Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Towards a feminist playology: social sport studies and the limits of critique

Heuvel, N.A.E. van den

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Chapter 3

Understanding Sacrifice in terms of Play

3.1 Introduction and central research question

The data gathered in this study has shown that the current models that we find in social sport studies are not sufficient. Recall that we concluded in chapter 2 that in order to do justice to the experiences of the elite women's football players, we cannot rely on the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist theoretical frameworks alone, but must complement these critiques with a theoretical framework capable of making sense of the experience of sacrifice as a key structure of the experiences of the elite women's football players. Accordingly, we must now further specify the central question this research poses. The central question this research poses is:

How should we conceptualize the experiences of the elite women's football players in order to do justice to the experience of sacrifice that always accompanies it?

The analysis of our data already pushes us in the direction of an answer. To be more precise, it already provides us with the requirements our conceptualisation should meet in order to answer the central research question. Recall that we argued that the data that emerged from the interviews fall into three irreducible themes: gender policing, high performance and sacrifice. The irreducibility of sacrifice consists in the fact that it cannot be reduced to either gender, labour conditions or identity-formation. More generally, we argued that the references to sacrifice cannot be reduced to the domain of real-life objective values. This contrasts with the view upheld by the existing frameworks that we find in the field of social sport studies, according to which sacrifices refer to rivalries between real-life objective values. We argued on the other hand that women's football players do not make sacrifices of the real world for the sake of the real world, but for the sake of their irreducible yet inarticulable commitment to football.

The implication of this is first of all that the experience of sacrifice must be understood as an experience of the subject's sovereignty. That is, the players seem to choose to sacrifice real-world values to playing the game for no particular reason identifiable from the point of view of real-world priorities. In short, they do so freely. The second implication is that the values of (football) play, to which real-world values are temporarily subjected (Huizinga, 1980, p. 9), do not need to justify themselves in other terms than their own, in particular not in terms of real-world values.

When we take these considerations into account, we must conclude that what we need is a theory that accommodates an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is: (i) not reliant on power/power-discourse, as the experiences of sacrifice can't be explained in terms of modes of subjection; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, but neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse, for if this were the case, it could be described in terms of real-life objective values; (iii) incommensurable in value, as it can't be understood as a

trade-off with real-world values; (iv) intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, as it cannot derive its meaning from real-life objective values.

In this chapter I shall develop each of these four requirements. However, as concluded in chapter 2, it is not only our task to make sense of the references to sacrifice in the data, but eventually to establish a theoretical account that allows us to understand the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' as being unified, for the women's football players always experience all three in conjunction with one another. Thus, what we need is a theoretical framework that allows us to develop the above listed four requirements *in a way congruent with* the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

In this chapter I shall argue that the solution lies in combining two distinct, yet related theoretical frameworks. Perhaps unsurprisingly we must first of all consider the an-economic theory of sacrifice which we find in the work of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, including Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris and most notably Georges Bataille. Second, and perhaps more surprisingly, we must consider the pre-rational theory of play which we find in the works of, amongst others, Eugen Fink, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Johan Huizinga.

As I shall argue in section 2 of this chapter, the an-economic theory of sacrifice will allow us to meet the following requirements: (i) it is not reliant on power/power-discourse; (ii) it pertains to the subject as such, but neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse; (iii) it accounts for values that are incommensurable with those of the real world. Of key importance in this framework is Bataille's radicalization of Mauss's theory of the gift. For Bataille, gifts or sacrifices are 'sovereign' moments of non-production that negate the demands of utility and subservience and induce within the subject an experience which is not that of the coherent subject of calculative or objectivist reason, but rather an experience of unadulterated freedom. More specifically, I shall argue that Bataille allows us to understand that sacrifices are irreducible experiences that free sacrificers from normative monism (that is: the view that all values belong on one unified scale).

While Bataille allows us to meet the first three requirements that we delineated, I shall subsequently argue that he does not allow us to meet the fourth requirement, 'playing should be accounted for as intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants' nor the congruence criteria, according to which we must theorize the experience of sacrifice in a way congruent with the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing'. By positing the logic of excess as the other pole of scarcity, Bataille's account maintains a conceptual dependence of abundance and excess on their opposite. Accordingly, Bataille would demand that we posit the experience of 'sacrifice' as the other side of the experience of 'high performance', or 'gender policing.' This would entail the failure of both the fourth requirement and the congruence criterion outlined above. Hence, I shall conclude in section 1 of this chapter that we are in need of a theoretical model that allows us to theorize the experience of sacrifice in the footsteps of Bataille's thesis of irreducibility, but that at the

same time does not assume that that which is not ordered by calculative reason, remains conceptually dependent on calculative reason.

Here we arrive at the second theoretical framework we must consider, namely the so-called "pre-rational theory of play" (Spariosu, 1989), which we find in the work of, amongst others, Fink, Gadamer and Huizinga. Following Spariosu, we call their account pre-rational as they direct our attention to a notion of experience that precedes the distinction between irrationality and rationality. In section 3 of this chapter, I shall argue that these theorists of play offer us a concept of experience—the experience of play—which both temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains operative in the dominant reality, yet should not be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, according to the pre-rational philosophy of play, the distinction between the rational and the irrational—or in terms of the language of play, the playful and the serious—is only a secondary or historical phenomenon. In 'reality', they argue, playfulness and seriousness are united. Accordingly, I shall argue that the pre-rational theory of play offers us the theoretical framework needed to conceptualize the experience of sacrifice. More precisely I shall argue that an understanding of the experience of sacrifice in terms of play covers both the four requirements we outlined above and the congruence requirement. Subsequently, I shall conclude that the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us: (i) adequate theoretical tools to theorize the experience of sacrifice by way of the establishment of the five requirements such as listed above; (ii) an adequate model to theorize the experience of 'sacrifice' as united with the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

Two notes must be made with regard to our adherence to the theory of play. First, speaking about 'the pre-rational philosophy of play' may wrongly suggest the existence of an already fully established friction-free framework that can be summarised and put to work for the task of this thesis. This is far from being the case. As in any field of study, there exist vast differences between the diverse theorists of play. However, as the object of this thesis is the establishment of a theoretical account that can do justice to the experiences of the elite women's football players and not a scholarly debate about the theory of play as such, the differences between these authors, where they don't affect their applicability to the experience of women footballers, will be left aside.

Second, to the best of my knowledge, theorizing sacrifice in terms of the pre-rational philosophy of play is an innovation in the field of social sport studies. Within the existing (sports) literature few examples can be found that argue for the importance of the pre-rational philosophy of play (see for instance in the context of the relationship between skill and spontaneity: Howe, 2007, and in the context of a discussion about the nature of sports: Novak, 1976; Feezell, 2004). However the broad majority of those few social sport studies that engage with the philosophy of play subsume play under the study of objective reality, thereby reducing and treating it as any other object in the world (see for instance: Brown,

2009). Concretely, this means that instead of play, these studies are engaged in the study of games (see: Suits, 1977, 2005).

This study distinguishes itself from game scholarship and its corollaries that regard play as an objective process that can be measured and manipulated. Rather we understand play as a subjective and meaningful way of relating to and experiencing the world.[11] Thus, what my theoretical account of play offers is a theorization of play as a key structure of experience that should be understood as a proper, independent and irreducible object of philosophical inquiry.

3.2 Sacrifices beyond the logic of the gift

3.2.1. Sacrifices and abundancy

Historically most theories of sacrifice have been based on an economy of debts and credits in which one gets a return on one's sacrificial investment (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). In general, within this economic framework sacrifices are understood as necessary passages through suffering or even death on the way to a moment of transcendent reward, whereby the latter is said to overcome, negate or cancel out the negative aspects of sacrifice. This economic understanding of sacrifice played an important role in sociological theory at the turn of the twentieth century (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). For instance in Max Weber's exploration of the role asceticism plays in the relationship between religion and economic and social life in modern culture in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and in Simmel's theory of economic exchange *Philosophy of Money* (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). Exemplary here is also the position of Marx, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Within life as characterised by scarcity, for Marx every decision we make involves a concomitant sacrifice. For our purposes, this economic understanding of sacrifice does not suffice, as the experiences of the elite women's football players, as reflected on by themselves, indicate that they do not think their sacrifices are performed for the sake of any calculative motives.

Importantly for our study, there is also a tradition of thought about sacrifice that challenges the economic model by positioning sacrifice within the non-instrumental realm. Here sacrifices are considered independently of calculation. They are an-economical sacrifices, that is sacrifices for nothing, or for no reason or goal. Paradigmatic here are the works of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, which includes Caillois, Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille. In line with the view that we find in the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist social sports studies paradigms, these authors argue that a society organized around utility or rational production is necessarily an oppressive one (Richman, 2003, p. 9). In such a society all possible activities and both non-human and human actors are evaluated in terms of costs and benefits, thereby reducing them to their usefulness:

11 For recent discussions of the philosophy of play, including from a phenomenological perspective, see for instance the volume edited by Ryall et al (Ryall, Russell, & Maclean, 2013).

'[E]each man is worth what he produces; in other words, he stops being an existence for itself' (Bataille, 1986, p. 138). Such a society is necessarily also a homogenous one, where 'each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity valid in itself' (Bataille, 1986, p. 138). Activities matter not in or by themselves, but solely in relation to other useful activities (Bataille, 1986, p. 138).

In order to counter the prevalence of utilitarian thought and to impute to humans the need to move beyond themselves in order to participate in a broader social experience, the main figures of the Collège de sociologie turned to the origins of the sacred in sacrifice (Richman, 2003, p. 34). Key for our study is Bataille's critique of utilitarian thought and more precisely his theory of sacrifice and abundancy. Informed by Mauss's seminal essay on the gift,[12] Bataille challenges the common view that 'the economy' equals the world of calculative reasoning, production and usefulness. Rather what we normally understand as 'the economy' should be understood as a 'restricted economy', that is a society viewed from the perspective of usefulness and characterized by calculation. Both surpassing and encompassing the so-called restricted economy, Bataille proposes what he calls a 'general economy', which is the economy of waste, loss, usefulness, sacrifices and gifts without returns, based not on scarcity but on excess (Pawlett, 2016, p. 86, 87).

Wealth, which includes basically anything, argues Bataille, is radically dependent on the circulation of energy on the earth. This flow of energy finds its origin and essence 'in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy - wealth - without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving' (Bataille, 1988, p. 28). The paradigmatic example that Bataille gives is that of plants. They manifest 'excess' and are 'nothing but growth and reproduction, as 'the energy necessary for their functional activity is negligible' (Bataille, 1988, p.

12 A few words on Bataille's divergence from Mauss are in place. With the aim of countering the prevalence of utilitarian thought Mauss's essay focuses on the social significance of a gift, i.e. what is it that gift exchanges tell us about the people giving and receiving, the meanings of the objects given and received, and what is that practices of giving tell us about social relations? What he considers to be unique about a gift, in contrast to commodities, is that gifts imply an enduring relation between people, whereas a commodity type of relationship is characterized by the lack of an enduring connection between the people and the object in a more alienated and fungible type of relationship (Olson, 2002, p. 352). For Mauss gifts are associated with tribal cultures dominated by kinship and group relations. Commodity exchanges are characteristic of industrial types of societies that are determined by social class and division of labour and in which self-interest, independence of both giver and recipient, and frequent impersonal relationships predominate (Olson, 2002, p. 353). It is however important to note that according to Mauss, the giving of a present to someone is not a voluntary action because any gift involves obligation and self-interest. More precisely, throughout his theory Mauss continually emphasizes the importance of obligation. Not meeting the demands of the obligation to give comes according to Mauss with serious political and social consequences: "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality. Also, one gives because one is compelled to do so, because the recipient possesses some kind of right of property over anything that belongs to the donor" (Mauss cited in: Olson, 2002, p. 354). Hence, Mauss perceives the necessity for a harmonious reciprocity amongst parties in the act of exchanging gifts. For Bataille by contrast, as further elaborated in this chapter, gifts precisely counter orderly society.

27). From the very beginning there is thus an excess of energy that must be dealt with. On the basis of this Bataille argues that it is not scarcity, but surplus that drives economic activity (Bataille, 1988, p. 106). Thus while classical economic thought presupposes that economies are driven by scarcity, Bataille by contrast posits his 'general economy' in terms of the expenditure of an excess of energy and production, 'willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically' (Bataille, 1988, p. 21).

Bataille's account of excess is first of all important for our purposes as it allows us to challenge the ground upon which social sport studies theorize sacrifice in terms of calculative motivations. To be more precise, Bataille exposes that this ground, that is the restricted economy should be understood as a reduction of the general economy in terms of usefulness. Put differently, what the classical model understands with 'the' economy rests on a prior objectification of life that reduces life to its usefulness. Life, that is the general economy is excessive, characterized not by scarcity, but by excess. Second, on this basis, Bataille provides us with an understanding of sacrifices beyond economic terms, resisting formalist or objectivist understandings. Third, on this basis Bataille provides us with an understanding of the experience of sacrifice as an experience of unadulterated freedom. To be more precise, Bataille provides for an understanding of sacrifices as irreducible experiences that place sacrificers in a sphere free from normative monism.

The second reason for considering Bataille's understanding of sacrifice is that, insofar as the excess-driven economy is opposed to the rationalist productive economy, Bataille simultaneously understands it as the condition for the disruption of the latter. More precisely, according to Bataille moments of nonproductive expenditure in the 'general' economy form internal threats to the homogenous order of society (Pawlett, 2016, p. xx). Unproductive expenditure introduces heterogeneity into the homogenous order, consisting of 'everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value', from 'the waste products of the human body', 'words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value', 'the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses', to mobs, aristocratic and impoverished classes, and those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.)' (Bataille, 1986, p. 142). Compared to everyday life, heterogeneous existence can be represented as 'something other', as 'incommensurate' (Bataille, 1986, p. 143).

In this context we must situate Bataille's account of sacrifice. According to Bataille the key characteristic and importance of sacrifices – historically, ritual destruction of goods and persons- is that they withdraw wealth from productive consumption. 'In general,' he writes, 'sacrifice withdraws useful products from profane circulation; in principle the gifts of potlatch liberate objects that are useless from the start' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 76). As a game, he furthermore contends, 'potlatch is the opposite of a principle of conservation: it puts an end to the stability of fortunes as it existed within the totemic economy, where possession was hereditary. An activity of excessive exchange replaced heredity (as source of possession) with a kind of deliriously formed ritual poker' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 76).

What importantly follows is that sacrifices resist formalist or objectivist understandings. To be more precise, for Bataille a sacrifice does not refer to a particular activity done for the sake of some benefit or other - biological, psychological, symbolic etc. - nor to a certain attitude of the one who performs the sacrifice. To be more precise, for Bataille a sacrifice is not a sacrifice to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but by contrast should be understood as a sacrifice to another reality, that is the intimate world or heterogeneous order. 'Sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 55). It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist forms of alienation, or oppression.

Here we arrive at the third reason why we must consider Bataille's theorisation of sacrifice, namely that when sacrificing the subject experiences something that transcends its real-life behaviours, thoughts and motives and is drawn into a sphere that is not of its own making, that is a sphere of freedom. Bataille argues that it is not only the sacrificed object, but the subject who offers the sacrifice as well, that temporarily escapes from the demands of utility. Those who offer sacrifices - from objects, to aspects of their daily life to even their very own existence - become freed from the domain of calculative reason. Heterogeneous experience 'suspends 'the subject', which is a construct of homogeneous society' and pushes it 'beyond the limits of homogeneous society which constitute it as a subject' (Pawlett, 2016, p. xxi). For Bataille, wasteful acts rediscover the intimate participation of the sacrificer and the sacrificed (Bataille, 1988b, p. 55). They must be understood as 'lived-in' experiences that open up the order of the intimate, characterised by immanence, immediacy and non-discursive, non-representable being, and as 'being antithetical to the real world', that is the world of things, or the realm of production (Bataille, 1988b, p. 58). According to Bataille, it is by such escapes that a different ethical self-relation becomes possible, unmediated by the logics of use and usefulness.

What we take this to mean is that the freedom experienced by the sacrificer allows her to arbitrate between two systems of value, that of the dominant reality and that of the play-world, that is, in Bataille's language, the heterogeneous order. The sacrificer, before she has access to an unfettered choice, stands in a normative vacuum and to that extent is free. To be free in this context means to do things out of one's nature, to do a or b because of what one is. Those who perform sacrifices can temporarily live free from societal constraints, that is the demands of useful and future oriented production, and enter the realm of the sacred: 'This useless consumption is *what suits me,* once my concern for the morrow is removed' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 58).

Important for our study is that we shouldn't understand such experiences in positive, but rather in negative terms. For Bataille the experiences of those who offer sacrifices are not those of a coherent identity that can be said to ground knowledge and politics. They are what Foucault once coined limit experiences that transgress the limits of coherent subjectivity as it functions in everyday life. (Foucault, 1991, p. 31). They must be understood as

neither personal, individual, nor fully interiorized experiences, but as obeying their own authority, albeit an authority that always and per definition undermines itself (Bataille, 1988a, p. 6).[13] Recall that we argued in the introduction to this chapter that we are in need of a concept of experience that meets amongst others the requirement of 'pertaining to the subject, neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse'.

Important for our task is, thus, that Bataille understands the freedom experienced in sacrifice as beyond a conceptualisation of the subject as either bearer or product of power-discourse. For Bataille by contrast, in limit experiences, the desire for the object cannot but annihilate the subject of desire as much as the object of desire. The outcome of such phenomena is neither unification, nor progress, nor sublimation, but nothing, disappearance, or even death.[14] Limit experiences transgress the limits of coherent subjectivity through

13 To further elucidate the importance of Bataille's view of 'limit experience', his *Inner Experience* is of help. In this work he first of all contrasts his account of limit experience with mysticism, in so far as mysticism implies a notion of a totalising experience and secondly with ascetic self-fashioning, in so far as such a project demands deliberate and articulable actions, which eventually cannot but depend on well-defined projects. On the first page of this work he writes: 'By inner experience I understand that which one usually calls mystical experience: the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of meditated emotion. But I am thinking less of confessional experience, to which one has had to adhere up to now, than of an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever. This is why I don't like the word mystical' (Bataille, 1988a, p.3). Derrida's remarks are here of assistance: 'That which indicates itself as mysticism, in order to shake the security of discursive knowledge, refers beyond the opposition of the mystic and the rational. Bataille above all is not a new mystic. That which indicates itself as interior experience is not an experience, because it is related to no presence, to no plenitude, but only to the "impossible" it "undergoes" in torture' (Derrida, 2005, p. 344). For Bataille, as Derrida observes, in negative experiences there is no hope for a totalising experience that could make the self and the world a harmonious whole, such as allegedly is the case with the ecstasy of the mystics. Rather the experience of intimacy with life is unsettling and upsetting. Secondly, negative inner experience cannot be understood as a project of self-fashioning, or of ascetic self-control. According to Bataille any project of self-fashioning demands deliberate and articulable actions, or, put differently, actions that are depended on projects, which cannot but be informed by discursive, articulable intentions. He writes: 'Discursive thought is evinced by an individual engaged in action: it takes place within him beginning with his projects, on the level of reflexion upon projects. Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action - it is a way of being in paradoxical time: the putting off of existence to a later point' (Bataille, 1988a, p. 46). Inner experience is the opposite of projects of self-fashioning as these are motivated by discursive reason. Inner experience must also not be conflated with ascetic self-control, i.e. attempts to reach a state of oneness with the universe or the divine through self-abnegation. Bataille writes: 'My principle against ascesis is that the extreme limit is accessible through excess, not through want. Even the ascesis of those who succeed in it takes on in my eyes the sense of a sin, of an impotent poverty. I don't deny that ascesis is a conducive experience. I even insist on it. Ascesis is a sure means of separating oneself from objects: it kills the desire which binds one to the object. But at the same time it makes an object of experience (one only killed the desire for objects by proposing a new object for desire)' (Bataille, 1988a, p. 21). In ascesis, of value is not experience as such, independent of pain, suffering, pleasure or excitement, but its outcome in terms of salvation and deliverance. Thus, the problem with projects of self-fashioning and ascesis is that they grant experience with an authority, not on their own account, but in relation to something else.

14 Nancy's engagement with Bataille is here of assistance: '"In" the "NOTHING" or in nothing-in sov-

the practice of expenditure. There is no anticipation, no purpose, no ought, or in short no normativity: 'That which counts is there each time that *anticipation*, that which binds one in activity, the meaning of which is manifested in the reasonable *anticipation* of the result, dissolves, in a staggering, unanticipated way, into NOTHING' (Bataille, 1991, Volume 111, p. 211). In nothing, we repeatedly read in his *Inner Experience*, there is only silence (Bataille, 1988a). This silence is not the silence of inactivity, but precisely the silence of morality. In silence we find: 'Laughter that doesn't laugh, and tears that don't cry', a 'cruelty that isn't harsh and fear that isn't afraid of anything' (Bataille, 1991, Volume 111, p. 441). What this means again is that in the experience of sacrifice, normativity has no say, or no hold on the subject. This for the reason that the sacrificer, as we argued above, stands in a normative vacuum, as arbiter between two scales of value that are not overarched by a third scale.

3.2.2 Sacrifices and freedom

Therefore, the most important lesson that we should draw from Bataille for our understanding of the references to sacrifice as they appear in the data, is that sacrifices point to an irreducible experience that places the subject in a sphere of unadulterated freedom. In effect, this is what the players' experiences of sacrifice amount to. Bataille allows us first of all to theorize that the sacrifices of the players do not refer to activities done for the sake of some benefit or other, biological, psychological, symbolic etc., nor to a certain attitude of the players themselves. To be more precise, Bataille brings into view that the players' sacrifices are not sacrifices to the real world - sacrifices of the real world to the real world - but by contrast should be understood as sacrifices to another reality, the playworld, or in his terms the heterogeneous order. Secondly, Bataille brings into view, that because the sacrificer arbitrates between two scales of value, she is free. When sacrificing, the subject commits to something that transcends its real-life behaviours, thoughts and motives and is drawn into a sphere that is not of its own making. Accordingly, the experience of sacrifice must be understood as an experience that allows something of the individual to escape the diverse modes of oppression related to calculative reason. What it saves from the diverse modes of oppression, must however not be understood in a foundationalist sense. Importantly and by contrast, for Bataille, the experience of sacrifice, understood as a form of limit experience is 'without shape or form' and '*has nothing as its object'* (Bataille, 1988b, p. 189, 190, emphasis in orginal).

Through such escapes a different ethical self-relation becomes possible, independent of the logic of use and usefulness. The subject according to Bataille engages two systems of value or meaning, that of the dominant reality and that of the heterogeneous order. She is

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ereignty-being is "outside itself'; it is in an exteriority that is impossible to recapture, or perhaps we should say that it is of this exteriority, that it is of an outside that it cannot relate to itself, but with which it entertains an essential and incommensurable relation. This relation prescribes the place of the singular being. This is why the "inner experience" of which Bataille speaks is in no way "interior" or "subjective," but is indissociable from the experience of this relation to an incommensurable outside' (Nancy, 1991, p. 18).

an arbiter between two systems of value un-subjected to a third system. Accordingly, the sacrificing subject stands in a normative vacuum and therefore is free. It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist alienation and oppression.

What Bataille's notion of sacrifice importantly makes visible is that the Foucauldian post-structuralist, cultural studies and Marxist frameworks in social sport studies miss important insights when theorizing athletes' 'willingness' to sacrifice. To be more precise, what Bataille's account makes visible is that the problem with the existing frameworks is that they are committed to a monistic understanding of normativity: whatever value is, and whatever its value, there is, in these models, only one scale of value. Recall that we argued in chapter 2 that the Marxist framework upholds the view that by making sacrifices we either delude ourselves, or risk something for the achievement of a higher good. On the other hand, Foucauldian poststructuralist sport studies make sense of the theme of sacrifice in terms of oppressive modes of self-realisation; it is by making sacrifices that we can become who we are told that we really are, provided that we listen to the knowledge of experts.

Accordingly what these frameworks fail to see is that a sacrifice involves not a rivalry between different 'real' world values (therefore a rivalry between two commensurables, and thereby a rivalry destined to be resolved), but a rivalry between two worlds, that of calculative reason and that, in Bataille's language, of the "heterogeneous order." This insight is of key importance for our task of making sense of the women's references to sacrifice in our interviews. Recall that the players suggest that sacrifices cannot be understood in terms of discipline, obedience or control, in short power, but must be understood in terms of the inarticulable value attributed to football. 'Football is actually not that important, but then at the same time it is.' Following Bataille, players sacrifice not to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but rather they sacrifice to what would be best described as *another reality*. Hence, they find themselves not confronted with competing values *of* the 'real' world, but rather with a rivalry between the values of the 'real' world and that other reality they are committed to. This contrasts with the view upheld by the existing frameworks in social sport studies, according to which sacrifices point at sacrifices of the real world to the real world.

To conclude. Moving beyond the reductionism we find in the existing frameworks, Bataille's theory of sacrifice allows us first of all to understand that there are at least two systems of value or meaning, that is that of the 'allegedly' real world such as accounted for by the existing frameworks, and that, in his language, of the 'other reality'. Players do not sacrifice a certain part of the real world (say, their health) to another (say, money), but to another reality that draws them into another sphere. Secondly, what this suggests is not only a dual model of value, but it circumscribes three existential areas: that of the real world as a certain scale of value, that of play as another, and that of arbitration between the two, which is that of a normative vacuum, freedom.

3.2.3 The limits of the logic of the gift

Yet, as should be clear by now, sacrifices or acts of wasteful expenditure are precisely not what a well-run or well-organised society requires. By contrast, according to Bataille these are necessarily excluded from the profane order of the social. To be more precise, for Bataille 'heterology' concerns an absolute difference that must be expelled or ejected from the world of ordered materiality, organized by the sameness of objects and subjects to themselves (Hynes & Sharpe, 2015, p. 121, 122). Recall that the very possibility of objective knowledge and calculation rests on the notion that we can separate ourselves from both ourselves and our surroundings. It is only by means of this separation that we can logically, scientifically or instrumentally make sense of ourselves and our surroundings. As suggested in the previous section, this is precisely what wasteful acts put at risk. The subject who offers the sacrifice escapes from the demands of utility, finding itself in a state where the logic of scarcity and discourses no longer apply.

However, precisely by positing non-productive expenditure as the other pole of the rational order, we must consider departing from Bataille's conceptualisation of the experience of sacrifice. As stated above, for Bataille 'heterology' concerns an absolute difference; it is the radical Other of calculative reason, the outside, the negative, the irrational. What this implies is that Bataille assumes that a sacrificer will think that a free act is one that offends calculative reason, or violates rationality.

Accordingly, what it means for the subject to be free depends on calculative reason. When the sacrificer attributes a meaning to sacrifice they do so on the basis of what they know it is not: calculative reason. A different way of saying this is that eventually for Bataille, the meaning that we find in sacrifices has no positive origin in the sacrificer. Rather, this meaning is derived from that which calculative reason is not. Thus for Bataille it seems impossible to attribute a meaning to what exceeds calculative reason, on its own terms, that is as something different from the Other of calculative reason. Following Bataille, we should then conclude that we can only say something about the meaning of being immersed in football, on the basis of that which it is not.

What the data of our study indeed points out is that the irreducible commitment cannot be understood in terms of real-life values. However, it does not suggest that the value that motivates this irreducible commitment derives its sense from the regime of the real world. By contrast, sacrifices show that the players play, because they sometimes choose being immersed in football rather than reality. If there was absolutely nothing positive *sui generis* about the player's immersion in football, it becomes hard to imagine why the players started playing football in the first place (see also: Feezell, 2004). In effect, they repeatedly say that their engagement in football gives them joy and satisfaction. Accordingly, our data point out that it is far from impossible to attribute meaning to something that exceeds (even our own) objective recognition. This is what Bataille's model cannot account for: for him, meaning recognition is the necessary condition for meaning attribution and it would be

irrational to attribute meaning to something that exceeds our understanding. We, on the other hand, lack any good reason to think that in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players meaning recognition (believing that X objectively has meaning) is the necessary condition for meaning attribution (granting X meaning in our lives) and that we can only say something about the meaning of being immersed in football, on the basis of that which it is not.

Here we arrive at the crucial point that marks our departure from Bataille. What we need is a theory that doesn't accept the problem of Bataille's understanding of sacrifice, as being meaningless. To be more precise, what we need in order to account for the theme of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players is a theory that meets the fourth requirement that we delineated in the introduction to this chapter: playing should be accounted for as intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants.

In effect, it is only under the condition that we meet this fourth requirement that we can meet the congruent requirement. Recall that we are in need of a theoretical framework that allows us to meet the four requirements that we delineated in the introduction, in a way congruent with the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'. What the limits of Bataille allow us to glimpse, yet not think is that we can only fulfil our task of theorizing the experience of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players under the condition that we theorize sacrifice as an irreducible and *sui generis* structure of experience that is both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', and ontologically anterior to them.

What the analysis of the data has pointed out is first of all that the experience of sacrifice evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations yet motivates the players in such a way that it can compete with these, as the players sacrifice not to the real world, but to another reality. However, it is only under the condition that players attribute a certain meaning to this other reality that it can compete with these 'real-life' values. Put differently, in the context of the players' experiences of sacrifice, meaning making precedes or even conditions recognition. Yet, in so far as meaning making is ontologically prior to recognition, we must conclude that the experience of being drawn into this other reality not only evades 'real-life' values, but importantly also precedes them.

3.3 Play: Theorizing sacrifice beyond dualisms

3.3.1 The lessons to be drawn from Bataille's notion of the gift

The final subsection of the previous section allowed us to be more precise about the key lesson that we should draw from Bataille for our aim of giving an account of the women's football players' experiences of sacrifice. Bataille aptly shows that the problem with social sport studies' adherence to the Marxist logic of scarcity and/or the Foucauldian poststructuralist account of the subject lies in their commitment to a monistic system of value, or as Bataille would have it, 'a logic of homogeneity'. This denies the irreducible character of sacrifice as a *sui generis* phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the commitments accounted for by the existing models.

The players themselves tell us that they sacrifice not because of football's culture of obedience or for the sake of material benefit, but for the sake of an irreducible and spontaneous commitment to another reality. What this importantly means is that Bataille allows us to understand that players do not sacrifice to the real world, but in terms of Bataille to the heterogeneous order. For the expression 'Football is the most important thing in the world, and at the same time it is not' amongst others, precisely evidences the players' experience of living a contradictory life, whereby the contradiction points not to conflicting real-life values, but between those of two competing realities.

However, for our purposes, Bataille's attachment to non-productive expenditure is eventually just as problematic as the attachment to its opposite, as it cannot do justice to the realisation that, in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players, it is not irrational to attribute meaning to something that exceeds recognition. As abundance operates, according to Bataille, as the other pole of scarcity, within his account, moments of transgression remain dependent on - derive their sense from - calculative reason and objectivism. For him, the 'No' of limit experience is always a 'No' that remains dependent on calculative reason. As a consequence, Bataille fails to provide us with the adequate tools to give a positive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice. For Bataille, sacrifices remain the Other of calculative reason, while we need to theorize the experience of sacrifice as being meaningful on its own terms.

We even argued that it is only under this condition that we meet the fourth requirement that we delineated in the introduction to this chapter: meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, that it will be possible to meet the congruence requirement, that is the requirement according to which the experience of sacrifice must be thought of in a way congruent with the experience of high performance and gender policing.

3.3.2 The Structures of Play

Here we arrive at the main thrust of this thesis, namely that the pre-rational philosophy of play which we find in the works of authors such as Huizinga, Fink and Gadamer offers

us adequate theoretical tools to theorize the experience of sacrifice as both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', yet ontologically anterior to them. These pre-rational philosophers of play present us with a concept of experience - the experience of play - which both temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains of the dominant reality yet cannot be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, what the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us is an account of experience that precisely resists the distinction between the rational and the irrational, or in terms of the language of play, the playful and the serious. What these authors bring into view is that the distinction between playfulness and seriousness is only a secondary or historical phenomenon. In 'reality', they argue, playfulness and seriousness are united.

What this importantly means, as I shall argue in the following sections, is that the pre-rational philosophy offers us not only adequate tools to account for the players' experience of feeling torn between the imperatives of the dominant reality and, in their language, play, but importantly also of their confusion before this very opposition. One thing that the players say when they say "football is not so important but again it is" is to evidence their sense of living a contradictory life. What the theory of play precisely allows us to understand is that they do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because they really do live a contradictory life (as would follow from Bataille's account) but because they have internalised the historically contingent and artificial separation of play and seriousness. They become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices because they use the ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, or irrationality and rationality. It is hence for this reason that they see, and supposedly only *can* see, their life choices as contradictory. As we shall see, the result is alienation and disempowerment.

In order to establish the required theoretical framework, the following subsections will weave together insights from Huizinga, Fink and Gadamer. The main focus will be on Huizinga's classic work, *Homo Ludens* (1938) and Fink's *Play as a Symbol of the World* (1960) and *The Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957). These works offer a theorization of the relevance of play in itself for human beings, instead of analyzing it in terms of externally defined functions, that is as games. On the basis of these works, I shall distinguish six characteristics, or structures of play. Together with the irreducibility thesis inherited from Bataille, these six characteristics provide us with a robust framework that allows us to make theoretical sense of our discovery that (i) it is far from irrational, nonsensical, or even pathological that the players should consider football as simultaneously both the most important and the least important thing in the world; (ii) the women's football players suffer from the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness, or the rational and the irrational. The six characteristics of play are: (i) Play is a subjective experience, and should be taken in its primary significance, that is from the perspective of those that experience play; (ii) play is free (iii) play precedes the opposition between seriousness and not-seriousness; (iv) play induces a double consciousness; (v);

play creates meaning, or imparts meaning to action; (vi) play is characterized by rules that are ambiguous. Together these characteristics allow us to give a comprehensive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice.

3.3.2.1 Play 'in itself'

As argued in chapter 2, what is central to the experiences of the women's football players is precisely the fact that calculative reason fails them when trying to explain what it is in football that motivates their willingness to sacrifice. For this reason, we argued in the introduction to this chapter that we need a theory that allows for an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is first. indifferent to power/power-discourse, and second, pertains to the subject as such, though as neither bearer nor as product of power-discourse (for otherwise it could be described in objective language). To this end, we considered Bataille's notion of sacrifice, or more precisely his account of the experience of sacrifice, but concluded that it can only partly fulfil our task.

A different way of saying that calculative reason fails us when trying to articulate a certain experience, is saying that it is impossible to describe that experience from an externalist perspective.

One of the most extensive accounts of play, which precisely starts with this impossibility of describing play from an externalist position, is to be found in Eugen Fink's meditations on play in his *Play as a Symbol of the World* (1960) and the *Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957). Fink writes: 'No one is likely to contest that play exists as a human possibility of a special, imaginatively, exhilarated comportment. As an anthropological phenomenon play is considered to be verified, even if controversy may reign over its "phenomenological" interpretations. The indisputable phenomenon of play in no way presents itself as readily evident and transparent; on the contrary: this phenomenon standing more or less on the margins of life offers surprising opposition to conceptual penetration as soon as one undertakes to analyse it structure' (Fink, 2016, p. 43). We are all, as Fink further contends, familiar with play, yet as soon as we reflect on it 'the immediate "use" is disturbed, it loses its fluent "self-evidence" and the light of understanding is clouded' (Fink, 2016, p. 44).[15] Huizinga is here of further assistance, suggesting that play should first of all be taken as the player takes it, that is in its primary significance (Huizinga, 1980, p. 4).

15 Presumably, it is because of this impenetrability of play that it lacks thorough attention in the field of social sport studies. The observation by Halák, one of Fink's commentators, does not then come as a surprise: 'although the way in which Fink elucidates the ontological potential of play has the power to be very instructive even 60 years after it was written', 'the attention it receives in the philosophy of sport does not come close to reflecting this fact' (Halák, 2016, p. 200). While philosophically rich, both in concrete descriptions and structural analyses, 'it is virtually absent in the philosophy of sport literature today' (Halák, 2016, p. 200). For example in the 2013 published volume *The Philosophy of Play*, there is only one, and then marginal reference to Fink (Hopsicker & Carlso, 2013, p. 181).

Importantly for our concerns, Huizinga even argues that it is for the experience play grants that players engage in play, as 'in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 2, 3). Players thus engage in play for no other reason than to be in play. Thus, when we aim to say something about how it 'feels' to be in play, we are better off using qualitative terms that, as Huizinga points out, resist 'any attempt to reduce it to other terms', as 'their rationale and their mutual relationships must lie in a very deep layer of our mental being' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 6). Similarly, Fink characterises play as a passion of the soul. At play, he further contends, humans are enwrapped in joy, to which he adds that 'the joy arising from play is a singular pleasure, difficult to put your finger on' (Fink, 2016, p.77). As soon as joy disappears, play likewise vanishes.

Important for our concern is thus that play cannot be reduced to anything beyond itself, or described in other terms. For Huizinga any theory of play that perceives play as a response to the necessities of life is misguided:[16] for Huizinga the nature or essence of play cannot be found outside play itself. According to him, in the heart of play resides a very specific meaning, 'a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 1), which resists and escapes any reductionist understanding. In effect, according to Huizinga, it is only from an internalist perspective, that is from the perspectives of the players themselves, that we can grasp the meaning of play.

3.3.2.2 The freedom of play

What does it mean that play must be understood as resisting the demands of utility? It is, according to Huizinga, because of the quality of freedom that play distinguishes itself from the course of natural processes (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). Similarly, Fink argues that play should be distinguished from other aspects of human existence, as it 'is not linked to other phenomena in a common pursuit of the ultimate end' (Fink, 2016, p.77). What is at

16 We may think here of the multitude of empirical studies, from psychology to anthropology, that focus on the descriptions and functions of play behaviour in animals, children and adults. What binds these functionalist understandings of play is the thrust they put on the benefits that play may have for individual players and groups. Following Spencer's Darwinian interpretation (Spencer, 1970), many psychologists, for instance, argue that play must be seen as a release of energy. Others argue that play should rather be understood as a practice of skills. Groos's well-known historical articulation, according to which children naturally imitate or practise adult activities and thus play as training or pre-exercise for (adult) life (Groos, 2013). Notorious is also the work of Piaget who considered play an important aspect of learning, as it would stimulate the integration of new experiences into motor and cognitive skills (Piaget, 1962). But we should also think here of Winnicott, who considered play as the most important way in which children sustain a coherent ego identity, as it would allow them do deal with unconscious emotions and express, indirectly or symbolically, suppressed feelings and fears (Winnicott, 1971). Differences aside, what these theories share is the belief that something like play exists, as it performs a function one could not do without. At the same time play is only contingently connected to its psychological or developmental functions. Play's function is not an internal quality of playing, it is, rather, derived from playing. In this way perceived playing, experiencing play, or being submerged in play is a vehicle of an extrinsic social function. This thesis, however, describes itself as belonging to the tradition of pre-rational play scholarship and centres on play as it is *in itself*.

stake in play is freedom. When players are playing, they are, in a sense, unconstrained by the restrictions of oppressive reality. It is precisely in this sense that the women's football players' experience of sacrifice evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations.[17] To be playing is to be free, or as Huizinga puts it, 'play to order is no longer play; it could best be but a forcible imitation of it' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). In this context the argument can be made that one can be forced to play. Such an argument however, overlooks Huizinga's point about subjective experience, which is that playing only happens when one is engrossed and that this engrossing cannot be forced.

17 In the context of our discussion about play as a non-productive and therefore free activity, particularly worth mentioning is Morgan's analysis of Adorno's theory of sport (Morgan, 1988) and in his footsteps that of Inglis (Inglis, 2004). Contrary to Brohm and Rigauer (see chapter 2 of this thesis), for whom Adorno's position vis-à-vis sport, must be understood as a denunciation of the field all together, both Morgan and Inglis give a more nuanced reading of Adorno's theory of sport. Morgan and in his footsteps Inglis, aim to show that Adorno's position vis-à-vis sport opens up an important perspective with which to assess critically its emancipatory pedigree (Morgan, 1988, p. 834). To be more precise, by reconstructing Adorno's scattered comments on this topic, Morgan argues that Adorno can be taken as holding that sport, understood as a form of play, is an activity which to a degree can stand beyond the realm of instrumental-rational activity (Inglis, 2004, p. 91). On the one hand, for Adorno, like most Marxist informed sport theorists, sport must be considered to be an agent of social domination. In the words of Adorno himself: '"Bourgeois sport... want(s) to differentiate itself... strictly from play. Its bestial seriousness consists in the fact that instead of remaining faithful to the dream of freedom by getting away from purposiveness, the treatment of play as a duty puts it among useful purposes and thereby wipes out the trace of freedom in it"' (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 818). However, for Adorno, 'apart from its involvement in the unseemly side of social life', 'sport can and often does serve as an important site of social resistance' (Morgan, 1988, p. 820). First of all, and in correspondence with Huizinga and Fink (see section 3.2.5 of this chapter), Adorno observes that people engaged in sport are characterized by a double consciousness. At the one hand "people certainly consume and accept what the culture industry presents them in their leisure, yet at the same time "they indeed don't simply take it as real" (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 820). On this basis, he concludes that 'the integration of consciousness and leisure has still not completely succeeded. The real interests of the individuals are still strong enough in limits to withstand total integration (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 820). In so far as the illusions 'propagated in or by sport are always accompanied by the disclaimer "but it's only pretend," or "its only a game,"' individuals are reminded that there is always more than meets the eye (Morgan, 1988, p. 820). Accordingly, according to Adorno, sport contributes to the strength of the individual to resist social integration. Secondly, Morgan argues that for Adorno, sport itself as a specific form of praxis carries with it a critical potential. Following Adorno's transcendental brand of immanent critique that redirects the attention to sport itself, i.e. to sport's intrinsic, formal rationality, Morgan argues that for Adorno it is precisely sports' playful dimension that elevates life '"...above the context of immediate economic praxis and purposive behavior"' (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 824). It is this aspect of play, which Adorno regards as 'its "genuine essence," that is covered over in the social demand that play distract us from our demeaning work' Morgan, 188, p. 824). To be more precise, what is specifically about the nature of sport qua play that for Adorno contests the status quo is it gratuitous character, that is a 'combination of vitality and disinterestedness, of seriousness and uselessness' (Morgan, 1988, p. 824). This combination is integral to the playful logic of sport, which decrees that we take the useless seriously, that we commit ourselves to the resolution of contrived difficulties that in themselves have no ulterior purpose. Hence it is by 'refocusing our energies and attention on tasks stripped of any apparent utility, that sport registers its protest against the fungibility of the real world' (Morgan, 1988, p. 824).

For Huizinga, forced play or play for the sake of extrinsically defined functions is precisely not an expression of freedom, as their value is determined from outside of itself. His references to Aristotle's meditations on leisure are here of help. As stated in reference to Marx's adherence to Aristotle in chapter 2, Aristotle draws a division between activities that are merely useful and those that have value in themselves. Following Aristotle, for Huizinga those activities that are done for the sake of themselves enjoy freedom. Activities whose value is determined from something outside themselves, belong rather to the sphere of necessity. While formalist accounts of play consider taking part in one concrete form of play or another as a means to a certain end, for Aristotle play has its place in *skholē*, 'because nature requires us not only to be able to work well but also to idle well' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161). This idleness, recounts Huizinga, is for Aristotle the principle of the universe. It is preferred over work; indeed, it is the aim of all work (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161).

For Aristotle, as we saw earlier, all other activities must then serve leisure. In leisure time one contemplates and all other activities (work etc.) appear as necessary for the achievement of contemplation, that is the contemplative life.[18] Hence, concludes Huizinga: 'For the free man, leisure contains in itself all the joy and delight of life. Leisure is neither necessary nor useful, but only serves the passing of free time' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161). In the footsteps of Huizinga, Novak puts it rather tellingly: 'Play, not work, is the end of life. To participate in the rites of play is to dwell in the Kingdom of Ends. To participate in work, career, and the making of history is to labor in the Kingdom of Means. The modern age, the age of history, nourishes illusions. In a protestant culture, as in Marxist cultures, work is serious, important, and adult. Its essential insignificance is overlooked. Work, of course, must be done. But we should be wise enough to distinguish necessity from reality. Play is reality, work is diversion and escape' (Novak, 1976, p. 41).

For Huizinga, thus, human beings are not determined to play. Rather to be in play is an actualized possibility for the sake of the enjoyment people find in play, wherein 'precisely lies their freedom' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). Play is 'free, is in fact freedom' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 8).

3.2.2.3 Play's non-seriousness

However, to say that play is free may wrongfully suggest that Huizinga posits play, as Bataille posits the heterogeneous order, as the radical outside of the order of calculative reason, that is seriousness. The following passage in which Huizinga outlines the formal characteristics of play is of here of help: '...we might call it a free activity standing quite

18 It must, however, be noted that, whereas in ancient Greece, the man of leisure or freedom symbolized self-actualization and liberation, Huizinga laments that after the industrial revolution work and production became the ideal, and then the idol, of the age (Huizinga, 1980, p. 192). As a consequence, those who do not work hard or hard enough belong, in this age, to the category of lazy - instead of Aristotle's 'idle men'. In addition it is important to keep in mind that we no longer live in the Polis, and hopefully also do not desire its return. This, for the very reason that the conditions that made leisure and intellectual life in Ancient Athens possible were precisely dependent on the invisible, yet forced labour by slaves and women (see footnote 3 of this thesis).

consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It prompts the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13).[19] For Huizinga, play is not-serious in the sense that it is separate from ordinary reality. This sense of separateness must, however, not be misunderstood, as play can be engaged in very seriously and must not be understood as unreal or unimportant.

Play is a free activity standing 'outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time it absorbs the player intensely and utterly' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13). Note that the earlier quote derived from our data, follows a similar structure: 'Football is not so important, but then again it is.' Huizinga maintains this description even when discussing games that require players to make rigorous sacrifices or even risk their lives. In effect, for Huizinga the seriousness that we find in play is that which makes play, wholly play. Thus, for Huizinga play includes both playfulness and seriousness (Huizinga, 1980, p. 45)

In the footsteps of Huizinga, although in other terminology, we therefore argue that play is best described as being 'non-serious', indicating its indifference to the disjunction of seriousness and playfulness. Gadamer's remarks on the seriousness of play in his *Truth and Method* amplify Huizinga's argument. For Gadamer, as for Huizinga, the serious character of play troubles purposeful seriousness: 'Thus it can be said that for the player play is not serious: that is why he plays. We can try to define the concept of play from this point of view. What is merely play is not serious. Play has a special relation to what is serious. It is not

19 The distinction that Mihai Spariosu draws between two opposing and competing understandings of the practice of 'as if', i.e. 'rational' and 'pre-rational' (Spariosu, 1989, p. 12) helps to situate Fink's and Huizinga's accounts of play in both the history of philosophy and the larger field of play scholarship. The distinction he draws, fits into the larger way Spariosu contrasts rational with pre-rational play, arguing that play concepts are subordinated to a power principle which has in turn controlled the Western mentality as a whole (Spariosu, 1989, p. 5). According to Spariosu play is either rational, i.e. play as a manifestation of subjective control or pre-rational, i.e. a manifestation of the 'natural forces' dominating the subject. Pre-rational narratives characterize play as vital, untamed and chaotic; it is a chance play related to archaic theories of cosmos as a power game in which a myriad divine, human, and physical forces ceaselessly contend for supremacy (Spariosu, 1989, pp. 12-15). Play is here also strongly connected with bodily affects and powers, as players, contends Spariosu, immerse themselves through direct sensual experience in play. In 'pre-rational' play, players are not fully in control of their actions. They are players and at the same time playthings from the perspective of play itself. Rational play on the other hand, according to Spariosu, separates play from this unmediated power, by limiting the chance element. Rational thought sees play, as 'a form of mediation between what is now represented as the "irrational" (the chaotic conflict of physical forces, the disorderedly eruption of violent emotion, the unashamed gratification of the physical senses etc.) and controlling Reason, or the universal Will to Order' (Spariosu, 1989, p. 12). For Spariosu, then, rational accounts of play, subordinate play to conventions and purposeful behaviour.

only that the latter gives it its "purpose": we play "for the sake of recreation," as Aristotle says. More important, play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness. Yet, in playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 102).

What Gadamer here aptly points out is that it is only from an externalist position that we can say that a player plays because of playfulness, yet from an internalist perspective a player plays for play's seriousness. Seriousness is thus even necessary to make the play wholly play. A different way of saying this is that unless players take their play wholly seriously, the game would not continue. Thus, taking play in its primary significance, that is from the perspective of those that are in play, means taking play in its seriousness. In effect, it is this 'taking seriously' that must be understood as the subjective experience that cannot be forced. On the other hand, taking play from an externalist position, means taking play in its playfulness. Yet, we can only speak of these two different perspectives, under the condition that in reality play is a unity of both seriousness and playfulness (Huizinga, 1980, p. 24), for it is impossible to imagine play without seriousness, as this would mean the end of the game. It is then also precisely for this reason that Huizinga argues that in many cases it is hard or even impossible to differentiate the serious from the playful.

3.3.2.4 The seriousness of the world

That play is both playfulness and seriousness does not imply that it is involved in any sense of objectivity. If this were the case, we'd be left again with an economic understanding of sacrifice. The women's football players sacrifice not to the real world, but following the pre-rational philosophers of play, to play, or the playworld. What this means is that play competes with the imperatives of the 'real' world, though precisely under the condition that play evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations.

Importantly for our concerns, according to Huizinga, play derives it serious character not from the seriousness that we find in the 'real' world'. Put differently, the seriousness that we find in play does not mimic or derive its meaning from the discourses that circulate within the 'real' world. By contrast, according to Huizinga, it is the 'real' world that derives its serious character from the seriousness that we find in play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 46, 75). A different way of saying this is that for Huizinga playing is ontologically prior to the distinction between subjectivity and reality. It may make sense to speak of subjectivity and reality, that is to make use of these categories, but only under the conditions that we acknowledge that both are secondary, historical and artificial phenomena. Hence, for Huizinga, it is not playing that needs to be explained in reference to reality and subjectivity, but reality that needs explanation in reference to playing, as he reminds us that all culture, that is all human experience, begins and ends with play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 173)

Put differently, our sense of reality is derived from play and not the reverse. Thus, for Huizinga, importantly moving beyond Bataille, play makes possible the seriousness that we

find in the 'real' world, yet at the same time it finds itself in opposition to the seriousness of the real world as it resists any reductionist, that is formalist understandings that take the distinction between playfulness and seriousness as ontologically primary. For Bataille, sacrifices remain 'not serious', while following Huizinga they should be called 'non-serious', precisely resisting the distinction between seriousness and playfulness.[20]

3.3.2.5 The double experience of consciousness

The above considerations provide us with key insights to make sense of the experience of sacrifice in the context of women's football. To be more precise, the pre-rational account of play allows us to theorize the experience of sacrifice as being both irreducible to the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', yet ontologically anterior to this distinction. Play temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains of the dominant reality yet cannot be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, play resists the distinction between the playful and the serious, that is the rational and the irrational, as in 'reality proper' playfulness and seriousness are united.

Furthermore, Huizinga's position brings into view that the women's football players experience not only being torn between the imperatives of the dominant reality and play, but eventually experience confusion before this very opposition. One thing that the players do when they say "football is not so important but again it is" is to express their sense of living a divided life. This is precisely what Fink means when he argues that play implies a 'peculiar schizophrenia' or 'a splitting of the subject', as all players 'exist in two spheres' (Fink, 2016, p. 24, 25).[21] Players act according to both their understanding of and commitment to the

20 The problem with Bataille is that he stops with what is relative, i.e. the artificial separation between playfulness and seriousness, or reality and subjectivity. As discussed, Bataille posits the general economy as both the condition and the possibility of the disruption of the world of calculative reason. Likewise for Bataille, the general economy and the experience it grants must always be understood in non-utilitarian terms and as such constitutive of human freedom. Yet, by positing sacrifices or acts of wasteful expenditure as the radical Other of calculative reason, he remains committed to what we exposed with Huizinga as the artificial separation between seriousness and playfulness. Hence, within Bataille's account, moments of transgression remain dependent on - derive their sense from - calculative reason and objectivism. For Bataille, the 'No' of limit experience is always a 'No' that remains dependent on calculative reason. As a consequence, Bataille fails to provide us with adequate tools to give a positive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice.

21 Fink compares this mixture with an actor playing a role: 'The one who plays, who enters into a game, performs in the actual world a certain kind of activity that is well known in its characteristic features. Within the internal context of the sense of play, however, he takes on a *role*. And now we must distinguish between the real human being who "plays" and the human role within the instance of play. The player "conceals" himself by means of his "role"; in a certain measure he vanishes into it. With an intensity of a particular sort he lives in the role - and, yet again, not like a person who is deluded, who is no longer able to distinguish between "actuality" and "appearance". The player can call himself back out of the role. In the enactment of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about his double existence' (Fink, 2016, p. 24, 25). Of importance here is that the role played is not so much an imitation or an 'objective illusion' (Halák, 2016, p. 205), but as what Fink describes as a 'subjective appearance' (Fink, 2016, p. 28). When playing a

playworld and the real world. What Huizinga's insistence on the primary and unitary character of play importantly allows us to understand is that the players do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because their life *is* truly bifurcated, but because they have internalized the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness. To be more precise, the players become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices because they use ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness.

Hence, we are in a better position to explain why we stated in chapter 2 that objective reasons or arguments fail the players when articulating why, even when confronted with a serious head injury, they'd nevertheless continue playing the game. They precisely lack a proper discourse that allows them to make sense of their decisions, because the discourse available to them is informed by the (historical) distinction between playfulness and seriousness. Hence, they see, and supposedly only can see their life choices as contradictory, irrational and meaningless. Thus, what Huizinga's account of play brings into view is that the players precisely suffer from the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness, or the rational and the irrational.

3.3.2.6 Meaning making

Now we must however ask, what does it precisely mean that play makes possible the seriousness that we find in the 'real' world? Put differently, what does it mean to say that play is productive of meaning and that this meaning conditions our sense of reality? While Huizinga has been famously criticized for his agonistic perspective on play,[22] he argues in fact that

role, the player withdraws from objective life, yet at the same time the player knows the difference between the playful and the serious and the real and is capable of moving between the two spheres. Insofar as one is aware of being in play, it is possible to oscillate between a playful and an unplayful understanding of a given situation, which ultimately results in a dual consciousness of the social, viewed both as play and non-play.

22 Caillois for instance laments Huizinga's agonistic account of play, arguing that his definition of play is too limited, but paradoxically also too broad as it engages, according to him, aspects of life that should not be considered play. With the aim of improving Huizinga's account of play, Caillois set himself the task of presenting a more detailed description of playing and games. According to Caillois, all types of play and games can be placed in a model consisting of two axes. The first axis is a continuum between what he calls paidia and ludus, or free-play and games: 'At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term paidia. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain or attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component ludus'(Caillois, 2001, p. 13). For Caillois, games proper are rules-heavy, while paida (play) on the other hand is characterised by free improvisation. The second axis is a classification of four types: agon or competition; alea or chance; mimesis or role-play; ilinx or sensation. According to Caillois, all types of play and game activity fall somewhere on the continuum between paidia and ludus and can be placed into at

play takes up two different forms under which we encounter it: 'as a contest for something or as a representation of something' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13).[23] While it is the latter which interests us, the word 'representation' in Huizinga's account is clearly in need of explanation, given that to say that play 'represents' seems to oppose the key argument that it is not playing that needs to be explained in reference to reality, but reality that needs explanation in reference to playing. Put differently, insofar as the concept of representation is here in place, it would be better to describe 'reality' as a 'representation of play' instead of the reverse.[24]

Already on the first page of *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga draws attention to a 'very important point'. Play, he argues, has a signifying function: 'In play there is something at "play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means

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least one of the four types above. Key for Caillois is that play becomes 'disciplined' by arbitrary conventions that place restrictions upon the players. However, in the light of the concept of play that I seek to delineate in this chapter, at least two objections should be made against Caillois's classification. First of all, it describes the characteristics of play from, predominantly, an external point of view and thus vis-a-vis the aims of this chapter overlooks the quintessential aspect of play, namely that it is first and foremost a subjective experience. The category of ilinx may form an exception to his classification as it comes closer to an aesthetic phenomena, however the data of the research under scrutiny demands a concept of play that allows for an understanding of ilinx in a heavily rule-bound setting, i.e. competitive football. Following this, the second objection can be made that the experience of play in football fits into both the category of ludus and paidia. What this importantly means is that a neat distinction between games and non-game play cannot be made.

23 According to Huizinga the agonistic element generates the 'tension' necessary for any form of play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 10). Tension, he writes, 'means uncertainty, chanciness; a striving to decide the issue and so end it. The player wants something to "go", to "come off"; he wants to "succeed" by his own exertions'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 10). While outside the range of the good and the bad, tension for Huizinga imparts a certain ethical value (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). In order to explain what he means with this notion of ethical value, he refers to the old Greek concept of arête, which in its old use meant virtue, yet without normative connotations. It meant 'to be fit or apt for something, to be the true and genuine thing in one's kind', from 'a horse, a dog, the eye, the axe, the bow - each has its proper virtue' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 63). Arête refers to a form of perfection, reached through long and steady exercise. Competition, argues Huizinga, was an integral aspect of this exercise, more precisely 'virtue, honour, nobility and glory fall at the outset within the field of competition, which is that of play'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 64).

24 Surprisingly, even in Plato, argues Spariosu, it would be possible to find a glimpse of the nature of imitation-play. Spariosu points out that we can find a glimpse of mimesis-play in Plato's account of the rhapsode's performance and its impact on the audience. Socrates there describes an archaic audience that totally identifies with the performer through mimetic participation, which is a kind of hypnotic trance that brings catharsis (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19). Combining the auditory-visual with emotion-action and collective participation, the performer is given power over his audience, allowing him to move it freely at will to laugher or tears. While this power in the archaic period remained unconscious, being attributed to the Gods and shared collectively, it later became conscious and self-servingly by amongst others, politicians, priests, and teachers (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19). This power, stresses Spariosu, came to appear as irrational and arbitrary when mimesis-play lost its cultural function. While glimpses of mimesis-play are to be found in Plato, it was at the same time Plato himself who turned mimesis-play into mimesis-imitation, by separating it from immediate power and subordinating it to the rational, mediated, and non-violent pleasure of philosophical contemplation (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19)

something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, "instinct", we explain nothing; if we call it "mind" or "will" we say too much. However we may regard it, the very fact that play has a meaning implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 1). Play is something that signifies and involves a reference to a 'reality' which is neither univocally present in material reality nor in the mind of the player, but should be understood as emerging from both.

This we may understand in the way that words and sentences refer to something which is itself not present in them: 'Take language, for instance that first and supreme instrument which man shapes in order to communicate, to teach, to command. Language allows him to distinguish, to establish, to state things; in short, to name them and by naming them to raise them into the domain of the spirit. In the making of speech and language the spirit is continually "sparking" between matter and mind, as it were, playing with this wondrous nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 4). Signifying words and sentences direct one's attention to something they are not. In the same way, play brings forth a reality that precedes the abstract or dominant reality of the real world.

Play thus brings forth a reality that cannot be found in the objective state of affairs and is novel in relation to the actual state of affairs. However this does not mean that this reality simply exists in the individual minds of players; rather is has a real substrate in the playing human beings and the playthings. Players are, as Fink likewise reminds us, at the same time 'enraptured in the irreal sphere and have therein a communal "intersubjectively" recognized continuity of sense depending in each case on the overall sense of the instance of play' (Fink, 2016, p. 112). What this means is that it is paradoxically not language, poetry, or art that allows us to understand what play is. By contrast, according to Huizinga, it is through play that art, poetry, language and all other phenomena that we construct, destruct and deconstruct are possible. In a similar way, Fink urges us to pay attention to the actual action of play itself, instead of concentrating on what is supposedly depicted by it (Halák, 2016, p. 209).[25]

I am now in a better position to explain the argument that I made in the previous section to the effect that play should be considered ontologically prior to the distinction between playfulness and seriousness. What Huizinga precisely means with this is that play should be understood as the originary ground of human's meaningful relationship with the world, from which we subsequently institute the abstractions of subjectivity and reality, or seriousness and playfulness: for Huizinga play denotes our fundamental intentional relation-

25 It is here however important to keep in mind that, notwithstanding his emphasis on the creative character of play, eventually, according to Fink, what play produces remains at the level of appearance. Playing he writes,' exists as the producing of playworldly appearance'(Fink, 2016, p. 114).

ship with the world. A different way of saying this is that in play we experience the autotelic character of our activities, that is the meaning of an activity as being intrinsic to itself.

Play characterizes a way of being for which the alleged fundamental division between subject and object, between self and world is denied. These categories must be understood as abstractions that can only falsely be taken as the starting point of analysis, as they themselves must be explained in reference to play, seen as our inter-relationship with the world.

3.3.2.7 The ambiguity of rules

On the basis of our previous discussions, and thus with the help of Bataille's thesis of irreducibility, we must conclude that in its primary sense play is what might be called pure play. This implies that playing does not demand a distinct play-sphere, such as the football pitch, within which play is experienced. Yet, insofar as the elite women's football player's experience of play takes place in a rule-governed and enclosed space - the stadium and the football pitch - the experiential situation becomes much more complicated. In fact, this is the moment that the experience of gender policing and high performance comes into play. The interviews have shown, however, that even though the elite women's football players are subjected to both high performance and gender normalisation, their experience of play is still profoundly real.

On the face of it, Huizinga seems, however, to argue that what makes play wholly play must also be understood through something that is not play, that is: rules: 'All play has its rules. They determine what "holds" in the temporary world circumscribed by play' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). Rules establish what Huizinga calls the 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11) and it is precisely within the 'magic circle' that a patch of grass becomes a football field and a person a player. Rules determine what is and is not allowed and form the condition under which a distinct play sphere comes into existence.[26] Importantly for Huizinga this is not the end of story. While rules are certainly made and not given they can neither be reduced to the real world, nor to the playworld. Rather they belong to both spheres at once. For, it is by way of rules that play comes with the illusion[27] not to be play. Yet at the same time, from the perspective of the real world, this illusion cannot be obtained. Like a Möbius strip, rules initiate both the separation between seriousness and playfulness and at the same time ensure their unity, as it is from a non-game perspective that a game is said to be only a game, and from a within the game perspective that the game is seen as serious. A different way of saying this is that rules are ambiguous, or liminal. They can

26 The nature of the rules may however be different. For instance, the rules of children playing with dolls or hide and seek differ from the rules that determine a football game or a play of chance. Playing with dolls does not allow for a winner, whereas in football the whole game is structured in such a way that a winner may emerge. Yet in both cases, rules determine what holds in the playworld and what does not.

27 As Huizinga reminds us, 'illusion', stemming from 'inlusio, illudere or inludere' literally means 'in play'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 11)

neither be reduced to the subject's inside nor to the subject's outside.[28] Thus, even when play becomes organized and separate from ordinary reality by virtue of its playworld, it is still profoundly real to the participant who engages in the activity.

Huizinga even contends, referencing the poet Paul Valery: "No scepticism is possible where the rules of a game are concerned, for the principle underlying them is an unshakable truth" (Valery cited in: Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). The 'unshakable truth' here precisely points to play's indifference to external facts. At play the world is a child and a doll or a football. Or as Huizinga contends: 'In his magic dance the savage is the kangaroo' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 25). This is precisely what it means when the women's football players say that football is the most important thing in the world. Thus, it is from a within the game perspective that we experience the game as wholly serious, that is the most important thing in the world that allows for no doubt, yet it is from an out of the game perspective that we can understand our game as being constructed by rules. By saying that football is not important and yet important, the players take both views at once.

3.4 Conclusion

Chapter 2 of this thesis argued that the existing theoretical frameworks in sport and gender studies are insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the experience of the elite women's football players, as these cannot account for the women's football players' references to sacrifice in the data. Contrary to the understanding within the dominant theoretical frameworks, what the women's football players' references to sacrifice reveal, is that sacrifices cannot be explained either on the basis of an argument of power, or on the basis of an argument of scarcity. Accordingly, we argued that in order to account for the women's football players' references to sacrifice, we cannot rely on the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist informed theoretical frameworks in social sport studies alone, but we must complement these models with a theoretical framework capable of making sense of the experience of sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience.

More precisely, in this chapter we have argued that we are in need of a theoretical framework that allows for an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is: i) not reliant on power/power-discourse, as the experiences of sacrifice can't be explained in terms of modes of subjection; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, though neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse, for if this were the case, it could be described in terms of

28 Important to note is that our position here clearly differs from formalist game scholarship, according to which it is impossible to experience the freedom of play in rule-bound settings. In game scholarship it is commonly agreed that we should make a distinction between play and games, as we do play games, yet not all play is said to consist of games. What is said to differentiate games from non-game play is that games are precisely constituted and governed by a rigid and explicit set of rules. Perceived like this, a little boy playing with a doll would be engaged in non-game play, while football players would be engaged in game play. We find this position in the work of Caillois (Caillois, 2001, and see footnote 21 of this thesis).

real-life objective values; (iii) incommensurable in value, as it can't be understood as a trade-off; (iv) intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, as it cannot derive its meaning from real-life objective values. Yet, in so far as the women's football players experience 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in conjunction with one another, we secondly argued that the model that can account for the above requirement must be congruent with the understanding of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

To this end, we first considered Bataille's an-economic theory of sacrifice and argued that this model allows us to develop the first three requirements of the concept of the experience of sacrifice we are in need of, as being: i) not reliant on power/power-discourse; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, though neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse; (iii) incommensurable in value. First of all Bataille allows for a theorization of sacrifice beyond the logics of scarcity. For Bataille a sacrifice does not refer to a particular activity done for the sake of some benefit or other - biological, psychological, symbolic, etc. - rather for Bataille a sacrifice is not a sacrifice to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but should be understood as a sacrifice to another reality, that is the heterogeneous order. It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist forms of alienation, or oppression. Secondly, Bataille allowed us to theorize sacrifice as an experience that saves something of the individual from the diverse modes of oppression related to calculative reason. What it saves from the diverse modes of oppression, must however not be understood in a foundationalist sense. Rather, according to Bataille, the experience of sacrifice radically destabilizes the self-coinciding subject.

However, based on the experiential accounts of the women football players, we concluded that by positing non-productive expenditure as the other pole of scarcity, that is as the irrational, Bataille fails to meet the fourth requirement that we delineated: he cannot make sacrifice intrinsically meaningful, as for Bataille the meaning of sacrifices remains dependent on calculative reason.

We argued by contrast that it is only under the condition that we do not consider it irrational that players attribute a certain meaning to this other reality that it can compete with these 'real-life' values. This brought into view that, at least in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players, the experience of being drawn into this other reality not only evades 'real-life' values, but importantly also precedes them, as the players attribute meaning to something that escapes immediate recognition.

This realization brought us to the central argument of this chapter, namely that the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us the required account of sacrifice as play. What the theory of play offers, is a concept of experience, that is the experience of play, which must at the same be distinguished from and posited prior to existing systems of value or meaning and their corollary dichotomies between playfulness/seriousness, irrational/rational. By contrast according to Huizinga these oppositions are only secondary phenomena, while in play

they are united. The creative characteristic of play allows us to further elucidate this point. As argued, what the experiences of the football players' show, is that meaning-attribution precedes recognition. Play according to Huizinga is involved with the production of new meanings. Put differently, play institutes meaning and therefore it is not subjected to any scale of value. Play both precedes and conditions the production of objective knowledge or calculative reason.

On this basis Huizinga allows us to understand that women's football players do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because their life is in fact bifurcated, but because they have internalized the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness. In very concrete terms this means that the players become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices, precisely because they use ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, irrationality and rationality, subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, Bataille importantly allows us to theorize sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience. What play allows us to understand over and above Bataille's notion of sacrifice, is that this experience must be considered ontologically prior to the distinction between rationality and irrationality, or playfulness and seriousness.

For this reason the theory of play not only provides us with the required model to theorize the experience of sacrifice as an irreducible experience of the elite women's football players, but correspondingly will allow us to meet our criterion of congruence, that is the criterion according to which the experience of sacrifice must be congruent with the experience of gender policing and high performance. What the theory of play allows us to understand, is that we can only fulfil our task of theorizing the experience of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players under the condition that we theorize sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience that is both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', and ontologically preceding them.