

Juergen Teller filmed himself watching the 2002 World Cup final (Germany lost 2-0 to Brazil). Eyes on the television set, he twists and shouts, stewing with bullish rage. He later said that this film was 'the most disturbing thing' he'd ever seen.<sup>1</sup>

'Zidane's melancholy is my melancholy,' explains the narrator of a story by Jean-Philippe Toussaint. Watching the infamous 2006 World Cup final during which Zidane was sent off for headbutting Italian defender Marco Materazzi, he becomes absorbed by the player's weariness, by 'the intoxication of fatigue and nervous tension. I know it,' he confesses, 'I have nourished it and I feel it.'<sup>2</sup>

Harun Farocki's 12-channel video projection *Deep Play* (2007) unpacks the visual archive of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) for the same match. Farocki's spectators have to tear themselves away from his installation – even knowing the outcome, gallery-goers drop their masks of cool sophistication in their compulsion to watch this two-hour drama unfold again and again, from impossible angles and in overwhelming statistical detail.

Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006) pushes that geometry to a new level by training 17 cameras on Zidane for the duration of a Real Madrid match. Isolated from the game by the camera's focus, we wait with Zidane for the pass, for the attack. The soundtrack layers Scottish band Mogwai and crowd noise, the slap of foot against ball and the scratch of Zidane's boot against the pitch. Over 90 minutes he smiles and laughs once in an exchange with a teammate. The singularity of this moment tells us he is at work. The film reveals nothing so well as Zidane's expert control over his face.

Unlike that of 20-year-old football stars, lithe from running around and fond of diamond studs and long, flowing hair (Dimitar Berbatov or Lionel Messi), Zidane's is a hard, menacing beauty. Gordon and Parreno's film would have had an entirely different tone had they chosen an exuberant or openly flirtatious subject. Ronaldinho smiles every minute he is on the field, no matter how badly things are going. David Beckham's audience is packed with fewer Marxist art critics (who prefer their subjects miserable) and with more women and gay men – as was the case for Sam Taylor-Wood's video *David* (2004), a film of the footballer sleeping which functions as a homage to Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963).

Gordon and Parreno cite Andy Warhol's films as an inspiration, but it is hard to see the connection: *Zidane* ... is too beautiful, too controlled, too glossy. You can buy the DVD in supermarkets in France – a sign of →



## Fever Pitch

The art of football by Jennifer Doyle



Above:  
Douglas Gordon and  
Philippe Parreno  
*Zidane: A 21st Century  
Portrait*  
2006

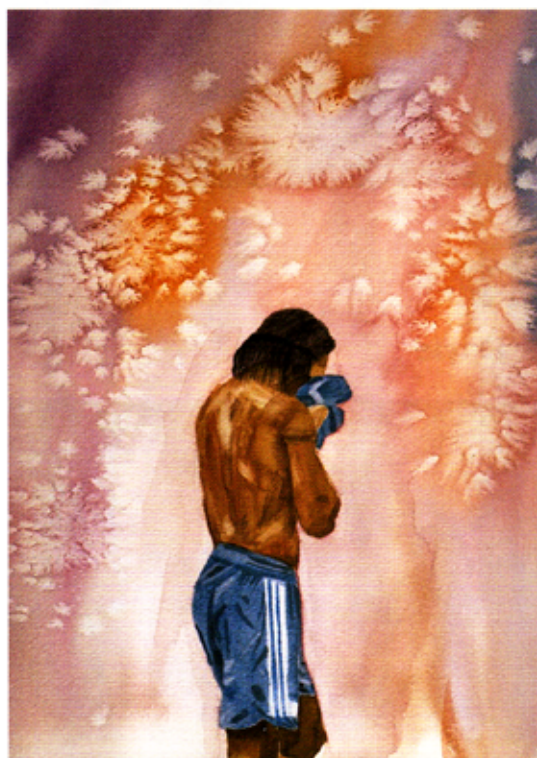
Top:  
Juergen Teller  
*World Cup Final,  
Germany 0, Brazil 2,  
London 2002*  
2002



Below:  
Hellmuth Costard  
*Fußball wie noch nie*  
(Football as Never  
Before)  
1971

Below middle:  
Yrsa Roca Fannberg  
*Icon* (Didier Drogba)  
2007

Bottom:  
Fred Poulet  
*Substitute*  
2006



## The real Warholian moment of football cinema is Hellmuth Costard's 1971 portrait of the famously charming George Best, *Fußball wie noch nie* (Football as Never Before), which is due for a DVD re-release this summer.

how deeply the film co-operates with and expands Zidane's celebrity. It has much more in common with Warhol's portraits.

The real Warholian moment of football cinema is Hellmuth Costard's film *Fußball wie noch nie* (Football as Never Before, 1971). A point of reference for Zidane ... and due for a European DVD re-release this summer, the film takes the famously charming George Best as its subject and edits multiple camera views to produce a real-time portrait of the player singled out during the course of an entire match. Lest we miss the homoerotic subtext of football art (and football culture), the half-time interval features a cruise bit of filmmaking as we follow Best through a narrow hallway and into what looks like the boot room. Best turns and faces the camera for nearly three minutes. He holds our gaze as long as he can, pursing his lips, looking away and then back in a seemingly overt homage to the Warholian screen test. Best strikes a deal here with the camera, inviting us to look at him when he takes the field again; shots of his socks, his shoulders and his crotch seem to go on for ever.

In her ongoing watercolour diary Yrsa Roca Fannberg sneaks onto Barcelona's pitch. These small, moody paintings are close cousins to Costard's film and an important counterpoint to work such as *Deep Play* and *Zidane ...*. Costard and Fannberg give the lie to the game's open secret. Football is a deeply sentimental space of male intimacy. Players explode in ecstasy, but they also love each other in more ordinary ways. They collapse in frustration, they cry. They are lost and wounded. They wrap their arms around each other and talk.

Eduardo Galeano (the Roland Barthes of football writing) describes 'the history of soccer' as 'a sad voyage from beauty to duty'. That 'duty' is paid to the sports 'teletocracy', in which 'functionaries specialize in avoiding defeat'.<sup>1</sup> Artists respond to this aspect of the game with melancholy and nostalgia – and often both. In 'big' art such as Farocki's installation and Gordon and Parreno's film, both of which were made in collaboration with that teletocracy, the game itself is a receding horizon of pure experience in which the player dissolves

with a pivot and a swing of the foot. His body – how it feels to be him – is beyond the reach of any representation. Technology and teletocracy unite in the erasure of the player's body, and his pleasure, from the picture. Roca Fannberg counters that theft by choosing as her medium a very simple dissolve of water on paper to capture how our moods, our thoughts, our legs get entangled with theirs. If the player dissolves, it is with us, and in tears.

The game is excised from the less romantic experimental film *Substitute* (2006) but not out of any formal trick. Fred Poulet gave his friend Vikash Dhorasoo a Super-8 camera so that the latter might keep a cinematic diary of his summer performances for the French national team during their 2006 World Cup run. The project was a disaster. Dhorasoo's teammates refused to be filmed. Some, such as Zidane and Thierry Henry, are global brands; their images are trademarked. In spite of having featured in qualifying matches, Dhorasoo scarcely left the bench – many think the film project was to blame. Filming training is off limits, and the teletocracy owns the game. The camera isolated Dhorasoo; we hardly ever leave his hotel room. His footage is grainy, often out of focus, while the narrative is sparse and grim. We track Dhorasoo's struggle to keep his alienation and bitterness in check. Poulet and Dhorasoo replace the macho heroics of wounded masculinity with a far more compelling truth of exile, desire and resentment. The film ends not with a defiant *geste* but with Dhorasoo climbing the stairs to his apartment and sitting down at a table to open a large stack of mail.

Jennifer Doyle is the author of *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire* (2006) and blogs about football at *From a Left Wing* (<http://fromaleftwing.blogspot.com>).

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Liz Hoggard in 'This is for You, Dad', *The Observer*, Sunday 14 September 2003  
<sup>2</sup> Jean-Philippe Toussaint, 'Zidane's Melancholy', in *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 62, 2007, pp. 12–14  
<sup>3</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, Verso, London, 1998