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Beyond Depth: A Materialist Critique of Morgan's Conventionalism of Sport and Geertz's Symbolic Play*

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Abstract

This article interrogates the unexamined parallels between William J. Morgan's "deep conventionalism" in the philosophy of sport and Clifford Geertz's "deep play" in anthropology. While both frameworks reject universalist explanations—Morgan by anchoring sport's normativity in social conventions, Geertz by decoding the Balinese cockfight (*sabungan*) as a symbolic struggle for status—they share a critical blind spot: their neglect of the material relations that enable and constrain cultural practices. Through a comparative critique, we demonstrate how Morgan's internalist conventionalism and Geertz's hermeneutics inadvertently naturalise oppressive social hierarchies (such as racial exclusion and gendered violence) by severing practices from their material conditions. Engaging Thomas Malaby's anthropology of play, we argue that sport must be analysed as a contested terrain where symbolic meaning and materiality intersect. The article concludes by advocating for a historical approach that transcends the "deep/shallow" dichotomy.

Keywords: anthropology of play, philosophy of sport, conventionalism, internalism, materiality, William J. Morgan, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Malaby.

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Más allá de la profundidad: una crítica materialista al convencionalismo de Morgan y al juego simbólico de Geertz

Resumen

Este artículo examina los paralelismos poco estudiados entre el "convencionalismo profundo" de William J. Morgan en la filosofía del deporte y el "juego profundo" de Clifford Geertz en la antropología. Si bien ambos marcos rechazan las explicaciones universalistas –Morgan al situar la normatividad del deporte en las convenciones sociales y Geertz al interpretar la pelea de gallos balinesa (*sabungan*) como una lucha simbólica por el estatus–, comparten un importante punto ciego crítico: el descuido de las relaciones materiales que hacen posibles las prácticas culturales y, al mismo tiempo, las constriñen. Mediante una crítica comparativa y apoyándose en la antropología del juego de Thomas Malaby, el artículo demuestra cómo esas perspectivas pueden naturalizar inadvertidamente jerarquías sociales opresivas –por ejemplo, la exclusión racial y la violencia de género– al desvincular las prácticas de sus condiciones materiales. Se concluye abogando por un enfoque histórico que trascienda la dicotomía entre lo "profundo" y lo "superficial", y que integre la materialidad en el análisis de las prácticas y los significados simbólicos del deporte y el juego.

Palabras clave: antropología del juego, filosofía del deporte, convencionalismo, internalismo, materialidad, William J. Morgan, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Malaby.

Introduction

> *[…] it is his [William J. Morgan] rejection of broad internalism as an explication of the rationale of rules in sport, and his commitment to a vision of conventionalism that will, perhaps, stand out as his most original contribution to the field*
> Durbin *et al.* (2018, p. 200)

> *Sports are not fickle activities that humans engage in at whim, but instead are deeply rooted in our human nature and meet important human needs. Play, as Clifford Geertz pointed out, might be deep. Deep play matters*
> Borge (2019, p. 49)

This article argues that William J. Morgan's "deep conventionalism" in the philosophy of sport and Clifford Geertz's "deep play" in anthropology, despite their different disciplinary origins, share a critical blind spot: *both detach conventions and symbols from the material relations that enable and constrain them.*

It is in this context that Morgan, more widely known within the sport context—particularly its philosophical domain—as "Bill" Morgan, stands today as

one of the central figures in sport theory (Durbin *et al.*, 2018, p. 199).[1] Since the publication of his *Leftist Theories of Sport* (Morgan, 1994), which offered a critique primarily of critical theory approaches for grounding their analyses of sport in concerns extrinsic to the phenomenon itself, the internalist foundations for reflecting on the nature of sport have been decisively laid.[2]

Building on these foundational insights, Morgan's approach drew extensively from MacIntyre's (2007, p. 187) concept of "social practice", which understands sport as a practice in its own right, simultaneously generative of and disclosive of its inherent characteristics. From this vantage point emerged key internalist frameworks such as "broad internalism" (or "interpretivism", Simon, 2015). Within this evolving landscape, Suitsian "formalism" (Suits, 2005 [1978]) was later retroactively situated, and Morgan himself would go on to spearhead the revitalisation of "conventionalism".[3]

While these developments chart the wider trajectory of *internalist* thought, our concern here is more narrowly focused on Morgan's own conventionalism. In doing so, we by no means wish to obscure the fact that his conventionalist framework continues to bear the imprint of his 1994 assumptions, as we hope to demonstrate *passim*. This is evident in the enduring salience of themes such as the "internal logic of sport", the rejection of materiality, and the notion of sport as an activity that transgresses everyday life.

In this respect, Morgan's conventionalism has undergone a series of transformations, sustained through ongoing dialogue with a range of interlocutors (*e.g.*, Frías, 2014b; Simon, 2015; Russell, 2018). Its principal metamorphoses include the "deep conventionalist" phase (2012); a subsequent articulation marked

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[1] If we accept that the debate on play follows an increasingly formalist trajectory –from Huizinga (1949), through Benveniste (1947), to Caillois (1967)– whose main features are later softened or qualified by Ehrmann (1968), then a strikingly similar pattern can be identified within the philosophy of sport, particularly in its analytic or hybrid traditions (Antunes, 2025a, 2025b). Our approach is partly aligned with Suits's (1988) concept of an intersection between *play, games, and sport*. Here, a dominant "realist" or "transcendent" line of thought–progressing from the direct "formalism" of Suits (2005) to the more nuanced "interpretivism" of Simon (2000) and Russell (1999, 2004), finds its decisive "conventionalist" continuation and ("anti-realist") challenge in the work of Morgan (2004, 2012, 2013). Škerbić (2021, pp. 327-328) draws attention to the fact that Morgan's historicist-ethnocentric view never fully abandoned the Suitsian framework –*i.e.*, it never ceased to seek the roots of the discipline in the metaphysics or nature of sport. We will return to these questions below.

[2] Hyland (2018, p. 339) reinforces the notion that Morgan's 1994 project undertook both a *critique* and a *reconstruction* of what he termed the "externalism" of sport. This move laid the groundwork for "internalism": a perspective that seeks to approach sport from within, through the specific features that constitute its *intrinsic* nature. In contrast, "externalism" focuses on broader social issues that are assumed to be outside the practice itself. It is this very project that has earned Morgan his place as one of the field's central figures: Durbin *et al*. (2018, p. 199) underscore Morgan as having "[...] also pioneered the very activity of the philosophy of sport over four decades of scholarship and leadership".

[3] See Devine and Frías (2023) for a description of these currents and for how they identify other broad internalist strands that have since emerged, including "contractualism", the "respect for the integrity of the game" framework, and mutualism.

by a more pronounced historicist orientation (2016), which signals a "historical turn" in his thinking; and, in continuity with this turn, the "ethical conventionalist" formulation (2020).

Among these, it is the "deep conventionalist" formulation that will concern us most. Although Morgan would later choose to set this version aside (Morgan, 2020, ch. 5)—a move prefigured in his response to Moore (2018); Morgan (2019)[4]—it is precisely this iteration that offers the conceptual purchase needed for the dialogue we seek to establish. This is especially the case when engaging with a well-known anthropologist, as the "deep" framework keeps open a line of inquiry: one that approaches sport through the idea of "*depth*" (*e.g.*, Ciomaga, 2012; Elcombe & Hardman, 2019; and, more subtly, English, 2019).[5] As noted in the epigraph, there is a theoretical framework for those who consider that "*deep play* matters".

This framework is epitomized in the work of Clifford Geertz, a leading figure in interpretive or symbolic anthropology. A telling illustration comes from his seminal work, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), described specifically in chapter 15, where he recounts a 1958 trip he and his wife took to a Balinese village (Geertz, 1973, p. 412). Initially, the villagers made every effort to ignore the couple's presence, an impasse that was only broken by a serendipitous event. This dynamic underscores Geertz's crucial observation that the village "[…] was its own world", a self-contained universe whose codes he had not yet penetrated.

The chapter in question is the essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 412-453), published a year earlier in *Daedalus*. While a cornerstone of anthropology, its relevance extends to broader debates on *play* and *sport*, transcending its specific ethnographic context. This very extension, however, raises a question about the terms of the comparison.

A clarification is in order. Morgan theorises modern sport; Geertz analyses the Balinese *sabungan*, a ritual game rather than a sport. This asymmetry does not invalidate the comparison, it strengthens it. If two thinkers working on such different objects converge on the same anti-materialist gesture, that convergence is less likely to be an artefact of either case and more likely to be a structural feature of the frameworks themselves.

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[4] Morgan (2020, pp. 133-137) came to conceive of "deep conventions" as excessively arbitrary and insufficiently amenable to internal critical examination.

[5] This conceptual divide did not end with conventionalism. MacRae (2017), for instance, proposes a distinction between "shallow interpretivism" and its "deep" counterpart. In that article, the author (MacRae, 2017, p. 293) argues that the shallow version, unlike the deep one, does not posit a foundational principle that governs or guides the practice; rather, it acknowledges the plurality of values at play. In this way, the proposal can be read as an attempt to sidestep certain criticisms commonly levelled at conventionalism.

That gesture can be specified. Geertz, in his time, explicitly opposed the "materialist conception of culture" (Malaby, 2009, p. 207); Morgan (1994) later achieved something analogous in the philosophy of sport through his decisive rejection of "externalism".[6] The comparison therefore rests not on a terminological coincidence—the shared word 'deep'—but on a substantive philosophical alignment: a common refusal to ground cultural practices in material relations.

Moreover, when Hyland (2018, p. 342) suggests that Morgan (1994, pp. 45, 86) has recently tempered his emphasis on "internal logic" in favour of the sport's *ethos*, this further underscores a connection with the kind of thinking characteristic of anthropologists and ethnographers such as Geertz, reinforcing the grounds for our comparison and the critique that follows. This reveals a fundamental tension that both authors must navigate: the tension between the internal logic of the practice and its wider cultural ethos.

It is precisely within this unresolved tension, however, that a critical limitation emerges: their shared reluctance to engage with materiality: the "missing half" of cultural analysis. This omission leaves their frameworks insufficient for understanding how sport and ritual games materially sustain or contest power structures. This article aims to address this gap by tracing the material embedding of conventions and symbols, thereby revealing their concrete implications.[7]

To pursue this line of inquiry, the article proceeds in three sections: 'Morgan and the Deep Conventionalism', which aims to reintroduce Morgan's position—tracing the transition from his 2012 formulation to the 2016 revision, at which point he had not yet fully departed from the same underlying *deep* principle; 'Geertz and the Balinese Cockfight', which revisits the anthropologist's 1972 essay, highlighting occasional key points of connection with Morgan; and finally, by extending aspects of Malaby's critique of Geertz (2009) to Morgan, the third section, 'Morgan and Geertz: A Critique', offers a critical reflection on the core "deep" orientations of each thinker, whether convergent or divergent.[8]

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[6] For a more precise understanding of the issue at hand: "[i]nternalism is a normative account of sport that was born in part as a response to Marxist analyses of sport" (Frías, 2014a, p. 362), specifically opposing critical theory of sport. For a more direct comparison, see Geertz (1973, pp. 201-202).

[7] It is true that in fields such as the sociology of sport, questions like the renunciation of the surrounding and subsisting materiality of sport have largely been overcome (see *Sport und Gesellschaft*). However, within the philosophy of sport and other adjacent areas, this debate remains necessary. The critical comparison we undertake aims to be a contribution in this very sense.

[8] Other contexts of "deep" could be retrieved and compared. For instance, as in Huizinga (1949, pp. 1, 12), where "play", besides being a fundamental condition of society, is said to reside in "[...] mutual relationships [which] must lie in a very deep layer of our mental being"; or in Malaby (2007, pp. 100-107), who recovers the state of "flow" to identify "[...] a state or mode of human experience", which can range from immersive activity to what can be understood "[...] as the learned condition of mastery over the performative challenges of a game or task"; or even in a comment by Lingard (1907, p. 39), a seventeenth-century priest, who observed: "[t]ake heed of *playing often* or *deep at Dice* and *Games of Chance*, for that is more *chargeable* than the seven deadly sins", exposing the addictive (and sinful) side of play. However, this article does not aim to deal with this theme exclusively or in depth, but rather to focus on the dialogue established by the two highlighted authors and, as mentioned, to offer a critique of both.

Morgan and the Deep Conventionalism

Morgan's earlier proposal (1994), which directly challenged what he called 'externalism', initially gained significant traction, especially within the philosophy of sport. This early work laid the groundwork for interpretivist developments by figures such as Russell (1999) and Simon (2000), who argued that sport's meaning and value are not fixed by rules alone, but must be continually interpreted to reveal its underlying principles and goods.[9] However, with the publication of his later article, "Broad Internalism, Deep Conventions, Moral Entrepreneurs, and Sport", Morgan (2012) began to face greater resistance (*e.g.*, Frías, 2014b; Moore, 2018; Russell, 2018), as this text solidified his commitment to a conventionalist framework.

Such a commitment was viewed critically by proponents of interpretivism, who believed they had surpassed this conception—just as they had formalism—through their own critiques. Within the new internalism that Morgan helped establish, he began to be seen as drifting towards a spurious revival of externalism (Simon, 2015, p. 29).

Morgan's dissent emerged shortly after the influential articles by Simon (2004), Russell (2004), and Dixon (2003). In 2004, he launched a critique against what he regarded as the "moral realist account of sport", instead defending a coherent "anti-realist" stance. To understand this debate, it is helpful to break down these terms. The "moral realist" position, which Morgan was opposing, essentially argues that sports have an inherent, purpose-driven nature from which objective moral rules naturally arise. For a realist, actions like cheating or deliberately injuring an opponent are inherently wrong because they violate the fundamental purpose of the sport itself.

In contrast, Morgan's "anti-realist" stance argues that there is no such timeless, objective moral essence to sport. Instead, he posits that the values and norms of any sport are constructed by the specific community that practices it—the athletes, coaches, fans, and governing bodies. What is considered right or wrong in a sport is a matter of social agreement and coherence within that community's shared beliefs, not the discovery of a pre-existing moral truth. Despite the confrontational and philosophical nature of this opposition, Morgan was careful to frame his argument in practical terms, seeking to avoid any suspicion of scholasticism, that is, abstract intellectualising detached from the real-world, lived experience of sport (Morgan, 2004, p. 161).

Morgan's forceful 2004 critique, however, left a fundamental question unresolved: if sports norms lack objective reality, what are they beyond mere social agreements? His allusion to a "social dependence thesis" (inspired by Raz) gestured

[9] For instance, Simon (2000, p. 7) claims that "[…] there are underlying principles that may be embedded in overall theories or accounts on the sport as practice", not merely rules or conventions.

toward an answer but did not fully theorize the cultural foundations of sport. At this intersection of ideas, we need (to deepen a dialogue with Geertz) a richer conception of conventionality. This is precisely what Morgan later provides by making a pivotal move: he explicitly (re)introduces the concept of "deep conventions".

In his later work, Morgan delves deeper into the structure of sports' unwritten rules by contrasting two key concepts. On one hand, there are "coordinating conventions" (Morgan, 2012, p. 66). These are simple, pragmatic agreements that solve a coordination problem but carry no deeper meaning. Think of the convention of driving on the right-hand side of the road: it is a "shallow" rule that functions purely to coordinate behaviour efficiently and could be easily replaced (*e.g.*, by switching to driving on the left) without any significant cultural loss. In sports, a "shallow" coordinating convention might be the specific colour of a jersey or the precise dimensions of a field. These rules are arbitrary and exist solely to make the game possible.

On the other hand, Morgan posits "deep conventions". These are not just rules for coordination; they are the bedrock values and fundamental understandings that give a sport its identity and cultural meaning. They are deeply embedded in a specific social and historical context (Morgan, 2012, p. 71).[10] For instance, the deep convention of "fair play" or the fundamental objective of "scoring more goals than the opponent" in football are not arbitrary. They define what the game *is* at its core. Changing a shallow convention is a minor adjustment; challenging a deep convention would fundamentally alter the nature of the sport itself.

It is from this distinction that Morgan (2012, p. 66) makes his critical argument: he claims that these *"deep conventions" are normatively superior* to the "abstract normative principles" often championed by broad internalists. While interpretivism might appeal to a universal principle like "justice" or "fairness" to judge a rule, Morgan argues that the true moral force in sport comes from these historically-grounded, deep conventions themselves. For him, the most compelling norms are not abstract philosophical concepts applied to sport, but the profound understandings that have evolved from within the practice of the sport over time.

This critical observation from Morgan aligns with his later exhortation (Morgan, 2016, p. 29) to abandon "Archimedean" or overly generalising efforts in interpretation.[11] For Morgan, an "Archimedean" approach would be a critic claiming that a sport like baseball is *inherently* a symbol of American individualism

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[10] As the author clarifies (Morgan, 2012, p. 66), deep conventions offer "[...] social and historical situatedness, because the background understandings that inform such conventions are the source of our best because contextualized normative judgments".

[11] Such efforts refer to the possibility of a perspective that is assumed to be entirely impartial, for instance, one from which a rational individual exerts the necessary force to govern the moral domain. See Gauthier (1986, pp. 233-267).

or that all sports are fundamentally tools of capitalist oppression, based on a pre-existing theoretical framework imposed from the outside. For instance, his "deep conventionalism" points to the same problem within critical theory that Morgan (1994, p. 182) originally identified: a tendency towards "transcendentalisation". This is the tendency to lift the analysis of sport out of its specific, historical context and into the realm of abstract, universal theory. "Deep conventionalism" resists this by insisting that the meaning of a sport is rooted in the specific, evolving understandings of its own community, not in a transcendental concept applied to it, as was evident in the "realist/anti-realist" debate.

Building on these critical premises, Morgan (2012, p. 79) consolidates the concept of "background social understandings", which are contextually bounded, even though not all strands of interpretivism rejected the notion of context (a distancing that would become more explicit with the later "historical turn"). These background understandings are embedded within the "deep conventions of sport", effectively replacing the so-called "abstract normative principles".[12] To this end, Morgan does not abandon the core internalist position; rather, he argues that while such "principles" are not always intrinsic to sport, they are nonetheless influenced by the *internal* "deep conceptions" of the practice.

In contrast to interpretivists who completely distance themselves from conventionalism, as exemplified by Simon and Russell's departure from the "social and historical forces" at play (what Wertz, *apud* Carlson, 2017, prefers to call "historical and institutional processes"), another conceptual intersection emerges in Morgan's (2012, p. 80) selective engagement with Rawls over Dworkin. Morgan favours Rawls's historically contingent, context-dependent alternative within political philosophy.[13]

Importantly, Morgan does not claim the normative superiority of "deep conventions" without grounding it in a concrete, contextualized example. The case that informs Morgan's (2012, p. 82) revision contrasts the late nineteenth-century English "amateur" and American "professional" views of sport, two dominant perspectives that exemplify this conceptual shift.[14] He contends that the terms in which the "dispute" originally unfolded are *no longer familiar today*, since fundamental issues from each perspective, such as "privileges of social class and the propriety of paying athletes", are no longer at stake. Instead, the current contest is over which conception best captures the core of athletic commitment.

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[12] To put it differently, for a practice to be genuinely social, a community must share "similar ways" (Ciomaga, 2012, p. 419).

[13] See Russell (1999) for a discussion invoking Dworkin in the philosophy of sport, and Frías (2017) for a more comprehensive account of his influence.

[14] Subsequently, Morgan (2020) further develops his theory and reaffirms that conventionalism remains the most robust position. In this work, he continues to explore the contrast between amateurism and professionalism.

According to the sport theorist (Morgan, 2012, p. 83), the English proponents of "amateurism" put forward as "deep conventions" the ideals of playing for the "love of the game", the "pleasure" it provides, and the rejection of any "instrumental benefit", which typically advantaged aristocrats over other classes.[15] For them, conduct on the field (the gentlemanly style) mattered more than winning. Strategies and training were frowned upon; exerting oneself *too hard* was discouraged in sporting interactions. Morgan (2012, p. 84) also highlights how this posture relied on a strict "respect for the rules", prohibiting any attempt to bend or circumvent them. Amateurs were expected to *internalise* self-imposed boundaries (see fn. 24).

This outlook would eventually be overturned by the process of professionalisation. In the United States, as Morgan explains (2012, p. 85 ff.), under the sway of pragmatism and instrumental rationality, values such as specialization and competitive emulation came to be seen not only as necessary, but as normatively appropriate. The game was no longer played *merely* for the "love of the game".

This fundamental historical shift from the Victorian era onward—from an aristocratic amateur ethos to a professional, win-oriented paradigm—poses a critical challenge for sport philosophy. For Morgan (2012, p. 85 ff.), broad internalism, in its general form, fails to account for these profound differences. It focuses solely on what can be *rationally* justified, whereas "deep conventions" operate outside that rational framework. In this sense, the rational (or transcendental) approach of broad internalism reduces the contrast between amateurism and professionalism to a shared commitment to athletic excellence, perhaps distinguishing some motives here and there.[16] Yet, as Morgan (2016, p. 33) argues, what truly sets these perspectives apart are conventions embedded in their historical moment, rather than abstract philosophical doctrines. For him, past and present conceptions are incommensurable, they cannot be unified under a single, *all-encompassing* principle.

It is precisely this incommensurability that necessitates a non-transcendent perspective to mediate such disputes, recognising that each side (amateur and professional) believes it understands the issues better than the other, with no neutral, rational standpoint capable of definitively resolving the disagreement.

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15 Skillen (1993, pp. 348, 357) also identified the Victorians as key advocates of the ideology of amateurism, particularly in their mythical elevation of ancient games and the ideal of playing for the love of sport.

16 Morgan (2016, p. 36) notes that the "principle of excellence" is so abstract and indeterminate that it can be endorsed by virtually anyone–amateurs and professionals alike–each expressing it in their own distinctive way. Moore (2018, pp. 3, 5) contends that Morgan is mistaken in asserting that broad internalism has nothing to contribute to "the dispute", arguing that he overlooks how clearly the position is articulated: both sides present elements that interpretivism can reasonably affirm or reject. As we saw in the introduction, Morgan (2019) would later acknowledge and appreciate these observations.

In line with this, although Morgan (2012, p. 65; 2016, p. 37), with varying degrees of reservation, reiterates that sport may indeed adhere to the "principles" set forth by Simon, he is equally clear that it should not be confined by Simon's "metaethical" restrictions when pursuing a normative ideal. For Morgan, something *deeper* must underpin what sport ultimately expresses. Whereas others perceive "skepticism" and "relativism" in Morgan's stance,[17] he identifies, as we have seen, "transcendentalism" in theirs.[18]

Overall, Morgan's deep conventionalism seeks to avoid both formalism and interpretivism by rejecting universal (and external) criteria when evaluating normative (and historical) sporting conventions. Instead, "deep conventions" are embedded within specific social (non-material) *contexts*. The background understandings that shape them—including interpretations and their symbolic meanings[19]—provide the foundation for our most informed normative judgments, precisely because they are *contextualised*. For Morgan (2012, p. 66), this framework defines the ultimate purpose of sporting practices and provides the foundation for the realignment he proposes for broad internalism.[20]

Indeed, *deep* conventions must be understood as distinct from other contexts or conventions, as evidenced by the disconnect between amateur and professional conceptions and contemporary views. *Every era carries its own perspective(s)*.

Geertz and the Balinese Cockfight

In his seminal article, Geertz (1973, p. 413 ff.) seeks to immerse the reader in the world he and his wife encountered in late-1950s Indonesia, reconstructing it with the rich detail afforded by his notes and recollections. His aim is to reveal the cultural foundations of the cockfights (*tetadjen*; *sabungan*), which, although officially banned by local authorities as a primitive form of entertainment, persisted underground.[21]

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17 In response, Moore (2018, p. 9) argues that deep conventionalism "[...] is clearly a form of metaethical moral relativism".

18 Consequently, Morgan is characterized by his interlocutors as an "anti-realist internalist", contrasting with the "realism" defended by Simon (2015, p. 30 ff., who responds to such critiques), Russell (2004, 2018), and Dixon (2003).

19 Frías (2017) notes that Morgan's conventionalism resonates with the hermeneutic approaches of Gadamer and Heidegger, emphasizing that "[t]he end of the fusion of horizons is not to understand completely, but rather to understand differently through time".

20 Later, and more decisively from a historical perspective, Morgan (2020, p. 9) seeks to demonstrate how "ethical conventions" have shaped sporting practices through his analysis of amateur and professional conceptions of sport.

21 Although illegal, Geertz notes that these events retained a covert structure and still served key communal purposes, such as fundraising.

As the saying goes, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do"—and the couple did their best to attend one of these cockfights. As it turned out, the event was targeted in a police raid, and instead of presenting themselves as tourists or researchers, they fled like any other local. From that moment on, the village became noticeably more welcoming towards them. It was, as the anthropologist describes it, the "turning point" that granted them true cultural access.

In this seemingly playful practice—let us call it that—Geertz (1973, pp. 416-417) identified a fusion of "emotional explosion, status war, and philosophical drama of central significance" for that society. He adds: "[...] it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men". In Geertz's view, this particular cultural expression offers a privileged lens into the community, just as, in the United States, one might gain insight into Americans through their engagement in a "[...] ball park, on a golf links, at a race track, or around a poker table".[22]

There may be some exaggeration in his account, but Geertz (1973, p. 417) reinforces the notion of a deep psychological bond between a man and his rooster, noting that "[...] cocks are viewed as detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own". *Sabung*, the Indonesian word for "cock", is almost always used as a term of praise in that context, unless it refers to a weak or unimpressive rooster.

Building on this symbolic weight, Geertz (1973, pp. 418-419) describes an intimacy between man and rooster that goes beyond the merely metaphorical. The animals become, in his words, "[...] aesthetically, morally, and metaphysically, expressions of human status: animality". By identifying with his rooster, the Balinese man aligns himself with his "ideal self", even with the "Powers of Darkness" (Geertz, 1973, p. 420). It is precisely because of this deep identification that defeat is a moment of profound humiliation for the loser, who may violently cast off the animal and let it be claimed by the victor. It is a moment marked by a "[...] mixture of social embarrassment, moral satisfaction, aesthetic disgust, and cannibal joy" (Geertz, 1973, p. 421).

Beyond this emotional complexity, Geertz's account also offers a portrayal of the event that resonates deeply with philosophical themes. He offers a description that is especially evocative for readers with a philosophical inclination—though not exclusively so—as the ideas that intermittently emerge, including a "Platonic concept of hate", are vividly embodied in the violent and fierce manner in which the roosters hurl themselves at one another.

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[22] In fact, one could say this idea resonates with Lingard's (1907, p. 39) observation, found just after the passage we previously cited: "[i]f you would read a man's Disposition, see him Game, you will then learn more of him in one hour, than in seven Years Conversation [...]". It also aligns with the view of the eighteenth-century antiquarian Strutt (1838, p. xvii), who argued: "[i]n order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them".

Building on this, Geertz (1973, pp. 423-424) turns to the participants' relationship with the rules, a central concern in both the philosophical and broader study of sport (*e.g.*, D'Agostino, 1981; Russell, 1999; Dixon, 2003; Suits, 2005, ch. 4). He emphasises that these regulations are primarily unwritten, passed down orally through generations as a vital "legal and cultural" element of local tradition. The umpire is therefore universally recognized as the final authority and enforcer of the rules, with his decisions never subject to challenge, even after the fight has concluded. Only he is responsible for awarding the prizes after the match.

Accordingly, only men of impeccable reputation are allowed to serve in this role, and it is only to them that the "fighters" entrust their roosters for competition. Geertz emphasizes that in all the dozens of fights he observed, he never saw any deviation from this established protocol. Interestingly, this stance echoes that of the British gentlemen who advocated for the amateur ideal of sport, as highlighted by Morgan (2020, pp. 17-18) and partially discussed earlier.

While this stance might suggest a formalist respect for the rules of the game, Geertz (1973, p. 424) makes it clear that in the setting where human and animal actors come together, each moment is shaped by "cultural preoccupations". This is evident, for example, in the role of the bettor, who must maintain a reputation beyond reproach and always have money on hand, as well as in the use of the iron spur, which may be adjusted—larger or smaller—depending on the desired balance between the roosters (Geertz, 1973, pp. 426, 429).

These layers of cultural meaning become especially apparent when Geertz turns to the topic of betting, which brings us to the core of his argument: the notion of "deep play". Drawing on Bentham's concept of "deep play", Geertz (1973, p. 431) explores how the central bet in the Balinese cockfight is what truly "makes the game".[23] The Balinese place great value on well-matched, unpredictable fights, aiming to pair roosters of similar—or artificially balanced—strength, and wagering heavily to sustain that equilibrium. Still, this ideal is not always achieved: many matches end up being relatively insignificant or emotionally flat, what the author refers to as "shallow affairs" (see fn. 5).

Nevertheless, there appears to be a consistent effort to maintain a "centre bet" as "[...] a means, a device, for creating "interesting", "deep" matches—not the reason, or at least not the main reason, why they are interesting, the source of their fascination, the substance of their depth" (Geertz, 1973, p. 432).

Bentham (1950, n. 106), for his part, opposed high-stakes gambling—perhaps anticipating the logic of amateurism, which resists professional involvement on the grounds that it places one's livelihood at the mercy of athletic performance.

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[23] From Bentham's *Theory of Legislation*, Geertz (1973, p. 432) draws the British philosopher's idea that "deep play" refers to "[...] play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all".

This opens the way for interpreting "depth" not simply in terms of monetary risk, but as residing in the ability to navigate and balance competing concerns. Importantly, this balance is not pursued for its own sake or merely for the integrity of the game, but reflects *deeper* cultural meanings and commitments. What is at stake, ultimately, is a moral symbol that transcends any utilitarian calculus (Geertz, 1973, p. 433).

This is why in the more "shallow" matches, utility is most evident, while in the "deep" ones, far more than material gain is involved: what is ultimately at play is honour and social status. Crucially, Geertz clarifies that such status is not permanently altered; it is momentarily affirmed or challenged during these contests. While lasting hostilities may arise, they are intended to remain confined *within* their "play form", that is, separate from "ordinary life". After all, as Geertz famously concludes, it is "only a cockfight" (Geertz, 1973, p. 440). This conclusion is grounded in the Balinese view that cockfighting stands at the very opposite end of the spectrum from "everyday life" (Geertz, 1973, p. 450). It is thus understood as functionally disconnected from it. At most, its function lies in interpretation, that is, in providing a Balinese reading of their own cultural experience (Geertz, 1973, pp. 446, 448).

This may be seen as a Balinese iteration of the "magic circle" (Huizinga, 1949, pp. 20, 57), but it also aligns with what Morgan (1976, p. 90) described just a few years after Geertz's essay as "[...] a world unto itself, that stands apart from the affairs of everyday life".[24] Therefore, it is no coincidence that Geertz (1973, p. 449) states, "[a]ttending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text".

Overall, Geertz (1973, p. 453) consciously distances himself from any "reductive formulas", prioritizing the extraction of the specific character of Balinese culture (its *ethos*) over seeking rational explanations for its framework or fitting it into a universal human context. In this respect, his ethnographic study is particularly significant.

Thus, to close this section, it is notable that the entire process, as described by Geertz, bears little relation to either formalist or interpretivist approaches to sport. Regarding the first approach, Geertz's explanation makes it clear that the concern is not with constitutive rules per se, even though participants must not disregard them and adhere to them as closely as possible (cheaters are ostracised). Nor is the notion of an "unnecessary obstacle" (Suits, 2005) what motivates them,

[24] In *Leftist Theories of Sport*, Morgan (1994, p. 86) retains these core assumptions—as previously noted in the introduction—but deepens them through Suits's (2005) notion of "unnecessary obstacles" (pp. 54-55), adding a further layer of conceptual nuance.

despite the fact that the roosters may be equipped with spurs more lethal than those found in natural fights.[25] As for the second approach, it is also apparent that "principles" are not the primary driving force, even though participants govern themselves by well-established principles, principles that might be understood as inherent to a practice of this nature. The most prominent principles remain part of the game but are deeply sociocultural; in other words, they transcend the mere scope of the practice, which Geertz presents as an extension of the society in which it is embedded.[26]

The difficulty of categorizing it is precisely the point. If one were to take the Balinese *respect for the rules* too literally, one might consider them the ultimate formalists, albeit formalist-ritualists. Conversely, if one were to interpret their *guiding principles* similarly, one could see them as the ultimate interpretivists, acting in accordance with the *bloody* principles of the game (after all, Geertz advanced hermeneutics within anthropology; *cf.* Frías, 2017). However, since this is not the central thrust of the argument, the parallels evident with Morgan's deep conventionalist notion should be taken as an invitation for further reflection by those interested in engaging more deeply with his theory.

With that said, it is now time to proceed with our own critique.

Morgan and Geertz: A Critique

While it is true that Morgan derives the notion of "deep" conventions more directly from Marmor (2009) than from Geertz, the Geertzian concept of "depth" offers a far richer, more symbolic dimension that moves beyond a mere Benthamite reinterpretation.[27] For Geertz, the "depth" of the Balinese cockfight is not found in the formal conventions of the *game itself*, but in the way the event functions as a profound story a society tells about itself. He demonstrates how the cockfight serves as a *vehicle* for understanding a population's cultural preoccupations, status hierarchies, and encounter with an idealised self, a symbolic realm that transcends mere utility or material gain.

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[25] It is Geertz himself (1973, p. 432) who suggests that "[t]he question of why such matches are interesting –indeed, for the Balinese, exquisitely absorbing– takes us out of the realm of formal concerns into more broadly sociological and social–psychological ones, and to a less purely economic idea of what "depth" in gaming amounts to". This also anticipates the rejection of external factors as explanatory frameworks for interpreting the game or sport, particularly when approached from an "economic" perspective.

[26] Contrary to the all-encompassing rational principles championed by interpretivists, Geertz (1973, p. 445) asserts that: "[...] cockfight is merely being Balinese".

[27] Moore (2019, p. 6), referring to Marmor (2009) –who describes conventions as social rules based on mutual expectations and shared reasons– points out that the idea of "constitutive conventions" can be traced back to Searle. Additionally, Geertz's concept of "deep play" may be better understood as an "extraordinarily high-stakes practice" and, as Borge (2019, pp. 50-51) further notes, it was something of a "historical accident" that the anthropologist encountered the term in Bentham, who apparently used it only once. However, Borge's interest lies not in revisiting the concept as Morgan does, but rather in examining the player's engagement with the activity itself, whether they are truly immersed (*deep*) in it.

This Geertzian perspective illuminates Morgan's framework.[28] What Geertz identifies as "cultural preoccupations" find a direct parallel in Morgan's "background social understandings". More significantly, the cockfight's function as a moral and status-laden symbol, rather than a purely utilitarian one, powerfully exemplifies Morgan's key argument for a normative approach to sport. In this way, Geertz's thick description provides the very ethnographic substance that elaborates Morgan's philosophical claim, showing how "deep conventions" are not just rules to be followed, but the symbolic bedrock upon which a community's identity is built and contested.

Geertz's analysis (1973, p. 453), when viewed through a Morganian lens, ultimately consolidates a theory of "deep symbolic convention".[29] While his exploration of a culture's ethos and his rejection of reductive formulas might initially suggest an affinity with interpretivism, his conclusions align more strongly with Morgan's conventionalist perspective. This is most evident where Geertz portrays the cockfight as a symbolic realm that derives its profound meaning precisely from its deep connection to the social world outside it. He famously concludes that the cockfight is a dramatisation of the very status hierarchies and cultural preoccupations that structure everyday Balinese life.

This final move is decisive: rather than grounding the event's significance in abstract, interpretive principles, he anchors it in the specific, conventional understandings of a particular society, thereby championing a view that is fundamentally conventionalist at its core:

> [o]ne can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them (Geertz, 1973, p. 453).

Here, "interpretations" should be understood not as "principles" but as "conventions", that is, as a shared framework of significance. Geertz himself indicates (1973, p. 434) that he aligns more closely with Weber than with Bentham, asserting that "[...] the imposition of meaning on life is the major end and primary condition of human existence, that access of significance more than compensates

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[28] Morgan himself (1994, p. 181 ff.) appears to have revisited –or at least maintained– the very framework he once criticised: a form of critical theory marked by what he called a "vulgar ethnocentric" and "reflective" approach, leading to an immanent conception of culture, as opposed to a transcendental one. Geertz's position could be seen as a form of "deep ethnocentrism".

[29] "By the ethos of the game, I mean those attitudes, commitments, values, goods, and virtues that are necessary to sustain the ways of life embodied in sporting practices. [...] The ethos speaks to [...] virtues such as justice and honesty whose exercise is crucial to the integrity of sporting practices" (Morgan, 1994, pp. 224-225).

for the economic costs involved". What matters most, then, is not material gain, but a shared framework of significance, culturally constructed and collectively upheld.[30]

This may raise the following questions: if money is secondary—or if what is considered external and material carries limited weight—how can its physical manifestation in the form of currency hold such symbolic power in expressing momentary status? And why do extragame social hierarchies influence the nature and scale of the bets placed? As Geertz himself notes (1973, p. 441), "[...] cockfighting has always been as much an elite concern as a popular one", and it is not even accessible to the participation of women or young people.

While these questions may appear "materialist" in the colloquial sense, it is, in fact, their philosophical dimension that warrants deeper consideration. That is, whatever is deemed "deep" is, strictly speaking, actually "shallow" if it fails to engage with the sphere of broader material relations—whether within or beyond the game, and whether related to monetary concerns or other factors, which, paradoxically, lose their significance when reduced solely to themselves.

In this regard, Geertzian approaches to gambling were succeeded in anthropology by a newer generation that, as Malaby notes (2009, n. 216), "[...] brought the matter back around to materiality by narrowly construing the gambling as a functionalist redistribution of wealth", in contrast to Geertz's interpretive approach.

Accordingly, while we argue for a partial re-evaluation of Morgan—paralleling the reassessment of Geertz—in light of a non-reductionist materialist turn in sport philosophy, our broader aim is to demonstrate that Malaby's critique of the anthropologist can, and perhaps should, be extended to the philosopher of sport. For instance, Malaby (2009, p. 207) argues that Geertz may have merely exchanged one form of reductionism for another. In a similar vein, it seems that Morgan—while attempting to move beyond formalism, interpretivism, and especially materialism—ultimately advances yet another mode of internalist reductionism. It is therefore necessary to move beyond the external–internal dichotomy, allowing whatever is accepted as "internal" to incorporate the *situated* insights of practice, not only athletic, but practical and social more broadly.

In line with Malaby (2009, p. 206), a representative of the post-Geertzian generation of anthropologists, we are confronted with the notion of a world that is irreducibly contingent. A world in constant flux, without transcendental foundations.[31] Admittedly, this perspective would likely not trouble Morgan. However, his account still falls short of fully engaging with the historical and material

[30] It is worth noting, however, that Morgan –just as Loland (2018, p. 3) points out– may reflect a limitation inherent in D'Agostino (1981) style conventionalism: namely, its tendency to focus solely on the shared interpretation of rules, without incorporating the broader social *ethos* of a particular sporting practice. Geertz, by contrast, consistently keeps the question of *ethos* at the centre of his analysis.

[31] To fully trace the genealogy of this critique, its earlier manifestations should be considered, such as in Moore (1975).

dimensions of practice. These dimensions are deliberately downplayed, and conventions often appear as a series of disconnected episodes,[32] or even as a "collection of dead facts", as Marx and Engels (1978, p. 27) critically put it.

It is precisely this shortcoming that Malaby addresses as he seeks to move beyond epiphenomenal readings by linking Geertz's work to that of Weber, even though he does not limit himself solely to this author. Unlike Geertz, Malaby (2009, p. 208) resists reducing consequences to mere symbolic statements or allowing games to become static within a social order, emphasizing instead that "[...] games assume a powerful relationship to human practice and social process". Malaby (2009, pp. 200-210) also challenges the harmful idea—originating from Huizinga and popularized by Caillois—that games are wholly separate activities without real consequences, a view reflected in both Geertz and Morgan.[33]

Pushing beyond this premise, Malaby (2009, p. 213) advocates for a different approach, drawing from anthropology that integrates Geertz's insights on play with perspectives that acknowledge the material constraints (Marx, 1974) and contingencies of social practice. This line of critique, by underscoring the need to consider *how meaning is generated through practice*—better understood as *praxis*—and *how such practice is materially situated*, confirms its applicability to Morgan's framework.

We accept this idea because, just as Malaby ultimately does with Geertz, we are not discarding Morgan's entire body of thought. However, arguably going beyond Malaby (who does not go as far as we would like), we understand that this position also entails accepting the fundamental role of *material relations* both within and beyond sport, not merely as constraints related to practice.

These relations are deeply interwoven with the rest of life, not merely *coexisting* or *codetermined*. To suggest a *mutual* belonging implies accepting the possibility of a *completely* disembedded non-material realm—an idea we reject. Without this acknowledgment, one risks falling into the same reasoning as Hyland (2018, pp. 343-344), who, relying on Morgan's (1994) *magnum opus*, treats institutions as separate from community *practices*.[34]

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[32] As Morgan himself (2020, p. 28) observes: "[...] the history of sport is nothing if not the history of significant breaks or ruptures in what was considered morally acceptable conduct from one period to the next".

[33] All the issues Geertz raises concerning the cockfight as transcending material gains or goods, or even ultimately going beyond their influence, run up against some of his own suggestions—such as when he (Geertz, 1973, p. 434) notes the loss of legality of the fight following Dutch colonisation, amongst other cultural influences, or when he points to the role the fight initially played in the monetisation of the island. Malaby (2009, p. 209) highlights how Ortner's (1999) definition of "serious games" helps overcome the notion that nothing of real significance is ever truly *at stake* in games, emphasising instead that games can carry profound social and material consequences.

[34] Essentially, Morgan does little more than what Vivas (1959, p. 239) did when revisiting "contextualism" and rejecting the subjectivism of poets, given that one's context is inescapable. Morgan situates himself within each context but treats these contexts as disconnected from one another. Simon (2015, p. 29) referred

Hyland illustrates this with basketball, noting how timeouts increased to boost advertising revenue. Yet, this perspective ultimately overlooks the umbilical connection between these institutional practices and sport itself; otherwise, financial interests would have no tangible impact on what the game truly is—in this case, basketball marked by more frequent interruptions in its rhythm.

The problem, then, is that basketball can only be a "lived religion" (Hyland, 2018, p. 345) if society provides the conditions for something even remotely like it, not merely through *internal* practice or convention. But to accept conventions on these terms alone is to invite the kind of normative challenge posed by Frías (2014b, p. 167): "[s]hould we accept bullfighters' tasks just because they are widely accepted within their community and because they exhibit some human excellences?"

This line of critique points towards a synthesis. As Frías (2014a, p. 364) notes, some internalists have argued for incorporating external principles to address 21st-century sports. Frías himself (2014b, pp. 169, 170 n.) acknowledges the "moral elements" that externalism can contribute and, accepting Russell's (2004, p. 148) argument that "[...] games are not separate from our regular moral institutions" (although this argument is not pursued by the authors to its full implications), agrees with Kretchmar's (2007) proposal, which Frías describes as a "more holistic ethical account" replacing the internal-external distinction.

However, our aim is not to pursue this kind of normative synthesis. The task of thinking about sport must go beyond the domain of ethical justification, whether framed by Habermas—or by Frías (2014b, p. 165) through Habermas—as a "third way" between externalism and internalism, or as an "eclectic" solution as proposed by Loland and McNamee (2000). That model implies a bidirectional relationship between pre-existing domains, and eclecticism involves selectively borrowing from different frameworks. Our objective, instead, is to properly situate the multiple dimensions of play, games, and sport within their constitutive historical and material context from the outset.

It is from this foundational premise that we can identify a central flaw in the approaches of both Geertz and Morgan. Despite their differences, they fall into the same trap: *by elevating the symbolic and the conventional to* autonomous *spheres, they detach them from the material conditions that make them possible and contestable*. In the end, culture and convention served less to illuminate

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to this stance as "critical contextualism". Frías (2014b, 159), aiming to revive Morgan's ideas, highlights how Morgan's concept of "intramurals" prevents any transcontextual debate across different contexts. However, in the same work, Frías (2014b, 170 n.) contrasts Morgan by invoking Habermas for the philosophy of sport, arguing that Habermas—like deep conventionalism—embraces context, but in a broader sense. Similarly, Loland and McNamee (2000, p. 76), while eclectically revisiting Morgan's internalist approach connected to the ethos of the game, seek to avoid an uncritical acceptance of the empirical conditions of each particular time and place. For a "context-sensitive" approach to sport focused on rules, see McFee (2004, ch. 2).

historical dynamics than to freeze specific moments in time, treating them as fixed rather than relational and open to transformation.

The hard lesson is this: *no "deep" understanding can endure when it ignores the ground from which it arises*, whether related to risk or to conventions. Any interpretation of sport that truly aims to be *deep* (not merely in the Marmorian sense; see fn. 28) must engage directly with the concrete history that sustains and shapes it.

Conclusion: A Materialist Spur in Response

This article has traced the affinities and tensions between Geertz's interpretive anthropology, centred on the notion of "deep play", and Morgan's "deep conventionalism" in the philosophy of sport. Despite emerging from different disciplinary backgrounds, both thinkers reject reductionist and universalist accounts, emphasising instead that cultural practices, be they Balinese cockfighting or modern sports, must be understood within their symbolic and conventional contexts.

However, this contextual emphasis is not without its limitations. In Geertz's work, the focus on symbolism can obscure the material conditions underpinning the practice, such as the betting economy, violence, and social hierarchies. Conversely, Morgan's insistence on the internal conventions of sport tends to overlook their entanglement with broader socioeconomic structures like professionalisation, funding, and commercial interests. This tension is not merely methodological. It has normative consequences. If conventions and symbols are treated as autonomous from material relations, then practices that are morally problematic—bullfighting's violence, sport's exclusions—cannot be critically assessed from within the framework itself. The price of "depth", in other words, is paid by those whom the framework cannot see.

The shortcomings of deep conventionalism further complicate this issue. If all conventions are viewed as merely contingent and incommensurable, how can we critically evaluate those that perpetuate injustice? Morgan's stance leaves the possibility of social transformation in a precariously ambiguous position. Meanwhile, Geertz provides rich descriptions but stops short of critique, presenting the cockfight as a cultural mirror rather than a subject for critical examination.

Thus, the critical potential of both Morgan's and Geertz's frameworks is limited by their shared reluctance to engage with the material conditions that sustain the *status quo*.[35] For Morgan, conventions encapsulate the meaning of a historical moment. Geertz, in turn, reduces the stakes to social status, whether the dominant order or simply "being Balinese". This limits the critical potential

[35] Though, with "ethical conventions", Morgan (2020) tries to offer an attempt to address this issue.

of their approaches, as it leaves oppressive practices—past and present—unchallenged, such as apartheid in rugby.[36] As a result, despite their promise of *depth*, their theories remain incomplete, avoiding engagement with broader power structures and possibilities for social change.

It is precisely here that a critical gap emerges. Although this may sound like a truism, the persistence of similar approaches makes the point worth reiterating: *the analysis of conventions must go hand in hand with a critique of the material and social conditions that produce and sustain them*, not in order to return to the outdated reductionisms these authors sought to overcome,[37] but also not to remain confined within the very frameworks they established.

In the end, while both modern sport and the cockfight can be seen as complex, ambiguous cultural practices reflecting and contesting social values, interpreting them requires more than mere description or ethnographic framing; it calls for critical intervention. If the analyses of Geertz and Morgan show that no practice exists outside of culture or ethos, then the next task is *to build a historical perspective that integrates material relations, treats conventions and symbols as constructs rather than (mere social or) natural facts, and transforms play and sport without uprooting them from their foundations*

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[36] Contemporary anthropology has moved beyond earlier debates by formulating a sophisticated, pragmatic answer to moral and theoretical relativism. Yet, a recurring obstacle in these studies, as is often the case, is the persistent reliance on the idea of bounded cultural wholes. (We are grateful to Thomas Malaby for this observation and for his generous feedback on an earlier draft of this text.) The case of apartheid-era rugby in South Africa exemplifies this limitation. The "deep conventions" of the sport—its *ethos* of masculinity, loyalty, and physical prowess—were not merely autonomous cultural symbols; they were materially and legally embedded in the apartheid state's apparatus of racial segregation and economic exploitation. A purely conventionalist (Morgan) or symbolic (Geertz) analysis, focused on internal meanings, would describe the practice but lack the critical tools to challenge its foundational injustice. It would risk treating the rugby field as a "bounded cultural whole" rather than a site where oppressive power was both performed and reinforced.

[37] Marx recognised the risk of conflating his theory with 'economic reductionism', which is why he described the relationship between the 'base' and the 'superstructure' as historical, uneven, and at times compatible with the superstructure's effectiveness, especially amidst contradictory tendencies. At minimum, praxis leaves us enough room to 'make our own history' or, metaphorically, to 'play our own games'. While other references could further develop these discussions, this is not a study of Marx. Given the topic at hand, however, the author's collection of Ethnological Studies (1974) is particularly relevant.

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