

Chapter One:

INTRODUCTION

The history of Australian Rules football parallels the history of Melbourne. The Game originated in the first decade of Victoria's separation from the colony of New South Wales and shared a common infancy with the Melbourne metropolitan area. Greater Melbourne was essentially shaped by a suburbanisation process which began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Its indigenous code of football was nurtured during this period, culminating in the formation of the Victorian Football League (V.F.L.) in 1897. While the Game itself attracted participants of various ages and levels of skill to regular organised competition, it was as a spectator sport at its elite level that football became the ubiquitous obsession of twentieth century Melburnians. This obsession, rather than the sport itself, is the primary concern of this study.

Although the League came into existence as a splinter group from the Victorian Football Association (V.F.A.), formed in 1877, it was the League rather than the Association which would produce the Game's elite competition. Although football's popularity extended beyond Victoria's borders, it was the V.F.L. competition, rather than the major football competitions in South Australia, Western Australia or Tasmania, that would attract national attention, even in those states where the Game was not as popular as the international football codes.

Within the broader context of the popularity of elite League football lie the separate strands of allegiance to individual clubs. From 1925 to 1981 the V.F.L. competition comprised eleven Melbourne-based clubs and the Geelong Football Club, each attracting separate bodies of support. These were, to a significant extent, a reflection of the way in which greater Melbourne had grown from John Batman's 'village' on the banks of the Freshwater River. The Australian Football League (A.F.L.), which by the end of the century included clubs from all Australian mainland states, was really an expansion of the V.F.L., renamed in 1990 to reflect its increasingly national status. The ongoing development of this highly sophisticated, professional and corporatised elite competition continued to mirror the development of Melbourne into a great metropolitan centre.

Such a competition could not exist without mass support. An understanding of the nature of this support is crucial to any insights that a study of this mass obsession might provide. Football's ever growing body of literature abounds with homage to the Game's on-field heroes. Among these are club histories, often commissioned by the clubs themselves, which serve as repositories of the kinds of facts and statistics from which many club supporters derive their sense of continuity with their respective clubs' pasts.

One such work is 125 years of the Melbourne Demons by Greg Hobbs. Because Melbourne is the oldest Australian Rules club and its early administrators, Thomas Wills and H.C.A. Harrison, are regarded as the founders of the Game itself, the coverage that Hobbs presents of the club's early history sheds much light

on the early development of this indigenous Victorian winter sport. The bulk of the work, however, is focused on the club's on-field successes. There are sections devoted to past Melbourne premiership teams, Brownlow Medallists, star players and administrators.¹ Father Gerard Dowling's The North story is similarly focused, almost exclusively, on happenings on the field.² Rarely do these kinds of histories throw any critical light on the phenomenon of club support itself or the history of the barracking experience.

Some writers of club histories gesture toward the importance of the connection between clubs and their local support. The residential and business population of an area nominally represented by a club is subsumed beneath a notion of community in which locality is the crucial component. These histories become local histories to the extent that they explore that connection. Lionel Frost's The old dark navy Blues includes an introduction that sets the Carlton Football Club's history firmly in the context of the social history of the Carlton area.³

Other more readily recognisable local histories, particularly those pertaining to localities with the same name as that of a League football club, explore the connection to some extent. Susan Priestley's history of South Melbourne is one such work.⁴ Priestley is not primarily concerned with football or the South Melbourne Football Club but makes some candid

¹ Hobbs, Greg, 125 years of the Melbourne Demons, Melbourne, Melbourne Football Club, 1984.

² Dowling, Gerard P., The North story, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1973.

³ Frost, Lionel, The old dark navy Blues, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1998.

⁴ Priestley, Susan, South Melbourne: a history, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1995.

observations about the link between business interests and football clubs, attributing at least two of South Melbourne's premierships to certain prominent local business identities. The 1909 premiership was won under the presidency of the controversial publican and subsequent State parliamentarian, Henry Skinner, whose Golden Gate Hotel in Clarendon Street had incurred the wrath of striking maritime workers by catering to 'scab' labour during the 1890 strike.⁵ The other great business identity mentioned by Priestley in relation to South was the wealthy grocery store proprietor, Archibald Crofts, whose playthings included racehorses and footballers. He employed 24 of South's 1933 premiership squad, the famed 'foreign legion', which Crofts had recruited mostly from Western Australia with the help of Frank Killingsworth, a jeweller whose shop became the virtual headquarters of the club for a time.⁶

If Priestley's work could be described as a local history that occasionally dabbles in football, Harry Gordon's The hard way provides an example of a football club history which occasionally dabbles in locality. Primarily a narrative history of the Hawthorn Football Club, The hard way at one point digresses from the charisma of John Kennedy, the courage of Peter Crimmins and the Grand Final heroics of Brereton, Platten and Dipierdomenico to examine the club's inability to attract support in Hawthorn itself. Gordon cites a 1953 article by H.A.de Lacy in the Sporting Globe, in which the writer attributed Hawthorn's 'lilywhite approach to football' to a lack of football-mindedness in that leafy middle class

⁵ Ibid., pp.214-215.

⁶ Ibid., pp.267-268.

stronghold. From Gordon's account it would appear that patrician values are the key to understanding the Hawthorn Football Club's local connection. He describes the Hawthorn City Council as having been the club's 'landlord and virtual master' during the club's early years.⁷ Gordon suggests that the council's strong support for the elevation of the club from V.F.A. ranks to League status in 1925 was motivated by a desire to enhance the area's esteem 'from a business as well as a public standpoint.'⁸

The picture of Hawthorn as a leafy middle class stronghold of conservative values is more comprehensively drawn in A history of Hawthorn by Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion and Jane Yule, a local history that touches on football even less comprehensively than Priestley. The writers refer to an essay competition run by the Hawthorn Standard in 1951 on 'Why Hawthorn boys should barrack for the Hawks', in the context of stressing the 'importance of locality as the common denominator for community'.⁹

An understanding of the relationship between locality and community is especially important in any historical analysis of the changing nature of the football public. The American social historian, Thomas Bender, defines community as 'a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds'. Importantly, he stresses that community is an experience rather than a place.¹⁰ In popular

⁷ Gordon, Harry, The hard way, Sydney, Lester-Townsend, 1990, p32.

⁸ Ibid., p.36.

⁹ Peel, Victoria, Zion, Deborah and Yule, Jane, A history of Hawthorn, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press with the City of Hawthorn, 1993, p.198.

¹⁰ Bender, Thomas, Community and social change in America, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press,

discussion, however, when the topic of Australian Rules Football is linked with the notion of community, a strong connection between community and place is almost invariably made. The nostalgically inclined point to a halcyon era when local boys fulfilled their childhood ambitions by growing up to wear the guernsey of the local club they had supported since infancy.

Collingwood club historian, Richard Stremski, one of the few writers of club history to look beyond the on-field heroics, has described the intense territorialism of Collingwood supporters in the early decades of the club's history. He has described how Smith Street, the geographical border between the suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy, became the scene of physical and verbal altercations between supporters of the Magpies and the Maroons when the rivalry between the two clubs was at its most bitter prior to World War 1.¹¹ In explaining the rationale behind his title, Kill for Collingwood, Stremski refers to an ongoing territorial dispute that had long been a strain on the relationship between the two municipalities and had helped to create the football rivalry. By an unfortunate accident of topography, Collingwood's closest neighbouring suburb to the west, Fitzroy, was able to indulge in what was perceived by Collingwood residents to be a relative snobbery at Collingwood's expense. In an era of poor drainage, the low-lying areas of the Collingwood flat were obliged to receive much of the effluent that flowed from the higher country immediately to the west. A bitter inter-municipal dispute raged over the use of an

1978, pp.6-7.

¹¹ Stremski, Richard, Kill for Collingwood Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1986, pp.37-38.

abattoir near the notorious Reilly Street drain, which regularly inundated the Collingwood flat with Fitzroy sewerage. Indignant Collingwood councillors refused to allow Fitzroy butchers to use the facility. Any killing at the Collingwood abattoir, with its inevitable resultant stench, had to be done 'for Collingwood'. By creating a football club, whose most bitter rivalry in its early years would be directed against Fitzroy, the population of Collingwood was giving its football team a similar license to 'kill for Collingwood'.¹²

Territorial rivalries of the kind described by Richard Stremski have long ceased to define football allegiances in Melbourne. Demographic changes, developments in mass media technology and economically driven changes in the League's organisational structure have been reflected in changes to the way in which football's mass support manifests itself.

In two papers published in 1998 and 1999, Ian Andrews from the University of Sydney's Department of Behavioural Sciences has called for, and indeed provided, a conceptual framework through which to interpret the changing nature of 'community' as it has applied to elite Australian Rules football since World War 2. He distilled the sociological literature on the subject of community into four distinct understandings of this frequently misused word. The first of these, community as a *geographical locale*, amply illustrated in Stremski's Smith Street border clashes, is clearly at odds with Bender's definition and is quickly dismissed by Andrews himself because it fails to capture the social dimension of what is essentially a sociological concept. From here he moves to the

¹² Ibid., pp.2-3.

palpably more useful understanding of community as a *local social system*. This view perceives community as the networks that arise from social interactions. Those who understand community in this way are divided as to whether or not these interactions need to occur wholly within a particular geographical locale. The territorially static model would tend to belong to a time when people lived, worked and played almost exclusively within the boundaries of a particular suburb or neighbourhood. The more physically mobile the population the less likely these local social systems are to be self-contained entities. The third understanding of community which Ian Andrews noted takes the second understanding a little further by taking into account the quality and content of the social interactions which occur. This understanding goes beyond an objective observation of such interactions towards an interpretation of the *sense of identity or belonging*, sometimes referred to as 'communion', which participants in these interactions can actively shape and experience. 'Culture', which Andrews defines as 'the collection of symbols, values, ideas and beliefs that help us to make sense of our world, as well as our place within it', becomes the direct result of successfully shared communion.¹³

In further exploring culture as an expression of community, Andrews looks to the historian, Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', applied by Anderson himself to whole nations, but similarly applicable to social groups of any size. Community, as 'imagined', belongs to the category of cognitive and

¹³ Andrews, Ian, 'The transformation of "Community" in the A.F.L. Part One: Towards a conceptual framework for "Community"', in Occasional Papers in Football

subjective phenomena rather than objective reality. It may even be illusory, but its genuineness or otherwise is secondary to the way in which it is imagined. While the size and heterogeneity of a large social grouping would tend to work against communion, the development of mass media has helped to provide common cultural symbols that bring similarities, rather than differences, to the fore. From here, Andrews looks to John Thompson's The media and modernity as an exploration of the way in which the media has become increasingly responsible for the production and circulation of cultural symbols.¹⁴

The use of the idea of community in an *ideological* capacity represents the fourth understanding that Ian Andrews identified in the literature on the subject. This usage is particularly prevalent in nostalgic reaction to the process of modernisation. Ferdinand Tönnies, in his pioneering work, "*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*", published in 1887, argued that industrialisation had caused the intimate and meaningful social interactions characteristic of community (*gemeinschaft*) to be replaced by the transient, less personal relationships prevalent in modern society (*gesellschaft*). This theme of loss of community has since been used as an ideological weapon, in various contexts, by people wanting to preserve what they believe to have been an older, simpler way of life in the face of change.¹⁵

Ian Andrews warns against making too clear a delineation between these four ideal types which, in reality, frequently overlap. While assessment of the

Studies, Vol.1, No.2, August 1998.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

degree of overlap between them may go part of the way to explaining the relative importance of each at any moment, Andrews suggests that a clearer picture of the changing balance of these understandings over time can be gathered by utilising the insights of Raymond Williams. In the course of examining the Marxist concept of hegemony in his 1977 publication, Marxism and literature, Williams proposed that social forces at any given point in time could be seen as either dominant, emergent or residual, with all three exerting some degree of influence over attitudes or events.¹⁶

The development of a connection between football allegiance and place during the Game's infancy was a product of the local historical context in which Australian Rules football was nurtured. Changing patterns of employment in Melbourne during the latter half of the nineteenth century encouraged a larger, more mobile and increasingly affluent population to settle progressively further from the city centre. Suburbs were formed by new aggregations of people in particular areas.¹⁷

Initially these suburbs were bureaucratic constructs capable only of giving rise to communities based solely on geographical locale. Only as local networks and institutions were developed could these communities develop characteristics of Ian Andrews's second and third understandings of community. Richard Cashman, in Paradise of sport: the rise of organised sport in Australia, explained that sporting clubs have

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Cashman, Richard, Paradise of sport: the rise of organised sport in Australia, Melbourne, Oxford

played a significant role in the development of communion in Australian suburbs. A club formed as a vehicle of local 'togetherness' could help to affirm the esteem of a suburb by engaging in regular competition with similar clubs formed in other localities.¹⁸

A factor that helped to reinforce the nexus between locality and football allegiance was the development of the electorate system for the recruitment of players. This formal constraint upon a player's choice of club made the virtue of loyalty to one's area a necessity for the men who played the Game and set a continuing example of local patriotism for those who watched. The system was adopted somewhat belatedly by the V.F.L. in 1915¹⁹ and not actually implemented until after World War 1. The idea had been considered by the V.F.A. in the 1890s, but the wealthier clubs, which would soon break away to form the V.F.L., had opposed the idea.²⁰

The adoption of the electorate system by the V.F.L. was a response to problems associated with professionalism. League clubs experienced severe financial pressure when leading players were able to play one club's offer off against that of another club in search of the best possible reward for their services. The League did not actually sanction payment to players until 1911, but strict amateurism had proven impossible to enforce. The amateur sportsman represented a middle class ideal, emanating from a

University Press, 1995, pp.93-94.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ V.F.L., Club Districts. Minutes of Special General Meeting, 1 October 1915.

²⁰ Sandercock, Leonie and Turner, Ian, Up where, Cazaly? London, Granada, 1981, p.52.

mid-nineteenth century ideology derived from athleticism, Muscular Christianity and Social Darwinism, which promoted sport as a form of rational recreation designed to build individual character and enhance social discipline. Protestant churches and elite public schools promoted the idea that participation in team sport would provide a framework for the moral development of society's future leaders.²¹ Professional sport, on the other hand, was linked with gambling and tainted by allegations of cheating, bribery and corruption. It was believed that a sportsman motivated by pecuniary gain could not share the noble ideals of the patrician amateur.²²

In October 1915 the League allotted recruiting territory to each of the eight Melbourne-based V.F.L. clubs, but the withdrawal of some clubs from the competition as a result of the war delayed the implementation of the new scheme. New territories had to be allotted in 1925 when Hawthorn, North Melbourne and Footscray were admitted to the League and there was periodic redistribution over the next sixty years to take account of demographic changes. In 1968, to eliminate the expensive practice of clubs attempting to outbid each other for country recruits, the League introduced zoning over the whole of the State of Victoria.²³

The development of clubs based on suburbs, a feature of most organised sport in Australian capital cities until the 1980s, was a necessary concession to the distances between Australia's major population

²¹ Ibid., pp.54-55.

²² Ibid., p.60.

²³ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1968, p.10.

centres. Weekly competition involving interstate travel was simply not feasible.²⁴

If it was the League's intention, in introducing the electorate system for the recruiting of players, to uphold some semblance of a middle class amateur ideal, it would seem ironic that the territorial consciousness which this helped to foster in the first half of the twentieth century was strongest in working class suburbs like Richmond, Collingwood and Footscray. The club most easily identifiable with patrician ideals was Melbourne, whose following was drawn largely from the ranks of the Melbourne Cricket Club (M.C.C.) members rather than from any particular territorial base. Essendon, too, had a far-flung following due partly to its consistent success, which gave it an appeal that transcended local boundaries, and the fact that until 1922 the club was based at the East Melbourne Cricket Ground. The club's following was characterised more by class than location until the move to the Essendon Recreation Reserve, later colloquially dubbed 'Windy Hill', which began the belated development of a territorial connection with the suburb after which the club was named.²⁵

The irony is perhaps diminished by consideration of the possibility of overlap between Ian Andrews's four ideal types. In the working class communities all four understandings can be simultaneously relevant. A social system centred on a particular geographical area implies the first two. Its very separateness

²⁴ Vamplew, Wray, 'Australians and sport' in Vamplew, Wray and Stoddart, Brian (eds), Sport in Australia: a social history, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.9.

²⁵ Mapleston, Michael, Flying higher: history of the Essendon Football Club, 1872-1994, Melbourne,

encourages communion, which can be galvanised when a sporting club representing that local social system is pitted against a club representing a separate system. Cashman's 'us against them' notions, corresponding to Andrews's third ideal type, then come into play. An inter-community battle played out on the football field can even take on an ideological dimension when the conflict goes beyond the mere tribalism of a match between teams representing similar ethnic, religious and socio-economic constituencies. If, for example, one team representing a predominantly Irish Catholic working class community is opposed to another representing an exclusive club for patrician gentlemen, it is possible that the ideologically inclined could perceive the match as being symbolic of class warfare.

The exclusive club is, of course, a community in its own right. In this case communion, if it exists, must come from something other than common membership of a local social system. It could possibly be the exclusivity, a sense of separateness from the common herd, which provides togetherness. If this is coupled with a sense of superiority or of having been 'born to rule' the ideological dimension is present. Separateness and superiority correspond respectively to the third and fourth of Ian Andrews's ideal types. It is possible that some members of the M.C.C. could experience their community in this way. For others the M.C.C. could simply provide an entitlement to occupy a particular geographical locale, in this case the Members' enclosure at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (M.C.G.), during events at that ground. In this case only the first ideal type is applicable.

Another factor that helped to reinforce a territorial consciousness among supporters of V.F.L. clubs between the two world wars was the convention that a club's home ground be located at or near the particular suburb with which the club was identified. This was almost universal among the V.F.L. clubs by the mid-1920s. Even the exception, the M.C.C. Football Club, adhered to the convention, in a sense, by being based at the cricket club's stadium. The short-lived University club, formed to represent a scholarly community had not only been an on-field failure, but had also failed to capture a substantial following without territorial support and an attempt in 1925 to form a club representing public servants was even less successful.²⁶

For those suburbs fortunate enough to share a name with a V.F.L. club, football provided what Richard Cashman has called a 'social cement'.²⁷ Civic leaders and media people used the football club as a tool for the formation of communities capable of being simultaneously understood in accordance with the first three ideal types.²⁸ These tightly knit football communities, centred on recognisable football suburbs and displaying a sense of communion arising from identification with a local social system, began to be gradually displaced after World War 2 as a result of the Federal Government's immigration program instituted in 1947. During this post-war period an increasingly affluent and, as a result, predominantly car-owning population was becoming less bound to locality.

²⁶ Pascoe, Robert, The winter game, Melbourne, Mandarin, 1996, pp.72-73.

²⁷ Cashman, op.cit., p.92.

Those imbued with both nostalgic inclination and a predilection for ideologies which make a virtue of the *status quo* could have been excused for thinking that the displacement of those largely self-contained football communities signalled the end of community itself. Indeed it is in the nature of community, understood ideologically, to be constantly under attack from the forces of modernity. This understanding is based on a polarised reading of the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* theories of Ferdinand Tönnies. It is a reading that interprets modernisation as the systematic replacement of *gemeinschaft* with *gesellschaft*. Thomas Bender, for one, rejects this interpretation, arguing that Tönnies himself had not advocated it and pointing to the survival of close inter-personal human interactions within essentially impersonal modern contexts.²⁹ A study of the transition of Australian Rules football from the rough-and-tumble schoolboy amusement of 1858 into the highly sophisticated corporate commodity that it became by the end of the twentieth century would do well to examine a possible sub-plot in which residual strains of *gemeinschaft* survive amidst the *gesellschaft* which surrounds and often threatens to engulf them.

Too strict an application of the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* dichotomy to a history of Melbourne is of limited value given that Melbourne was not a village for long. By the time Australian Rules football began to be played, it was well on the way to becoming an industrial metropolis. The spectators who attended the earliest matches, however, were engaging in *gemeinschaft* in its purest

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bender, *op.cit.*, chapter 2.

form. Only the immediate friends and family of the players attended. Matches were played on open parklands and there was usually no admission fee charged. The spatial divide between player and spectator was largely a matter of informal negotiation. As a result it was not uncommon for spectators to encroach on to the field of play. By the mid-1870s crowds of 10,000 or more were not unknown and the constant invasion of the playing field by spectators was creating serious problems for the conduct of matches.³⁰ Refinement of the sport would require the fencing of ovals. The rapid escalation in the popularity of the game would present the opportunity for revenue raising by the charging of an admission fee to matches played within the confines of enclosed grounds.

In his 1996 University of Melbourne doctoral thesis, Cricket, culture and consciousness: England and Australia, 1860-1939, Ian Harriss interpreted, among other things, the cultural significance of the design and infrastructure of English and Australian cricket grounds during the period to which his title referred. As Australian Rules football originated as a winter pastime for cricketers and was played, for much of its history, on grounds designed for cricket, Harriss's insights are useful here. Harriss noted that, unlike English cricket grounds that were inclined to relate directly to their environmental setting, Australian grounds were 'based on the principle of closure' so as to keep their surrounds at a distance.³¹ He suggested that Australian colonial

³⁰ Ross, John (ed), 100 years of Australian football: 1897-1996, Melbourne, Viking Penguin, 1996, p.28.

³¹ Harriss, Ian, 'Cricket, culture and consciousness',

culture's origins in both the Enlightenment and early modern capitalism had produced a 'desire to dominate and control nature'.³² If this is the case, the emergence of football as a marketable commodity provided the ideal catalyst through which those cultural origins could take on a concrete expression.

The provision of a spatial infrastructure for the commodification of the game and the formalisation of an organised elite competition, the V.F.A., in 1877 could, in the polarised interpretation of Tönnies which Bender rejected, be regarded as the end of *gemeinschaft* in elite Australian Rules football. Melbourne itself was no longer a village. Industrial *gesellschaft* had infiltrated its people's way of life. To regard such developments as the overthrow of *gemeinschaft* would be to render discussion of the role of community in football quite barren. The nature of modernisation is such that community, almost inevitably, is seen to be in decline. There can be little point, therefore, in making an arbitrary choice of a particular event to mark its final overthrow. The fencing of ovals, the charging of an admission fee, Ron Barassi's defection to Carlton, South Melbourne's move to Sydney and other developments which popular mythology has identified, from time to time, as the end of 'football as we once knew it' are all symptomatic of the rise of *gesellschaft*. Football administrators have, by necessity, responded to the increasing complexities which *gesellschaft* has brought to bear on their task. What needs to be examined is the way in which the imposition of these responses on the football public has affected the barracking

University of Melbourne, Ph.D. thesis, 1996, p.40.

³² Ibid., p.69.

experience, and the ways in which *gemeinschaft* has continued to assert itself within the context of this imposed *gesellschaft*.

If a polarised interpretation of Tönnies renders discussion of community in football redundant, a less extreme approach may be more useful for the social historian determined to press on regardless. Community could be seen as being not so much declining as changing. The trappings which people associate with community, which are sometimes mistaken for community itself, come and go and are frequently mourned in their passing. Even as this is happening, community is evolving new manifestations, which in turn will be mistaken for community itself and eventually mourned in their passing. A simple example of this type of thinking is the perception that television has destroyed football communities by turning passionate supporters into armchair spectators. As television's role in the Game grew in importance, from the provider of humble local 'live' telecasts in 1957 to a vehicle for the development of a national competition in the 1980s and into the 1990s, it lured many football followers away from the terraces. Far from destroying football communities, however, television was instrumental in the production and circulation of the cultural symbols that enabled viewers to imagine their community. Football communities came to include television viewers who had never actually attended a League match. With national coverage, Essendon supporters living at Broome could be as intimately acquainted with happenings at their club as Bomber fans living at Moonee Ponds.

The development of internet technology and its increasing affordability and availability to Australian households through the 1990s opened up new avenues for community formation among fans of the A.F.L. clubs and of the Game itself. At the beginning of the new century, the *Official Australian Football League Website* provided a ready source of information, including results, live score updates, current news stories and match reviews as a free service to football enthusiasts in any part of the world where the technology was available. Copyright for the site was credited to Seven Network Ltd., News Ltd., and the A.F.L. itself.³³

In addition to free services the site also provided the opportunity for visitors to join its *Premiers Club*, a subscription initiative that enabled its members to access live audio coverage of every A.F.L. match, weekly video highlights, advanced statistical services and competitions. It was described on site as 'footy's first truly international club', a community for 'passionate footy followers all over the world'.³⁴ Unlike the free aspects of the A.F.L.'s site, which fostered the same essentially passive consumption of the Game that television encouraged, the *Premiers Club* provided its members with the opportunity to participate in discussion with other fans in an ongoing on-line forum.³⁵

³³ *Official Australian Football League Website*. Internet site. Updated 10 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at <http://www.afl.com.au/home/default.htm>

³⁴ *Premiers Club - welcome*. Internet site. Updated 10 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at <http://www.afl.com.au/premiersclub/home.htm>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Official A.F.L. club web-sites provided a club-specific variation on the type of services available on the A.F.L. site. The Collingwood site, for example, offered news, player profiles and pictures, club history, coaching tips and streaming audio of the club song. It also provided facilities for the on-line purchase of club memberships and merchandise.³⁶ With the exception of its free chat room, the Collingwood site did not provide much scope for interactivity. It was primarily a public relations avenue for the club, providing a predominantly passive experience for visitors.

Club supporters seeking to actively shape an internet community centred around allegiance to their particular club had the option of frequenting one of the many unofficial fan sites. One such site was *Nick's Collingwood Page*, set up in 1996 by a teenage Magpie supporter based in Tasmania. Nick's page provided a 'live scoreboard' service on match days, club information, player statistics and a complete database of scores from all Collingwood matches since 1897.³⁷ It also provided a facility for fans to send email messages to individual players.³⁸

The bulletin board, however, was the feature that gave *Nick's Collingwood Page* its strongest impetus as a tool for community formation. Here Collingwood supporters and a handful of dissidents

³⁶ *Home of the Mighty Pies, Collingwood Football Club.* Internet site. Updated 10 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at

<http://www.collingwoodfc.com.au/index.htm>

³⁷ *Nick's Collingwood Page.* Internet site. Updated 11 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at

<http://www.magpies.org.au/nick/>

³⁸ *Nick's Collingwood Page - the Team.* Internet site. Updated 11 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at

from rival clubs could engage in lively discussion on a range of topics classified under broad forum headings such as 'General Discussion', 'Team', 'Training', 'Match', 'Club' and 'Cheer Squads'. Access to the bulletin board was free to all and discussions were only subject to minimal moderation. Only extreme language and potentially libellous content was censored by the site organisers. Beyond that there was no restriction on topics discussed or opinions expressed.³⁹

The replacement of the comfortably familiar with economically driven innovation, particularly over the last four decades of the twentieth century, has changed the nature of community in football significantly and been a source of resentment among football's vast public. Public debate about these changes has been characterised by a number of linked antitheses parallel to the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* dichotomy. Football's administrators have been readily demonised for being (allegedly) out of touch with the football public. They have been seen to court favour with football's increasingly important 'corporate' sector at the expense of the 'real' football fan. Changes made to this end are seen to have been at the expense of 'tradition'. Although, in practice, these parallel dichotomies are not absolute, they are often treated as such as debate become emotionally heated and polarised.

<http://www.magpies.org.au/nick/team.htm>

³⁹ *Nick's Collingwood Page - Bulletin Board*. Internet site. Updated 11 April 2000. Accessed 11 April 2000 at <http://www.magpies.org.au/nick/ubb-cgi/ultimate.cgi>

This thesis is primarily concerned with the historical interplay between the corporate and communal aspects of Australian Rules football at its elite level. It is therefore to be expected that the dichotomies set out above will come into play. It is also to be expected that a sharpening of the focus on these linked antitheses will reveal a blurring of the boundaries between them, suggesting that they are based on an over-simplification of reality. While this is unlikely to surprise academic theorists it would seem to go against much of the rhetoric which flavours public debate on these issues. The dichotomies themselves are neither remarkable nor unique to football. It would be reasonable, if perhaps a shade mischievous, to say, ideologically of course, that they have been around for as long as community has been declining. It has been particularly since the 1960s, however, that changes in the marketing and presentation of football have intensified debate. It is this period, therefore, which will receive most scrutiny.

Notwithstanding due recognition that the parallel dichotomies represent an over-simplification of the objective realities at work, the existence of a subjective perception among many of the Game's disaffected supporters that the Game has been hijacked by corporate interests is unmistakable. For the purposes of this discussion it would be useful to clarify the difference between the corporate football supporter and the non-corporate fan.

A non-corporate football fan is one whose financial commitment to the Game extends only to an annual expenditure on membership dues or, alternatively, the payment of cash admission charges

each week, possibly in addition to the cost of club merchandise and individual or family participation in relatively inexpensive club functions. Very roughly speaking, on the basis of 2000 prices, it is likely that such a supporter's personal annual expenditure on football would be a matter of hundreds of dollars. This is significantly less than the thousands, tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands that a club or League corporate sponsor might plough into the Game. The ability, quite apart from the matter of willingness, to make a corporate commitment to the Game or to a club is therefore dependent to a very large degree on the financial resources at one's disposal. Clearly, a person on a low income or otherwise lacking in financial assets is in no position to become part of football's corporate sector.

The word 'corporate' is being used here as a catch-all to describe that section of the football community whose financial resources, and willingness to channel them into football, enable them to make a level of financial commitment which encourages football authorities to grant them privileged status. Used in its strictest sense the word would apply exclusively to the affairs of corporations. As such it would have a specific meaning in the vocabulary of business. However, the term is used in the present discussion from the point of view of the supporter whose commitment to football is merely a personal one, as defined in the previous paragraph. Such a supporter may not know, or want to know, the difference between a corporation, a company, a propriety limited or any other of the myriad terms which have specific meanings to those whose business it is to know them. Football's

'corporate sector', therefore, is a term in discourse rather than an easily definable social category. As such it represents something of a mysterious and largely misunderstood presence in the Game's culture. Its denizens are loosely identified and demonised as the 'suited brigade', to use a term coined by one of the persons interviewed as part of the oral research component of this study.⁴⁰ Its spatial territory is defined by corporate boxes and other areas from which the non-corporate supporter is normally excluded. Nowhere is the dichotomy between the corporate and the non-corporate supporter more apparent than in the privileged access that the corporate sector receives for the purchase of Grand Final tickets. For this reason the evolution of the current system of Grand Final ticket distribution will be examined thoroughly in later chapters.

Partisanship is an essential feature of Australian football, including its history. It is as well to confess from the outset that my own sympathies lie with the endangered remnant of traditional club supporters rather than the A.F.L. executives and their big business allies who increasingly control the Game. While I have striven to avoid polemic, I cannot claim to be an impartial witness of the recent history of the Game. I recognise that corporatisation is now a *fait accompli*. So this history is not a nostalgic cry for the return of the good old days of club football. Nevertheless, in concentrating attention on the activities and outlook of the remnant of traditional club supporters, I have necessarily sought to convey

⁴⁰ Research interview, Pam Mawson, 21 August 1998, p.9.

the sense of powerlessness and alienation felt by many towards the modern version of the Game. Their subjectivity is an objectively important subject of analysis. That I share something of their outlook is, I hope, an aid to empathetic understanding, not a professional disqualification.

The powerless and alienation referred to above contrasts with the quaint democratic notion, believable in the days of low admission prices and little corporate involvement, that the Game was, in a sense, public property. The validity or otherwise of this notion will receive more detailed scrutiny in Chapter Three of this dissertation. As a perception, however, it coloured much popular wisdom and, when challenged by the alienating and disempowering influences of corporatisation, it produced a sense in which something seemed to have been lost.

This sense of loss is not unique to football. Indeed it has been very much at the core of opposition to economic rationalism and globalisation in broader Australian society. In the 2000 Hugo Wolfsohn Memorial Lecture at La Trobe University, Judith Brett called upon the work of the then-recently deceased Graham Little to articulate a plea on behalf of those people who saw themselves as the losers in the move toward the internationalisation of the Australian economy. She urged Australian political leaders to recognise that, even given the inevitability of globalisation, the loss that many people were experiencing was real, as was the need to mourn. 'Recognise our loss and give us time to

mourn,' she urged. 'Don't just berate us as slow learners and yesterday's people.'⁴¹

The situation facing the non-corporate football supporter at the beginning of the twenty-first century presents a microcosm of many of the problems associated with the sense of loss resulting from these broader social changes. With comfortably familiar popular understandings of football under constant attack from the forces of modernisation, the reaction of football's disaffected non-corporate public could well be seen as a process of grieving the loss of football as they once knew it and their previously assumed sovereignty over the Game.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-born psychiatrist who studied dying patients in America in the 1960s, provided a useful metaphorical framework for understanding this reaction. Her studies revealed five stages in the psychological responses of the terminally ill to their impending deaths. The five stages that she identified were denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.⁴² These five stages should not be interpreted too rigidly, but treated instead as ideal types, each one representing the predominant defence mechanism in place at particular points in the dying process, providing for the dying patient a 'coping mechanism to deal with [an] extremely difficult situation.'⁴³

⁴¹ Brett, Judith, 'From mourning to hope: Graham Little, emotional literacy, and why John Howard can't say sorry,' 15th Hugo Wolfsohn Memorial Lecture, La Trobe University, 18 October 2000, in La Trobe Forum, No.17, December-February 2000-1, p.21.

⁴² Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth, On death and dying, cited in Phipps, William E., Death: confronting the reality, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1987, p.49.

⁴³ Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth, On death and dying, New

These ideal types can and do overlap. In his critique of Kübler-Ross, John S. Stephenson warned against the practice of her 'true believers' who rigidly interpret her work as meaning that the only 'good death' is one in which the deceased has passed neatly and sequentially through all five stages as set forth by Kübler-Ross.⁴⁴ One would do well to heed Stephenson's advice so as not to be guilty of using, as Stephenson put it, a 'fine conceptual instrumental' as a 'dogmatic sledge hammer'.⁴⁵ The warning is even more appropriate given that this model is being applied in the present project to a situation merely analogous to that for which it was originally devised.

The title of this thesis has been chosen with a sense of irony. Belief in popular ownership of the Game is the very concept that has become the object of mourning. During the period with which this project is primarily concerned elite Australian Rules football ceased to be turnstile-sufficient. In particular it was escalating player payments that made it necessary for the football industry to look beyond the paying spectator in order to make ends meet. The greater the shortfall between gate revenue and the costs of running the Game the more reliant football became on the corporate sector.

Dr. Shayne Quick from the Department of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance at Victoria University, reacted to the failure of moves to merge the Melbourne and Hawthorn clubs at the end of the

York, MacMillan, 1969, p.122.

⁴⁴ Stephenson, John S., Death, grief and mourning, New York, MacMillan, 1985, p.92.

1996 season by lamenting the 'disproportionate influence' that the 'subsidised fan in the outer' had been exerting over the way the Game was delivered.⁴⁶ Dr.Quick's comments give an economic rationalist's perspective of the non-corporate supporter's position. Subsidised status is a far cry from ownership. Non-corporate football supporters could be forgiven for failing to realise that the ever increasing admission and reserved seat prices that the A.F.L. demands from them represent only a fraction of the cost of presenting the Game to them. Many would be indignant at the suggestion that they were being subsidised.

Although the success of the rearguard action on the part of the anti-merger forces in 1996 was a mere hiccup in the ongoing rationalisation of the A.F.L. competition, this momentary reprieve would have served to perpetuate the myth of popular ownership. It is on the strength of this myth that the denial phase of the grieving process rests. When irresistible emergent forces once again assume control, mounting losses to the non-corporate sector turn denial into anger.

At Kübler-Ross's third stage, her patients sought to negotiate a delay to their inevitable fate.⁴⁷ This bargaining phase, applied to the football situation, makes the consumer susceptible to exploitation. Individuals keen to keep what once seemed to be theirs by right pay exorbitant prices

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Quick, Shayne, 'Paying to win: the business of the A.F.L.' in Bulletin of Sport and Culture, No.9, December 1996, pp.1-2.

⁴⁷ Kübler-Ross, op.cit., p.72.

for whatever privileged consumer status the authorities are willing to sell to them.

The payment of an ever-increasing premium in order to maintain privileges once taken for granted is as unsustainable for the football supporter of modest means as is the bargaining phase for Kübler-Ross's dying patients. When the bargaining phase can no longer be sustained, depression sets in. Kübler-Ross identified two aspects of the depression phase. *Reactive* depression was a response to losses incurred as a result of the patient's declining condition.

With the extensive treatment and hospitalisation, financial burdens are added; little luxuries at first and necessities later on may not be afforded any more.⁴⁸

The applicability of this analogy to the situation facing the football fan seems clear. The depression stage also has a *preparatory* aspect. Kübler-Ross referred to the 'preparatory grief that the terminally ill patient has to undergo in order to prepare for his final separation from this world.'⁴⁹ For the football fan, a mounting history of injustice produces the expectation of further injustice and a sense of futility. The depression phase purges the barracker of any remaining resistance and acceptance becomes possible. Kübler-Ross suggests that acceptance should not be mistaken for contentment.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.76.

She describes it as a state 'void of feelings ... as if the pain [has] gone, the struggle is over.'⁵⁰

The question as to whether football is sufficiently important to warrant such a study could, and perhaps should, be asked. Football's significance to a local history of Melbourne lies in its ubiquity and its bigness. It became, and remains, big because of community support. Without that it is merely a game, albeit a great one. The community that supported and continues to support football is an ever-changing entity. Far from being in decline, it is an ongoing reflection of life in the city of football's birth. Its injustices are those to be expected in a post-industrial capitalist society. The way in which football fans have reacted to injustice, real or imagined, is the subject matter through which the human condition can be studied. I can think of no better laboratory for a study of the human condition than my adopted and much-loved home metropolis of Melbourne and no better context in which to study it than that city's ubiquitous obsession.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.100.