1999 "Courting Lesbianism." (with Jim McKay and Randy Martin).
Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory 11, no. 1: 211-34.

COURTING LESBIANISM

Toby Miller, Jim McKay, and Randy Martin

> Looking up at Sylvie during the match was that little extra support that I needed. It gave me strength. Finding Sylvie and having such a good personal life now has made the difference in my tennis. It had been the missing part of my life.
>
> —Amélie Mauresmo

> The inference from the coverage of Mauresmo's story is that she is somehow a problem for women's tennis, that her lesbianism is an embarrassment and that her size and power somehow disrupts the marketing plan, which seems to be based around Anna Kournikova.
>
> — *Sydney Morning Herald*

After defeating world number one Lindsay Davenport in the 1999 Australian Open Tennis semi-finals, Amélie Mauresmo "leapt into the arms of girlfriend Sylvie Bourdon and was cradled with hugs." Throughout the match, Bourdon had been "pumping her fists and yelling, 'Allez.'" Following a whirlwind romance, begun just a month or two earlier, they had moved in together and embarked on a joint workout régime of several hours weightlifting each week. Now they were on tour (Leand 1999). Mauresmo came out to the media during the Open.

Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory, Issue 21, 11:1
©1999 Women & Performance Project, Inc.

We seek here to contextualize this limit case for women in sport, the point when masculinity is female, inside three sites — a) the female sports body; b) the intersection of tennis and lesbianism; and c) media coverage. Our overall argument is that three competing, uneven, and frequently discontinuous discourses currently define and control women's bodies: i) heteronormative ideals of femininity; ii) private life as a point of commodification for the sport; and iii) the strong female body as a challenge to conventions of womanhood.

Davenport had attained the world number one ranking by deploying her height and strength. She was defeated at her own game. Although five inches shorter, Mauresmo prevailed due to her superb physical condition, a fast and accurate serve, and a hard topspin forehand (traditionally used only by male players).

Until her victory the media had barely noticed Mauresmo, even though she was the 1996 world junior champion. But after the post-match media conference Mauresmo became front-page news, because Davenport said:

> A couple of times, I mean, I thought I was playing a guy, the girl was hitting so hard, so strong . . . she is so strong in those shoulders and she just hits the ball very well . . . I mean, she hits the ball not like any other girl. She hits it so hard and with so much topspin. . . . Women's tennis isn't usually played like that. (ESPN Television 28 January 1999)

In addition to this tacit criticism (or, at least, othering) of her for displaying "unnatural," masculine-like power, Davenport also sparked speculation that Mauresmo may have attained her physique through drugs by commenting that her shoulders "looked huge to me. I think they must have grown; maybe because she's wearing a tank top." Mauresmo responded to Davenport thus: "the fact that I'm strong physically is maybe impressing her. It means that I'm a very solid player, so I take it as a compliment" (quoted in *Washington Times* 1999). Of course, Mauresmo musculature is unexceptional next to such players as Mary Pierce and Venus and Serena Williams.

Before their match to decide the Open, Martina Hingis said to reporters that Mauresmo "came to Melbourne with her girlfriend,

I think she's half a man." Mauresmo exclaimed: "On top of wanting to beat her, now I'm enraged!" Hingis apologized and supposedly discussed the issue with Mauresmo following the Final, but then told *Sports Illustrated,* "I'm not regretting anything I said about her" (quoted in Layden 1999). Ironically named after the out lesbian Martina Navratilova, Hingis also told a press conference after the Open that "it wouldn't be very healthy for all the girls to go through five sets" and referred to herself as "one of the Spice Girls of tennis" (quoted in *New York Times* 1999). The founding mother of women's professional tennis, Billie Jean King, said she was going to ask Chris Evert, Hingis' tour mentor, to counsel against this homophobic speech (Araton 1999). The new joke ran: "What do you get when Rupert Murdoch meets Martina Hingis? Tabloid heaven, essentially" (Dillman 1999b).

The Australian sporting media went into a frenzy over the issue. Melbourne's *Herald Sun* featured Mauresmo in pictures from the rear, on-court, and necking with Bourdon, under the headline "OH MAN, SHE'S GOOD" (quoted in Layden 1999). Other headlines indicate the depth of press anxiety and sensationalism: "Bourdon works in a bistro near her St. Tropez home called Le Gorille. Translation: Gorilla. Just don't tell Lindsay Davenport" (*Age* 1999); "Women normally only play tennis against men in mixed doubles. But that all changed yesterday if you believe the world's number one player Lindsay Davenport" and "shoulders like Lou Ferrigno — she is the French 'incroyable hulk.' . . . Where is women's tennis headed?; Mind boggles at the muscle monsters" (*Daily Telegraph* 1999); "'Man' taunts fire up Mauresmo" and "Mauresmo out in the Open" (*Weekend Australian* 1999); and "Grace v. Power: An eternal struggle" (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1999).

North American press comments on Mauresmo's body veered from surprise at "her strong chin and muscular shoulders" (Clarey 1999a), through analogy — "the best 200-meter butterfly swimmers in the world" (Dillman 1999a), "huge linebacker shoulders" (*Toronto Star* 1999), and "the shoulders of an Olympic swimmer" (Naughton 1999), to discrimination, via critiques of her femininity as "rather manly . . . a bit butch, with masculine facial features" (*Toronto Star* 1999), and the Reuters News Agency query: "Who is this guy?" (Naughton 1999).

The controversy was handled quite differently by sports cable network ESPN2's commentators Fred Stolle, Patrick McEnroe, Cliff Drysdale, Pam Shriver, and Mary-Jo Fernandez and John Alexander of Australia's Channel Seven (coverage of 29 January 1999). Drysdale criticized the Australian media, describing Davenport's remarks as "much ado about nothing" and agreeing with Mauresmo that "to say that somebody plays like a man, I think that is a compliment." McEnroe applauded Mauresmo's handling of the situation, paraphrasing her: "I'm here with my girlfriend, what's the big deal?" Drysdale concurred, while Stolle stated matter-of-factly that "she lives with her girlfriend down in St. Tropez — spends time in the gym with her." In noting the power emphasis of her game, McEnroe did acknowledge, admiringly, a change, that this "may be the future of women's tennis." Shriver and Fernandez previewed the Final without referring to the controversy, other than alluding to the supposedly male-like game of Mauresmo (of course, the gendered "nature/origin" of that form of life was being complicated all the time). Alexander expressed admiration for Mauresmo's hard work, physical condition, and dedication. During the Final, the cameras cut about equally between the play, Hingis' mother, and Mauresmo's girfriend, but the latter was verbally identified less often.

At her press conference after the Final, Mauresmo talked about closeted players on the tour, saying that they "had a hard time dealing with their situation . . . I feel sorry for them" (quoted in *Village Voice* 1999). She had decided prior to the tournament that she would come out, because she felt it would be a topic of debate and this would clear the air. Shriver, President of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), said that "if the commercial world embraces her, it's a different era," alluding to Navratilova's sparse endorsements and sponsorships. Mauresmo said that she expected to maintain her clothing contract, and "if they want to set me aside, there will be dozens more who will take me .... And if they let me go for that, they are jerks anyway" (quoted in Clarey 1999b).

Meanwhile, record ratings were posted for Australian TV's coverage and the WTA announced it was continuing with pre-tournament/pre-"out" plans to feature Mauresmo in a marketing campaign, even as fears were voiced about their search for a new sponsor (Weir 1999; Young 1999). Mauresmo practiced on Melbourne courts

with bodyguards, and French television satirists made a puppet with her head on Arnold Schwarzenegger's body and this voice-over: "It's the first time in the history of French sport that a man says he is a lesbian" (quoted in Dutter & Parsons 1999).

Clearly, homophobia was at work in the inference that Mauresmo, and not Davenport, Pierce, or the Williams sisters pushed the limits of tennis' transgenderization. A predicament faced heteronormativity in the constitutive contradiction of on/off, play/frame, referent/narrative, that so suffuses women's tennis today. Passing on-court as women's champion disrupted what women were being asked to pass as off the court. This gender play cast the maleness of the men's game into doubt.

THE SPORTING BODY

> One is physically fit when (1) she is free from disease, (2) does not have significant deviations from normal body structure or function, (3) has sufficient strength, speed, agility, endurance, and skill to do the maximum tasks of daily life, (4) is mentally and emotionally adjusted, and (5) has high morale and spiritual concepts.
>
> — M. Vannier & H. S. Poindexter

> The body is dangerous. The deliberately muscular woman disturbs dominant notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, and any discursive field that includes her risks opening up a site of contest and conflict, anxiety and ambiguity.
>
> — L. Schulze

> Some wondered whether Navratilova even belonged on the women's tour anymore, given her apparent invincibility. Noting her high-tech, precision-oriented training methods, they characterized her as a "bionic sci-fi creation" of her training team — a kind of unnatural, even monstrous "Amazon."
>
> — S. K. Cahn

> I had trouble as a competitor because I kept wanting to fight the other player every time I started to lose a match . . . . After a while I began to understand that you could walk out on the

> court like a lady, all dressed up in immaculate white, be polite to everybody, and still play like a tiger and beat the liver and lights out of the ball.
>
> — Althea Gibson

What do Margaret Smith Court, Renee Richards, King, Navratilova, and Mauresmo have in common? Each one is an elite women tennis player who became the focus of moral panic in the popular media for "playing like a man." The latter four were framed by the media as doubly abject — Richards for being a transsexual, and King, Navratilova, and Mauresmo for being lesbians (very openly in the last two cases). The US Tennis Association and the WTA disaffiliated some events in which Richards competed, and these tournaments were also boycotted by many players (Birrell and Cole 1994, 373).

By contrast, Evert, the ur-"white American darling" (a mode of embodiment rather than simply a style of play that we'll abbreviate as WAD), was portrayed as the ethical and textual centre of tennis, her makeup and earrings designed to attract sponsors and spectators and her "cool and delicate looking" style deemed more demure than that of stronger-looking players. Two years after she retired, when Navratilova was still playing, Evert was the country's most popular tennis celebrity, Navratilova number 27 (Spencer 1997, 373, 375). When the latter was honored at a fundraiser for the 1994 Gay Games, US newspapers gave almost no coverage (Wenner 1993, 76).

Chase (1988) has noted that everyday discursive practices invariably construct "women who become like men" as deviants. The emphasis in sport on intimidation, violence, and physical prowess, as well as its misogynist, homophobic, and male homosocial valences, mean that sportswomen who challenge its gender régime usually face formidable resistance. Nevertheless, traditional athletic ideologies of masculine superiority have been destabilized as women have gained greater access to sport. The "gender gap" in the performances of males and females has gradually narrowed and women have outperformed men in certain (usually endurance) events. Increasing numbers of women are competing in traditionally masculine sports like powerlifting, bodybuilding, the martial arts, rugby, and ice hockey (Young 1997). The presence of physically vigorous

and robust women athletes demonstrates that sporting prowess is not "naturally" masculine. Yet their presence also poses threats to masculinity, thus precipitating male "hysteria" and attempts by men to contain women's aspirations and resistance (McKay 1997; Ndalianis 1995; White & Gillett 1994). It also produces a cosmic ambivalence when women actually compete with men's physiques — recall the sequence in the film *A League of Their Own* (Marshall 1992) when Marla, a stupendous home-run hitter who is "masculine looking" (Berlage 1992, 150), has to undergo a makeover and be saved for heterosexuality by winding up with a husband.

The recent turn towards strong bodies as female fashion statements, for all the associated rhetoric of empowerment, privileges a small and implausible array of somatotypes: "a body that is slim, tight, and small-breasted; a body that signifies deference through its posture, movements, and gestures; and a bodily surface disciplined for adornment." Marketed as "technologies of transgression," worked-out bodies are more usefully seen as "normalizing technologies," with the body a self-styled and self-nominated commodity of sobriety. Hence links to the hermeneutics of suspicion that surround this desirable body — is it still female, is it still feminine, and is it drug-enhanced (Cole 1993, 87-90)?

If so, it has met the dictates and preconditions of "corporate feminism and enterprise culture," where "just do it" is the putative answer to structural disadvantages of race, class, age, and sexual preference. The bizarre tendency to associate feminism with lesbianism, to which many critics are prone, encourages many women to adopt bourgeois-individualist, "merit/excellence"-based norms (McKay 1997, 41, 43, 88, 91). Even the "acceptable" female athlete has her body scrutinized: Hingis' relative failure in 1998 (one Grand Slam victory and the eventual loss of number one ranking after a miraculous first year on the senior circuit) was attributed by *Sports Illustrated* to "the physical and emotional effects of just growing up," as her body "became wider and softer, hampering her coordination" (Layden 1999).

The "feminization of women's tennis," as King called it, became part of the professional game's business strategy in the 1980s (King quoted in Spencer 1997, 375). It was quickly picked up by the media, via sexualization of the female sporting body in a manner akin to soft-core porn or misogynist advertising, with the predom-

inantly passive female athlete functioning as the object of the male gaze. This is particularly prominent in the special swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated,* the *Golden Girls of Athletics* and *Golden Girls of Sport* calendars, and *Inside Sport* and *Sports Monthly* magazines (Davis 1997; Mikosza & Phillips 1999), based on the antithesis of men's sports/women's bodies (Jefferson Lenskyj 1998, 31). *Sports Illustrated* has turned into a bastion of late masculinism, with women reporters and readers encouraged to go elsewhere (Cagan 1999). We sense that events such as the Mauresmo affair put that bifurcation at risk, or at least signify its instability.

WRITING TENNIS/WRITING LESBIANISM

> "This is the best part of all, taking a picture with the trophy, in a social dress," Hingis said, flipping her freshly sprayed bob and smiling wickedly through layers of makeup applied for the occasion. Abruptly she unzipped her suede jacket, revealing the spectacular red minidress she hadn't worn in September. "This is quite cute, I think," she said. "Don't you?"
>
> —T. Layden

> I was always told to lay low so I wouldn't throw off potential sponsors. Not pretend to be someone else, but just keep quiet. I finally realized I wasn't getting any deals anyway, and I was tired of laying low.
>
> —Martina Navratilova

> [S]port serves as fertile ground for women bonding passionately with and loving other women, whether this love or passion become sexual or not . . . . central to many sport experiences is the development of trust, admiration and respect for one's opponents and teammates, as well as passion, joy and commitment to one's self. When these feelings take place in a physically intimate setting, and, in many cases, within a sex-segregated environment, homoerotic love between women becomes a distinct possibility . . . the lesbian possibility in sport should be frightening.
>
> — M. J. Kane & H. J. Lenskyj

When tennis arrived in the US in the 1870s, it was seen as not overly vigorous, in fact a suitable candidate for displaying ruling-class daughters to single men (Hargreaves 1994, 54). Within a decade, the white bourgeois country-club world of the US Lawn Tennis Association was in play. Women engaged in international competition from 1900, via the Wightman Cup (Vannier & Poindexter 1960, 253). Today, they comprise 58% of registered US players (Lichtenstein 1998, 59).

The "question" of femininity has always been central to women's tennis, from medical to media discourse and back. In the late nineteenth century, gynecology debated whether women should play tennis during menstruation, and biologically-derived alibis for restricting women's participation in sport have continued. Medical articles and general manuals on the relevance of sport to young women were more overtly ideological in discouraging activities coded as masculine. Into the 1940s, tennis was deemed risky because it was thought to promote over-development of abdominal muscles, which might hinder childbirth (Lenskyj 1986, 26, 29-30, 36-37, 39, 44). The corollary was that competing without regard to one's cycle was somehow to be less a woman. There have been homologies in the association of styles of play with genders — by the 1960s, men were to use power via a serve-and-volley game or vicious topspin, while women should emphasize style and finesse.

Occasionally, female players have forged the alchemical miracle of "man-like strokes" and "feminine grace" (quoted in Cahn 1994, 31), exemplified in the success of Helen Wills across the Depression. Wills became the first WAD of the court. Her great predecessor Suzanne Lenglen, a "flapper"-like figure who was reported to sip alcohol between games, moved like a dancer, wore short skirts, and declined to marry, was known as the "best-loved young nymph" of the sport — a fusion of unavailability and femininity that served to beguile and made her a gigantic international celebrity (Lichtenstein 1998, 61). Wills' WAD-like demureness, girlish demeanor, and class signifiers gave her a traditional, "moral" appeal (Cahn 1994, 50), but both players were testimony to middle-class women's resistance to seclusion from the public world (Hall 1996, 101). Wills' nickname of "Little Miss Poker Face" (Lichtenstein 1998, 61) evidenced the steely efficiency side to WADism, while Alice Marble,

next to dominate the scene, had a power game that intimidated many men (63).

Given the game's colonial origin, it is especially interesting to note the landmark achievement of Althea Gibson, the sport's first leading African-American. (In the US, Gibson's black successors — Chanda Rubin and the Williams sisters — represent a threat to the hegemony of whiteness. In other parts of the world, there is less anxiety expressed about these players.) Gibson was best in the world in the late 1950s, with "explosive power" her stock in trade (Lichtenstein 1998, 64). Gibson's statement, quoted earlier, about her own social distance from the polite, exclusionary norms of the court touches on a profound truth about tennis and its cross-gender politics — what King called "a perfect combination of a violent action taking place in an atmosphere of total tranquility . . . almost like having an orgasm" (King quoted in Schinto 1994, 24).

By the 1940s, tennis was an ordinary component of physical education for middle-class white women. Instructional manuals emphasized the need for certain native qualities — "good rhythm, balance, footwork, and power" — which could be supplemented by training. A fast and well-placed serve was proposed, along with attacking net play. A "dress or shorts" was recommended, with the rule of thumb "freedom of movement" (Goss 1943, 309, 343, 310). No sense of any prohibition here on strength, or on comfort. Manuals from the following decades were similarly technical and gender-neutral in their instruction.

But the psy-complexes eventually turned up for work, socializing students into notions of the greater collective good and gender roles (Miller & Ley 1956, 239–270; Vannier & Poindexter 1960, 257). Lesbianism has long been a concern of the self-appointed police of women's sport in the US, and from the 1930s, the psy-complexes were hauled in to allay fears on this score. Psychologists proposed that "normal" sexual development was put at risk through gender segregation in sport. This became a concern during the 1950s as part of Cold-War cultural normalization, with women athletes under notice to assert their heterosexuality, and "mannishness" a negative trope of sports journalists. For women, associations were drawn between spinsters and sporting activity; men, by contrast, were thought less likely to be gay if they played sport when young. So women students of physical education were given special lessons in

attracting men, required to shave their legs, and instructed in appropriate hairdos, while athletics officials promulgated statistics highlighting the high levels of young athletes who went on to marriage. This drew a riposte from many "out" butch athletes, who specialized in duck-ass hair cuts, men's footwear, and so on (Cahn 1994, 176-179, 182-183, 196).

When women's tennis developed from country club amateurism to professional tournament play in the early 1970s, a great deal of effort went into maintaining the sport's genteel image, notably by refusing sponsorships from manufacturers of "feminine hygiene" products (Creedon 1998, 96; Young 1999). The private and the public worlds of the women's game were undergoing major relational shifts that encouraged disclosure/construction of a self away from the court. Starting in 1985, the WTA published a calendar with leading players adorned in evening gowns or bathing suits and encouraged them to talk about their private lives — a simultaneously humanizing and commodifying device (Schinto 1994, 25; Young 1999). The negative side to this is expressed by Rita Mae Brown's criticism that the women's tour, perceived in the early '70s "as a feminist epiphany," had turned into a site where "players are packaged and marketed if not as latter-day Shirley Temples, then as retro-women" (1993, 13).

For all this attention on the personal, television cameras rarely focused on Navratilova's girlfriends during matches (Lurie 1994, 120, 126). With increasing commodification of women's sport has come a new wave of "dyke bashing." Avon, long a strong supporter of women's tennis, ceased its sponsorship in 1981 in the wake of King's palimony suit and Navratilova's relationship with Rita Mae Brown (which Navratilova denied at first because it put her application for US citizenship at risk, as per headlines describing her as "the bisexual defector." This closeting led to an unflattering depiction as "Carmen Semana" in the roman à clef *Sudden Death* (one of a stream of lesbian sports novels that records a brutally competitive world) (123-124; Kort 1994, 134; Sandoz 1995). In 1990, Smith Court, a champion of the 1960s who had suffered from taunts about her femininity, now a member of one of Australia's most notorious right-wing plutocratic Christian conservative families, held a press conference at which she alerted the media that women's pro tennis was full of lesbians who seduced young women into their ways —

a "group of lesbian-bisexual players on the circuit, and they're the ones who get at the youngsters."

This alarm over the alleged recruitment of young heterosexual women in sport by predatory lesbians was of course longstanding (Burroughs et al 1995; Lenskyj 1995). Then Gabriela Sabatini said "I don't even like to take my clothes off in the dressing room," and was joined in her critiques of "predatory lesbianism" by Steffi Graf, Jennifer Capriati, and Seles (Brownworth 1994, 75-76; Lurie 1994, 121), while Hana Mandlikova said of Navratilova that she "must have a chromosomic screw loose somewhere" (quoted in Cahn 1994, 2).

This controversy erupted towards the end of Navratilova's preeminence in tennis, which had long seen derision of her "lifestyle" by reference not only to her sexual object-choice but certain signifiers of power — she was said to have "developed 'unnatural,' 'masculine' strength through weight training" (Sloan 1994, 95). It seems to have been as much these signifiers as anything else that aided the controversy, since the data about sex between established and young sports-people reveal a pattern of senior men having sex with young men and women, not of senior and junior women (Lenskyj 1991, 63). At the same time, the old gay rallying-cry ("Think we're disgusting. Damn right we are"), which seeks to turn negative stereotypes into positive attributes, has also been claimed for lesbians and sport. Confronted with the need to sanitize and deny, some scholars are now arguing for the power of sport as a source of and site for lesbian community, effectively rejecting a liberal politics that says "don't worry, we'll leave your daughters alone" in favor of a more radical claim that "lesbian existence should be feared" (Kane & Lenskyj 1998, 190).

Playing innocent about these matters from the mythos of liberalism is unworthy. Susan Fox Rogers introduces her anthology of critical and fictional writings on lesbianism and sport with an account of her own coming out. Where was she supposed to go, actually, once she had emerged? "My choices seemed to be the bar, or the softball field — the two loci of women's gatherings." This is the flip-side to the nostrum that "women who play sports are mannish, and mannish women are lesbians." Associated moral panics about heterosexual womanhood being claimed for lesbianism leave many athletes "closeted" for "fear of losing scholarships

[and] sponsorships" (1994, xiv, xvi; also see Lenskyj 1991 and Fusco 1998). Sport is a place to look for sexual community, just as it is a site for sexual fantasy — here is the body on display, asking for evaluation and projection, and sold as such. Consider published fantasies by women about Navratilova (Zimet 1994, 113) and her heroisation as a role model for young queers (Zwerman 1995). The upside to her visibility is as part of "lesbian chic," a consumerist-celebrity hybrid form that can turn marginality into market position (Macdonald 1997, 184). This commodification has distinct limits, however. *Playboy* featured the "vivacious and curvaceous" figure skater Katarina Witt in a December 1998 nude pictorial, part of her successful sale of sexuality. Her gay colleagues, by contrast, have to hide their sexuality if they are to secure endorsements (Deacon 1998). Of course, this is not to suggest that Witt's actual sex-life or sense of self are characterized by an appearance in *Playboy.* Rather, it points to a double standard in the realm of representational politics.

Technically, it would not be so hard to make the case for convergence between men and women as a challenge to this doubleness. Venus Williams serving at over 120 miles an hour does not surpass Greg Rusedki's 148 mph record-breaker, but her speed is fast for the men's game. The grunts of Monica Seles that accompanied her groundstrokes were never called manly, and now many women professional players generate that kind of pace, with or without the sound effects. Conversely, many men have assimilated the speed associated with their game and are producing elongated, strategic rallies long thought of as the hallmark of women's tennis.

The doubleness returns at the level of remuneration, but again, tennis provides some cracks in the patriarchal story. The Association of Tennis Professionals and the WTA are parallel corporations charged with distinguishing their product lines. While women at the top of the game can take home seven-figure winnings, outside the top twenty players in the world, their earnings are roughly half that of men, typically in the lower six-figures. The four major Open events (the Australian, the French, Wimbledon, and the US) integrate women's and men's matches, but they do not match salaries (Spencer 1998, 364-368). But women have perhaps come further towards parity in tennis than other sports. In 1975, Evert earned more in tournament pay than Arthur Ashe (the men's number one)

and leading golfer Jack Nicklaus. Twenty years later, Graf was the only woman to appear in *Forbes* magazine's list of the wealthiest 40 athletes (Spencer 1998, 370, 376).

A debt is owed to the women's movement, which reemerged alongside the tennis rage of the seventies. Feminism's social agonism had its tennis equivalent in the match arranged between former Wimbledon champion and latter-day hustler Bobby Riggs and King, then at the top of the women's game. King's activism not only advocated but was propelled by the burgeoning presence of women in the workforce and the more general labor of women's bodies. For many viewers, she represented a class as well as a gender revolution, dragging tennis from its upper-crust origins to the rock era; and she was the first American woman to learn the (mostly male) Australian model of "percentage tennis," a form of risk-averse play that imported rational calculation from economics to sport (Lichtenstein 1998, 57, 65).

And women's tennis has been relatively free to elaborate its social and economic value on the basis of a stylistics of play and a star-system that clearly beat the men on their own terrain. While Pete Sampras scrambles after Roy Emerson's record 12 Open titles, which has stood for nearly three decades, Hingis at 18 and with six such wins is on track to overtake 29 year-old Graf's 21 Open crowns. Graf herself surpassed the 19 titles amassed by Navratilova, who played until she was nearly forty. At the 1999 Australian Open, the lower half of the women's quarterfinal draw had Hingis, Graf, and Seles (the last unbeaten through four previous appearances at the tournament) who together had won the event ten times. On the men's side, the corollary numbers totaled zero. This concentration of talent has produced sustained rivalries of the sort that build cultural investment and audience.

In the strictest calculus of political economy, women's expanded labor time was generating more value. There was at least a basis for the price of their efforts to rise as well. But as a commodity, the value of tennis has no such transparency. Like any other sport that has been professionalized, its value comes mediated. And through this mediation, we could say that gender returns with a vengeance, such that the way in which women's tennis appears in public (as opposed to the ways in which it is played) reinscribes gender in the game so that it might play to a more general sexual economy.

MEDIA TENNIS

Sports Illustrated marked Evert's retirement with a cover story entitled "Now I'm Going to Be a Full-Time Wife," refining this suburban mythography with a photo montage of her ex-lovers (Kane & Lenskyj 1998, 189). A decade on, the sex part of that syntagm was increasingly important in the women's game. In the summer of 1998, leading up to the US Open, Venus Williams, Kournikova, and Hingis each graced the cover of a major fashion magazine. This double-duty as icons of the feminine is part of a conjuncture that goes well beyond tennis. A recent front-page spread in the Business Day section of the *New York Times* (30 January 1999 C1 and C4) reports on the displacement of supermodels by "celebrities" in the covers of record for women's representation. Oprah Winfrey (October 1998) out-Vogued model Carolyn Murphy (August 1998) 810,000 to 520,000. Courtney Love (October 1997) sold almost a hundred thousand more issues of *Bazaar* than Linda Evangelista (March 1997). As of this writing, numbers were not available for the December 1998 cover of Vogue featuring Hillary Clinton. It would be a stretch to see women working in non-fashion fields as somehow typical of the female Nine-to-Fiver. But if the star of the supermodel is experiencing even a partial eclipse, it is interesting to speculate on whether the high modernist beauty for beauty's sake is on the wane. The imaginary of feminine beauty, or more broadly the mimetic ideal, is attached to women's bodies that otherwise do a different kind of work. This opens up spaces of women's performativity and burdens the newly reborn women with yet another version of the double shift. Whatever symbolic capital has accrued in the primary sphere of women's bodily commodification must now be made to work in the realm of leisure.

Of course, these shifts can be trivializing in the extreme. Consider the following descriptions of women competitors at the 1988 Australian Open:

• The striking blonde Russian Anna Kournikova tipped by some pundits to be the game's next superstar, is not your average adolescent . . . . Her stunning appearance and obvious talent combine to drive a million-dollar business. (Hogan 1998)

• For sex, read the preening Mary Pierce, the pubescent Nabokovian Anna Kournikova. Perhaps the petite South African Amanda Coetzer for the mature male . . . Serena Williams had biceps like a stevedore's. (MacDonald 1998)

• Dressed in a skimpy black number closer in dimensions to a postage stamp than a dress, Kournikova turned heads as she waited on the steps of the Members Stand for the Australians to walk back to their dressing room . . . the media fell over themselves to capture the moment or (dare we say it) take a closer look. (Gatt 1998)

• If all the world's a stage, Anna Kournikova wants to be the main act. Make that the only act. Never mind that she's only 16 and never been kissed. This walking, talking, Russian-born Barbie look-alike has completed the learning curve . . . [she] reduces men aged 15 to 50 to gibbering idiots and . . . tells ball boys who want to take her out that they can't afford her. (Evans 1998)

In 1999, this sexual rhetoric was finely honed onto Mauresmo and Kournikova. Of the latter, it was said that her "every match was attended by the hormonal frenzy usually reserved for your finer strip clubs" (Layden 1999). And as we have seen, Mauresmo bore the brunt of critique and negative fascination, as if at a grotesque whose sexuality was mirrored by her shoulders and jaw. And these tendencies are not the sole domain of the print media.

Tennis is the only women's sport that routinely obtains mainstream TV network attention worldwide (Daddario 1997, 103; Tuggle 1997, 20-21). But TV tennis talk still awaits its full development. A shot is the tennis equivalent of the sign. Like the latter, the former does not contain meaning but registers only in syntagmatic context. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a player to win more points than an opponent, yet lose the set or even the match. The larger tennis phrasings and cadences have yet to make their way into broadcast language. In the meantime, gender provides continuity where a shot-by-shot account cannot. Broadcast announcers, often former professionals, remark upon the appearance of women's bodies in a manner that has only the vaguest equivalent in terms of men's "fitness." Seldom is an opportunity lost to remark upon how much weight Davenport has shed as an account of her improved performance. In contrast, Seles' former coach was said to have her weight reduction as his sole function. But the body can also be too femme — Hingis is frequently termed a "scrambler" who lacks any

"big weapons" and therefore miraculously manages to get the ball back more times than her opponent. On one level these missives reflect the general impoverishment of tennis announcing, which has neither the descriptive simultaneity of basketball or boxing, nor the arch abstractions of football and baseball statistical buffs. Numbers don't seem to tell as effective a story in tennis as elsewhere, and no clear and present narrative has developed to address what players are doing at any given moment that also addresses the game's larger temporality.

Commentary on women's sport has conventionally focused less on tactics, strategy, and history than on looks (Bruce 1998, 377), emphasizing emotional interiority over skill. Success and failure are routinely attributed to "feelings." Infantilization is achieved by referring to women by their first names and men by their last. US coverage has recently shied away from calling the competitors "girls," but they remain "Steffis" and "Martinas." Similar trivializing norms are found on internet discussion groups (Duncan & Messner 1998, 177, 181, 183). The age discrimination evident in these descriptions is significant — women turn pro in the month of their fourteenth birthday, and with numerous cases of anorexia and bulimia reported (Schinto 1994, 24), there is a real issue over gender and youthfulness in the sport.

The policing of women's bodies by commentary is complicated by the very diversity of types that it must describe, especially in the women's game. Simply looking at who wins, it is much easier to draw the conclusion that corporeal diversity is a resource for women and not a deficit. If King's off-court appearance was overdetermined by the women's movement, a coterie of present players have become icons of the fashion movement. Venus Williams has had a line of tennis wear designed for her that features cutout backs or sides, functionally mimicking the haute couture fashions that highlight the exceptionalism of the women's bodies who display them. A woman short of the six foot two inch muscularity of Venus Williams would have some difficulty fitting her togs. Yet Venus' body gets most attention for an incident at the 1997 US Open semifinal where she and Irina Spirlea collided during a change-over from one side of the court to the other. Spirlea is typically seen as challenging the African-American teenager to defer to a more experienced player. Such insouciance is extended to the talk of Williams' beaded hair, which

rattles, hums, and occasionally falls onto the court. She was docked a point in Melbourne for one such errant bead, which became the opportunity for further comment on her defiant posture. At the same time, Kournikova (ranked 12th in the world) can be dismissed as unserious because she is a sexual icon. When she ran up a string of double faults at the Australian, but otherwise thoroughly outplayed her opponents to win matches, she was treated as if she were getting by on looks alone. Hingis, on the other hand, is typically infantilized as a "nice little girl," always smiling and polite, good-natured, precocious but unthreatening, infinitely adaptable to others (and therefore winning by exposing their weaknesses). Her mother Melanie Molitor is coach and single parent, and Martina's tennis is infinitely treated as evidence of what a fine job Melanie has done with her daughter.

CONCLUSION: FROM THE STADIUM TO THE STREETS

The tennis quotidian is no less replete with the questions posed here. Consider this account of a weekly game by one of the authors of this paper: A crackling serve sends me wide for a diving backhand return. I just manage to get my racquet on the ball to slice it low over the net. My opponent is there at the net and scoops the ball crosscourt. I tear after it and send it sailing high for a defensive lob. No avail. An overhead smash puts the ball definitively out of reach. If I were to break the protocols of play, take my eye off the ball, and regard the person I'm playing with, I'd know right away she's a woman. But within the point, it's certainly not clear what makes for the gender divide between us. Is it the net? A binary machinery if ever there was one, literally painting partners into separate boxes. The arsenal of shots and the longer durée of strategy convert differences taken as axiomatic off the court into calibrations of points won and lost for reasons of their own. The person I'm playing, Michele Machee, has an all-court game: deeply penetrating topspin groundstrokes, unerring serves that clip the back of the line, savvy net-rushing that yields crisp angled volleys, fine court coverage, and the patience and perseverance to make the point on the third or fourth shot. She was a top player on her Texas State Championship-winning high school team. While growing up she never found it

complimentary to be told, "wow, you don't play like a girl." Michele observed that in the days of John McEnroe and Evert, net-play divided the men's and women's games, but not today. That poses the question, aside from the tautology that women's tennis is tennis played by women, where does the gender of the game lie?

The contradictions of commodified, gendered tennis do not allow a functionalist landscape, of docile, hyper-feminine women fresh from the country club. Today's tennis is caught in a vice of the sort discarded years ago when warpable wood racquets were replaced with synthetic fibers and carbon. The ad campaign for the 1998 US Open made direct comparisons with football and basketball, asserting that tennis players ran further and longer, in effect playing harder. Tennis toughness in this newly universalized sporting aesthetic was a virtue. Men and women were featured in the ads grunting, hurtling, and smashing. Six months later, Mauresmo gambled — but the power in the game is something she is sure to get a slice of. The personalization of tennis stars, the storytelling that is part of WTA marketing and broadcasting, had a visual spot for the significant other in the stands that could not be left vacant. Similarly, in revisiting the 1970s debates about the femininity of Richards and Navratilova, Judith Butler has pointed out the multiple irony of applied gender science from those days: that the shift in sex testing that oscillated from chromosomal to hormonal signs registered both an anxiety to fix identity and the unattainability of acultural absolutes. This cris of womanhood is a productive site (1998, 109–111).

Four weeks after their meeting in Melbourne, Mauresmo and Hingis played again, in the quarter-finals of the Gaz de France Open. This time, the result was reversed, with Mauresmo winning. The crowd hissed and booed her opponent during introductions and the warm-up and held up banners reading "We love you Amélie" and "We're behind you Amélie" (*New York Times* 1999). And as one letter-writer to the *Toronto Star* put it, "if Mauresmo's one-handed backhand is comparable to Pete Sampras" then who is to say that Sampras isn't playing like a girl?' (Patel 1999).

Thanks to May Joseph for commissioning this paper and Jason King for his editorial comments.

Works Cited

Age. 1999. "Muscled out: World No. 1 yields to new force." 29 January: 1.

Araton, H. 1999. "King says Hingis needs a talking-to." *New York Times,* 9 February: D1.

Berlage, G. I. 1992. "Women's professional baseball gets a new look: On film and in print." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 16(2): 149-152.

Birrell, S. and C. L. Cole. 1994. "Double Fault: Renee Richards and the Construction and Naturalization Of Difference." In *Women, Sport, and Culture,* edited by S. Birrell & C. L. Cole, 373–397. Champaign: Human Kinetics.

Brownworth, V. A. 1994. "The Competitive Closet." In *SportsDykes: Stories from On and Off the Field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, 75–86. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bruce, T. 1998. "Audience frustration and pleasure: Women viewers confront televised women's basketball," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 22(4): 373–397.

Burroughs, A., L. Ashburn & L. Seebohm. 1995. "'Add sex and stir': Homophobic coverage of women's cricket in Australia," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 19: 266–284.

Cagan, J. 1999. "The second sex and SI: Women models win out over women writers," *Village Voice* 23 February: 173.

Cahn, S. K. 1994. *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Chase, S. 1988. "Making sense of 'the woman who becomes a man'." In *Gender and Discourse: The Power of Talk,* edited by A. Todd & S. Fisher, n. p. Norwood: Ablex.

Clarey, C. 1999a. "Unseeded wonder serves Davenport a defeat." *International Herald Tribune* 29 January: n. p.

Clarey, C. 1999b. "Runner-up's revelation likely to test the waters," *New York Times* 31 January: 10.

Cole, C. L. 1993. "Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport, and Technologies of the Body," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 17(2): 77-97.

Creedon, P. J. 1998. "Women, Sport, and Media Institutions: Issues in Sports Journalism and Marketing." In *MediaSport,* edited by L. A. Wenner, 88-99. London: Routledge.

Daddario, G. 1997. "Gendered sports programming: 1992 summer Olympic coverage and the feminine narrative form." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 14(2): 103-120.

Daily Telegraph. 1999. "Teenager stuns world's best player," 29 January: 3, 116.

Davis, L. 1997. *The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Deacon, J. 1998. "Sex sells — to a point: While Katarina Witt can flaunt her sexuality, many gay athletes hide theirs," *Maclean's* 30 November: 78.

Dillman, L. 1999a. "Davenport finally meets her match," *Los Angeles Times* 28 January: 1.

Dillman, L. 1999b. "Hingis fires the first volley," *Los Angeles Times* 29 January: 3.

Duncan, M. C. & M. A. Messner. 1998. "The media image of sport and gender." In *MediaSport,* edited by L. A. Wenner, 170–85. London: Routledge.

Dutter, B. & J. Parsons. "Muscular lesbian is a very nice girl, says tennis no 1," *Daily Telegraph* 30 January: 4.

Evans, L. 1998. "Kournikova has eyes only for the lead role and center stage," *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 January: 10.

Fusco, C. 1998. "Lesbians and locker rooms: The subjective experiences of lesbians in sport." In *Sport and Postmodern Times,* edited by G. Rail, 87-116. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gatt, R. 1998. "Anna has her wicket way with Warne." *Australian* 14 January: 5.

Gibson, A. 1979. "I always wanted to be somebody." In *Out Of The Bleachers: Writings On Women And Sport,* edited by by S. L. Twin, 130-142. New York: The Feminist Press/McGraw-Hill.

Goss, G. 1943. "Tennis." In *Individual Sports for Women,* edited by D. S. Ainsworth, M. R. Broer, A. G. Goss, G. Goss, E. Jennings, B. A. Pitkin, & F. Ryder, 308–352. Philadelphia: WB Saunders.

Hall, M. A. 1996. *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice.* Champaign: Human Kinetics.

Hargreaves, J. 1994. *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports.* London: Routledge.

Hogan, J. 1998. "Kournikova plays waiting game," *Australian* 14 January: 50.

Jefferson Lenskyj, H. 1998. "'Inside Sport' or 'On the Margins'? Australian women and the sport media," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 33: 19–32.

Kane, M. J. & H. J. Lenskyj. 1998. "Media treatment of female athletes: Issues of gender and sexualities." In *MediaSport,* edited by L. A. Wenner, 187–201. London: Routledge.

Kort, M. 1994. "Interview: Martina Navratilova." In *Sportsdykes: Stories from On and Off the Field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, 133–142. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Layden, T. 1999. "Coming out party," *Sports Illustrated* 8 February: 58.

Leand, A. 1999. "French teen bursts onto scene: Mauresmo credits her girlfriend for success," *USA Today* 29 January: 3C.

Lenskyj, H. 1986. *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality.* Toronto: The Women's Press.

Lenskyj, H. 1991. "Combating homophobia in sport and physical education," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8(1): 61–69.

Lichtenstein, G. 1998. "Net profits." In *Nike is a Goddess: The History of Women in Sports,* edited by L. Smith, 57–77. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Lurie, R. 1994. "Martina and Me: A Trilogy." In *SportsDykes: Stories from On and Off the Field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, 120–129. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Macdonald, M. 1997. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media.* London: Arnold.

MacDonald, J. 1998. "Fairer sex has only S&V to play with," *Australian* 14 January: 18.

Marshall, P. (Director). 1992. *A League of Their Own* [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures.

McKay, J. 1997. *Managing Gender: Affirmative Action and Organizational Power in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand Sport.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mikosza, J. & M. Phillips. 1999. "Gender, sport and the body politic: The framing of femininity in the Golden Girls of

Sport Calendar and The Atlanta Dream," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34: 5–16.

Miller, D. M. & K. L. Ley. 1956. *Individual and Team Sports for Women.* Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.

Naughton, P. 1999. "Davenport asks: Who is this guy?" *Reuters:* 28 January, n.p.

Ndalianis, A. 1995. "Muscle, excess and rupture: Female body-building & gender construction," *Media Information Australia* 75: 13–23.

New York Times. 1999. "Mauresmo, to cheers, hammers Hingis," 27 February: D7.

Patel, N. 1999. Letter. *Toronto Star* 18 February: n. p.

Rogers, S. F. 1994. Introduction. In *SportsDykes: Stories from On and Off the field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, xiii–xvii. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Sandoz, J. 1995. "Lesbian sport fiction," *Lesbian Review of Fiction,* 1 June 1995: 22.

Schinto, J. 1994. "Narrow world of sports," *Women's Review of Books* 11, 1 February: 24–25.

Schulze, L. 1990. "On the Muscle." In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body,* edited by J. Gaines and C. Herzog, 58–78. London: Routledge.

Sloan, L. 1994. "Taking up space." In *SportsDykes: Stories from On and Off the Field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, 95–98. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Spencer, N. E. 1997. "Once upon a subculture: Professional women's tennis and the meaning of style, 1970–1974," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 21(4): 363-378.

Sydney Morning Herald. 1999. "Grace v. power: An eternal struggle" 30 January: 50.

Toronto Star. 1999. "Tough talk in women's pro tennis" 4 February: n. p.

Tuggle, C. A. 1997. "Differences in television sports reporting of men's and women's athletics: ESPN SportsCenter and CNN Sports Tonight," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 41(1): 14-24.

Vannier, M. & H.B. Poindexter. 1960. *Individual and Team Sports for Girls And Women.* Philadelphia: WB Saunders.

Village Voice. 1999. "Out in the open" 4 February: 174.

Washington Times. 1999. "Hingis, Mauresmo to meet in final" 28 January: B2.

Weekend Australian. 1999. "'Man' taunts fire up Mauresmo . . . Mauresmo out in the Open" 30–31 January: 63, 5.

Weir, T. 1999. "Revelation can often take a toll. Mauresmo faces scrutiny on, off the court," *USA Today* 4 February: 3C.

Wenner, L. A. 1993. "Intersections as dangerous places: Theories and role models in sport studies," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 17(2): 75–76.

White, P. & J. Gillett. 1994. "Reading the muscular body: A critical decoding of advertisements in "Flex" magazine." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11: 18–39.

Young, J. 1999. "Mauresmo creates a PR problem," *Washington Times* 5 February: B6.

Young, K. 1997. "Women, sport and physicality: Preliminary findings from a Canadian study," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32: 297–305.

Zimet, J. 1994. Confessions of a confirmed couch potato, or, the lamentations of a latent sports dyke. In *SportsDykes: Stories from On and Off the Field,* edited by S. F. Rogers, 111–117. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Zwerman, G. 1995. *Martina Navratilova.* New York: Chelsea House Publications.