

Joe Namath and Super Bowl III: An Interpretation of Style

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In 1969, the author of the National Football League's official narrative, N.F.L. Films, faced the difficult task of producing a highlight rendition of Super Bowl III, a game in which their team, the Baltimore Colts, lost unexpectedly to the New York Jets of the newer, rival American Football League. To make the job even tougher, the Jets upset the Colts under the leadership of a young, flamboyant, and brash quarterback, Joe Namath, who wore white shoes and long hair, stayed out late at night, and rather immodestly "guaranteed" victory against the seemingly unstoppable Colts. Consequently, N.F.L. Films did not present this game as a mere contest between two football teams or quarterbacks as they had for Super Bowls I and II. Rather, they made a film about a battle between Namath's style of masculinity and that of Colts quarterback Johnny Unitas. In the process, N.F.L. Films touched upon some basic challenges to dominant cultural values presented by the youthful 1960's counter culture, and upon changing ideas of gender identity.

In a story on Super Bowl III for *Sports Illustrated* the week after the event, Tex Maule called Namath "the folk hero of the new generation" whose persona "spells insouciant youth in the jet age."¹ The contrast Namath provided against Baltimore's Unitas was as great and symbolic as that between their team's nicknames. Unitas' Colts, with their blue horseshoe decal pressed to the side of their helmets, recalled a rugged form of transportation associated with a mythic image of the old west. Namath's Jets, on the other hand, symbolized a generation whose technology had shattered barriers of space and time. As the N.F.L. Films highlight presentation demonstrates, the competition between the Colts and the Jets had become a clash of icons, a battle of symbols, and a war of style.

"John is crew cut and quiet," wrote Maule, "and Joe has long hair and a big mouth, but haircuts and gab obviously have nothing to do with efficiency of quarterbacks."² The stylistic contrast between these two men certainly skewed attention away from their on-field performances. But understanding cultural

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1. Tex Maule, "Say It's So. Joe." *Sports Illustrated*, 20 January 1969, 10.

2. *Ibid.*, 15.

symbols is a much more complex process than analyzing game plans. Within the context of militaristic and corporate rules by which football defined play, Namath and Unitas represented historically specific competing styles of masculinity. It is the job of the cultural scholar to interpret these styles, describe their texture, and unveil their possible layers of reception.

While the following pages focus primarily upon Namath, it is important to look at the contrast N.F.L. films set up between the Jets' quarterback and Unitas. Early on, narrator John Facenda uses words such as "inconsistent" to describe Namath while portraying Unitas as a cool, rational quarterback who only accepts fame by producing results. Clearly, the makers of this film found it difficult to reconcile Namath's image with football's intrinsic masculinity. Unitas, on the other hand, represented the kind of man that football had managed to preserve throughout the 1960s against constant challenges from counter-cultural forces. In reality, Unitas was Namath's hero, as they both grew up amid the steel mills of western Pennsylvania, and both shared an intense competitive spirit. Yet their personal histories made them into very different images that spoke to often conflicting notions of manhood.

After a rather marginal college career at the University of Louisville, Johnny Unitas was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1955. That summer, the Steelers released him in training camp, forcing Unitas to take a job as a construction worker. After playing semi-pro football for the Bloomfield Rams of the Greater Pittsburgh League for six dollars a game, Unitas received a call from Colts General Manager Don Kellert, and in 1956 made the team as a backup quarterback. By 1958, Unitas was considered the game's top passer, leading the Colts to an overtime victory over the New York Giants in the National Football League championship game.³

Unlike Unitas, Namath experienced a much quicker rise to fame. Colleges interested in Namath's football talents had to compete with professional baseball teams seeking to sign the Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania native to a minor league contract. After an outstanding college career at Alabama, he was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals of the N.F.L. and the New York Jets of the A.F.L. Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant advised Namath to try to negotiate as lucrative a contract as possible, letting the competing leagues bid ever higher for his services. Jets owner Sonny Werblin finally signed Namath to a \$400,000 contract in 1964.⁴

Namath soon became famous for the way in which he spent his newly acquired wealth. He lived in a penthouse apartment in New York City, wore mink coats, and enjoyed New York's night life. "I make good money," Namath once said, defending himself against his detractors, "I spend it, it's mine. I go out with girls. I like girls."⁵ At one point in his career, the Jets wanted Namath to move near their stadium on Long Island. Werblin, however, would not allow this to

3. Dave Anderson, *The Story of Football* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 55-59.

4. Joe Namath as told to Larry King, "The Joe Namath I Know," *Esquire*, December 1968, 110-112.

5. Namath and King. "The Joe Namath I Know," 112.

happen, maintaining that Namath “is Park Avenue.”⁶ A former show business promoter, Werblin said of his most famous acquisition, “Namath has the presence of a star. You know how a real star lights up a room when he comes in. Joe has that quality.”

By contrast, those who admired Unitas usually had little to say about his public persona. Jim Klobuchar of the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* once wrote that “Unitas was earnest and likable, a clubby guy. He might not electrify television on Sunday afternoon, but who did?”⁸ Unitas’ reputation resided in his reliability and stability on the field. Klobuchar writes that “Unitas was methodical, precise, brave, and, in his fashion, great.”⁹ Players often respected Unitas for his grit and toughness. “When he sees us coming,” said former Los Angeles Rams defensive tackle Merlin Olsen, “he knows it’s going to hurt and we know it’s going to hurt, but he just stands there and takes it. No other quarterback has such class.”¹⁰

Given the time of reception, Unitas and Namath represented what Horace Newcomb calls “character zones,” or images of languages that carry a range of meaning and respond to a central ideology from different perspectives. The power of visual media, according to Newcomb, lies in the layers of ideological content presented on screen before any sound or action begins to take place.¹¹ A montage that contrasts Unitas’ crew cut to Namath’s shaggy locks has meaning, therefore, on a number of different levels. One can see Unitas as the stable, white collar worker, or “company man,” and Namath as the young jet-set consumer who wears trendy double breasted suits to late evenings at the “21 Club.” On another level, Unitas is the one his coach Don Shula once called “an excellent field general” who heroically leads his team into glorious battles, while Namath is a reckless cowboy who inspires players through his bold individualism and swaggering confidence. And, most important, Unitas represents masculine virtues as defined in the 1950s, and Namath the rebellious youth of the 1960s.

Methodologically, two approaches to the meaning of sports help in understanding the dualities that Namath presents the cultural scholar. The first is from Michael Novak’s book *The Joy of Sports*. Novak writes of sports as civil religion, a religion that liberates by demonstrating the ultimate in human virtue, courage, and perfection in the face of a repressive modern social order. Football, within the often terrifying structure of its rules, replicates brutal and regimented conditions of life. Yet, Novak argues that all sports, including football, are the “basic reality of human life” offering metaphors for all that is important: “beauty, truth, excellence, transcendence.”¹²

6. John R. McDermott, “The Famous Mustache that Was,” *Life*, 20 December 1968, 56.

7. “Football’s Super Star: Joseph William Namath,” *The New York Times*, 13 January 1969, A32.

8. Jim Klobuchar and Fran Tarkenton, *Tarkenton* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1976), 13.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Paul Zimmerman, *The New Thinking Man’s Guide to Pro Football* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 67.

11. Horace M. Newcomb, “On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984): 34-50.

12. Michael Novak, *The Joy of sports* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), xii.

While Novak beautifully describes his view of the aesthetic of sport, he tends to interpret history as a series of inescapably corrupt cycles. True freedom, according to Novak, lies in transcending human space and time through play, games and sport. Thus, to Novak, sports are a sacred ritual. While agreeing that sports do contain possibilities for enablement, Richard Gruneau takes issue with most of Novak's analysis. In *Class, Sports and Social Development*, Gruneau writes that Novak downplays, or ignores completely, material history's influence upon the rules that have historically defined play and sports. He addresses issues of freedom in broader social and political terms. Yet, Gruneau does not view sports in purely functional terms in which athletics as cultural production merely reify economic structures. Rather, sports to Gruneau are forms of social practice which must be viewed in the context of a struggle over the control of rules relating to structured limits and possibilities in life.¹³ Gruneau writes that play and games can, when separated from the context of the making and remaking of social and cultural conditions, reify these conditions and separate them from history. As this happens, Gruneau believes that symbols evoked by sports become recreated in mythic forms that have powerful ideological overtones.¹⁴

Because Novak values sports as activity somewhat isolated from historically specific conditions, he has trouble viewing Namath positively in a cultural context. Novak writes of the quarterback as an exciting football player and excellent passer,¹⁵ but also labels him "the central figure in the decay of sports."¹⁶ Namath's subversive influence, according to Novak, centers upon his initiation of the six figure salary to pro football. This Novak writes, has created a situation where coaches and team owners, not wanting to risk injury to highly paid players, discourage their stars from playing to their upmost abilities.¹⁷ Novak has a point. During the well-publicized feuds between Namath and Jets head coach Weeb Ewbank, Werblin was a constant ally of his \$400,000 quarterback. According to *Sports Illustrated*, Werblin at one point attempted to solve the conflicts by firing Ewbank. Thus, Namath often felt secure acting against the wishes of his coach, like the time he opted to rest his sore knees and sit out a 1968 preseason game against Houston.¹⁸

The conflicts over Namath's salary took on special force within the context of the social and political turbulence of the 1960s. Namath's high salary gave him the power to rebel against authority (at least the immediate authority that coach Ewbank represented). It is this power, and not the money itself, that Novak seems to object to. As a young player with the ability to subvert the authority of his coach (and the audacity to wear his flashy street clothes instead of his

13. Richard Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 51.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Novak, *The Joy of Sports*. 264.

16. *Ibid.*, 264.

17. *Ibid.*, 302.

18. Edwin Shrake, "A.F.L.: The East." *Sports Illustrated*, 16 September 1968, 84-86.

uniform when sidelined during that pre-season game),¹⁹ one can see Namath as a hero of dissent, especially within the context of the 1960's counter-cultural movements.

To many fans, Namath seemed to personify football's version of the generation gap. At one point, he even received angry letters calling him a "draft dodger," accusing the quarterback of exaggerating his knee injuries to escape conscription.²⁰ The impact of Namath's image upon the American consciousness had, at this point, begun to resonate with the actions and ideas of the counter-culture. This was an entity that William O'Neill describes in his book *Coming Apart* as a vague and elastic substitute for more traditional notions of "youth culture," touching "everything from clothing to politics."²¹ Turning to the analysis of Paul Goodman, O'Neill states that central to the counter-culture were dissent and rebellion from society's institutions, and an unwillingness to understand how they worked or where they originated.²² The counter-culture manifested itself in "communes and hippie farms, magic, hedonism, [and] eroticism," as well as rock music, long hair, and fashion.²³

The fact that Namath had a reputation for late nights on the town and a hedonistic lifestyle does not, alone, link him to the counter-culture. After all, American sports had nurtured similarly flamboyant personalities throughout the 20th century such as Babe Ruth, Sonny Jurgenson, and Paul Hornung. Yet, within the context of generational conflict in the 1960s, Namath's youthful celebration of leisure culture took on special force. This was a time when affluent women and men between the ages of 18 and 30 were rebelling against what Theodore Roszak called "technocracy," a culture that places a premium upon efficiency and seeks technical solutions to problems at every level of human life. The youth refused to accept the authoritarian position of technology to which Roszak noted the older generation had surrendered. Thus, Unitas' popularity drew directly from his reliability and stability as an efficient quarterback. Namath, however, gathered his support by bringing his private, leisure life onto the technological space of the gridiron. As a young player who slightly blurred football's focus upon efficiency and hard work, Namath joined what Roszak called "technocracy's children" to become football's most famous hippie.²⁴

Ironically, Namath used the ethic of efficiency to justify his style, once angrily saying, "I wear my hair the way I like to wear my hair. What does that possibly have to do with how well I throw a football?"²⁵ Still, in 1968, he found

19. Ibid.

20. Namath and King, "The Joe Namath I Know," 112.

21. William O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's* (New York: New York Times, 1971), 233.

22. Ibid., 258.

23. Ibid.

24. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 22-36. Thomas Wolfe provides one view of how the counter culture altered "the usual order of things" in his account of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in chapters 6 and 7 of *The Electric Kool- Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux., 1968).

25. Namath and King, "The Joe Namath I Know," 108.

it difficult to reconcile his public image with the expectations of many sports fans. This may stem from the way in which sports, according to O'Neill, had become by the late 1960s the last bastion of an era when "hard work and ability were pre-eminent and unmistakable."²⁶ O'Neill writes that "Sport used to seem a metaphor for such virtues as drive, ambition, respect for standards, and individual excellence. Now many thought it was their last resort."²⁷

As the counter-culture's representative in this bastion of masculine virtue, Namath drew quite a bit of fire from fans and press alike. The criticism he received often reinforced his style's connection to the counter-culture. In 1968, for instance, *Life* magazine printed a photo of a sign hanging from the stands in San Diego that read "Joe #12, get a Haircut." These words stood on a large white sheet with a drawing of the quarterback flashing a peace sign while wearing his fu-man-chu mustache, a goatee, a flower in his long hair, two dollar signs on his arms, and two question marks on his knees. Additionally, the "o" in "Joe" contained the three lines of a peace symbol.²⁸

This style that O'Neill and Roszak call counter-cultural, strongly parallels Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of the "postmodern." Lyotard argues that a postmodern sensibility deconstructs grand historical narratives that justify an interpretation of knowledge in a modernist paradigm. Such narratives, or interpretations of history, offer emancipation based upon the progress of civilization. Yet, Lyotard also feels that this promise is "terroristic," for it snuffs out dissenting narratives and languages. A postmodern moment allows for a multiplicity of languages that attack the sensible and subvert historical meaning.²⁹

The counter-culture, unwilling to accept the totality of Roszak's technocracy, used dissent and disruption to break with modern interpretations of history. Therefore, Namath's youth and brash rebelliousness that tied him to the counter-culture, seemed to reject ideals of hard work, drive, and ambition that O'Neill states sports symbolized. Namath appeared to turn away from the progressive values that stand at the core of the modern narrative. O'Neill's statement in *Coming Apart* that political conflicts tended to become cultural wars seems appropriate, for style had come to define one's stake in the promises of the modern world.

It is fitting, therefore, that N.F.L. Films would constantly use war metaphors in its presentation of Super Bowl III. The deep voice of narrator Facenda states that as the game drew to a close, the Colts were locked in a "grim battle for survival." Later, he describes Colts quarterback Johnny Unitas as, "a man whose reputation was made fighting and winning such battles." Unitas, said Facenda, had a "tattered" throwing arm, but could at least offer "a fighting heart and a will to win." By attaching the seriousness of war to football, the film

26. *Ibid.*, 230.

27. *Ibid.*

28. McDermott, "Famous Mustache that Was," 56

29. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984). on the "Postmodern," 79-82.

presents the game as a war of styles, and, in turn, a battle between the values of modernity and the subversive influence of the counter-culture.³⁰

The constant audio and visual juxtaposition of Namath's style with Unitas' sharpens the battle lines. The film starts with shots of Broadway lights, Namath surrounded by women at a rally, and the quarterback's fu-man-chu mustache. Over all of this, the viewer hears a song called "Broadway Joe" sung by the "Super Chicks." Later, we see a still photograph of Namath lounging beside a pool answering reporters' questions as the narrator recounts the star's brash predictions of victory. In contrast, the film never presents Unitas out of uniform. His crew cut stands out sharply against Namath's long, shaggy hair. When Unitas and the Colts play, the music turns somber serious, or triumphant. Facenda says of Unitas, "his fluid grace on the football field was all the color he had ever needed to make himself a hero." The style war that the film sets up presents Unitas as tough, hard working, and old while Namath is flamboyant, reckless, and young.³¹

From Novak's analysis of sports, we might be able to conclude that the Jets win represented a religiously significant victory of the "counter-culture" over the "establishment." Yet, it is here, that Novak bears a contradiction. Like Lyotard, he sees the modern narrative of progressivism as bankrupt. He writes that, "history is an escape,"³² and that the notion of progress through history is a myth. Like Lyotard, he also takes note of the terror done in the name of this narrative. But, by looking to human perfection as exemplified in sports for his answer, he turns to a highly conservative idea of liberation. According to Novak, sports are "the heart of human reality," in that they demonstrate "courage, honesty, freedom, community, excellence."³³ Novak sees sports as upholding the standards of civilization.

In this light, Namath becomes a puzzle. As a sports hero, through his performance on the field, he becomes a demonstration of civilized valor. But, as a hero of style, he rejects civilization and celebrates dissent and diversity. Perhaps this contradiction is at the root of Novak's ambivalence toward Namath. Yet, it also calls into question how the quarterback could possibly represent the counter-culture if he was willing to accept and conform to the game of football.

To reach deeper into the complexities of his image, we can return to the opening segments of the highlight film. The words to "Broadway Joe" convey the physical attractiveness of Namath, with a young, all female chorus singing,

He's a hero,
He's a pro,
He's a mister something else,
He's Broadway Joe,
He's a groovy, super guy,
He can pass a football through a needle's eye,

30. "The Baltimore Colts and the New York Jets in the Championship of Professional Football: Super Bowl III," Steve Sabol, Producer, N.F.L. Films Inc., 1969.

31. Ibid.

32. Novak, *Joy of Sports*, 42.

33. Ibid.

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What a feeling,
What a sight,
When we see that number 12 in green and white,
One, two, three, hip, go-go-go,
No one else can throw like Broadway Joe.³⁴

The “Super Chicks” also sing of his hair and his sex appeal. Combined with shots of women blowing kisses, cheering, and grabbing Namath, one gets the idea that his fame has something to do with his own objectification as a sex symbol. Feminist scholarship on subjectivity connected to the work of Linda Williams can help in clarifying this point.

Subjectivity refers to the consciousness of the person or persons who receive a text in popular culture. Scholars such as Williams have noted that to understand subjectivity, we must see how the audience identifies with the images they see. Men have traditionally monopolized images, and, within the texts themselves, have tended to be viewers and not the object of viewing. Kate Linker writes about this phenomenon in discussing representation and sexuality. Linker states that the representational apparatus usually defines the male as subject, denying female subjectivity.³⁵ This, according to Linker, places women in a passive rather than active role in constructing their own identity within popular culture.

By illustrating female attraction to Namath, this film shows the objectification of a quarterback. By placing his attractiveness in terms of style, the film illustrates him empowering women to construct his identity. These sequences seem to place women in an active role. Of course, this is not to say that Namath actually provided women with an active role in culture by empowering them with the ability to objectify his image. Rather, by presenting Namath in this light, N.F.L. Films demonstrates a perceived threat to masculinity that his style provided. By contrasting Namath with Unitas, the film asserts that a man should express heroism through action, not by becoming a passive object.

Still, the film does seem to accept Namath in the end. In the final line of the narration, Facenda poetically states, “Two champions on a Sunday afternoon. A new one as a quarterback, an old one as a man.”³⁶ To see Namath’s style only in terms of female subjectivity, therefore, is a mistake. Barbara Ehrenreich can provide an account that illuminates Namath’s style as even more complex still. Ehrenreich’s analysis helps in seeing Namath’s image as a product of historical forces acting upon notions of masculinity.

In *The Hearts of Men*, Ehrenreich begins with an account of a 1950s moral climate in which men upheld values of responsibility, self-discipline, and a protective commitment to women and children. Since that decade, she asserts these “attributes” have been destroyed in favor of an affirmation of irresponsibility, self-indulgence, and an “isolationist detachment from the chains of

34. N.F.L. Films.

35. Kate Linker, “Representation and Sexuality,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (York: The Museum of Contemporary Art, in association with D. R. Godne, Boston, 1984), 394.

36. N.F.L. Films.

others.³⁷ More than seeing the flight from the breadwinner ethic as one of pure liberation, Ehrenreich poses it in terms of a consumerist, capitalist society.

According to Ehrenreich, counter-cultural styles, like those Namath displayed, merely affirmed the values they originally had set out to oppose. Hedonism and androgyny only led to a unisex idea of consumption where “men with the wherewithal to participate learned that it was not effete to be deeply interested in clothes or food or even hair styles; it was, almost certainly, attractive.”³⁸

The audio and visual bombardment of female adoration for Namath during the opening sequences of the Super Bowl III film, therefore, seem to indicate as much a male fantasy as an affront to traditional masculinity. Namath’s liberation from the image that *Unitas* presents is deeply tied to consumerism. Such, notes Ehrenreich, was the function of *Playboy* magazine, which she states used eroticism to cloak the flight from responsibilities of marriage within the boundaries of heterosexuality.³⁹

Within this new growth in the possibilities for consumption, Ehrenreich notes that most men took a safe route toward identifying with the counter-culture, one that displayed their contempt for responsibility but allowed them the pleasures of material privileges. Thus, men “grew out their sideburns, wore their shirts unbuttoned to display their beads or gold chains, and day-dreamed . . . of long-haired young women with exotic sexual skills.”⁴⁰

The affirmation that one could live free of responsibility yet still be a man seems to thrive in the public image of Namath. Within his style, a man could fantasize about a flight from commitment, yet within Namath’s sexual activity and football ability still find a model for masculinity. A book titled, *Joe Namath: A Matter of Style*, illustrates this phenomenon by asserting that Namath’s personal style has a direct relationship to his playing style. The book details Namath’s busy, jet-set life and includes photos of “Broadway Joe” dressed in flamboyant clothes, getting his hair done, and attending the Academy Awards in the company of Raquel Welch. Co-author Bob Oates, Jr. almost seems to worship Namath’s public image, writing that both on and off the playing field, “he makes it look easy most of the time.”⁴¹

Oates goes on to tie Namath’s persona to his approach to football.⁴² By making this connection, Oates reflects a consumer mentality that glorifies play and denigrates work. Namath’s hedonism provides a liberation to an “easy” and “comfortable” life. Once more, this life is justified for, in the end, it is actually more efficient than the old ways tied to responsibility. In this sense, it conforms to the progressive modern narrative that the counter-culture rejected. Namath’s style becomes good because it works.

37. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1983), 169.

38. *Ibid.*, 115.

39. *Ibid.*, 51.

40. *Ibid.*, 115.

41. Joe Namath and Bob Oates, Jr., *A Matter of Style* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973). 16.

42. *Ibid.*

Here, it is useful to look to Richard Gruneau's hegemonic view of sports in the tradition of Stuart Hall's cultural studies approach. Gruneau sees hegemony as a dynamic ideological system that does not serve the needs of any specific class, but constantly moves and shapes itself toward the expansion of dominant social productive systems.⁴³ Namath's conformity to the standards of consumerist society leads us to view him more as a constraining figure. He represents a cooptation of the styles that, in the counter-culture, had a significance in their rejection of social power structures. Namath really poses no threat to anybody in power, for, in him, the styles of the counter-culture serve to promote values of consumption and validate a game that reifies ideologies of corporate capitalism.

Gruneau warns that we must not view those who perform in sporting activities as "voluntary agents acting in the absence of constraining structures." He sees play, games, and sports as only offering a promise shaped by social and cultural conditions.⁴⁴ This is true in football, which, in its structure, often affirms militaristic and corporate values that many find oppressive. By tying Namath's style to his ability to play this game well, Oates and N.F.L. Films legitimate his style only through his ability to win under the conditions that the football provides. In this sense, Namath rebels very little.

Yet, it seems too harsh to judge Namath purely as a hegemonic crossover from the counter-culture who merely perpetuated existing power structures. After all, even Gruneau feels that the rules and traditions of sport "may be both enabling and constraining."⁴⁵ By bringing his style into professional football, he did present the game with an image that drew the admiration of other players who found Namath's persona to be liberating. After Namath's famous "guarantee" of victory in Super Bowl III, for instance, Bubba Smith of the Colts said, "Joe is one of the finest quarterbacks I've ever seen, next to Johnny Unitas, and what he's doing now is a wonderful gimmick. Joe really has nothing to lose. If he wins, he's a fortune teller; if he loses, it was a beautiful try."⁴⁶

Smith recounts an incident in Super Bowl III where he had an opportunity to hit Namath and put him out of the game. Yet Smith's admiration for the quarterback could not allow him to do this. "If it was a Tarkenton," said Smith, "I would have sent him to the hospital, but I chose to let Namath live."⁴⁷

By stating that he might have sent "a Tarkenton" to the hospital, Smith refers to Fran Tarkenton, a quarterback known for his drive and ambition more than his style. It seems clear that in Namath's image, Smith finds something worth saving. An article by Clayton Riley for *Ms.* magazine in 1974 may help in understanding Smith's admiration for Namath. In comparing white and black attitudes toward sports, Riley states that white males emphasize winning because they are the "only people in this country who have regular consistent opportunities to utilize meaningful levers of power."⁴⁸ Riley states that blacks,

43. Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 170, n. 24.

44. *Ibid.*, 51.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Bubba Smith and Hal DeWindt, *Kill, Bubba, Kill* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 123.

47. *Ibid.*, 127.

48. Clayton Riley, "Did O.J. Dance?" *Ms.*, March 1974, 97.

conversely, seek to compel their bodies to go “beyond where you are supposed to remain” and therefore see style as primary.⁴⁹

Perhaps Bubba Smith, a black player, was able to find something enabling in Namath’s brashness that spoke to the condition of a minority. Namath’s cocky predictions were, after all, those of an underdog going beyond where he was “supposed” to remain. And even Ehrenreich notes that there is an optimistic reading of the male revolt that Namath represents. She writes that the rejection of responsibility that has characterized the changes in masculinity over the past 30 years, “can be seen as a blow against a system of social control that operates to make men unquestioning and obedient employees.”⁵⁰

Namath’s image, therefore, cannot be seen as either the product of total ideological domination, nor as pure opposition to the constraining demands of a patriarchal and capitalist system. Instead, he must be viewed as a negotiating figure between the counter-culture and modern progressive narratives. While he promoted consumption through his hedonism, exemplifying the constraining hegemony of a capitalist society that subverts the dissent of subcultures, he also won considerable concessions from dominant cultural forces. His lifestyle focused upon having fun in this world, blurring the lines between work and leisure that are so important to maintaining an obedient labor pool in an industrial democracy. And his youthful brashness identified him with a counter-culture that resisted the authoritarian position of technology in American society. Namath may not have been a perfect symbol of rebellion. Yet the ambiguity and multiple interpretations his style allowed made him a most surprising representative of cultural change within the rigidly conservative game of football.

49. Ibid., 96.

50. Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 170. Elizabeth and Joseph Pleck provide an analysis of the “organization man” that illustrates how this phenomenon was the product of separate spheres of work and leisure. See their introduction in Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, eds., *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980). 1-52.