The FIFA World Cup is the most important and widely watched sporting event in the world, and will run this year from June 11-July 11, 2010, in South Africa. In fact, it is the first time that the World Cup, dominated historically by Latin America and Europe, has taken place on the African continent. The germinal idea for the show is very simple: to create the perfect football environment, a sort of mini-soccer paradise at apexart for watching games. Around the games themselves, there will be talks, events and a series of works, objects and activities that will expand the spectacle into a more conceptual and sensual rumination on the meaning and significance of football/soccer.

The World Cup is a spectacle in the strictly Situational sense. It is a shiny display of nations in symbolic, indeed rather atavistic, national combat adorned with multiple layers of commodification, sponsorship and the seemingly infinite commercialization—among this year’s official sponsors are Coca Cola, Budweiser, and MacDonalds. The World Cup is an image of our age at its worst and most gaudy.

But it is also something more, something bound up with difficult and recalcitrant questions of conflict, memory, history, place, social class, masculinity, violence, national identity, tribe, and group. The hope of this show is to construct a unique situation where these questions can be ruminated on collectively, where some lineament of reality can break through the image.

Football is working-class ballet. It’s an experience of enchantment. For an hour and a half, a different order of time unfolds and one submits oneself to it. A football game is a temporal rupture with the routine of everyday: ecstatic, evanescent and most importantly, shared. At its best, football is about shifts in the intensity of experience.

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Let me be entirely honest with you. This show is an act of communal, personal and political protest. When the good generals, the army doesn’t approach me about curating something in their space, they made a huge mistake. After some points back and forth, Steven, Ryan and I had a meeting. We’ll give you to do something that reflects your passion.” I replied, “Well, football or what you call soccer is your passion. It’s only my religious commitment. The Mexican pressure is coming up soon and I’ll live in soccer planet where we could watch games together.” Amazingly, they agreed.

Let me try and explain why football is so important to me, and why it becomes more rather than less important to me as I get closer and closer to the end of my natural life in Liverpool and my father used to train at Liverpool Football Club’s training ground in the early 1950s until an ankle injury curtailed his career. Doggedly and fervent he had to wear Chester boots for the rest of his life, although he looked kind of stylish in them.

My mum tells me that I could kick a ball before I could walk and the main plank in my somewhat tempestuous relationship with my parents’ football. Until I was about 11 and during the final weeks of his illness — it was the only thing we talked about sensibly at any length. When we discussed politics, we would always end up shouting at each other. As a schoolboy, I would go on long car journeys to follow games and from where we would analyze every facet of the game in anticipation (for the way, or for the way to beat). In the 1960s, I was a little star. I started playing in that way. I remember playing a little bit, a bit of a little bit. It was a sort of irrepressible, irritating O.0 draw that went down in legend because the Argentine captain, Ruggero, had committed gruesome body harm in the very first minute of the match. I remember the experience of the defeat. In the end, it was just about some experience of disappointment in the present that is linked to some dintless illusory memory of greatness and heroic virtue.

The first memory of the World Cup is when my dad took me to see England play Argentina at Wembley Stadium in 1966. I was 6 years old. It was a wonderful experience for me. I remember it vividly, especially the build-up. I remember sitting on the car on the way back from an FA Cup semi-final when Liverpool had lost badly to a man in the car next to me. It was a little bit of a lot of people.

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My nuclear unit of a family moved from Liverpool to the south of England, which is where I grew up. We were economic migrants like the rest of the world. I didn’t recognize us. Liverpool Football Club came to represent whatever ‘home’ meant to me and was a huge element in whatever sense of a family I considered myself to have grown up as a family. Our house was called De-Kap after the famous sloping terrace at Anfield where the hardcore supported. Indeed, you could never feel confident playing a football match (Wolff’s enough, got enough). The World Cup is what I called it. I would have learned to play football in that way. We had said before the game that football had nothing to do with the Marxism, not even. I wanted to play like Beckett’s Good Thing. I was told: you there, kill them like little birds. And this was revenge. Football is the continuation of war by other means.

Speaking of war, if you are not English, it is difficult to understand the way in which the memory of England’s victory in the World Cup 1966 against the erstwhile West Germany still defines and distorts the present. It is a veritable avalanche around the neck of the England team. Football reveals something about the persistent nature of fantasy. I know that England will lose, probably in a penalty shoot out against Germany or Argentina, but the weight of my soul still believes that it has something worth recalling that, since its inception in Uruguay in 1930, only seven teams have won the World Cup: Uruguay (twice, 1930, 1950), Italy (four times, 1934, 1938, 1982, 2006), Germany (three times, 1954, 1974, 1990), Brazil (five times, 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002), England (once, 1966), Argentina (twice, 1978, 1986) and France (1998).

The friendly hospitality in which these victories are vast and deeply alien to Brazil in 1970 and Argentina in 1978, World Cup victories were used by military governments to fuel nationalist sentiment and the declarations and murder of opponents to the regime. In France in 1998, after the extreme right-wing nationalist Jean-Marie Le Pen complained that there were too many black players in the national team, football became the signifier for an emergent French multi-cultural identity. The precise political salience of Zidane’s headbutt against Marco Materazzi in the 2006 final is still a source of intense hermeneutical debate. Personally, I wish he’d hit him a little harder.

My most powerful memory of the World Cup is from Mexico, in 1970. Brazil won the for the third time, which meant that they got to keep the trophy. This was the team of Pele, who had never taken home the Cup, Jairzinho, Rivellino, Tostao, and Gerson. The names alone had a sort of magical power, for me. I would roll these names around my mouth as I kicked a ball against the wall, as if incarnating a spell. The 1970 Brazil team was the greatest attacking team of all time and the side against which any subsequent side (the Netherlands in 1974 or France in 1998) is measured. My mother has a photograph of me wearing a full Brazilian uniform.

The World Cup, then, is all about shifting floors of memory and the complexity of personal and national identity. But most of all it is about grace. A truly great player, like Pele, like Johan Cruyff, like Michel Platini, like Zinedine Zidane, like Zidane, has grace: an unforged bodily containment. The World Cup is about grace. Grace is a gift. It is the gift of a certain disposition, some call it faith, in the hope that grace will be dispensed.

The central drama of this show will unravel as we watch games together. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging. It is as if, over all these years, all the bits and pieces of the story are quietly emerging.