Beginnings

The veritable explosion of soccer studies in Latin America began in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The invention of the field dates back to 1982, when Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta published *O Universo do futebol* (Da Matta, 1982). However, over the next ten years, production was limited to the works by Da Matta and Argentine anthropologist Eduardo Archetti, who mainly addressed the relationship between football and identity and, to a lesser extent, the phenomena of violence (only Archetti addressed the latter of the two issues). In the 1990s, production began to grow thanks to new researchers, some of whom came together in the Sports and Society Work Group between 1999 and 2002. Financed by CLACSO (the Latin American Council of Social Sciences), this group was able to bring together the knowledge of what was then scarce Latin American research on these topics.

These were times in which a single researcher could aspire to review all of the existing literature on the topic. In a volume published just a few years earlier, Joseph Arbena had achieved just that while expanding the disciplinary borders. Arbena did not limit his exploration to the social sciences but incorporated the humanities and even some relevant media materials (Arbena, 1999). The experience of the CLACSO Work Group helps expand research across the continent, with the goal of having group members in all countries and thus overcoming the over-representation of Argentines and Brazilians at the start. At the same time, for the years it lasted, the group encouraged many young researchers to emerge from the underground and publish their works.

The ‘underground’ is a political metaphor but a highly descriptive one. When speaking of those years, we use the term to describe a field that was just getting started and necessarily peripheral, one that carried a certain illegitimacy as a presumably banal topic and thus opted for the margins, the underground.

Until those years, researching sports topics within Latin American institutional spaces – universities and research centers, not in homes or at cafés – posed two problems. The first was the lack of any previous bibliography, that is, not having the resources to search for ideas among others who had studied similar themes. The second involved coming up against the discredit and illegitimacy of sports topics in the social sciences in Latin America. The sole exception is
perhaps Brazil; following Da Matta’s initial steps, his Brazilian colleagues began systematically producing literature on sports and gradually increasing its quality and quantity, especially in terms of graduate theses. This is owed to the exceptional quality of Brazilian anthropology – which is known for being much less structured and much more creative than, for example, its Argentine counterpart – and to the importance of the physical education departments of Brazilian universities.

**Explosions**

Until just a few years ago, all of the literature analyzing soccer from the perspectives of the social sciences in Latin America began (obligatorily) with the same phrase: ‘There has been scarce research on this topic on South America.’

This statement on the absence of literature is no longer valid and would now lack academic rigor. If we agree on dating the origin of these works to 1982, we are already speaking of more than thirty years of literature. The field thus abandoned its underground status at the beginning of that same decade. And although these works remain (and shall remain) condemned to the periphery of academic legitimacy, their quantity, visibility, solidity and academic rigor have grown. The research on soccer and society has exceeded the ‘essay’ genre and is supported by the contemporary categories and tools of sociology, anthropology, history and cultural studies. As a result, these works no longer require whiny introductions and have no need to refute the old slogan of sports as the ‘modern opiate of the people,’ to quote the old 1960s perspective.

Therefore, the dream of bringing them all together, that possibility of gathering all the works about sports in the Latin American social sciences in a single archive or library has become clearly impossible. In fact, the field could be said to be suffering from a growth crisis. The great theoretical tenets have been explored and confirmed: following the lines of research laid out by Roberto Da Matta or by Eduardo Archetti, the two great founders of this field, the next generation established the framework for interpreting these phenomena with precision. A glance at the works by Simoni Lahud Guedes, Luiz Henrique de Toledo, Rolando Helal, Hugo Lovisolo and Antonio Soares in Brazil suffices, as does a glimpse at the Latin American complications that we have edited for CLACSO: the bases of the discussion are established there, the foundations that definitely make these topics – sports in a broad sense and principally, soccer – legitimate. These works have also provided the framework necessary for interpreting these topics. What is left is the production of new hypotheses, be these local, regional or continental; comparisons – comparative research is absolutely fundamental; the opening of new work zones in history – these have been historically scarce, with the exception of a few Brazilians and the solitary work of Julio Frydenberg in Argentina. With new research of this kind, the field would be able to review these initial theoretical lines of research and either confirm their validity or propose that they be reviewed in a new stage. At this point, it would be difficult for the statement, ‘Soccer is important for social/age/gender/racial identities,’ to surprise anyone; the question is how, in what way, since when, where and with what inflections. Another important question is the level of rigor needed to overcome the constricted language of sports journalism.

**A Latin American map**

The general outline of Latin America’s biographical production is thus complex, rich and varied. Since 2002, there have been strong research groups and networks in Mexico and Colombia. An association – the Latin American Association of the Socio–Cultural Studies of
Sport, or ALESDE, its Spanish acronym – was founded as the first continental project in the field. There have been dozens of academic conferences, and a new generation of young researchers have done their doctoral theses on sports themes – once again, the majority in Brazil and on topics related to soccer. New books have been published, though it is important to note that most are anthologies. If Joseph Arbena were to rerelease his *Latin American Sport: An Annotated Bibliography*, the quantity of pages would be surprising to say the least.

We would thus like to propose a critical revision of the main trends in the field over the past decade. This revision will include some of the areas that have yet to be explored but which we consider have great potential. Of course, the original themes continue to be relevant, such as the obstacles that the topic has come up against in Latin American academia for decades. This is an obstacle associated with the fear of a populist tone or a certain leftist leaning – the myth of sports as the ‘opiate of the people.’

As we have already mentioned, the publication of Roberto Da Matta’s compilation *O universo do futebol* marks the inauguration of the field in 1982. In his previous works – especially the classic *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* from 1979 (Da Matta, 1983) – Da Matta had already employed soccer in his attempt to analyze Brazilian culture. If what defined Da Matta’s work had always been an attempt to create a ‘sociology of the Brazilian dilemma,’ soccer became one of the legitimate rituals from which one could understand the hierarchy, the *malandragem*, the carnavalization, the investment and the reproduction. Da Matta’s use of the category of ‘ritual’ would become critical in later Latin American cultural studies, including those dedicated to other topics besides sports. The importance of Clifford Geertz’s interpretative anthropology as laid out in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz, 1987) is undeniable (and in the work by Vogel included in Da Matta’s compilation, this becomes fundamental and explicit), particularly in Geertz’s celebrated work on the Balinese cock fights. By shifting the perspective, this work sheds light on the mechanisms that come into play in universal sports. It is about playing with fire without getting burned, the idea of a symbolically significant wager; what is at stake is hierarchy, status, identity, and one’s belonging to a collective, through a practice as peripheral as a cock fight … or a soccer match, in our case. It is important that all of the works included in Da Matta’s anthology (the work by Da Matta himself, along with the work by Vogel cited above and those by Simoni Lahud Guedes and Luis Felipe Baêta Neves Flores) start by noting the absence of previous or contemporary works on the topic and then give reasons to legitimize their own efforts. This is the foundational framework of the field par excellence. Da Matta, in fact, dedicates an important chunk of his essay to refuting the theory of the ‘opiate of the people,’ arguing that this theory reveals an instrumental-functionalist vision of sociology.

These initial explorations provide a fundamental basis for our works. Soccer here can be seen as a focal point, a place where the analyst interrogates the symbolic dimension and its problematic articulation with politics. However, soccer is also a space where some of the most important narratives take place, the narratives most effective at constructing identity. Along this periphery of legitimacy (because the central spot continues to be the university, politics or the media, according to their historically shifting ability to institute and oversee the legitimacies of discourse), we can see classifications taking place that aid in the challenging constructions of identity narratives.

As noted by Guedes (2002), following Lévi-Strauss:

Soccer is a privileged signifier, a vehicle whose demand for meaning is so great that the only thing it cannot accept is the absence of meaning … The semantic process set
off by the game is constructed in a field of debates where diverse positions are challenged.

(Guedes, 2002: 3)

In this proliferation of discourses, continues Guedes, ‘Several dimensions of identity are disputed, negotiated and constructed … One of these dimensions is the nation’ (ibid: 4). And the role of otherness is essential to these discourses. For this reason, Guedes states that:

From this point of view, the fact that soccer is the world’s most popular sport is anything but irrelevant. It is about constructing difference in a code that everyone understands and in a practice that everyone values, though to varying degrees. Otherness, therefore, as we were taught by those researching ethnic groups … does not come after identification: it is part of the same process.

(Guedes, 2002: 5)

The first works by Eduardo Archetti, a contemporary of Da Matta, were informed by the studies of the Brazilian researcher, and published in 1984–1985. An anthropologist like Da Matta, Archetti followed a similar path as his Brazilian counterpart i.e. the preference for practices which were – only in principle – peripheral. In an article published in 1994, Archetti stated that national or ethnic identity is associated with heterogeneous social practices (war, the ideologies of political parties, the nature of the State, cookbooks or sports) and is produced in discontinuous times and spaces. Archetti was going against a historical and theoretical trend that required official, legitimate spaces to be researched (although these were only more visible in theory) when examining how nationality was invented. In contrast, the Argentine anthropologist directed his efforts towards marginal, border practices, popular or otherwise (soccer, boxing, and polo), though these were off-center and illegitimate in two ways: illegitimate as hegemonic narratives and as academic topics.

These practices are then an especially productive space, an area where significant, relevant discourses are generated. According to Archetti (1999), ‘Football and tango are mirrors and masks at the same time’ (17), mirrors where the Argentines see themselves and masks that are looked upon by others. And this is possible because they are part of what Archetti refers to as ‘free’ zones in a culture:

The tango and football as arenas for ‘national male’ identities reveal the complexity of these kinds of ‘free’ zones in relation to ‘otherness.’ The ordering tendencies of society are related to public arenas like school, military service, work, public ceremonies and rituals of nationhood. ‘Free’ zones, like the anti-structural properties of liminality and hybrid sacra in the work of Turner … permit the articulation of languages and practices that can challenge an official and puritanical public domain. ‘Free’ zones are also spaces for mixing, for the appearance of hybrids, for sexuality and for the exaltation of bodily performances. In modern societies sport, games and dance are privileged loci for the analysis of ‘freedom’ and cultural creativity. The tango and football can thus be conceptualized as a threat to official ideologies.

(ibid.: 18)

This creativity and freedom, anchored in the peripheral nature of the practices in contrast to those deemed officially legitimate, cannot, however, lead to populist idealizations. Because, although this is a production that takes place in the gaps, that does not necessarily make it
alternative production. The narratives of the national identity of soccer in Argentina are complementary (as opposed to confrontational) to the official, legitimate narratives. They are democratizing, but also dependent on a hierarchy of class. The invention of soccer arises from complex constructions, where the identity statements make reference to very different integrators (migratory groups, neighborhoods, generational or class references). However, these tend to share one of two oppositional axes: against the British (as the inventors, owners and managers), which resulted in a myth of Argentine nationalities, or against the hegemonic classes (the owners of leisure, stigmatizers), which results in a myth of humble, though not proletarian, origin.

Around this concept of the free zones of culture, Archetti explores three typically modern body practices, tango, soccer and polo, in the belief that they constitute public arenas where national and generic identities can be researched. In the case of Argentina, the analysis is about hybridization and the varied forms in which the masculine and the feminine are classified; a place where these practices relate to Argentina’s modern national culture and globalized international culture. Hybridization, then, serves as a key concept, one that designates the particular way in which national identity is constructed early on in a society like Argentina that resides on the periphery of modernity, taking into account the massive wave of immigrants during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Thus, the hybrids are ideological constructions of social organization and in this sense they are products of tradition. Archetti’s arguments go beyond – and by doing so, bring into question – the positions popularized by García Canclini (1990). With Archetti, hybridization ceased to be a sort of feature of postmodernism, thus recovering its profoundness as a topic along with historic weight.

Later Alabarces (2002) expanded on Archetti’s initial intervention with respect to the period of soccer’s ‘foundation’ and its national narratives during the last decades of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. Alabarces analyzed how media sources served as ‘cultural machinery,’ the builders of nationality. However, it was a nationality that had been turned into promotional merchandise, a discourse that manufactured nationalism as a commodity. Media sources, according to Alabarces, replaced the complementary narratives of the state – which, as a result of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, disappears as the principal narrator – with a single text that was, obviously, television.

At the same time, the anthropological tone of Archetti and Da Matta allowed the ‘opiate’ myth to be deconstructed. Just as it had with religion, ethnographic work allowed researchers to reaffirm the distance between the alienating illusion and the significant practice of the natives. In his 1982 work, Da Matta definitively did away with this intent, although the need to radicalize the debate led him to anti-Marxist positions for a time. In 1998, at the LASA conference in Chicago, a panel was organized by US anthropologist Jeffrey Tobin. During the panel, we spoke with Da Matta and Arbena about the main research trends in the field at that time. Da Matta was still convinced that the myth of alienation continued to limit Latin American research. In our opinion, this obstacle had been overcome for many reasons, including the diminished significance of Marxism in the theoretical and methodological practices in our areas. This, we argued, was precisely why we should recover some of Da Matta’s arguments, though there was a need to rework the question of alienation with regards to sports. That same year, in the prologue to our work Deporte y Sociedad – the first Argentine collection produced at a university and dedicated entirely to sports (Archetti 1998), Archetti noted the obstacles that these studies had suffered in the past. He also regretted the excessive importance still given to more apocalyptic postures – in the classic sense that Umberto Eco gave to interpretations of mass culture and their debt to critical theory. Given the panorama, the research agenda presented by Archetti was gaining legitimacy and it would guide researchers over the next decade.
According to Archetti’s agenda, the game was a critical zone for freedom and creativity; it was also important to analyze the socially differentiated appropriations of sports practices, the processes by which identities were constructed, and violence as a complicated phenomenon. All of this had to be done with ‘more sophisticated theoretical efforts and a passion for empirical analysis’ (Archetti, 1998: 12).

Names on a map

Since this initial production, there has been a true explosion in sports studies across the continent. However, these studies reveal many local differences, which we will attempt to summarize here.

In the case of Argentina, there has been a significant increase in the number of master’s and PhD theses on sports-related topics, mainly by anthropology students. Some of the most outstanding of these authors are José Garriga Zucal (2010) and Verónica Moreira (2010), who have examined the phenomena of the so-called barras bravas – which, as our colleagues note, is not a native term in Argentina – along with the complex relations between local identities, the practices of fans, and the social, territorial and political networks. In addition, new academic groups have been formed, especially that organized by Julio Frydenberg at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Center for Sports Studies). This group brings together young researchers, including anthropologists, sociologists and historians like Frydenberg himself. The group’s leader has published the brilliant work **Historia social del fútbol** (Frydenberg, 2011), in addition to ceaseless work as the editor of collections (Frydenberg and Daskal, 2009).

Although the social sciences in Uruguay have not been involved in this development, two groups have formed in Chile. The first, which began with the work by Miguel Cornejo at the Universidad de Concepción, has emphasized sports policies and the analysis of sports institutions. The newer of the two groups, which has already been working for a decade, is at the Universidad de Iquique and its main figure is Bernardo Guerrero; this group focuses mainly on history and local identities. In Peru, almost all local production revolves around the work of Aldo Panfichi, who coordinated a group of sociologists from the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Lima to edit a brief compilation entitled **Fútbol, identidad, violencia y racionalidad** (Panfichi et al., 1997). This represented an initial approach towards the issues of identity and violence in soccer. Later, in 2008, Panfichi compiled another anthology, this one dedicated to the relationship between soccer and identity (Panfichi, 2008).

In Ecuador, the field of sports studies has experienced a secret expansion; thanks to the ceaseless work of Fernando Carrión, there have been more publications than lines of research and research projects. Although the topic has not been fully established in academia, Carrión has published a work unlike any other on the continent: a five-volume library entitled **Biblioteca del Fútbol ecuatoriano**, with more than 1,300 pages of academic and journalist texts. The work was published by FLACSO in collaboration with other organizations in 2006 (Carrión, 2006).

Around that same time, Colombian studies in the field began and soon thrived. It started in 2006 at the IX National Sociology Conference thanks to the efforts of the young researchers working with Gabriel Restrepo at the Universidad Nacional and at the Universidad Pedagogica. The work of the Colombians led to the founding of a local entity – ASCIENDE, the Asociación Colombiana de Investigación y Estudios sobre el Deporte (Colombian Association of Sports Research and Studies). A similar but more important group is the Red de investigadores sobre Deporte, cultura física, ocio y recreación (Network of Researchers on Sports, Physical Culture, Leisure and Recreation) in Mexico, a group organized by Samuel Martínez López and Miguel Ángel Lara Hidalgo at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico. The publication of a
collective volume (Martínez López, 2010) reveals broad, confident work, with certain emphasis on the media, physical education and the exploration of local identities around soccer. There are two very important Mexican books with an emphasis on ethnography: the book by Magazine in Mexico City and that of Fábregas Puig in Guadalajara (Magazine, 2007; Fábregas Puig, 2010). It is important to add to this list the recent volume by sociologist Arturo Santamaría Gómez, which is dedicated to the relationship between soccer and migration, a very original phenomenon that the author analyzes brilliantly (Santamaría Gómez, 2010).

Naturally, it is impossible to summarize the Brazilian case in this article; its magnitude exceeds the possibilities of this work and would oblige us to incur in errors owed to both omissions and ignorance. The first graduate thesis on soccer in Latin America was, of course, done in Brazil; authored by Simoni Lahud Guedes, it was entitled O futebol brasileiro: instituição zero, and presented as a master’s thesis at the School of Social Anthropology of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro in 1977. However, another important thesis on sport was presented by Ronaldo Helal at New York University in 1994; it was published in 1997 as Passes e Impasses. Futebol e Cultura de Massa no Brasil (Helal, 1997). In addition to the quality of Helal’s work, the author provides a whole new twist on perspectives by combining sociology with research into mass culture. This was the inevitable direction of research of this sort bearing in mind the transformation of soccer into a (televised) spectacle.

Regarding the collectives in the field that have brought together what were initially dispersed individual efforts, two important groups should be mentioned. The first is the Núcleo Permanente de Sociologia do Futebol (Permanent Group of Soccer Sociology), founded in 1990 at the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro and coordinated by Mauricio Murad, and its journal Pesquisa de Campo, published since 1994. The second group was at the Universidade Gama Filho do Rio de Janeiro and published the journal Motus Corporis; it was led by Hugo Rodolfo Lovisolo and Antonio Jorge Soares, who collaborated with Ronaldo Helal on the book A invenção do país do futebol. Mídia, Raça e Idolatria (Helal et al., 2001). Other important books include that by Simoni Lahud Guedes in 1998 (O Brasil no campo do futebol), the work by Carlos Alberto Máximo Pimenta (1997) in Taubaté and that of Luiz Henrique de Toledo (1996) at the Universidade de San Pablo (USP), both about organized fan clubs; Luiz Henrique’s books Logicas do futebol (2002) and Visão de Jogo (2009); and a book by Brazilian researchers Ruben Oliven and Arlei Damo (2001) that was paradoxically published in Spanish in Argentina.

It is now possible to speak of two generations, though the division between the two is not as much about age as it is about belonging to the group of the founders or the group of their adherents. The efforts of both groups have brought institutional recognition at universities across Brazil and by the following associations of different academic fields: ANPOCS (the social sciences), ABA (anthropology), SBS (sociology) and INTERCOM (communication). Although there are more anthologies than individual books, the breadth of the publications is evidence of continuity in terms of both bold theory as well as empirical strength. New research groups have joined those that have existed for at least a decade; the field continues to grow and expand in Rio de Janeiro, thanks to researchers like Hugo Lovisolo, Ronaldo Helal and Antonio Soares, along with Edison Gastaldo, César Gordon, José Jairo Veira and Marco Paulo Stigger, who have also dabbed in daily interventions in their Comunicação, Esporte e Cultura (http://comunicacaoesporte.wordpress.com). Research and publication also continue in Niterói, under Simone Lahud Guedes and Luiz Fernando Rojo; in San Pablo, where Luiz Henrique de Toledo continues to be one of the main contributors; and in Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, thanks to Carmen Rial and Arlei Damo. More recently, research groups have also formed in Pernambuco (Túlio Barreto and Jorge Ventura); Campinas (Heloísa Reis); Baurú, in the state of San Pablo (José Carlos Marques and Jefferson Oliveira Goulart); Paraná
Pablo Alabarces and Verónica Moreira

(Wanderley Marchi and Luiz Ribeiro) and Espírito Santo (Otavio Tavarez). This is only a
glimpse of current-day production and many omissions have been made; the field is constantly
being enriched by the solid Brazilian graduate school system, which means that a good chunk
of production involves dozens of master’s and PhD theses each year. The graduate school
system follows the imperatives of stable academia, which requires candidates to frequently write
papers and articles. This feature, which is especially visible in Argentina and Brazil, often
produces some artificial inflation.

In any case, there are constant opportunities for research of this kind, especially in contrast
to the scarce opportunities available just ten years ago. Today both national conferences and
continent-wide gatherings generally include a work group on sports studies – this is the case of
sociology at ALAS (the Latin American Association of Sociology), anthropology at ALA (the
Latin American Association of Anthropology) and RAM (the MERCOSUR Anthropology
Meeting). In addition, there are conferences now held on the topic of sports, such as the ones
organized by ALESDE. Academic journals like *Horizontes antropológicos*, *Estudios de Sociología,*
*Intersecciones en Antropología* and even the Spanish *Revista internacional de Sociología* (a journal
traditionally reluctant to these perspectives) have regularly released special issues or dossiers on
sports. Another important characteristic of recent production in the field, then, is the opportunity
to publish.

**Lasting marks on the field**

Different subjects associated with the way soccer relates to our societies have been addressed by
these researchers over the past decade. We will attempt to summarize these topics here.

The strong influence of Da Matta and Archetti as founders of the field has placed an
important emphasis on the question of identities, be they local, regional, national or micro-level
identities. Although, as we have noted, this connection between soccer and identity has gone
from a theoretical statement to a starting point, more recent studies have moved towards new
empirical analyses. This is especially clear in Mexican and Colombian production, which builds
on previous Brazilian and Argentine research in their own local analyses. This can be seen in
works on cities and regions – Medellin and Bogota, in the case of Colombia and the Mexico–
Guadalajara rivalry, in the case of Mexico, to cite just two examples – and in works on the
relationship between soccer, identities and national narratives (see Martínez López, 2010;
Quitián, 2012). While Brazilian and Argentine research still address these topics, they are no
longer the main focus of studies; at the same time, researchers do return to them as a key for
interpreting the phenomena of violence.

The work we have already cited by Moreira (2010, 2012) and Garriga Zucal (2007 and
2010), in the case of Argentina, are two clear examples of the shifting focus of the field. Moreira
analyzes the relationship between football, territorial identities – the neighborhood, the small
town – and local politics, all with regards to fans, especially the so-called *barras bravas,* which are
the most active (and violent) of Argentine fan groups. Garriga Zucal presents an extensive
ethnography of the fan group of a Buenos Aires soccer club, Huracán, with a focus on the
practices of the fans, both violent and non-violent. This perspective allows him to conclude that
these practices serve as useful resources in the construction of social networks for exchanges
among fans, the territorial community, club leaders and politicians. In both cases, the question
of identity shifts in a way that allows these micro-level identities to be incorporated to a broader,
especially moral story: the so-called ethic of the *aguante* (Alabarces *et al.*, 2012). This is an
exclusively masculine morality in which violence, in a way similar to that presented in
Armstrong’s analysis of British hooligans (1999), loses its negative connotation and acquires
moral legitimacy among the fans and their broader communities. The findings of Alabarces, Garriga Zucal and Moreira have had an influence on the rest of Latin America, although similar ethnographies in Colombia and Mexico have not revealed such an extended and explicit morality among fans (see Magazine, 2007; Quitián, 2012).

The phenomena of violence so important in Latin American soccer are the second dominant focus of contemporary research. However, there has yet to be significant work on this topic outside of Brazil and Argentina, possibly because other Latin American governments have not included the topic on their funding agendas. The Brazilian government recently organized a Latin American Symposium, inviting researchers from different countries to attend; this could be a starting point or merely a symbolic gesture.

A third focus of the analysis are the media and the ways in which they narrate sports in relation to both national arguments (Alabarces, 2002) as well as the narratives of sports heroes (Helal, 2003). This zone is indicative of the intersection between sociological and media analysis. However, this has not yielded an analysis from the perspective of the political economics of the media, in spite of the fact that Latin America is a terrain marked by the enormous weight of three oligopolies. The Argentine conglomerate Clarín, the Brazilian O Globo and the Mexican Televisa have all forged alliances with Fox or Sky, monopolizing the soccer and sports market. The recent state takeover of televised soccer in Argentina has been analyzed by Alabarces and Duek (2013) in relation to the proposals on cultural citizenship of David Rowe (2004). To date, however, there have been no similar analyses in other places in Latin America.

**Risks and warnings**

The field of sport studies continues to have the same agenda: we must continue to talk about rituals, games, histories, economies, politics, violence, heroics, femininities and social corporalities, as we have been doing since these studies were initiated. However, more work is needed in other fields and other perspectives: for example, there is an enormous gap in the analysis of the relationship between sports and politics, both now and historically. This analysis would move away from the constraints of sports journalism or from the old perspective of manipulative reification. In both zones, novel and rigorous tenets must be built, ones inevitably linked to critical, informed interpretations that intersect with the current categories and debates in the social sciences. This is essential if we want to continue building a field of studies that is relevant to our societies.

There is, also, the risk of overlaying our interpretations on those of journalists, with whom we have entered into dialogue. Journalists have acknowledged our expertise in this field, an aspect that we should continue exploring while insisting on our involvement in public and political debates. This should be done, of course, while paying careful attention to the language of the mass media in order to avoid incurring in the use of jargon. However, we must also keep watch on our own language in order to avoid sounding banal. This new risk could be the result of our success; now that the field has attained academic legitimacy, we have also begun to achieve a certain social legitimacy as academics and are called on by the media when a big sports-related story appears — and sports produce countless stories of this kind every day. Thus our work is spread but it also runs the risk of banality.

During the last Soccer World Championship, a commercial produced by Torneos y Competencias (a company that monopolized the transmission of Argentine sporting events for two decades) aired frequently on national television. In the commercial, a series of European fans praise the unique (and fanatical) features of Argentine soccer fans. After several of the descriptions, the speakers repeat a phrase, like a mantra: “It’s cultural.” What the advertisement
reveals is the popularization of the discourse of identity, not from the clichéd place of the mirror but as a more sophisticated symbolic operation: culture, they say, has a lot to do with sports. And although it is disguised, the sociological-anthropological reference is at work in the background. One day in the not-so-distant future we run the risk of seeing a World Cup commercial starring an anthropologist who repeats what these advertisers are saying. When that day comes, we will have been transformed into merchandise and we will have failed at something. The temptation of receiving media attention – and of narcissism – must be continuously kept in check through unwavering self-criticism. This is why we are in academia, the reason we are researchers – to be so rigorous and critical that we run the risk of being disliked.

Naturally, this does not limit our agenda, which can and must find new challenges and possibilities at every turn with the question of power as its guiding framework. Even if we make mistakes; even if we substantiate the challenging and resistant possibilities of the subjects in sports practices – including those of the spectators – or vice-versa, even if we consider that the institutions, agents and regulations are omnipotent and irrefutable. But in both cases – and for all the possibilities in between – we must always question the power relationships involved, as this is the crucial question of the social sciences in Latin America.

Notes

1 ANPOCS stands for the National Association of Graduate Programs in the Social Sciences; ABA, the Brazilian Association of Anthropology; SBS, the Brazilian Society of Sociology; and INTERCOM, the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies (all of the acronyms are in the original Portuguese). The topic of INTERCOM’s 2012 conference was Esporte na Idade Média, a play on words in Portuguese that could mean ‘Sports in the Middle Ages’ or ‘Sports in the Media Age.’ In homage to the great founder of the field, the opening speech was given by Roberto Da Matta.

2 The video can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LHT79Cd3CI (accessed 30 July 2013).

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