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1. Introduction

- 1 The Super Bowl is, at its simplest, a game of American football played annually since 1967, in late January or early February, to decide the champion of the US National Football League, the NFL (this champion being known somewhat immodestly as the «World Champion»). However, it is simultaneously much more than that: as Schwarz puts it «the Super Bowl's significance far surpasses the outcome of the game» (1998: 87). Indeed, «Super Bowl Sunday» constitutes a major social event with its own highly complex «structure of feeling». The Super Bowl is not only the high point of the sporting year in the United States, it also the televisual and above all the advertising highlight of the year as well (Kellner, 2003: 23). Even in the multi-channel era of fragmenting audiences the Super Bowl currently attracts on average 80-90 million viewers, peaking at around 130-140+ million. The 2008 Super Bowl drew the second largest audience in US television history, with over 43% of the nation's TV screens and more than 65% of the viewing audience tuning in, while historically the event has become iconic, occupying 17 of the 20 highest ratings ever. As regards the commercials – of which as many as one hundred might be broadcast during the game – not only are these specifically produced for, and premiered at this event, they are also the subject of intense media interest in themselves with widespread reporting on their costs, competing tables of the most popular ads and so on. The bulk of the income generated by the Super Bowl for the broadcasting networks de-rives from the advertising space these sell to other companies. The following table illustrates the cost of a thirty-second ad and total advertising revenue between 2002 and 2007:

Year	Cost per 30 sec. (\$000)	Total ad revenue (\$millions)
2002	2,200	134.2
2003	2,150	130.1
2004	2,302	149.6
2005	2,400	158.4
2006	2,500	162.5
2007	2,385	151.5

Source: TNS Media Intelligence.

- 2 Following the momentary downturn in 2007, in 2008 the unit cost for a thirty second spot climbed again to a new high of \$2.7 million.
- 3 Despite the obvious importance of the Super Bowl as a phenomenon of American social, sporting, commercial and indeed political culture (Wenner, 1998: 3-5), it has been the object of relatively little sustained academic inter-est in the past. Previous studies – some of them very insightful – have tended to concentrate either on the mythical meanings of the *game* (Real, 1982) or on its place within American football more generally (Gannon *et al.*, 1994: 302-320) while making relatively little reference to either the commentary or the advertising, or alternatively attention has been focused on the advertising itself to the almost total exclusion of the game (Kanner, 2004). In this paper, which is based on a detailed analysis of all ten Super Bowls between 1999 and 2008, we will argue that despite the superficially fractal and fragmented nature of the televised Super Bowl as a visual, linguistic and even to some extent choreographic text, ads, commentary and indeed many other elements combine to produce an identifiable discursive formation. We will also pay particular attention to the important transformations which took place within this discursive formation during the period in question.
- 4 In his now classic analysis of the Super Bowl Michael Real summed up what he called the «structural values» of the game as follows:

American football is an aggressive, strictly regulated team game fought between males who use both violence and technology to win monopoly control of property for the economic gain of individuals within a nationalistic, entertainment context (1982: 238).
- 5 In our analysis we will show that these values are not so much in American football itself but are *ascribed to it* through the operation of the discursive formation within which it – or more precisely for our purposes the Super Bowl – takes place. Through a number of interlocking discourses delivered via different but complementary modalities of enunciation (commentary, ads and so on) these values and other suffuse not just the game itself, but all elements of the Super Bowl as a media spectacle.

2. Discourse and discursive formations

- 6 For the purposes of the present analysis we will be applying the understanding of discourse and discursive formations developed by French theorist Michel Foucault.

Central to our understanding is his characterisation of dis-courses and the broader formations to which they belong as «systems of dispersion» (2002: 41) which have no single author, but consist of statements emanating from a wide range of often anonymous sources. Far from being characterised by harmony or uniformity, they are sites where a constant struggle for dominance takes place – they are «a space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described» (2002: 173). For Foucault, when analysing such formations we must:

characterize and individualize ... the coexistence of these dispersed and heterogeneous statements; the system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend upon one another, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement and replacement (2002: 37-8).

- 7 Despite these internal oppositions and dissensions, what binds a discursive formation together and makes it possible to individuate one from another are its «regularities», above all its «rules of formation» which govern the objects, modes of enunciation, concepts and thematic choices of the whole. These rules constitute, in Foucault's words, «conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification and disappearance) in a given discursive division» (2002: 42).
- 8 For Foucault such analyses can never be merely textual in nature. On the contrary, such an approach:
 - also reveals relations between discursive formations and non-discursive do-mains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes) ... it seeks to define specific forms of articulation (2002: 179-180).
- 9 The televised version of the Super Bowl as discursive formation is remarkably complex, consisting not only of the game commentary and the ads, but also the many elements which make this media event – lasting on average some seven hours – unique: the pre-game show, the national anthem, the half-time show, the sideline interviews, the on-screen graphics. It is a place where a sporting event, an advertising event and a music industry event meet and overlap and also maintain now long-established relationships with the entertainment industry more generally and with the military, and also on occasions the world of politics. This article does not offer an exhaustive list of all the discourses which participate in this formation. We ourselves have identified others – relating, for example, to sporting and cultural history or to property rights – which are not covered here. We have chosen, rather, to focus strategically on those most directly related to the war-play dialectic.

3. The televised super bowl as discursive formation

- 10 The official discursive framework of the televised version of the Super Bowl might be termed «America at play». In this context «America at play» means to all intents and purposes «private America» – in other words private individuals (fans) and private enterprise – but this private play also takes place under the discrete but watchful eye of the state.
- 11 As there was a notable albeit temporary change in the Super Bowl – not so much in the content of the discursive field as in what, following Greimas, we might call its actantial structure (1987: 107-110): in other words, which actors in the discourse perform which roles on the basis of which competences – following the attacks of 11 September 2001,

we will divide our analysis into two time frames. The first section will analyse those elements which have remained stable throughout the period analysed (1999-2008). The second will concentrate more specifically on the changes which were visible from 2002 on and discuss to what extent they were time-limited responses to a specific situation and/or to what extent they have managed to establish themselves as more permanent elements of the field.

3.1. The overarching paradigm: america at play

3.1.1. Fun

- 12 The framing discourse of the Super Bowl as media event is one of excitement and fun. We must never lose sight of the fact that the bulk of the audience – both the dedicated sports fans and the more «casual» audience which such events invariably attract – tune in primarily for the thrills of the game, or attend «Super Bowl parties» in homes and at establishments as a social event. Such a conclusion can be easily drawn from the fact that if, for any of a wide gamut of reasons, the sporting context proves to be less than gripping the viewers invariably drift away before the final quarter, much to the annoyance no doubt of those corporate interests who have paid substantial figures for advertisements in the latter stages of the game. The excitement is delivered not only by the game and the accompanying commentary and analysis and the often remarkable technology utilized in the telecast, the discourse of fun also suffuses large swathes of the advertising. A number of the ads are in fact anti-ads (Goldman, 1992: 155-163), poking fun at themselves, at sport and even at the concept of advertising in general, thereby establishing a humorous complicity with the viewer. This discourse of fun has now become institutionalised with viewers with people-meters voting for their favourite ads (they are occasionally shown on screen during the broadcast), websites likewise inviting votes along the same lines, and the publishing of tables of most-voted-for ads in a number of outlets on the following day. In 2005 an ad for FedEx even parodied the «ten items» needed to come top of this poll, the list including «a celebrity» (Burt Reynolds), a «cute kid» and «attractive females».

3.1.2. Affluence

- 13 The discourse of affluence is everywhere. In the 2003 Super Bowl, nearly half a minute was devoted by the commentators to the amount of money Tampa Bay paid to Oakland for coach Bill Johnson, a dialogue accompanied by a graphic emphasising the costs involved and interspersed with shots of the Oakland management. The ads overwhelmingly feature young men with high levels of discretionary income which they are able to spend freely not only on low-cost items such as beer and pizza but also on entertainment, personal grooming, fashion, cars, and investments, with Visa, Mastercard or American Express always on hand to help out if required. Affluence is presented as the key to a fun-loving lifestyle, with even the costs of the ads being parodied self-referentially in the modality of fun. Thus a 2000 ad for internet company e-trade showed an old hillbilly and his son sitting singing with a monkey dancing between them on an oil drum. After around twenty seconds of this the following words appeared on screen: «Well, we've just wasted 2 billion [sic] bucks. What are you doing with your money?» In 2005 Fox announced that dedicating a 30-second slot of potential advertising time to a trailer for its own series 24 had just cost it \$2.4 million in

advertising revenue, but that it was «worth every penny». Even the cost of game sponsorship can be parodied in this way. In the dialogue on Bill Johnston mentioned above, commentator Al Michaels remarked that the Tampa Bay owners obviously didn't find Johnson on employee recruitment website monster.com, one of the sponsors of the game.

3.1.3. Community

- 14 The discourse of community is one of the most complex of the Super Bowl and emerges in different forms and at different levels. The simplest level is that of the team, with the importance of teamwork being routinely stressed not only by commentators and coaches, but also by the players themselves in the short statements they make before each march. This community can acquire almost religious overtones. When Blaine Bishop was injured during the 2000 game all the players – from both teams – were described as a «fraternity» by the commentator who informed viewers that in cases like this they all «prayed for one of our fallen friends, fallen gladiators». But the team also provides a linkage to a hugely powerful discourse of family which also permeates many of the ads. For example when the player Eugene Robinson was arrested for soliciting a prostitute before the game in 1999 – something never referred to during the telecast itself, since it would be in serious breach of its «rules of formation» – the coach was quoted as saying «One thing we are, we are family. That means unconditional love». Beyond this the teams are often presented as part of both their local and a wider national community. In all the games analysed the NFL ran its own ads in conjunction with consolidated charity United Way stressing the community activism of the players, showing them working with, for example, young children, and presenting football as the «People's Game». This was foregrounded in 2008 when the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award was presented to Jason Taylor of the Miami Dolphins for his «community service».
- 15 The crowning moment of the national-community discourse is, of course, the singing of the national anthem, always preceded by the phrase «And now, to honour America», always sung by a different (and usually noted) performer or choir (and on occasions signed for the deaf). But in addition the national community is always present, either by implication or through express statement, in many of the ads. A 1999 ad for GTE Wireless American Choice cell phone service showed a truck driving through a number of different states removing the state frontier signs, and had as its tag line «the United State of America». These various levels of community provide the defensive bulwarks within which the fun-loving lifestyle takes place, and link the enjoyment-seeking individual to broader civic and patriotic values.

3.1.4. Competition, opportunity and enterprise

- 16 This is yet another all-pervasive discourse. The game itself is of course fiercely competitive,¹ and the hegemony of «the American Dream» is ever present. Players are often singled out for rags-to-riches stories – in 2000 both Kurt Warner and Blaine Bishop were the recipients of this discourse, the latter being described as a young man from a single-parent environment (no mention, however, of his blackness) – while the New York Giants' struggle from mediocrity in 2006 to World Champions in 2008 was also presented as the story of «the Dream». Former players also take advantage of

sideline interviews to announce the launch of their new businesses. However, it is present above all in the ads, which assure viewers that «opportunity has a new address» (kforce.com) or promise them «Work. Life. Opportunities» (monster.com). The top-rated ad of 2008 was a reaffirmation of «the American Dream» as a rejected Clydesdale horse worked hard to qualify himself to be a member of the Budweiser Clydesdale team. For those looking to set up their own company Mail Boxes Etc offers help to the small businessman, while IT support of a range of kinds is available from e-trade, Enterprise Relation Software or Microsoft e-business. Inside the competitive world of business promotion can be assured by using the services of FedEx or careerbuilder.com, one of the sponsors of the 2005 game. For those at the top of the tree there is always the Wall Street Journal or help with takeovers and mergers provided by First Union. A highly complex ad screened by this company in 1999 showed a cityscape changing in scenes strongly reminiscent of the 1998 movie *Dark City* accompanied by the following spoken text:

In the financial world nothing is permanent but change. The landscape is constantly shifting. Every day companies are downsizing, seeking the right merger, looking for acquisitions that make sense. Even deceptively simple corrections like debt restructuring can take months and demand a variety of financial products. Today companies searching for solutions in a changing world are finding them in a place of stability and experience. Come to the financial mountain called First Union, or if you prefer the mountain will come to you.

- 17 Major investment brokers like Charles Schwab – «when we created a smarter kind of investment firm we created a smarter kind of investor» – have been among the broadcast’s main sponsors and their ads have had an extremely high profile. This kind of advertising is unthinkable in televised football coverage in Europe where much sports reporting is infused with deep mistrust at the way in which Big Business is vitiating what was once considered a working-class sport. While the NFL profiles itself as the «People’s Game» in the American sense of «We the People»² (in other words, «all of us»), European soccer is inserted in a discourse of the «people’s game» (in small letters) where the «people» are understood broadly as the working class.

3.1.5. Celebrity

- 18 In the meritocratic mythology of the Super Bowl, celebrity belongs uniquely to the «achieved» rather than «ascribed» (lineage) or «attributed» (manufactured) category (Rojek, 2001: 17-18). The discourse of celebrity is one of the most powerful technical mechanisms through which the game, the commentary, the ads and the world of stardom more generally are pulled together at a textual level. Former players are invited to be present at the coin toss before every game, and the commentary team invariably includes at least one former player. In 2006, the pre-game ceremony was a tribute to every player chosen as «Most Valuable Player» in all previous Super Bowls, with each player taking his turn to walk onto the field to thunderous applause. Celebrities are frequently picked out in the crowd (in 1999 Calista Flockhart, spotted in the stands, was referred to by the commentators as Ali McBeal, while in 2008 Pamela Anderson was the object of considerable attention). The ads likewise feature a heavy concentration of both film and television stars. Thus in 1999 Jerry Seinfeld appeared in an ad for American Express, in 2000 Christopher Reeves featured in an ad for Nuveen Investments and Ringo Starr in another for Schwab Investments, while in 2002 Danny De Vito (in puppet form!) «starred» in an ad for Lipton Tea.

19 But the boundaries between game, commentary, ads and even other media products frequently dissolve. Both players and the coaches – as well as stars from other sports – can appear in adverts, both for products and for films: in 2007 Payton Manning appeared both on the field and in the ads, extending his celebrity-hood into salesmanship. Even the commentators can be pressed into duty: in 1999 a trailer for the episode of *The Simpsons* which was to immediately follow the Super Bowl announced that game commentators John Madden and Pat Summerall would appear in that episode in cartoon form. In 2000 a trailer for *Gladiator* intercut shots of Russell Crowe fighting in the Coliseum with shots of a football game. The players are regularly presented during the game in a visual style which has deliberate sci-fi overtones (Brookes, 2002: 92). This particular technique would reach its peak in 2003 when, in a proleptic vision fusing sport, Hollywood and politics, soon- -to-be Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger appeared in a tribute to *Terminator 2* featuring a large number of the players presented as human machines.

3.1.6. The protective shield of the state

- 20 The discourse of (private) «America at play» is, of course, incompatible with an obvious presence of the state. The sitting president is seldom there in person, and not even the events of September 11 enticed George W. Bush to attend the 2002 Super Bowl. But the political arm of the state is always present, in however brief or understated a manner. In 1999 ex-president Jimmy Carter was picked out sitting in the stands, while (a momentary pre-recorded shot of) Bill Clinton appeared briefly in the introduction to the 2000 game, and the now traditional post-game phone-call from the incumbent President to the winning team also lies within this frame.
- 21 The presence of the military arm of the state is always much more prominent, with the singing of the national anthem invariably accompanied by members of the Armed Forces. Perhaps its most obvious expression is the brief – but impressive – fly-past by the military following the national anthem, while military aircraft also patrol a «no-fly» zone around the game site. Such security measures were specifically mentioned by the commentators in 2005, and popular press stories about Super Sunday security in the weeks leading up to game day are numerous. The state is therefore present within a dis-course of protection and care: the «America» constructed by the Super Bowl is too precious to be left unguarded.

3.2. Troublesome discourses

22 Both the discourse of race and the discourse of gender have proved troublesome for the Super Bowl in the first decade of the twenty-first century, though with differing trajectories. Their troublesomeness derives from the penetration of this discursive formation by discourses from elsewhere which threaten in different ways to upset its framing discourse of community.

3.2.1. Gender

23 The Super Bowl itself is an overwhelmingly masculine event, even though recent figures show that an increasing number of female viewers are watching: over 40% of the audience in the last four years. Traditionally all allowable gender behaviour –

allowable, that is, within the limits of its «rules of formation» – has adhered, following a widespread pattern in elite sport (Creedon, 1994: 5; Duncan and Messner, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994) to an overwhelmingly patriarchal norm. The role of women has been generally limited to the obligation to look good, to provide (often unseen) moral support to men and to give birth to future generations of Americans.

- 24 During coverage of the game itself the presence of women is limited to three roles: they can appear as cheer leaders, occasionally as trackside reporters, or at key moments in the game players' wives/girlfriends might be singled out in the crowd. They are quite literally «on the sidelines». Women are never employed as play-by-play announcers or «colour» commentators. In the adverts women have long been more likely to appear either as sexy adjuncts to men or as providers of unseen moral structure to men's lives. Of these roles, women as «sexy» continues to constitute by far the most common presentation, with the number of ads coming under this heading being simply too large to itemise here, and this presentation is also absorbed into the discourse of fun. In 1999 a spot for Victoria's Secret fashion show, featuring a succession of scantily clad supermodels, displayed the following words on screen (the references are to football teams): «The Broncos won't be there. The Falcons won't be there. You won't care. Victoria's Secret fashion show. Live in 72 hours. ONLY on the World Wide Web». Victoria's Secret returned to the 2008 Super Bowl, paying a premium (estimated at \$3 million) to get their ad placed in a prominent position. The ad, which featured a woman demurely posed in underwear, was ranked near the middle by USA Today raters, while the «Under Armor» ad which featured women (and men) in displays of power and fitness was ranked near the bottom.
- 25 The perpetuation of the American citizenry could be found, for example, in a 2002 ad for mlife (a wireless telecommunication company) featuring numerous shots of navels followed by a woman giving birth, the cutting of the umbilical cord proving that «we are meant to lead a wireless life». In 1999 an ad for the Oxygen website – «A new voice. For women, by women» – featured a maternity ward full of baby girls throwing their pink bonnets out of their cribs. Women, in short, though strictly peripheral to the game itself, ensure the continuation of the American national community of which it is a constituent part.
- 26 None the less, transformation is an essential part of the life of any discursive formation. The much commented-on Dove ads of 2007 introduced a different focus on women, specifically moving away from a focus on «beauty» and celebrating their difference and even «ordinariness», while the cheerleaders have slowly receded into visual distance. Needless to say, this change itself has since been the object of attempts at incorporation. In 2008, a woman presented as grossly unattractive proved mysteriously attractive to handsome men because (the audience discovers) she uses oil from Planters cashews as her perfume.

3.2.2. Race

- 27 The currently dominant official discourse of race in relation to sport in the Western World is that there is no discourse of race: race is emphatically a non-issue, with only sporting skills and competences available for comment. Thus wherever we look – whether in the Olympics, World Cup football, tennis or wherever – race is invisible as an issue and attempts to breach this discursive barrier – as in the Black Panther salute at the 1968 Olympics – or the occasional gaffe by a commentator³ attract outraged

disapproval and usually result in disqualification, dismissal or other material sanctions. The Super Bowl is no exception, and despite the high number of black players involved their «blackness» is never mentioned: it is vetoed by the «rules of formation». And yet here also change can be detected. Deviations have occurred when a race-related storyline dominates media coverage surrounding the event to such an extent that it cannot be ignored. This was the case in 2007 with the first head-to-head competition between two black head coaches, and to a lesser extent in 2008 with the first ever African-American referee. Though both cases were mentioned by the commentators – in itself unusual – this was done in the most minimal of terms.

- 28 But what does this invisibility of colour actually mean? For whites in general it is without consequence since, as Dyer powerfully argues, the «invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white (which is to say dominant) discourse is of a piece with its ubiquity» (1997: 3). It is as obvious – and therefore beyond comment – as their relative privilege. For blacks and others, however, the invisibility of colour means not the absence of racial position, but the *denial* of race and the prejudices and discriminations which accompany it. When race must emerge within the discursive formation of the Super Bowl it is dissolved into the discourse of community, as when the two black head coaches in 2007 was continually referenced in terms of their friendship or when players (of both colours) are shown visiting hospital wards or helping build homes.

3.3. The aftermath of September 11: America at war

- 29 Super Bowl 2002 – delayed by a full week – took place just under five months after the September 11 attacks in a period of heightened ideological struggle in the United States which had profound effects on the political and therefore the discursive landscape of American society as a whole. All areas of American life were affected by this struggle and Super Bowl XXXVI – like the Salt Lake Winter Olympics which would follow it a few weeks later (Kellner, 2003: 24-5) – was no exception.
- 30 Our analysis of television coverage of Super Bowl 2002 (provided on this occasion by the Fox network) suggests that while the main elements of the discursive formation remained essentially unchanged, a number of structural realignments did indeed take place. The most striking differences related to the discourses of community (in particular the national community) and the role of the state. The first clear indication of this change occurred when the New England Patriots chose to enter the stadium as a team rather than as named individuals – as had been normal prior to that – stressing that what was important was above all the group (the changed symbolism was commented on at a number of points during the game). A few minutes later when the national anthem was being sung by Mariah Carey in the presence of members of the crew of USS Cole, the American Marine Corps and the New York City police and fire departments, sport, history, politics and military fused in a single moment. As the camera focused in on the American flag a model of the famous Iwo Jima sculpture in Washington DC (celebrating a World War II American victory in Japan) was superimposed on the screen. No doubt this sculpture was chosen not just for its symbolism of victory in battle, but also because it had been linked by the American media with the action of the fire fighters raising a similar flag over the ruins of the Twin Towers (McKinley and Simonet, 2003), that flag itself being reserved for the

international audience of the Winter Olympics where it was paraded during the opening ceremony.

- 31 A second highly explicit reproduction of this discourse took place during the first quarter when the former Mayor of New York Rudi Giuliani appeared in an ad addressing the viewer. The text of the ad (a «tribute made possible by monster.com») went as follows:

On September 11 we as Americans were attacked because of our beliefs. The heroism of our fire fighters, police officers and emergency workers inspired an entire nation who immediately responded with their love and support. As a New Yorker I am very proud of the strength and resolve of all of our people and so grateful for all the help we received. Now more than ever we are one nation. For all New Yorkers I just want to say thank you America.

- 32 When Mr. Giuliani was later picked out in the crowd the following ex-change between the commentators – who would normally avoid any state-ment which might be in any way interpreted as «political» – took place:

What a whale of a job that guy did, Rudi Giuliani, the ex-Mayor of New York. Mayor Giuliani, when someone had to step up and everyone needed him, he stepped up big time.

- 33 During the half-time show, as U2 sang on stage, a list appeared behind them itemising the names of all the people who had perished in the Twin Towers attack. Later the three brothers of the player Joe Andruzzi were also picked out in the crowd and viewers were informed on two occasions that they were all fire fighters.

- 34 The coin toss for this particular game was attended by George Bush Sr. (introduced as «World War II hero and the forty-first president of the United States»), as transparent a double for his son as the Iwo Jima flag had been for the flag of the Twin Towers. In addition, at the end of each quarter viewers saw live images beamed from Afghanistan featuring «our boys in Kandahar»

- 35 – a variation on the images sometimes shown of viewers pressing on their people meters to vote for their favourite ad. During half-time viewers were shown live footage of American troops in Afghanistan watching the game, while the following exchange took place between the reporter in Kandahar and the commentary team:

Reporter: They [the troops] want to see the winning team [visiting them] here in Afghanistan and at the very least bring the cheerleaders. Pat Summerall: What a wholesome thought.

- 36 A further four spots featured various players – who under normal circumstances would talk only of their game strategy – addressing the Armed Forces in grateful tones. These spots also invariably drew some kind of response from the commentators:

Grant Winstrom: We know that many of you serving our country overseas right now are watching the Super Bowl on the American Forces Network. So from all of us in the NFL a special hello and thanks to all of you. Pat Summerall: And thanks to you from us as well.

Ty Law: Our entire team is proud of the United States Armed Forces and what you do for our country every day. John Madden: Ty Law is even more proud of the Patriots, the troops and himself.

Orlando Pace: I'm proud to be part of Super Bowl XXXVI and I'm proud to be an American. I'm especially proud of the men and women who fight for our free-dom every day. Thanks for your commitment and dedication. Pat Summerall: A lot of us join you in being proud to be American.

Joe Andruzzi: On behalf of my team mates and the fellow NFL players we thank the men and women of the United States military for all that you do to protect our way of life. We salute you. Pat Summerall: We can salute the fire fighters and the policemen of our country also.

- 37 Even in the ads the question of «Americanness» enjoyed a heightened presence. Thus monster.com, which had previously simply promised that «there's a better job out there», now promised «great jobs for great Americans». An ad for Bud featuring the traditional Clydesdales showed them kneeling in front of the Statue of Liberty. There was even a sense of menace. An ad for Cadillac suggested that «the legendary bloodline is about to boil». A trailer for *Blade II* showed Wesley Snipes – described as fighting «a new kind of terror» – shouting at a group of assailants «You do not know who you are messing with». Two ads in the third and fourth quarters by the Office of National Drug Control Policy warned young Americans that money they spent on drugs could well end up funding terrorist activities of all kinds. The text of the second of these, featuring a series of young people speaking to camera, specifically sought to define the limits of «fun»:

I helped murder families in Colombia.
It was just innocent fun.
I helped kidnap people's dads.
Hey, some harmless fun.
I helped kids learn how to kill.
I was just having fun, you know.
I helped kill policemen.
I was just having fun.
I helped a bomber get a fake passport.
All the kids do it.
I helped kill a judge.
I helped blow up buildings.
My life, my body.
Drug money supports terror.
If you buy drugs you might too.
It's not like I was hurting anybody else.

- 38 What must be stressed here, however, is that although there is clearly a heightened sense of national unity and of vigilance and armed response in the face of threat, this has been achieved with great economy of means. *All* the resources needed to achieve this effect were already present in the discursive formation of the Super Bowl as built up in the preceding years, and indeed some of them – Super Bowl players had visited American troops in Vietnam in the nineteen-seventies, there were Gulf War floats at Super Bowl XXV in 1991 – had been essayed, albeit in less dramatic form, before. All that was required was minor changes in terms of personnel and vocabulary. Despite the immediately visible change in texture, all the rules of formation as previously existing remained absolutely intact as the ideological was presented using the discursive resources – above all those of national community and the protective shield of the state – already present.
- 39 Some of these features remained in evidence in subsequent years, though at a somewhat more muted level. Thus several later Super Bowl telecasts included live shots of soldiers watching in the Middle East, and in 2005, against the background of a rapidly deteriorating situation in Iraq, kick-off was preceded by a seven-minute celebration of the end of World War Two which the actor Michael Douglas described in the following terms:

- 40 World War Two [was] a war in which nothing less than our destiny as a people was at stake, but in the cause of freedom a generations of Americans united in sacrifice and fought with honour, and in saving our democracy they saved our future.
- 41 This commemoration was attended by former presidents Clinton and Bush Sr., featured the famous photograph of Iwo Jima by Joe Rosenthal on which the Washington DC sculpture is based, and showed shots of American soldiers «defending our country» in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as in... Europe (Germany), and also troops in South East Asia helping victims of the tsunami. In the same year Anheuser-Busch (makers of Budweiser) produced the emotion-provoking ad «Applause» in which a busy airport is brought to its feet applauding a squad of returning soldiers. This ad was so evocative in nature that an (unknowing) audience in China insisted it must have been produced by the U.S. government exhorting citizens to appreciate the sacrifice of soldiers.
- 42 Since 2005, however, a very noticeable change has taken place in the distribution of the discursive field, with the discourse of «America at war» disappearing almost entirely, to be replaced by a return to «America at play». In 2006 and 2007 there were no references to, or shots of, troops stationed abroad – though they made an incredibly brief return (less than one second) in 2008 under Fox – and no rhetoric of a glorious military past. In their own way, therefore, the last ten Super Bowls as discursive formations have revealed the changing relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive, much as Foucault would have predicted. While «America at War» emerged in response to a precise ideological push, with the deterioration of support for the war in Iraq «America at play» has reasserted itself within the context of fun and the hegemony of «the American Dream».

4. Conclusion

- 43 While tensions of various kinds are clear enough within the mediated Super Bowl, in the representation of women, for example, or of race, or in clashes between the sporting and the advertising agendas – more than one key sporting moment has been «lost» because the ads have overrun (Cal-houn, 1986: 11) – the rules of formation involve the absolute exclusion of a specific range of dissonant voices from the broadcast itself: sexual misbehaviour can neither be seen nor even discussed, the possibility of the physical (or mental) exploitation of the players is never addressed, the prohibitive cost of the event for the fans is seldom raised, party-political advocacy is banned, and so on. The insistence on national community likewise pre-empts any reference to unequal relationships with the «People's Game». In exceptional cases the networks will not hesitate to use their institutional power to fore-close unwanted expression. A striking example of this kind of censure took place in 2004 when CBS turned down a request for ad time by moveon.org, which wanted to run anti-Bush ads, quoting its policy of not allowing advocacy advertising (a statement ridiculed by many since the same broadcast included anti-drug ads produced by the White House).
- 44 It is not, of course, and never can be one-way traffic. A number of authors have analysed the Super Bowl in terms of ritual (Real, 1982; Gannon et al., 1994), but, while elements of ritual can be clearly discerned, what distances media event from ritual in the classic sense is the ability of the audience to simply opt out. Beyond that, no discourse or discursive formation simply acts as a conveyor belt where hegemonic values are passed on without resistance to a passive population. As Foucault argues

they are sites of dissension, and therefore of resistance and opposition to as well as reproduction of dominant views. All discursive interventions carry with them the risk of failure or appropriation or of simply being ignored, but there can be little doubt that the institutional structures of the Super Bowl as a media event give the organisers a significant advantage in the discursive and ideological stakes... so long as the game is entertaining, otherwise the viewers drift away. Not all, of course, is discourse.

- 45 A study such as the present cannot in itself grasp the varying extents to which the massive audiences of the Super Bowl do or do not consent to the image of America they are quite literally being «sold», but the simple fact that the audience drifts away if the game itself is not exciting suggests that their agenda may not always coincide perfectly with those of the other actors (media, economic, political) involved. While financial ownership of the Super Bowl is clear – the NFL expressly asserts its copyright during every game – as far as the meanings generated by the event are concerned the Super Bowl, like American Football more generally, «is no more fully ‘owned’ today than it was at the turn of the [nineteenth] century ... the networks cannot control the meanings fans find in the game» (Oriard, 1993: 281-2). Other tensions are likewise apparent. Towards half time in 2005 commentator Terry Bradshaw specifically referred to the fact that «over the past few years people say, well, it’s become such a corporate event it takes a lot of the emotion out of the stadium», while the over-played irony of many of the ads suggests a somewhat nervy relationship between defensive advertisers and street-wise consumers (Goldman, 1992: 227). Whatever the case, though, what seems certain is that the constant crowding out of the discursive space in the Super Bowl provides the foundations for highly targeted responses in moments of hegemonic crisis, for a smooth transition when needed from «America at play» to «America at war». The complex development of the Super Bowl as a media event over a long period has set in place a wide and growing range of mechanisms – the first presidential phone-call was in 1981, the first Air Force fly-past in 1991, and we can no doubt expect further developments in the future – whereby punctures, large and small, in the hegemonic fabric can be at least discursively repaired and support for specific policies marshalled through ideological work done by more or less anonymous agents in a discursive formation already firmly embedded in the national culture. The Super Bowl is, therefore, a formation where undoubted pleasure and fun co-exist with the ever-present potential to transform the event from a site of celebration of mythical American values to one enabling the promotion of highly material «patriotic» causes.

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NOTES

1. NFL coach Vince Lombardi, after whom the Super Bowl trophy is named, is reputed to have said, in a phrase which is now a well-established element of this discourse, that «Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing» (Wray, 2001: 70-71).
2. These are the first words of the American Constitution.
3. In April 2004 British football commentator Ron Atkinson was sacked by ITV when, after a match between Chelsea and Monaco, he described Chelsea's black French player Marcel Dessailly as a «lazy nigger», little knowing that his comments were still being broadcast in a number of Arab countries.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyses the last ten Super Bowls (1999-2008) and the image they present of America as a society characterised by fun, opportunity and enterprise, all carried out under the protection of the state and military. It addresses the troublesome place of both race and gender within this configuration, and pays particular attention to the changes which took place in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks responding to the motif of «America at war», changes which would themselves be affected by the gradual loss of social support for the war in Iraq.

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Palavras-chave: Este artigo analisa as dez últimas edições da Super Bowl (1999- -2008) e a imagem que apresentam dos Estados Unidos como país caracterizado por divertimento, oportunidade e iniciativa privada, tudo isto levado a cabo sob a protecção do Estado e das Forças Armadas. Examina o papel incómodo desempenhado tanto pela raça como pelo género dentro desta configuração, e presta uma atenção particular às transformações que se produziram depois dos atentados terroristas do onze de Setembro de 2001, transformações elas mesmas afectadas pela perda paulatina de apoio social à guerra no Iraque. Super Bowl, discurso, raça, género, guerra

Keywords: Super Bowl, discourse, race, gender, war

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