmania as:

In addition to the raw statistical intel, each positional section contains a few rules of thumb, designed to serve as numerical guideposts when walking the compendium’s roads. They detail the threshold a player needs to be considered elite, what figures should be seen as acceptable minimums for backups and, most important, which metrics condemn a player to the draft-unworthy bin. (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 136)

What Metricmania exemplifies is the process that Oates and Durham call “enumeration,” the process of converting NFL players into numbers (302). The NFL has long been enumerating its players through the practice of keeping statistical records for each game. However, while the NFL uses these statistics primarily for record keeping, the fantasy football industry uses these official statistics for the purpose of converting players into commodities. Because these players will be drafted by individual fantasy owners in their respective leagues, it is necessary to assign each player a relative value based on their fantasy production so that those reading this advice will have guidance on who to draft and when to draft him. For instance, a website or magazine might offer a list of the Top 20 players in each position, ranked in order of their value. These values come primarily in the form of positional rankings based on their ability to outperform others players at their position, such as quarterback, running back, or wide receiver. In the rankings from *ESPN Fantasy Football*, “Position by position, players were nominated, dissected (well, not literally—that would be gross and illegal), then voted into their spots into the positional rankings” (5).

These rankings, based on statistical production and how that production translates into fantasy success, are an initial part of creating commodity value for each NFL player. For example, in the quarterback rankings from *Fantasy Football Index*, Pittsburgh

Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, who was suspended for the first six games of 2010, is “ranked only 23rd in this poll ... the higher the player is ranked, the more his production is weighted. And given that scoring system, it’s awfully enticing to rank players who can be counted on play 16 games” (42). So Roethlisberger would have been valued higher if he was guaranteed to generate more production. As a result, players who were more likely to play the entire season barring injury were considered more valuable.

The process does not end at just ranking each player by position. Within these rankings, NFL players are divided into tiers that put players into similar relative value with other players who perform in the same way. For example, Minnesota Vikings tight end Visanthe Shiancoe is a “solid, second-tier tight end” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 23). Also, Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning “comes in as the No. 2 quarterback on our board, but it would be fairer to call him No. 1B. He’s pretty much interchangeable with Drew Brees. He has the same smarts, the same stellar track record, and he’s also surrounded by a great group of receivers” (*Fantasy Football Index* 71). Players are also assigned the distinction of “sleepers” or “busts.” As explained in chapter 3, “sleepers” are players lesser known for their fantasy value, but might have a lot of potential for production. “Busts” are overvalued players who are predicted by the experts to not reward owners based on the draft pick invested in them. *ESPN Fantasy Football* further divides “sleepers” and “busts” into four categories to distinguish what sort of value each player might have. These categories include Category I, which for “sleepers” means “solid starters who have enough upside to be No. 1 options at their position” and for “busts” is “supposed No. 1 options who may not perform that way” (6). Category III is either “fantasy backups who have star potential” or “fantasy backups who risk giving you

nothing” (6). These tiers become relevant to fantasy football owners in all areas of season preparation because everyone who plays to win is attempting to capitalize on the value of each player by not drafting him too high. Consequently, understanding how similar players might be equally valuable is important for expanding owners’ options and not missing out on commodities.

Another way that fantasy owners help generate commodity value is through the practice of mock drafting, or “mocking.” While the expert rankings set much of the stage for assigning commodity value, mock drafts are essentially practice drafts that help fantasy owners test where NFL players are actually being drafted by other fantasy participants. Typically, mock drafts do not occur with other people in an owner’s fantasy league, as this would give away a great deal of strategy and personal affect a fantasy owner might have for a particular NFL player. Rather, they are performed on meeting sites like mockdraftcentral.com or fantasyfootballcalculator.com where a fantasy participant interested in practicing can draft with other anonymous owners interested in testing the value of players. Mock drafting is encouraged as a way to get a huge edge over other competitors in your respective fantasy league. For example, Mock Draft Central’s home page offers this reassurance:

Participating in mock drafts is essential in preparing for your league's official draft, before your pride and money are on the line. Practicing a large number of mocks gives you a huge edge over your peers—uncover positional trends, determine which players are over/under-valued, and map out when to pull the trigger on that hidden sleeper that is destined to propel your fantasy team to glory.

As fantasy owners participate in more and more mock drafts, they can attempt to get a closer approximation of how the expert rankings play out with other human players.

Furthermore, mocking allows the fantasy owner to adjust his or her own rankings based on the expert rankings, mock draft results, and personal preference for players.

The procedures of fantasy football that occur at the pre-draft stage are generally focused around translating NFL statistics into fantasy potential, creating relative value against other players at the same position and scouting for particular commodities that are low risk and high reward for the fantasy football owner. These procedures are primarily centered on recognizing and establishing value because in the next stage, drafting, fantasy football owners are forced to make the actual choice of who to own or not based on this value. While it is true that a fantasy football participant could play the game without ever engaging in draft preparation, by playing the game he or she would learn that the chances of winning are increased substantially by engaging in such practices.

The Draft: Choosing Commodities

The next important process is the fantasy football draft. While the draft preparation phase is focused primarily on establishing value, the draft phase is focused on procedures that highlight choice, because it is within this phase of playing fantasy football that owners make the actual decision as to who they will own for the start of the season. After the draft, owners are free to trade players or attain other players who were not drafted on what is called a “waiver system.” However, it is in the draft process where all of the highly valued commodities are selected.

In order to understand how this process works, I begin by giving an overview of how a sample draft might work. In a predetermined draft order (in my leagues, we do it by drawing names out of a hat; many websites randomly assign an order), fantasy owners select from the existing pool of real NFL players, ensuring they are able to field a

complete lineup, along with a set of reserve or backup players. To ensure the most level playing field, owners select in what is called a “serpentine” order, where the first round will start with the person picking in the first position and end with the person picking in the last. To maintain balance, however, the next round will begin with the “last” position and end with the “first,” with the following round reversing order yet again. This process continues until the final round of the draft is complete. Once it becomes an owner’s turn to select his or her player, he or she typically gets a couple of minutes to calculate which player is the best choice for that spot, given who has already been selected, what his or her current needs are, and what players remain. Most drafts typically include 15 rounds of selection, long enough so that players can select full fantasy teams based on the rules of their specific league. Also, fantasy owners try and maximize draft value by selecting players early who are worth more and waiting on players who are worth less, based on projected value by the fantasy guides, experts, and their own intuition. Once the draft has been completed, the teams are loaded onto the league website and stand ready for owner manipulation during the season.

The central procedure to the fantasy football draft is the actual picking of NFL players by each fantasy owner. Through this process, ownership becomes the central element of the draft process, because in drafting, the choice is not *to* own or *not* own, but *who* to own based on the position and round in the draft. Either way, when participating in fantasy football and the draft, ownership is the vehicle and the outcome; it becomes the constant. The variable element in drafting is what was established in the pre-draft stage: value. Thus, when a fantasy owner is given the option to select a player, typically he or she is looking for the best value at that point in the draft based on his or her needs at

various positions. In fact, the experts at *ESPN Fantasy Football* encourage owners to “Value value like Scooby values Velma” (13). It becomes more evident how critical value is when looking at comments other owners make about drafts. For example, fantasy football expert Louis Tranquilli comments on his draft, “Arian Foster in the 15th—that was some serious value for a potential stud starter, and a very low price if he doesn’t get it done” (*Fantasy Football Index* 59). Also, one fan bragged about selecting Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Percy Harvin, “I got him at a discount in my league by drafting him in the 8th round as my #3” (the spanker).

To try and maximize commodity value while decreasing risk, a fantasy football owner will implement different strategies. Each strategy invites the owner to make a prepared choice about what position he or she might select in a given round. David Dodds, expert at *footballguys.com* states that in his draft he “hoped to land some quality backs at discounts and then just wait for value. The top running backs were all going for deep discounts which made executing this even easier than usual” (*Fantasy Football Index* 68). Also, Yahoo! Sports’ Scott Pianowski recalls, “I wanted to get dynamic players at the running back and receiver spots, at least at the top, and then take a worker-bee approach and have plenty of depth elsewhere” (*Fantasy Football Index* 68). Pianowski further comments that he likes “what [other fantasy football expert] Chris Harris did here, waiting at quarterback and loading up with six-point studs” (*Fantasy Football Index* 63). When drafting quarterbacks specifically, *Fantasy Football Index* suggests that “the smart draft plan might include selecting a high-level backup; maybe he only starts a few games for your team, but he could be valuable trade bait during the season” (*Fantasy Football Index* 71). In all of these strategies, the unifying element is

the idea of maximizing the commodity value based on the draft position, which helps the individual fantasy owner feel as if he or she did the best job possible in minimizing “cost” and maximizing “capital.” But in all of these strategies, there is still the idea of making choices based on preference for particular positions.

Rather than implementing position-based strategies, the experts at *ESPN Fantasy Football* suggest a more specific method called “Value Based Drafting” (VBD), which operates with the assumption “that a player’s value isn’t based on the number of points he scores, but rather the extent to which he outscores others at his position” (13). They claim that this method can get a fantasy owner out of difficult choices typical in fantasy football drafts, such as, “When it’s your pick in Round 2, and you see a decent RB and a topflight WR are available, which should you choose? VBD tells you the answer: You want the guy who’ll most outpace the baseline” (13). What VBD does that is different than other strategies is that rather than putting any premium on positions or specific players, it encourages fantasy owners to fall back specifically on the notion of value as a pure measure of success. Making procedural choices using VBD invites fantasy owners to eliminate all factors besides the pure notion of value, such as reputation or position, placing a premium on the numbers.

While these few strategies do not encompass all of the potential strategies a fantasy owner could employ when drafting players in fantasy football, they do demonstrate how choice works within the game. Drafting is an illuminating procedural part of how fantasy football players learn to think like owners, because whatever choice they make or strategy they employ, they are trying to attain the best team possible that will optimize their chance for success. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that the

draft is purely about calculation. Rather, as many fantasy football players will tell you, there is excitement in the draft, where the ticking clock and the anticipation of selecting another player for the best value both provide a sense of thrill. The draft can be a very emotional time for fantasy owners, which perhaps allows space for the ideology of the process to slide in more unrecognized. Drafting, however, is just the beginning of the season. In the next section, I will discuss more about the procedures available throughout the season and how they emphasize management.

The Season: Managing Commodities

Season management includes the starting, benching, trading, dropping, adding, and continual evaluation of players. Throughout the season, the fantasy owner must manage his or her lineup to ensure that the value sought after in the draft is maintained or improved. This process consists of deciding whom to start each week based on his projected future performance, which also entails weighing factors like the player's history of performance and his matchup that week. Also, because some players decline and others emerge, a fantasy owner must always be willing to drop "cold" or add "hot" players or potentially trade these players with other owners based on want and need.

Once the draft is completed, fantasy owners learn that the evaluation of NFL players is never done. The players must always be measured in terms of their production to maintain a fantasy owner's competitive edge. While draft preparation can be a great deal of work and the draft itself can be a hectic and stressful time for fantasy owners, the season is often described as the real test of success because of the constant management. For example, Andy Richardson describes his early season experience this way:

I overreacted, like when I cut some barely used rookie just a few weeks into the season. Alas, Corey Dillon would rush for 1,000 yards and score 10 TDs from Week 6 on.

I'd get stressed out. Pacing around, agonizing over possible wheeling and dealing, afraid to make any moves for fear they'd be the wrong ones. I looked in on my team constantly, making sure it was OK. (*Fantasy Football Index* 194)

The procedures of seasonal management are important because they represent the majority of “play” that an owner does in fantasy football, requiring participants to log in each week, check his or her players, matchups, standings, etc. In this section, I will highlight a few of the typical procedures that a fantasy owner confronts in managing his or her season, such as starting and benching players, checking the matchup, and adding, dropping or trading players.

Each week, a fantasy owner is expected to field a starting lineup based on his or her team of acquired players. Usually, the starting lineup consists of about half of the owner's total amount of players. The specific starting lineup requirements really depends on the individual league requirements, but one arrangement might look like this (this is from my Yahoo! Sports league): one quarterback, two running backs, two wide receivers, one tight end, one player from either running back, wide receiver, or tight end, one kicker and a team defense. Some leagues choose to draft and field individual defensive positions like they do on offense. Fantasy football owners only receive points for players they put in their starting lineup, so it is important to try and field the lineup that will maximize the point production for each week. Typically, at the start of the season, these decisions are easy because the owner simply starts the players they drafted the highest, or they ones they felt had the high potential for production and value. However, as the season moves on, these decisions become more difficult because NFL players get injured, do not play certain weeks, underperform compared to reserves, or face tough opponents

in a given week. Thus, it is the role of the fantasy owner to constantly decide who holds the highest value and is worth starting based on their ability to generate points.

Often times, this process is so difficult for owners to decide that they turn back to the fantasy experts to help them make these decisions. For instance, NFL.com's Michael Fabiano produces a column each week called "Start 'Em & Sit 'Em," which "is the ultimate look at the weekly NFL matchups and how they'll affect your fantasy team" (Fabiano). In this column, Fabiano tries to detail those players who he thinks fantasy owners could be wavering about in the given week, while avoiding discussion over those players he considers a must-start every week. For example, he advises owners to start Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford against the New Orleans Saints because he "has alternated good and bad fantasy performances, but this week he's in line for a nice stat line against the Saints. Their defense has surrendered the seventh-most fantasy points to quarterbacks, so look for the Georgia product to thrive in a potential shootout" (Fabiano).

Sometimes, fans ask for this advice directly through call in radio shows or online fantasy football forums. This scenario is played out in the fantasy football based television show, *The League*, in an episode from season two titled, "Ramona Neopolitano." Kevin, one of the main characters on the show and the commissioner of the group's fantasy league, calls into "Sirius XM Fantasy Radio" looking for fantasy football advice on whether he should start New Orleans Saints receiver Robert Meachem or Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Mike Wallace for his playoff game. The radio experts give him some suggestions on both players, but Kevin is not satisfied until they tell him which one to start, resulting in Kevin being called a "rankings slave." Kevin is

stressed out about the decision because he sees upside potential in both players, making them essentially equal and is worried that he will make the wrong decision. As it turns out, he follows the advice of the experts, starts Wallace and loses because Meachem has a great game. While fictional, this example is representative of the kinds of line up decisions owners have to make when playing fantasy football. Also, in making line up decisions like this one, owners are assigning continued value as to which NFL players are worth more than others in the fantasy process.

Besides making line up decisions, fantasy football owners monitor their team's progress during the week. As explained earlier, fantasy football is based on the actions of real NFL players in real games. When these actions are played out on the football field, they get compiled into statistics. These statistics are then converted in the fantasy football leagues into point values. For example, a touchdown is worth six points in most fantasy leagues and a NFL player might earn one point for every ten yards rushing in a given fantasy football scoring format. Thus, if a NFL player rushes for 100 yards and scores a touchdown in his NFL game, then he scores 16 points for the fantasy owner that week. In a head-to-head matchup in a fantasy league, the owner whose starting players earn the most points by way of statistical production wins the game. Thus, fantasy owners will monitor NFL games for the output of their players while also checking their fantasy league website to see how that output translated into points. Sometimes this process becomes so addictive for fantasy owners, it appears to be an obsession. As Andy Richardson explains:

I couldn't watch just a single game; I had to be always vigilant, ready to jump at a moment's notice. Watching *every* game. Cleveland-Cincinnati is in overtime? I'm there. I didn't ask to give up slumbering on the couch with a half-drunk beer in my lap, drifting in and out of only one game. I *had* to.

I gave up a lot of sleep. Those Monday night games sometimes end after midnight, but when my weekly matchups depended on them—and they invariably did—I had little choice but to stay up ... Fretting, pacing, humming, nervously. Being there ... no matter what. (*Fantasy Football Index* 194)

While one could play fantasy football without ever watching a single NFL broadcast or monitoring their statistics online, the typical fantasy player does not play in this fashion. Furthermore, with the way that websites compile statistics into points, the fantasy owners are invited to interact primarily with the numbers, not the action within the games. While a fan could watch NFL games to determine fantasy production, the point values on the website are what really determine the winners and losers of the weekly matchups and make converting that action into easily digestible point values. The live games and the plays on the field become a way to access the mediated excitement of what produces the fantasy success, the NFL action. As suggested by Richardson, these two things become very intertwined. Furthermore, the NFL now has a cable channel called “The NFL Redzone” that only shows scoring plays in the weekly games, which perfectly caters to fantasy football players’ need to monitor all scoring in all games.

Another aspect of season management is dropping players who are underperforming their predicted value and adding “free agent” players from the waiver wire who could improve the owner’s roster. For instance, this assessment of value is demonstrated in this description of Jacksonville Jaguars wide receiver Mike Sims-Walker’s production, “Those aren’t [wide receiver 2] numbers. Those are stash-at-the-end-of-bench-and-cut-if-something-better-comes-along numbers” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 20). Also, the idea of managing a fantasy football lineup during the season is depicted in one fan’s plea for suggestions in improving his individual defense with a better linebacker: “I need a frigging ball hawk cause my team is getting whipped right

now and I need some production” (Markus P Dub). Another fan is excited to have picked up Indianapolis Colts wide receiver Blair White on waivers because, as he argues, “I have Garcon [and] now I have his handcuff and Collie’s handcuff. If White hits the field, he has the ability to be made into a beast by Manning. I love that” (szatzu). Here, the fan is arguing that having White ensures that if the other commodities do not produce or become injured, specifically Garcon and Collie, then he or she has the player (i.e., White) who should take their position in the Colts’ starting lineup. Through watching a player produce or not produce, fantasy owners learn how to either keep valuable commodities or replace them with new ones.

Sometimes, players are not added and dropped from the waiver wire, but rather traded in transactions with other owners within the same fantasy league. Trading players becomes a process of finding similar value out of both sides of the trade that will benefit both owners. For example, if one owner has a lot of running backs on his or her roster, but is missing quality production at wide receiver, then he or she may choose to attempt a trade with someone who is plentiful at wide receiver, but lacking at running back. These trades can become very beneficial for both owners because keeping valuable commodities on the bench at a particular position does not earn points each week. This situation worsens when the owner is losing points at other deficient positions. Here is an example of a trade proposal from *ESPN Fantasy Football*:

Dear FFT,

I see that you have three No. 1 receivers but are starting LenDale White at running back. Well, good news: I have a player in Knowshon Moreno who can step in right away at RB2 and keep from giving away points at the position—points that could cost you a playoff spot I such a close division.

So, here’s what I propose: Knowshon Moreno and Eddie Royal for Calvin Johnson and LenDale White. Take a closer look because the trade will make both our lineups much better. Imagine getting Moreno’s 20 carries a week instead of

White's 10! And imagine what Moreno will do when he faces the Raiders in week 15!

Look forward to hearing back from you. (16)

In this trade scenario, the one player is attempting to improve his or her own team value, while making a case for a fair exchange in value to get the deal done. By playing fantasy football, owners learn that these trades can greatly improve teams that are not producing enough production to win. Sometimes, however, trades can also be costly if both sides of the deal are not evaluated clearly (read here as looking closely enough at the numbers) or because an acquired player immediately gets injured; owners learn this lesson by trading as well. Trades, along with adding/dropping players, monitoring team production and fielding a lineup are all part of the procedures of playing fantasy football during the actual season. Just as draft preparation focuses on evaluation and drafting itself emphasizes choice, league play during the season puts management as the defining feature of its procedures because owners must also become coaches and managers. Value and choice, however, are still critical components of season management because an owner's decisions made during the season are typically motivated by increasing commodity value, and as a result, the success of the team.

What do the procedures argue?

Based on these processes outlined here, fantasy football procedurally makes a few arguments about NFL players and the mediated relationship between them and fantasy owners. First, and most obviously so, NFL players are intentionally converted into commodities in fantasy football for manipulation by fantasy owners. In the draft preparation stage of the fantasy season, NFL players are evaluated, ranked and placed into hierarchies so that they may be judged on their relative worth to fantasy owners.

These fantasy owners will then choose to own or not own these commodified players in fantasy football drafts based on their perceived value. During the fantasy season, these NFL players will be continually evaluated for their worth within the game, which is contingent on the amount of statistics produced through the on-the-field labor of the NFL player. If these players do not produce enough to maintain their worth, then fantasy owners will disown these players through dismissal or trade.

Also, the computational system of fantasy football takes the very real actions of human beings and converts them into numerical representations, first as statistics, then as points. This process, and the fantasy owner's interaction with it, creates a relationship that characterizes value as production and also commodifies the players. If a NFL player is able to play well on the football field, then they not only reward the fans in the seats who cheer their accomplishments, but they also reward the fantasy owners, who reap the benefits of their numeric production. Furthermore, the fantasy owners often never see the athletic feat, as it is possible but difficult to watch every NFL game; however, they can always interact with the points, an inherent process of the game. Thus, in fantasy football the focus is on the numbers themselves, not the identity of personhood of the player, which distances the player from the production.

Braverman contends that in a modern system of capitalism, it is not just the products of labor that are capital, but labor itself is capital. Through the commodity form presented in fantasy football, it is reasonable to conclude that just as the statistical production is valuable capital to fantasy owners, the players are also capital because they are the labor force that generates these products of labor. However, it is the player, not the production, which is dehumanized through the commodity form. While in chapter

three of this project I argued that players are otherized, commodified, and ultimately dehumanized in the colonial discourse of fantasy football, these arguments function differently when looking at the procedures of the game. In the language of fantasy football, fantasy football participants learn that players are nonhuman others through the way that the players are described in the metaphors of the discourse. However, by making choices in the game and seeing the effects of those decisions, fantasy owners understand this rhetoric differently in the *playing* of the game. For instance, a fantasy owner learns quickly that keeping a player in the starting lineup just because they have name value or play on the owner's favorite team will quickly cause the fantasy owner to lose if that player does not *produce points*. This relationship was alluded to in the Brian Urlacher example, where he came with this advice: "Reputations and names don't always equal huge numbers, but he's transitioned from a once-overrated asset into a low-risk, upside commodity" (*ESPN Fantasy Football 97*). In this excerpt, players can read that the name value of a player does not equal production, but it is through the process of playing the game and interacting with the point system where the gamer understands this particular rhetoric more fully. Fantasy football owners can see how this discourse about particular players impacts the success or failure of their actual fantasy teams.

Also as I discussed in chapter three, there are examples where players are added or maintained on NFL rosters for their ability to draw fans into the stadium, wisdom and leadership that mentors young players, or playoff experience. In fantasy football, these qualities do not bring any value to the fantasy team because they do not produce statistics and, as a result, they maintain no commodity value. However, fantasy football participants can learn by actually playing the game that there really is no place in the

game for well-respected players who do not produce because fantasy football does not allow a procedure where those qualities will translate into production. This is exemplified in an article headline from *ESPN Fantasy Football*, which reads: “Respect Your Seniors, Just Don’t Draft Them” (14). In this article, the magazine discourages fantasy owners from drafting running backs over the age of 30, because while they may seem like attractive names that are loved by NFL fans, they will give you little fantasy production. Furthermore, it is better to select younger backs that might have less to do with the actual success of the NFL team, but create statistics that will ultimately help your fantasy team. While this information can be gleaned by reading this article, the fantasy owner does not understand the way the game itself specifically argues such a claim without playing and seeing the results. Making these choices within the game better helps the fantasy football participant to see not just the NFL player’s value within the language of the marketplace, but the actual effects this has on *ownership* of the players.

Another way that fantasy owners can learn to see players as commodities through procedure is by experiencing what *ESPN Fantasy Football* calls “the endowment effect,” described here as:

When we own something, we often have an irrational emotional connection to that something, causing you to overvalue that something. It’s why you can’t bring yourself to cut Lance Moore as you chase his elusive upside, or why FFT won’t part ways with Megatron no matter how sweet your offer. (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 16)

Through experiencing the endowment effect, fantasy owners become too attached to the actual player, not his production. He or she is compelled by the ownership of the actual player, but fails to recognize his actual commodity value. Here again, as non-productive

factors of the game are emphasized more, it has further potential to hurt the fantasy owner in game play.

The second main procedural argument that fantasy football makes is that owners have only a virtual and somewhat passive existence to the production of a given player. Evident in the name “fantasy owner,” fantasy football is the fantasy of *owning* a football team. The fantasy owner has no control over what an NFL player will do in any given week. Sutton-Smith calls this type of play a “rhetoric of fate,” where the player is left at the discrepancy of chance. This process somewhat compares in logic to the actual processes of the NFL. An NFL owner typically has power in deciding whom the franchise selects in the draft and what players are expected to be on the field, but he cannot go onto the field and control the results of the game. He must direct his franchise from afar and bear the results of his decisions. From a procedural standpoint, fantasy football works much the same way. Fantasy owners select players in the draft, manage who is on the roster, and make the “tough call” each week on who goes into the starting lineup. However, they must also idly watch the outcome of those decisions as the real NFL games unfold each week. As many fantasy football owners will express, this is the most frustrating part of the game because the owner can no longer control the fate of his or her team. This is a rhetoric that written or visual forms cannot fully convey in the same way that playing the fantasy football does. It takes a fantasy owner playing the game, performing the procedures, to experience the true nature of the passivity.

While ownership in fantasy football is similar to ownership in the NFL in that the owners are forced to watch the outcome of games, but not actually play, one major difference between the two is that great majority of fantasy owners have no real access to

NFL players. In *The League*, this scenario plays out in an episode from season two titled, “The White Knuckler.” Another main character in the show, Ruxin, who is also a member of the fantasy league, attempts to gain additional control over his team by getting access to an NFL player on his team, Cleveland Browns kick return specialist Josh Cribbs. Ruxin, a Chicago lawyer, is sent by his law firm to hospital to help a child’s dream come true through the Make-a-Wish Foundation. As it turns out, the child’s dream is to meet his favorite NFL player, Baltimore Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs. Ruxin, however, convinces the child to meet Cribbs instead because he wants the opportunity to find out how many points he is going to score that week. In the end, when Ruxin meets Cribbs, Cribbs catches on to his scheme and ends up giving Ruxin none of the information he is looking for.

Successful or not, this episode of *The League* represents the tension felt by fantasy owners in trying to gain additional control over their team, as well as the way that fantasy football argues that the only control is through the process of who to own and not to own, who to start and not start. The control comes in choosing which potential production the owner lays claim to. Just like the capitalistic marketplace, where people buy, sell and trade commodities, there is an illusion of control over what will happen to these commodities. In the end, however, it is all a prediction or a “roll of the dice” based upon research and trends in the market, which is used to reduce risk. Fantasy football relies on this same illusion of control where owners evaluate and select players, manage them throughout the season, and deal with the consequences of those actions, but there is no real control in the game itself besides perceiving how much players are worth and then

choosing to own or disown them. Control is part of what attracts fans to play fantasy football, but there really is little control besides the notion of ownership.

Braverman argues that “Like a rider who uses reins, bridle, spurs, carrot, whip, and training from birth to impose his will, the capitalist strives, through management, to *control*. And control is indeed the central concept of all management systems, as has been recognized implicitly or explicitly by all theoreticians of management” (47). The logic of the capital marketplace, which makes its way ideologically into the procedures of fantasy football and naturalizes the illusion of control within the game, argues consistently that players are not judged and evaluated for their human qualities, but solely for commodity value and production. For example, when Chris Liss from Rotowire was interrogated about the amount of “bad boy wideouts” he acquired in their mock draft, Liss responded in a rather tongue-in-cheek way: “My P.R. people will have their hands full, that’s for sure, but my organization tends to look the other way. It’s all about on-field performance, and who my players assault on their own time is their business” (*Fantasy Football Index* 61). Here Liss reinforces the idea that production is supreme in fantasy football while also acknowledging the way that the character of players is not relevant to the game or supported by the logic of the marketplace. If fantasy football owners can understand the market logic of the fantasy game by doing research, staying focused on production and thus playing the game effectively, then fantasy football reinforces through its procedures that owners will have a great chance to increase their amount of control and predicted outcomes. Thus, in playing the game, fantasy owners will typically abide by the procedures that support market logic over human qualities even if, for example, the player has a bad reputation or is disliked by NFL fans.

This is also illustrated in the tension surrounding Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Michael Vick, who was sent to prison in 2007 for owning a dog fighting operation and suspended from the NFL. After Vick rejoined the NFL in 2009, he was met with a lot of hatred from fans, despite his regained dominance in the league. As a result, drafting Vick in fantasy football became an issue of dissonance for fantasy owners because he was a valuable commodity, but people did not agree with his personal actions. While NFL fans can choose to not root for Vick on the field due to personal concerns with his character, for fantasy owners, the choice fell on the logic of the marketplace. As fantasy expert Matthew Berry argues, “Here's my argument as to why Vick is not only worth a first-round pick, and not only should be the No. 1 quarterback taken, but should be the No. 1 pick overall. It's actually very simple. If Michael Vick is as good as he was last season and stays healthy all year, you win your league. Period. And he's the only guy you can say that about.” Furthermore, Vick, despite all of the fan hatred and dissonance in drafting him, was on 21.7% of teams that made it to ESPN.com league championship games in 2010 and owned in almost 100% of all leagues (Berry). Thus, in the end, fantasy football players were more interested in possessing Vick’s production than they were in “owning up” to his character issues. However, the procedures of fantasy football, and their emphasis on commodity value, production rights, and ownership made the choice easy because it fit with the logic of the marketplace that becomes naturalized by playing the game.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the procedures of fantasy football make their own claims about the relationship between fantasy football owners and NFL players. In

particular, the procedures of fantasy football, from the transformation of human action into numeric representation to trading players with other fantasy owners, are processes that bear the marks of its dominant messages: commodification and ownership. I have claimed that these procedures can be looked at in three major phases: draft preparation, the league draft and season management. The draft preparation stage, focused on the evaluation of NFL players, includes rankings players against others in their respective positions, creating tiers or hierarchies within those rankings and doing practice mock drafts that test this evaluation process. This process is necessary to turn the actions of NFL players into monetary forms that can be commodified and manipulated. In the drafting stage, which emphasizes choice, fantasy owners take turns selecting NFL players in their individual fantasy leagues, attempting to capitalize on each player's projected commodity value by not "spending" too high of a draft pick on him. In the regular season stage, characterized mostly by processes of management, fantasy owners make decisions that try to maintain and optimize the commodity value of their teams. These processes include choosing which players to start and which to bench, as well as the adding, dropping or trading of players.

From these procedures, I advanced two major claims that fantasy football owners can learn by playing the game and moving through these processes. First, NFL players are meant to be commodified in the play of fantasy football, as there are no procedures in the game to reward owners for valuing anything but the pure statistical production of a player. Furthermore, those who play fantasy football are really only required to interact with the numbers, not the actual plays in the NFL games, which serve as the human origin of these statistics. This additionally argues that it is the production,

not the actual player that matters. Thus, the procedures of fantasy football utilize the logic of the marketplace, where production becomes the only commodifiable element in the pursuit of value.

Second, the processes of fantasy football, while giving the illusion of control in the game, really only allow for control within the realm of ownership. Those who play fantasy football are invited to think and act like NFL owners, but without the same privileges afforded to those who own real NFL franchises. Fantasy owners are allowed to evaluate NFL players and decide whether they want to own them or not, but they have no control over what these NFL players do on the field, nor do they have any real access to manipulating a player's production. Also, because the procedures of fantasy football are rooted in a marketplace logic, fantasy owners will focus on the production of a player over his character in an effort to increase his or her level of control; after all, such a move would be rewarded in the market.

But this is a major difference between being an NFL owner and being a fantasy football owner. In the NFL, owners have a great deal of concern for the character of their players, as this can affect the identity of the franchise in both positive and negative ways because the physical player is the actual property of the NFL owner. While it is true that fantasy football is also focused on the notion of ownership, it that owners actually *own*? As the physical presence of NFL players is obscured in the game, what is it that fantasy football owners own besides the rights to a player's production, which is still distributed across millions of other fantasy football participants? Maybe fantasy owners own the mere *fantasy* of ownership?

Now that I have discussed what a procedural analysis might reveal about the colonial relationship between fantasy owners and NFL players, I want to turn my attention to some significant insights worth noting about procedurality and gaming studies in light of fantasy football. First, the nature of fantasy football's procedures seems drastically different than often-studied videogames like *Grand Theft Auto* (Bogost; Wark). In those videogames, the rule-based representation can be confined to all the relative choices of the gamer, as programmed by the game designers. Its "possibility space" or "myriad configurations the player might construct to see the ways the processes inscribed in the system work" can be totally accounted for because its gameplay occurs entirely in an enclosed virtual space (Bogost 42-43).

The possibility space of fantasy football, in contrast, cannot be fully accounted for in advance as it utilizes the actions of real people in real spaces to *become* the content. Also, because its game play involves the input of other participants to play (it does not occur in a virtual vacuum), it more closely resembles the also often-studied "massive multiplayer online role playing game" (MMORPG), *World of Warcraft* (Galloway), whose procedurality must also account for the actions of others in game play. To play these types of games alone would not be playing them at all. Therefore, because fantasy football requires the interaction of multiple people to perform its procedures and has content based in the actions of real players, its procedural rhetoric is characterized with more unpredictability than the rhetoric of virtual videogames. This dynamic alters the limits of a given game's possibility space, thus changing the range of rhetoric that one may encounter, the consistency and frequency of that rhetoric, and who plays a part in the construction of such rhetoric. Games can be reduced to their programs, but humans

cannot. As humans become an increasing part of the game, it seems salient to consider the organic, changing dynamic of the procedural rhetoric, and subsequently, its arguments.

Similarly, because fantasy football is a simulated game, but so intertwined with actual people and real events, it would also follow that perhaps this type of gaming is even stronger proof of Wark's merger between real space and "gamespace." When we play a videogame portraying a character, even if that character is a digitized representation of a real person, we are controlling actions that occur only in imaginary spaces. Even in documentary games like *911 Survivor* or *JFK Reloaded*, our actions occur in a temporal and historical vacuum (Raessens). But in fantasy football, owners do not play with fictional characters. They instead play with the hypermediated and numerical identities of actual people. What exactly is "gamespace" and what is real space in regards to fantasy football? What is fantasy and what is reality? Because it incorporates the actions of humans, and exists *within* the social relations between communities of people, the game and its procedural limits cannot be reasonably defined and completely represented. At the very least, it rhetorically blurs the line of procedure, play and social relations.

In chapter three, I posed the question: What would fantasy football owners think of NFL players if they did not have visual access to NFL games? I suggested that the colonial discourse would have to stand in as the only representation for NFL players, which in itself is a colonial, commodified and dehumanizing description. Given, first, how the interactivity between the fantasy owner and the numerical representation in the game argues that players are commodities and, second, that fantasy football participants

are partial owners to the production rights of NFL players through game play, I would like to instead ask: How does the visual representation of fantasy football impact the colonial relationship manifested in the discourse and procedures of fantasy football? Also, considering that the fantasy owners are predominately middle-class and white and NFL players are over two-thirds black, are there broader racial implications for this mediated and colonial relationship? In order to begin to answer these questions I raise here, I will focus my attention in the next chapter on understanding how race is a distinctly visual element of the game that cannot be ignored when playing fantasy football, considering the colonial nature of its both its language and processes.

CHAPTER 5 NUMBERS IN BLACK AND WHITE: “SEEING” RACE IN FANTASY FOOTBALL

As indicated by numerous blog inquiries, fans are very curious about the race of NFL players. This is especially the case when players are not easily identifiable by their skin color, like free agent running back Nick Goings. For instance, one fan asks, “Nick Goings is the [running back] for the Carolina Panthers...Is this dude white?...They said with Deshaun Foster getting hurt that this dude was going to start...I thought I heard somebody say he's not white but dude looks white to me...” (Doc Holliday). Another fan confidently responds, “He might be half white but his skin has a brown tint to it so I would say he is black for now” (Guest). Furthermore, another fan argues that free agent running back Justin Fargas, also questioned about his race, “qualifies as the Nick Goings of the AFC” (Don Wassall). This kind of inquiry about the race of NFL players shows the way that audiences respond to questions of racial identity when typical racial cues like skin color are at their disposal. However, how do fans make sense an NFL player’s race when no visual signifier like skin color is available? What other cultural signifiers do fans use to make sense of race? In this chapter, I intend to explore these questions more fully as I investigate how race functions in fantasy football, as this activity is one such arena where racial identity is seemingly obscured, but still becomes present within the game.

As chapters three and four demonstrate, fantasy football is a colonial and commodifying apparatus that otherizes, commodifies and dehumanizes NFL players. However, it is not only my assumption that fantasy football is colonial, but also rhetorically *racist* in that it positions predominately white audiences in ways to treat

primarily black players as gaming commodities, which rearticulates and naturalizes the already racist ideology of the NFL. Ono calls this a “neocolonial rhetoric,” because its technologies have adapted to promote racism in acceptable ways (2). However, while I critique fantasy football as being a racialized and colonial discourse, there is nothing depicted visually that allows owners to actually see race in the game. This poses an interesting dilemma because theories of race and difference tell us that race is something we primarily read visually by the color of another’s skin (hooks; Williams). For example, Fanon argues that, for colonized blacks, racial difference becomes literally known by sight. He states, “the black man is unaware of it as long he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin” (128). Yet, in fantasy football, NFL players are represented in the game digitally by names, positions, and statistical production, which actually function to obscure race and the body from the owner. Besides a picture of the player’s face embedded deep into a hyperlink, fantasy football participants do not see the physical appearance of the player within the game play.

Fantasy football is a digitized game, but it is not played on a gaming console nor is it accompanied by increasingly realistic graphics like those featured in console games like *Madden NFL*. Instead, fantasy football is an online game almost entirely depicted through numerical statistics or digitalized representations that stand in for the real player. Specifically, a player is represented by the amount of catches made, yards gained, or touchdowns scored. This process of representation is what Oates and Durham call “enumeration,” the “strategies of measurement and quantification of the human body for the purposes of ranking and classification” (302). Oates and Durham examine

enumeration in the ways that NFL prospects are measured up and quantified through the discourses of the NFL draft. Their analysis is helpful here for fantasy football because the practices and discourses of the fantasy game are mirrored in part after the NFL game. However, fantasy football is not the fantasy of playing football but rather of roleplaying as an NFL owner. As Oates and Durham suggest, “Numbers as a measurement of a player’s performance and relative value also play a central role in the wildly popular fan pursuit of ‘fantasy leagues’, in which fans are asked to imagine themselves as managers, organizing and deploying the increasingly black labour force” (307-308).

Thus, in fantasy football, real NFL players are drafted, monitored, and traded throughout the league so that an owner might optimize his or her team’s production and success. In essence, the NFL players or, more importantly, their bodies and athletic feats are reduced to statistical commodities that are valued because of their labor and production on the field. In a league that has been called the “Old Plantation South” of sports because of its tremendous amount of black players (66%) as compared to white head coaches (75%) and owners (100%), this game has material implications for black athletes and the black community who continue to fight for equality in the public sphere ever since the civil rights era (Rhoden; Oriard). However, as explained in chapter three, while the two are tightly interwoven with its practices and discourses, fantasy football is not the NFL nor do the colonial rhetorics of fantasy football operate in the same fashion that they do in professional football. And while race is such an integral visual element of the NFL, fantasy football makes every attempt to obscure race from its game play. However, this chapter explores, race and racist ideology still persist despite the erasure of the body and race.

Therefore, because racist relations between owner and player are such a dominant feature of the NFL and various parts of discourse about fantasy football players in a purported non-racialized game like fantasy football, it seems worthwhile to ask: Does the lack of visual representation in fantasy football affect perceptions of race or race relations? Or perhaps there are ways of seeing or perceiving that allow race to be read even in its absence? In short, I ask: How do we *see* race in fantasy football? Further, *why* is it that we see race in fantasy football at all?

The answer to these questions may reside partially in the way social knowledge plays a role in seeing and the manner in which race operates visually. Therefore, in this chapter, I intend to answer these questions and explore this paradox by first reviewing some of the leading theories on visual rhetoric, noting how each approach addresses the hermeneutics of the visual. Then, I situate the racial myths that play a role in how race functions in fantasy football within the broader discourses of the NFL. Next, I examine how fantasy football is a type of visual apparatus and how social knowledge plays an integral part in the game. Finally, I discuss how fantasy football participants may come to see race in fantasy football. In doing so, I argue that despite the enumerated representations of players in fantasy football that function to obscure race visually, race is still present within the game because our prior social knowledge, accurate or not, directs and trains how we see.

Leading Approaches in Visual Rhetoric

Although it is unknown at what point in history images became a primary way of communicating and knowing, humans have long communicated through visual means. However, some scholars contend that the recent proliferation of images due to the onset

of the digital age mark a noticeable shift in research similar to that of the “linguistic turn” of human sciences (Hariman and Lucaites 5). Similarly, other theorists argue that visual discourses have become the “dominant rhetorics of our time” (Prelli 2). Yet, some scholars contend that visual rhetorics have always been central and prevalent to our epistemology and lived experience (Olson, Finnegan, and Hope; Mitchell, “Showing Seeing”). While we may be unable to pin down precisely the visual’s genesis as a critical area of study, there is agreement that the visual is and perhaps always has been a way that we are influenced by and make sense of our environment and our complex social relations within it. What is more important about the particular theories of visual rhetoric reviewed here is that rather than being unified by their visual object of study, these theories are all concerned with the manner in which we approach the visual, which will become central to my discussion of race and fantasy football.

W. J. T. Mitchell invites us to consider “What is visual culture or visual studies?” (“Showing Seeing” 165). It is a salient question when we consider the prominence of the visual in contemporary social scientific and humanities research. In addition to addressing the disciplinary tensions involved with the emergence of such a distinct field in academia, Mitchell more importantly offers several theses that define some important characteristics of the visual. First, vision is not an isolated human sense that enables a sensory epistemology through the unique medium of sight. Rather, sight is tightly interwoven with other senses such as hearing and touch. He explains that to posit seeing as an isolated form of perception would hegemonically exclude the blind who rely on tactile or haptic forms of sense making to “see” things in particular ways. Thus, it is important to always understand visuality in relation to other senses.

Second, Mitchell maintains that all media are mixed media. Similar to the notion that senses are not isolated in everyday interaction, it is also true that we confront media that utilize varying ratios of senses and sign-types. These media require us to utilize varying configurations of technological literacy as we make sense of the rhetoric we encounter. For example, images are accompanied by written captions, moving images are layered with voice over, and we use cell phones to both talk and text.

Finally, Mitchell reminds us that seeing itself is an invisible process because the eye cannot see itself seeing. For instance, while the eyeball can see the physical embodiment of itself in a mirror, it cannot see the act of seeing. Furthermore, we often take for granted in a visual culture the learned familiarity we have with particular elements of the visual. That is, we take for granted all of the work the mind does to make sense of what is presented, which has been constructed and reconstructed through our continuous social relations. Indeed, Mitchell points to social construction as a defining moment of the visual, when we learned that images were not “automatic,” but actually “learned” (“Showing Seeing” 170).

Hariman and Lucaites take on the task of understanding the way that iconic photographs play a role in underwriting the United States’ liberal-democratic citizenship. In response to the proliferation of images accessible to the public, Hariman and Lucaites write, “there is little reason to doubt that social actors are more and more likely to be thinking, feeling, and acting on the basis of what they have seen rather than only heard or read” (5). As if speaking to Mitchell’s call to the interconnectedness of senses and media, they add, “Of course, these modalities are not so neatly separated in practice, so there is good reason to move beyond the question of which mode is dominant and

consider more complicated relationships between communication technology and culture” (5).

Hariman and Lucaites offer five vectors of influence for iconic photographs, two of which are most relevant to my investigation of visual media. First, Hariman and Lucaites argue that iconic photographs are an effective ways of reproducing ideology within the social order because of their ability to remain “relatively inarticulate” yet depict “the dynamic negotiations that are the rich, embodied play of societal power relations in everyday life” (9). In short, pictures represent concepts that resonate with us; yet, because there is always room for interpretation, we can never quite identify exactly what they communicate. The gap in meaning is the space in which ideology is able to function most effectively. As images are able to remain ambiguous, they leave space for multiple interpretations that may individually suite each viewer.

This leads to the second important vector: iconic photographs communicate social knowledge. Hariman and Lucaites write, “Photographs are an ideal medium for activating tacit social knowledge precisely because they are a mute record of social performance” (10). As they further contend, photographs are “storehouses of the classifications, economies, wisdom, and gestural artistry that make up social interaction” (10). Similar to Mitchell’s idea that we often take elements of the visual for granted, Hariman and Lucaites argue that visual artifacts rely on our mental schema or familiarity to make sense of what we see. When we interact with the artifact, we must use its features to create meaning out of what we see. Overall, these two vectors of iconic photograph effects are helpful in understanding the broader ways we articulate the visual.

Like Hariman and Lucaites, Barbie Zelizer also explores the power of iconic photography, but her focus is specifically on “about-to-die” photographs and the way that these images are used to influence the public judgment concerning the broader social issues and policy. Using genre analysis, Zelizer contends that photographs contain two important dimensions: the denotative and connotative. Denotative is the “as is” dimension, which we read as a modernist and static account of what is happening in the photograph. What we see in the photograph, and what the accompanying caption tells us, is precisely what “is there” (4). This dimension gives the photograph a certain sense of meaning-making authority, where the photograph itself tells us what to see.

The second dimension is a connotative read of the photograph, or the “as if” dimension, which allows for contingency in the interpretation of the photograph’s depiction. This dimension posits photographs as selective and incomplete frames of reality and, even when they are accompanied with captions, cannot provide us with a complete idea of what is being shown. Everything that is outside the material depictions in the photograph is filled in by the viewer based upon their preconceived notions of what is presented by the image. Zelizer’s “as is/if” distinction is similar to Hariman and Lucaites’ observation that photographs effectively deploy ideology through the activation of social knowledge; the “as if” dimension of a photograph is the space where social knowledge begins to do the work of ideology.

Kress and van Leeuwen attempt to provide a vocabulary for understanding how images and their producers speak to audiences and build relations between producers and viewers. First, they make a distinction between direct interaction, where viewers can see who is producing the message and producers can see how it was received, and indirect

interaction, where images are produced in a place and time and then viewed later by audiences without the presence of the producer. It is these latter interactions that are relevant to understanding the relationship between media and ideology because through these indirect interactions, we have less of an opportunity as viewers to understand the intended meaning of the message. As Kress and van Leeuwen argue:

Most viewers will not only never meet all these contributors to the production process face to face, but also have only a hazy, and perhaps distorted and glamourized idea of the production processes behind the image. All they have is the picture itself, as it appears in the magazine. And producers, similarly, can never really know their vast and absent audiences, and must, instead, create a mental image of “the” viewers and “the” way viewers make sense of their pictures. (119)

While this passage tells us much about the relationship between producers and viewers, it perhaps speaks more about the hermeneutics of the image and the way that we rely on social knowledge to make sense of what we see. When we see an image, our social knowledge or schema, makes sense of what we perceive. When we do not have an image to see, we still rely on our social knowledge to create meaning as to what we *might* see. Thus, the producer imagines how the audience will react and the audience imagines the intent of the producer. The image serves as a mediator to facilitate this imagined relationship between the two actors.

Lawrence Prelli claims that visual rhetorics are epideictic rhetorics of display, which include images, photographs, architecture, and demonstrations. However, for Prelli, rhetorics of display necessarily take on Zelizer’s “as if” dimension of images. As he explains, “There is, to put it directly, no way to see that which is displayed as it really is, unencumbered by our own partial points of view” (10). Prelli makes clear that images can never completely represent reality nor be received by multiple audiences in identical

ways as visual rhetorics are always mediated by processes of “rhetorical selectivity” (12). He identifies four such processes that influence how visual displays are seen: (1) the verbal depiction of the visual and the visual depiction of the verbal; (2) the disposition of the place and the placing of disposition; (3) demonstrations as rhetorical display and rhetorical displays as demonstrative; and (4) epideictic identifications and divisions. (12).

While I will not go through great pains to explain each of these individually, what I will touch upon is how these processes speak to the mutually influential nature of the visual and highlight characteristics of visual rhetoric mentioned earlier. For instance, Prelli’s first process, the interconnected nature of the verbal and the visual, harkens back to Mitchell’s claim that all media are mixed media. Furthermore, Olson et al. also reiterate that images and words are often “mixed together in rhetorically interesting ways” (2). Also, Prelli’s fourth process is another way of stating Kress and van Leeuwen’s point that the way audiences will receive a message is never really known to the producer and the audiences that receive the messages can be completely unintended. The possibility for a particular rhetoric of display to convey an intended meaning to an audience depends more on the social knowledge of the audience to allow for that rhetorical interpretation than it does for the producer to develop a well-crafted message that is presented to the audience. Olson et al. add, “while visual images, artifacts, and performances have considerable power to shape the world, viewers and spectators are hardly passive; rather, they co-create meaning along with the artifacts themselves” (3).

This brief review of dominant theories of visual rhetoric demonstrates the way that we approach studying visual artifacts as well as highlights the important role that social construction and social knowledge play in understanding the effect of visual

rhetoric. While much of visual studies are focused on theorizing the power of images, it is equally important to discuss the role that audience members play in co-constructing what images mean. As I have shown, ideology functions in this meaning making process.

Racial Myths in the NFL and the Curious Case of Peyton Hillis

In order to answer my larger questions about fantasy football and race, it is necessary to outline some dominant cultural myths that play an important role in how race is viewed in fantasy football. Part of what makes the NFL racist, besides the racial power imbalances and the commodification of predominately black athletes, is that there are still biological and cultural myths that exist regarding what race is best suited to play particular positions. While this has been an issue in a variety of NFL positions such as wide receiver, middle linebacker, and center, these stereotypes appear most often and clearly still today in discussions about the positions of running back and quarterback. In general, black athletes are seen as being “naturally gifted” athletically whereas white athletes are seen as being “students of the game” (Smith; Oriard). These stereotypes translate badly into mutually exclusive categories, where black players are almost always “fast and strong” and white players are most typically “leaders” and “smart.” In turn, we more often see white players starting at quarterback and black players starting at running back, despite the lack of any definitive or legitimate biological data to support this assumption (Smith). Furthermore, these stereotypical position assignments potentially have financial and future career implications for both black and white players. If white players are most often quarterbacks, generally the highest paid position on the field and the one associated with intelligence and leadership, it could translate into more future

coaching opportunities, financial security and success. Perhaps this is why there is such a gap in black coaches and owners as compared to whites (Oriard).

Black quarterbacks have made small but important gains in obtaining starting positions around the NFL. For example, black quarterbacks such as Michael Vick, Josh Freeman, Tavaris Jackson and Cam Newton all started a majority of the games for NFL teams in 2011, with most of those being for the entire season. However, this number still represents only around 12% of the overall starting quarterback positions in the NFL. Furthermore, white quarterbacks such as Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, and Drew Brees continue to represent the “face” of the NFL (*Fantasy Football Index* 71). Meanwhile, the defining “face” of black NFL stars is linebacker Ray Lewis, known for his intensity, ferociousness and rage (*The Show*). There is little doubt the struggle for black players at the quarterback position still exists despite gains. Even when black players field the quarterback position, they are not typically read as smart passers but rather as “athletes,” players who can win games using their legs, not their arms or intelligence (Oriard 223-224). Thus, when blacks play quarterback in the NFL, they still get coded as running backs, players who do not throw passes, but mostly use their legs to carry the football. Also, black quarterbacks are perceived to not have the same intelligence as their white counterparts.

For example, former Tennessee Titans starting quarterback Vince Young was touted highly upon entering the NFL for his ability to single-handedly control a game with the use of his legs and run past defenders, resulting in the Titans selecting Young third overall in the 2006 NFL draft. However, once Young transitioned into the NFL, he was consistently criticized for not being able to fit the mold of the “true” quarterback

(read here as “white”), battling repeated questions of whether or not he is even smart enough to play the NFL game (Dougherty and Wyatt). This type of racist logic is also recognizable in how NFL fans discuss white New York Jets quarterback Tim Tebow, who is also praised for his athletic ability as a “runner.” Tebow has created a lot of controversy in the NFL because many feel he is not suited for the professional level game and receives a great deal of attention for doing very little on the field. One fan inquires:

I wonder if Tim Tebow was a black Quarterback with the same skill set of being a good runner but lacking good accuracy, would he be as polarizing a figure and as hated and critiqued? Most agree he is a good leader and has true passion and love for football. He also seems pretty bright. His biggest knock is his lack of accuracy and bad throwing motion. (Rangenius)

What is interesting here is that even when Tebow took on the supposed characteristics of black quarterbacks, like “being a good runner” and “bad throwing motion,” it did not remove his other qualities as a “good leader” and “bright.” In other words, like Young, Tebow’s race provided the dominant frame for how audiences viewed his abilities in the position.

The black quarterback struggle is a very important one in understanding race in the NFL, but here I want to focus my attention on the running back disparity for white athletes, which has garnered much more media attention within the last couple of seasons. While black quarterbacks in starting roles are by far the minority at that position, successful white running backs in the last two decades have been incredibly rare. While this may seem empowering for black athletes at first glance, the running back position is one associated more so with power and agility than intelligence and leadership, which serves to perpetuate the myth that blacks are athletically gifted and not “students of the game.” As a result, the running back is racialized as a position where

only black players can be effective, an ideology that extends into fantasy football as well. This is made evident by one fantasy owner's comment, "I have a rule in Fantasy: Never draft a white [running back]. Ever" (Tim). His comment was met with agreement by another fantasy owner, who responded that the rule "makes sense" (CarltonBanksEsq). Considering the mutual understanding between these two fantasy owners about the sparse utility of white running backs in fantasy football, the myth that white players are not effective at the position is more than a personal opinion, which suggests the presence of a broader racist ideology concerning the speed and strength of black players.

One fantasy owner makes a similar argument in a somewhat different fashion, where he praises earlier discussed running back Nick Goings: "Goings kicked butt [in 2005] after Carolina's 'full-blooded' [runningbacks] were hurt. I had him on my fantasy team and he helped lead me to the league championship. But by the way races are defined and categorized in the U.S., there's no way he can be considered white" (The Duke). Here, the fantasy owner uses the "one drop" logic in U.S. race categorization to code Goings as black, which is also evident in his use of "full-blooded" to describe players he perceives as "fully black." Since Goings had a successful amount of fantasy production, it was perhaps easier to code him as black, as this logic aligns with the racial myths that already exist about black players and the running back position. If Goings were white, on the other hand, it would not make as much "sense" that he was so successful at running back.

Similarly, one fan offers the following racially focused comments about running back Justin Fargas, discussed earlier for his racial ambiguity: "I know he is not 100% white but if you appear caucasian [sic] and play tailback in the NFL you better get

dreadlocks if you want playing time. I imagine if he got a haircut and dyed it blonde he would have been move to the practice squad and never been described as ‘speedy’ in the media guide” (JTJTJT). Both the Goings and Fargas examples illustrate how the race logic surrounding NFL positions works tautologically. Not only does race dictate what position a player might be best suited to play in the NFL, but through the circular function of these cultural myths, when a player is racially ambiguous to audiences like Goings or Fargas, the position they play will *dictate their race*. Thus, when a player is presented with a racial likeness that does not easily fit in the binary of black or white that has become naturalized in the NFL, then fans will rely on a signifier like player position to decide their race.

Sometimes NFL positions can become a marker for racial coding, even if the player neatly fits into a racial category. Such is the case with former Cleveland Browns running back Peyton Hillis, who was became a top statistical performer in most running back categories during the 2010 season, and is the main reason that the running back position has garnered much attention recently. Put shortly, Hillis was absolutely outstanding in 2010. In the 2011 season, unfortunately, Hillis spent a great part of the season recovering from injury. Despite this setback, Hillis signed a major long-term contract with the Kansas City Chiefs in March of 2012. However, what made Hillis’ performance even more attention worthy is that he is a *white* running back producing effective (read here as “black”) numbers at the position. Indeed, he did so well that Hillis earned the much coveted 2012 cover of the EA Sports game *Madden NFL*, an honor reserved for one of football’s highest achieving performers from the previous year.

Hillis' performance on the field was indeed noteworthy, but what is most relevant to my discussion is the discourse that surrounded Hillis during his emerging success. Hillis was the first white running back to rush for over a 1,000 yards in the NFL in 25 years. Almost immediately, Hillis began to be referred to by multiple nicknames around the league, which most commonly included names like "The Albino Rhino" and "The Great White Hope." The rhetorical curiosities surrounding these names are many, but for the purpose of brevity and focus, I narrow my focus to the way that Hillis' nickname was tied directly into his racial status and his position. The rhino points to the function of the running back position, which charges into the defense on his way to the end zone. However, Hillis is not just any rhino, but an "albino" rhino, making direct reference to his race as a white player as well as his status as a rarity at the position. The U.S. National Library of Medicine describes albinism as a rare "defect of melanin production" that results in a loss of color in one's skin, hair and eyes. Thus, by Hillis being called the "Albino Rhino" he is racially coded as white, rare, and a "defect" at running back. Additionally, the nickname "The Great White Hope" references the 1967 play and 1970 movie of the same name which deal with the racial controversy surrounding black boxer Jack Johnson and the public search for a great white boxer to defeat him. Hillis being referred to as "The Great White Hope," alludes to the racial tension surrounding the running back position because the nickname indicates that Hillis gives white players a chance to show that they are still able to play the position well. One Cleveland Brown fan posted an article on his blog from bleacherreport.com, which stated, "He's even started getting nicknames like Chuck Norris and the Albino Rhino, but in actuality he is

the ‘Great White Hope.’ Peyton Hillis is showing that white guys can run the ball despite the trash being talked to him by the other players” (WRREBEL).

Hillis’ race makes him rhetorically distinct in the game of football because he challenges the notions of what a running back “looks like.” When one sees Peyton Hillis play for the first time, he or she is potentially stunned that Hillis is indeed white and yet carrying the football well. Hillis even reported on the “Dan Patrick Show” in January of 2011 that he was harassed by opposing teams frequently for being a white running back (Grzegorak). What Hillis’ multiple nicknames illustrate is the tension created between the race of the player, the position he fields, and his success in playing that position when the configuration of those elements does not align with the existing cultural myths about race in the NFL. Thus, there must be a way for audiences to rhetorically mediate that tension. Just as Hillis’ race affected how people reacted to his success at running back, so did his success at the running back position impact how others incorporated Hillis’ race into the forefront of his NFL identity. Hillis could not be just a rhino; he had to be an *albino* rhino. This shows how race is intimately tied to not only skin color, but to other cultural markers of identity wrapped up in the ideological myths of the NFL, which audiences use to constantly read the race of players. I bring up Hillis not only as a way to illuminate the function of cultural race myths surrounding particular positions in the NFL, but to also help explaining the operation of race in fantasy football, which rearticulates the same ideology.

“Seeing” Race in Fantasy Football

Before I use Hillis as a way to discuss how race is seen in fantasy football and rearticulates these racial myths of the NFL, it is necessary return back to visual theories

to justify fantasy football as a rhetoric that strongly relies on visual elements, despite its focus on the display of statistical information. Fantasy football is an online form of gaming that relies primarily on statistical representation to stand in for the bodies and on-the-field actions of real NFL players. The game enumerates players for the manipulation of fantasy participants in pursuit of their own gaming outcomes. Put simply, fantasy football is mostly a game of numbers. However, it is a game played on a digital interface and it is designed to be much more than a simple display of black numbers on a white screen. The website I use as my representative example, Yahoo! Sports, does a quality job of making the fantasy football interface vibrant and engaging. And while this does contribute to making fantasy football visual in nature, this display interface is not primarily what I am interested in. Instead, what primarily interests me here is how the statistics themselves serve as the primary form of visual engagement in fantasy football. After all, it is the control of the numbers that fantasy football players are after and it is the numbers that make up the primary representation of the game (Davis and Duncan; Farquhar and Meeds).

While it is tempting to view the numbers and the accompanying discursive labels that describe their meaning as primarily textual or linguistic in nature, Mitchell argues that the problem of “word and image” is “a kind of shorthand name for a basic division in the human experience of representations, presentations, and symbols” (“Word and Image” 47). However, Mitchell argues that words are visual signs and images are described using language; thus, they are overlapping and intimately tied. As he explains in an appropriately visual way:

Consider, for instance, the words you are reading at this moment. They are (one hopes) intelligible verbal signs. You can read them aloud, translate them into

other languages, interpret or paraphrase them. They are also visible marks on the page, or (if read aloud) audible sounds in the air. You can see them as black marks on a white background, with specific shapes, sizes, and locations; you can hear them as sounds against a background of relative silence. In short, they present a double face to both the eye and the ear: one face is that of the articulate sign in a language; the other is that of a formal visual or aural gestalt, an optical or acoustical image. Normally we look only at one face and ignore the other: we don't pay much attention to the typography or graphic look of a text; we don't listen to the sounds of words, preferring to concentrate on the meaning they convey. But it is always possible to shift our attention, to let those

black marks on a white background

become objects of visual or aural attention, as in this self-referential example. (“Word and Image” 47)

Furthermore, in his work, *What Do Pictures Want?*, Mitchell plainly defines “images” as “any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or another” (xiii). Thus, by Mitchell’s definition, numbers and letters are *visual* artifacts. If statistics and the textual representations that describe them, such as “catches,” “yards” and “touchdowns,” are visual and the interface of fantasy football is interactive and vibrant in bringing to life these statistics and framing them in appealing visual ways, then it can be suggested that fantasy football operates as a visual enterprise, despite its lack of “pictures.” This observation is further supported by Farquhar and Meeds’ finding that fantasy football players are much more interested in interacting with the numbers visually than they are interacting with fellow league members through message boards verbally (1224).

Even if it is enjoyed through visual means, fantasy football is a *different* visual game as it does not rely on flashy images of NFL players making miraculous catches or spectacular tackles like an NFL broadcast; it obscures the players, their bodies, and their race through the process of enumeration. Because of this difference, I return back to the

relationship between visuality and social knowledge. While fantasy football could be played without any knowledge of NFL rules or the identities of its players, only an extremely small margin of people who play fantasy football might fit this profile. A few people may draft a fantasy squad, submit their lineups weekly and reap the rewards or failures of their actions without any knowledge of the professional game. However, this would most likely result in an ineffectual approach to fantasy football and this naïve player would play the game poorly.

In comparison, most people who play the fantasy game are NFL fans first, with a high level of NFL viewership and a complex set of rooting interests and investment in NFL players. In short, they have deep social knowledge of the game. This is evident in the overlapping discourses between fantasy football and NFL broadcasts. Fans can track their scoring live on fantasy websites while simultaneously getting fantasy updates during the broadcasts of NFL games (Oates, "New Media" 37). Also, a 2002 survey concluded that fantasy participants watch almost two more hours of NFL football than even the average fan (Lefton). Further, Davis and Duncan contend that social knowledge is an integral part of the fantasy game. Fantasy sport participants spend a great deal of time watching sports broadcasts and gathering statistical information on players (253). This information is then used to oust and shame other players for knowing less about players. In doing so, these participants assert masculine dominance through possessing more knowledge over the less knowledgeable player and feeding their compulsive desire for information (Davis and Duncan 253). Thus, knowing more than just the game of fantasy football and its rules, but also being able to acquire and retain sports knowledge about NFL players, is a common characteristic among fantasy participants as it is an integral

part of how one wins and asserts dominance in the game. Because fantasy football is a visual activity whose discursive and numerical markers serve to stand in for living and/or more visceral representations, it asks fantasy football participants to rely on this valuable, taken-for-granted social knowledge to make meaning out of what they see represented in minimal ways.

This is where I now turn to the interesting race problem of fantasy football. In a general sense, this relationship between symbol and referent does not have detrimental implications for football players and human social relations. However, when we talk specifically about race, the relationship between the signifier and signified has critical implications. In fantasy football, players are represented discursively by textual or numerical representations that tell the owner the name of the player as well as their statistical production. Thus, the visual artifact that fantasy football owners interact with on the screen is not a picture of the players themselves or video clips of their performances, but rather these digitalized textual representations. More importantly, race is not depicted in visual ways. Indeed, race is not present at all, as race is not evident in a name or numbers and knowledge of player's race is not necessary to play the game. Yet, a player's race is still there in ideological and, more importantly, perceived ways. Even when it is not visually present, fantasy football participants see the visual construct of race, because for the most part, fantasy owners know who is white and who is non-white in the NFL.

For example, most fantasy football participants know that Tom Brady is the white, starlet-dating quarterback of the New England Patriots. They know this information because their prior social knowledge of player and person known as "Tom

Brady” tells them so. This social knowledge is an important element in the fantasy game. When fantasy football participants read the name “Tom Brady” on the screen, they will most likely have an idea of whom “Tom Brady” is. Moreover, when the information is presented in the context of fantasy football, they are even more assured that it is *the* Tom Brady they are thinking of. In a similar fashion, when fantasy football participants see the name “Michael Vick” on the screen, they know who Michael Vick is because of their mental schema; they might even see an image of a black Michael Vick in their minds. There is no race actually presented to fantasy football owners in the form of white skin or black skin, yet they are able to visualize the image, what Mitchell describes as “mental things, residing in the psychological media of dreams, memory, and fantasy” (*What Do Pictures Want* 84). Just like Hariman and Lucaites and others detailed more theoretically, fantasy football owners rely on their social knowledge to fill in the gaps of what “Tom Brady” or “Michael Vick” means and what they look like. The visual stimulus is the name on the screen, the position they play and the accompanying statistics. However, as fantasy football owners, participants do not actually see race there. Instead, the visual-textual image on the screen gives them the space to fill in and imagine the race of the player.

Tom Brady and Michael Vick are more common players that receive gratuitous media attention and have very storied histories in the NFL, thus many fantasy participants obviously know their identities and, more central to this discussion, their race. So how does this process work when the player is less likely to be known? What happens as our social knowledge becomes more limited and our social construction occurs with fewer definitive cues? Audiences end up using other kinds of cultural assumptions to read race,

like their racial assumptions about names. For example, one fan asks, is New Orleans Saints tight end Jimmy Graham, whose father and mother are of two different races, a “white dude?” (Mr. Smoke Weed). When other fans respond that Graham is “mulatto,” the first replies, “I always thought dude was 100% white cause [sic] of the name but I guess he's mixed” (Mr. Smoke Weed). Here, Graham was read as white because his name suggested to at least one fan that “Jimmy Graham” was a name more indicative of a white man than a black man. Furthermore, the tight end position is one where both white and black players have seen statistical success, thus making it less distinctly racial.

In fantasy football, however, this process does not always occur by way of name, but rather because of the racial myths about NFL positions, through the statistics. Let me now turn back to the example of Peyton Hillis. Hillis was a lesser known football player before his success and as a result, when most fantasy football owners read the name “Peyton Hillis” on the screen, they were unable to identify whether he was white or black because they have no previous knowledge of his appearance. To the fantasy football player, prior to his emergence as a star, Hillis was just a name on the screen with numerical production; he was a commodity. But because he was specifically a running back and had a great amount of statistical production at the position, Hillis was thought to be *black* by many fantasy players. For instance, in an article from *Scene* magazine, writer Vince Grzegorak writes, “Hey! Did you know Peyton Hillis is white? No, really, he’s white” (Grzegorak). While a white running back is rare and at times difficult to imagine, a successful white running back is so rare that fans and sports writers are forced to enter his race into the discussion to make sense of Hillis’ ability. In the case of fantasy football, where race is obscured, audiences must make sense of his race through his

statistical production, because the visual marker of his skin color is not available unless the owner knows who Hillis is. And as this article suggests, they default to assuming he is black until his skin color, which is distinctly “white” in this case, informs them visually or they learn through other means. Furthermore, once Hillis was known to be white running back by many audiences, it did not seemingly change their perception of white running backs, despite his success. Rather, his presence invited them to use their existing cultural assumptions about NFL running backs to make sense of his race, position, and success, evident in him being the “Albino Rhino” and the “The Great White Hope.”

Another example of how race functions in fantasy football would be the case of mobile quarterbacks, who are perceived as valuable fantasy commodities because of owners’ perception that they can both pass and run the ball effectively, increasing their potential to score points in more categories than “pocket passing” quarterbacks. Here, if fantasy owners were to only interact with the numbers, then they might read any quarterback who has a great deal of rushing yards and passing yards to be black because of the cultural myth that black quarterbacks are faster and more mobile. This myth is of course easily dispelled by white Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers, who in 2009 was “second among [quarterbacks] in rushing yards and scrambled for five touchdowns” (*ESPN Fantasy Football* 26). Thus, if fantasy owners had no knowledge of Rodgers, specifically his race, they could code Rodgers as black because their cultural assumptions about black quarterbacks might suggest as much.

What is important here is that, as fantasy participants, when race is not made evident visually, such as a picture depicting the race of the player, we turn to other cues to make sense of it. Unfortunately, we rely on outdated and unfounded tropes of black

players being “fast and strong” and white players being “smart.” Such is the case with Hillis, whom fantasy football players imagined and thus saw as black because he was a successful running back. When our visual stimulus is void of the bodily images that we traditionally use to cue race, we become reliant on textually presented information and social knowledge to draw inferences. Often, as shown here, these meanings are constructed from cultural stereotypes that lead us to incorrect conclusions. These meanings, based on our social knowledge, are what we rely on to then make sense of what we see and the textual-visual artifact on the screen simply becomes reduced to an empty ideological signifier. Mitchell’s notion of mixed media comes in here as the digital words and the signified work together to help us create meaning in alternating roles. Therefore, we do not “see” race on the screen, but we definitely imagine it and use it to interpret what we “see.”

Conclusion

Earlier I posed the questions: Does the lack of visual representation in fantasy football affect perceptions of race or race relations? Or perhaps there are ways of seeing or perceiving that allow race to be read even in its absence? In short, how do we *see* race in fantasy football? Further, *why* is it that we see race in fantasy football at all? I already answered the first three questions by discussing how textual-visual artifacts cause us to use our social knowledge and cultural myths and see race when it is not visually explicit. Race is there in fantasy football because, as fantasy football owners, our prior social knowledge puts it there as we interact with the text. As fantasy football owners are mostly avid fans of the NFL, they already know who is white, black or otherwise. And when fantasy football participants do not already know race of the player, they use other

cues and myths to read it in the image, represented here as names, positions and statistical production. Hence, while it may seem that fantasy football obscures the body and race through the process of enumeration, we cannot eliminate race in the game nor deny its existence as critics. It is there because we put it there. Thus, it does not mask race nor does it serve to neutralize the colonial gaze of fantasy football participants that is maintained through the visual, numeric representation of the game. Rather, fantasy football does in fact function to rearticulate the colonial ideology that exists in the discourses of the NFL.

But to address the last question about our need to put race into fantasy football, I turn to a conversation I had with another friend of mine about this project who plays fantasy baseball, but not fantasy football. She said, “I don’t agree. When I look at my fantasy baseball players, I don’t imagine whether they are white or black. I just know the Hispanic sounding names are probably Latino players.” This anecdote perfectly illustrates my point about race and fantasy football. It is not so much the discourse of the fantasy game or its procedurality that makes fantasy football racist, but rather its intersection with United States racial history and the subsequent race relations that continue to exist in the NFL, which we come to read into the game. We do not have conversations about the race of unknown baseball players like we did with Hillis because there is not the same dilemma of race in professional baseball. There is little to no discussion about which races are best suited to play particular positions. Major League Baseball also does not operate in the same binary black and white players like we saw reproduced with the discussions on Goings, Fargas and Graham. Furthermore, while it has its own racial struggle, the MLB is not metaphorically linked to slavery and the

physical punishment of black bodies for white gain. We do not “erotically gaze” (Oates, “The Erotic Gaze” 74) at muscular black bodies in the MLB draft like southern plantation owners did at slave auctions. In fact, the MLB draft is not even televised. We need to see race in fantasy football because the myths about black and white athletic ability and intellect are still prevalent and as a result, resonate with us because it “makes sense” with the colonial ideology of the league, whether we see pictures of players or not. We need to see race in this context because we have been taught to see race as a way to make sense of who holds what positions and who has what power. We see race in fantasy football because the racist ideology that we rearticulate when we play the game has helped us to.

Finally, by returning back to the relevant literature in visual studies, the way race is seen in fantasy football allows us to rethink our approach to studying the visual. First, if it is true as Prelli notes, that we have entered an age dominated by images, then it is also reasonable to assume that we make sense of our environment in increasingly visual ways. But what does it mean for something to be a *visual* object? Further, what do critics mean when they claim that they study *images*? My assumption is that most visual scholars study predominately “pictures” of various mediums, static or moving representations both human and nonhuman life. However, as I argued using Mitchell’s definition of an “image,” the notion of the visual goes far beyond just pictures. In the case of fantasy football, numeric representation, which would most commonly be referred to as a discursive or textual rhetoric of sorts, was defined as a distinctly different *visual* artifact, which had larger implications for the commodification of NFL players and the construction of race. Thus, I suggest that as critics, we should open up and rethink

how we define the visual, as well as what we choose to study visually. Maybe studying the visual is more fittingly defined by *how* an artifact is approached, not *what* is being studied.

However, in making this suggestion, I am not arguing that all discursive artifacts are to be studied visually. After all, there is certainly something different about a traditional novel that is not there in fantasy football. There is also something different about fantasy football that is not there in a picture. Rather, the point I am making here, as the numerical representation of fantasy football demonstrates, perhaps not all artifacts are exclusively discursive or visual. I argued that fantasy football was a distinctly different visual artifact than a photograph. However, it could also be suggested that fantasy football is a distinctly different discursive text than a novel. While both a novel and fantasy football have discursive and visual elements, both texts invites us to co-create meaning with them in different ways, just as a photograph and fantasy football call us to this process in varying ways as well. A novel requires a certain level of grammatical syntax and reading orientation that allows us to make sense of what the author intended. In western societies, for instance, we traditionally follow the rules of the English language and read from left to right. However, a picture also has a different syntax or grammar that requires us to see it “all at once,” or at least choose where we begin to look if a focal point doesn’t direct us otherwise. Thus, I grant that novels are different than pictures, as we do not look at them the same way. Also, as critics we have theories at our disposal that allow us to critique novels differently than pictures. Nevertheless, what I am more interested in here are the artifacts like fantasy football that allow us space to do both, those objects of study that are both “textual” and “visual.”

Consider, for instance, Robert Indiana's iconic painting "Love." While the primary of substance of this painting is the word "LOVE," it obviously presented in such a way that invites audiences to read it visually. After all, it is a painting, but a painting of a *word*. Thus, is Indiana's "Love" a textual or visual artifact? I think it is both, but I leave it up to the critic to decide how he or she chooses to study it. As critics we can turn to our theoretical "toolbox" and make sense of which items make the best sense to use when trying to critique a given text. Sure, I could drive a screw into a piece of wood using a hammer, if I use enough force, but the threaded design of the screw and the slots in the head certainly invite me to use the screwdriver. I think Bogost's procedural rhetoric emerged out of a similar line of thinking as he posited that discursive or textual theories do not account for the way that videogames uniquely argue through processes. As the numerical representation of fantasy football helps me demonstrate, while some texts might seem strongly discursive, visual or even procedural, there are a great deal of artifacts that blur all of those lines completely. As critics we need to decide the best way of approaching them without falling into essentialism based upon genre. Perhaps, via Mitchell, we should try and ask, "What do texts want?"

Second, the relative absence of player's pictures in fantasy football, as well as the way that social knowledge impacts the nature of how fantasy owners read race into the game, calls into question the importance of the material or digital image over the impact of social knowledge. It seems that much of the literature on visual studies acknowledges the social constructionist view of the visual, but does not take it to social constructionist ends. In other words, theories of visual rhetoric take into account the "relatively inarticulate" (Hariman and Lucaites) nature of images, but pay little attention to what

precisely make them so relative and inarticulate! It is not the image itself that is inarticulate, or perhaps that embodies Zelizer's notion of the "as if," but instead it is the various audiences, with their multiple variations of social knowledge, who produce various complex meanings and give an image its ambiguity. After all, this hermeneutical gap, or the distance between the presence of the object and the interpretation by the subject, is where ideology plays on our topoi and maneuvers so effectively. Just as Olson et al. contend that images and their audiences co-create meaning, the image does not possess meaning, but rather allows the space for us to give it meaning.

Also, in response to the anticipated charge that I might be urging for a more scientific method here, surveying audiences in what they "see," I want to reframe my suggestion in a different way: Perhaps theories of visual rhetoric should account more for how social knowledge is *rhetorical* and, like any other artifact, argues, sometimes to mythical or ideological ends. The notion of "co-creation" after all insinuates that the artifact and the receiver have to work together to decide what something "means." Thus, neither the text nor social knowledge is ever definitive in their orientation to one another and are always rhetorically constitutive. I think visual theories need to start to account more for this relationship between the artifact and social knowledge. I also understand that it is difficult for a critic to make judgments about rhetorics they cannot see, such as the mental schema informed by social knowledge, but will the attempt to do so lead to commentary any more relative than a critic making subjective judgments about photographs? In either case, we require language to make sense of what we think we see. We require language to bridge the ineffable perceptions of our lived world. My

suggestion here is that theories of the visual need to rethink the relative existence of the image and what it means to “see.”

However, “seeing” is only one part of fantasy football’s rhetoric. As shown in chapters three and four, there are discursive and procedural rhetorics to consider that “other,” commodify and dehumanize NFL players, playing an important part in the racial tensions of fantasy football. Thus, in the next chapter, I will use my arguments and conclusions from this chapter to build larger arguments concerning the colonial ideology of fantasy football. I bring these analyses together in order to answer my research questions posited in the opening chapter of this project and to provide more nuanced responses to some of the other suspicions I have concerning fantasy football and its colonial relationship to NFL players. Furthermore, I will provide limitations of my own research and suggestions for future study.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS: UNDERSTANDING IDEOLOGY

The Articulation of the NFL Player as a Colonial Subject

This project sought to answer the following questions: In what ways do the discourses surrounding fantasy football rhetorically function to sustain American colonial ideology? In analyzing fantasy football as a game, how do the procedures of fantasy football serve to rearticulate the colonial ways we still view bodies as commodities in the United States? How do we digitally perceive race in fantasy football when it is not actually represented through the traditional visual markers of race? And, lastly, how does fantasy football rhetorically articulate the black and white relations that exist in the United States today?

First, in regards to the ways that the discourses surrounding fantasy football rhetorically function to sustain American colonial ideology, the analysis demonstrates that the discourses of fantasy football utilizes three dominant colonial metaphors—the player as money, the player as monster, and the player as machine—that function to otherize, commodify, and dehumanize NFL players. In the player as money metaphor, NFL players are described using the language of the marketplace, referred to as “commodities,” “insurance,” and “lottery tickets,” which position them as a type of merchandise with commodity value. In the player as monster metaphor, NFL players become otherized sublime objects because their large athletic bodies and monstrous athletic feats fill people with anxiety and admiration. Furthermore, NFL players are described as nonhuman “beasts” where they take on the role of “studs,” “workhorses,” and “bell cows,” which metaphorically argue that players are valuable for their labor and production. In the player as machine metaphor, NFL players are described as different

types of machines, whether it is a “hammer,” “weapon” or “bulldozer” that illustrate the masculine violence and functionality of the player and his commodity value to perform as effectively and efficiently as a machine. Also, all of these “nonhuman” metaphors are used in conjunction with one another and are unified by the same essential principles: othering, commodity, and production. Thus, these discourses encourage fantasy football owners, in the words of hooks, to “eat the other,” to consume NFL players in colonial ways, whether as money, monsters or machines.

Second, regarding how the fantasy football procedures serve to rearticulate colonial examination of bodies as commodities, I argue that the procedures—from the transformation of human action into numeric representation to trading players with other fantasy owners—bear the marks of game’s dominant colonial themes: commodification and ownership. These colonial procedures exist in three major phases: draft preparation, the league draft, and season management. The draft preparation stage focuses on the evaluation of NFL players, which is necessary to turn NFL players’ actions into monetary forms that can be commodified and manipulated. The drafting stage emphasizes choice because fantasy participants begin to take on the role the “owner” and sequentially select NFL players within their individual fantasy leagues, attempting to capitalize on the commodity value of each player. The regular season stage is characterized by management processes, where fantasy owners make decisions to maintain and also optimize the commodity value of their teams. These decisions include choosing a starting lineup and adding, dropping, or trading players as their production changes throughout the season.

From the analysis of these procedures, I posit that fantasy football argues two major claims about NFL players. First, NFL players are commodities in the play of fantasy football, as there are no procedures in the game to reward owners for valuing anything but the pure statistical production of a player. Also, NFL players are converted into numerical representation within the game, which calls the fantasy football owner to interact primarily with this production, not the player's body or his action. Second, the processes of fantasy football argue that participants of the game are owners of their teams, given the illusion of control over NFL players. Through these procedures, fantasy football argues that NFL players are indeed commodities and those who play the game are their owners. Additionally, owners are asked to use a marketplace logic that values production, not character, when evaluating players. However, while the physical body is not present in game play of fantasy football, the body's absence actually serves to reassert the commodification process because the numbers manufactured by the body's production replaces it.

The next research question considered how we digitally perceive race in fantasy football when it is not actually represented through the traditional visual markers of race. In chapter four, I contend that social knowledge and cultural myths play a role in seeing race when it is not visually explicit; thus, fantasy football owners insert it into a visual gap. Most fantasy football owners are fans of the NFL and, as a result, already know the race of players. When owners do not know the race of the player beforehand, they use other signifiers to read it in the image, which includes names, positions and statistics. Therefore, while it may seem that fantasy football obscures the body and race through

numerical representation, race is not eliminated in the game because owners' social knowledge inserts it.

The final research question raised by this project asked: How does fantasy football rhetorically articulate black-white race relations in the United States today? The analysis found in chapter three, four, and five demonstrate how fantasy football discourses and procedures are colonial in nature, which function to otherize, commodify, and dehumanize NFL players for the primary purposes of perceived ownership over these players and valuing them solely for production. However, I also determine that fantasy football rhetoric is not just colonial but also a racialized discourse that operates through the racist cultural myths of the NFL. In attempting to remove race from its game play, fantasy football still makes race an important part of playing the game because owners use their social knowledge to insert race. When considering the predominate white and middle class makeup of the fantasy football owners versus the predominate black makeup of the NFL, the idea that fantasy football invites its gaming audience to commodify, own, monitor and attempt to control these players for the purposes of entertainment suggests that fantasy football operates through a racist logic that serves to rearticulate problematic black-white racial relations.

While other scholars such as Ono and hooks have identified the racist function of the media to position colonized bodies for the purposes of white consumption, what fantasy football does is invite these audiences to become much more active participants in this racist consumption. Those who play fantasy football are not asked to just observe the racist representations of colonized peoples, but rather are invited to imagine

themselves as possessors of these bodies in a fantasy of ownership. As Oates argues, what makes this process alarming is that it is so deliberate (“New Media”).

While Oates does interrogate the participatory nature of fantasy football in his study on vicarious management, what I have done in this project is show how the specific discursive, procedural, and visual rhetorics of fantasy football do more than just connect to broader colonial structures of white dominance, but rearticulate black-white relations in the United States within a radical contextuality. In particular, I agree with Oates that fantasy football is a type of vicarious management, where audiences are asked to take on the role of the white owner to consume a black other. However, fantasy football discourse operates much differently and more ideological than the televised NFL draft or the videogame *Madden NFL* because in fantasy football, the colonized bodies of NFL players are rarely if ever displayed in the game. The colonized bodies are not visually explicit or present in the metaphors used to describe NFL players, the procedures followed when playing, or in the numerical representation of the game. While these rhetorics ask fantasy owners to read the bodies into their function, the discourse makes a double gesture to obscure the body in various ways. So while other forms of vicarious management might convey a racist ideology to white audiences, fantasy football rearticulates this ideology in more troubling and insidious ways because it is both guised as entertainment and a form of play and it attempts to obscure the actual consumed bodies of NFL players. Thus, this discourse is what Ono calls “neocolonial” because it is more innocuous, naturalized, and ideologically dangerous as a racist practice.

What also separates fantasy football from other forms of vicarious management is that much of its colonial ideology manifests itself through the running back position. For

instance, a substantial and startling number of the examples of colonialist discourse found in the texts are running backs in particular. This percentage is not representative of what I chose to include, but representative of fantasy football as a whole. At first glance, this focus on the running back may seem obvious because the position is a highly versatile position in the NFL. For example, the running back is the primary carrier of the football, who accumulates rushing yards and rushing touchdowns, but also can be a receiver, who earns points for receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns. Sometimes in craftier plays, the running back even throws the ball, producing statistics in both passing yards and touchdowns. There is also typically only one running back on the field at a time, as opposed to wide receiver, so he fights less for playing time and his “touches” in the game. As a result, it resonates in terms of production that the running back has been traditionally paramount in fantasy football.

However, the ideological significance of this connection, as described in chapter five, is that the running back position is the one most strongly associated with black athletes. For example, even when black athletes play quarterback, they are read as running backs or “mobile” players who use their “legs and feet” to win games. The running back position at large is also the position most intimately tied to the slavery metaphor of the NFL, as it is most often referred to in the context of “labor” and “production” (Rhoden). Thus, in considering the racial myths and the slavery metaphors of the NFL, it would make sense, for instance, that Cincinnati Bengals running back Cedric Benson is described as a “stud,” a “workhorse runner,” and a “bell-cow back,” or that Carolina Panthers running back Jonathan Stewart is labeled as “bullish” and, along with teammate running back DeAngelo Williams, will be “rode hard for all their worth.”

In ruminating about the significance of slavery metaphors, Fanon notes, “I have always been struck by how quickly we switch from ‘handsome young black man’ to ‘young colt or stud’” (145). But as suggested by the preceding chapters, these players are more than just beautiful “beasts” of labor in the game of fantasy football; they are also “merchandise,” “monsters,” and “machines”—the colonial others commodified by the discursive, procedural and visual rhetorics of fantasy football. And even if these running backs were not well known black players, they might be coded as such because the position and its corresponding levels of production would code players as such within the racist ideology of fantasy football.

Recent trends in the NFL have reflected more of a “committee” approach at the running back position, where there is still only one running back on the field at a time, but the player who fills that role is being substituted out with other players more frequently. Rather than there being one featured or “stud” running back on a team, there is more of what is being referred to as “running back by committee” (RBBC). The thought in the NFL is that rather than focusing on the skills of one key back, RBBC allows different styles of running to enter the game in particular situations while keeping each running back more rested and fresh during the game. In the fantasy football world, RBBC has implications on the commodity value of running backs in the league and the drafting strategies implemented in fantasy football drafts. As Ken Daube argues for *ESPN Fantasy Football*:

The market had changed ... please, once and for all, let’s bury the Two Stud Running Backs Theory—the outdated strategy of drafting [running backs] with your first two picks no matter what. As more NFL teams have adopted [RBBC], fantasy options at that position have grown more plentiful while the scoring output of middle-tier performers has declined. (13).

As Daube illustrates, the market has changed for running backs in fantasy football and consequently so has their commodity value within the fantasy draft. What I find so intriguing here is not that the impact of running back play in the NFL has affected fantasy football so directly, but rather that despite the running back decreasing in terms of commodity value, the colonial language surrounding them has not. In other words, if commodification is a colonial concept, and running backs are less commodified in fantasy football now than quarterbacks or wide receivers, then why has the colonial language not shifted as well? While I cannot prove the answer here, I would suggest that the trend that running back has decreased in commodity value in fantasy football but is described in equal if not increasingly colonial ways in its discourse is likely related to the race of the players who predominately play running back and the colonial myths that, as a result, surround the position.

This peculiarity about the running back position makes it an ideological nodal point for understanding how fantasy football might be so directly connected to not only colonial and racist tendencies but to slavery discourse. In examining the rhetorics that surround the fantasy game and the way that predominately white audiences are deliberately invited to own and control predominately black players, there is certainly an association between fantasy football and slavery discourses. This relationship is complicated by the double gesture in which the fantasy game attempts to both obscure race and the body while constantly circulating discourse about race and the body. But as seen specifically with the running back position, this racist rhetoric might have even more direct ties to slavery discourse, much like the NFL operates as the “Old Plantation South” of sports (Rhoden).

The relationship between fantasy football and slavery discourse can be further exposed if we pull back and examine the similarity between the accounts of slavery practices and the broader culture of fantasy football. First, slave auctions were festive in nature, where people gathered to celebrate the practice of buying and owning slaves. Roach states, “In antebellum New Orleans particularly, slave auctions proved a popular and highly theatrical spectacle. The most popular of them took place in a magnificent theatre-like rotunda, designed and built for this purpose, in the St. Louis Hotel” (211). Likewise, the fantasy football draft is often treated like a big party, where people bring in refreshments and build camaraderie through the act of ownership. Some describe the draft as “Christmas in August” (St. Amant 53). Even though most drafting has moved to an online format, Jon McDaid, fantasy football player of over 15 years, is quoted as saying, “It’s still about doing the draft and having a party” (qtd. in Yost 117). As well, long-time fantasy football veteran Howard Appel adds, “Draft Day is usually the highlight of the season... so you should make it a party-like event. Pick a place that has plenty of room for everyone to spread out, bring in food and refreshments, and try to make the atmosphere just like that of the NFL draft” (44).

Also, during the process of selection, slaves were put on display so that owners had a chance to “size them up” before purchasing them. This slavery spectacle is described in W. O. Blake’s 1857 book *History of Slavery* this way:

On this occasion [market day] the slaves were stationed in a circle in the marketplace, and the one whose turn it was to be sold, mounted a table, where he exhibited himself and was knocked down to the best bidder ... They were placed on a raised stone, or table, so that everyone might see and handle them, even if they did not wish to purchase them. Purchasers took care to have them stripped, for slave dealers had recourse to as many tricks to conceal defects, as a horse-jockey of modern times. (qtd. in Roach 211)

While the NFL players in a fantasy football league are not placed on a raised stone, they are placed on a contemporary virtual platform, where each potential fantasy owner has the opportunity to gawk at their projected statistical achievements for the season and weigh that information against the risks of injury or “bust.” In other words, based on commodity value, owners decide which NFL players are worth the value of their pick.

In order to reduce the risk of picking a slave that would not work hard or would get injured, it was important for slave owners to know how to spot a “good” one. Johnson details that some slave owners had an eye for spotting a “good” slave, while other, less experienced owners brought a consul in the slave market. He writes:

Being able to see that way was a talent, and inexperienced buyers often took someone along with them when they went to the slave market ... These more experienced men examined the lots of slaves for sale in the market, reading their bodies aloud and helping buyers select the ‘likely’ and the healthy from among them. (137)

Similarly, in fantasy football, some owners have a knack for knowing who will have a good season and who will be a “bust,” but most consult the fantasy football websites and guidebooks that have already evaluated these players to help choose which players are worth selecting and which players are not.

Finally, the slave marketplace was a place where humanity was deliberately removed so that the slaves could be more easily transformed from people into exchangeable commodities to be evaluated, bought, and sold. As Roach describes:

The restored behavior of the marketplace created by its synergy a behavioral vortex in which human relationships could be drained of sympathetic imagination and shaped to the purposes of consumption and exchange. Under such conditions, the most intolerable of injustices may be made to seem natural and commonplace, and the most demented of spectacles normal. (213).

As I showed here in this project, fantasy football’s colonial rhetorics provides an outlet

where NFL players, represented by statistical production that stands in for the physical body, are evaluated, commodified, drafted, and manipulated by fantasy football participants called “owners.” This process is embedded in the logic of the marketplace for the purported purposes of entertainment and play. Thus, just as the slave market was a place that used control, commodity, and consumption as a means to dehumanize and naturalize slaves as “others,” fantasy football also commodifies and dehumanizes NFL players in ideological and naturalized ways.

In looking at the overlap between colonial slave practices and the broader culture of the fantasy game, it is tempting to contend that the NFL player is more directly articulated as a kind of mediated slave in the context of fantasy football. However, I find the comparison rather troubling to make. When considering the lack of direct contact between NFL players and fantasy owners and the difference between the severe pain, toil and oppression endured by slaves through the process of colonization and the typical life on an NFL player in today’s racial climate, the argument seems too specious to make. Instead, I maintain that the rhetorical peculiarity of the similarity between discourses about slavery and fantasy football seems significant, especially given the connections that exist between the colonial and racist practices of media culture that rearticulate the relationship between black subjects and white audiences in fantasy football.

The Illusion of Control: What Do Fantasy Football Owners Really Own?

In addition to positing a colonial relationship, fantasy football discourse also creates an illusion of control, as outlined in chapter four, where fantasy owners seek out ways to have dominion over not just which NFL players they “own” production rights to within their individual fantasy leagues, but also to have an impact on how those players perform.

However, fantasy football is really just a game of chance where fantasy owners gamble on starting NFL players each week, hoping that the players they start will produce more points than the players started by the opposing owner. Almost every fantasy owner has no access whatsoever to NFL players to influence this outcome. Thus, fantasy owners rely on the logic of the marketplace to predict and control the factors they can. Moreover, fantasy football operates under a myth of ownership, where although fantasy football owners imagine themselves owning these NFL players exclusively, they are not the sole owners of the player or the player's production rights. Considering the amount of people who play fantasy football worldwide, it is reasonable to assume that each player is owned by millions of other fantasy owners. And even these millions of players do not own the actual player. So what do fantasy owners really own? I return to this question and my assumptions about it as a way to explore more fully the illusion of control, its origin, and why it emerges.

The NFL has been tracking statistics since its origin. Besides the obvious function of record keeping for games, these statistics serve as the basis for measuring up players. For example, this data answers questions about who holds the record for the most rushing yards all time, who has thrown the most passing touchdowns in a single season and who holds the record for the amount of catches in a single game? These statistics help justify contract amounts for NFL players and their bid to be part of the NFL Hall of Fame. However, the statistics are not an inherent part of the game, as NFL games could be played every season without keeping track of any statistics except who wins or loses.

From a Marxist perspective, statistics are not part of the production process itself of playing the game, but rather represent a surplus of the commodity form. As the NFL grew more complex, the desire for more statistics grew exponentially, which resulted in keeping track of nearly every facet of the game. Braverman contends that this same process of keeping track of surplus value and managing it marks the emergence of two particular industries in modern day capitalism, the financial industry and clerical workers, whose “only function is the struggle over the allocation of the social surplus among the various sectors of the capitalist class and its dependents” (177). Braverman provides a more detailed description of these industries:

Each step is detailed, recorded, and controlled from afar, and worked up into reports that offer a cross-sectional picture at a given moment, often on a daily basis, of the physical processes of production, maintenance, shipment, storage, etc. This work is attended to by armies of clerks, data-processing equipment, and an office management dedicated to its accomplishments. (170)

Considering this description, fantasy football emerges out of this same function of capitalism, where not only did the NFL employ a type of clerical workforce to keep track of its growing body of statistics, but another industry materialized to do something with those statistics. As the NFL grew in popularity and increased its commodity value, the surplus value of the NFL increased as well. Fantasy football is a practice that surfaced out of a need to productively use those statistics in the spirit of the ever-expanding notion of capital. In other words, in the logic of capitalism, the statistics provided an exigency for the emergence of fantasy football, as a formal structure to utilize the surplus value of the NFL.

Willis would call the NFL and fantasy football “cultural commodities,” which are different than other forms of commodities while being just as fetishized as other

commodity forms, in that a cultural commodity also bears a sense of usefulness (55). Willis argues, “The general form which breaks communication through its very fetishism—concealing its social relations of production, its embedded labour and how and why it was made, for whom and by whom—must in this case and as its first purpose enable meaningful communication” (55). As a result, cultural commodities are constantly in a state of contradiction, because while they are “subject to commodity fetishism simply because they are commodities they are simultaneously subject to the absolute need to de-fetishize themselves, simply because they have to offer communicative and cultural use values” (Willis 56). Willis gives the example of commercialized music. While on one hand, commercial music represents fetishism in that consumers buy the finished product, having no connection to the production of the music. On the other hand, the music itself still requires a sense of community and shared taste, communicated across multiple people, to value it and create a market for its need. The result of this contradiction is not a useful commodity, but rather a commodity form where “usefulness and fetishism [are] so unifyingly opposed” (Willis 58). Thus, the cultural commodity represents a constant contradiction, a lack of stability in the commodity form, where it requires usefulness and community to exist but is always negated by its own form because it so overtly admits its own fetishized nature.

How does fantasy football operate as a cultural commodity? Fantasy football expresses its “usefulness” in the way that it builds a broader community around the NFL as it increases NFL viewership and revenue (Oates, “New Media”; Yost). This is important because not everyone can be a part of the immediate production process of the NFL by being at the game, as even the largest NFL stadium, MetLife Stadium in East

Rutherford, New Jersey, holds only 82,566 people at capacity. Also, considering the high ticket prices to enter these stadiums on game day as well as the difficulty in getting tickets, fantasy football allows access to some portion of the NFL for any fan, as most hosting sites are free and open to anyone willing to join. The sheer fact that fantasy football has a market of people willing to participate in its activities demonstrates its usefulness as a cultural commodity, because it has no other usefulness besides its appeal to that community and the communication surrounding it.

At the same time that fantasy football communicates its usefulness as a cultural commodity, it also acknowledges its own fetishized existence. The game is not called football, but rather *fantasy* football because it admits its own status as a cultural byproduct of the NFL. So a fantasy football owner might have some access to the NFL within the game, but it is clearly not the same as being present at an NFL game or, as shown in chapter four, even being an NFL owner. Also, what do fantasy football owners own besides the fantasized rights over an NFL player's production? Perhaps it could be argued that fantasy football participants own some stake in the mediated production of NFL players, but even that ownership is shared with millions of other people. Fantasy football is clearly not the NFL both because of the way it is structured and the way it is played.

Thus, as a cultural commodity, fantasy football is always discursively operating as a double gesture where it demonstrates its usefulness through its connection to the NFL and its fans but is also always fetishized by its own admitted fantasy. Another way to understand fantasy football as a cultural commodity and its incessant contradiction is through Bolter and Grusin's double logic of remediation, where "our culture wants to

both multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation” (5). Remediation itself is the “representation of one medium into another” (45), which “always operates under the cultural assumptions about immediacy and hypermediacy” (21). Immediacy refers to the attempted transparency of a medium, where the user becomes less aware of the technology, like three-dimensional graphics and virtual reality simulators. Hypermediacy, contrastingly, is the logic where technology admits its own presence and emphasizes process over perception, like the “windowed style” of the World Wide Web.

What is interesting about fantasy football, as a remediated technology, is that it follows a hypermediated logic in its presentation but falls into a mediated effect of immediacy when observing its effects. Fantasy football is played on the Internet, in a “windowed style,” where the primary representation and game play comes through the interactivity between fantasy football owners and statistics. As I discussed in chapter five, there are no three-dimensional graphics and there is hardly anything one might call a traditional “image” in the game. Unlike *Madden NFL*, the representation of NFL players does not come in the form of increasingly realistic graphics and controls that grow closer and closer to a player’s human likeness and movement. Rather, fantasy football does not try to be anything more than a game of numbers in its procedures and technological presentation, focusing on process over perception. However, while fantasy football admits its own hypermediacy, those who play the game are still seemingly duped by its mediated game play. Through the procedures of the game, fantasy owners are urged to imagine themselves as real owners of NFL players, which often they do. Simultaneously, there is a sort of recognition that fantasy football owners have no control, because they have no access or real impact in the existence of NFL players; thus, it is an illusion. So

in terms of being a cultural commodity in the logic of remediation, fantasy football is always in contradiction, producing a double gesture.

Perhaps one of the reasons for fantasy football's perpetual contradiction resides in the way that the game is not an isolated game space, where all the procedures of the game can be represented within its programming language. This is a curiosity I raised in chapter four, where I delineated fantasy football from videogames like *Madden NFL* or *Grand Theft Auto*. In these games, all of the procedures of the game can be represented in a finite gaming space. Also, those who play those games can explore the space of the game in isolation, being the only subject in their virtual world. The user can control any agent that the game allows and all other actors are programmed to be controlled by the game. However, in fantasy football, not only is one playing with other humans in the game, the content of the game is a real time representation of performed human action. While it is true that the statistics are represented in numerical form, their source is not programmed. Instead, the statistics are mediated forms of actual human action and is an organic element that the game cannot account for in its processes. In this way, maybe fantasy football, in its numerical, hypermediated form, represents a modernist tension to use technology and dictate that which it cannot (e.g., human behavior on a football field) and subsequently gives the illusion of control.

Another way to look at this relationship between the technology of fantasy football and human action is through the work of both Benjamin and Kittler. Benjamin argues in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," that the reproducibility of a piece of art removes the aura attached to the presence of the original piece. As art is constantly replicated, the aura of the original becomes lost. Moreover,

Kittler, in his work, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, contends that one's handwriting was connected to his/her soul, as there was something unique and personal about individual styles of handwriting. However, with the invention of printing and the typewriter, people were no longer an integral part of their technologies in the same way, as communicating in print became sterile and standardized through these industrial machines.

When considering the work of Benjamin and Kittler, I suggest that fantasy football, though its hypermediated, numerical representation, takes the aura away from the human action of NFL players, stripping the excitement of their individual plays and converts them into a sterile, reproducible form: statistics. Furthermore, the technological apparatus of fantasy football, through a similar process, takes the soul out of an NFL player and removes his body from the game, allowing the fantasy owner to only interact with his enumerated production. Thus, all NFL players represented in fantasy football are not depicted by their unique physical bodies and distinct styles of play, but rather by the same digitized and enumerated form transmitted in black and white on the computer screen. It is tempting to stop there and imply that on a rhetorical level, fantasy football creates this separation between NFL players and fantasy owner, but my suspicion is that the relationship is not that simple. Instead, I suggest that by looking again through remediation, fantasy football discourse resituates the existing relations between NFL players and their fans. While on a rhetorical level, fantasy football takes the aura away from the human action of NFL players through its discursive, procedural, and visual rhetorics, it simultaneously shifts and rejuvenates the mediated bond between those same players and fans through the context of ownership, making fans more interested in players than ever before.

Remediation plays out in two particular behaviors. First, as suggested by the illusion of ownership, fantasy football owners are attempting desperately to control fantasy football outcomes and reduce risk within their matchups. Sometimes, this even includes trying to access the real NFL player to either get some information about or have influence over the player's anticipated performance in the game. In chapter four, I offered this in a fictional example from the show *The League*; yet, as St. Amant shares, this behavior is very real. He writes, "Back in the old days of Broadway Joe and Dandy Don Meredith, pro football players were typically approached by beautiful women; now, unfortunately for them, it's mostly [fantasy football]—obsessed men" (180). St. Amant focuses his discussion around Chicago Bears long snapper Patrick Mannelly, who as a player with no fantasy value, constantly gets questioned about the production of his fellow teammates owned by fantasy football participants. In the book, Mannelly recalls an incident when a fan at training camp who shouted to former Bears running back Anthony Thomas, "I drafted you this year, A-Train, gimme some points, baby!" to which Thomas reluctantly replied, "I'll try, man, I'll try" (qtd in St. Amant 180). Also, former Jacksonville Jaguars running back Fred Taylor adds that he constantly gets bombarded with fantasy owners telling him to "play good" for them because they have Taylor in their starting lineups; Taylor admits that he grows tired of hearing it (St. Amant 181). As these two examples illustrate, while the fan pursues a more personal connection with the player, the player does not feel any more connected to the fan. This suggests that even as fantasy football owners seek NFL players for more control, they still do not have the sort of access they desire.

The second behavior that demonstrates the resituated but rejuvenated relations between NFL players and fans through fantasy football is how ownership affects the rooting interests of fantasy owners. Typically, fantasy owners already watched the NFL before fantasy football, but by having personal investment in more than just a team but also individual players on a variety of teams, it changes how many games they watch. As Mannelly explains,

Fantasy football is probably the best thing going for our sport ... It makes someone an instant Falcons fan or Chargers fan if they have, say, Tomlinson or Vick on their team and makes them want to watch more than just their home team's games. It increases viewership, Internet traffic, magazine and newspaper coverage. It's only going to help the sport out in the long run. Bottom line, fans are the number one thing in the NFL, and fantasy football is probably the biggest fan interaction we have. (qtd. in St. Amant 182)

As fans of the NFL engage in fantasy football, they also become more interested in particular players and, as a result, watch more games. Fantasy owners might even wear jerseys of their favorite fantasy players to their league draft (Appel). Sometimes these rooting interests come in conflict when an owner's fantasy quarterback is playing against his or her favorite NFL team. Does he or she root for the individual player to produce, but also root for his or her NFL team to win? This scenario gets even more complicated if the opposing owner has a player on the fantasy owner's favorite NFL team. Root for the fantasy player? Root for the NFL team? Root against the opponent's player but still root for the NFL team as a whole? In my experience, the answer to these questions usually falls back onto marketplace logic and production: Root for all the players score as many points as possible so that the NFL team still has a chance to win but let the player owned in fantasy score the most points individually. Regardless of how the fantasy

owner's rooting interests might fall in the end, what is more important here is that fantasy football increases the amount of interest in the entire NFL and its players.

To return to my original point, these two relationships are indicative of fantasy football's remediation. By attending games live and watching NFL broadcasts, fans already had *mediated* relationships with NFL players before fantasy football. However, fantasy football also *remediates* this relationship. While the specific rhetoric of fantasy football operates to remove the aura from the NFL player's human action, on a more cultural level, fantasy football also shifts and energizes the bond between NFL players and fantasy owners in both positive and negative ways. At the same time, while fantasy football acknowledges its own hypermediacy in its technological format, it also has effects that are characteristic of immediacy as participants get "lost" in the fantasy of being an NFL owner. Fantasy football is a cultural commodity that communicates its usefulness to its fans, as it is the fans that establish this community of taste around it, but also falls victim to its own fetishism because it is "fantasy" football. Consequently, fantasy football is always making a double rhetorical gesture, caught up in the contradiction of its own existence.

I note this contradictory nature because it is within this contradiction that fantasy football is so firmly able to use control as an illusory device. Fantasy football perpetuates this illusion of control through its otherizing, procedural ownership, and visual/numerical discourse. However, I again return to the question: What do fantasy football participants own? What is fantasy football the fantasy of?

In light of my previous discussion on the surplus value of statistics, I turn back to the narrative of fantasy football's creation to answer these questions. Fantasy football

was created by Oakland Raiders part owner Bill Winkenbach, who, along with two sports writers, came up with the idea in a New York hotel room in 1962. What is interesting about Winkenbach and the genesis of fantasy football, however, is unveiled in this description of him from *Fantasy Football Index*: “The man who conceived the idea for fantasy football, and who deserves the most credit for the birth of the game, is the late Wilfred "Bill" Winkenbach, who was a limited partner with the Raiders (he owned a financial stake in the team, but had no say in its operation)” (Esser). What is most notably interesting about this description of Winkenbach is that he was a part owner of the Raiders, with financial stake in the team, but he had *no control over the operation*. Thus, it could be suggested that fantasy football was birthed out of the same tension that fantasy owners experience when they seek additional control over their fantasy football teams. Perhaps Winkenbach wanted more operational control in the Raiders organization but did not have access or agency to influence the players. Maybe he did not. I cannot be sure either way. However, Winkenbach did certainly have an interest in doing something else with NFL statistics than just reading them. He certainly wanted to make a game out of them, to play them, compete with them, and conceivably, attempt to control them.

So what do fantasy owners own? Perhaps, in the fetishized, contradictory nature of fantasy football, they only own the *identity* of ownership. As suggested throughout my analysis, there is not much stake in owning anything else. In fantasy football, the control is illusory and the relations are forced or fragmented. Fantasy owners get to take stock in their own identity of ownership over a fantasy football team, but the rest is mostly empty digital signifiers. So the “reality” of fantasy football is that it really is a “fantasy.” But,

what is fantasy football the fantasy of? As it seems from its genesis, fantasy football might just be the fantasy of being Bill Winkenbach, an owner with stake in a professional team, but no real control over its outcomes.

Minding the Gap

While I demonstrated that the ownership in fantasy football is illusory and that nothing material is actually owned by its participants, there is more at stake here. It still remains that fantasy football operates through a racist logic that makes colonial arguments about NFL players. While ownership in fantasy football is a façade of sorts, those who play the game are still a predominately white audience that perceives that they own a mostly black labor force through the arguments advanced by the discourse, procedures, and visual representation of fantasy football. As a cultural commodity, fantasy football is a constant contradiction. However, while these two positions are contradictory—i.e. what fantasy football argues through its rhetoric and the ontological position of the fantasy football owner—a better move theoretically is to identify their distance as a gap.

I choose this term in particular because fantasy football is not any kind of rhetoric but, more importantly, a game with procedures and the “possibility space” for fantasy football owners to make choices within it. Bogost argues that “the ontological position of a videogame (or simulation, or procedural system) resides in the gap between rule-based representation and player subjectivity” (43). The gap between what the game can represent and everything it cannot is the unrepresentable or the ineffable. Thus, I read this gap as an imminent, sublime space, too vast to contain, quantify, or control. To “play” a game, then, is more than just following the processes of the game, but it is the

attempt to bridge that sublime gap between the rhetoric of the game and the subjectivity of the gamer.

Procedural rhetoric attempts to discover that sublime, to name it, and determine its meaning in breaking down the choices between what the game can offer and what the human will choose. As I allude to earlier in this chapter, this process is much easier when dealing with a traditional sort of videogame like *Madden NFL*. Since fantasy football requires a community of real people to play, as well as real human action as content, there is a certain difficulty in encompassing all of its procedures. While the processes of fantasy football may try to put limits on what the gap means, this process is made more difficult because fantasy football requires so much human action from both ends of the game. In fantasy football, humans play with the enumerated actions of humans. So as “real space” and “game space” begin to merge more closely, like they do in fantasy football, the gap also begins to grow larger because more factors are being brought into the processes of the game that cannot be fully accounted for or controlled.

As I have shown here, this gap in fantasy football is characterized by the colonial rhetorics of the game, which argue a sense of control, and the ontological position of the participant, which operates contrastingly under a veil of control. So like all other videogames, there is a gap between what the game rhetorically argues and how the gamer will make choices within that game based on his or her own assumptions about the world. Thus, the gap between the rhetoric of the game and the subjectivity of the user cannot remain an empty void, stagnant in their opposition. Rather, as I suggested most strongly in chapter 5 and in various other ways in chapter three and four, this gap is filled in with

our social knowledge. And when we “play” games, we use our social knowledge to interact directly with the processes of the game and attempt to bridge this ineffable space.

Consequently, this is also the space where ideology maneuvers so effectively, in the inarticulate spaces between subject and object. This is the space where the colonial rhetorics of fantasy football are able to argue that NFL players are commodified and dehumanized others, while simultaneously giving the fantasy owner no more agency within the game than the banal identity of ownership. Thus, it is also a contradictory and unstable space, where various competing logics can appear coherent all at the same time. Fantasy football owners are active participants in the rearticulation of racist relations, but likely have no idea of their involvement, nor can really be held at fault. While these racist ideologies and logics are discernible to a critic, I do not expect fantasy football owners to recognize this logical instability and implications in the culture of the game. After all, ideology is an elusive foe.

And this is my departure from Hill’s analysis of fantasy football. She argues that those who play fantasy football bring white masculinity into the game with racist intentions. Those who play fantasy football are unlikely to be overtly racist or enter the game with a conscious racism seeking to control specifically black players. I maintain that this relationship is not that simple, where we can pin the problem on the conscious racist desires of fantasy football participants. Rather, on a rhetorical level, fantasy football, through its multiple colonial rhetorics that operate in different aspects of and gaps created by the game, allows for a space for racist ideology to function. This is especially true *because* fantasy owners are so unaware of their active participation in the game. The colonial rhetorics of the game in conjunction with the illusion of control,

allow space for the racist myths of the NFL and black-white race relations in the United States at large to become increasingly naturalized and intelligible. The incessant contradiction of fantasy football is precisely what makes it so unstable as a rhetoric and, in the same way, is what gives ideology the space to function so subversively and unannounced.

Considering my previous arguments about race, the body, and control, there are two other ways I want to suggest that fantasy football does the work of ideology. First, fantasy football in its various kinds of colonial rhetorics removes the physical body of NFL players from the game and the discourse surrounding it. The body is evoked, yet simultaneously hidden by the gap in the discourse as it cannot “show” the body in its language. Also, the numerical representation of the game argues both visually and procedurally that bodies are not a part of the game. So, on one hand, the rhetorics of the game argue that the body is not necessary to play. Yet, as fantasy football owners, we use our social knowledge and put the bodies and our assumptions of race into the game in ideological ways.

However, if we return to the desire to control that emerges out of fantasy football, this relationship is much more troubling, because not only do fantasy football owners perceive race and bodies in the game, they also seek out the physical bodies of these players at real games, training camps, team practices, and in public. Thus, even though the game might argue to fantasy owners that bodies are unimportant or superfluous to the play of the game, the desire for bodies still comes into the game because at some point, the numbers are not enough. Again, I do not want to imply that fantasy football owners are consciously racist in this process. Rather, I suggest that the ideological space of the

game, where fantasy owners are taught to see players as commodities they own and control, but are left with only the illusion of control, allows the space for this desire of bodies to function. In this way, I argue that fantasy football rearticulates the relationship that white audiences have with mediated black bodies and changes its methods of consumption to a more active participation in the process through innocuous, normalized, and problematic ways.

Second, in the United States, racial and visual logics operate in a black and white binary despite actual racial dynamics being much more complex. Thus, race is made into something easily categorized and understood. In the NFL, we also see distinct divisions of individual positions, such as quarterback, running back, linebacker and safety, which can only perform certain actions on the field. The guiding norms and rules of football are very clear about how these positions operate on the field, as well as how players can use their bodies within those positions. Hence, these positions are essentially segregated by function in the NFL. Also, as I argued in chapter five, we see segregation in the positions by not just function, but also by race, as quarterbacks are typically white and running backs are almost exclusively black. We read race into the positions and contribute to the racial myths of the NFL because the simple divided structures of the game enable us to. Thus, in the United States, race is constructed as a black and white issue and football is a black and white game.

Fantasy football also operates using simple structures. It is a black and white game dominated by numerical representations which reduce embodied and unique human actions into statistics. These statistics allow owners to see the separation between players who are valuable commodities and players who are not. Subsequently, those who play

fantasy football also sometimes use these numbers to describe who is black and who is white. Thus, fantasy football aligns perfectly with the NFL as a black and white game, where black and white is read here more broadly as a color binary and a clear distinction. Professional football takes the human and racial messiness of our culture and reduces it to simple stereotypes; fantasy football goes the next logical step to turn that disarray into a representation even more distinct, calculated, and often presented in a binary language: numbers.

Thus, again in fantasy football, we see a modernist/postmodernist tension play out that offers room for ideology to function so subversively. Postmodernism is concerned with things we admittedly cannot control, such as the meaning gap between signifier and signified, where social knowledge plays such a crucial role in forming meaning. Modernism, conversely, is about attempting to limit the ineffable by categorizing and naming it. In fantasy football, the numbers offer space for the existence of race to be denied or maybe just difficult to locate while simultaneously distancing fantasy football owners from their active role in rearticulating this racist logic; in short: no race, no racism. For that reason, the numbers of the game represent a modernist attempt to control and reduce the racial relations in the game; however, it is still there because our social knowledge does not allow for this kind of control to be so absolute.

At a broader technological level, the ideological gap in fantasy football represents the tension between technological determinism, represented in Kittler's work, and the physical embodiment of media, as argued by Mark B.N. Hansen. Kittler and Hansen are vehemently engaged in a debate over which position—technological determinism or user

embodiment—really explains the development of media. Hayles mediates these two positions in her book, *My Mother Was a Computer*, by arguing:

Certainly media are dependent on embodied subjects, not only for their reception and significance but also because researchers extensively investigate the precise nature of computer/human interfaces to develop and design networked and programmable media that will have certain effects. There would be no media without humans to give them meaning and significance ... On the other hand, media clearly determine and help constitute humans' embodied responses, which include not only the historically specific conditioned reactions of a given epoch but also the evolutionary evolved cognitive and perceptual capabilities that Hansen evokes. (35-36)

I would suggest that fantasy football is a technology typified by a similar dynamic. While the technology of fantasy football offers specific colonial rhetorics to its users for the purposes of othering and control, the fantasy owner's embodiment of fantasy football is located in an illusion of control where they are passively situated at a distance from the performance of NFL players and ultimately have no impact. As a result, fantasy football is characterized by both a sense of technological determinism and the embodiment of the users rather than being distinctly one or the other.

What is interesting to me in this delineation is how this same tension between technological determinism and user embodiment is characteristic of the gap created between fantasy football's colonial rhetoric and the ontological positions of those who play it. This gap is the interpretive space where ideology operates in between what the game argues and what the users choose. Braverman also implies this ideological relationship between technology and social relations. He argues on one hand that technology "is endowed with the power to shape the life of mankind, and is sometimes even invested with designs upon the human race" (158), but also that technology, "instead of simply *producing* social relations, *is produced by* the social relation

represented by capital” (14). Thus, fantasy football does not only impact social relations with its colonial rhetorics, but it is also a reflection of those social relations, as illustrated by the evoked desire to pursue colonized bodies and the segregated nature of fantasy football’s black-white dynamics.

I take such length to point out this gap in fantasy football, not only because I believe it is the point at which ideology is able to operate so well, but also because within this space, the contradictory nature of ideology exposes itself most clearly. The gap allows competing logics to function and prosper, but at the same time, the instability of that ideology is the fissure where the critic can locate and name it. Moreover, because I view power as relational and rhizomatic in its operation, I also see this fissure in ideology as the point of resistance. In fact, all of these contradictions in fantasy football are places to remove the parasitic ideology from its social host, because when it is resituated, recontextualized, and ultimately exposed by the critic, then ideology has trouble sustaining its life. However, when ideology is allowed to become naturalized between fantasy football’s colonial rhetorics and the illusion of control within the game, that is the comfortable space where ideology naturally flourishes. Thus, the first step toward dismantling ideology and resisting it is recognizing its contradictions.

At this point, I could propose that fantasy football owners become more politically correct in the way that they speak about NFL players, moving their language away from colonial and marketplace metaphors to something more human and empowering. Rather than being “touchdown machines” or “workhorses,” perhaps players could just be “excellent” or “remarkable” at playing football. I suppose I could also suggest that fantasy football owners should start thinking about NFL players in a

different way, recognizing them as people rather than commodities. After all, the colonial logic of the game becomes so evident when the ideology is exposed. Further, I could also recommend that fantasy football participants boycott fantasy football all together, putting away their guidebooks and cheat sheets and go back to just being regular fans of the NFL, who just root for their favorite teams on Sundays.

While I could advocate any of these positions, I know that all of them are shortsighted and optimistic at best. None of these recommendations will fix the issue because, unfortunately, fantasy football is not the problem. It is a technology that influences social relations, but it was also created out of our social relations. Fantasy football, while it rearticulates the colonial subject in various ways, is really just a *vehicle* and *enabler* of ideology, a transfer point that shifts, rearticulates, and redistributes ideology. The gap in meaning always allows room for the contradiction, the “fill in” of social knowledge, or the space of ideology. Even as an ideological myth is exposed, another construct will almost certainly take its place.

Instead, I put the onus of resistance on the critic to continually find these fissures in ideology and expose them. Foucault argues that fighting ideology in discourse is much like fighting a constant war, where ideology is persistently battling to naturalize itself in our social relations (*Power/Knowledge*). Thus, it is the critic’s responsibility to always engage in this war with ideology, locating its whereabouts and dismantling its logics. Ideology may never cease, but if critics engage in what Ivie calls “productive criticism” or what McKerrow describes as “critical rhetoric,” we can at least keep ideology on the move, never resting too long or become too normalized. As enlightened critics, this is our main entry point for a kind of resistance.

On a broader scale, my analysis of the discursive, procedural, and visual rhetorics of fantasy football contributes to communication and rhetorical studies in a few important ways. First, this project builds on the work in procedural rhetoric and demonstrates its application well beyond just traditional videogames. When moved outside of this digital realm into practices like fantasy football that utilize more human interaction, it becomes clearer how understanding the procedures of a system and the way those processes uniquely argue moves us beyond critiquing mere representations. Instead, we end up engaging a rhetoric that is a material part of life itself. As a result, the real space and game space tightly merge, which allows critics to examine the ways that this particular rhetoric rearticulates the relationships between digital media users and the living persons mediated within it. To study procedural rhetoric is not to examine static accounts, but to engage the impact of active choice making.

Second, this project makes a contribution to the study of visual rhetoric. By showing how race is obscured in fantasy football through its statistical representation, but brought into the game through the social knowledge of those who play, I offer a few suggestions about how we should approach visual rhetoric. Initially, by demonstrating that fantasy football is a differently visual artifact in that it relies on numbers rather than pictures to be its primarily visual mode, I argue that visual rhetoric scholars should rethink what it means to study the visual. Instead of just assuming texts or numbers are discursive and pictures are inherently visual, we should look and see if they are operating in visual or discursive ways. Thus, my intent is to open up what artifacts we might study in visual ways, suggesting to critics that we might generate new insights concerning often studied artifacts not considered by visual approaches. Additionally, because I

demonstrated that social knowledge plays such an important role in the construction of meaning when dealing with artifacts that are relatively inarticulate, my suggestion is that visual scholars perhaps shift their focus away from isolating their study to the interpretations of images and pay more attention to the rhetorical force of social knowledge, which influences how those images mean different things to different people. My concern is that as critics we need to engage more directly the meaning making process that comes with rhetorical influence in not scientific, but by rhetorical means.

Despite the contributions of my project, there are many places where my investigation does not go. Indeed, my analysis concludes with more questions than answers at times; thus, there is certainly more work to do. Future research should examine a number of issues in both the context of fantasy football and beyond it. As Edward Said argues, “The work of theory, criticism, de-mystification, deconsecration, and decentralization they imply is never finished. The point of theory therefore is to travel, always beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile” (252). In other words, theories must always be used to dig deeper into specific locations of time and place, finding new ideological nodal points to interrogate, as well as travel beyond those particular contexts into realms unexplored by the theory. In this spirit, a number of issues should be further addressed.

First, considering the prolific and obsessed manner that fantasy owners attempt to access and control NFL players, investigating these parasocial relationships could net interesting findings about how that connection impacts fantasy football, as I did not have the texts or ability to explore this cultural aspect deeply enough. How often does this occur? Do the players ever respond favorably to these advances? From a colonial lens,

does the NFL player ever acknowledge his ownership and become constituted by it? How would the player's acknowledgment of the fan influence the illusion of control? Exploring this relationship between fan and NFL player could generate important insights for not only the study of fantasy and NFL football but also hold implications for relational communication theories.

Second, bearing in mind my discussion of the black and white visual dynamics of the NFL and fantasy football, a rhetorical analysis of this relationship is more fully warranted. While I drew connections between the postmodernist move to account for the multiplicity of race and the modernist attempt to control it in both the structures of fantasy football and the NFL, a further interrogation should specifically explain how each position operates in terms of its particular function and racial makeup within the rules of both the NFL and fantasy football seems necessary. What is the racial makeup of each position? How are these positions permitted to move? What sort of ideology exists in the normalized discourses about these positions? Such an analysis might raise even more important questions and spawn valuable conclusions concerning the transference of the NFL to fantasy football and the ideological race relations structured in both.

Finally, taking into consideration the financial impact that fantasy football has on the revenue of the NFL, more work could be done on the economic implications of fantasy football, which is a crucial trajectory not explored in this analysis. Fantasy football has made NFL owners wealthier through marketing and viewership, but it also translates into more money for the players because of the NFL's collective bargaining agreement, which guarantees the players a certain percentage of overall NFL revenue. Thus, I think it might be beneficial to understand the way that those economic relations

influence the propagation of fantasy football, as well as the way it is marketed by the NFL. Furthermore, as illustrated earlier, there seems to be a separation between those players like Patrick Mannelly, who see the benefit of fantasy football financially, and those players like Fred Taylor who are put off by its ubiquity and penetration. Considering the 2011 NFL labor dispute, where players and owners were locked in a struggle over the new collective bargaining agreement, it seems that economics could serve as another place to connect the discourses of fantasy football to larger socio-political structures within the game. Moreover, fantasy football is also connected as a “game of risk” to the gambling industry, where fans can win large cash sums for winning fantasy football championships; thus, there is a great deal of economic impact at both the player and fan levels. While popular culture is a critical entry point for studying relations of power and ideology, I agree with Lawrence Grossberg’s contention in his more recent work that careful consideration of the force of economics is particularly imperative in our global culture of late neoliberal capitalism. As Grossberg argues, while popular culture allows access to representations, economics links us more directly to the material effects of culture and power (*CSFT*).

Although theories must travel deeper into specific contexts, theories also should journey into completely new territories of exploration. In this project, I used an array of theories to critique fantasy football, including postcolonial theory, cultural studies, Marxism, procedural rhetoric, and visual studies. Rather than taking the effort to show every way that these theories could be used in light of my analysis, I will only highlight a few that invite an immediate and relevant discussion. First, my conclusions regarding the function of race in fantasy football, where it is seemingly obscured, but still present

within the game, could prove beneficial for other areas of representation where racist rhetoric seems easily denied because the visual markers of race are not present. When considering my suggestions about the role of social knowledge in the maintenance of ideology, perhaps the obscuration of race is an issue worth interrogating more in online environments where users take on veiled virtual personas. Similarly, more work could come from my discussion on the nature of visual studies, where I argued that critics should avoid essentialist logic when deciding how to approach artifacts that blur the line between the discursive and the visual. Approaching visual studies with this lens in mind might warrant different conclusions about how “images” argue within their relative ambiguity. At the very least, I hope these claims breed more discussion about what it means to study visual rhetoric.

Also, when reflecting on the modernist tensions of fantasy football as a procedural rhetoric, where human influence makes defining its processes difficult, more work could be done in the merger between game and reality. How do the procedures of a game account rhetorically for the level of human interactivity within it? In fantasy football, I explored how the competing logics between the colonial rhetorics of the game and the subjectivity of the user created an instable space of ideology. However, is this type of contradiction between technological determinism and the user embodiment within a single medium unique to fantasy football? How does this gap function in other types of games where human action becomes the content? While Bogost encourages procedural rhetoric to move outside the realm of traditional videogames, my suspicion is that most scholars have used his theory comfortably within that domain. Perhaps moving outside of videogames into other process-based systems would allow for more complexity in the

theory and increased application, finding even more subversive ways that ideology functions within procedures.

In these recommendations for future research, I recognize that there is vast overlap and intersections between them in media theory, cultural studies and rhetoric, thus it may seem as if these suggestions are just reiterations of the same project. However, that is the point. My analysis is an intersectional project where I use a multidimensional approach to map particular trajectories of discourse, yet also show how specific rhetorics recontextualize and rearticulate meaning within a larger culture. Utilizing a methodology drawing from both cultural and rhetorical studies allows me the room to avoid dogmatic assumptions about where ideology comes from and how it manifests, evading the trap of essentialism or doing rhetoric for the sake of argument. Moreover, this approach offers me liberty to use culture not as my main artifact of study, but as an entry point to see how it operates and contradicts. Ultimately, my goal in pursuing an intersectional project is to more precisely locate ideology and critique it for the productive purposes of human empowerment. As Rosteck argues:

Control and power are manifested today in a staggering array of discursive forms. Only a multidimensional critical practice can do justice to them. Cultural studies and rhetorical studies, while perhaps pursuing different paths, are driven by the same goal: understanding how discourse places and sustains relationships between people in society and how we might bring about positive changes in those relationships with the end of, as Stuart Hall has put it, “making the world a more humane place.” (23).

As critics, we should always remain connected to broader theories and longer histories of discourse while simultaneously paying attention to a radical contextuality. In doing so, we should interrogate how that same discourse is rearticulated in rhetorics of specific times and particular locations. Therefore, my project is not taking what existing scholars

such as hooks and Ono have done with colonial media consumption or what Oates and Hill have done with racism in fantasy football and just make these arguments more specific. Rather, I demonstrate how these colonial rhetorics of fantasy football manifested in the discourse, procedures, and visuality of the game rearticulate that ideology in a precise, exigent location of culture.

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ABSTRACT**READING BETWEEN THE NUMBERS: THE COLONIAL RHETORICS OF
FANTASY FOOTBALL AND THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL**

by

ROBERT KYLE KELLAM**December 2012****Advisor:** Dr. Kelly Young**Major:** Communication**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

In this project, I build on existing research in the critical intersection of media, sport, gaming and race to explore how fantasy football, an entertainment byproduct of the National Football League (NFL), rearticulates and recontextualizes the colonial ideology already prolific in the NFL and other products of American media culture. I investigate how fantasy football may represent an innocuous, yet exigent place to study the commodification and consumption of bodies in our contemporary media landscape because of the way that the increasingly popular game operates in a capitalistic logic, where NFL players are almost exclusively valued for their statistical production and fantasy football participants are positioned as “owners” of these players.

Within this assumption, I analyze three specific colonial rhetorics of fantasy football: the language used to talk about NFL players in fantasy football discourse, the procedures of playing fantasy football and the numerical representation of NFL players within the game that serve as the main conduit for visual interactivity. Through a postcolonial lens, I argue that these various rhetorics in fantasy football serve to otherize, commodify, and ultimately dehumanize NFL players, while also inviting fantasy

“owners” to attempt to control these bodies. However, because those who play fantasy football have no real access to the operations of the NFL or its players, I suggest that fantasy football participants become situated in an ideological illusion of control, caught in the contradiction between the game’s colonial rhetorics and their own level of agency. Furthermore, I explore how these colonial rhetorics impact how we come to see, know and interact with race and rhetorically reshape black and white relations within the United States. In the end, I draw conclusions about the way colonial ideology functions and is rearticulated through fantasy football, as well as offer limitations of my own project and suggestions for future research.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

R. Kyle Kellam was born on August 7, 1980 in Richmond, Indiana and grew on a small farm in rural Fayette County, Indiana. He attended Connersville Senior High School in Connersville, Indiana and was mostly involved in speech, theatre and art. Upon receiving his diploma in 1998, Kyle went on to Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, earning a B.S. in Communication Studies in May of 2002 and a M.A. in Communication Studies in May of 2005. Currently, Kyle is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, where he has been awarded a graduate teaching assistantship, a Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and formal recognition for his outstanding service.

During his academic career, Kyle has worked in various sales and management positions in industry, as well as adjunct and instructor appointments at various colleges and universities. He has also remained heavily involved in the speech and debate community as a competitor, judge and coach. Kyle is beginning a tenure-track appointment as an Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of Forensics in August 2012 in the Department of English and Communication at Marian University in Indianapolis, Indiana. He will be awarded his Ph.D. in Communication in December of 2012.