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## ***This Sporting Life: The Antithetical Novel's Revelation of the Organization and Work of Sport***

### **<<Abstract>>**

The novel *This Sporting Life* by David Storey is used in this article as fictive, ethnographic data to explore the relationship between sports work, industrial organization, identity, and the management of the body. Drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu on sport, and rugby specifically, and the relationship between sport, the body, class and rationalization this paper argues that David Storey provides a vivid, if pessimistic, fictional, and semi-autobiographical account of the ways in which sports, and sports work specifically, is driven by management discourses of rationality and control. We examine how this functions as class exploitation where labour is embodied and expended as a form of bodily capital. Lastly we offer a critique of the precarious social mobility that sports work promises. Through Storey's Rugby League playing fictional anti-hero—Art Machin—we explore the central struggle between social structures and individual agency.

**Keywords:** sport, Rugby League, industrial labour, class, management of the body

## Introduction

It is now an established practice to use artistic works—including literary fiction—as alternative means of understanding organizations and interpreting management practices (Penfold-Mounce, Beer, and Burrows 2011; Beyes 2009; Czarniawska 1999; Czarniawska 2009; Rhodes and Brown 2005; Rhodes 2009; Rhodes 2014; Rippin 2009; Land and Sliwa 2009; Sliwa and Cairns 2007; Sliwa et al. 2012; De Cock 2000; Munro and Huber 2012) .

Such accounts are sought because they can be 'much more complex, multi-layered, and vivid' than traditional social science (Weiskopf 2014, 152) and provide 'vicarious access to the lived experiences of work, organization and management' (Sliwa et al. 2012, 868). Beer explains how social scientists engage with fiction and other cultural forms in order 'to expand, enrich and energize theoretical projects, concepts and ideas' (2015, 2). Fiction produces 'rich, culturally determined documents' and it would be 'naïve' to exclude them as sources due to a 'misplaced quest for referential truthfulness' (Longo 2015, 6). Following Longo, this paper uses David Storey's novel *This Sporting Life* (Storey 1960, hereafter 'TSL') as a form of fictive ethnographic data that provides a valuable perspective on social reality. This is of sociological value because of the ability of fiction to offer information about 'the subjective interior world of characters', 'environmental influences and psychological motivations' and enables analysis to go 'beneath the surface of social phenomena' (Longo 2015, 8).

In organization studies this is usually achieved through a thematic exploration of a text (or multiple texts) selected for relevance to a theme or theory. For example, the use of novels by Milan Kundera and Aldous Huxley to explore organizational commitment (Sliwa and

Cairns 2007), or the works of Luis Borges to explore the representation of organizations (De Cock 2000)—among many potential examples. Sliwa and Cairns (2007), following DeVault (DeVault 1990), describe how a 'lay reading' of a text becomes the starting point to apply the theme or theory to the text, for which it has been selected to articulate. What is striking about this approach is that the text is used to develop organization theory, but organization theory is generally not used to advance understanding of a text itself in its own terms (hence the 'lay' reading). This is not problematical if the research objective is so defined, but for organization studies to more fully achieve an 'attentive dialogue with other disciplines' (Knights and Willmott 1997, 21) and greater rapprochement with the humanities (Zald 1993; Zald 1996; Suddaby 2016), there needs to be greater 'dual integrity' (Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg 2016) whereby a contribution to knowledge is made in multiple contributing fields or areas of study. In this article we undertake a critical reading of a text with this dual purpose in mind: both to explore organization theory, and demonstrate the value of organization theory to a critical interpretation of the text as a whole. In this way the article contributes both to a critical understanding of the organization of sports and sports work<sup>1</sup>, and also to the wider interpretive understanding of the text itself.

Written in the mid 1950s (Pittock 1998) by 'the most important' of the realist British writers of that era (Stead 1998, 79), TSL was first published in 1960 and it enjoyed a popular reception. Indeed, in 1963 it was dramatized as a film directed by Lindsay

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sports work' is understood here as paid employment to 'play' a sport. As such it contrasts with notions of unpaid amateur sport. Such employment is often both precarious and ephemeral, being uncertain and normally lasting only a few years (Stebbins 1992; Sayers and Edwards 2004; Roderick 2006).

Anderson and starring Richard Harris (Cowie and Anderson 1964). Since then TSL has enjoyed a sustained reputation as one of *the* most significant and famous novels taking an anti-heroic and dramatic view of professional sport (Redhead 2007). TSL follows the career and personal life of Arthur ('Art') Machin as a Rugby League professional in an anonymous northern town, where both its team, 'City', and the local economy are dominated by a single industry and its owner (Storey 1960). Rugby League's founding narrative is that it was an emancipatory working-class breakaway from middle-class Rugby Union (Collins 1996). We argue that TSL unpicks this somewhat romantic narrative, demonstrating the 'bread and circuses' aspect of sport, and showing that Rugby League was always ultimately a commercial venture. It also shows how the sporting life – for all its sometimes realized promises of micro-emancipation in the moment of victory, and, for the sportsman (here), of career escape from the drudgeries of working class labour – simultaneously reinforces those drudgeries, embedding gendered and class bound patterns of exploitation (Hill 2005).

The article is structured as follows. First, we contextualize TSL and summarize the plot. Second, we discuss the autobiographical and auto-ethnographical elements of the novel. This is critical in establishing the unique status of the fictional work. We then turn to the textual analysis. The third section explores the management of the body, and the fourth the performative nature of the labour documented in TSL. Finally, the fifth section examines the precarious nature of social mobility highlighted in the novel.

## **1. Context and plot**

In the late 1800s Rugby football was governed by the Rugby Football Union (Dunning and Sheard 2005). Its Northern English players were largely made up of industrial workers who played sport alongside their paid employment in the textile mills, mines, and ports (Collins 1996). In contrast, the southern and midland English players were often of more middle-class or upper-class origins (Tuck 2003; Dunning and Sheard 2005). The ‘schism’ of Rugby League from Rugby Union is an important founding narrative for the sport (Collins 1996; Dunning and Sheard 2005). The Northern rugby clubs wanted to be able to pay their players “broken time” payments for not being able to undertake their mill or factory work because of playing or training. In contrast, the Rugby Football Union wanted to preserve the fiction (or aspiration) of a Corinthian ethic<sup>2</sup> of the amateur sportsman (Dunning and Sheard 1976). Commercialisation therefore differentiated Rugby League from its antecedent which has continued as the sport of Rugby Union (for a comprehensive treatment of this history, see Collins 1996, 2006, 2013).

This founding narrative of Rugby League forms part of a powerful mythos which is a signifier of social ethics, culture, geography and the politics of ‘the North’ (Lucas, Deeks, and Spracklen 2011). Yet the heroic myth of the poor working man who needed to be rewarded for his “broken time” somewhat obscures that the industrial employers of those men did not pay enough in the first place to free them to play sport as an amateur. So while Rugby League is associated with industrial labour and some progressive values, at its inception and through its professionalised commercial history, rugby league also has a strong connection to industrial capitalism (Blackledge 2001). As we will demonstrate with

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<sup>2</sup> Shorthand for an idealized sense of the value of amateur sporting activity (“Corinthian” 2017).

reference to TSL, professionalization of sport facilitated the commodification of working men's sporting lives, transforming them into a product for other workers to consume. In this aspect TSL has striking parallel with the pressure on contemporary sports workers.

TSL is set in 1950s austerity Britain in a Northern town dominated by industrial manufacturing. As such the novel captures a now largely vanished way of life. Nevertheless, the book has a contemporary resonance—not only in its transcendent qualities as a recognised piece of literary fiction—but also because of the parallels of the present austerity that has deeply affected the North of England, the dissonance between the wealth of those who own capital and those that scrape a living, and the desirousness of emancipation through professional sport that drives many young people to hope to become sports workers.

TSL covers the career of Arthur ('Art') Machin from when he signs for his local Rugby League club ('City'), to the end of his playing career a few years later. The book charts his rise and fall from a playing point of view, from the early days when he was athletic and able, to the end when he is effectively unable to play the game any longer, both physically or emotionally. The book is roughly in three phases: early career, mid-career, and shortly before retirement. Machin plays a 'forward', where size is important ("I was big. Big!" (Storey 1960, 22)) and whose value to the game, to the team, and so to the sport is in his power, not his artistry. Initially, Machin is valued for his violence and aggression. The extraction of that value is enabled in the domestic/home arena by the sacrifice - more or less literally in this case - of a woman, Machin's landlady, Mrs Hammond. She is disgusted

by but also attracted to Machin, with whom she has a sexual relationship, but is humiliated by his public boorishness. Machin himself is subject to advances from the wife of the owner (named Weaver) of 'City' and the local factory, as a literal and metaphorical bit of rough. As the games progress, Machin becomes more and more physically disfigured and broken down; and eventually, like the machin(e) he really is, he is discarded by Weaver, and his fair-weather friends. These dramatic themes open up the darker side of organization (Linstead, Maréchal, and Griffin 2014) and enable us to negotiate between 'organization studies texts [that] present rationality, organization and monolithic power' and 'popular culture [that] plays out sex, violence, emotion, power struggle, the personal consequences of success and failure, and *disorganization* upon its stage' (Hassard and Holliday 1998, 1).

## **2. David Storey, *Art Machin(e): This Sporting Life* as autobiography and autoethnography**

Methodologically, novels can be used as 'a kind of testimony' or 'witness literature' (White 2005, 148). A novel like *This Sporting Life*, with a clear semi-autobiographical aspect to it can be understood as Storey seeking to convey, through fiction, the lived experience of the professional sportsman within the context of industrial labour in an industrial town. In so doing, our argument is that Storey is able to foreground and illuminate the emotional experience of the organisational structure of the intertwined relationship between sport and industrial manufacturing - details which would be difficult to glean through purely factual documentation and accounts. Establishing the autobiographical elements of TSL is therefore a critical element of supporting our claim that it has ethnographic value as resource.



The chief autobiographical to autoethnographic claim that can be made is that the character of Art Machin is to some extent David Storey, and that in TSL he recounts elements of his life as a professional Rugby League player (Hutchings 1987; Pittock 1998). The *New York Times* observed in its obituary of Storey that he 'described much of his writing as disguised autobiography' (Nightingale 2017). David Storey (1933-2017) was born in Wakefield where his father worked as a miner. He attended a grammar school but turned down the possibility of going to university to go to the Slade School of Art in London instead. So disappointed was his father that Storey was forced, or chose, to turn to professional Rugby League with Leeds RLFC in order to make a living to support himself. Storey was just eighteen when he signed professionally (Rees 2013; Campbell 2004; Hennessy 1969). He led, then, an improbable dual life, spending some of his weekdays studying in London, turning up in Leeds at weekends for matches. On the train between the two, it is reported, he wrote TSL (Campbell 2004). The suggested image of the artist rugby player in 1950s England shuttling between an arty metropole and sooty provincial towns suggests itself that Storey inhabited a strange and unheralded liminal space from which TSL emerged. As he commented in an interview in 2004, "I only really felt at home on the train, where the two different parts of my life came together" (Campbell 2004). Storey became a successful novelist, winning the Booker Prize in 1976 for *Saville*, a novel which re-treads some of the same ground as TSL (Pittock 1998; Storey 2011). Nevertheless, TSL is unarguably the work for which Storey is most famous, mentioned in many of the obituaries published after his recent death in March 2017 (Nightingale 2017; Coveney 2017; Schudel 2017; *The Times* 2017).

In an interview given in 2013, Storey recollects his decision to sign as a professional Rugby League player because he needed income to be an artist and to write:

It became clear that if I wanted to carry on writing I couldn't have a full-time job. Leeds advertised for a full-time player. It suddenly seemed if I could get enough money doing that I could carry on painting. So I went for a trial and played two trial games and they signed me on for what seemed a lot of money: £1,200, for which I got £400. I would get the second £400 when I was 21. The contract was until I was 32. I only actually got the 400 down and then my father told me he thought they were entitled for half of it (David Storey quoted by Rees, 2013).

The amount of money he signed for was, indeed, quite a lot. In 2014 prices £1,200 would be worth £99,220 [calculated as adjusted labour-value (Officer and Williamson 2016)]. The nature of the contract was, however, indicative of the asymmetry of relative power in the relationship. Storey signed a fourteen-year contract, tying him to one employer. He only received part of the money, and his father attempted to claim part of that. Clearly, then, the act of signing was not the triumphant payday that, perhaps, Storey had hoped for. This is reflected in the novel over ten pages where Machin negotiates with City (Storey 1960, 50-60). He thinks he negotiates well, holding out for a good deal by refusing to sign a lesser deal until they meet what he considers to be a great figure. Once the deal is concluded by City agreeing to his terms, he becomes 'property of the City' (60), and only then discovers that other clubs were interested in signing him and City simply negotiated first to secure a

good deal *for them*. This serves as a parable of the asymmetries of labour bargaining. Without a proper context for pay negotiation (or any kind of agential or collective bargaining on his behalf) an unknowing Machin plays a structurally weaker hand, unable to exploit the wider demand for his playing services elsewhere to increase the offer of pay for his labour. This signing-on episode and the issue of pay are contrasted in the novel with the non-compensation of Mrs Hammond for her husband's death (which it is hinted at is a possible suicide). Weaver owns both City and the factory, so being both the employer of Mrs Hammond's deceased husband and Machin. The reluctance of Weaver to pay compensation for the death is allegorical of the structural power which enables City to pay less for Machin than they might.

Storey clearly did not like his life as a professional sportsman:

I didn't want to go on doing it. It was a horrendous life. I liked the game, and I liked the players, but I just couldn't accommodate what I really wanted to do. I spent most of my time trying to get seriously injured. In fact the seed of Sporting Life came out of cowardice really. In one game - it all happened in a split second - the ball came to my feet in a scrum, I knew I should pick it up, I knew if I picked it up I'd get kicked in the face, and I paused. My second-row partner was on his way out and his instincts were spontaneous, he just leaned down and picked it up instead of me. And he got kicked in the mouth and he looked and his mouth was just a mash of blood and broken teeth. And instead of looking at the guy who kicked him he looked at me and said, "You cunt." But I thought somehow this is a microcosm of my experience there.

.... My father wouldn't support me there so I played rugby league in order to go to art school in order to learn to write (David Storey quoted by Rees, 2013).

The 'horrendous' nature of the professional sporting *life* was only indirectly connected to the violence of the play, but quite probably more directly to the contrast with Storey's different and quite probably incompatible dual lives, which he describes as 'a kind of duplicity'.

### **3. The body as managed and controlled machine in *This Sporting Life***

Sport, as a cultural formation, is, in many ways, connected to what Hargreaves describes as the 'power apparatus' (Hargreaves 1986), the social structures for maintaining control in a capitalist system. As such, the sporting body exemplifies how "the body acts as a mediating entity linking individuals to broader socio-spatial processes of power, reproduction and change" (Brown 2006, 163). Clément, drawing from Bourdieu, adds that the "bodily dimension [of the sports figure] and the social uses of the body" make it an "ideal field within which to understand the various class dispositions"(Clément 1995, 149). This section will explore how TSL highlights the role of management and control within sport (particularly of the body) and, in so doing, the novel affirms Bourdieu's assertion that sport is one of many 'objects of struggle' (Bourdieu 1978). This is not to suggest that this struggle is without resistance nor to suggest that sports players or spectators are 'passive dupes' (Hargreaves 1986). On the contrary, Stephen Jones (Jones 1989) documents the role of organised labour within factory sport clubs similar to the form as documented in TSL and the use of sports as a site of resistance. While one of the strengths of TSL is to document the

interiority of the sports player by highlighting Machin's interiority and acute awareness of his role within this particular social structure, the book is, still, a negative depiction of the power relationship between the workers (whether sports worker or factory worker) and management.

Sports, in general, and, especially, sports clubs managed by industrial factories as depicted in TSL, are accompanied and, often, driven by goals and processes of rationalisation. This is a Weberian understanding of rationalisation with an emphasis on improving predictability and calculability with the creation of specific rules and specialised governing bodies (Bourdieu 1978). Underscoring the interconnectedness of the relationship between sports and factory labour, factory owners would encourage workers to participate in factory sports clubs as a way of promoting social integration as a form of control (Hargreaves 1986) and to improve the fitness of the workforce in order to improve labour productivity (Jones, 1988). For part-time professional sportsmen, as depicted by Machin, the rationalised management of the body was for the simultaneous purpose of both capitalist endeavours of professional sport and industrial production.

The struggle of the sporting body, as such, is a part of larger struggles over "the definition of the *legitimate body* and the *legitimate use of the body*" (Bourdieu 1978, 826 italics in original). The body of the sports figure is a component of the capitalist production. As (Bourdieu 1978, 830) refers to the 'well-oiled machinery' of a French rugby team, so does Storey use the metaphor of a machine, one which functions well or poorly and which is expendable and can be replaced. The use of the machine metaphor in TSL highlights the

disassociation of the body with the individual in sports and industrial production and the unequal power relationship embedded within this. Wacquant (Wacquant 1995), in his work on boxers, describes how the body is cared for and rationalised. It becomes a form of 'bodily capital' linked to 'bodily labor' linked in a 'recursive relationship' and 'closely dependent on one another' (Wacquant, 1995, 65). When the body becomes expended, the labour is lost. Both within boxing and rugby, the sport is a regulated expression of violence where the sporting bodies are relegated within managerial discourses to the 'role of docile, submissive, brute force ('gentle giant', etc.)' resulting in 'working-class strength in its approved form' (Bourdieu 2010, 211). As such, the regulation and rationalisation of the body as depicted in TSL underscores how issues of control and class exploitation within industrial labour extended to the management of professional sports.

Machin is well aware of the relationship between his body, his labour and his identity and Storey vividly depicts the brutality of the sporting labour and the ways in which the body is managed, regarded and, subsequently, discarded. Weaver is the ultimate source of managerial power in Machin's life. He owns both the factory and the 'City' sports club and the same individuals who work in the factory are recruited to play on the team. As a result, he holds power over Machin's body and his precarious social mobility (explored below). The sporting body, though embodying the brutality of the sport, is also fragile. It functions as a machine which is exploited by the industrial capitalist system until it is expended. Anson Rabinbach (1992) examines the role of human energy and fatigue in industrial modernity; fatigue is one of the features to be countered and managed among workers. The notion of the human motor is in contrast to machine-motors (Rabinbach 1992). This is a

different vision of modernity, superseded by Fordist notions of the factory line, and later by cyborg workers (Haraway 2000). In the industrial revolution, despite its growing mechanisation, mass labour was an essential input. Many of the industrial activities required the human motors to power activities which might be aided by tools but which were nulled without human agency.

Rugby League's organizational form is rooted in the machine-like organization of 'human motors' where fatigue is to be resisted, sometimes with drugs. Fatigue and combatting fatigue are recurrent themes of TSL, and indicate something of the conditions of sports-work. In the very first game, fatigue is vividly described by Machin:

In the last quarter of an hour the elation gave way to a weariness I'd never imagined before. I never wanted to play again. .... I never felt so exhausted and relieved as after that first match. I didn't care if I never played again. Just to get on my backside was enough. I never wanted to move again. I lay soaking and gasping in the bath, the water clinging to my chest in a suffocating grip, my skin convulsed in as the heat burnt at its broken surface (Storey 1960, 22).

This is also repeated in the final game in the book, which is Machin's final career game as the fatigue of the sporting life finally, inevitably, takes its toll. At half-time '[t]he men sprawled and collapsed on to the massage table and the bench. Belching and groaning. There was no gas left' (Storey 1960, 250). 'Gas' has a dual meaning, of both air and fuel. During the second-half a team-mate endured a particularly brutal tackle, which is described in way which indicates the visceral failings of his human motor: 'He wheezed

like a beaten machine as his skull drove into the earth' (Storey 1960, 251). This 'beaten machine' becomes, just a page later, a description of a beaten Machin(e) himself, finally shot-through, a once virile player reduced to cheating (or trying to, anyway) to prevent a scoring opportunity:

'I put my foot out, and as the man stumbled took a swing with my fist. I missed, and fell down with a huge sound from the crowd. The man recovered and went on running. He ran between the posts. Frank picked me up, the mud covering my tears. Where's the bleeding full-back? I wanted to shout. But I could only stare unbelievably at my legs which had betrayed me'(Storey 1960, 252) .

The notion of legs betraying a sportsman is a common shorthand for how age and injury can deny players the ability to carry on playing, even if their minds are still willing.

To combat this fatigue throughout TSL Machin uses drugs. Early in the book, when still able to play with full power, Machin comments that he walks off the pitch 'with Dai shoving an ammonia phial up my nose' (Storey 1960, 7). A page later in the same game Machin comments that 'I've time for one burst. The effect of the benzedrine has already worn off' (Storey 1960, 8). His fatigue is such that it has almost overcome his body and the amphetamines he has used to stimulate his performance. The use of ammonia as a stimulant is an interesting element of the book because it recurs often, indicating that it was (probably) a regular part of Storey's professional sporting life:

'He shoved my head in the bucket, game me an ammonia sniff, and I went back on. ... For the first time I was afraid of being hurt' (Storey 1960, 49).



'The room was a stall of steaming cattle. Dai was going at it hard, telling how everything was going wrong. I crunched an ammonia phial in my fingers and shoved it up Frank's nose.' (Storey 1960, 250).

Storey evokes an engine or a machine in the sense that after administration of ammonia Frank 'shuddered, choked, and coughed to life (Storey 1960, 250).' Ammonia was sometimes used as a stimulant to counter-act the effects of concussion. In TSL concussion is expressly noted. In a scene after a match with Mrs Hammond and Machin, Storey also reveals something of the damage concussion caused, and the use of painkillers to deal with it.

'You're eyes are all red', she said. 'They're full of blood.' 'It's concussion, lady.' 'There's a blue mark between your eyes.' 'You don't have to tell me these things. I can feel it. Have you got any codeine or something?' (Storey 1960, 67).

Machin's use of painkillers may also reveal sports players chronic reliance on them, and the potential for usage which exceeds the stated dose: 'I find some aspirin on the shelf, by a tin of Mrs Weaver's talcum... I take four tablets. Then two more to make sure.' (Storey 1960, 77) Fatigue, concussion, and drug-use are a significant part of TSL, and are in marked contrast to associations of sport with health and personal well-being.

#### **4. The spectacle and performance of aesthetic labour in *This Sporting Life***

The watching and supporting of working-class sports, with Rugby League a prime example,

often functioned as the center of social activity in the towns in which they dominated during the post-war period in England (Hargreaves, 1986). As these professional teams were often linked to the local factory, which would also be the main employer, supporting the local team was central to the formation of the local identity and sense of belonging and 'reproduc[ed] a corporate consciousness among working-class people' (Hargreaves, 1986: 100). Sports such as Rugby League functioned as 'spectacles produced for the people' and emerged as a 'mass commodity' (Bourdieu, 1978: 828) produced by industrialists both as a source of profit and for promoting social integration as a form of social control (Hargreaves, 1986), such as that depicted by Weaver in TSL.

Wacquant (1995) described the labour of the boxer as a form of both 'practical labour' and as 'body work' making an analogy with (Hochschild 2003) 'emotional labour'. The 'body work' consisted of 'highly intensive and finely regulated manipulation' of the body (Wacquant, 1995: 73). Within sport the body becomes a commodity which is consumed by both the spectators and by the owner who consumes the body through the extraction of the labour. The relationship is described in an issue of *Daily Worker* from 1930, "The puppets give their health, their lives: the spectators give their money" (quoted in Jones, 1988: 83). The sportsman uses his body to perform the spectacle as a form of aesthetic labour. Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003)—drawing upon the work of Hochschild and Bourdieu—define aesthetic labour as "the mobilization, development and commodification of embodied 'dispositions'" (Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson 2003, 37). They emphasise that it is the employers who 'mobilize, develop and commodify these embodied dispositions' (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003: 37). As such, there is an inherent power imbalance in the

relationship between employee and employer. Though the concept of aesthetic labour is generally used to describe the aesthetic aspects of worker embodiment within the service industry, it is useful here to use this term as a more specific articulation of Wacquant's notion of 'body work' to describe the performative and embodied nature of sports labour.

In TSL, Storey explores the implications and repercussions of the performative and embodied nature of the sport work. It becomes an all-encompassing aspect of Machin's character where his identity is understood through his labour and his body and, as such, assumptions are made by others (and Machin himself through his insecurity) about his personality and interior self because of his labour and his body. The stereotype of the unreflective sportsman is reproduced in a recent article by Christine Coupland (Coupland 2014). Coupland notes the capability for reflection by contemporary professional Rugby League players, whose critical insights into their own working lives are described as "not the articulations we would expect from hard, un-reflexive, rugby players" (Coupland, 2014, 11). TSL, then, also stands in contrast to stereotypes whereby people are judged purely by external physical perception, and the occupation of labour, rather than by the actual internal life of the whole person.

In the character of Machin, as the 'brute', there is both the brutalisation of others (which makes them brutes, or assumes they are brutish, to be treated as brutes), and brutalisation of the self (that Machin become brutalised through the brutality of the game). Machin's is an existentialist struggle where he finds that he is forced and managed into a particular identity centrally focused on his physical body by those in power but that, further, he can not help but to embody and internalise that identity. This interpellation as 'brute' and 'ape'

(a theme which runs through much of Storey's literary work (Solomon 1994)) embeds within it the power imbalance between sports worker and sports owner, which in this case results in Machin's sense of loss of himself as individual. Machin 'as concrete individual' becomes 'concrete subject' (Althusser 2008, 47). Here, TSL also functions as a fictionalized demonstration of Bourdieu's central interest in the tension and reconciliation of social structure and individual agency (Maton 2012).

Jeffrey Hill (2005) views the recurrent metaphor of the 'ape' in TSL as the central simile of the text and that it is an important aspect of how TSL offers 'a critique of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity from the point of view of a dominant heterosexual male' (Hill 2005, 420). While agreeing with Hill's interpretation, we conclude that the metaphor of the 'ape' is, also, crucially connected with Machin's labour and the extent to which his labour becomes inextricably intertwined with his identity from which he struggles to escape. Machin understands that, as a forward, he is the 'ape' of the game, valued for his size and brute force as opposed to intellect. As well, his labour is to 'ape' for the public in his role in the performance of the sporting spectacle. Off the field, and particularly with his relationships with women, he struggles to be recognized as more than an ape.

Machin articulates the difficulties and the confines between the relationship between his body and the embodied performance of his social status, "I was the big ape again, known and feared for its strength, frightened of showing a bit of soft feeling in case it might be weakness... I wasn't going to be a footballer forever. But I was an ape. Big, awe-inspiring, something interesting to see perform... No feelings... I was paid not to have feelings"

(Storey 1960, 164). Here he articulates the reduction of his identity to his labour and laments this fact particularly because of the precarious nature of his sporting career. Of course, because of the first-person narration of the novel, it is clear that Machin does have an interiority, strong feelings and an acute awareness of his position. However, he also uses his 'ape' identity, as something that he can draw upon 'like a welcome disguise' (Storey 1960, 211).

In his account of Mrs Weaver's sexual advances he articulates the power imbalance in their respective class positions and the performative nature of his professional identity: "She'd treated me like an ape. Grabbing hold of an ape was, for some people, better than just watching it perform" (Storey 1960, 168). Later, highlighting the extent to which Machin has been interpellated into the role of 'ape', Mrs Weaver stares at him as if he "might be a person" (Storey 1960, 169) when he fails to maintain his ape identity and shows up at her house upset after his argument with Mrs Hammond.

With his relationship with Mrs Hammond, he further struggles to escape his identity and expresses self-loathing when she rejects a relationship with him. He credits his failure to win Mrs Hammond's affections (which is more important to him than the fact that he does 'win' her body) as due to the fact that he behaved as an ape. His self-critique is that he is "like a big ape given something precious to hold, but only squashing it in my big, clumsy, useless hands" (Storey 1960, 162). This juxtaposition between the violence of his first sexual encounter with Mrs Hammond and his desire for an emotional relationship with her is underscored by his devotion to her when she is in a coma. He explains: "I felt elated. I'd

got hold of something... which I wasn't too clumsy to hold... I was no longer alone" (Storey 1960, 234).

### **5. Art Machin as working class (anti) hero and the precarity of social mobility**

Sport is intrinsically connected to class. Participation is not a matter of merely personal choice, but of access to financial resources, the social status of those engaged in the sport and the cultural meaning of the sport and it, thus, functions as "a form of social enclosure, in which potential entrants are vetted and excluded as suits the incumbent gatekeepers" in a culture which is tightly monitored and controlled (Sugden and Tomlinson 2000, 318). However, sports such as Rugby League, according to Bourdieu, represent "one of the few paths of upward mobility open to children of the dominated classes" and "the working-class cult of sportsmen of working-class origin is doubtless explained in part by the fact that these 'success stories' symbolize the only recognized route to wealth and fame" (Bourdieu, 1978: 832).

This is reflected both in David Storey's own personal biography and the fictional account of Machin's experience in the novel. Jane Mansfield argues that novels such as *This Sporting Life* document a particular moment of "growing permeability of the class barrier between working class and middle class" (Mansfield 2010, 34). However, Storey's account of the precarity and constraints within this perceived permeability is critical and pessimistic. Machin's particular journey through the intricacies of class and his brief experience of social mobility in a northern industrial city offers a scathing account of the particularities and distinctions between class and status. Storey's depiction of class identity is explicitly

unflattering, from the lecherous mayor to his father lecturing him on respectability, depicted as a sad figure not wearing any trousers. Machin functions as ideal vehicle for this journey as the tensions of respectability and morality are underscored through his awkwardness with his body, with the working class exemplified by his parents and Mrs Hammond, and with his uncomfortable interactions with the industrial bourgeois. His fleeting social mobility leads Machin to feel that he does not 'fit' in either class-defined space. Using Bourdieu's sporting metaphor for the disconnect between habitus and field as demonstrated by Machin, he has lost his 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990). In interactions with both the working class from which he emerges to the middle class social spaces in which he briefly visits he is a 'fish out of water' demonstrating how habitus is not static but constantly shifting as a result of choices made and experiences both chosen and imposed (Maton 2012).

Machin understands his social mobility through consumption frequently emphasising his car and his suit as signifiers of status. As such, he does not understand the disapproval he receives from Mrs Hammond and his parents, who have a class specific moral judgement on his wealth. Likewise, amongst the 'important people' he gains access to, he is never embraced because his wealth is precarious and he lacks cultural capital. "Belonging to a group is something you build up, negotiate and bargain over, and play for" (Bourdieu 1990, 75). When Machin replies to Mrs Weaver's query that he prefers playing football over working she summarises that "It raises you above the general level" (Storey 1960, 104). His sporting life gives Machin an ephemeral status of minor celebrity. Machin refers to his new found financial comfort, along with the signifiers of automobile and suit, as giving him the

confidence from which he finds the “knack of getting close to some important people from local industrialists... to soccer stars from nearby towns and the local MP” (Storey 1960, 88). This is juxtaposed with his description of the working class terraces as ‘a field of broken down ambition’ (Storey 1960, 112).

The industrialist Weaver and his wife both seek to metaphorically consume or devour Machin. The gulf between the social classes and the ephemerality of access is evident when Machin, at a party at the Weavers' house, finds himself in the couple's bedroom where he joins their conversation with a business partner, Slomer. Across the bedroom wall is a tapestry graphically depicting a hunting scene of dogs attacking a small animal. Slomer stares between Machin and the tapestry as if “he finds the juxtaposition ludicrous or even maybe obscene” (Storey 1960, 119). And later, Slomer, somewhere between comforting and warning explains to Machin that he is not the first to be ‘crushed by the husband and wife team’ (Storey 1960, 124–25). This repeated suggestion of Machin being consumed, devoured and crushed indicates that his social mobility is dependent on those with status. Furthermore, this access can be rescinded when he has been expended.

Within this depiction of social mobility and the difficulties Machin encounters with his fleeting status, Storey portrays an immorality amongst the industrial bourgeois. The local MP and the Mayor are described in morally scathing terms as being sexually licentious and of having advanced opportunistically and without “any distinction of insight or ability” (Storey 1960, 118). Conversely, both Machin's parents and Mrs Hammond are consumed with notions of respectability that Machin struggles to understand. In his final falling out



with Mrs Hammond, her rage is focused on the feeling that his new wealth and their living situation have led them to be the subject of gossip:

“A better life than any other woman on this street! My life is hell! I can’t lift my head without somebody pointing at me and calling me your . . . slut! ... We’re not proper people now because of you. Because you show off every Sat’day in front of thousands of them. We’re like cripples that daren’t show ourselves. You’ve put your stanching mark on all of us” (Storey 1960, 177).

To Machin’s father wealth and celebrity also lack respectability. In contrast Machin argues that ‘ideals don’t count where money’s concerned’ (Storey 1960, 112). Machin is dismissive of the neighborhood in which he grew up and his father is depicted (in Machin’s fictional voice) as a ‘little man with no trousers’ with a ‘face screwed up with inadequacy and self-reproach, half blinded with tiredness and life-fatigue’ (Storey 1960, 112). Machin scoffs at the moral values of his parents and Mrs Hammond. This is not to suggest that Machin is unencumbered by traditional morality. Machin is not merely the ‘brute-hero’ as depicted by Mansfield (2010). He is, rather, constantly in conflict with the brutality of self and others, as described above. His liminality within these systems of brutality is demonstrated in two ways. First, Machin’s physical brutality is juxtaposed with the moral brutality he encounters as he moves his way up through social networks. When Mrs Weaver propositions him, attracted by his brute masculinity, he refuses. He articulates the discrepancy in social capital between himself and Mrs Weaver by concluding that, “It’s so uneconomical that I’ve to turn down the best thing that ever happened to me’ (Storey 1960, 107). He was a ‘scrubbing nobody’ who had turned her down (Storey 1960, 107). Re-

emphasising the transactional nature of the sexual proposition Machin states, “It was so uneconomical that I’d acted like a decent human being” (Storey 1960, 107). He is incapable of being complicit in Mrs Weaver’s infidelity because of his own ‘decency’ and his rejection of being treated as an ‘ape’. This decency appears again when Machin wants his friend Maurice to do the ‘decent thing’ when he gets the Mayor’s secretary, Judith, pregnant. Maurice is pressured into marrying Judith and blames Machin. And, while his sexual relations with Mrs Hammond are imbued with violence and aggression there is the other, more domestic, side of their relationship where Machin is repeatedly trying to do the ‘right thing’ despite Mrs Hammond’s protests. This culminates with Mrs Hammond in a coma, no longer able to resist, and Machin is able to take on the role of devoted partner by her side. Machin’s character is deployed by Storey to move between the spaces of the proud morality of the working class and the decadence of the wealthy industrialists. Similarly, Machin’s identity shifts between acts of brutality and decency. Machin aspires to do the right thing but struggles to move beyond the confines of the way in which his class and profession are inscribed upon his identity. He aspires to be the hero, but is let down, either by himself or by others. Storey explores Machin’s heroic fantasies through the use of a fictional intertextuality with imagined pulp novels that Machin is frequently reading. These books function as signifiers for Machin’s aspirations and are used to vividly illustrate the discrepancy between his fantasy and reality.

First, Storey interweaves Machin’s return to Mrs Hammond’s house after a game, unsuccessfully seeking attention from her, with Machin’s reading of *Blood on the Canvas* where the ‘hero’ boxer recounts his fight to ‘his woman’ while she strokes his hair which is

interrupted by Mrs Hammond suggesting that Machin could do the washing up. Later, he reads *Toreador* admiring the way in which the bullfighter can control the crowd and whip up their emotions while, within the same sentence, waiting for Mrs Hammond to stop crying downstairs. The connection between Machin's attempt to win Mrs Hammond's affections and his fascination with the heroes in the novels who have no trouble wooing crowds and women culminates when Machin retreats to the empty nightclub and reads *Tropical Orgy* after his first violent sexual encounter with Mrs Hammond. The extract shifts between the sexual success of the fictional hero and his guilt towards his own sexual violence:

"I sat at the bar and got out *Tropical Orgy* - a moonlit night on a calm tropical sea, and Capt. Summers had just come on deck after leaving his sample 'fully satisfied and utterly contented' in his cabin below. ... I found I wasn't blaming myself. I wasn't all that responsible, I told myself. Don't tell me she's that innocent. She's been married. I wouldn't have tumbled like that if I hadn't thought..." (Storey 1960, 97).

At Machin's lowest point, after he's been domestically rejected by Mrs Hammond and is living in a boarding house, he retreats into his fancy car, one of the last remnants of his fleeting social mobility, and into his latest book *Love Tomorrow* where the protagonist in this (supposedly) American novel drives out of town, away from his problems. Machin tries (and fails) to mimic the vistas of pulp Americana:

"I even tried driving out of town fast. But the roads were crammed. They twisted and ducked about. And I'd only gone a couple of miles, hardly leaving town behind, before I was in the next bloody place... There was no place to feel free. I was on a chain, and

wherever I went I had to come back the same way” (Storey 1960, 191).

The disconnection between Machin’s circumstances in the cramped industrial North and America’s seemingly limitless space and open roads is laid bare in Storey’s vivid juxtaposition.

## **Conclusion**

The recent death of David Storey has highlighted the enduring appeal of *This Sporting Life*, the novel for which he is chiefly known and will be mainly remembered (Nightingale 2017; Coveney 2017; Schudel 2017; *The Times* 2017). Its autobiographical elements mean that it can be simultaneously read as both fiction and ethnography, providing a rich and rare insight into the working life of a professional sports worker. Its critical voice, and unvarnished account, enable us to see through performative and lionised accounts of sport and sports-work. TSL exposes the class rigidities which professional sport struggles to break down, indicating how social structures condition and limit the agency of the individual even as they hope for emancipation through their sports-work.

Art Machin’s desire to become a professional sportsman and the eventual sad lamentation as his body fails him and he faces the end (the un-becoming) of *his* sporting life indicate the fundamentally precarious nature of that work, and the unfulfilling and socially immobile nature of industrial work as well. Like Storey in his years as a sportsman-artist, Machin is trapped into a social liminality, accepted in neither of the realms he inhabits. Similarly, what Machin gains in material terms, he gives up in the degradation of his own body, which

eventually, inevitably, fails him. The leitmotif of the destruction of Machin's teeth, which runs right through the book, signals the sacrificial nature of sports-work and the irreplaceability of what is given away in almost biblical terms—not so much a tooth *for* a tooth, but tooth *after* tooth *after* tooth. In this sense, then, sporting labour is a kind of stigmatizing work, for which there are actual physical stigmata that increase over time as the body wears and bodily capital is expended. The sacrifices that Machin makes, both physically and morally are juxtaposed with the precarious ephemerality of his gains.

This paper has drawn upon these themes to argue that TSL offers a powerful critique of the organization of sport, and indicates the sociological insights of the novel. TSL deserves to be read as an organizational text because it reveals in painfully stark terms the way in which sports-workers are used for commercial gain. It shows how a sports-worker is commodified, exploited, and valorized for the physical feats s/he can perform. The personal and physical sacrifices that must be borne to achieve this are great and eventually fatigued and worn out, their human-motors expended such workers are discarded.

In this article, we have used TSL to elucidate theories of management and organization studies and, conversely, used these themes to better understand this work of fiction and its significance. We argue that TSL functions as a valuable lens through which to view the lived experience of the sports worker within the space and time of the industrialized North of England and to illustrate the interconnectedness of individual agency and capitalist structures within this context.

Three broad themes were discussed primarily drawing upon the work of Bourdieu. The first theme, using Bourdieu and Wacquant (Bourdieu 1978; Bourdieu 2010; Wacquant 1995) and considering the relationship between sport and capitalism, explored how TSL provides evidence to how sports work was impacted by processes of rationalization and control through the management and exploitation of labour and the precarious body of the sports worker as exemplified in the novel through metaphors of the body as machine. The second, building upon this connection between the body and capitalist labour, examined the performative nature of the labour drawing upon theories of 'aesthetic labour' from Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson 2003) and 'emotional labour' from Hochschild (Hochschild 2003). The sports-work contributes to the spectacle of the sporting event. Through the use of metaphors such as that of the 'ape' Storey shows how capitalist structures interpellate (Althusser 2008) individuals into particular roles, and through the dominance of these roles they struggle to assert an individual self. Third, and lastly, drawing upon Bourdieu's work on class, taste and 'distinction' (Bourdieu 2010), this article considered how TSL demonstrated the precarity of social mobility depicted through Machin's liminal status and how he is confined by the lack of cultural capital which prevents him from integrating into the middle class but, also, by the pressures of 'respectability' from the working class. In this depiction, Storey is critical of the pressures of conformity and hypocrisy across the class spectrum.

We argue that this novel can be used as empirical evidence, a form of 'testimony' (White 2005, 148), to elucidate these theories and that our use of the novel creates a 'surface of contact' between fiction and theoretical ideas which can, as argued by Phillips, create a

space where these theories can 'come to life' (Phillips 1995, 635). Following on and finally, we argue that one of the strengths of using TSL is the link between the autobiographical element of the novel and the use of the character of Art Machin as a device for exploring the personal lived experience within a particular organizational and cultural context. Grounded in his own personal experience, Storey uses the fictional narration of Machin foregrounding this juxtaposition between interiority (particularly through the use of intertextuality) and his exteriority (the explicit focus on the body as external signifier of an essentialist identity) to highlight the tension between the existentialist struggle for an authentic self and the interpellation of individuals within a confining social structure. Additionally, the liminality of Machin, moving between the different class spaces and not finding a comfortable fit in any, enables Storey to develop his particular sociological class critique within the novel. This exemplifies the connection and similarities that can be present between fictional authors and academic theorists, and further legitimates the use of narrative fiction (Phillips 1995). In this instance narrative fiction has been used as further empirical evidence and as a device with which to explore the connection between agency and structure within the context of sporting labour and to consider how this labour is intertwined with capitalism, class structure, processes of rationalisation and the social construction and imposition of identity. These more general themes, and their importance for understanding the experience of work in a theoretically articulated way, indicate the value of *This Sporting Life* as a resource for a richer understanding of the organization and work of sport, and indeed, for work in general.

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