





# *Spoilsport*

*Questions around  
a social space*

*Edited by Riccardo Giacconi*



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# Warm-up

What follows is a path around the social space surrounding contemporary sport, the mechanisms regulating its production of values, its historical background. It is defined as 'spoilsport', as it tries to analyze the roots of a passion, determine the measurement conventions of a movement, investigate the causes of success of particular social practices. In English "to spoil" means "to impair the completeness, perfection, or unity of something"; this book defines itself 'spoilsport' as it intends to decompose, disunite and compromise the completeness of a phenomenon that requires to be disassembled to be studied in detail.

'Spoilsport' is an attitude rather than a research modality. Throughout the thread of featured conversations and contributions, a transdisciplinary field of investigation will be defined, including elements of history, philosophy, art, cinema, performance, music, literature, and accounts of first-hand sport experiences. Along the path, the reader will encounter different works of art, which aim to trigger doubts and questions about specific aspects of the social space defined by contemporary sport, such as the film *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait* (2006) by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, the video *David* (2004) by Sam Taylor-Wood, the photographic installation *Untitled (Bourgeoisie)* by Lyle Ashton Harris (2006), and the performance *Rest Energy* (1980) by Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

*Ce qui suit est un chemin autour de l'espace social du sport contemporain, des mécanismes qui régulent sa production de valeur, de son contexte historique. La publication aimerait se définir comme un spoilsport («trouble-fête», «rabat-joie») dans la mesure où elle tente d'analyser les racines des passions, de déterminer les composantes de la production de valeur autour d'un geste, d'enquêter sur les causes du succès de certaines pratiques sociales. Si spoil en anglais, signifie «compromettre l'exhaustivité, la perfection, ou l'unité de quelque chose», le livre souhaite mettre en pratique le sport en décomposant, désunissant et compromettant la complétude d'un phénomène qui nécessite d'être désassemblé pour être étudié en détail.*

*Spoilsport est une attitude, plus qu'une modalité de recherche. Tout au long du fil des conversations et des contributions présentées dans ce livre, un champ transdisciplinaire d'enquête apparaît, impliquant des éléments de philosophie, d'histoire, d'art, de cinéma, de performance, de musique, de littérature et des récits à la première personne d'expériences sportives.*

*Le long du chemin, le lecteur rencontre différentes œuvres d'art, qui doutent et qui questionnent des aspects spécifiques de l'espace social défini par les sports contemporains, comme le film *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait* (2006) par Doug-*

Among the different texts that form the book, four dialogues between Achilles and the Tortoise appear. The two protagonists of Zeno's paradox were chosen as they are athletes participating in a race that never ends.<sup>1</sup> In the pages that follow, the reader will occasionally encounter them introducing points for reflection, and raising questions and issues around the relationship between art and sport. We are pleased to welcome the reader on the playing field.

*las Gordon et Philippe Parreno ; la vidéo David (2004) par Sam Taylor-Wood ; l'installation photographique Untitled (Bourgeoisie) par Lyle Ashton Harris (2006) ; la performance Rest Energy (1980) par Marina Abramovic et Ulay. Parmi les différents textes qui composent ce livre, figurent quatre dialogues entre Achille et la Tortue, les protagonistes du paradoxe de Zénon, qui ont été choisis en raison de leur rôle d'athlètes participant à une course qui ne finit jamais.<sup>1</sup> Les apparitions ponctuelles des deux personnages apportent matière à réflexion, entraînant questions et problématiques autour de la relation entre l'art et le sport. Nous sommes heureux d'accueillir le lecteur sur le terrain.*

<sup>1</sup> The choice is also a reference to *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (Basic Books, 1979), the book by Douglas Hofstadter whose chapters alternate with dialogues between these imaginary characters.

<sup>1</sup> Le choix est aussi une référence à l'essai *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (Basic Books, 1979) par Douglas Hofstadter, dont les chapitres s'alternent avec des dialogues entre ces personnages imaginaires.



# *Excellence and Performance*

## *A conversation with RoseLee Goldberg*

**Historian Eric Hobsbawm described the spread of sports in Western societies during the first decades of the twentieth century as the “invention of a tradition”. Do you see any influence the diffusion of modern sport might have had on performative arts during the 20th Century?**

Radical dance and the fascination with sports that marked the early twentieth-century are indeed closely connected. Both were hugely emancipating for women. Stripping the body of corsetry and conventions, showing women as physically strong, independent, and expressive, marked both sports and new dance and spilled over into art, design, and fashion.

**You mean in Germany and Italy in the early 1900s?**

Yes, especially in the teens and twenties. Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Isadora Duncan, Valentine de Saint Point, Giannina Censi, Valeska Gert, among many others, created highly individual dances which paralleled the athletic movement of the time, although the fact that they performed solo, as opposed to participating in mass sport events, was further demonstration of their determination to publically display dance as a statement of feminist independence. In Germany,

there was an added nationalistic fervour and ambition to create the perfect, healthy body that would produce strong future generations; in Russia the interest in sport and new dance was evident in the avant-garde theatre and costume design of artists such as Liubov Popova or Varvara Stepanova, which was also considered a means to convey ideas of a new society to the public. The dancers, artists, and gymnasts presented a radical idea about the body as an instrument to communicate political and intellectual viewpoints. The body-as-machine, the body transformed by desire, the body as an aesthetic instrument, the body as an expression of the new age, was ever present in art, philosophy, literature, theatre, and design. The fact that these radical attitudes were also displayed in sport made the discussion very public.

**“A man walks across this empty stage whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”. This sentence, that opens Peter Brook’s book *The Empty Space* [1968], triggered in me the urge to investigate the discerning line between sport value and aesthetic value. In a way, sport and performance (theatre, art, dance...) both take place in “empty spaces”, where social value is given through a conventional system.**

Peter Brook is right when he says that all you need is a body and the eye of the viewer. Even so, that “eye” is the product of many different histories: it reflects the education and the experiences of the viewer, who will always try to make sense of the body in that empty space. The brain can’t help itself, it will always make connections. If the viewer is a theatre person, he or she will immediately make a connection to language and anticipate that words will be spoken; the artist will focus on the visual shape of the piece and understand the spaces around the body; and what does somebody who comes from another culture altogether, who doesn’t have any of those references, do? They will probably wait for some kind of action to happen, and maybe be more patient. I think context really changes the reading. Choreographer Jérôme Bel takes a slightly different approach than Peter Brook to an empty-stage-with-body, in *The show must go on*, 2001; for the first twenty minutes the viewer sits in total darkness. The lights are off and there’s music playing. For a long time – at least, it feels like a very long time – there’s nothing there: you

know that the curtains are open and you sense that there are people on stage, but you can't see a thing. It's as though he's saying, "go on, imagine your own theatre!"

**The value of a performance is always given by the social context around it. As art, sport creates a certain realm around itself too. Society gives a lot of value to the person who's best able to kick a ball in a certain way: that value is a social one, it has to do with the whole community that gathers around to watch that person kicking the ball. This is a completely useless activity if you take it out of this 'empty space', of this realm. In sports, the structure of the game would be the same without the audience, but in order to institute a system around it, it has to take place in a social context that provides it with a certain value. So, in a way, it needs an audience – as theatre – to be what it is.**

Well, within the conceptual art framework you could almost say that it doesn't need it. The audience (in sport) does not complete the game but is only there at the very end to witness the battle between teams. This is an ongoing conversation in the art world, about the audience as "witness," the audience as completing the work. As you say, context gives meaning. In sport or traditional theatre there are precise measures as to what makes it so; in sport there's a real form, you need a set of perfectly co-ordinated muscles, there's a long training period, and in theatre, there's mastery of text, and the techniques of acting. On the other hand in the art world, you actually don't need any expertise. Up until the last century, you needed to draw beautifully or know how to make exquisite objects, you attended an academic school or joined a guild and learned a craft. It's more difficult to describe that process in contemporary art. There are a lot of different ways of being an artist now that have nothing to do with form or even with aesthetics: it might be pure theory, which becomes the art practice. So I think it's interesting to look at sport in contrast to art or performance, because it is about extraordinary technique; it's about *excellence*.

**This makes me think of something else Peter Brook wrote about theatre: "incompetence is the vice, the condition and the tragedy of the world's theatre on any level". Sport is much clearer instead: there is only room for excellence.**

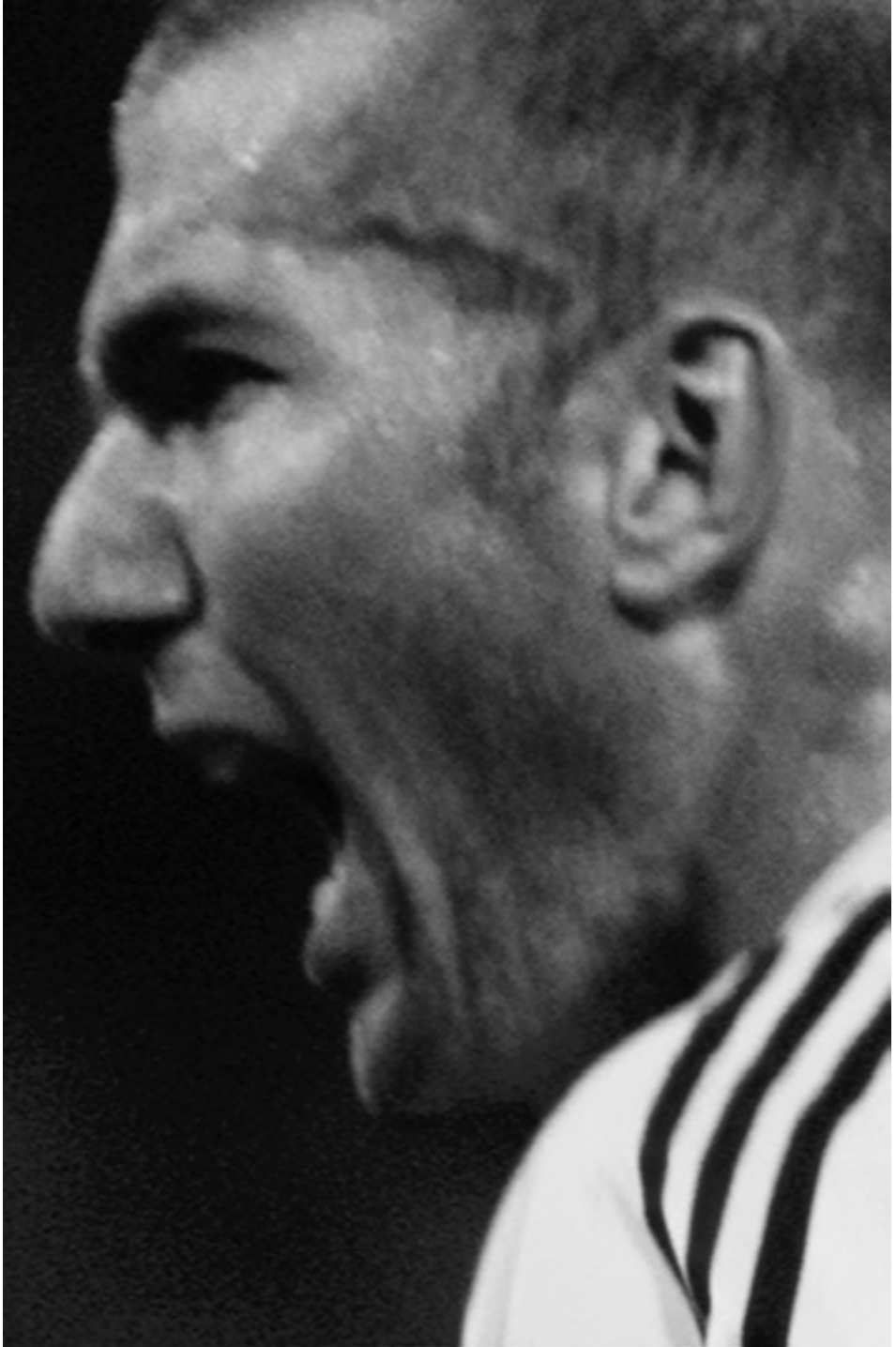
It's very different to watch Zidane playing than it is to watch professional ice-skating, which looks like bad ballet – it's very *kitsch*. It's about excellence but the costumes, and the entire aesthetics of the sport is mainstream and hard to watch. On the other hand, watching guys playing soccer which is fast paced and fierce, is about watching the body move like a machine, and it's not dressed-up.

**Douglas Gordon said that *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* is a film about “a man just doing his job”. Following a player for the whole duration of a match means showing the instants of Zidane’s wonderful moves (the spectacle, which can be seen in sport broadcasts), but also the enormous amount of time when he is not doing anything spectacular: the work. Professional sports situate themselves in the space between the two. How would you describe the limit between spectacle-performance and working performance? How does work becomes spectacle, is it due to a social value system?**

When you are in that level of physical excellence, as Zidane was, I don't think he is merely doing a job, I can't agree with Douglas there, because it is so physically demanding: the level of excellence, the level of consciousness of what he is doing every minute, is very high... I don't think artists in performance work this way. They invent their own form with every project, they do not have pre-established levels of excellence to reach or surpass. There are no expectations on the part of the audience, only they want to be surprised and moved, to see something they've never seen before. Spectacle has more to do with scale than with performance. Even if Zidane is not in the center of the game but on the side somewhere, he's watching everything, because if he weren't, then he wouldn't be able to get started again. I don't think he can stop and start in the middle of a game. Maybe the only time when he's “doing his job” is when he becomes “the soccer player” and he's not on the field: then he's just doing his job. But when he's playing, he's always performing.

**Always performing.**

Yes, he knows he's being watched every minute.



# *Around Zidane*

## *A conversation with Douglas Gordon*

***Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* is a film about ‘a man just doing his job’. Following a player for the whole duration of a match means showing not only the instants of Zidane’s wonderful moves – the *spectacle*, which can be seen in sport coverage – but also the enormous amount of time when he is not doing anything spectacular: the *work*. Professional sports are somewhere in the space between the two. How would you describe the distinction between a sport performance and a work performance? How does work become a spectacle?**

I suppose that the spectacle has very little to do with the popular meaning of the ‘spectacular’. I suppose that the difference between work and spectacle is simply the presence and consciousness of an audience. Ordinary work may be carried out in isolation, in silence, without fear of failure or the excitement of success. Even teamwork can be applied in this case. The absence of the viewer makes work, work and the conscious inclusion of an audience makes almost everything spectacular. Even when Zidane is not in contact with the ball, he is still performing in some sense, in front of an audience. Always spectacular in a way...

**Zidane himself said, “anything can happen in one hour and a half”. Anyway, in a curious way the unwritten script of the film seems to follow the standard structure of a feature movie. In particular, the left-footed cross which leads to Ronaldo’s goal, and the final red card sequence, seem to coincide with two ‘plot points’ of the screenwriting paradigm as Syd Field talks about: the *midpoint* and the *showdown*. What are the similarities in the narrative structure of a football match and of a feature movie you were most interested in?**

Hah, yes. I think that Philippe and I can give you a whole load of films that we might have been thinking of during the editing process.

One of the first things that we realised, when we started the project was that the shape of the field is similar to the proportions of a cinema screen. And of course, the 90-minute duration is exactly that of a feature length movie.

I don’t think that these things are necessarily a coincidence.

As for me, I always had an idea that our portrait of Zidane might fall somewhere close to [Jean-Pierre] Melville’s *Le Samourai*. Zidane as a similarly self contained assassin, the role played by Alain Delon, for example.

**The way the film was shot makes me think of the increasing acceptance of surveillance cameras in the public space. In this sense, sport events in general and your film in particular are good examples of a complete and inescapable control of the visual representation of an individual in a given space (the ‘carré vert’). How does this control influence the concept of portraiture? You quoted Pasolini when he talks about infinity of points of view.**

I think I understand your point of view but I do not agree with the idea that surveillance can be equated with portraiture.

Surveillance is very much about the ‘moment’. Portraiture is not at all about that. Even although our portrait of Zidane is framed in an event that is understood to be happening in ‘real time’, the portrait was carefully constructed over a long period – composed, recomposed, etcetera, much in the same way a painter would approach the model in a studio.

Philippe and I did seriously consider the idea of the infinite points of view of course. We did talk about having everyone in the stadium, or at least thousands of people try to record their own portrait on telephone cam-

eras or what not.

Thank god we heard that the Beastie Boys were already doing something like this because it was already difficult enough to edit 17 points of view!

**Do you think the amount of emotional intensity aroused in the masses by sport events cannot be reached by any other practice in contemporary society?**

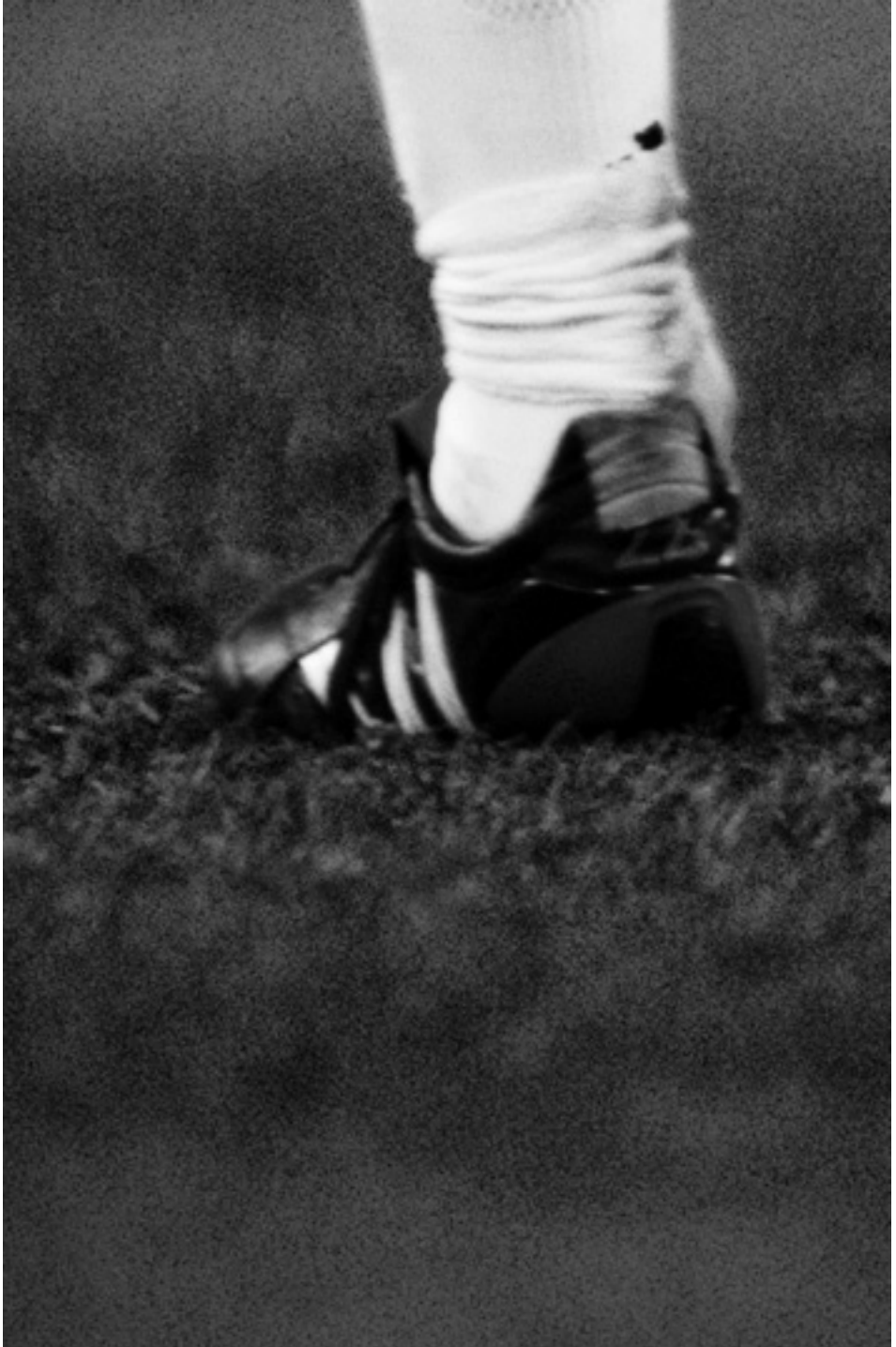
I don't really see the same combination of provocative elements anywhere in society that are present in sport. And within sport I do not see any other activity that harnesses so many provocative elements such as a football match; athleticism, sexuality, competition, inter-team rivalry, struggle against time, etcetera. It's amazing. And with 22 and more personalities and characters to contend with, it's an astonishing piece of theatrical management, the match!

**You said your film doesn't want to picture Zidane neither as a hero nor as an antihero. But in sport events (especially football in Europe) the feeling of attachment to a common cause (the team) is a phenomenon that has the power to trigger instincts, the qualities of which are similar to the ones of warfare. Do you think this is one of the reasons why sports have this particular significance in contemporary society?**

I'm not at all sure about that. It's clear that the use of emblems and music and all the periphera that the audience bring to the stadium is emblematic of a certain love of competition if not combat, that our society loves.

pp. 11, 15

Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait*, 2006. Courtesy of the artist.



# *The New Man*

*Tortoise: Have you ever had the feeling that the world is missing someone?*

*Achilles: Gilles Deleuze said that “the entire nineteenth century went through the search for the man without a name, regicide and parricide, the modern-day Ulysses (“I am no one”): the crushed and mechanized man of the great metropolises, but from which one expects, perhaps, the emergence of the Man of the Future or New World Man”. Who was, then, the New Man who was being expected?*

*T: Professional sport, as we understand it today, was born at the beginning of the last century; it was an invention of a tradition, as theorized by Eric Hobsbawm. Gigantic narratives that involved all social classes in a continuum were established; football, cycling, athletics... And every narrative needs its heroes.*

*A: Then, the New Man is the athlete?*

*T: The New Man whose arrival was expected in the nineteenth century would have risen from a mechanized society, from monotonous factory work, from great social divisions. He would not have subverted the ground from which he would have arisen; he would, instead, have absorbed from it the lymph he would have constantly needed to maintain his status.*

*A: The New Man is then identified as Zátopek, Coppi, Garrincha?*

*T: Each of your examples shows some of the features of the New Man. Emil Zátopek, before becoming one of the greatest athletes of all time, worked in a factory in a small town in Czechoslovakia. He rose*

*to the heights of popularity of his time. Yet his agere never evaded his political status.*

A: Social popularity is not a political issue?

T: *Certainly, but the impossibility to get out of an established political status is a distinctive characteristic of the New Man Zatopek's story. It was always the communist regime to define his possibilities, and when Zatopek, no longer an athlete, attempted to publicly question it, the regime mercilessly turned against him. The success of the superhuman Zatopek never stemmed from anything other than the tradition (the narrative) that created it. He actually succeeded in rising from the condition of the "crushed and mechanized man" mentioned by Deleuze, but at the end of the day he never had the chance to become anything else.*

A: What about Coppi, then?

T: *Fausto Coppi was the best because he was a machine. That is why he is so often put in contrast with Bartali. According to Curzio Malaparte, the difference is that Bartali is a human, while Coppi is a machine; Bartali is a hero, Coppi a champion; Bartali is still a romantic man, Coppi is already a modern man. The New Man is the one who takes the tradition (in the sense of 'transmission') on his shoulders and brings it forward. He is the mechanical man: he is Coppi.*

A: Why Garrincha, then? He was neither a machine nor a superhuman. He had a slight squint, a dislocated pelvis, his spine was deformed, his right leg bent inwards and his left leg was six centimetres shorter and curved outwards.

T: *It is useful to highlight a third feature of the New Man on the example of Garrincha., who responds to a specific vocation of the twentieth century. The attribute of this Brazilian footballer that interests us here is the potential for redemption. Garrincha is a messianic man, who redeems his condition (physical and social)*

*and that of an entire people, without actually changing anything. Nothing changes because Garrincha – in the words of Eduardo Galeano – was nothing else but “un perdedor con buena suerte. Y la buena suerte no dura. Bien dicen en Brasil que si la mierda tuviera valor, los pobres nacerían sin culo. Garrincha murió de su suerte: pobre, borracho y solo”.*

A: The messianic event takes the form of a transformation, a crisis (*the crisis*) of the Law.

T: *That's right. The New Man is the messiah, insofar as he announces (of course, without fulfilling it) the New World that Deleuze talks about.*



Quoted books: Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby La formula della creazione*, Quodlibet, 1993; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press 1983; Curzio Malaparte, *Coppi e Bartali*, Adelphi 2009; Eduardo Galeano, *El fútbol a sol y sombra*, Siglo Ventiuno Editores, 1995.

Following page: Garrincha.



# *I Have Often Compared Cyclists to Jazz Musicians*

*Jørgen Leth in conversation with Giovanni Giaretta*

**I know you played table-tennis and you were a professional cyclist. Is this the beginning of your interest in sport?**

Yes, I played table-tennis in Marselisgaard Bordtennis Klub in Aarhus in the 1950's; my best individual result was winning the singles championship of Aarhus, once. In cycling, I was a member of an amateur road-racing club, but never became a professional. My childhood experiences with cycling came from the fact that my uncle Erik Linde, a former sprint champion, was director of the famous Aarhus Cyklebane track. He invited me to all the races, and I saw the great names of track sprint racing of the late 40s and early 50s, among which Joseph Scherens, Arie van Vliet, Jan Derksen, Reginald Harris, Louis Gérardin, Georges Senteften, Oscar Plattner, Antonio Maspes... They were my heroes – flamboyant eccentric characters. I could come close to them, and I had them write their autographs in my little green book. That's where it all started for me. Then, for some years I didn't follow sports – sports was seen as a lower trivial culture – and I came back to my childhood fascination only when I wrote my third collection of poetry, *Sports Poems*, in 1967.

**“My intention is to produce not a history of sport but rather, let us say, its phenomenology and its poetics...”**

**This is the beginning of a letter between Hubert Aquin and Roland Barthes. Somehow sport is not considered an intellectual subject even if it has so much weight in our society. Did you try to create a phenomenology and a poetics of sport in your films?**

I have read Roland Barthes' essay about Fausto Coppi, who was a big hero for me. Among my *Sports Poems* there is a poem called 'Fausto Coppi' that has been much quoted, and which I still read when performing with musicians. I am not familiar with the correspondence between Aquin and Barthes, but it is true – and very much so in Scandinavia – that sport was not considered an intellectual subject. I felt my poems were a rebellion against the arrogance of the intellectuals against sport. My poems were the first literary work on sport. We were a group of artists – painters, writers, filmmakers – who had a fresh look at some aspects of the so-called trivial culture. For instance, we were fans of the “spaghetti-westerns”: Sergio Corbucci's *Django* and then, of course, all Sergio Leone's films. And we liked sports. My ambition was to lift the fascination of sports up into a higher level of appreciation. And yes, I wanted to create a poetics of it, to portrait sports heroes as representing old-fashioned virtues, such as courage, sacrifice, extreme loyalty etc.

**In your films on tennis and table-tennis, such as *Monument* (1969), *Motion Picture* (1970) and *Chinese Table-tennis* (1972), you seem to focus on the choreographic aspects of gestures – on movement itself. There is a quote by Robert Bresson from his book *Notes on cinematography* that came to my mind when I first saw your films: “Be The First To See What You See As You See It”. Could you expand on that?**

I have an aesthetic approach to sports. I like the images of great performances. I want to study effort in detail. You can see that very clearly in the films you mention. Of course, the most programmatic one is *Motion Picture*, which I see as one of my most important films – experimental, quite rough. But also in my cycling films, for instance in the time trial sequence in *Stars And Watercarriers*, you can see this tendency to study the athlete like an artist at work.

**You have worked a lot on cycling, in films such as *Stars and Watercarriers* (1974), *The Impossible Hour* (1975) and *A Sunday in Hell* (1976), as well as in your work as a TV commentator. What has always impressed me in cycling is the**



**possibility to create epic stories. Cyclists become something more, as the protagonists of an adventure novel. Can you talk about that?**

Cycle races have a great epic value. They are stories that move in time and space. They happen in geography and climate, they have characters with extreme courage. Riders create adventures as they move on. I love this quality of great sport. Definitely, cyclists become more than just cyclists. They are heroes because they represent emotions and imagination.

**Roland Barthes said that the Tour de France is the challenge of man against the landscape, that bullfighting is the challenge of man against animals and that Formula One is the challenge of man against time – a way to become immortal. Do you agree with this idea? In your film *The Impossible Hour*, I encountered a strong feeling of being against time, an anxiety to fight against the laws of nature...**

I agree with Roland Barthes. I have studied anthropology myself for some years, and was very inspired by an anthropologist of an older generation, Bronislaw Malinowski, who has been an influence on much of my filmmaking, an inspiration for what I call my pseudo-anthropological films – such as *The Perfect Human*, *Life in Denmark*, *Good and Evil*, *Notes on Love*, *Erotic Man* and even my two America films. I agree with Barthes' view about the challenge of man against nature. What always moves me in the Tour de France is the fact that the riders transcend all limits and all suffering to step into mythological material – thereby, sometimes, becoming immortal. As Coppi in certain years, in certain races, or Bahamontes, Gaul, Koblet, Pantani.

**In your film *Pelota* (1983), about the “Basque pelota” sport, it seems as if the entire soul of a people can be reflected in one sport. Can you talk about it? Is it possible to portray a place starting from its most popular game or sport? In particular, I am thinking of the images of playing fields as they appear in *Pelota*.**

For what regards *Pelota*, our intention was to seek the ‘soul’ of this archaic sport. I wanted to caress the melancholic beauty of the Basque landscape that frames those tough men playing with a hard ball, and to get into the history and mythology of this sport by looking at dynasties and generations of players.

**In your film *Moments of Play* (1986) you gather a sort of collection of different games and ways to play them around the world. How did you come up with the idea for the film? Have you been inspired by Roger Caillois' book *Man, play and games*? Did you have an anthropological intent?**

I don't know the book by Roger Caillois. Neither was the film inspired by Huizinga's famous book *Homo ludens*. From the start of the project we decided that we would not connect to the rich literature about play and games; it would have been boring to follow ideas from these works. We only let ourselves be inspired by the simple view of playing in different cultures – what we saw when travelling. We simply wanted to tell stories in different settings about how people play.

**Several times, it has been said that the 90-minute duration of a football match is exactly that of a feature-length movie. Can you talk about the relationships between sport and cinema?**

I suppose you mean fiction films? I think it is surprising that there are so *few* great sports films. I like some of the American movies about baseball; *The Natural* (1984) with Robert Redford, for instance – not a great film, but a decent one. I like the mystique and romanticism around this purely American sport. I also like several boxing films. Not least, Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, which in my opinion is a masterpiece. If we talk about documentaries, I think there are some good ones but, again, surprisingly few. One of the best is, of course, *When We Were Kings* about the Ali-Foreman match in Zaïre 1974. I was once involved in a big Hollywood project; I was hired by the great producer-screenwriter Carl Foreman (*High Noon*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*) to do the 'second unit' footage for a Tour de France movie, based on an English novel, *The Yellow Jersey*. In 1985 I guided Dustin Hoffman and Al Pacino on the Tour – they were drawn into the project. And in 1986 I was directing a crew of 15 French technicians to shoot documentary material for the second unit. The project was not very appreciated in Hollywood, and finally it stranded. I have seen the film about Zidane. It is too technical to my taste. Alex Gibney's *The Armstrong Lie* offers some interesting insights in the Tour de France, especially in the behind-the-scenes footage from the 2009 race, which we already know from the 'official' race footage. But I don't like the omniscient narrator in the film; it is too conventional. I do not like to be told what to think.

**Somehow, *The Five Obstructions* (2003), the film you made with Lars Von Trier, has some elements of a sport challenge. Was it experienced like that?**

The *Five Obstructions* was, of course, a film about challenge; it was putting somebody up against real difficulties. It is an art film, not a sports film. But it is about game rules, like in sports; it is about being up against terrible obstacles. I have always been working with game rules for my films and my writing. Deciding what I can do and what I cannot do. I have been teaching that concept at the National Film School in Copenhagen to students like Thomas Vinterberg, Per Fly, Ole Christian Madsen. Lars von Trier credits me for inspiring the Dogme films. In *The Five Obstructions* I have to find out what to do. Solutions can be painful and almost impossible. That is what gives that film its unique quality of real struggle and suspense.

**Italian painter Sandro Chia once made a controversial statement about doping in sport. He said that, in a way, it's beautiful to see an athlete who wants to get his heart break, who wants to offer himself completely to the audience. It is like an actor who wants to act in the best possible way. In a way, the stadium is like a theatre.**

And why is this controversial? I will tell you why: because there is so much hypocrisy about doping. I have to be careful with what I say, since I am a public person in Denmark; I have been a commentator of the Tour de France and other great races for more than thirty years. I have often compared cyclists to jazz musicians, who willingly sacrifice their own health for the benefit of innovative music. Cyclists are experimenting with their health to enhance their performances. I absolutely think that there must be doping control, because we need to have the illusion of equal conditions. But extreme sport is an experimental area and athletes are like test pilots. I do not think it is fair to demonize them for always going to the limits of what is permissible.

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Jørgen Leth, *Pelota*. Photo: Georg Oddner.

following page:

*Jai alai hall*, Havana, Cuba, circa 1904. Detroit Publishing Company.



# *Bourgeoisie*

## *A conversation with Lyle Ashton Harris*

**Sport is a social arena, a social context with definite values, and the production of value is given by the context itself.**

Yes, and that social context is not just in the field *per se*, but it extends to the spectator. In *Untitled (Bourgeoisie)* [2006], I became much more interested in those who actually watch – the spectators – versus the object of their gaze. So I am much more interested in typologies of spectators and instances of acting out: class and gender issues. At the time I did *Untitled (Bourgeoisie)*, I was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome – I spent nine months there in 2000/2001. The second month there I felt it was time to start to work. That particular year, issues of races in European soccer were very popular in the media. I just photographed Berlusconi for *The New York Times*, and I started going to see soccer matches. My access was to the field, and I photographed Roma-Lazio and several other matches all over Italy. I photographed and interviewed African black soccer players: Aldair from Brazil, Phil Masinga from South Africa... I never watched sports before. I became much more interested in crowds, and how crowds were acting out. It was about what happens in the fields, but also about what's happening in the stadium.





## What about the interviews with the players?

Initially I did interviews and photographs, and I was going to juxtapose the black soccer players against soccer hooligans, but then I realized it was not about the individual but about crowds. Crowds and power.

**The team in Italy is not an ideology; it's something more – you don't question it. It is interesting to put it in comparison to political involvement. The connection to the team is more pure than current political involvement, you feel totally part of one thing.**

Yes, but is it true that, depending on what team they support, you get a sense of the population in terms of the politics? Could you say that the Roma audience is generally more progressive than the Lazio audience? I went to a game in Verona; the audience seemed much more conservative there in respect to Rome. You get a temperature of the social context.

**It is interesting how political involvement and sport involvement are sometimes intertwined. Politics in Italy is so messed up and it is hard to believe in the institutions in a total way, whereas I have the feeling that when you go to the stadium you can give yourself totally to the team. A community is built around it, and it is much more stronger than a political belief; happiness is much more clear...**

Where does that energy go?

**That is the question: is supporting a team a completely apolitical activity because that energy doesn't turn into a political statement? Were you interested in the bourgeoisie because of a connection between power structures and the audience of a soccer game?**

I think that piece is curious, because whenever Italian or international soccer press talks about hooliganism, there's a class bias. They are often referred to as being a working class crowd, and you never actually see the other types of people who are attending the game. So I was interested in how you could read a certain amount of restraint within the body, the gesture, the physical expression of that particular crowd, and that in a certain sense it becomes a canvas of different points of society that are

often not represented. Magazines or newspapers talk about people throwing down the stadium a *motorino*, but it would be curious if they printed that image of the bourgeoisie: they might not have carried the *motorino* in, yet they are part of the collective body – and they never get exposed. In that particular image there are politicians, dignitaries, writers etc...

**It is one of the few events where you have a clear façade of a social class. Like in theatre.**

Yes, precisely. And to really highlight that sense of theatre, I wanted the crowd to close in on itself. So the image has been cut in half and then reversed.

**And that was only a part of the audience in the stadium. It's interesting how social classes can be defined based on where they sit.**

Precisely.

**You live part of your life in Ghana. What about the difference between Italy or the US and there, in regard to the social value and importance of sport?**

Ghana, from my experience, seems to have a temperature similar to Italy. Sport permeates all aspects of a cultural community. Nationalism is spread out through sports.

**You can give all yourself to Italy, if 'Italy' means a soccer team during the world cup. Many say that a real belonging to the idea of Italy only happens when the *Nazionale* plays. So soccer does play a political role in a way, because it gathers together a community.**

That is true. But within that, in the more regional plays, the splinter identities – Calabria or Naples, for example – emerge. So the national identity emerges only in an international form, whereas on a regional level you have these other tensions that exist within the identity. South versus the North, for example.

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Lyle Ashton Harris, *Untitled (Bourgeoisie)*, 2006. Installed at the 52nd Venice Biennale.  
Photo courtesy: the artist.

# *Documents*

*Achilles:* Why do you care about winning? Anyway, there will be a faster tortoise one day, and it will break your record.

*Tortoise:* *And what if art actually shared the characteristics of sports records? What if all works of art became nothing but a document as soon as they were completed and exhibited? What if a piece of art is just a crystallization of an individual's potentiality?*

*A:* Yes, but in sports this is related with time, since the physical limit to tend to, is zero. Take, for example, a 100-meter dash in athletics.

*T:* *Or any speed race in general, should it be swimming, car racing, motorcycling, speed ice-skating...*

*A:* It is not about the extreme limits of language and of the 'sayable', as Italo Calvino puts it when talking about the role of literature. In sports it is more about trying to overcome the laws of nature; it is the will to get closer to an unapproachable limit – to run 100 meters in zero seconds.

You attempt to create an irreducible work, which is already in its first form redeemed as much as unsurpassable – you try to reach the redemption of your work already at the moment of its creation, which is a paradox.

Art is often defined as being *centrifugal*, always reaching out towards where you cannot get to. It therefore doesn't have to deal with perceivable limits; its only limit is the infinity. For a speed athlete, however, limits are clear and unattainable; his practice will cover an asymptote that cannot reach zero, if it is not *ad infinitum*, but which, at the same time, is constantly approaching it.

*T:* *This is true only about that have to do with time. In other types*

*of races, like discus throwing, long jump and high jump, however, the infinity (and not zero) is the limit. In other disciplines, such as in gymnastics, certain limits can be reached, as it happened with Nadia Comaneci's seven perfect scores at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.*

A: So sport, in comparison with art, has a more conscious relationship with its limits, right?

T: *Roland Barthes says that in sport "muscles alone do not win the race. What wins the race is a certain concept of man and the world, of man in this world. This concept is that man is proven by his actions; and man's actions are aimed, not at the domination of other men, but at the domination of things".*

A: Perhaps it is through exploring their own limits that men explore their relationship with the world. On 20th July 1969 Neil Armstrong walked on the Moon before any other human being did. A month later, athlete Vladimiras Dudinas made another discovery in the exploration of the relationship between man and the world; he ran the 3000 metre steeplechase faster than any other human being before him.



Quoted books: Italo Calvino, *Saggi 1945-1985*, Mondadori 1995; Roland Barthes, *What is sport?*, Yale University Press 2007.

# *‘Cuore Matto’*

## *A conversation with Franco Bitossi*

**Among your numerous victories are 21 Giro d’Italia stages and 4 Tour de France stages.**

**Furthermore, you have won the Best Climber Classification in the Giro d’Italia three times (1964, 1965, 1966), the Points Classification in the Giro twice (1969, 1970), and you won both the Points Classification and the Combination Classification in the Tour de France of 1968.**

**Which one of your victories has made you happiest?**

I particularly remember my victory in the third stage of the 1964 Giro d’Italia, from Brescia to San Pellegrino. I went professional in 1961, but both 1962 and 1963 were unsuccessful years because of my heart problems. When the victory at the 1964 Giro came, it felt like liberation. I realized that I could allow myself to hope again, and that I was able to compete with the best cyclists. It was a great satisfaction, an immense joy – the unfortunate period had passed. I always had confidence in myself, but the heart problems hindered me a great deal.

**That’s why the audience nicknamed you “Cuore matto” (‘crazy heart’). What heart problems did you have?**

I would feel an extra-systole coming, and then an attack of tachycardia would start. My heart rate would

climb up to 220 beats per minute. But every time I took a test at the doctors, there was never any evidence of a heart problem. It would only happen only during a race. Tachycardia causes the circulation to malfunction, and therefore if it happened when I was going uphill, I had to stop and wait for the beat to slow down again. I remember that there was a specific place that would have such an effect on me. When taking part in the Tour of Lombardy, every time I crossed a particular bridge in Lecco, just before a climb, I had such an attack. There was something mysterious about it; it was like some sort of a conditioned reflex, it happened every time I crossed that bridge. For two or three years I had to give up any hope of winning, because after those breaks I had to take, I could not catch up with the others. In the 1967 Tour of Lombardy, when crossing the same bridge, my heart went off once again, but on that occasion I had the strength to react, and ended up winning the whole race. The tachycardia would usually occur before the decisive climbs, so I guess it was also related to my emotional state at those moments.

**So you think you were negatively affected by your emotional character?**

Until 1967 my career was greatly affected by these heart crises, and I felt discouraged and at times was even considering quitting racing all together. Eventually I found my own way of racing, a dimension of myself, and I began to win. In respect to my character, though, I have always been emotional. During the stage races some runners sleep peacefully until their masseur comes to wake them up. I, on the other hand, used to wake up an hour or two beforehand, because I felt the tension of the race. Being able to control oneself and having a calm character is crucial, especially in stage races. In my years there was Merckx who would win all stage races, so it was hard to beat him, and I also could not grasp the idea of winning a tour not having won a single stage. I rode instinctively. For me, winning meant to be the first at the finish line. It is the same in boxing, where you can win a match either by a KO or just by gaining enough points. Winning by the KO has another flavour to it. I enjoyed winning.

**Can you give me some examples of cyclists with whom you have raced, who had a peculiar character?**



Surely there were cyclists who, despite being strong, were adversely affected by their nature; they would easily get down and could not get back up again, for example after a fall. Italo Zilioli for instance, who has finished second at the Giro three times, used to lose heart easily; at times he would not even react. I think he could have been more successful, if he had had a different character. Felice Gimondi on the other hand had a strong character; he was contained and used to plan the races carefully. I used to ride more lightheartedly, as if, at times, I was not interested in the race.

### **And what about Raymond Poulidor?**

Poulidor had a great personality and he was physically very strong. I think his weakest point was the fact that he did not have a strong team at his disposal; he often remained isolated and had to work alone. He might have also had some sort of a complex related with Jacques Anquetil, who was the winner, the champion. He was always his rival and I think that, in spite of the sympathy the audience had for him, he suffered by the popularity and charm of Anquetil. But he was one of the greatest – up to the age of forty he was fighting at the top. Hats off.

**I would like to hear about the World Championships in Gap in 1972. With just a few kilometers to go you broke away. You were about to win and become the World Champion when Marino Basso, your Italian teammate, passed you just a few meters before the finishing line.**

I had been riding well throughout the whole day, trying to save my energy. In the final kilometers I was in a group of seven, with [Michele] Dancelli, [Marino] Basso, [Eddy] Merckx, [Cyrille] Guimard, [Joop] Zoetemelk, and [Leif] Mortensen. With three or four kilometers to go, going up a little hill, Guimard took off and I followed him. Being very fast, Guimard was dangerous. He expected my cooperation, but I just drafted him to avoid wasting energy. I was hoping he could ‘take’ me to the line. When he saw I was not working with him, he slowed down and the rest of the group reached us. I was fresh because I had been drafting Guimard, so I took off. I thought; “Merckx is a friend so is not going to chase me. Dancelli and Basso are Italian and therefore are not going to try to catch up with me either. Guimard is tired.

There are only Zoetemelk and Mortensen left”.

I didn't think Mortensen would try to go with me and therefore there was only Zoetemelk to take care of. I thought; "It's done".

When I took off, nobody followed me and I immediately gained several meters. I thought I was going to be the World Champion. When I turned the last corner, having 1300 meters to go, I turned around and saw that the group was 300 meters behind me.

In the last kilometer there was a flat part, then a descent, through which I really flew, and then there was a little rise. And that is where I made a mistake; at the beginning of the climb I changed the gear to a lower one. But then I had the feeling it was too light. The finishing line was there, it seemed I could almost touch it. However, it never arrived, so I changed to a higher gear and this was the mistake. After a hundred meters my legs got stuck. It was windy that day. The wind was in my face and coming from the right. While riding that last kilometer I was protected by the people on the right side of the road, but when I realized I was getting stuck, I tried to look back to where the other riders were. I noticed they were really speeding up. Well, my teammates didn't do much to protect me... I thought there was somebody trying to take off and catch up with me, but they were hidden behind the two referee cars, and to see them I had to move to the middle of the road, where it was very windy. This slowed me down even more. Of course, if I had changed back to a lower gear (or if I had left the lower gear in the first place), I would have probably been the champion. On the finishing line Basso passed me when I had just six or seven meters to go. During the last 100 meters I knew they were very close to me, but I was just pedaling in the wind and keeping my eyes on the line, hoping they would not pass me. I could see the finishing line was very close, so I thought; "I am the world champion", and at that moment I stalled out. It ended like that.

### **I guess it is a very bitter memory.**

It is not so bitter; after a while we end up forgetting things. On that occasion, I had given it everything, so I did not have too much to blame myself for. Looking back, I felt sad about it for about ten days, but then I moved on.

**In 1976, at age of 36, you won your third Italian Championship.**

At that age, it was a great satisfaction to win such a long race, in the rain and with so many climbs, managing to beat young Francesco Moser.

**In 1977 you finished third in another World Championship, in San Cristobal, Venezuela. You were 37 years old.**

Yes, I was somewhat senior. I felt good, I rode well. There was a thunderstorm. My only regret was that we could not agree with my masseur to give me a bottle with some carbohydrates for the final. In the final we broke away with Moser, Saronni and Thurau, and I suffered from the lack of sugar. Not having made that error, I could have done even better.

**During a long stage race, what does a cyclist think about?**

You do not think a lot; you know you have so many kilometers to go, you try to nourish yourself regularly. Some stages were an uninterrupted tension for 300 kilometers, from the start to the finish.

During some other stages the peloton tacitly decided to advance unhurriedly. Those were the days when we could do anything; from joking to eating spaghetti and desserts the audience had brought for us, or having a break to do our own business. We had fun like a bunch of boys who go out dancing together. I remember that, once, they gave me a fine because, as a joke, we had exchanged shirts with another cyclist. When I started to win, to compete with the best ones, I gradually became more open, more sociable. I had fun with everyone, from Merckx and Gimondi to the last runner to reach the finishing line. When the race was slow, I was in the habit of riding at the back of the peloton, and many came to see me to joke, tell funny stories, make fun of one another and have a few laughs. It was all part of the game. Gimondi used to ride at the front of the pack most of the time, even at the beginning of a stage. On the contrary, I would usually start at the back. Every time I realized that Merckx was in the back too, I would go to the front to look for Gimondi and I would tell him; "Did you not notice that Merckx is in the back too? Come on, come to the back and have fun with us".

### **Can you tell me about the moment you decided to quit racing?**

At a certain point one gets to understand that he is no longer capable of getting certain results. I quit when I realized that it was the right time, without any regret. Somehow it was also liberating, getting rid of everything that had prevented me from living a normal life. Most of my year was dedicated to the bike and all the related obligations to be fulfilled. I took a year off, and had fun hunting and doing whatever I felt like, and then I decided to dedicate myself to the countryside. I bought some land and a house, and I became a farmer for twenty years. A much freer and laid back life.

### **What is a cyclist's relationship with the landscapes during a race?**

During a race, you always have to pay attention to your position and where you are going, so you cannot take much time to appreciate the landscape. You focus on the race, so even if you catch a glimpse of the landscape around you, you cannot store it in your memory – it remains a swift flash. Especially when you are going uphill, or are under stress you are not aware of the nature around you, you only focus on the end of the climb. This is different during training sessions. When I went to Venezuela for the 1977 World Championship, I decided to train on my own, without my team. I needed to recover after the journey and from my jet lag. I remember that I went on a cycle alone, which became somewhat an exploration of a landscape unknown to me. I wandered on my bike, alone, through absolutely deserted stretches of land, occasionally interrupted by small, isolated villages.

**There is a famous quote by Pietro Mennea that says; "Effort is never wasted".**

It is true; the exhaustion and sweat are important for a man because they are lessons – a way of understanding reality.

# *Notas al margen de una ex apneista*

*Carolina Valencia Caicedo*

*“Cola! Cola! Vieni a terra, che fai? Non sei mica un pesce?”  
E lui, a nuotare sempre più lontano...<sup>1</sup>*

Los rayos del sol dejan someramente al descubierto la profundidad, pero no desplazan el cumplimiento de un deseo, y la mente no tarda en calcular largamente una trayectoria de fuga, esperando poder lanzarse como una flecha y desaparecer en el horizonte.

La posibilidad de sortear los obstáculos que retardan el cumplimiento de un deseo o el restablecimiento de un bien perdido, es lo que me remite a la fabula de Pesce Cola: un niño que permanecía en el agua día y noche, convirtiéndose luego en un pez-humano por una involuntaria maldición que su madre lanza en un día de cielo abierto, y de ahí en adelante, aquel íntimo deseo de nadar se transforma en el imperativo del deseo de otros.

Esta fabula popular de Palermo se encadena con la nostalgia que permanece desde mi último hálito de apnea, mezclado con el deseo de restablecer el bienestar de tocar la profundidad. Pesce Cola viene entonces a recordarme aquel proceso mental en el que enfocaba la apnea a la finalidad de aferrarme a una energía interior que me fortaleciera y no solamente como un instrumento para la competencia, sin embargo, pese a la falta de entusiasmo para competir gané cinco medallas, pero la finalidad de ganar seguía estando lejos de mi foco de interés. Mi punto de fuga se encontraba entre dos estados

<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Cola Pesce*, in *Fiabe Italiane*, Einaudi, Torino 1956.

de plenitud: sumergirme y suspenderme, la sensación sublime de sumergirse en el agua y suspender la respiración.

*Il Re, al vederlo, gli face buon viso.  
“Cola Pesce,” gli disse, “tu che sei così bravo nuotatore,  
dovresti fare un giro tutt’intorno a la Sicilia e sapermi dire  
dov’è il mare più fondo e cosa si vede!”*

El rey se empeñaba en determinar como un valor mensurable la velocidad y la increíble adaptación al medio acuático de Pesce Cola. Y a esta forma de medir la capacidad humana por medio de records, se le llama progreso, un modo de equivalencia entre el hombre y la máquina. Pero siempre han de haber pequeños puntos de fuga que se escapan de la regla, prácticas como la apnea que no se dejan medir por imposiciones sobre la velocidad, sino por la capacidad de concentrar la mente a los fines propuestos, pero como la mente no se ciñe a amoldamientos caprichosos siempre va a imponer un límite: la dificultad de confrontar a nuestro antojo la capacidad mental con la competencia.

*“Cola, devi dirmi quant’è profondo il mare qui al Faro,  
più o meno”.*  
*Cola calò giù e ci stette due giorni, quando tornò su disse  
che il fondo non l’aveva visto, perchè c’era una colonna di  
fumo che usciva da sotto uno scoglio e intorbinava l’acqua.*

Los reflejos mamíferos acuáticos de Pesce Cola, le tenían sin cuidado al rey que solo se interesaba en solventar su curiosidad, sin que le llamase la atención el valor en sí mismo de esta capacidad acuática, la cual es sorprendente ya que en la apnea se cambia la idea preestablecida de la velocidad como el valor que ayuda a llegar pronto a la meta, por la precisa administración del tiempo, determinada por la concentración mental y por la perfección del movimiento. La belleza del movimiento definido como la capacidad de elongar el cuerpo y mantenerlo en una perfecta postura lineal y deslizando el movimiento por toda la columna vertebral, hasta concentrarlo en la espina dorsal y desde allí dinamizar la energía resumida en un potente aleteo que como una ola duplica su movimiento orgánico y se deja deslizar suavemente hasta la orilla.

Todo este proceso en el que el hombre fomenta sus reflejos acuáticos está basado en la perfecta combinación entre: estilo, agilidad, desenvoltura del movimiento y economía del tiempo, este último paso acoge una paradoja, ya que el record es marcado por un manejo diverso del tiempo, lo que significa que cuanto más tiempo se economice, más tiempo se podrá perder.



*Il Re, che non ne poteva più dalla curiosità disse: “Gettati dalla cima della torre del Faro”.*

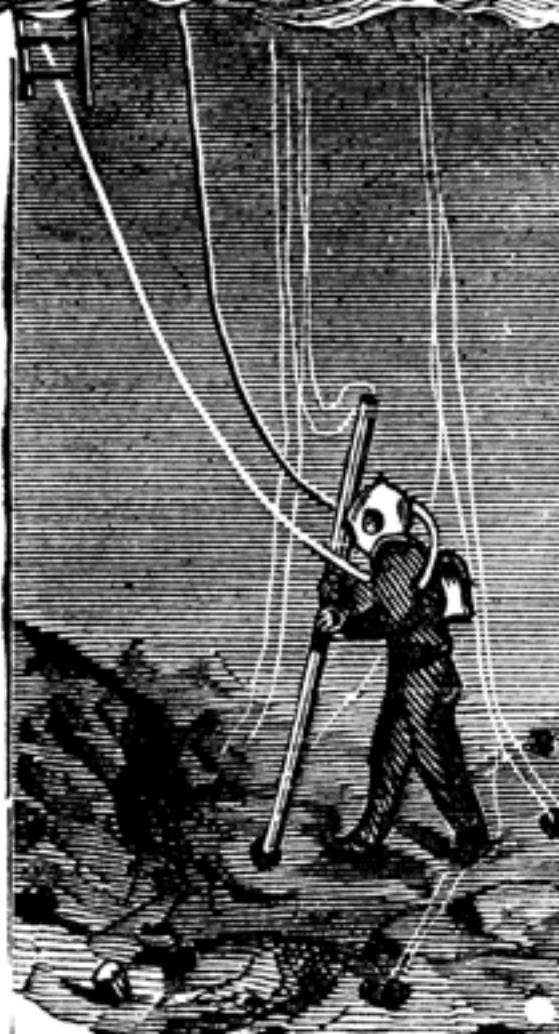
*Cola Pesce si tuffò di lassù in cima.*

*Il Re aspettò un giorno, ne aspettò due, ne aspettò tre, ma Cola non si rivedeva.*

*Finalmente venne fuori, ma era pallido come un morto.*

Sumergirse y dejar correr el tiempo marca el record en la apnea, pero también, aquello fragmentado, escindido y disgregado que es el tiempo, marca la muerte. Es así de perjudicial maquinar un pensamiento sobre el abstracto tiempo en un estado desprovisto de la vitalidad del oxígeno, pues ello implica perder la dosis única de aire, que como el tiempo, se disminuye y rueda hacia su fin.

*“Se voi così volete, Maestà,” disse Cola, “scenderò. Ma il cuore mi dice che non tornerò più su. Datemi una manciata di lenticchie. Se scampo, tornerò su io; ma se vedete venire a galla le lenticchie, è segno che io non torno più.”*



*Gli diedero le lenticchie, e Cola scese in mare.  
Aspetta, aspetta; dopo tanto aspettare, vennero  
a galla le lenticchie.  
Cola Pesce s'aspetta ancora che torni.*

Una línea recta conforma el encuentro más breve entre dos puntos. El muro se acerca y alerta el corte inevitable de la línea, la fatalidad del movimiento se aplaza solo si una rápida curva marca líneas disgregadas del rastro; las disgregaciones alargarán el fin del movimiento y la mente será el motor que imprime a la voluntad rápidas ensoñaciones que hacen perder las propias huellas. Es el recorrido fulmíneo de los circuitos mentales que capturan y vinculan puntos alejados en el espacio y en el tiempo, este movimiento de la mente es el equivalente a una potente energía interior. Una pequeña provisión de complejos, enredados y tortuosos pensamientos basta para absorber la única dosis de oxígeno que te mantiene en estado de apnea. Una mente ágil y creativa hará que el tiempo se extravíe, permaneciendo ocultos en los mudables escondrijos de la mente.

# *The Two Most Important Hours*

## *A conversation with Stefano Baldini*

**You once said in an interview that, unlike in team sports, in a marathon “you have to do everything on your own”. In individual sports you have a nearly complete responsibility for your own career and your life. Such form of responsibility is not easy to find elsewhere in contemporary society. Which were the moments in which you felt this responsibility as a burden, and in which as a fortune?**

I have never seen responsibility as a burden; quite the opposite, I have almost always managed to turn it into positive energy. What is more, my instructors and my two coaches (first Emilio Benati and later on Luciano Gigliotti) always taught me that participating in sport competitions all around the world is a privilege, and that the main responsibility is to wear your country’s colours clean and correctly. They also taught me that there are far more important professions, such as those involved in taking care of public health, or in making decisions for a community; we, after all, just do sport...

**Sport is a practice in which committing oneself completely – fully and unconditionally up**



**to and beyond the limits of one's body – is at the basis of everything, especially in an endurance discipline such as the marathon. What does one's mind occupy itself with during a marathon?**

The mind must be directly connected to the body; it affects 50 % of one's sport performance regardless of their level, be it professional or amateur. I have met many kids who are very good during training, but who too often run the race in their heads before they do the real one, thus consuming their emotional energy prematurely. The champion is the one who stands out in the final. This happens precisely because they are able to manage the symbiosis of their mind and body better than others, and distribute their fuel tank evenly over the whole 42 km.

**A race, due to such total and unconditional commitment, cannot be described as a job. It is something more; it goes beyond the mere act of working. For an athlete the actual work might be the one you perform on your own body: the training, the “workout”. Do you agree? What are, in your opinion, the activities of an athlete that can be considered a job, and the ones that exceed the notion of work?**

I have never considered sport as a job. If I did, I would have already retired a long time ago because daily life just would become too difficult. Of course, being methodical and repetitive during a race could make you to think that you are, after all, doing a job. The secret is to change training locations and travel companions often, run races you have never done before, set new goals – just simply live your sport well.

**It is very difficult to find such immense and unconditional happiness as that of an athlete who has won the most important race of his life elsewhere in contemporary society. Would you agree? Could you tell me about the moments after crossing the finishing line of the 2004 marathon in Athens?**

I wish all sportsmen could experience moments like that, even though I realize that winning the Olympic marathon in Athens was a privilege granted to two people only (me and the legendary Spiridon<sup>1</sup> in 1896) up to now... I felt a real sense of accomplishment. I was able to concentrate all my life experiences into the two most important hours of my career. The moment right after I had crossed the finishing line was the one when I felt the most empowered by a sporting event.

If you achieve something so beautiful and significant, you immediately become a role model for others, and then you have to be very careful about everything you do and say. It is a privilege that I have lived with great satisfaction and gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Spyridon "Spyros" Louis (1873 – 1940) was a Greek water-carrier who won the first modern-day Olympic marathon at the 1896 Summer Olympics, thereby becoming a national hero.

*Sports  
et Divertissements*

*Erik Satie*

## Le Tennis

Avec cérémonie

Play? Yes!

*p*

Le bon serveur. Comme il a de belles jambes!

*f* *pp*

Il a un beau nez

*f* Service coupé

Game!

Detailed description: The score is for a piano piece titled 'Le Tennis'. It consists of four systems of music. The first system has a vocal line with lyrics 'Play?' and 'Yes!' and a piano accompaniment starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system has lyrics 'Le bon serveur.' and 'Comme il a de belles jambes!'. The third system has a forte (*f*) dynamic in the vocal line and a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic in the piano accompaniment. The fourth system has lyrics 'Il a un beau nez' and 'Service coupé' followed by 'Game!'. The piano accompaniment features various textures, including arpeggiated chords and rhythmic patterns.

21 Avril 1914

## Le Golf

Exalté

*p* Le colonel est vêtu de 'Scotch Tweed' d'un vert violent *f* Il sera victorieux

*pp* son 'caddie' le suit portant les 'bags' Les nuages sont étonnés.

*pp* Les 'holes' sont tout tremblants *f* Le colonel est là *p*

son 'club' vole en éclats! *ff* 8va

*f* Le voici qui assure le coup:

20 Mai 1914

# *Unruliness, or When Practice Isn't Perfect*

*Julia Bryan-Wilson*

In 2000, the U.S. Tennis Association unveiled a sculpture to honor the legacy of African-American tennis great Arthur Ashe. The fourteen-foot-high bronze figure stands in a landscaped area near the main entrance of the National Tennis Center in Flushing, New York, depicting a muscular nude male, one hand reaching toward the sky as if in midserve, the other grasping a broken tennis racket. Designed by artist Eric Fischl, the statue, entitled *Soul in Flight*, is not meant to be a literal representation or portrait of the sports figure, but a gestural evocation of the dynamism of Ashe's actions on and off the court.

Almost immediately, the sculpture came under criticism, not only for failing to recognizably resemble the tennis star—its beefy form is far from Ashe's legendarily slender frame—but also for the audacity of the nakedness and the perceived bleakness of the incomplete racket.<sup>1</sup> Fischl defended his choices, noting that the nudity recalled classical sculptures of athletes in motion, and that the racket stub alluded to a “life cut short” (Ashe died of AIDS in 1993).<sup>2</sup> This veiled reference to Ashe's death is notable given how the sculpture's hulking, healthy body contrasts to the realities of the ravages of the late stages of the disease, which can cause the flesh to waste away. Ashe was heterosexual, and contracted the disease from a blood transfusion, but long-standing presumption in the United States that AIDS is a “gay” affliction might have also motivated another of Fischl's decisions: Was the potent nakedness of the figure meant to offer a more conventional model of masculinity? Or did the

<sup>1</sup> Ira Berkow, “Sports of the Times; Bronze Guy Stands Tall Sans Towel,” *New York Times* (September 7, 2000): D1.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in F. T. Rea, “The Broken Racket,” at *Richmond.com* (September 8, 2000): [www.richmond.com/news-features/17940](http://www.richmond.com/news-features/17940), accessed June 15, 2008.

sculpture's very exaggeration of virility make it somewhat queer?

The controversy over *Soul in Flight* thus revealed how Ashe embodied an unresolved contradiction: how can a male body celebrated for its physical

agility be reconciled with its ultimate vulnerability? Indeed, sports is an arena in which ideas of masculine purity and bodily integrity are tested and refined. But it equally raises questions about male bodies that do not obey rules of strength and machinelike efficiency. This essay considers such accounts of non-normative identities (often dismissed as "imperfections")—queer, transgender, and differently abled—within artistic and cultural representations of sports. In other words, it looks at "unruly bodies"—bodies that resist confinement by traditional notions of gender and ability.<sup>3</sup> How is such unruliness represented—given form—within the realms of athletics and aesthetics, and what can it tell us about changing notions of masculinity?

Sports can be an especially precise lens for focusing on questions of sex and gender.<sup>4</sup> From ancient Greek statuary to George Bellows's heaving boxers, the athletic male body has frequently been idealized in art as the embodiment of sleekness and power. At times this glorification of physical flawlessness can dovetail with more sinister visions, such as racist beliefs in Aryan supremacy and eugenic programs to weed out genetic undesirables. For instance, one of Hitler's favorite artists, sculptor Arno Breker, was celebrated in Nazi Germany for works such as *Bereitschaft (Readiness)*, 1939, which showed male physique at its most fascistically forceful. In Breker's work, bodies stand tall and rigid, unmarred by weakness, injury, or illness—such ruptures are unthinkable within the logic of his pristine, brutish racial perfection. What is more, their emphatic masculinity appears unquestioned.

Fischl's symbolic likeness of Ashe is quite unlike Breker's figure, given its acknowledgment—however subtle—of mortality, much less its glorification of a black athlete. Yet in Breker and Fischl alike, the anxious, even over-compensatory assertions of maleness demonstrate that artistic representations of sports reveal masculinity as an unfixed concept that must be repeatedly enacted and enforced. As theorist Judith Butler has influentially written, "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instated through a *stylized repetition of acts*."<sup>5</sup>

The notion of gender not only as a performance but also a kind of disciplinary training (to key more precisely into the realm of athletics), has been

<sup>3</sup> I have taken the phrase "unruly bodies" from Suzannah B. Mintz, *Unruly Bodies: Life Writing by Women With Disabilities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007). See also Tobin Siebers, "Disability Aesthetics," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 7 no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 63-73. Other important essays on sexuality and sports include those in the volume "The Cultural Value of Sport: Title IX and Beyond," special issue of *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 4, no. 4, ed. E. Grace Glenney and Janet Jakobsen, (Summer 2006), and Jennifer Doyle's ongoing, intelligent writings about soccer, including her blog "From a Left Wing" ([www.fromleftwing.blogspot.com/](http://www.fromleftwing.blogspot.com/)).

<sup>4</sup> In fact, some of the earliest critiques of the construction of masculinity came from the field of sports theory, such as the work of sociologist Micheal A. Messner. See "When Bodies are Weapons" (1985), reprinted in *Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007). Recent work includes Toby Miller, *Sportsex* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). For more on masculinity in art in particular, see Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner, *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 402.

explicitly theorized by Michel Foucault. In his *History of Sexuality*, he discusses how “biopower” subjects gender to a closed system that is unwilling to account for variation.<sup>6</sup> Discourses of medicalization and education have enforced the notion that the so-called “truth” of sex and gender is physically fixed, and demand that the body constantly undergo a series of regimes of maintenance and upkeep to keep it in place.

Some of the extreme subcultures of contemporary sport have taken such Foucauldian notions as practice, training, and discipline to new levels, focusing on strictly calibrated nutrition, performance-enhancing drugs, and body modifications intended to help athletes reach new heights of accomplishment.

Foucault’s and Butler’s writings are part of a rich literature about the fluidity of gender; though widely accepted within the academic realm of queer theory, their ideas are not widely embraced in the mainstream sporting world. More than almost any other realm of contemporary culture, organized sports illuminates how the presumed fixity of gender is codified and upheld. During the 1960s, officials from the International Olympic Committee began to demand “sex verification” of female athletes—administering chromosomal tests as well as physical examinations to verify their “true” gender. There has only been one documented case of a male pretending to be a female to gain competitive advantage in sports: German high jumper Hermann Ratjen, who in 1936 was forced by the Nazi regime to participate in the Olympics as “Dora.” (He came in fourth, and reverted back to his male identity when the games were over.) Still, over the past few decades, such tests have banned runners (such as Polish runner Ewa Klobukowska, who was deemed “abnormal” in 1967) and stripped others of their medals (Indian runner Santhi Soundarajanto was forced to relinquish her silver medal from the 2006 Asian Games). As recently as the 2008 Beijing Olympics, despite an outcry from the medical establishment, a “sex determination laboratory” examined “suspect” females.<sup>7</sup>

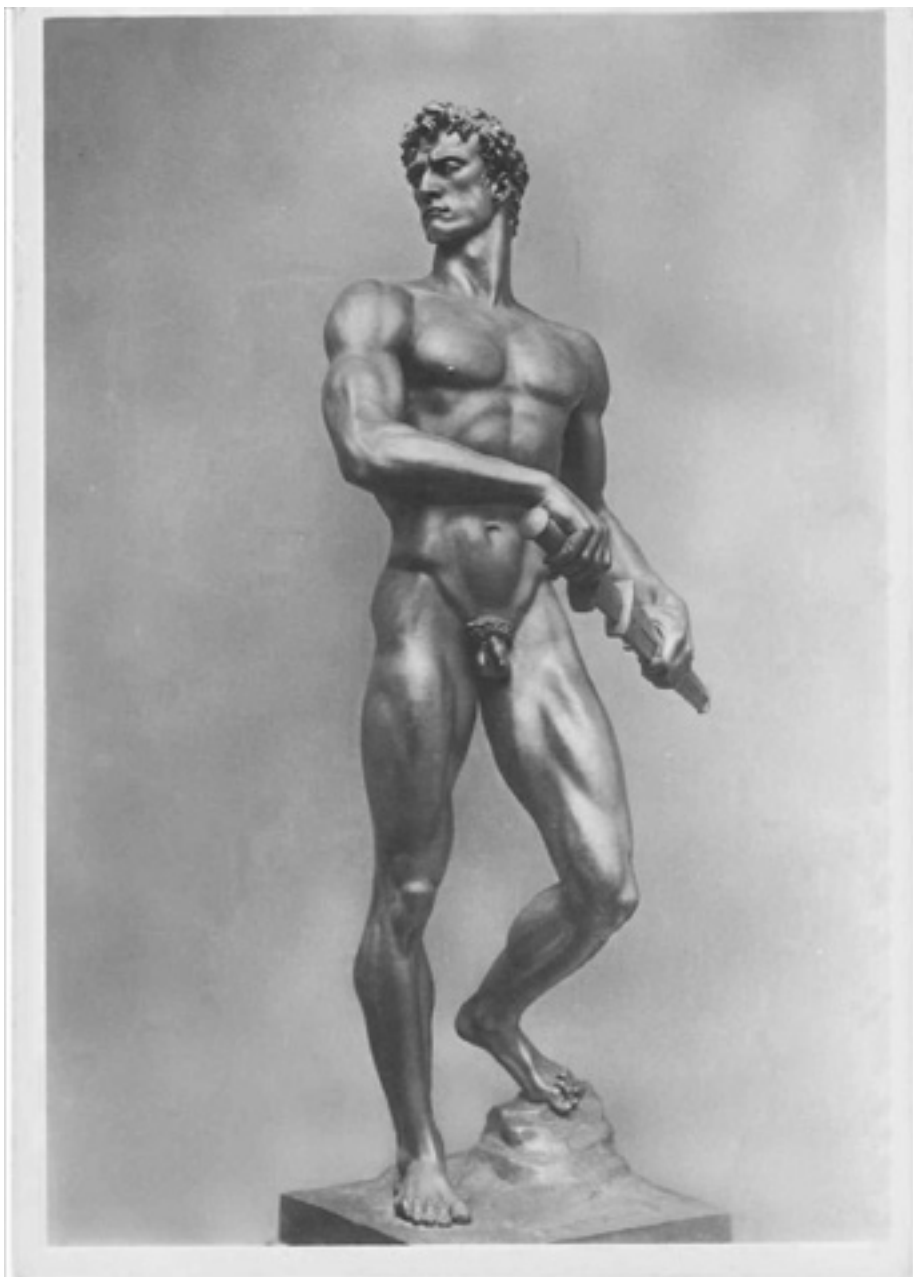
Such tests assume that gender is defined by a rigid idea of biological “normality” in which there are only two choices: male or female. In fact, there is a wide spectrum of chromosomal variation, as well as a host of diverse physical characteristics along the gender continuum. Transgender author Jennifer Finney Boylan objected to these repressive tests, saying, “The Olympic hosts seem to want to impose a binary order upon the messy continuum of gender. They are searching for concreteness and certainty in a world that contains neither.”<sup>8</sup> Public awareness of the fluidity of gender—due to genetic variations as well as many individuals’ self-chosen identifications—has grown as transgender and intersex activists have demanded rights and pushed for visibility.

In 2004, despite this increased awareness of the malleability of gender identity, the International Olympic Committee deemed that transgender

<sup>6</sup> See especially Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980); and Foucault’s Introduction to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Diary of a Nineteenth Century Hermaphrodite* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Katie Thomas, “A Lab Is Set to Test the Gender of Some Female Athletes,” *New York Times* (July 30, 2008): C9.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Finney Boylan, “The XY Games,” *New York Times* (August 3, 2008): WK 10.



athletes could compete in the games, but only if they had had sex-reassignment surgery and lived for at least two years undergoing hormonal treatments. Thus, only those who had fully, bodily transitioned from one sex to another within these medicalized conditions met the requirements for eligibility, while those who might inhabit a more unfixed gender identity did not. Such policing of what constitutes proper masculinity and femininity is anathema to progressive queer activism. In this, the Olympics are several steps behind the times. Yet while athletics can be used to reinforce gender normativity, it can also provide a place where such normativity is constantly being discomfited and departed from. Queer and trans-people of course participate widely in sports (so much so, that they have in some instances become a kind of stereotype, as in the paradigmatic dyke softball team). These arenas of play celebrate a diversity of bodies and abilities that departs from the disciplinary regimes of some sectors of organized sports; in addition, alternative fan cultures that come together around watching sports can beget queer affective relations that exceed the presumed heterosexism within sports fandom.

Queer art that addresses sports has become a fertile site in which to imagine bodies without borders. Take, for instance, art duo Marriage (Matt Bass and Wu Ingrid Tsang), whose short video *Soccer*, 2004, from their *Fortunate Living Trilogy*, shows two players of somewhat indeterminate gender practicing their soccer moves to an intermittent soundtrack of music by Queen. Here, Bass and Tsang—who perform the roles of the athletes in the video—deploy sports gear as a sort of prosthetic device that questions its relationship to masculinity. Their bodies are encased in kneepads and theatrical, brightly colored spandex suits (fringed at the shoulders), as they use the soccer ball to engage in a series of exercises. These aerobics do not ever culminate in a game, but seem to be rehearsed entirely for their own exhausting pleasure. As one artist cradles the ball into his/her crotch (incongruously, with hands sporting red fingernails), a visible pun about masculine “balls” becomes evident. Such movements—rolling the ball with their heads, kicking, and stretching—mimic and make absurd the repetitive nature of “training” in terms of both sexuality and sports. If sports is a proving ground for perfecting masculinity, Marriage’s wonderfully unruly bodies create their own radical, queer vision of fitness, practice, and performance. Definitions of what constitutes physical perfection, like the debates about athletes deemed to be “abnormal” in terms of gender, are constantly changing; such shifts also shed light on contemporary ideas of able-bodiedness. And there is significant overlap between the fertile fields of queer theory and disability studies. Queer disability studies posits that the ideas of physical normativity are discursively constructed within frames of power that do not acknowledge levels of otherness or difference. Self-declared “crip theorist” Robert McRuer speculates that that “the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness.”<sup>9</sup> Traditional standards of bodily integrity—such as the elevation, even worship, of athletes in pop culture—suggest that “deviant” or unruly trans, in-

tersex, and disabled bodies alike that do not fit these norms are “broken” and need to be “fixed.”<sup>10</sup>

However, recent developments indicate a move away from an intractable system that polices which bodies count as “whole” and which do not. After a lengthy legal battle, in May 2008, Oscar Pistorius, the South African double amputee and Paralympic running champion, successfully petitioned the International Association of Athletic Federations to reverse its ruling about the use of prosthetics in competitions. (He aimed to compete in the Beijing Olympics as the first-ever runner without legs, but his dream was postponed when he failed to qualify for the South African team.) Pistorius wears a pair of “cheetah feet”—high-tech C-shaped carbon-graphite devices that, unlike previous artificial legs, do not mimic human anatomy, and whose springlike flexion provides the runner with great shock absorption. Some feared that these prosthetics were so efficient that they would give him a competitive advantage. In fact, so drastic are the desires for victory at any cost that some commentators even postulated that athletes with healthy legs would consider cutting off their limbs to use such devices.

Does this turn of events—able-bodied athletes threatened by an amputee—signal that the tide is turning in terms of our comfort level with human-made physical interventions? Many athletes today—those who are using individually configured outfits and equipment, wind-tunnel training tubes, and constant monitoring and feedback technologies—are already at the cutting edge of certain types of body modification. Yet the controversy over Pistorius reveals that this matter is by no means clean-cut, and with every new technology comes new rules and hand-wringing about the degradation of the ostensible purity of sports.

In contrast, at the forefront of thinkers who have advocated blurring the divisions between humans and machines is feminist theorist Donna Haraway. She has called for an embrace of cyborgism—an acceptance of incomplete, partial, and unruly identities that are able to promote strategic alliances between and across difference. Haraway turns to the question of prosthetics precisely as a model for how to envision such a politics of flexibility: “Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices.”<sup>11</sup>

Artists such as Matthew Barney have made use of prosthetic devices not to contest impossible ideals of human perfection, but as aesthetic extensions of the imagination—for example, double amputee Aimee Mullins wearing clear legs that end in tentacles in his film *Cremaster 3*, 2002, a troublingly exoticized depiction that many have taken issue with.<sup>12</sup> More often, Barney has mined the pageantry and fetishization of sports as a way to play out complex fantasies about how the

<sup>9</sup> Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Experience,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Leonard J. Davis, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 301. See also McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Sumi Colligan, “Why the Intersexed Shouldn’t Be Fixed: Insights from Queer Theory and Disability Studies,” in *Gendering Disability*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith and Beth Hutchinson (Rutgers: New Brunswick, 2004), pp. 45–60.

<sup>11</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 178.



performance of masculinity is indebted to ritual and spectacle.

In contemporary U.S. culture, sports has been cast as a pioneering terrain where barriers are dismantled. Most famously, the baseball field was integrated before the schoolyard, and athletes such as Jackie Robinson were heralded as critical to changing race relations in this country. But this myth of sports as culturally progressive is paradoxical, as the terms by which its pluralism is enacted are often limited and compromised (as ongoing “gender testing” has made clear). Although it can be a transformative realm in which prejudices are overcome, sports can also be conservative, fighting to maintain myths of physical integrity. With its punitive policing of transgender and intersex identities, mainstream sports has become one of the last bastions of gender essentialism.

Art, though, continues to provide a space of possibility, a place to envision and depict a world beyond gender binaries as well as bodies unconfined by distinctions between the natural and artificial. At a time when sports (uncertainly) upholds codes of normative masculinity, queer theory and disability studies give new ways to think about the corporeal, ritualistic aspects of physical upkeep, practice, and training that do not reify one standard of physicality but are adaptable, supple, and functional. In other words, art is often able to celebrate variability and a blurring of masculine identities in a way that conventional sports has not—yet. To return to Fischl’s statue of the male body arrested in motion, with broken racket in hand: is it not just as critical for art to make visible the poignant moments of physical failure, of mortality—the missed serve, the life cut short—as it is to embody perfection?

First published in *Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports* (Independent Curators International, 2009)

p. 55

Eric Fischl, *Study for Soul in Flight: A Memorial to Arthur Ashe*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 58

Arno Breker, *Bereitschaft (Readiness)*, 1939

# Style

*Achilles:* I may not be able to reach you, but you do not have any style. I do.

*Tortoise:* Roland Barthes says that style in sport is “endowing an act of necessity with the appearance of free choice”.

*A:* The *poiesis* of sport is connected with nature, with the limitations of the world, in which humans live, and the limitations of humans in relation to the world, in which they live (and, thus, to each other as well). This is the necessity mentioned by Barthes, and Zidane’s style appears to be such. Such necessity can be measured; charts are produced, records are transmitted... Sport records are a tradition (transmission) of the relationship between humans and the world (and, thus, to each other as well).

*T:* Wait a minute. Also art is connected with nature, with the limitations of the world, in which humans live, and the limitations of humans in relation to the world, in which they live (and, thus, to each other as well). Are you sure that art is free from necessity? Are you sure that the definition of style by Barthes could not be used also for artistic poiesis?

*A:* The *poiesis* is to bring something from nonbeing into being, thus opening the space of truth. The poietic activity of a man is given through the *techné*, the technics. Perhaps it is a matter of technics. The separation between technology and art is quite recent, as well as the one between products of a technics and artworks which are to be placed in an aesthetic regime. Art has been considered for a long time a hand-to-hand encounter with necessity.

*T:* The poiesis, according to Agamben, “has nothing to do with the expression of a will (with respect to which art is in no way necessary): this essence is found instead in the production of truth and in the subsequent opening of a world for man’s existence and action.”

A: So the *poiesis* are the records, attested by human institutions as the truth. And the *praxis* (the operari) is the training.

T: *A fragment of Nietzsche resonates in that of Barthes: "To impress upon becoming the character of being – that is the highest will to power". Nietzsche refers to the eternal return of the same when he says that redemption is to "transform every 'It was' into an 'I willed it thus!'" Is this equal to "endowing an act of necessity with the appearance of free choice"?*

A: In sport, style is a luxury – a surplus. And it has an effective validity only in those disciplines, in which aesthetic judgment is involved (synchronized swimming, rhythmic gymnastics, artistic gymnastics, figure skating...). It is not surprising that their names often reveal their proximity to art. What is evaluated in those disciplines, in which there is an external judgment (an aesthetic one?), is the 'free choice' with which the athletes comply with the necessity to perform some exercises in a certain way. In other words, judges evaluate their naturalness, their ability not to show their stress, their commitment and will (their ability to appear as 'nature' and not 'culture'). Style is effectively valid only in those disciplines. And, in the same disciplines, necessity is necessary in order to define them as sport, that is, to be able to apply measures and judgments – to turn a performance into a competition.

T: *The full score in seven exercises of Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci in the 1976 Olympics assumed its precise value only in the social context in which such series of movements could be judged and measured according to shared criteria. The certification of perfection of a performance is no longer related to its aesthetic value; it becomes a precise conventional criterion shared by members of a social institution. It is something like an outcome of a trial, or a legal dispute. What would become of these disciplines if such necessity to comply with a model, with an idea of a movement, did not exist?*

A: Yes, maybe they would become art, a field in which things can no longer be evaluated according to universally fixed categories. Michael Johnson ran in a very peculiar style, in a manner that appeared, in a traditional

sense, wrong. Yet he won and no one could penalize him for his style. The style in the high jump (more properly, the technique) has radically changed due to Dick Fosbury's new one he came with, and it has been universally adopted now, precisely because it is more effective. In sports, technics have factual relevance, not style.

T: *Writing about Shakespearian theatre, Peter Brook states that "the author had a precise, human and social aim which gave him reason for searching for his themes, reason for searching for his means, reason for making theatre. We see the present-day author still locked in the prison of anecdote, consistency and style". It is probably a necessity of this kind that Antonin Artaud refers to when he says that "the actor is an athlete of the heart": a theatre no longer of the expression but of the effort; a theatre for boxers and not for dancers - an art where all is necessary.*

A: Do we have to abandon aesthetics for athletics?



Quoted books: Roland Barthes, *What is sport?*, Yale University Press 2007; Giorgio Agamben, *L'uomo senza contenuto*, Quodlibet 1994; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, 1883; Peter Brook, *The empty space*, Touchstone 1968; Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Gallimard 1938.

Following page: Nadia Comaneci at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.



# *Greek Tragedy, Shakespeare, Sports*

## *A conversation with David Rimanelli*

**Plastic surgeons have their job because of a conventional system of value around them. So I see a similarity between sport and art because both are non-utilitarian activities, which value is given by a certain system around them.**

It's strictly speaking useless, but there's a system which validates certain things, and actually certain things get validated absolutely, transcendentally: the Sistine Chapel, the Parthenon, Jasper Johns... Things that are really *important* even if you don't like them. And there's a whole system of rewards, in terms of fame, potentially great wealth, and then you've got your eyes on a history book: "maybe I will not be a footnote to a footnote; maybe I will even get a *chapter!*". Of course, not many people apart from Manet or Picasso get to know it. Only a few people in sport achieve that kind of validation, enter that domain where they become historical figures.

**But it's more objective.**

Yes, it's much more objective, because it's a score: win-lose. 41-12. Objectivity of performance. The excitement and the thrill are immediate. Sometimes it spills over into excess, violence: in some sports – such as rugby, hockey, American football – disobeying the rules is part of the rules, in a way. Part of the expectation is that it's going to go overboard into something that is actually violent. And that *is* part of the thrill. I mean, for people who love hockey, isn't when players go crazy the most exciting part?

**It's like a catharsis. Maybe it has something to do with the social function of Greek theatre. People gathering and attending to a performance that is capable of generating a degree of emotional intensity.**

Yes, the Greek tragedy thing has been displaced from art to sport. Even if many people gather in rock concerts, you can watch the recording on YouTube or on DVD. Sports, instead, is inscribed in the present, it's more about the instant – it's not the same feeling about recording. Almost nobody wants to see a football match from 1961; instead, you might easily want to see a video of Beatles or Rolling Stones from 1961. And, anyway, if you collect old sport videos, you're not part of the mass and the catharsis; you become something else, a collector, a *connoisseur*.

**The catharsis happens only because there's something going on *at that time*. Theatre is not very interesting for mass culture; television, movies and music can be recorded and played anytime. In Greek theatre, you could see it only *if you were there at that time*. You had to be there.**

You had to be there and it was more than just, "I'm going to a play". A whole community was there. We still don't know exactly how those things were performed, but one thing we know is that they had this semi-sacred halo, if not fully religious. It was like participating in a re-enactment of a mythology which you could understand as your history. "Yes, this is *us*, this is the story of our *polis*". Then, Shakespeare. Super-successful history plays, to be performed at court sometimes in front of Queen Elizabeth, about the things leading up to the fact that allowed Elizabeth to be on the throne. *Henry IV*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*: history plays about the more vexing parts of Medieval English history. They could have been very cathartic, because it was the emergence of

England as a superpower: that was the time, precisely the period when Shakespeare wrote these plays. The stage had been set for Britain's conquest of a large part of the world. The idea of the nation, and the excitement in participating in the story of your country.

**The thread you traced – from Greek tragedy to contemporary sport events through William Shakespeare's history plays – has its roots in the idea of a separate space, a *temple*. They all happen in a separate space and they create a myth.**

Also the Greek sports were all happening under the aegis of the gods: it was a religious rite. They were a culture who really believed. Why did they make Socrates drink hemlock? Because he confused people, he might have led to lack of respect or belief in the truth or powers of the gods. The reason was that he instilled potential scepticism. Isn't there an underside to sports that is constitutive of it? Isn't soccer hooliganism part of the soccer system?

**The involvement of a community around an ideology. I found a historical link between the separate space of the temple, tragedy, sacrifice (which were used to gather together a community by creating myths), Shakespeare (the creation of the idea of a nation) and the instincts aroused in sport events. Hooliganism is connected to this idea of feeling totally part of something, to a point when you disregard moral, institutions... Your institution is your team; actually it is more important than any other one, because it's not mediated by moral, law or ideology – it's like a mother.**

Or a *cult*.

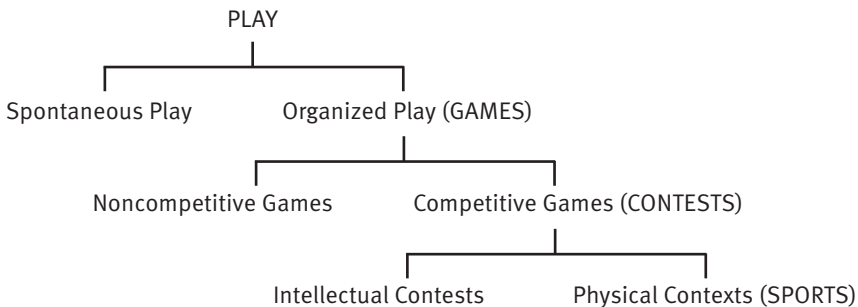
**It's stronger than a usual political involvement in contemporary democracies. It's more connected to the notion of a *heimat*. A *patria* (which in Italian means fatherland).**

An absolute identification.

# *Hommes de métier*

## *Riccardo Giacconi*

Carl Diem (historian of sport, sports administrator and chief organizer of the 1936 Olympic Summer Games) expressed himself in these terms; ‘play is purposeless activity, for its own sake, the opposite of work’<sup>1</sup>. The English language, unlike Italian, German or French, differentiates between ‘play’ and ‘game’. It is this distinction that inspired sport theorist Allen Guttmann’s attempt to come up with the definition of sport, through three successive distinctions:



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<sup>1</sup> Carl Diem, *Wesen und Lehre des Sports*, Weidmannsche Verlags-Buchhandlung 1949.

A classical definition of a play is the one provided by Johan Huizinga in his essay *Homo ludens*;

*play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'.<sup>2</sup>*

The idea of separation from 'ordinary life' is at the core of another definition of play, which appears in the same book. Huizinga describes it as a 'free activity, [...] 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it.' While trying to adjust Huizinga's definition that he considered somewhat inadequate, Roger Caillois in his *Les jeux et les hommes* agrees that play is an *inoperative* activity, and in that it differs from work or art ('il ne crée aucune richesse, aucune œuvre<sup>3</sup>'). Later on, however, Caillois brings into question professional sport, a social mechanism that spoils the inoperativity of play:

*Quant aux professionnels, boxeurs, cyclistes, jockeys ou acteurs qui gagnent leur vie sur le ring, la piste, l'hippodrome ou les planches, et qui doivent songer à la prime, au salaire ou au cachet, il est clair qu'ils ne sont pas en ceci joueurs, mais hommes de métier. Quand ils jouent, c'est à quelque autre jeu.<sup>4</sup>*

Professional sports is defined as destruction of play in sport – a *spoilsport*. For the '*hommes de métier*', professional athletes, to play becomes a job. This statement appears paradoxical; anyone who has ever attempted to define 'play' initially paid extra care to distinguishing it from 'work'. Is professional sport no longer play, then? The articulation is complex as it brings into question elements that are not intrinsic to the play-practice itself, but regard the social mechanism around it. It is *outside the playing field* where the dipolarity between work and play is established. The following pages attempt to study the mechanism that allows play and, consequently, sport, to be '*different from ordinary life*'.

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<sup>2</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens; a study of the play-element in culture*, Beacon Press 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, Gallimard 1967, p. 35. Even for what regards gambling activities, the author states that; "Il y a déplacement de propriété, mais non production de biens", p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

## Temenos (un espace pur)

*Magic is sometimes very close to nothing at all. Nothing at all.  
When I retire, I will miss the green of the field, 'le carré vert'.*

Zinédine Zidane, in *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait*

*templum = consecrated piece of ground, enclosure. Usually referred to Proto-Indo-European root \*tem-, 'to cut', on notion of 'place reserved or cut out', that gave as an outcome, in Ancient Greek, τέμενος (temenos, temple), derived from the verb τέμνω, 'I cut'.*

The etymology of the word 'temple' refers to an act of separation: a space is separated from what surrounds it. It is easy to trace the religious acceptance that the act of cutting has assumed. The temple (*temenos*), a space dedicated to the cult of the gods (therefore to kinds of practices that need to be separated from the common space in order to assume a specific social status), inevitably refers to the category of the sacred. The space defined by the temple circumscribes and produces the conditions of existence for a series of acts that are removed from common reality and to the mechanisms of everyday meaning in order to embody a language of their own. The sacred is a category that contains actions that are separated from life (others, different than the ordinary) and that, at the same time, enjoy a sort of precise and sanctioned validation<sup>5</sup>). Both of these characteristics exist because of the separate space, the *temenos*.

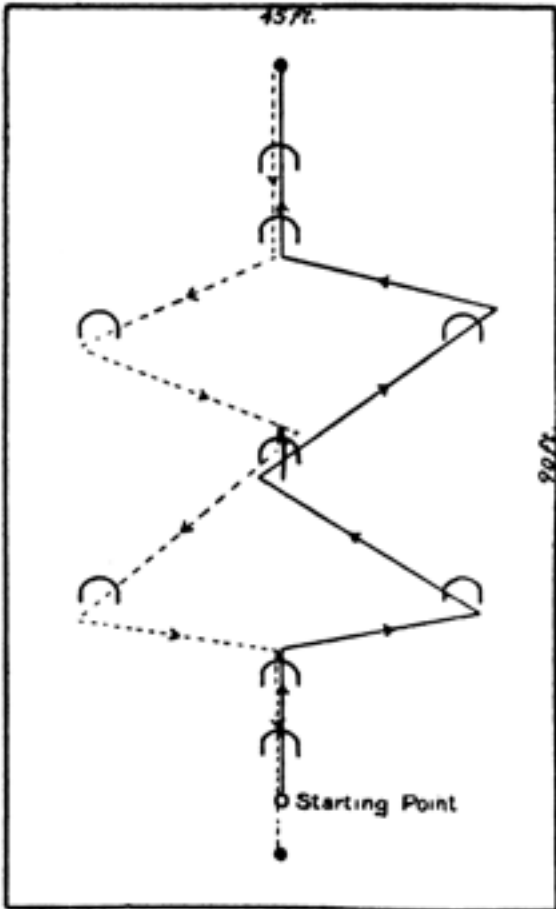
Games and the sacred both define a space inside which certain activities exist in a separate mode, and which determines their connections with the outside world. In his analysis Roger Caillois provides us with some tools to further define this affinity:

*Le jeu est essentiellement une occupation séparée, soigneusement isolée du reste de l'existence, et accomplie en général dans des limites précises de temps et de lieu. [...] Il y a un espace de jeu: suivant les cas, la marelle, l'échiquier, le damier, le stade, la piste, la lice, le ring, la scène, l'arène, etc. Rien de ce qui se passe à l'extérieur de la frontière idéale n'entre en ligne de compte. [...] Le même pour le temps : la partie commence et prend fin au signal donné. [...] Dans tous les cas, le domaine du jeu est ainsi un univers réservé, clos, protégé : un espace pur.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup>«Le sacré est un élément de la structure de la conscience et non un stade dans l'histoire de cette conscience. L'expérience du sacré est indissolublement liée à l'effort fait par l'homme pour construire un monde qui ait une signification. Les hiérophanies c'est-à-dire les manifestations du sacré exprimées dans des symboles [...] constituent un langage préreflexif qui nécessite une herméneutique particulière.» Mircea Eliade, *Fragment d'un journal*, Gallimard, 1970-1978.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, Gallimard 1967, p. 37.



With regards to professional sport, what are the implications of placing a *temenos*, a pure and separated space, at the centre of a community that gathers around it? What a community gathers around is, similarly as in religious temples, nothing more but *an empty space*.<sup>7</sup> Or, more precisely, a space of exception that eludes the regulatory mechanisms on which a society is based, but that, at the same time, involves the society itself. It is from this perspective that we can fully appreciate the relevance of former footballer Zinédine Zidane's words; for him, the *espace pur*, the *carré vert* of a soccer field, is very close to nothing, that nothing in which magic may happen.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Peter Brook, *The empty space*, Touchstone 1968.

*Flamean las banderas, suenan las matracas, los cohetes, los tambores, llueven las serpentinas y el papel picado: la ciudad desaparece, la rutina se olvida, sólo existe el templo. En este espacio sagrado, la única religión que no tiene ateos exhibe a sus divinidades.*<sup>8</sup>

Thus Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano portrays the soccer stadium; as a temple. Inquiring further on the similarity between sports and religion, he explains the ways in which soccer resembles God; “En la devoción que le tienen muchos creyentes y en la desconfianza que le tienen muchos intelectuales”<sup>9</sup>.

### **A man just doing his job**

*It is not only the measure of what someone can do, but also and primarily the capacity of maintaining oneself in relation to one's own possibility to not do, that defines the status of one's action. While fire can only burn, and other living beings are only capable of their own specific potentialities—they are capable of only this or that behavior inscribed into their biological vocation—human beings are the animals capable of their own impotentiality.*<sup>10</sup>

Giorgio Agamben

In the film *David* (2004), a work commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery of London, artist Sam Taylor-Wood portrays English footballer David Beckham while he is asleep. The shot is fixed, there are no cuts, and it lasts one hour and seven minutes. The portrait is a clear reference to Andy Warhol's film *Sleep* (1963), except that in this case the emphasis is on the celebrity of the protagonist; David Beckham may be considered an icon of English popular culture between of the nineties and early 2000s. Warhol's 'real-time films' were mentioned as a reference also for *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*. Both portraits show their subjects absorbed in an action.<sup>11</sup> Unlike what Gordon and Parreno did with Zidane, however, Taylor-Wood's portrait does not show its subject absorbed in the activity that determines his social importance and rank. On the contrary, Beckham is pictured while performing the most basic activity.

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<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *El fútbol a sol y sombra*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1995, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Su ciò che possiamo non fare*, in *Nudità*, Nottetempo, 2009, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> “The portrait as a genre was singularly ill equipped to comply with the demand that a painting negate or neutralize the presence of the beholder. [...] One strategy that painters adopted to overcome this limitation was to depict persons in a portrait as absorbed in thought or action.” Cfr. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, University of California Press 1980 and Michael Fried, *Absorbed in the action*, on ArtForum, Sept, 2006.

The portrait is thus devoid of an essential feature: the subject's role in their community. *David* has always been described as a piece of art referring to the body and the inner substance of an individual, leaving his social *persona* (in the ancient meaning of 'mask') out. Conversely, we could refer to Beckham's *persona*, to his excellence in performing a certain social task, precisely in order to determine the status of a portrait that is no longer dealing with such a *persona*. We know that the subject is an excellent soccer player, yet this excellence is disabled; it has no place in the image of a sleeping man. We witness a potency that does not drip at all in the act itself. David is a portrait of an impotentiality (of a perfect potentiality<sup>12</sup>).

*I accepted because I didn't have to play a role. I just had to be myself doing what I do every Sunday... and that's it.*<sup>13</sup>

Zinédine Zidane, talking about *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait*

Douglas Gordon, while introducing the film *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait* during the Basel art fair, described it as a portrait of 'a man just doing his job'. This statement reminds us of the opening words of Eduardo Galeano's book about soccer, *El fútbol a sol y sombra*; 'La historia del fútbol es un triste viaje del placer al deber'. Is it possible to find the point where practicing a sport may start to be defined as a job?

## Operari / opus

One's intimate and inoperative relationship with the body is expressed in its pure form in training, in which the athlete-to-be (not-yet-competitor) experiences their own potentiality. In training, even a world record is nothing more than a personal accomplishment, an inoperative and momentary discovery of one's pure potentiality. In order to become a professional athlete, one needs to access the validation mechanisms of professional sports that use measurement conventions and public certifications of an athlete's work.

The creation of a universal terrain for modern sports led to a comprehensive quantification of an athlete's performance. All professional sport activities are nowadays immediately translated into a result, into a series of data; sports records are a "marvellous abstraction that permits competition not only among those gathered together on the field of sport but also

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<sup>12</sup> "...vi è, infine, una potenza compiuta o perfetta, che è quella di uno scriba perfettamente padrone dell'arte di scrivere, nel momento in cui non scrive". Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby, o della contingenza*, in Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby. La formula della creazione*, Quodlibet 1993, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Zinédine Zidane in the extras of the DVD *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait*, Artificial Eye 2007.

among them and others distant in time and space”<sup>14</sup>. This transition from the continuous to the discrete determined the need to quantify also sports performances that are essentially not possible to measure objectively, but that have to be assessed on the basis of an adherence to a model, to an idea of movement. In such disciplines (such as gymnastics, diving, figure skating, synchronized swimming, horse dressage...) an aesthetic appraisal turned into an athletic evaluation, supposedly objective. One can fully appreciate the existence of a ‘sports institution’ in these sport disciplines clearer than in others. The transition from the aesthetic to the athletic may be validated only through recognition by an established authority. *Judges* reach an agreement on the results of competitions through a real judicial verdict, whose truth and objectivity are based on conventions.

Work of professional sportsmen is thus validated and given shape through these mechanisms, which transform potentiality into act. The record (registration, document), once made official, is no longer connected to the intimate relationship of an individual with their own potentiality; entering a social contract as a document, an act of a sportsman becomes a piece of *work* (an *œuvre*).

The relationship between records and training can also be approached through the dipolarity between one’s *studio* and their *work* or, using Latin terms, *operari* (working) and *opus* (work). What is trained during training is the availability to enter the regime of work – to become an *opus*. Training is therefore the stage that would in other professions coincide with the *studio*, that is the exercise of one’s own faculties – the *operari*.<sup>15</sup> In the case of an athlete – as in the case of a musician – the *opus* exists only an exception. One has spent all of their time *studying* oneself, repeating an exercise, but it is only in a particular context (a competition, a concert) that they are provided with the opportunity to transform the exercise into a performance, to actualize their potentiality and turn study into work. The athlete’s doing, their *opus*, is destined to specific social, conventional, temple-like settings that are “separated from life”<sup>16</sup>. An athlete’s *opus* is not in itself different from its *operari*; the action of running 100 metres is the same in a competition and in training. In order to be identified and acknowledged as an *opus*, the action needs validation *outside of itself*; sports records essentially need measurement mechanisms and accurate, non-debatable procedural conventions. The *opus* of an athlete (as the one of a priest) exists only within a social institution.

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<sup>14</sup> Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record. The Nature of Modern Sports*, Columbia University Press 1978, pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> In Judaism there is a clear distinction between *melacha* (activity aimed at a productive purpose, usually translated as ‘work’) and *menucha* (a term usually translated as ‘Sabbath rest’ but which, to be more precise, denotes the sphere of inoperativity – all activities devoid of a productive purpose).

<sup>16</sup> “A man walks across this empty stage whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”. Peter Brook, *The empty space*, Touchstone 1968, p.11.

## Inoperativity

In short, what separates a game from professional sports is their relationship with work. The mechanism underlying a soccer match can be perfectly well described as a game: what discerns between the playing of a game and the performance of a work cannot be intrinsically grasped in the activity itself. The distinction has to be made outside the playing field, in the social space that the activity occupies, and within the social conventions measuring its effectiveness. Precisely because this distinction is not substantial, these two statutes necessarily continue to coexist. Inside the field, there is no substantial difference between a soccer match in the suburbs, and a World Cup finals – both are instances of the same game, defined by the same rules. The greater or lesser degree of ‘operativity’ is decided in the social space that surrounds these two practices. The study of sport as a social event needs to start from the values assigned by a society to certain activities intrinsically characterized as *games*.

*Inoperativity [...] is neither a consequence nor a precondition (the abstention from labor) of the feast day but coincides with festiveness itself in the sense that it consists precisely in neutralizing and rendering inoperative human gestures, actions, and works, which in turn can become festive only in this way. [...] The inoperativity that defines the feast is not mere inertia or abstention; it is, rather, a sanctification, that is to say, a particular modality of acting and living.<sup>17</sup>*

The movement between work and inoperativity has been extensively studied by Giorgio Agamben. In a series of considerations on the feast, he speaks of “simple, quotidian human activities” which are “suspended and rendered inoperative. [...] Thus, the procession and the dance exhibit and transform the simple gait of a human body walking, the gift reveals an unexpected possibility within the products of an economy and labor, and the festive meal renews and transfigures the hunger of an ox.”<sup>18</sup> Human activities are removed from their common use and introduced into a different field, in which they are withdrawn from their usual purpose and from the external mechanisms of value, assuming an alternative mode of existence. Actions are emptied of their ordinary uses and made inoperative in play too; the playing field then creates a new purpose (*telos*) for them, which is different from the usual one, and connected to the mechanisms of the field itself. Play, just like feast, defines a sacred, separate space inside which action exists in an alternative mode.

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<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Una fame da bue. Considerazioni sul sabato, la festa e l'inoperosità*, in *Nudità*, Nottetempo 2009, p. 154, 149.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 159.

As far as inoperativity is concerned, similarities between feast and play go even further. A new *telos* is assigned to playing activities when they pass from the regime of play to the regime of professional sports (when players become *hommes de métier*). A parallel development occurs during the passage from feast to a religious ceremony:

*Signifiers with “zero symbolic value” may correspond to human actions and objects that the feast emptied out and rendered inoperative and that religion then came to separate and recodify through its ceremonial apparatus.*<sup>19</sup>

The conventional-ceremonial apparatus that marks the passage from feast (inoperative) to a religious ceremony (operative) is similar to the one that regulates the passage from play to work when a game becomes an official competition, professional sport. The parallel between sport and religion finds its *raison d'être* in this double movement; just as religion recodifies acts that had previously been *separated* and rendered inoperative, social mechanisms in sport apply a value (emotional and economic) to a series of acts that, in their *playful* nature, had previously only had a value *within the field* in which they were happening. A set conventional-ceremonial value is, in both cases, applied to a *temenos* in order to produce operativity – a work (*opus*). We define this value as conventional-ceremonial by virtue of the fact that the new *telos* applied to these practices cannot be intrinsic to them, but only linked to a *convention shared by a community* that surrounds them.

Roland Barthes suggests that “all our modern sport can be found in this spectacle from another age, inherited from ancient religious sacrifices”<sup>20</sup>. A sport event, just like religion, is able to establish a community insofar as it locates itself outside of it and carves out a temple-like ‘empty space’ from which the community is excluded. In order to demarcate this *temenos*, the violence of a sacrificial rite is used, and it has the characteristics of a game; it is sublimated and regulated. The practice of such a game assumes the sacrificial function, as much as a community assembles around it. Just as a religious sacrifice provides a community with the *mise-en-scene* of its origins, similarly a playing field provides a sports community with a founding ritual that repeats itself.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *What is sport?*, Yale University Press 2007, p. 3.

# Expression

*Achilles:* Perhaps you're faster than me, but I win in the fight.

*Tortoise:* “*Le catch n'est pas un sport, c'est un spectacle, et il n'est pas plus ignoble d'assister à une représentation catchée de la Douleur qu'aux souffrances d'Arnolphe ou d'Andromaque*”.

*A:* According to Roland Barthes, the ‘catch’ (what today we would call ‘wrestling’, that is, a simulated and pre-choreographed fight) is a spectacle: a piece of art. Where is the distinction between art and sport?

*T:* *On the level of language. It is all about the moment when an object (a piece of writing, a drawing, a series of actions performed in a span of time...) becomes a ‘text’, that is, enters a kind of social regime in which a community gives an aesthetic value to it. In other words, the ‘text’ is no longer just an object – it becomes something more than what it is. This ‘addition’ is imparted by the social system that receives and positions it. Marcel Duchamp’s objects clearly unveiled this mechanism.*

*A:* You mean that artwork becomes *poiesis*, a human oeuvre in the proper sense, only through a validation mechanism?

*T:* *Surely you agree with me that there is no artwork if no one is willing to assume it as such.*

*A:* A similar validation mechanism creates the conditions of existence of sports events and records – their officialisation. I ask you again; where is, then, the distinction between a spectacle and a sports event?

*T:* *In spectacles, “le spectateur ne souhaite pas la souffrance réelle du combattant, il goûte seulement la perfection d'une iconographie”.*

A: Yet it cannot be only a question of a greater or lesser adherence to reality. You agree with me that, in a competition, athletes 'give themselves completely'. But on the other hand, you cannot say that all art is nothing else but a language, an iconography, a representation either! *Rest energy*, the 1980 performance by Marina Abramovic and Ulay, had to do with reality and with 'giving oneself completely' at least as much (if not more) as a sports competition. On that occasion, the artists held an arrow on the weight of their bodies, and the arrow was pointed right into Abramovic's heart. They had two small microphones near their hearts, in order to hear their heartbeats growing more and more intense. And you can find many other examples of artworks that have truly incorporated life.

T: *Historically, sports (or, more precisely, those social practices that we can arbitrarily associate with modern sports) has always been a matter of life or death, as with gladiatorial fights in imperial Rome, for example, or in medieval tournaments, which often (at least until the thirteenth century) comprised death as an essential ingredient.*

A: Modern sport, instead, comprises death only slantwise, as an accident; not even in boxing, the objective is to kill the other.

T: *Allen Guttman argues that the distinction between art and play lies on the level of expression, since art has always a communicative function; "the artist needs his audience which, regrettably, he is sometimes forced to do without". Or, as Peter Brook says about theatre work, "the last lonely look at the completed object is not possible – until an audience is present the object is not complete". Play, however, has no functional necessity to be communicated, to be expressed; the same is true, according to Guttman, about sports, which "have existed, do exist and will continue to exist in situations without an audience".*

A: I do not agree. The social *dispositif* of professional sports cannot occur in a vacuum. Although communication is not functionally intrinsic to the practice of professional sports, the validation and officialisational mechanism around the playing field must always be in place. The field could otherwise not maintain its temple-like value, based on the axiom that *nothing that happens outside it counts in the game*. As a sacrifice entails a community around it, the

writing of a sport record necessitates a social system that assigns to that record a conventional value in the community. Otherwise, why record it at all?

T: *“A man walks across this empty stage whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”. Thus Peter Brook describes the essence of theatre.*

A: Both art and sport construct two temple-like social spaces, that is, spaces separated from life, where what goes on inside escapes the external mechanisms of value, assuming an alternative mode of existence.

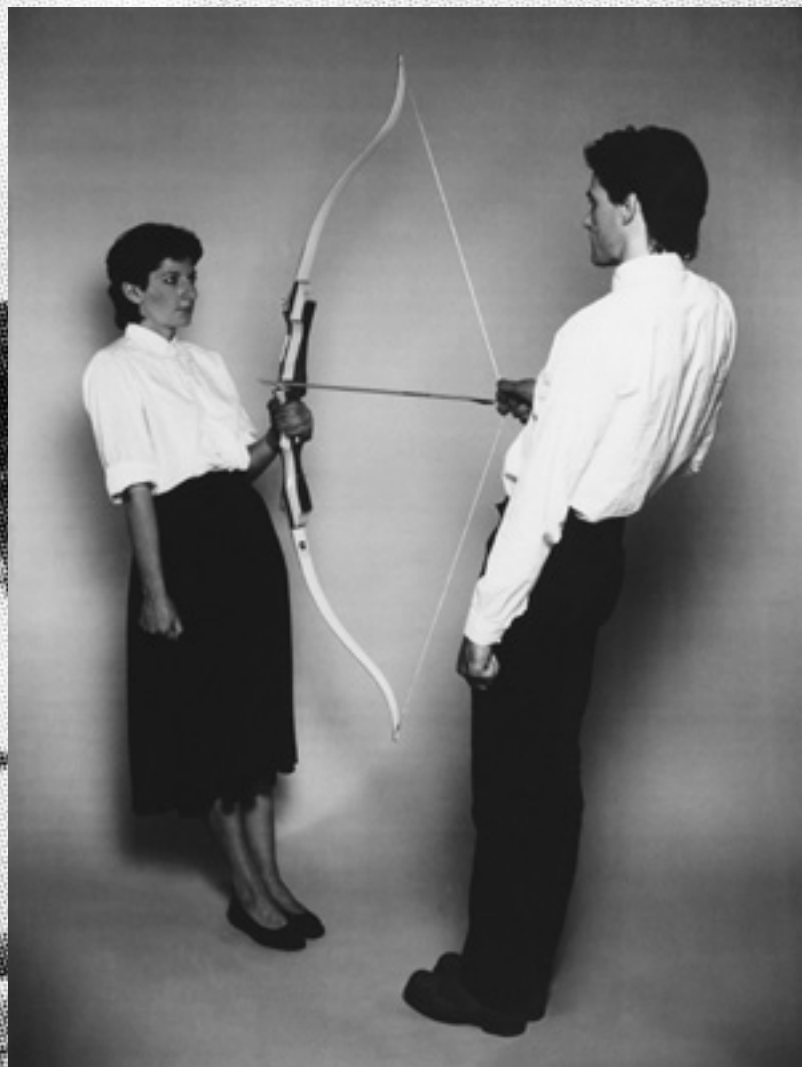
T: *So what is the difference in the social value assigned to a long jump and an arabesque?*

A: Perhaps we should go back to the notion of ‘expression’. Sociologist Norbert Elias describes a football game as a series of “interlocking plans and actions. Each team may have planned its strategy [...], however, as the game proceeds, it often produces constellations which were not intended or foreseen by either side”. The responsibility for the form, in sports, is due to the clash of two necessities, of two competing forces: the expression is not an intention, but the result itself of such clash. In art, instead, the expression is complete and all-inclusive – one could say it is an essential component of the concept of ‘art’ itself.

T: *Ah! Are you really sure that a work of art in itself is not a result of different, competing forces?*



Quoted books: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Éditions du Seuil 1957; Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record. The Nature of Modern Sports*, Columbia University Press 1978; Peter Brook, *The empty space*, Touchstone 1968; Norbert Elias e Eric Dunning (ed.), *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, Basil Blackwell 1986. Following page: Marina Abramovic and Ulay, *Rest Energy*, 1980, 16mm film, Courtesy Marina Abramovic and Sean Kelly Gallery.



# *Legend Football League – Spectacle rétrograde ou sport féministe?*

*Nathan Cheriki*

Imaginez quatorze femmes, sept par équipe, vêtues de lingerie sur un terrain de football<sup>1</sup>. C'est la *Legend Football League*, ligue créée en 2009 par Mitch Mortaza sous le nom de *Lingerie Football League*. Les amateurs peuvent suivre des équipes féminines qui jouent, avec comme seul uniforme, un bikini, une jarretière et quelques protections. Les règles sont à peu près les mêmes qu'en *National Football League* (LA ligue professionnelle et masculine de football américain). À l'exception de quelques ligues indépendantes sans réelle envergure, c'est la seule ligue de football féminin disposant d'une véritable exposition.

Sexualiser ces joueuses a clairement pour objectif de leur permettre d'avoir les moyens d'exercer leur sport et d'exister sur la scène médiatique. Bien sûr, j'imagine déjà les plus féministes d'entre vous s'insurger contre cette horreur machiste et rétrograde, dirigée par des hommes exploitant des femmes, pour satisfaire un public à majorité masculine. Cette façon de pratiquer le sport collectif féminin n'est-elle pas le reflet de la condition féminine dans le sport en général? Pas besoin d'aller chercher bien loin pour trouver dans le sport plusieurs exemples, au sein d'une même discipline, de variation de la tenue selon le sexe du pratiquant. Pourquoi trouve-t-on les femmes en brassière et culotte quand les hommes portent une combinaison intégrale? Le succès de la *Legend Football League* dans l'univers du sport collectif professionnel féminin américain

<sup>1</sup> La Legend Football League est un sport uniquement américain, j'utiliserai le mot football pour désigner le football américain et soccer pour parler du football classique.

n'est-il pas un symptôme de la volonté de faire du sport collectif une affaire d'homme? Dans le cas de Mitch Mortaza, les choses sont assez complexes. Le créateur de la *LFL* a décidé de s'emparer de l'athlète femme et d'en faire un business. Il applique à cette ligue une stratégie marketing efficace et qui a fait ses preuves : le sexe fait vendre. Les recettes et la visibilité de la *LFL* n'ont cessé d'augmenter ces quatre dernières années. En entretenant des clichés sexistes, Mortaza permet paradoxalement à ces femmes de jouer au football et d'en vivre, ce qui n'est pas le cas des autres ligues indépendantes de football féminin comme la *Independent Women's Football League* qui reste dans l'ombre de sa concurrente.

### **Tenues de femmes, tenues de sportives**

La tenue portée par les joueuses fait la singularité de la *LFL* bien que cela ne soit pas la tenue idéale pour pratiquer un sport de haut niveau. Il existe d'autres cas et d'autres disciplines où l'habillement des sportives diffère de celui de leurs homologues masculins.

Le beach-volley, contrairement à la *Legend Football League*, n'existe pour le grand public, que tous les quatre ans, lors des Jeux Olympiques. Faute de succès, ce sport se retrouve programmé le plus souvent l'après-midi lorsqu'aucune compétition d'un sport plus populaire ne se déroule. La plupart des spectateurs ne regardent pas les matchs pour le jeu mais pour la plastique de *top model* des joueuses et le bikini ridiculement petit qui était obligatoire jusqu'à récemment. La fédération de volley-ball (à laquelle appartient le beach-volley) interdisait aux joueuses de porter un bas plus large que 7cm jusqu'en 2012, juste avant les JO de Londres.

Et quelle est donc la raison qui oblige, en athlétisme, les sprinteuses à courir le ventre à l'air alors que les hommes portent des maillots et des shorts plus longs? Y a-t-il une raison morphologique qui fait que les femmes ne puissent pas courir aussi vite quand elles ne portent pas une tenue qui dévoile leurs abdominaux saillants? Cette différence est-elle liée à la prise en compte du plaisir que le spectateur/télespectateur masculin pourrait ressentir en voyant ces sportives dénudées? Ou bien, peut-être que porter des vêtements sexy rend les sportives plus performantes?

Prenons ce sport individuel très populaire qu'est le tennis. Au tennis les femmes ne portent pas la même tenue que les hommes ; là où Rafael Nadal porte un bermuda et un t-shirt, Vénus Williams porte une jupe et un débardeur. Pourquoi cette différence? Parce que les joueuses de tennis doivent d'être sexy pour plaire au public masculin, à la presse et aux sponsors. Mais Serena Williams joue-t-elle mieux au tennis parce qu'elle est sexy? Bien entendu, la question est rhétorique, mais on peut légitimement se la poser quand on voit cette volonté de sexualiser les joueuses. En 2008, Maria Shara-



pova a fait scandale en déclarant qu'elle porterait un short lors du tournoi de Wimbledon, réputé pour son conservatisme en raison de ses origines bourgeoises. Dans la mythologie collective, avant d'être une joueuse, la *tenniswoman* se doit d'être une femme et cela doit se traduire dans les tenues qu'elle porte.

Lorsque la pratique du sport a été ouverte aux femmes, la tenue des athlètes a été modifiée, non pour être adaptée à la morphologie féminine, mais pour permettre de conserver une identité de genre féminin normé et conventionnel dans l'habillement sportif. Les tenues des joueuses de LFL posent un vrai problème de sécurité : vu le peu de protections dont elles disposent, leur intégrité physique ne peut pas être garantie intégralement. Mais si les protections étaient plus nombreuses, les corps des joueuses seraient moins visibles. Il est donc cohérent de dire que la lingerie n'est pas un équipement adéquat pour la pratique du football féminin. Mais cet équipement est-il plus choquant que celui d'autres sports plus respectables ? Si les tenues sexy ne sont pas l'équipement idéal pour le football, sont-elles plus adaptées à la pratique du tennis ou du beach-volley? La vraie différence est que les joueuses, la ligue et leurs managers font de cette tenue le centre du jeu et ne cachent pas qu'elle est là pour attirer un public masculin qui, autrement, ne serait sans doute pas présent pour suivre un match de football féminin.

## Les femmes dans l'univers du sport collectif américain

Et si les filles sexy en lingerie n'étaient pas la seule raison pour laquelle cette ligue si particulière trouve à la fois un écho auprès des médias et des supporters. Il y a un autre facteur qui pourrait l'expliquer : le manque de représentation féminine dans l'univers du sport collectif féminin américain. Au pays du sport spectacle, la femme est souvent remise au rôle de supportrice de charme; la *Cheerleader* en est la principale démonstration.

Aux Etats-Unis, le sport professionnel est divisé en ligues privées qui ont le monopole sur le sport qu'elles représentent; la *National Basket Association* pour le basket, la *National Football League* pour le football ou la *Major League Baseball* pour le baseball. Il existe aussi un championnat universitaire très important, appelé *National Collegiate Athletic Association*, qui regroupe des nombreuses disciplines. En dehors de ces ligues, il est très difficile pour ces sports d'exister sur le plan national.

Lorsque l'on se penche sur le sport collectif féminin, le nombre de ligues professionnelles est très réduit par rapport au sport masculin, et on ne trouve dans les sports les plus populaires que la Women's National Basketball Association et la National Women's Soccer League. Il n'y a seulement quarante ans que les Etats-Unis ont adopté une loi refusant les subventions aux structures pratiquant une discrimination liée au sexe. La pratique du sport universitaire (extrêmement importante aux Etats-Unis) par les femmes est donc assez récente, mais elle semble s'être bien développée. On trouvera plus de ligues féminines dans les championnats universitaires que dans les championnats professionnels. Un constat semble donc s'imposer : le sport collectif n'offre pas aux femmes américaines une perspective d'avenir. Cela n'est pas le cas des pratiques individuelles comme la natation, l'athlétisme ou le tennis, qui regorgent de sportives aussi célèbres que leurs camarades masculins (Missy Franklin, Allyson Felix ou Serena Williams). Pourquoi cette différence entre sport individuel et collectif est-elle aussi marquée? Dès que l'on sort du cadre du sport individuel ou du sport universitaire, pourquoi ne voit-on pas plus d'équipes professionnelles féminines? On se demande si l'Américain moyen devant sa télé est prêt à regarder des matchs de football féminin car, pour lui, femmes et football riment avec *Cheerleading*. Les femmes sont sur le bord du terrain dénudées, pompons en main, encourageant l'équipe masculine qui se trouve sur le terrain. Pour cet Américain moyen, le sport d'équipe, et en particulier le football, c'est quelque chose de viril, et, comme dans l'armée, les femmes n'y ont pas leur place. Le créateur de la LFL s'est donc engouffré dans une brèche: il propose du football féminin, mais en lingerie et il réussit à gagner l'attention de cet américain lambda qui ne regarde pas les joueuses dans les yeux, mais qui prend quand même la peine de suivre le match.

## En conclusion

L'expansion de la *Legend Football League* est-elle dans l'intérêt du sport féminin, ou au contraire est-ce que cela tend à renforcer l'image rétrograde qui veut que la femme n'ait pas sa place dans le sport d'équipe (à part en lingerie) ? On ne peut pas vraiment dire que la LFL est une institution féministe, elle continue à cantonner la sportive féminine au rôle d'objet au potentiel sexuel. Mais, paradoxalement, c'est la lingerie qui a permis la professionnalisation des joueuses. L'argent ramené par le succès que la ligue rencontre a permis de proposer aux joueuses des meilleures conditions d'entraînement et une complète disponibilité ce qui entraîne forcément une amélioration du niveau de jeu global au sein de la ligue. Ce n'est pas le cas des ligues indépendantes de football féminin, qui jouent avec le même uniforme que leurs homologues masculins mais qui, faute de médiatisations, ne peuvent pas offrir aux joueuses ces conditions idéales à la pratique du sport qui seraient nécessaires pour faire de ces sportives femmes les égales des sportifs hommes. La ligue est en plein essor, les dirigeants de la LFL envisagent même de développer cette franchise dans d'autres pays que les Etats-Unis. Peut-être que l'avenir de la footballeuse féminine se trouve dans la lingerie; et qu'après avoir brûlé leurs soutiens-gorge, les femmes s'en serviront pour s'émanciper en tant que sportive dans un territoire habituellement réservé aux hommes.

# *Schémas*

*Marine Lahaix*

BOUCLE EN DEUX PHASES  
DE LA PSYCHOLOGIE  
DANS L'EFFORT

mise en route du système de dépense d'énergie ;  
accélération totale → Rythme cardiaque, perceptions visuelles,  
pensées

→ PHASE D'EFFORT  
ACCÉLÉRATION, MAINTIEN  
« SOUFFRIR SES MUSCLES, SON SOUFFLE »

passage en phase difficile

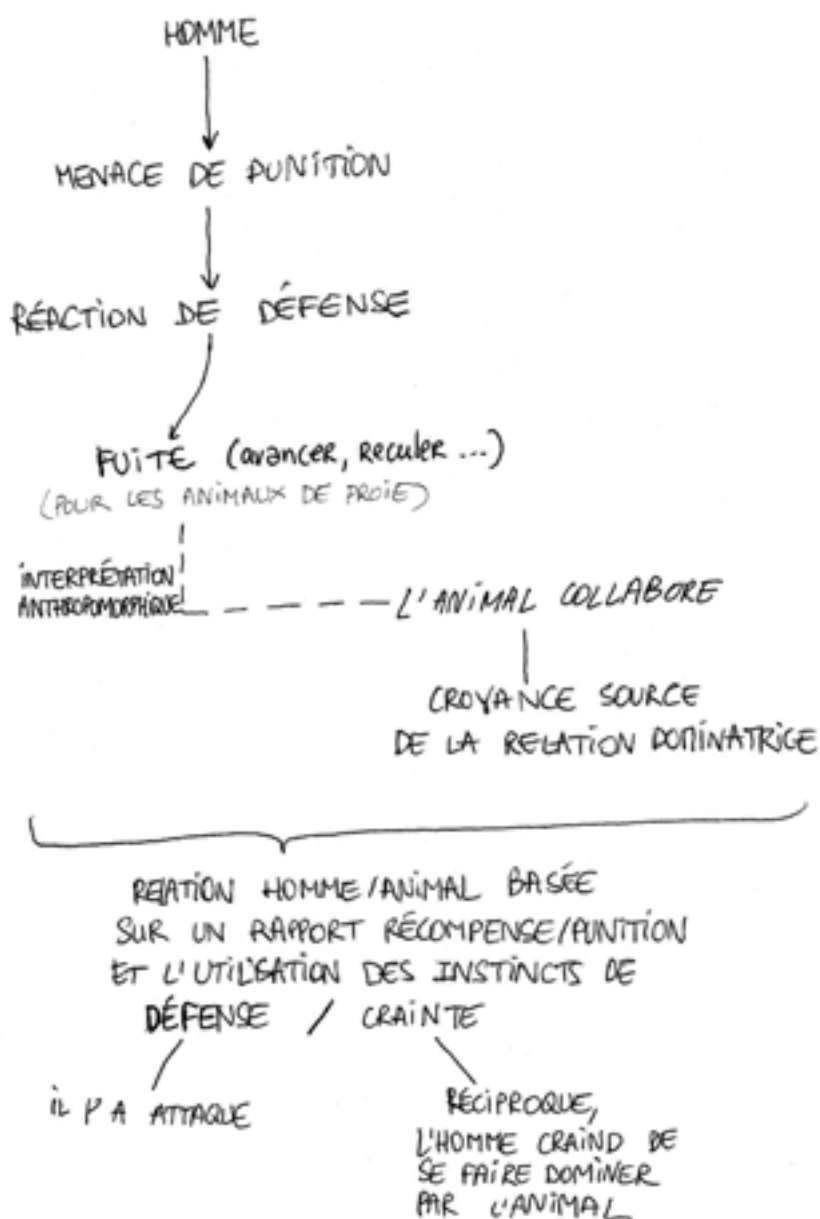
passage en phase de soulagement

mise au repos de toutes les fonctions  
prise d'un rythme régulier

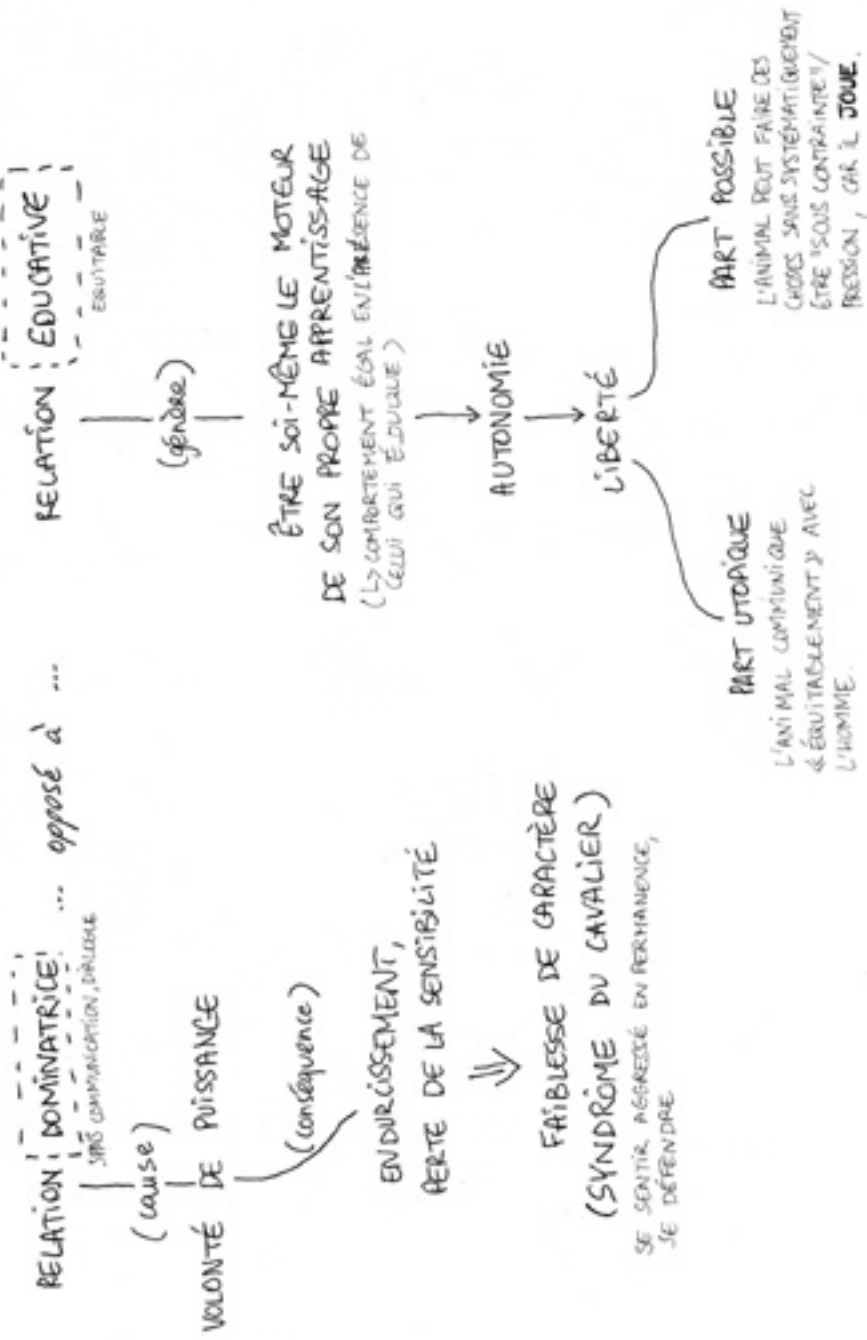
PHASE DE RÉCUPÉRATION  
MAINTIEN ET RELACHEMENT

↳ PRINCIPE DE L'ENDURANCE

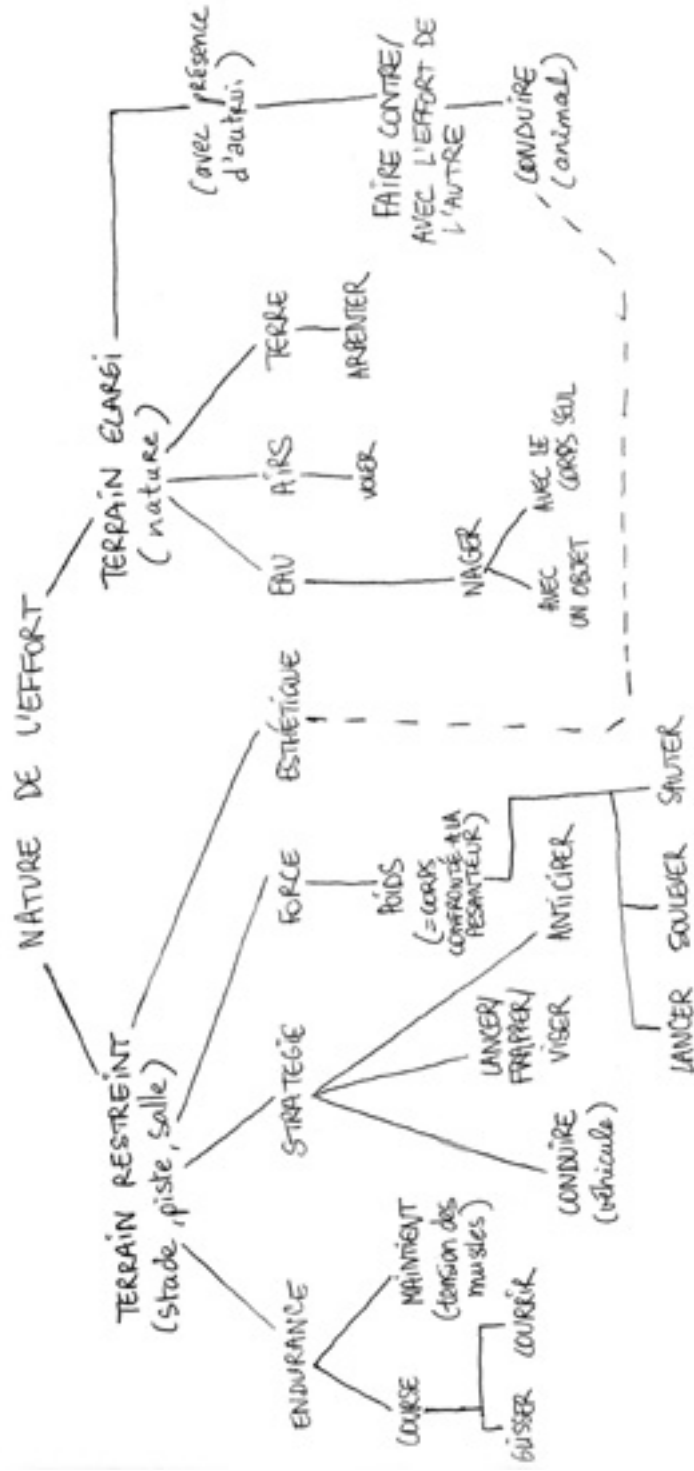
# RAPPORT HOMME-ANIMAL DANS LE DRESSAGE



( suite du rapport homme/animal dans le dressage )



PROPOSITION DE CLASSIFICATION  
DES SPORTS PAR TYPE D'EFFORT





# Biographies

**Stefano Baldini** is a retired Italian athlete who specialized in the marathon, Olympic champion in Athens 2004 and twice European champion (Budapest 1998 and Gothenburg 2006). He was also a World Champion in the half marathon in Palma de Mallorca 1996. He finished third in the World Championships twice (Edmonton 2001 and Paris 2003). In 2007 he ran the New York City Marathon where he finished 4th. Baldini closed his Olympic career at the 2008 Beijing Olympics finishing 12th. He is the Italian marathon record holder with a time of 2:07:22” recorded the London Marathon in April 23, 2006.

**Franco Bitossi** is an Italian former professional cyclist. As a professional cyclist, from 1961 until 1978, he won a total of 171 races. In 1967 he won the Tirreno–Adriatico, Giro di Lombardia and Coppa Agostoni, while the following year he became the first Italian to win the points classification in the Tour de France. He won the Italian championship in 1970 and in 1978. In 1972 he became famous for his near victory at the World Championship in Gap, France, where he was beaten by only a few meters by his teammate Marino Basso. He won 21 Giro d’Italia stages and 4 Tour de France stages. He has won the Best Climber Classification in the Giro d’Italia three times (1964, 1965, 1966), the Points Classification in the Giro twice

(1969, 1970). Bitossi was nicknamed *Cuore matto* (“Crazy heart”) due to a cardiac arrhythmia which often compelled him to stop midway in a stage.

**Julia Bryan-Wilson** is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the History of Art Department at UC Berkeley. Her research interests include questions of artistic labor, feminism, queer theory, performance, photography, and textile handicraft. She is the author of *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, UC Press, 2009, which was named a “best book of the year” by Artforum magazine, and editor of *OCTOBER Files: Robert Morris*, which was published in 2013 by the MIT Press. A scholar and critic, Bryan-Wilson has written about artists such as Laylah Ali, Ida Applebroog, Lisa Anne Auerbach, the Cockettes, Sharon Hayes, Harmony Hammond, Yoko Ono, Ana Mendieta, Yvonne Rainer, and Anne Wilson, in publications that include *Art Bulletin*, *Artforum*, *The Craft Reader*, *the Textiles Reader*, *October*, *the Journal of Modern Craft*, and many exhibition catalogs. Her article ‘Invisible Products’ received the 2013 *Art Journal* award. She has held grants from the Getty, the Clark Art Institute, the Henry Moore Institute, and the Center for Craft, Creativity and Design.

**Nathan Cheriki** is an artist whose work focuses on the links between art, sport and society. He uses sculpture, video performance and serial production of objects, going back and forth between craftsmanship and means of rapid prototyping. He has studied fine arts at the ESAD of Reims and at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Bourges. He lives and works between Paris and Bourges.

**Riccardo Giacconi** has studied fine arts at the University IUAV of Venezia, at UWE in Bristol and at New York University. His work has been exhibited in different countries, including at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino (2013), at Peep-Hole, Milano (2013), at the Lyon Biennial (2011) at the Prague Biennial (2011) and at La Alhondiga, Bilbao (2010). In 2011 he was a finalist for the Ariane de Rothschild Prize. He was artist-in-residence in Viafarini (Milan), lugar a dudas (Cali, Colombia), MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome and La Box (Bourges). He presented his films at several festivals, including the Rome Film Festival, the Torino Film Festival and the FID Marseille International Film Festival. In 2007 he co-founded the collective Blauer Hase, with which he curates the periodical publication 'Paesaggio' and the 'Helicotrema' festival.

**Giovanni Giaretta** is an Italian artist. In 2011 he was artist in residence at the Centre International d'Accueil et d'échange des Recollets with the Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art in Paris and at the Fondazione Bevilacqua la Masa in Venezia. Among his latest exhibitions: *5x5Castelló. Premi Internacional d'art contemporani Diputació de Castelló*, Castelló; *Studio-show*, Final residence exhibition, MACRO Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Roma; *La plupart du temps*, curated by Martial De-

flacieux, La Tôlerie, Clermont-Ferrand; *Livret IV*, curated by Irmavep Club, Musée départemental d'art contemporain de Rochechouart; *Opera 2011. Lunar Park. Artists from the Atelier*, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venezia; *Livret III*, curated by Irmavep Club, Motive Gallery, Amsterdam; *Corso Aperto*, curated by Cesare Pietroiusti, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como; *To see an object, to see the light*, curated by Ginny Kollak, Padraic E. Moore and Pavel S. Pys, Palazzo Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Guarene d'Alba, Cuneo. He has studied at IUAV University of Venezia.

**RoseLee Goldberg** is an art historian, author, critic and curator. She is the author of *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (Thames & Hudson, 2011), a key text for teaching performance in universities. Throughout her career, Goldberg has established new models for exhibiting modern and contemporary performance and organized exhibitions. As curator at the Kitchen in New York, she presented works by Laurie Anderson, Phillip Glass, and Meredith Monk, and curated the first solo exhibitions of, Robert Longo, David Salle, and Cindy Sherman. Goldberg has created performance series for the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum, and is a frequent contributor to Artforum. She is the author of *Performance: Live Art Since 1960* (Abrams, 1998), *Laurie Anderson* (Abrams, 2000) and *Shirin Neshat* (Charta, 2002). In 2004, Goldberg founded PERFORMA, a non-profit multi-disciplinary arts organization for the research, development, and presentation of 21st Century visual art performance. She received her degree at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London.

**Douglas Gordon** was the recipient of the 1996 Turner Prize, the 1997 Venice Biennial's Premio 2000 award, the 1998 Hugo Boss Prize awarded by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the 2008 Roswitha Haftmann Prize, and the 2012 Käthe Kollwitz Prize. His work has been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2001); the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2006); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2006); the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (2006); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2007); DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague (2009); Tate Britain, London (2010), and Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main (2011) and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* premiered at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival before screenings at numerous international venues. *k.364* premiered at the Venice Film Festival in September 2010, and *Henry Rebel: Drawing and Burning* premiered at Art Basel's Art Unlimited in 2012. Gordon lives and works in Berlin and Glasgow.

For more than two decades **Lyle Ashton Harris** has cultivated a diverse artistic practice ranging from photographic media, collage, installation and performance. His work explores intersections between the personal and the political, examining the impact of ethnicity, gender and desire on the contemporary social and cultural dynamic. Known for his self-portraits and use of pop culture icons (such as Billie Holiday and Michael Jackson), Harris teases the viewers' perceptions and expectations, resignifying cultural cursors, and recalibrating the familiar with the extraordinary. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,

and the 52nd Venice Biennale. His work has been acquired by major international museums, most recently by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His commissioned work has been featured in a wide range of publications, including *The New York Times Magazine* and the *New Yorker*. He currently lives and works in New York City and is an Associate Professor at New York University.

**Marine Lahaix** is a filmmaker and dressage rider. She has exhibited her artistic work in different contexts, including at the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid on the occasion of the exhibition *Poéticas del incabado*, curated by Alejandra Rivera. As a dressage rider, Lahaix investigates what she calls a 'po-éthique du dressage'. She creates video works around the ambiguity between violence and an 'equitable communication' linking a rider and her horse. She has studied fine arts at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Bourges.

**Jørgen Leth** is a film director, producer, poet, TV commentator and musician. He was born in 1937 in Aarhus, Denmark. He studied literature and anthropology in Aarhus and Copenhagen and has worked as a journalist and jazz, theater and film critic for leading Danish newspapers since 1959. Leth was creative consultant at the Danish Film Institute between 1971-73 and 1975-77 and chairman of the board of The Danish Film Institute from 1977 to 1982. He has been a professor at the Danish National Film School in Copenhagen, at the State Studiocenter in Oslo and has lectured at UCLA, Berkeley, Harvard, NYU and other American universities. Jørgen Leth has made more than 40 films since the beginning of his career, marking himself as one of Denmark's most achieving au-

teurs. Leth was one of the founding members of the avant-garde film group Abcinema in the sixties.

**David Rimanelli** began writing about art in 1988 and has chronicled developments in the New York art world for over two decades. From 1993 to 1999, he was an editor and writer for the *New Yorker* and, since 1997, has been a contributing editor at Artforum, writing also for Bookforum, Interview, Vogue Paris, frieze, Parkett, the New York Times, and Flash Art. He wrote some of the first articles on artists who are now influential figures, ranging from Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelley, Thomas Ruff, and Matthew Barney to Carol Bove and Nate Lowman. His essays address Jeff Koons, Op Art, Damien Hirst, Tony Oursler, Philip Taaffe, Felix Gmelin, Roe Ethridge, and many others. As a corollary to his writing practice, he has curated exhibitions including *Bruce Nauman*, at pkm, Seoul (the first exhibition of Nauman's work in Korea), *Murder Letters*, at Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, and *Survivor*, at Bortolami Dyan.

**Erik Satie** (1866 - 1925) was a French composer whose spare, unconventional, often witty style exerted a major influence on 20th-century music. He is best remembered for several groups of piano pieces, including *Trois Gymnopédies* (1888), *Trois Sarabandes* (1887) and *Trois Gnossiennes* (1890). Satie studied at the Paris Conservatory, dropped out, and later worked as a café pianist. Closely allied to the Dada and Surrealist movements in art, Satie's music refuses to become involved with grandiose sentiment or transcendent significance, disregards traditional forms and tonal structures, and characteristically takes the form of parody, with flippant titles, such as *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (1903; 'Three

Pieces in the Shape of a Pear') and *Embryons Desséchés* (1913; 'Desiccated Embryos'), and directions to the player such as "with much illness" or "light as an egg". In 1917 Satie first introduced the concept of 'musique d'ameublement' ('furniture music'), which notably influenced John Cage's work. In his last decade he turned out several ballets, including *Parade* and *Relâche*, indicating his growing predilection for program and theater music. In 1925 Satie developed pleurisy and his fragile health worsened. He was taken to St. Joseph Hospital, where he lived on for several months before his death on July 1, 1925.

**Carolina Valencia Caicedo** is a writer and philosopher. Her writings have been published in the "lugar a dudas" publication series, as well as in Colombian magazines such as La Palabra and El Malpensante. She works at the "Librería Atlas" bookshop in Cali, Colombia. She has competed as a freediver (in static and dynamic apnea disciplines) for five years, as part of the Grupo de Actividades Subacuáticas of Cali. Valencia Caicedo has studied philosophy at the Universidad del Valle. She lives and works between Cali and Europe.



## **Spoilsport**

### **Questions around a social space**

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