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REAL-TIME SPECTACLES: THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCCER
MATERIALITY, DIGITIZATION, AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHOTOGRAPH
REVIEWS, REVIEWS, REVIEWS

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REAL-TIME SPECTACLES: TWO ARTWORKS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCCER

Two recent artworks take the soccer stadium as the arena in which to create two radically different representations of the game as a real-time spectacle. Both Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006) and Harun Farocki's video installation "Deep Play" (2007) have successfully infiltrated the world of professional sports. They have produced works of art that ultimately explore to what extent our view of this industry is defined by all-encompassing mediation. However, while Gordon and Parreno visually comment on this by producing a seemingly coherent re-interpretation of a soccer game, Farocki analyzes and deconstructs in detail the various layers of data that are available to determine and evaluate the contemporary visualization of World Cup games.

SOCCER AS NEVER SEEN BEFORE

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)

The 1966 World Cup final between England and West Germany is widely regarded as the first instance of soccer experienced as an international televised event.¹ By the 1970s, the wide-spanning TV coverage became essential to the finals, and shifted in focus from transmitting a visual record of a sporting event to a carefully constructed global phenomenon. Along with this development, another shift occurred during this decade. Credited with the invention of "Total Football," the legendary Dutch soccer coach Rinus Michels, aka "The General," notoriously exposed the cruel nature of soccer in drawing a parallel between the sport and warfare: "Professional football is something like war. Whoever behaves too properly is lost."² Throughout the 1970s, Michels radically modernized the game, introducing a strategy that called on players to become extremely tactical by, for example, shifting positions at high speed.

Much in the spirit of Guy Debord, soccer transformed into a "total spectacle" in which social interactions between people are mediated solely by images. Along these lines, Jean Baudrillard, in his essay "The Mirror of Terrorism" (1993), ponders on the ways in which media representation has displaced the "real" event. In this text, Baudrillard evokes the European Cup final of 1987, which was played behind closed doors, with no spectators allowed inside the stadium. The extreme carefulness of the organizers stemmed from the tragic Heysel Disaster that occurred two years earlier.³ As Baudrillard suggests, "it does perfectly exemplify the terroristic hyperrealism of our world, a world where a 'real' event occurs in a vacuum, stripped of its context and visible only from afar, televisually."⁴ For Baudrillard, in the spectacle of sports the "real" event needs not to take place, as long as it is mediated through broadcasts: "No one will have directly experienced the actual

course of such happenings, but everyone will have received an image of them."⁵

Although Baudrillard's thoughts should be regarded metaphorically, in recent years the occasional employing of large-size screens at soccer stadiums has provided live spectators with an elongated, mediated view of the game. Through techniques such as instant replay and slow motion, the spatio-temporality of the event already becomes fragmented as it is occurring. Furthermore, interactive television features allow the viewer at home to adopt a point of view on a particular action (a tackle for example) or focus on a player through slow motion and super close-ups.⁶ Through such ever-evolving real-time technologies, the mediated point of view is the norm through which the imagery of soccer is collectively formed. As such, our relationship to the game is profoundly altered, knowable only through fragmented audiovisual representations, either live in the stadium or at home on television.

ZIDANE

For me, the most important thing is that I still know who I am.

—Zinedine Zidane in an interview with Andrew Huxley⁷

The particularity of Zinedine Zidane as a complex iconic figure of world sports makes him the ideal subject for a "21st century portrait."⁸ In their essay "Quiet contradictions of celebrity," scholars Hugh Dauncey and Douglas Morrey state that the French soccer player "has become a blank canvas on which the French media has played out the nation's preoccupation with race and national identity," while also suggesting that "Zidane's careful refusal to take up ideological positions or explain his actions may represent a canny negotiation of a global arena in which the slightest utterance is subject to fine scrutiny."⁹ On several occasions, Gordon and Parreno have declared that their intent with *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* was to use portraiture as a way to get closer to the unreadable international sportsman. Making a film that would focus solely on Zidane during an entire soccer game, they were aware of the danger of injuries or other unforeseeable interventions that could abort their project. However, as both artists have claimed, they never considered another subject for the project, and in the event of Zidane canceling or proving uncooperative, they would not have created the piece.¹⁰ Their collaborative project became the filming of a regular match held in Madrid between Spanish soccer club Real Madrid (for which Zidane played at the time) and Villareal FC.

Although both artists have worked collectively on projects in the past, *Zidane* marks the most extensive collaboration, and the largest artistic undertaking for both so far. Gordon is mostly known for his video installations that investigate iconic moving images and their relation to



time, such as his well-known slowdown of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to 24 *Hours Psycho* (1993). Parreno makes work that revolves around the nature of images, often using existing material. For *No Ghost Just a Shell* (2001), he famously purchased the copyright of a Japanese manga figure, offering colleague artists the opportunity to manipulate the character.

For this project, seventeen cameras were placed around the soccer field, allowing cinematographers to capture Zidane from 360°. The unique technology employed on some of the cameras (NASA lenses used for non-scientific ends for the first time) suited the project particularly well, allowing the cameramen to focus on, and track, a distant moving target with extreme precision. The work first premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006 as a feature film, but is occasionally also exhibited in museum or gallery spaces as a two-channel video installation. The artists remain vague about which format the work was intended for, but have stated that for them, there is no significant hierarchy between the cinematic "black box" screening and the transferred "white cube" installation.¹¹ This essay will consider *Zidane* solely in its full-length film format.

A 21st-CENTURY PORTRAIT

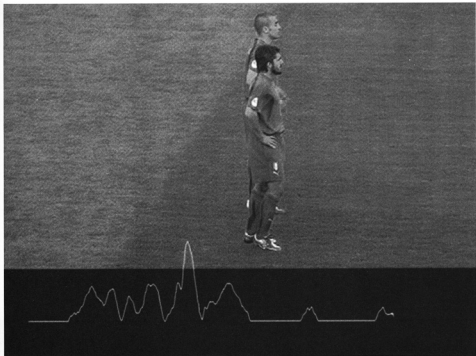
Every moral value can be invested in [succi]: endurance, self-possession, tenacity, courage. The great players are heroes, not stars.

—Roland Barthes, *What Is Sport?* (1960)

Although Gordon and Parreno cite Andy Warhol's screen tests as an important influence, the meticulous formal and narrative structuring of *Zidane* into a coherent whole starkly opposes Warhol's cinematic non-events. Notably, a Warholian approach to filmmaking has been more strictly applied to other soccer-themed media artworks. Sam Taylor-Wood's video *David* (2002) shows an unedited hour-long shot of David Beckham taking a nap, referencing Warhol's iconic film *Sleep* (1963). Earlier, an experimental film by German director Hellmuth Costard, entitled *Football as Never Seen Before* (1970), offered a portrait of the British Manchester United star player George Best. The film focuses on Best during an entire game using eight 16mm cameras. Despite the superficial conceptual analogies, the incomparability between *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* and *Football as Never Seen Before* is rightfully emphasized by Parreno and Gordon, but perhaps not for the right reasons.¹² What is crucial, beyond technical dissimilarities, is the ways in which *Zidane* opens up the strict Warholian spatio-temporality of "real time." Manipulating various aspects of their footage, Gordon and Parreno suggest something about the nature of mediated images that is more layered than what the above-mentioned intriguing portraits of emblematic soccer players reveal.

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Still from *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno; Courtesy Palomar Pictures & Anna Lena Films



While close-ups are an integral part of televised international soccer games, *Zidane* employs them in such a way that they evoke a cinematic language, reinforced by the inherent aesthetic quality of 35mm film stock. Certain shots directly quote the visual style of classical film genres, such as the western or even wildlife documentaries, as Mark W. Pennings suggests.¹³ Such close-ups and extreme close-ups dominate, occasionally alternating with wide shots of Zidane on the field and tracking shots following his maneuvers. The sporadic amplification of his sighs, groans, and yells is an aural accompaniment to these shots, offering a striking but distancing focus on Zidane's physicality. The unrelenting scrutinizing of the player's gestures does not provide clues as to his psychological disposition, as Gordon and Parreno suggest.¹⁴ Rather, his physicality seems to largely occur within a closed *mise-en-scène* to which Zidane's unreadable persona is inexorably linked. By disregarding an essential rule of televised soccer editing, namely using the trajectory of the ball as the guide for the master narrative, the view shifts not only to Zidane, but to all the visual codes that envelop him around the arena.

Early on in the film, Zidane is shown amid flashing, animated ad displays on LED screens installed around the soccer field. On more than one occasion, Zidane appears embedded within multimedia images of giant Gillette razors and other desired consumer products that exude power and masculinity. Such images remind us that Zidane, a multimillion-dollar commodity, cannot be separated from this mediated mass event, and indeed, from the soccer industry at large. A highly self-reflexive

moment of the film makes this explicit—when a moving ad shows a soccer ball rolling by, providing a visual echo of how images of soccer, since the 1960s, have come to us in mediated form. Zidane's representation, an integral part of this media spectacle, remains "all image and no interiority," as Hal Foster notably remarked.¹⁵ Not even the occasionally appearing titles, citing Zidane's thoughts on his soccer career, culled from previous interviews, can counter this. Gordon and Parreno seem to be aware of the impossibility of understanding the player, as they decide to show the climactic moment of the film from a rarely used camera angle (from behind the goal) and in a wide-shot. Toward the end of the game, Zidane, without apparent reason, aggressively attacks an opponent, for which he receives a red card and is sent off of the field. This action is mostly hidden from our view, which reinforces our psychological detachment from Zidane and the impossibility of getting to his persona beyond its representations.

At half time, a remarkable sequence unfolds, during which the film moves away from the soccer stadium, showing a montage of events from around the globe. Linked to the Real Madrid game only by their occurrence on the same day, they range in scope and importance: from the bizarre swelling and explosion of a population of toads to a roadside bombing in Iraq to the falling ill of the child of one of the filmmakers. The ways in which (televised) sporting events are often dissociated from broader global sociopolitical realities have been central to a number of critical studies of media and popular

culture. Focusing on the 1978 World Cup held in Argentina, both Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Umberto Eco have written influential essays on the subject. They condemned this particular sports event for drawing away attention from the harsh political "realities" that were happening at the time in the South American country and other parts of the world.¹⁶ Gordon and Parreno's evocation of contemporary issues is not a simple response to this ongoing sociopolitical problem. The anecdotal interlinking of global events—ranging from the historical to the inexplicable as well as the personal—does, however, depart from the habitual isolation of sporting events, by opening up the film's spatial and temporal registers. Allowing "other realities" to infiltrate the reality of a soccer game, the filmmakers suggest that it is the multiplicity of simultaneous incidents on a global scale that is at the center of this sequence and not necessarily their political potential. Thus, this sequence is perhaps also a failed one, as its spatiotemporal multiplicities are merely self-referential and remain ambiguous through their sentimentality (emphasized by Mogwai's bombastic score).

The "self enclosure" of the overall filmed event is further disrupted by cutaways to the live Spanish television broadcast of the Real Madrid-Villarreal game.¹⁷ An extreme zoom on a TV monitor's surface transforms these images into intriguingly abstracted, colorful squares, while the reporter's commentary in Spanish remains distinctly audible. When Zidane's unexpected sending off of the field marks the conclusion of the film, the game and TV broadcast continue. As the film's protagonist leaves the field, there is once again a cut to the filmed TV monitor. Aware of the filming taking place, the Spanish TV anchor, while excitedly announcing Zidane's dramatic exit, simultaneously declares the moment as "the end of the Zidane film."¹⁸ Thus, Gordon and Parreno's intervention into the "reality" of a sporting event inevitably influenced that very event. As Mark W. Pennings notes, Zidane's "mediated celebrity in the 21st century configures a precarious consciousness embedded in a fictionalized reality."¹⁹ Ultimately, Zidane, as a highly controlled and aestheticized film portrait, reveals the complexities associated with mediation and our, as well as Zidane's, complicity in it.

DEEP PLAY

If the spectacle—understood in the limited sense of those 'mass media' that are its most stabilizing superficial manifestation—seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a new apparatus, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics.

—Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1962)

Contrasting significantly with Gordon and Parreno's aestheticized film, Harun Farocki's 12-channel video installation "Deep Play" interprets the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals with a cold objective eye. Carefully deconstructing the "making" of a media spectacle, the game is presented in its entirety. Besides utilizing unedited versions of the internationally broadcast original footage, Farocki shows images from eleven other vantage points, providing a complex perspective. He utilizes recordings of surveillance cameras, computer simulations, charts of player stats, real-time 2-D and 3-D animation sequences,

graphic and mathematical analyses of players and game data, as well as original footage: a continuous steady shot of the stadium filmed from his hotel room in Berlin during the game.

Farocki's oeuvre, ranging from television productions to feature films and from essay films to video installations, is united by a highly unique media philosophy that constitutes an overtly political view on images and their societal implications. In his work, Farocki does not necessarily construct a cinematic space and time; instead, he carefully observes images to instigate a discourse. For Farocki, an image is not merely representation; it is a tool manufactured by a powerful body that is used for control and manipulation. By carefully examining images and raising fundamental questions about their nature, Farocki reveals their hidden ideology. According to film theorist Thomas Elsaesser, his oeuvre is "a constant dialogue with images, with image making, and with the institutions that produce and circulate those images."²⁰

The twelve perspectives revealed in "Deep Play" are an invitation to critically investigate the controlled audiovisual environment that surrounded this significant media event. A striking parallel can be drawn between Farocki's now classic trilogy of video installations, "Eye/Machine" (2000–03) and this one. Showing the arenas of war through the eyes of machines and the complicity of the human eye in this process, the earlier works analyze images originally intended for war technicians and army analysts exclusively. Reaching beyond their original purpose, these images have found their way into televised daily news broadcasts during the first Gulf War. With "Deep Play" Farocki turns his gaze elsewhere, on soccer and its media essence, while exploring similar ideas. Like the media theater of war in "Eye/Machine," this sports spectacle, as Farocki presents it, seems to take place under total control: sensors tracking players replace dynamic spontaneity on the field, and data representation usurps human interaction between players. The images presented in "Deep Play" are similar to those in "Eye/Machine"—audiovisual data originally created for specific purposes of control and analysis. Thus, while Rinus Michel's analogy between "total football" and warfare related specifically to the combat on the field, Farocki's association between the two concepts has broader implications. How does such mediation—the machine analysis of sports—influence our experience of the game and determine its ultimate meaning?

THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant (whether animal in a reserve or human in a corporation, as with an electronic collar), is not necessarily one of science fiction.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Preface to the Society of Control* (1992)

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Installation view of "Deep Play" (2007) by Harun Farocki; courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

Over 1.5 billion spectators throughout the world watched the 2006 World Cup finals. Creating a complex audiovisual representation, Farocki deconstructs its various layers. One perspective provides an uneventful steady shot of activities recorded by surveillance cameras, rendering the supporters as much controlled and interpreted subjects of the spectacle as the constantly analyzed players on the field. Next to it, a simple audio recording accompanying the officially broadcast footage summarizes the way in which the event is a manipulated interpretation created in real time. The director is heard constantly repositioning the eye of the cameras to create an orchestrated narrative of visual highs. Unlike *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*'s ideological ambiguity, "Deep Play" proposes a politically charged investigation of its mediated visualizations and hints at their totalitarian nature. As Elsaesser points out, "Visuality in all its forms is now the face and visage that a control society gives itself when it has replaced dialogue and democracy with sensing and data-mining."²¹ Thus, Farocki's installation not only points toward "the politics of representation in the image," but also to how an enclosed environment, such as a soccer stadium, has become a "workplace" of images in which the role of the spectator has drastically changed, so that "even the most detached or distracted observer leaves his footprints and tracks in electronic space."²²

In his essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992), quoted by Farocki as a major inspiration regarding the political preoccupation of his installations²³, Gilles Deleuze notably reflected on the emergence of the "societies of control." Hinting toward a study of its inherent

mechanisms, Deleuze made clear that the very conception of control is "not necessarily one of science fiction."²⁴ Indeed, as Farocki's "Deep Play" demonstrates, "commodifying public space and simulating citizenship in gated communities or enclosed experienced worlds"²⁵ is increasingly becoming our reality. Then, the task of the artist lies in the making visible of these mechanisms by exposing their wide-ranging application. Farocki's "Deep Play" is a deeply rooted metaphor of the society of control. Using the world of soccer, it demonstrates to what extent it includes and excludes its participants. Although cold in its machine-like representation, "Deep Play" goes not without a feeling of loss and responsibility. As Diedrich Diedrichsen eloquently suggested, we all get excited while experiencing "Deep Play" and the soccer game through its multifarious presentation, even if we witness "how eerily close the wishes of the consumers, the trainers and the police really are to each other."²⁶

EPILOGUE

Significantly, Zidane's outburst, which supplied the climactic moment of Gordon and Parreno's film, reoccurs in Farocki's installation. During the World Cup finale, Zidane famously gave the Italian defense player Marco Materazzi a head-butt, an impulsive response to a verbal insult. Zidane was thus dramatically suspended before the last minutes of what was to be the ultimate game of his career. The social importance of the





event was created after the fact, as multiple replays and representations flooded the media, even inspiring numerous amateur videos that restaged the conflict. As Furocki's hard facts evidence, the actual event was never shown in the real-time broadcast, nor did it alter the continuous image and data flow that the multiple perspectives of "Deep Play" reveal. Pointing to the falsity of real-time representation and analysis, perhaps Zidane put it best: "One doesn't necessarily remember a match as an experience in 'real time.' [M]emories of matches are often fragmented."¹⁷ The ultimate irony is that this experience of soccer evoked by Zidane was undoubtedly formed by the same formal language of broadcast soccer games (continuous slow motion and replay interrupting the real-time transmission of images), as the one responsible for the image of him knocking down his opponent that came to iconically represent the entire World Cup final.

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NOTES 1. Steve Redhead, "Baudrillard, 'Amérique,' and the Hyperreal World Cup," in ed. Genevieve Rail, *Sport and Postmodern Times* (Oxford: State University of New York Press, 1998), 221. 2. NBC Handheld. "'Football is soccer' is wel degelijk van Rino Michels" at www.nbc.nl/brand/article/040101/04010101_soccer_is_wel_degelijk_van_Rino_Michels (accessed February 23, 2009). 3. The European Cup final of 1985 between Liverpool F.C. and Juventus F.C. was held in Brussels' Heysel Stadium. An aggressive Liverpool fan crossed the fence separating them from rival supporters, chaos ensued. The event left thirty-nine dead and over six hundred injured, becoming one of the best-known examples of the drama of uncontained soccer hooliganism. For one of numerous publications analyzing the event, see for example Paul Durbly et al., *Soccer and Disaster* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 77-93. 4. Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (New York and London: Verso, 1993), 89. For a study of the implications of Baudrillard's book *America: the study of the 1994 World Cup held in the United States*, see Redhead, "Baudrillard, 'Amérique,' and the Hyperreal World Cup." 5. Ibid. 6. Jill Bennett, "Aesthetics of Intermediality," in *Art History* Vol. 30, no. 3 (June 2007), 499. 7. The Observer, "ZZ Top," available at www.guardian.co.uk/football/2004/apr/04/sport/features (accessed March 2, 2009). 8. First of all, Zinedine Zidane's complex ethnic heritage, being of Algerian descent from a Berber minority, contrast with his official function as an iconic representative of French sport culture. Secondly, as an idealized man of honor known for his charitable work and courtesy toward other players, he has also been known for occasional outbreaks of aggression on the field. Such aspects complicate Zidane's image and make readings of his star cult in a

national, political, or sociocultural context complex. See Hugh Dansey and Douglas Morrey, "Quiet contradictions of celebrity: Zinedine Zidane, image, sound, silence and fury" in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 11, no. 3 (2008), 381-329. 9. Dansey and Morrey, 319. 10. Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (London: Artificial Eye, 2006). DVD with interview with filmmakers (thereof: DVD interview). 11. DVD interview. 12. For example, Parreno wrongly suggested that Goutard only used two cameras to produce his film and could not be seen as a precursor to Zidane. See DVD interview. 13. Mark W. Penning, "Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno: Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Art* Vol. 8, no. 1 (2007), 145. 14. Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno cited in "Van Abbe Museum: Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait" in e-flux newsletter, www.e-flux.com/shows/view/6596 (accessed March 2, 2009). 15. Hal Foster cited in Tom Griffin, "The Job Chagossian Box," *Artforum* (September 2006), 16. See Redhead, "Baudrillard, 'Amérique,' and the Hyperreal World Cup." 22. 17. David Rowe, "Time and Timelessness in Sport Film," *Sport in Society*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (2008), 153. 18. Philippe Parreno, Douglas Gordon and Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait," *Spole: Art Quarterly* (Summer 2006), 18. Penning, "Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno: Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait," 145. 19. Thomas Elsaesser, "Hans Furocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist," in Hans Furocki, *Working on the Sight-Lines* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 26. 21. Elsaesser, "Hans Furocki," 25. 22. Ibid. 23. In his interview with Furocki, Rombert Hauser goes even further by suggesting that Furocki's installation "I Thought I Was Seeing Contexts" (2009) is an adaptation of Gilles Deleuze's Postscript on the Societies of Control (1992). See Rombert Hauser, "Nine Minutes in the Yard: A Conversation with Hans Furocki," in Hans Furocki, *Working on the Sight-Lines*, 298. 24. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *OCTOBER* 39 (Winter 1982), 3-23. Elsaesser, "Hans Furocki," 25. 26. Dierck Dieckhoff, *Disobedience in Documents* (Kassel: 16/00-23/06) (Documents 17 Catalog) (Köln: Taschen, 2007). 27. Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (London: Artificial Eye, 2006) (Subtitles).

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Still from Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno; courtesy Palomar Pictures & Anna Lena Films