



10-28-2013

Authenticity at the Right Price: The Development and Implications of Commodified Sports Memorabilia

Stephen Andon
Nova Southeastern University, sandon@nova.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/quadrivium>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Andon, Stephen (2013) "Authenticity at the Right Price: The Development and Implications of Commodified Sports Memorabilia," *Quadrivium: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/quadrivium/vol5/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CAHSS Journals at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Quadrivium: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship* by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

AUTHENTICITY AT THE RIGHT PRICE: THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS OF
COMMODIFIED SPORTS MEMORABILIA

Stephen Andon

Since 1947, the Little League World Series (LLWS), an annual baseball tournament for national and international teams comprised of 11-13 year olds, has been held on the grounds of the Little League Association headquarters in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The games between these teams, which are broadcast nationally on ESPN/ABC, are held in two proportionally-sized stadiums: the oldest, built in 1959, is Howard J. Lamade Stadium and the other, constructed in 2001, is Volunteer Stadium. At an elimination game during the 2010 LLWS, team Panama defeated Canada by a score of 4-2, ending the Vancouver-based team's participation in the tournament. After the traditional post-game handshakes, ESPN cameras found a player from team Canada carefully scooping up dirt from the Volunteer Stadium infield into a plastic bag. The play-by-play commentator, cued to this scene, almost incredulously stated, "How's that? If that doesn't sum up the experience for [the player], I can't imagine what else does" (Sandulli, 2010). That remark was enthusiastically reiterated by the analyst commentator, a former Major League Baseball manager, who remarked, "You talked about memories and taking things home. A little dirt from Williamsport. What a memory and I'm sure the coaches are going to make a little memento for each player with the dirt that they've collected here because that's a super coaching staff" (Sandulli, 2010).

Without addressing their possibly over-eager assumptions, the statements from the commentators frame the powerful memory-making function of something as meager as a few ounces of dirt. Notably, the scene from Williamsport was eerily similar to the post-game activity following the final out of the 2008 season at the old Yankee Stadium two years previously. After the game between the Baltimore Orioles and New York Yankees concluded, players from both teams scooped various amounts of dirt from the soon-to-be-demolished field. Notably, Yankees closer Mariano Rivera, who recorded the final out against Baltimore infielder Brian Roberts, was completely surrounded by cameramen when he piled several handfuls of dirt from the pitcher's mound into a plastic jug.



Figure 1: Cleats from the last player to bat in old Yankee Stadium, prized for the caked-on stadium dirt, on display at the National Sports Collector's Convention in 2010. Photo: Andon personal Collection.

Unlike Williamsport, however, the dirt in the old Yankee Stadium was not only gathered by players but by the stadium's grounds crew. Under the watchful eye of Major League Baseball (MLB) authenticators, the dirt was placed into large white buckets, sealed, and affixed with an authentic hologram sticker. In the months that followed, the Yankees and corporate memorabilia partner Steiner Sports dispersed that dirt, in tablespoon-sized increments, into a myriad of products, including drink coasters, key fobs, picture frames, and crystal desk ornaments. In total, Steiner Sports reported that in the year following the demolition of Yankee Stadium they had sold \$3 million worth of dirt and another \$800,000 in freeze-dried grass from the ballpark (Brennan, "Need new chairs," 2010).

While the desire for keepsakes of all kinds has not abated, the process for acquiring them certainly has, and companies, teams, and leagues are no longer waiting for stadium closings to peddle what Gordon (1986) refers to as "piece-of-the-rock" memorabilia: objects like dirt, grass, game-used clothing and equipment, used team champagne bottles, and a miscellany of stadium artifacts. A further examination into this process exposes the stranglehold that official agreements between companies, teams, and leagues have on a devoted market of sports fans eager to grasp at the aura encased within a litany of products. Designed to ameliorate the overwhelming amount of fraud that problematized the memorabilia market through the late

1990s and early 2000s, this process has created an assembly line of tightly secured and highly credible authentication procedures as a means of delivering - at various price levels - a myriad of authenticated sports memorabilia.

As such, this essay will examine this burgeoning authentic memorabilia market as an exemplar of Mosco's (1996, 2009) concept of commodification, with a focus on its implications for sport (Andrews, 2001; Andrews, 2004; Boyd, 2000; Horne, 2006; Sage, 2000; Sewart, 1987). More specifically, this theoretical perspective situates modern, American professional sport within a late-capitalist understanding of culture (Andrews & Ritzer, 2007; Andrews, 2009). With mounds of these mass-produced and authenticated materials, sports memorabilia companies package aura through powerful symbols of history, memory, and nostalgia for a hefty price, "transforming [them]...into marketable products" (Mosco, 1996, p.146) as part of managing "the sport entity as a network of merchandizable brands and embodied sub-brands" and exhausting "sport-related revenue streams and consumption opportunities" (Andrews, 2009, p. 222). Consequently, I will first outline the development of commodification in the realm of sport, with an eye towards the position of authentic memorabilia in the period of late capitalism. Second, I point to the FBI's now-infamous sports memorabilia forgery and fakes investigation as the impetus for a new era of memorabilia oversight, production, and authenticity. Finally, I will use the case of Steiner Sports and authenticated dirt from Yankee Stadium to exemplify the commodification of sports memorabilia and examine the semiotic, interpretive, and practical repercussions associated with the conglomeration of memorabilia companies with various professional leagues, teams, and players.

Tracing the History of Commodification and Sport

Looking back to origins of professional sport, Jhally (1989) delivers the premise that "sports have *always* been based on commercial relations" (p. 80). He later clarifies this position, in that "professional sports depend on two kinds of commodity sales...they sell tickets...[and they] sell the rights to broadcast the events to the media" (p. 80). This discrepancy can only be reconciled by the idea that the beginnings of the commodification of sport must be traced back to the era before tickets and before media. It is possible, Bale (1993) suggests, to locate sport in a period before it became 'sportified.' That is, to follow the evolution of sport back to the true ludic activity played in town squares and courtyards, before, as Bourdieu (1999) explains, "[the] extension to sport of the rules of neo-liberal economics" (p. 17). But once designated spaces

were outlined for sport in the late 19th century, rules were established, stands were built, and games became scheduled events. Unlike games that took place in wide-open spaces, designated sports facilities accomplished two things that would forever change sport. First, they separated spectators from players and second, they initiated and normalized the charging of admission to these events.

Once these designated spaces had been constructed, Jhally's (1989) understanding of sport as a two-headed commodity producer was fulfilled. Over time, ticket prices to sporting events increased as teams constantly built new stadiums, most readily apparent in the past decade as teams introduced a new era of stadiums deemed "mallparks" (Kimmelman, 2009). By offering a wealth of shopping and eating facilities, expansive club-level seating sections, luxurious private suites, and other distractions, these facilities prioritize the opportunity for profit making.

Meanwhile, the second element of Jhally's (1989) commodity sales, sports media broadcast rights, has also evolved since the early 20th century. Beginning in the age of industrialization and urbanization, "Sport sold newspapers and newspapers sold sport" (Horne, 2006, p. 41). Because of this relationship, Burstyn (1999) explains that more fans were following and attending sporting events, which in turn, allowed athletes to transform from amateurs to full-time professionals. With athletes dedicated full-time to training, sporting events became higher-skilled dramatic events that, following this sport-media symbiosis, drew even larger audiences (Burstyn, 1999, p. 106). Recognizing this mutually beneficial relationship is the key to understanding sports and media in the modern era. It is what Jhally (1989) calls the "sports/media complex" (p. 77). Both entities work in concert with each other to promote and sell their respective product.

However, much as stadiums developed over time, the sport/media relationship reached new heights as the media industry was transformed through the second half of the 20th century. As an example, for the 1949 Major League Baseball season the Chicago Cubs charged just \$5,000 for the right to televise the team's games (Bellamy, Jr., & Walker, 2008). Sports leagues today, however, charge billions of dollars for the right to broadcast sports contests and gain access to a highly desirable audience demographic: "18-34 year-old male consumers prized by corporate advertisers" (Slack, 2004, p. 8). As such, sport media scholars have pointed to the power of media companies to use sporting spectacles for the sole purpose of drawing huge audiences and selling those audiences to advertisers. Sage (1990) summarizes the process

succinctly: “Sport programs are merely bait for selling advertising: that is how the media uses sport...the media have no inherent interest in sport. It is merely a means for profit making” (p. 123).

But selling tickets and providing audiences for sport does not fully constitute the commodification of sport. To investigate a new direction for the commodification of sport requires a standard definition, especially in light of Moor’s (2007) observation that the term has expanded to include “ticket price inflation and increasing sponsorship revenues to the sale of branded goods by clubs and the use of sporting imagery in advertising” (p. 132). Thus, without making special consideration for sport, Mosco (2009) simplifies the term by returning to basic Marxian principles: “Commodification is the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange” (p. 127). This transformation obscures the social relations inherent in the exchange process and imparts a great potency onto the commodity. As such, “the commodity contains a double mystification,” where, first, the commodity appears without the appearance or knowledge of the social struggles that are involved in its production (Mosco, 2009, p. 131). Second, and with reference to the Marxian concept of commodity fetishism, the commodity becomes “reified,” and “takes on a life and a power of its own, over that of both its producers and consumers (Mosco, 2009, p. 131).

As a target for sports scholars, the concept of commodification has been used to underscore the destruction of pure sport. Aligning with Mosco’s (2009) definition, Sewart (1987) states that sport “becomes a commodity governed by market principles [when] there is little or no regard for its intrinsic content or form” (p. 172). The sport commodity, therefore, privileges exchange value at the expense of an idyllic form of sport. Sewart (1987) outlines this inherent conflict by pointing towards the indefatigable desire to draw large audiences, thus propagating the sports/media complex. This desire, while responsible for both the many rule changes in professional sport as well as the termination of a sporting meritocracy in favor of “market principles and the canons of entertainment,” has also steered sport toward “spectacle and theatricality” (Sewart, 1987, pp. 176-8). These developments, while inter-related, are driven by a spectacularization that ensures the vested interests in the sports/media complex deliver entertainment mega-events, not merely athletic contests, in order to suit “the commercial needs of advanced monopoly capital” (Young, 1986, p. 12).

Situating Game-Used Memorabilia in the Media/Sport Spectacle

The transformation of sport into spectacle has become so commonplace and acceptable that, according to Kellner (2003), it is “one of the characteristic features of contemporary postindustrial societies” (p. 65). As such, Andrews (2006; 2009) makes the logical connection between Debord’s (1994) definition of the spectacle with Jameson’s (1991) critique of the late capitalist moment in sport, embodied by the sports/media complex. Specifically, by avoiding the pitfalls of sport scholarship that use Debord’s concept of the spectacle as a “superficial invocation,” Andrews (2006) makes a clear distinction in describing the dualistic nature of the spectacle:

the upper-case Spectacle (mediated mega-event) and the lower-case spectacle (relentless outpourings of the corroborating and/or parasitic culture industries) provide both the monumental and vernacular architecture of a spectacular society, in which the spectacle—as capitalist product and process—realizes a situation in which the “commodity completes its colonization of social life” (cited in Debord 1994a [1967]), p. 29). (pp. 93-4)

These two orders of the spectacle, “the monumental as the production of sport media mega events and the vernacular as the ancillary commercial texts, products and services,” (Andrews, 2009, p. 225) characterize contemporary sport as an entertainment and cross-promotional machine.

In one example, Andrews (2006) marks the dualities of Debord’s spectacle with regards to how the National Basketball Association (NBA) has developed as a commodity. First, the presentation of the monumental, upper-case Spectacles, like national TV coverage, playoffs, and all-star game extravaganzas, “[represent] the ‘final form of commodity reification’ (Jameson, 1991, p. 18)” (as cited by Andrews, 2009, p. 226). Concurrently, an overwhelming number of lower-case spectacles, in the form of sports merchandise, apparel, memorabilia, themed restaurants, video games, and media products, work to promote the experiential aura of the upper-case Spectacle. These lower-case spectacles are “designed to stimulate positive sensory experiences with the core brands (the league and its franchises) and their constitutive embodied sub-brands (players)” and thus, further stimulate the sports/media complex (Andrews, 2009, p. 227).

Therefore, the development of sports leagues and teams as consumer-driven, entertainment entities has altered the Jhally’s (1989) dualistic understanding of sport as commodity. Because both selling tickets and broadcast rights to the media has eventuated the

sport theatricality, understanding the extent of sport as a commodity must embrace a meticulous understanding of the spectacle and avoid understating Debord's dualistic intentions (Tomlinson, 2002). As such, the best means of exploring how items like authentic, game-used sports memorabilia further commodify sport requires Andrews' (2006; 2009) interpretation of the co-promotional tactics of the spectacle, via the integration of media mega-events and a bevy of ancillary products.

Overall, the large number and variety of these products are prized for the ability to "cultivate the aura of the sport Spectacle...[and] further stimulate desires for its myriad commodified forms" (Andrews, 2009, p. 227-8). However, a distinction must be made between these products, noting those that do more than cultivate, but actually can encapsulate the auratic experience of the sporting spectacle. Essentially different from mass-produced apparel, DVDs or video games, these products are the authenticated, game-used, "piece-of-the-rock" memorabilia items that have, in just the past decade, exploded in number and scope into the sports memorabilia marketplace.

Along with items like stadium grass and dirt, professional game-used jerseys and equipment have become prized for their aura, a combination of material presence, uniqueness, and authenticity that recall the experience of the sport spectacle. Originally, the term aura was defined by cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1968b) to distinguish original pieces of art against the impending movement toward lithography, photography, and film. He identifies "presence" to describe the quality of the authentic original that is sacrificed in mechanical reproduction (Benjamin, 1968b, p. 222). This presence is destroyed because new technology can physically separate the original work of art from direct experience. In other words, distance, for Benjamin, is no longer an impediment because mechanical reproductions allow the work, previously docked to a particular location, to move "into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (p. 222). The Sistine Chapel cannot be moved and, as such, it requires arduous work to travel to see it firsthand and in its original form. Copies, however, of Michelangelo's famous ceiling, can travel and, in doing so, not only lack such a presence but work to destroy the presence of the original. Benjamin is more direct in concluding, "One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (p. 223). This aura, he adds, is only further decimated by a social paradigm shift where works of art are only designed for their

reproducibility (p. 226). Therefore, given the recent increase of auratic products, the following section tracks the origins and development of authentic, game-used memorabilia, from its origins with religious relics to early instances in sport, to its current, corporatized formula.

The Growth of Game-Used, Explosion of Fraud, and Solutions for Credibility

In sports, the opportunities for fans, en masse, to acquire pieces of the spectacle throughout the 20th century were relatively rare. Old game-used uniforms and equipment became available sporadically and unsystematically, often through auction. The only objects that had some precedence for being available, however, were pieces of professional sports stadiums. The high turnover of stadiums throughout the 20th century (deMause & Cagan, 2008) gave fans the opportunity to purchase items informally as well as apprehend items that would have been thrown away when old stadiums closed. In other cases, fans simply took what they wanted after the final game concluded. Venerated sports writer Red Smith, witness to the final game in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field in 1957, writes that "kids tore up the bases, clawed at the mound for the pitchers' rubber and dug for home plate...[and] scooped earth from the mound into paper bags and pulled outfield grass which they stuffed into pants' pockets" (Smith, 2000, p. 225). When the Yankees first refurbished their stadium in 1973, some fans left with various pieces of the stadium like seats and signage, while others with connections to the organization made smaller purchases later. Among these purchases included former Yankee manager Casey Stengel's shower door and a pair of Babe Ruth's underwear (Montandon, 2008). These stadium yard sales have continued, in more controlled and organized formats, with contemporary stadium closings. For example, when Philadelphia's Spectrum closed in 2010, after the most prized artifacts had been harvested from the building for later sale, fans were given the opportunity to take what leftover furniture and miscellany they could carry (Clark, 2010).

Meanwhile, the latter half of the 20th century in the sports memorabilia industry was driven by baseball card shows (Bloom, 2002) and an increasing number of sports memorabilia companies. Between them, the industry was dominated by mass-produced items like cards and the quest for autographs, but featured the occasional aura-infused game-used memorabilia items. In total, by the 1990s, the sports memorabilia industry had blossomed into a \$1 billion annual industry (Nelson, 2006). Much of this growth is attributed to the advent of the Internet and eBay, which allowed sports memorabilia to become readily available to a large audience.

As this technology developed, the sports memorabilia industry was captivated by the

prices that historic home run baseballs, hit by Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa during the 1998 MLB season's home run chase, were fetching on the open market. McGwire's 70th home run ball, then representative of the most home runs ever hit during a MLB season and considered "the crown jewel of sports memorabilia" (Gilbert, 2003, p. 299), was sold to comic book author Todd McFarlane at auction for \$3 million in 1999. Six more home run balls from the chase, three from McGwire and three from Sosa, were also purchased by McFarlane for a total of \$300,000. According to *Sports Collector's Daily* editor Rich Mueller,

the prices that were paid for some of those home run balls really opened people's eyes to the fact that there were people out there willing to spend a lot of money for things like that. And I think the trickle-down effect came into historic game-used bats, jerseys, etc. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

Unfortunately, for many fans eager to obtain authentic game-used sports items, the development of online selling in the largely unregulated industry fostered a breeding ground for fraud. Millions of products sold at card shows and online, often by fly-by-night memorabilia companies, were counterfeited pieces falsely labeled as authentic. Many of these pieces featured forged signatures from a loosely connected network of impersonators seeking to take advantage of gullible consumers looking for deals. Relying on the power of Internet anonymity, these forgers could operate without fear of retribution.

Consequently, the number of incidences of fraud increased sharply during the 1990s. At its height, forgeries so deeply infiltrated the sports collectibles market that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) believed that anywhere from 50% to 90% of all signed pieces of sports memorabilia sold online were fake (FBI, 2000). This, in combination with an untold number of pieces labeled as game-used and authentic that were equally fraudulent, created a crisis in the sports memorabilia industry.

The first part of the crisis was legal. Fans who wanted a real piece of sports memorabilia were, as one whistleblowing memorabilia dealer told the *New York Times* in 1994, "being taken each week by unscrupulous people" both online and offline (Marks, 1994, ¶ 4). The pursuit of profit meant that many of these forgers were willing to sign, fake, or fabricate anything for an extra dollar. Such brazenness led one such forger, Greg Marino, to create five official World Series baseballs with Mother Teresa's forged signature on the sweet spot. As Nelson (2006) notes, "little did Marino know that when he filled [that] order...he was creating some of the most sensational, and unique, counterfeit products in the 2,300-year-old history of forgery" (p. i). To

deal with this sprawling crisis, an FBI undercover case was launched, entitled “Operation Bullpen,” to investigate this masterful ring of memorabilia deception.

The FBI began the national investigation in 1997, after local FBI officials in Chicago discovered a ring of Michael Jordan memorabilia forgers across five states. In October of 1999, after two years of undercover work, the FBI simultaneously executed sixty warrants across five states and seized \$500,000 in cash and approximately \$10 million of forged memorabilia (FBI, 2000). These raids, which involved 400 special agents from the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), constituted “one of the largest one-day takedowns in FBI history, breaking up the biggest, most profitable forgery ring in the annals of American crime” (Nelson, 2006, p. i). Ultimately, twenty-six individuals were convicted as part of forgery rings responsible for supplying memorabilia dealers throughout the country.

Beyond introducing the FBI to the sports memorabilia world, the crisis that the sports memorabilia industry was facing also included a growing disillusionment among their fans. Specifically, the inundation of forged materials destroyed the ethos of authenticity for sports fans. Beset by this overwhelming problem, sports memorabilia dealers began to offer letters of authenticity (LOAs, also known as certificates of authenticity, or COAs) that would both justify the expensive price of authentic items and ease the concerns of potential consumers. These LOAs primarily served to rhetorically connect the authenticity of an item to the original, a process that recalls Benjamin (1968b) and the notion of aura. For him, authenticity is a special quality that, if genuine, is inextricably linked with aura. To prove the authenticity of something requires “all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” (Benjamin, 1968b, p. 223). LOAs, in this case, establish their credibility by telling a story of provenance and by detailing a series of authentication procedures that were used to link the item to its historical past.

Still, the validity of LOAs relied heavily on the credibility of the authenticators who signed them. Not surprisingly, the conspirators who ran the Operation Bullpen ring found ways to circumvent this issue and deliver LOAs relatively easily. According to the FBI, many of the LOAs that accompanied forged items were simply blank forms mass-produced by distributors. In other instances, the crime ring would find authenticators who were either easily fooled or would offer LOAs without thorough investigations. After all, technically, the authenticity purported by authenticators was merely an opinion of their best judgment. This created an intriguing loophole

in the system, as noted by the FBI press release that outlined the Operation Bullpen scheme:

It is the COA which allows distributors to feign, or maintain, ignorance of the fraudulent nature of the item they are selling. On the few occasions when an unsuspecting buyer discovers the fraud, the seller can claim that he relied on the accuracy of the COA and was unaware of the counterfeit... On the other hand, the authenticators... can always claim that they are not responsible for the fraud and merely gave their best opinion as to whether the signature was genuine. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000)

The lesson for consumers was to be wary of nearly all sports memorabilia. Ultimately, despite their growing proliferation, LOAs had not fully solved the sports memorabilia crisis.

Meanwhile, professional sports leagues were beginning to catch on to the surging interest in game-used authentic sports memorabilia. More and more, strange items began to appear on eBay. Arizona Diamondbacks outfielder Luiz Gonzalez's game-used chewing gum, which was retrieved by a fan during a spring training game, sold on eBay for \$10,000 (Rovell, 2002a). Just a few weeks later, Seattle Mariners relief pitcher Jeff Nelson placed the surgically removed bone chips from his throwing elbow onto eBay. The online auction company removed the listing from its site after just ninety minutes, citing their policy against selling body parts. But in that time, the auction had received 124 bids and the price for the bone chips soared from \$250 to \$23,600 (Rovell, 2002b).

Yet, few teams fully understood the demand for game-used authentic memorabilia and even fewer knew how to solve the issue of authentication (Lindgren, 2002). The desire to capitalize on game-used products, therefore, required the leagues to distance themselves from the questionable credibility of anonymous eBay bidding and the forgery crisis in the sports memorabilia market. The realization of maximum profits required a series of rigid authentication procedures that were developed with sports memorabilia companies willing to sign deals with various professional sports leagues and teams. Not only did these companies work to establish procedures that would limit the opportunities for fraud, they could create new markets by determining what was valuable and how to sell it quickly. The NHL, for example, had no idea what to do with its game-used equipment until 2002, when the league signed a deal with the sports memorabilia company Meigray Group. Barry Meisel, the company's founder, helped develop jersey tags and security codes that could combat potential fraud. According to Meisel, the NHL "didn't know what a resource they had... The [New York] Rangers had a closet stuffed with 674 jerseys. They were probably going to get chucked out" (Lindgren, 2002). With the help

of Meigray, however, no product and, thus, no profit would be wasted. The contract between the NHL and Meigray has now been in place for over a decade. The memorabilia company has a similar deal with the NBA, in place since 2006, while the NFL is affiliated with PSA/DNA, a professional authentication firm that was founded in 1998 and is now the world's largest (Stack, 2010).

Notably, the sport most directly affected by the crisis of authenticity, as well as the sport with the most to gain from its resolution, was baseball. As the national pastime, baseball not only needed to maintain its pure image (Butterworth, 2010), it needed to make wholesale changes to capitalize on its popularity and large volume of potential products. In 2001, MLB introduced a new league-wide initiative to combat the fraud surrounding game-used authentic memorabilia. The first step in the process required MLB to solve the credibility issue surrounding sports memorabilia authenticators. The new program, therefore, put at least one official authenticator at every game in every major league stadium. To staff the position, MLB recruited "a team of 120 active and retired law-enforcement officials" to authenticate every game-used item in the stadium, including: bases, dirt, equipment, baseballs, jerseys, and even champagne bottles used for team celebrations (Branch, 2009, ¶ 7). In addition to their law-enforcement backgrounds, and to further cement their credibility, MLB maintains that these authenticators are volunteers who belong to an independent third-party fittingly called Authenticators, Incorporated (Stack, 2010).

Beyond solidifying authenticator ethos, MLB focused on generating standard procedures that would create an airtight assembly line of authentication. During each game, the authenticator – or in some cases, like the playoffs or new stadium closings and openings, a team of authenticators – will sit in or adjacent to the stadium's dugout ready to collect items directly from the field of play. Each authenticator carries a large roll of high-tech, MLB-issued hologram stickers. These high-tech stickers, which cannot be removed from the item without being damaged or destroyed, contain a unique tracking number. As soon as authenticators get their hands on an item, it is immediately tagged with one half of the sticker. Once applied, the authenticator scans the other half of the matching sticker with a handheld device and enters a short description, establishing provenance and creating a digital record of the item's origin. Consumers can then use the sticker attached to the item to research the object's provenance in MLB's online database.

Having rehabilitated the authentication procedures and implemented background-checks

for the individuals involved, baseball teams found new ways to meet demands for a piece of the spectacle by offering more game-used authentic items than ever. Because both MLB and the home team will ask the authenticators before each game for a list of items to be obtained during the game and authenticated, game-used merchandise is now consistently available. Furthermore, anything related to the team that can be sold is authenticated as used, including locker room carpeting and urinals, insect repellent, stadium dirt, even unfrozen arena ice.

Memorabilia Companies, Market Expansion, and Meaning

While the sum total of these changes produced an efficient and value-potent supply chain of authenticated memorabilia, the commodification process evolved because collaborations between sports teams and sports memorabilia companies sought to most effectively “transform things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange” (Mosco, 2009, p. 127). This evolution, for sports memorabilia, has created the following two developments. First, a product line with a wide variety of price points for potential consumers has emerged as a means of exhausting “sport-related revenue streams and consumption opportunities” (Andrews, 2009, p. 222). Second, marketing techniques for game-used authentic sports memorabilia companies have focused on the symbolic nature of their products in order to foment a “sense of personal identity [that] is bound up with the regular acquisition of material possessions” (Billig, 1999, p. 317). Importantly, the emphasis on fan identity underscores the forgetting of social relations that bring these products to market, as defined by Marx’s fetishizing of the commodity. Even as many of these authenticated products are assembled overseas, sports memorabilia companies and leagues have used them to appeal to fan identity by constructing a mystical connection to the sporting spectacle. This mystique relies heavily on a narrative of aura, history, and nostalgia because, on one hand, using game-used sports memorabilia products as indicators of memory helps to assuage the loss of meaning inherent in postmodernity (Dickinson, 1997). On the other, these products bolster a performative identity that validates sports fans as experiential witnesses to other fans.

These developments are manifest in Steiner Sports, one of the largest commercial sports memorabilia companies, whose partnerships for game-used authentic items include a number of professional and collegiate sports’ most high-profile teams. The most preeminent of Steiner’s partnerships is with MLB’s New York Yankees, the league’s preeminent franchise and currently the third most valuable sports franchise in the world according to *Forbes* (Ozanian &

Badenhausen, 2010). The contract with the Yankees, signed in 2004, gave Steiner an opportunity to capitalize on the Yankees' immense popularity as a worldwide brand. According to Jason Klein, head of product development at Steiner, the 2004 contract "was really the first deal of its kind in the industry, where a memorabilia company is working directly with a professional franchise, getting exclusive rights to their game-used and things of that nature" (personal communication, August 12, 2010).

Serendipitously, the closing of old Yankee Stadium in 2008 created an unprecedented amount of material that could be authenticated and sold. A deal with the city of New York, the owner of the stadium, granted the Yankees and Steiner access to every inch. Thus, unlike the free-for-all policies in place before the previous renovation of the stadium in 1973, security was increased during the final season so that fans could not walk out with objects and pieces from the stadium (Amore, 2008). For Steiner Sports, their challenge was representative of a wider sports memorabilia industry movement to break up large, and potentially expensive, items into smaller items that could be sold in high volume to sports fans. According to Jason Alpert, director of corporate sales at Mounted Memories, the world's largest authentic sports memorabilia wholesaler, most memorabilia companies had a difficult time selling higher-priced items, and so "the industry had to find a way to offer less expensive product" (personal communication, June 29, 2010). As Klein explains further,

we were able to offer pieces of the sod from the ground, pieces of the dugout, monument park, foul poles. We got access to all of that stuff and we think we did a great job putting those pieces together at different price points so that everybody could get involved. You could get something from the stadium from anywhere from \$29.99 to \$1500. (personal communication, August 12, 2010)

Maximizing consumption opportunities led Steiner to selling dirt and sod-related products for as little as \$30. The low cost made dirt readily available to a multitude of Yankees fans who purchased almost \$4 million worth of dirt and sod in the year after the ballpark closed (Brennan, 2010). This success, according to Rich Mueller, editor of *Sport's Collector's Daily*, soon spread to the sale of authenticated earth in other sports like professional and collegiate football (personal communication, October 7, 2010). In the case of Yankee Stadium, Mueller states, these authenticated dirt products were designed by sports memorabilia companies for mass consumption by the "public-at-large," with an eye towards "what can we make a buck on, when we tear down the stadium, what can we sell to make money [because] people are out there who

will buy it” (personal communication, October 7, 2010). Supporting Mueller’s claim, *New York Magazine* labeled the old Yankee Stadium products as part of “a quantity-over-quality sale...[a] bonanza [that] will turn literal junk into as much as \$50 million” (Montandon, 2008).

The key to the profitability of dirt and sod – as well as other products, like used baseballs, bases, and team equipment - is that they are infinitely reproducible. The infield dirt for Yankee Stadium, sold by the tablespoon in Steiner products, is provided by a company in New Jersey for \$75 a ton (Levinson & Buteau, 2009). Once installed in the stadium’s playing surface, game-used and authenticated Yankees dirt is a renewable resource. As Steiner Sports founder and CEO Brandon Steiner succinctly told *Sports Business Daily*, “underneath the dirt, there’s more dirt” (Lefton, 2009, ¶ 10).

More importantly, the reproducibility of dirt means that it can be sold in an ever-increasing number of products and displays. After the company procured a league-wide deal to provide authenticated MLB dirt from all 30 teams, Jason Klein’s team of product developers spent five months “working a product line, developing plaques, developing collages, the coasters, the crystals...trying to get that right look and make sure that, not only was it authentic, but we also want it to look good” (personal communication, August 12, 2010). The end result is an impressive product line with hundreds of items,(an unspecified number assembled in China), listed on Steiner’s own homepage as well as on a network of associated websites. Driven to expand these product lines at affordable price points, memorabilia companies, thus, provided the impetus for delivering fractured pieces of aura sleekly packaged to a mass audience.

Many of these products, in the way they are developed as well as marketed, speak to the semiotic power of game-used dirt. Steiner has dozens of products that place swatches of dirt inside picture frames, paired with stadium and player photographs, as well as game-used baseballs and replica lineup cards. As Klein notes, “The aura of [these stadiums] is just so great that even when the teams are not playing well, their fans are still interested in something from the stadium” (personal communication, August 12, 2010). Taken to its ultimate conclusion, using dirt to connect fans with a stadium can be extremely powerful. Specifically, with regards to old Yankee Stadium, Brandon Steiner claims, “dirt really is a piece of history, and it is something other fans generally can’t get. In some way, Yankee Stadium dirt connects you to Babe Ruth” (Lefton, 2009, ¶ 4). Physically, it may be difficult to believe the same dirt particles from Ruth’s final game in Yankee Stadium in 1934 were harvested from old Yankee Stadium in 2008. In

addition, Steiner's position to capitalize financially on the connection undermines the credibility of his claim.

Yet, rhetorically, the marketing of dirt products works to create demand via an enticing aura that artfully avoids Benjamin's (1968b) notion that reproducibility is destructive. The result is a logical inconsistency that is negated, to Steiner's benefit, by exploiting the power of stadiums as memory places and using dirt as a marker of social identity. In his examination of commercial naming of sports stadiums, Boyd (2000) taps into this power by recalling Dickinson's (1997) concept of memory places as solvents for the crisis of identity in consumer culture. More specifically, stadiums can become crucial public sites because they provide and house the memories that "motivate, stabilize, secure, and provide the resources for identity" (Dickinson, 1997, p. 21, as cited in Boyd, 2000, p. 334). Those memories are triggered through the both the stadium architecture as well as the players, teams, and games to which it bore witness. From this perspective, Steiner may not have gone far enough as Yankee Stadium dirt also signifies the memories of all the great Yankee players, over two-dozen World Series titles, and moments like Lou Gehrig's famed farewell speech in 1939, Don Larsen's perfect game in the 1956 World Series, and Reggie Jackson's three-home-run performance in game six of the 1977 World Series. The dirt provides a critical function, therefore, because without these memories and "without some proof of our history, we don't know who we are and cannot forecast or plan where we're going" (Belk, 1991, p. 124).

On the other hand, considering the ways in which these – and other authentic, game-used – products have become part of an assembly line, it is possible to argue that their auratic integrity has been compromised. To package aura, Benjamin would interject, is to destroy it. Notably, because authentic game-used memorabilia has become a highly valuable commodity for sports memorabilia companies, the streamlined nature of producing this kind of memorabilia neglects aura's primordial characteristic of firsthand experience and, in doing so, removes some of the innate spontaneity and uniqueness of experiencing the game in person – as well as potentially acquiring game-used items in person. Therefore, something is lost when these products are available without the sweat equity of physical attendance. For example, numerous athletes have been known to toss headbands, armbands, foul balls, or other token one-time use artifacts into the crowd. Notably, NBA player Gilbert Arenas has been known to toss his jersey into the stands after every one of his team's games, home or away. Aware of the personal cost to replace the

jersey, Arenas insists the tradition was a means of establishing his legacy, noting he wanted people to remember, “he gave his jersey away” (Trem, 2006, ¶ 19). Emblematic of the industry’s development, however, fans no longer have to attend a game and hope for a happenstance moment to catch a foul ball or a player’s jersey because on corporate memorabilia websites fans can pre-order and buy items like baseballs, bases, or jerseys from games of their choosing. By expanding the opportunities for fans unable, or unwilling, to attend the game in person, the ability to pre-order authentic game-used sports memorabilia destroys the unique experiential possibilities of attending a game.

As a corollary, by expanding opportunities for those not in attendance, sports teams and memorabilia companies remind fans that there is nothing particularly unique about their attendance at games. In his operationalization of aura, Benjamin lamented reproduced art because it lacked the cult value of hidden, or difficult to reach, art. When authentic, game-used memorabilia is no longer difficult to reach or acquire, what is the value of the acquired object? As Rich Mueller insinuates, most collectors realize that the products delivered by Steiner and other corporate memorabilia companies will not hold their financial value over time. Even for fans unconcerned with the potential return on their investment, the uniqueness of an authentic game-used item is certainly reduced when it is ubiquitously available in an expanding number of increasingly mundane products.

Implicit in this critique is that the mass production of a work of art impacts the original. By dividing up and selling piecemeal the old Yankee Stadium, its aura has, thus, withered. The harvesting of sacrosanct real estate, in terms of grass and dirt, reduces the collective presence of the original. For as long as stadiums have been in existence, they have created separated space for players and spectators. As fans sit or stand in the stadium’s apportioned areas, the space that lies in front of them is supposed to be a special and unique place, quite literally untouchable. Akin to the glass protecting the Mona Lisa, this distance allows for players to act out the drama in a sanctified space that contributes to the uniqueness of the stadium experience. Benjamin (1968) understands this “phenomenon of a distance” as a critical component of aura, especially in an age where the masses desire “to bring things ‘closer’” is matched by “their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (p. 225). To take items from this space, “to pry an object from its shell,” as Benjamin mused, destroys its function in a tradition. Even if that tradition is merely where professional players exhibit their specialized set

of skills, it must be preserved for the stadium's aura to remain intact.

From a fan standpoint, the debate seems moot. While dirt from the stadium provides eighty-five years worth of encapsulated memories to stabilize memory in the postmodern self, it also works to perform fan identity by displaying experiential evidence of attendance. Rinehart (1998) notes that sport memorabilia is often used by fans for this purpose in order to demonstrate their presence and, thus, their passion to other fans. These kinds of fans have become more like tourists, for whom "the collection of the experience, not the experience itself has become paramount" (Rinehart, 1998, p. 16). Dirt, and other game-used authentic products, can serve as evidence of the experience and, in many cases, can serve to replace the actual experience...just as a 'Been There, Done That'-emblazoned sweatshirt initially serves as a tangible reminder of a tourist experience, so too the collection of tangible markers of experience by sport enthusiasts substitutes for the actual experience (Rinehart, 1998, p. 16). In this case, dirt is a substitute for the actual experience that allows fans to feel like they are a part of the stadium, or team, or player. But that dirt from old Yankee Stadium is even more powerful for fans because the old stadium was razed in 2008 and, as such, its dirt is embedded with a presence that no longer exists. The dirt has become "metonymic," in that it "operates as a sign...for the whole of which [it was] a part" (Pearce, 1994, p. 23). Consequently, for Yankees fans, the acquiring this kind of presence grants a measure of status. Objects from the past enable individuals to "at least imagine [them]selves, as [they] contemplate these possessions, before a rapt audience which is anxious to know just what it was like for [them] to have been there" (Belk, 1991, p. 124).

Yet, privileging this kind of status encourages fans to become mere consumers who collect as many objects as possible. Consequently, the quest for measuring fandom is reduced to competitive purchasing. As Lindholm notes (2008), "conspicuous consumption has always been insidiously appealing to Americans...[because] the main way for people to distinguish themselves has always been through the purchase, accumulation, and display of possessions" (p. 53). In this case, Steiner has encouraged competition with the recent introduction of pre-assembled game-used authentic memorabilia kits for the home, specifically for rooms designed solely for the enjoyment of men. A new section of the Steiner web site is being used to promote grouped material that would be ideal for "man caves," rooms where men install high-definition televisions surrounded by often-garish displays of pre-sexual infatuations deemed unsuitable for the rest of the domestic space. As described by Steiner, these rooms are "cool spaces to either

show off to your friends or to surround yourself in your home.” By offering a package that groups three or four game-used, authentic memorabilia products together, Steiner entreats its customers to “show off your fan loyalty,” and “make your basement or garage into a man cave all your friends will admire” (n.a.).

This desire for objects, however, extends beyond Steiner’s offerings. For example, after Philadelphia Phillies pitcher Roy Halladay threw a perfect game in front of a half-empty Sun Life Stadium in Miami, Florida, thousands of unused tickets to the game became available for purchase through the Florida Marlins web site (Barzilai, 2010). Within hours, several thousand tickets to the already-completed game had been sold, experiential markers of just the 20th perfect game in MLB history. This overwhelming demand seems to suggest that fans are driven by consumption more than aura. To have a piece of something, even if it is a product of the MLB authentication process, is better than having nothing at all. This concept in practice was evident for the New York Mets during the second half of a disastrous 2009 MLB campaign, with the team holding “a garage sale” of authentic, game-used memorabilia from its lesser-known players (Shpigel, 2009, ¶ 2). In a concourse display, the Mets mixed equipment used by players who had been traded during the season with surplus supply of used batting helmets because as a team vice president stated, despite the team’s poor record and the relative obscurity of the memorabilia offered, “there [was] still a high level of interest” (Shpigel, 2009, ¶ 3).

Conclusion

Throughout the history of sport, the implementation of more advanced elements of capitalism have had profound impacts. As previously noted, the last century of professional sport has opened the cultural institution to “the rules of neo-liberal economics” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 17). As part of sport’s trend towards consumerism, authentic, game-used sports memorabilia are also beholden to the consequences of their economic development. In particular, the example of Steiner Sports and old Yankee Stadium dirt shows how the overhaul of sports memorabilia authentication has expanded opportunities for the consuming the aura of the sport spectacle. In combination with a voluminous amount of low-priced products that are infinitely reproducible, the commodification of authentic game-used sports memorabilia has evolved from chaos and confusion to an incredibly streamlined, efficient, and “profit-driven architectures” (Andrews, 2009, p. 221). Crucial to this system is a fetishizing that masks the use of overseas facilities to assemble the dirt products and emphasizes the ability of a commodity to serve pleasurable

identity functions. Taken a step further, these dirt products complete the promotional circle of the spectacle by insisting that partaking in the monumental spectacle is central to stabilizing identity and affirming social status.

The emergence of a great number of authentic game-used sports memorabilia products has created yet another revenue stream for sports leagues and companies. Responding to sports memorabilia's crisis in authenticity, the new system of procedures delivered new levels of authentication, thus securing the value of game-used items. Seizing the opportunity to expand their market, memorabilia companies' partnerships with professional leagues, teams, and players enabled the widespread dispersal of a litany of products at various price levels.

Still, while these items promise to deliver aura and cultivate memory, the implications of their mass-production deserve consideration within Andrews' conceptualization of Debord's spectacle. Items that were previously headed to the trash, now officially authenticated and priced, have become a significant part of the sports marketplace.

In so doing, they have purported to solve the difficult issue of providing an infinite number of authenticated sports memorabilia products in a marketplace that has been historically rife with fraud. While Steiner and other memorabilia companies started with dirt and equipment, they can use auratic items to fulfill an ever-diverse array of products from cufflinks and bottle openers made from game used baseballs and bats today to used-baseball infused mobile phone cases tomorrow. For fans and collectors, these products reflect a new category of memorabilia that is infinite.

For culture at large, taking equipment from athletes and the stadiums they play in and providing them as products affirms the idea that society is a mall from which anything previously held as sacred, special, or scarce is potentially for sale. Given that this mall is available online, the rise of these kinds of products also suggests that leaving one's house is not a necessary to experience something. But there is certainly something different about seeing, in person, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the pyramids at Giza, the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, or the Great Wall of China. The sensory factors that make the experience special – whether in a baseball stadium or a museum or an opera house – are unique and meaningful in a way that no memorabilia product bought online can replicate.

REFERENCES

- Amore, D. (2008, September 19). The biggest door prize, clubhouse manager has unique memento. *The Hartford Courant*, p. C1.
- Andrews, D.L. (2001). Sport. In R. Maxwell (Ed.), *Culture works: Essays on the political economy of culture* (pp. 131-162). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Andrews, D.L. (2004). Sport in the late capitalist moment. In T. Slack (Ed.), *Commercialisation of Sport* (pp. 3-28). New York: Routledge.
- Andrews, D.L. (2006). Disneyization, Debord, and the integrated NBA spectacle. *Social Semiotics*, 16(1), 89-102.
- Andrews, D.L. (2009). Sport, culture, and late capitalism. In B. Carrington & I. McDonald (Eds.), *Marxism, cultural studies, and sport* (pp. 213-231). New York: Routledge.
- Andrews, D.L. & Ritzer, G. (2007). The grobal in the sporting glocal. *Global Networks*, 7(2), 113-153.
- Bale, J. (1993). The spatial development of the modern stadium. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 28, 121-133.
- Barzilai, P. (2010, June 2). Marlins tickets to Roy Halladay's perfect game going fast, no joke. *USA Today*. Retrieved January 3, 2011 from <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/dailypitch/post/2010/06/marlins-tickets-to-roy-halladays-perfect-game-are-going-fast/1>
- Belk, R.W. (1991). Possessions and the sense of past. In R.W. Belk (Ed.), *Highways and byways: Naturalistic research from the consumer behavior odyssey* (pp. 114-130). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research
- Bellamy Jr., R.V & Walker, J.R. (2008). *Center field shot: A history of baseball on television*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1968). *Illuminations*. (H. Zohn, Trans.). New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc. (Original work published in 1955).
- Billig, M. (1999). Commodity fetishism and repression: Reflections on Marx, Freud, and the psychology of consumer capitalism. *Theory & Psychology*, 9(3), 313-329.
- Bloom, J. (2002). Cardboard patriarchy: Adult baseball card collecting and the nostalgia for a presexual past. In H. Jenkins, T. McPherson, & J. Shattuc (Eds.), *Hop on pop* (pp. 66-87).

Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Bourdieu, P. (1999). The state, economics and sport. In H. Dauncey & G. Hare (Eds.), *France and the 1998 World Cup* (pp. 15-21). London: Frank Cass.
- Boyd, J. (2000). Selling home: Corporate stadium names and the destruction of commemoration. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 28(4), 330-346.
- Branch, J. (2009, Apr 20). Baseball fights fakery with an army of authenticators. *New York Times*. Retrieved January 25, 2010, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/sports/baseball/21authenticate.html>.
- Brennan, J. (2010, Jan 14). Need new chairs? Giants Stadium has a pair for \$499.99. *The North Jersey Record*. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from http://www.northjersey.com/sports/011410_Need_new_chairs_Giants_Stadium_has_an_outgoing_pair_for_49999.html
- Burstyn, V. (1999). *The rites of men: Manhood, politics, and the culture of sport*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Butterworth, M.L. (2010). *Baseball and rhetorics of purity: The national pastime and American identity during the war on terror*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Clark, V. (2010, November 7). One last chance for Spectrum memorabilia. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved November 10, 2010 from http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/20101107_One_last_chance_for_Spectrum_memorabilia.html
- deMause, N. & Cagan, J. (2008). *Field of schemes: How the great stadium swindle turns public money into private profit*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Dickinson, G. (1997). Memories for sale: Nostalgia and the construction of identity in Old Pasadena. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 87, 1-27.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2000, April 11). *Operation Bullpen* [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://sandiego.fbi.gov/bullpen/bullpen.htm>
- Gordon, B. (1986). The souvenir: Messenger of the extraordinary. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20(3), 135-146.
- Gilbert, B. (2003). *The seasons: Ten memorable years in baseball, and in America*. New York: Kensington Publishing Group.
- Horne, J. (2006). *Sport in consumer culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham,

NC: Duke University Press.

- Jhally, S. (1989). Cultural studies and the sports/media complex. In L.A. Wenner (Ed.), *Media, sports, and society* (pp. 70-96). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kellner, D. (2003). *Media spectacle*. New York: Routledge.
- Kimmelman, M. (2009, November 19). At the bad new ballparks [Review of the book *The Last days of Shea: Delight and despair in the life of a Mets fan*, by D. Brand]. *The New York Review of Books*. Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/nov/19/at-the-bad-new-ballparks/>
- Lefton, T. (2009, Jan 5). Dirty business: As other memorabilia sales slow, turf is growing. *Sports Business Daily*. Retrieved January 24, 2010, from <http://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/article/61081>
- Levinson, M. & Buteau, M. (2009, May 13). Yankees offer the real dirt on stadium memorabilia, for \$80. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved January 24, 2010, from <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?sid=aiFZC5CK6kW0&pid=20601079>.
- Lindgren, H. (2002, December 15). The year in ideas; Sweaty jerseys as bodily relics. *New York Times*. Retrieved January 23, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/the-year-in-ideas-sweaty-jerseys-as-bodily-relics.html>
- Lindholm, C. (2008). *Culture and authenticity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Marks, P. (1994, October 12). Shop of dreams is termed field of fraud. *New York Times*. Retrieved December 1, 2010 from <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10C12FA3D580C718DDDA90994DC494D81>
- Moor, L. (2007). Sport and commodification: A reflection on key concepts. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 31(2), 128-142.
- Montandon, M. (2008, July 6). Harvesting Yankee Stadium. *New York Magazine*. Retrieved January 23, 2010, from <http://nymag.com/news/sports/48329/>
- Mosco, V. (1996). *The political economy of communication: Rethinking and renewal*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mosco, V. (2009). *The political economy of communication* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nelson, K. (2006). *Operation bullpen: The inside story of the biggest forgery scam in American history*. Benecia, CA: Southampton Books.

- Ozanian, M.K., & Badenhausen, K. (2010, July 21). The world's most valuable teams and athletes. *Forbes*. Retrieved December 13, 2010 from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/20/most-valuable-athletes-and-teams-business-sports-sportsmoney-fifty-fifty.html>
- Pearce, S.M. (1994). Objects as meaning; or narrating the past. In S.M. Pearce (Ed.), *Interpreting objects and collections* (pp. 19-29). New York: Routledge.
- Rinehart, R. (1998). *Players all: Performances in contemporary sport*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Rovell, D. (2002a). The gum to savor the longest. *ESPN*. Retrieved December 1, 2010 from <http://espn.go.com/sportsbusiness/news/2002/0415/1369298.html>
- Rovell, D. (2002b). Body parts not allowed to be listed on eBay. *ESPN*. Retrieved December 1, 2010 from <http://espn.go.com/sportsbusiness/s/2002/0515/1382741.html>
- Sage, G.H. (1990). *Power and ideology in American sport: A critical perspective*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Sage, G.H. (2000). Political economy and sport. In J. Coakley & E. Dunning (Eds.), *Handbook of Sports Studies* (pp. 260-276). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sandulli, M. (Producer). (2010, August 24). *Little League World Series: Canada vs. Panama* [Television broadcast]. Williamsport, PA: ESPN.
- Sewart, J.J. (1987). The commodification of sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 22(3), 171-192.
- Shpigel, B. (2009, September 21). Something to remember from a Mets season to forget. *New York Times*. Retrieved December 10, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/22/sports/baseball/22mets.html>
- Slack, T. (2004). *The commercialisation of sport*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, R. (2000). *Red Smith on baseball: The game's greatest writer on the game's greatest years*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee.
- Stack, K. (2010, December 17). Behind the scenes with Major League Baseball's authentication process. *Sports Illustrated*. Retrieved December 18, 2010 from http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2010/writers/the_bonus/12/16/mlb.authentication/
- Tomlinson, A. (2002). Theorising spectacle: Beyond Debord. In J. Sugden & A. Tomlinson (Eds.), *Power games: A critical sociology of sport* (pp. 44-60). London: Routledge.

Trem, R. (2006). Interview with Gilbert Arenas. *Stack Magazine*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from http://magazine.stack.com/TheIssue/Article/3036/Interview_with_Gilbert_Arenas.aspx

United States Department of Justice. (2000). Three year FBI and IRS investigation reveals nationwide black market dealing in hundreds of millions of dollars in counterfeit sports and celebrity memorabilia [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/criminal/cybercrime/sports.htm>

Young, T.R. (1986). The sociology of sport: Structural Marxist and cultural Marxist approaches. *Sociological Perspectives*, 29, 3-28.