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Out of Bounds: Footballs' Trajectory Off the
Pitch and Into the Gallery

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Fine Art

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Out of Bounds: Football's Trajectory Off the Pitch and Into the Gallery

Fine Art Dissertation

Elena Uxue Nieva

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Abstract

This dissertation explores works by five contemporary artists; who have produced works that drill beyond the obvious stereotypes of football representation to challenge social norms, audience roles and complex social biases through their work. Representations of football, and football culture by the media are abundant; often disparaging, cynical, and loaded with negative stereotyping which fuels class division (Giulianotti, 1999). The contemporary artists explored in this dissertation have, produced works that question different aspects of contemporary culture and society. re-examining and presenting a nuanced understanding of football and its culture as a vehicle for cultural commentary (Phillips-Ewen, I. 2020).

In this dissertation a short section setting out it's theoretical basis is followed by a section defining what is intended, and included by the term 'football', in the context of this study, and a chapter outlining the role of the gallery space as a juncture between the 'art world', football, and the public. This chapter acknowledges the importance of the work of these artists, in addressing the cultural gap between the 'art world' and football (Thorne, H. 2018). Thereafter, across three chapters, analysis of relevant works by the five artists is provided. The artists and works are, in order of mention; Roderick Buchanan's 'Work In Progress' (1995), a work that looks at the class dynamic and sectarian divide within Glasgow's football culture and brings these political questions of accessibility and community into the gallery space, questioning accessibility and community (National Galleries, 2020). Cevdet Ereğ's, recent work 'Away Terrace (Us

and Them)' (2025) raises similar themes of class and cultural representation within the gallery (Linckens, 2025). Eddie Peake's performance piece, 'Touch' (2012) in which a game of naked football was staged inside the Royal Academy where the work challenged the 'highbrow' culture of the gallery space (Bourdieu, 1984). Marder Lopez's, whose work 'Polder Cup' (2011) challenges themes of social compliance and obedience. Within this work Lopez utilising a similarly leftist ideology to Peake (van Rijn, Schmitz and Tegelaers, 2011). Finally, Harun Faroki's 'Deep Play' (2007) brings together simulation theory with semiotics and the role of the viewer (Moss, 2010). Faroki's work challenges the political structures within the gallery by asking his viewers to carefully question the images they are presented with, within the context that they are viewed (Le Grand Café, 2020).

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Introduction

The intention of this dissertation intends to examine how artworks by five artists harness the cultural unifier or divider that is football, and how they function when placed in the distinct context of the arts (Thorne, H. 2018). All the artworks that use, or are about football, and have been exhibited in public galleries. These works arguably build a relationship between football culture, gallery audiences and the art world. The works explored vary in their intention, medium and focus but they are unified in have their use of the subject matter of football/football culture in common. The dissertation explores these works' presentation in the art world and the way the works introduce new narratives about football and its potential for socio-political commentary, whilst acknowledging the problematic aspects of the sport. The works studied are characterised by an assertive effort by the artists to intellectualise the discourse around a ubiquitous sport which has been simplified and maligned by the media (Giulianotti, 1999). Contemporary artworks that utilise football and football culture as the subject are relatively uncommon, and they therefore cross unwritten cultural boundaries when exhibited in the artworld (Thorne, H. 2018). Finally, this dissertation explores the power of the selected works, by examining them against a perceived cultural divide between the art world and football. In a BBC Sounds interview, Irvine Welsh reflects on his own experience of this cultural divide:

I loved football, boxing, tennis, and I also loved sitting writing and drawing... I had two different sets of friends, and I always operated in these two different ways. It was strange, there was no real cross fertilisation between these two different types of groups... I always liked being in both camps, but I just hated the idea that you had to choose. (Welsh, 2020)

The cultural disconnect between the ‘art world’, used in this dissertation as a term used to describe the elitist circles within the arts that decide what is tasteful, profitable, memorable and culturally important (Bourdieu, 1984), and ‘football’, used in this dissertation to mean the merge of both the sport and its surrounding culture was found to be particularly relevant as the lack of artwork about football experienced in galleries is surprising considering the cultural importance of football at local and international levels. (Giulianotti, 1999). In writing this dissertation, an astonishing lack of critical writing on the topic of football, culture and contemporary arts became evident and is arguably as did a notable gap in theoretical research into the intersection of two highly relevant, far-reaching cultural spheres. This lack of critical writing on football in art is so significant it may require its own separate study. This dissertation therefore seeks to acknowledge the gap as part of a wider divide as it assesses how these works are a force for change and impact in the arts.

Theoretical Context

This dissertation builds a broad and comprehensive framework of cultural, sociological and political theorists as the backbone of its analysis of the artworks. This reason for using a broader theoretical framework is designed to help overcome the gap in research and critical writing about football and the art-world, by using adjacent sources. The following theorists, and their key works of relevance to this dissertation are outlined below. The section also includes working definitions of both football and the gallery space.

Pierre Bourdieu, 'Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste' (1984)

Pierre Bourdieu's book, 'Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste', first published in 1984, remains an influential work in cultural studies. In it, Bourdieu postulates that 'taste' or aesthetic judgements are really acts of social signalling (positioning) (1984, p.95-108). He theorised that through which intellectual, and ruling classes maintain their social position of privilege (1984). As a sociologist, Bourdieu was primarily interested in the dynamics of power in society, as well as the sociology of aesthetics; (1984) and he introduced key concepts such as 'symbolic violence' (class against another class), the concept of 'cultural capital', 'cultural reproduction' and the concept of 'the habitus' (1984, p. 165- 462). Because of the significance for studies of culture and class, Bourdieu's work is immensely relevant to this dissertation (1984).

Bourdieu's concern with the subtle methods of preserving class control, and the apparent social capital of institutions provides a basis for understanding the power, and social capital, of refined art gallery spaces - where intellectual classes preserve their control and status, partly by defining what is tasteful (what they curate, and include in their spaces) (1984). For this dissertation, the question about the importance of including representations of football, where it is associated with working class culture(s) or used to explain cultural challenge to the status quo, Bourdieu is a key theorist (1984).

Ellen Seiter, 'Semiotics, Structuralism and Television' (1977)

Ellen Seiter seeks to unravel our comprehension of digital media, particularly television. Seiter argues that the layers to understanding television: electronic image, framing, text, tone and soundtrack all conduct or compel the viewer watching to adopt certain beliefs and or ideologies. Part of the trouble with decoding electronic images is that they cannot be broken down into their bare building blocks unlike words to sounds to letters. This adds a layer of confusion or disguise within televised media that renders viewers more vulnerable to digital manipulation. Seiter's work will be used to investigate the use of television footage and digitally altered footage in the gallery space (1977).

Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulation' (1981)

In Jean Baudrillard's change date work 'Simulacra and Simulation', Baudrillard explains 'Simulacra' are copies of copies, so far removed from their original meaning

that they aren't linked to what they once represented, and 'Simulation' is the process of overwriting reality with copies, to create a hyperreality where copies empty of their original meaning have become more 'real' than the real world itself. In Baudrillard's writing he identifies ways proliferating copies of copies paint a new truth of the world (1981 p. 1 - 48). This process is relevant to the mass produced and repeated the signs, flags and team colours of football - creating a hyperreal perception of football, understood by a false narrative of only its negative aspects - a concept fed and fuelled by mass media (1981).

Guy Debord, 'The Theory of the Derive' (1958)

In Debord's article of 1958, he campaigns for a radical break in routine by taking a 'derive' a aimless wonder through your surroundings, guided only by attraction for and against different terrain. Deriving should be done in groups to maximise community and enjoyment. Debord encourages taking a step away from work or leisure activities to just aimlessly wander during these derives, not contributing to society or being productive in a capitalist sense, deriving liberates the participant (1958 p. 1-5). This radical campaign for social and economic freedom is reflected in this dissertation where themes of anarchy and anti-capitalist motivations are explored through football (1958)

Roland Barthes, 'Mythologies' (1957)

Roland Barthes book 'Mythologies' outlines a cultural condition where a sign loses its signified meaning in favour of a 'myth' a meaning that is not related to the sign

or the signified but is believed as its presence is culturally accepted as 'natural' and therefore true. Myths complicate the individual's way of navigating the world as they seem at first as though they may be the reasonable explanation for various happenings, but they instead need to be second guessed and deconstructed to isolate the lack of relationship to their signifier. Barthes promotes investigating the source of these myths back to who they benefit to expose their creation and manipulation over those who choose to believe these myths as real (1957, p. 131-187) 'Mythologies' helps to cast a critical eye on the media coverage of football and its surrounding culture to unpick what sources that string together myths to change the perception of the sport and its surrounding culture (1957).

Richard Giulianotti, 'Football: A Sociology of the Game' (1999)

In his book, Richard Giulianotti contextualises the game of football globally to allow for a better understanding of the existence of football as we know it today. In this book, he dissects the cultural relevance of football including how forces of capitalism, nationalism and social control are exerted through the sport, and he explores football's history of hooliganism, sexism and racism. Giulianotti is careful to balance all aspects of football, to assert that the game's relevance is not only about its technicality, but also about its cultural ties which are firmly embedded in its history and its communities. This book provides a very clear understanding of all aspects of football, but particularly of relevance for this dissertation is its class associations and the nuances of viewer-based experiences (1999)

Defining Football

The term 'football' has come to represent far more than just a tactical ball game. The global reverence and reach of 'the beautiful game' has fostered many communities and cultural groups. These communities around the sport have expanded the understanding of 'football' to include its fan circles (Ahluwalia, P. and Miller, T. '2024'). As a result, what football means to the public, has changed to include both the game itself and its associated culture. This dissertation will use the word football in a similar manner, referring to both the game and fan culture.

The dissertation must acknowledge that undesirable political and ideological values are present within football culture. Those expounding sexism, racism and far right ideologies use the culture of the sport itself to spread their agenda. This fuels associated domestic violence and leads to racially motivated attacks on black and people of colour players who have performed badly (Fraser, N. 2018: Lee, J. 2021), and these issues have come to define much of the culture attached to football (Buckingham, P. 2025). There is however a level of nuance: the media coverage football violence overly attributes these issues to working class fans. This distracts from the hidden violence of non-working-class fans. It is generally accepted that during the 1960s, a new wave of investment and commercialisation of football teams and dual individual players contributed to an increase in number of middle-class fans of football at which time football hooliganism, and its associated behaviours also began to take root (Giulianotti, 1999). Although it's not clear whether this was causation or correlation, the press dubbed these hooligans as 'working-class', cementing football's working-class identity, despite the socioeconomic changes to the make-up of fans (Giulianotti, 1999).

The role of the media in condemning the term 'football' and to some extent the working class is summed up by Richard Giulianotti in 'Football: A Sociology of The Global Game' where he challenges a predominant view (expressed by Simon Kauper) that working-class fans:

...are unable to appreciate or practice the aesthetics of the game; that a sense of 'belonging' precludes an appreciation of football genius; that working-class fans are the most racist and sexist; that working-class chauvinisms rather than more deep-seated economic and cultural inequalities prevent less powerful social groups from football involvement. Indeed, Kauper is guilty of blaming one less powerful social group (the working-class) for the social exclusion experienced by others (ethnic minorities and women). (Giulianotti, 1999, p.151)

Whilst accepting that football's history can't be separated from issues of bigotry of the effects of class discrimination, this dissertation seeks to avoid prejudice about football and its fans in its analysis of works by artists who are exploring complex social phenomena with football present in their subject matter.

Defining the Gallery Space

At this point within the paper, it is imperative to address the role and relevance of the gallery space as the location where the works in this dissertation have been exhibited. Generally speaking, there is a stark absence of a relationship between the 'art world' and football. It is remarkable that this divide exists considering that both the art and football enjoy devotion of their audiences, and both cultural spheres influence and reflect history, politics and communities, but these spheres rarely intersect (Thorne, H. 2018). All of the artworks within this dissertation have been displayed in sterile 'white cube' gallery spaces, which in this dissertation is used to refer to the

practice of painting the walls of galleries, creating a detached space where art works are displayed in a neutralised context (O'Doherty, B., 1976). The works in this dissertation therefore bridge a gap between worlds of football and art, which have previously had minimal interaction, establishing a dialogue that was long overdue. challenging more typically seen curatorial choices of galleries as 'taste-makers' (Bourdieu, 1984).

In this dissertation the 'art world' as a term is used to describe the taste-makers of the arts (art institutions, curators, and critics) who shape the views of audiences by deciding conducting what artworks and artists will be elevated (Bourdieu, 1984). This means pushing certain political beliefs, establishing arts market value and deciding what is worthy of being remembered (Creel, Z. 2017). The art world is often considered to be mostly 'upper-class', The need for more class mobility in the arts and better accessibility to the arts is generally accepted (Bourdieu, 1984). Because of this class distinction it could be argued that certain traditional mediums are still disproportionately represented, and certain artists or styles favoured above others (Bourdieu, 1984). It is not surprising therefore that the works examined within this dissertation, which adopt football within their subject, are unusual 'exhibits' within galleries, and in fact it may be that this formed part of conscious artistic and political decisions by the five artists examined.

For the artists within this dissertation, the gallery space allows both the nuance of the artworks and their strong political narratives to be appreciated whilst also providing a platform for these works to begin untangling the threads of classism, media manipulation and cultural obsession in front of an audience of both the public

and the taste-makers of the art world (O'Doherty, B. 1976). In the context of the artworks explored within this paper the gallery can be seen as a 'no-mans-land' the space between two cultural spheres largely divided by their perceived class associations (Bourdieu, 2010; Giulianotti, 2008). It's not impossible to assume that, in general those artists and artworks that use football in their practice will be able to bring about a change to the art world and its audiences and may even help to overcome the seemingly indelible stain that tabloids have left on football as a sport and its associated culture. The artists within this dissertation have produced works that reach between these two cultural spheres.

Chapter 1 - Cultural Representations of Football



Figure 1, Buchanan, R., 'Work in Progress', 2000, image from Sinclair, R., Beaumont, S., Jewesbury, D. (2001) *Roderick Buchanan Players 2000*, Dundee Contemporary Arts

Roderick Buchanan's 'Work in Progress' (1995) is comprised of a collection of photographed portraits of men in either AC Milan or Inter Milan football strips. These faces belong to the men of Glasgow's football pitches, representing the Italian teams in their amateur games (National Galleries, 2002).

Exploration into the different cultures around sport is a recurring and important theme in Roderick Buchanan's work (DCA, 2000). His interest in representing these cultures to the viewer appears as an almost sociological review on the intersections of class, sports, internationality and mass media (Lisson Galley, 2001). Buchanan engages the viewer in football culture, a controversial topic, given its associations with violence, hooliganism and antisocial behaviour (Giulianotti, 2008). However, Buchanan reflects these cultures in his work without judgement ("Here's an artist who

knows the score”, 2000). This sincerity allows viewers to consider and renegotiate football culturally on their own new terms:

‘Work in Progress’ urges us to look at the bond between working-class Glasgow and football and consider why these men have chosen to adopt the football strips of a team some 926 miles away, appropriating another country’s teams in their own sports community. (National Galleries, 2002).

Within 'Work in Progress', the relationship between the teams AC Milan and Inter Milan, can be interpreted as a nod to the relationships between Glasgow's two major football teams: Celtic and Rangers (National Galleries, 2002). Both teams occupy sides of the same city, meeting in a bitter rivalry that extends beyond the pitch and into the stands where home and away fans clash. The additional dimension of the sectarian divide between the city’s two teams has long plagued the people of Glasgow, fostering division and hatred, that also involves a charged political aspect of nationhood when these two ‘sides’ meet on and off the pitch (Bradley, J. M 1993). It is important to acknowledge for Glasgow, that the games between Celtic and Rangers involve a political conflict (Ogasawara, H. ‘no date’). Here football changes, what was once a game now bleeds into day-to-day life, social connections are decided based on what side of the divide someone falls on (McBride, M. 2022).

What's intriguing about ‘Work in Progress’ is that it handles the sectarian divide very gently, taking a less common approach to this issue. By using these two teams from Milan, Buchanan draws faint parallels to the sectarianism of Glasgow without ever directly referencing it (National Galleries, 2002). The message reaches the viewer lightly and carefully, implying that in spite of this divide these amateur players, use another cities teams to redefine the game, placing what is usually a game of politics,

religion and sometimes violence with 'plain and simple' football, teams and players do not have to acknowledge what side of the divide they identify with. Instead, their small community exists in separation to sectarianism letting them move freely around each other with no fear or crossing sociopolitical lines.

It can be argued that, because of the working-class associations of football, Buchanan is consciously bringing football into the gallery environment; the culturally significant, and otherwise absent component of working-class culture is legitimised and represented in his work. When 'Work in Progress' appeared in a solo exhibition entitled 'Players 2000' at Dundee Contemporary Arts one article noted, "... fans will love Players, while critics will remain frosty." (The Herald, 2000)

Furthermore, by reflecting the importance of sport and team identity, Buchanan seeks to evolve the narrative around football and its followers and appeal to a broader 'gallery going' audience that would not otherwise engage with a working-class subject; helping to bridge a divide. Hill, Moore and Wood note the prevailing exclusion of working-class sports culture from the museum sector, a point that would equally apply to art institutions:

... museums of sport are a relatively recent phenomenon in the UK, and that sports with a higher social class involvement developed museums first, while those with stronger working-class (and northern) associations developed museums later. ... Sports museums have faced an additional barrier to popular culture, as sport is perceived by many as not a part of culture, but separate and, indeed, perhaps in opposition to it. This perception of sports as not culture, though largely unspoken, is a feature of the museum and wider cultural sector in the UK. (Hill, J. And Moore, K. And Wood, J., 2012)

The power of Buchanan's work is how thought provoking it is; the work asks the viewer to separate the politics from the sport only for a moment to allow some

perspective on how the sport is being used as a device for community. Although football cannot ever be completely removed from politics (Power, M. *et al.*, 2020), particularly in Glasgow (Ogasawara, H., 'no date'), 'Work in Progress' asks for only a moment of reflection. Despite the on and off pitch conflicts, we must also recognise how fans can still flock together to create and reinforce belonging, and to establish social connections. (Sanders, A. *et al.*, 2012). Buchanan makes a conscious effort to reframe perceptions of football in the mid-nineties, during the height of the violence from the old firm derby (Kernaghan, E., 2023). He challenges the notion that football was merely an 'excuse' for sectarian violence by presenting the importance of football for cultural unification and community. The men of 'Work in Progress' make great effort to renegotiate the game into their terms and play for the joy of the game. Buchanan's work gently cradles the necessity of belonging and cultural identity.



Figure 2 Ereğ, C., 'Away Stand (Us and Them)', 2025, image from Daaad; Daaad, Daaad, 2025

'Away Terrace (Us and Them)' was an installation made by artist Cevdet Ereğ for the 2025 Liverpool Biennial, where invited artists were asked to make work in response to the city (Saha, 2025). Cevdet Ereğ, a Turkish artist, in homage to the host city Liverpool, drew upon the heartbeat of the city's cultural identity, forged in football fandom (Lebreton, L., 2025). The artist's city-specific work makes multiple references to Liverpool; starting with a stadium constructed in sustainable bricks manufactured in the UK - echoes of the brick fabric of much of the city's buildings (Daaad, 2019). The huge scale of the work, its exaggerated proportions, speak to the spectacle of the arena. It taps into the human desire to see that spectacle, the soundtrack of chants and drums adding layers of sensory experience to generate tension (Saha, 2025). The awe the work inspires in the viewer mimics pre-match nerves of players and those of

fans' uncertain of a match outcome, and touch upon the feeling of polarisation that a big match can have in the city (Lebreton, L., 2025).

Commentators from Liverpool have not let it go unnoticed that the 2025 Biennial was the first time that most of the works were contained behind doors rather than on the street or in outdoor public spaces (de la Puente, G., 2025) and whilst social commentators regret this shift away from the populace, the shift also brings about new opportunity; the chance to see a work such as this, 'Away Terrace (Us and Them)'.

In acknowledging the relationship between Liverpool's working-class population, and football, 'Away Terrace (Us and Them)' legitimises the city's fierce team fan identity and 'legitimises' it. Anfield is brought into the gallery as a representation of the city's football culture, and with it attracts an audience that would rarely have seen this aspect of their culture reflected in a gallery space (Thorne, H., 2018). Ere's work also bridges a divide by encouraging a potentially excluded audience into the gallery space (Bourdieu, 2010). In spite of Ere's intentions, and the 2025 Biennial themes upholding the city's built and cultural heritage, critical art writing of this extraordinary ephemeral, location-specific piece was almost non-existent, once again indicating an unwritten bias in the art world against serious discourse about football in art, and as a key part of our culture (Thorne, H., 2018).

Chapter 1 Summary

Both Ere and Buchanan highlight the cultural relevance of football in their artworks some thirty years apart. Football has remained a force of sociological and

political relevance globally, its popularity has generated huge waves of fans that often mobilise outside of football for greater global causes, these fan groups have recognised the strength in football culture for change (O’Ceallaigh, E., 2015). When weighing up the cultural unifiers of the arts against football an interesting phenomenon is isolated; the underrepresentation of football in the gallery space (Thorne, H., 2018). Though this underrepresentation cannot be solely attributed to galleries and art-world taste-makers the responsibility of cultural institutions, such as art galleries, to reflect and preserve major cultural events and movements has not been extended to sport, because it is not viewed as ‘culture’. (Hill, J. And Moore, K. And Wood, J., 2012)

Each of the two artists has distilled what they perceive to be the cultural unifier in each city Glasgow and Liverpool (football), and in turn both have chosen to reflect that cultural value back into the gallery space and invite a new wave of viewers into the gallery.

Chapter 2 – Viewing the Viewer



Figure 3, Peake, T., 'Organ Harvest (Touch)', 2025 image from Willson, T. (2025) CircleZeroEight



Figure 4, Peake, E., 'Touch', 2012 image from Royal Academy of the Arts, 'Peake, E, article

'Touch' was a performance orchestrated by artist Eddie Peake in 2012, featuring a game of naked five-a-side football that took place in the Royal Academy, London (Cohen, L., 2016). Each team was completely naked save for their socks, one colour for each team. 'Touch', which was Peake's breakout work, had not been scripted; instead it was devised as an initial set of instructions to start the game, anything that happened after that was pure chance, there was no predetermined score or larger motive that the performers had to communicate, they were only playing to win, as Peake has previously stated, "... the performers simply carried out the instruction, the performance ending once that had happened". (Peake E., RIA Interview 2022)

The 2012 performance of 'Touch', the tabloid press was unrelenting in reporting it for its shock value but their retelling of the performance troubled Peake (Cohen, L., 2016). In contrast, art critical writing focussed on reporting his work as a critique of footballs 'homoeroticism' (Nairne, E., 'no date') Despite these misreadings, the shock that Peake's performance generated allowed Peake to rapidly establish a unique presence in the art world.

'Touch', like many of Peake's subsequent performances, is intended to involve the audience and reverse the gaze back onto the spectator; their reactions becoming part of the overall event (RIA, 2022). Utilising nudity in both an explicit, and neutral sense, as an artist, Peake mostly focuses on connections and actions (Brumfitt, S., 2016). 'Touch' also epitomises Peake's ongoing interest in exploring the role of the viewer in his work, in this case, by reversing the act of looking, or watching, back onto the viewer. Viewers are left to consider their reactions to his work; the self-referential

act of viewing outwardly and inwardly allows audiences to reevaluate the subject matter (RIA, 2022), achieving a multi-faceted interpretation of 'subject'.

In 'Touch', Peake firstly utilises the nakedness of the performers to create a stark visual contrast to the usual images expected of a game of football; gone are the shirts, shorts, logos and numbers, and stripped away with them is the hyper-masculinity of football. The irony of the work hinges on the players' lack of uniform: naked, they appear vulnerable. (Brumfitt, S., 2016). However, after the initial shock or amusement, the audience adjusts, the nakedness no longer shocks them (Brumfitt, S., 2015). They are left with the 10 men, undivided and unbranded by a 'kit' or a 'team'. Once the branded clothes are removed from the performers, the division between teams is eroded and serious competitive angst dissolves into what is essentially a performance of a game, something to entertain and to be enjoyed (Brumfitt, S., 2015).

When Peake uses the nakedness, it comes from an awareness of the controversial nature of football personalities. He uses the shock of player nudity to reframe the narrative from 'masculinity' to 'connectedness'. It is clear that this is intentional, as Peake has also deliberately re-interpreted the symbols of football kit in other early works, "*... five-a-side football match piece in which each player was physically conjoined to a player from the opposing team by way of kits I had sewn together*". (Peake, E., RIA Interview 2022)

In discussing his earlier, unnamed and undocumented piece described above, Peake shows a longstanding interest in undermining the combative, competitive and

confrontational aspect of two teams encountering each other. The nuance of his work lies beneath the nudity of the performers; the lack of clothing becomes a device that Peake uses to push a new narrative through to the audience.

All the players wear is socks and shoes, signifying their team. One of the reasons I avoid clothes or costume in my other performances is that clothing is a language of signs and messages, and I want to strip the body down to something essential and not attached to a period or culture.(Brumfitt, S., 2015)

Reactions to 'Touch' varied and it was not uncommon for viewers to have initially found the work very funny. Peake does not dismiss this reaction, but he has made a point to stress the neutrality of nudity; stressing that it's neither funny nor shameful, just normal.

"Despite his fear of trashy, basic interpretations of the nudity in his work, he's always drawn back to it, since it strips the body of period or culture, and also "refers to the history of art — an on-going wrestling match of mine, for example, with the poses of classical sculpture." (Brumfitt, S., 2016)

In fact, it should be stressed that in a gallery, nudity is in fact normal, and on abundant display: carved Greek statues, still life's, paintings, photographs... galleries are full of nudes, and so is performance art (Rodosthenous, G. Theatre as Voyeurism., 2015). Therefore, it could be argued that the reason 'Touch' provoked such a strong media reaction, wasn't the nudity, it was instead, the presence of football in an art space.

"Although the fact that the players are naked may be the first thing that strikes you about the piece, what is interesting is how quickly this becomes unimportant. In Touch, a similar work I staged in 2012, people remarked that they forgot about the players' nakedness as the drama and/or banality of the game took over." (Brumfitt, S., 2016)

If it could be deduced that it was the football, rather than the nudity of 'Touch' which shocked the press, and took the audience and by extension, the art world by surprise,

then it has to be asked: why was it that 'Football' in the performance elicited that reaction? Perhaps the lack of football presence within gallery spaces is what drives the 'shock' of 'Touch'. And by extension, it has to be asked why there is such a scarcity of contemporary art exploring football, within art institutions' exhibitions (Thorne, H., 2018). Either way, considering the popularity of football globally and its enduring relevance within popular culture, it should be noted that the reactions to 'Touch' evidence the importance of bringing new cultural dialogue, possible only through football, into the gallery space.

Peake's work, a performance in a gallery space, highlights aspects of sports culture, without seeking to influence or change or intervene in that culture directly. Instead, he engages his audience of gallery goers in exploring the nature of voyeurism, commercialisation of players bodies and asks them to reconsider the culture around football through a more nuanced experience. A final point to be considered in relation to 'Touch' is Peake's constant defiance of stereotypes in his work; he doesn't make his nudes sexual; he doesn't make his football macho; this staunch opposition to succumbing to stereotypes is echoed across all his work (Spence, R., 2014). His refusal to allow his work to be stereotyped can be interpreted as a pushing back at the art world conventions.



Figure 5, Lopez, M., 'Polder Cup', 2011, image from artist's website: MaidierLopez.com



Figure 6, Lopez, M., 'Polder Cup', 2011, image from artist's website: MaidierLopez.com

Maidier Lopez is Basque artist whose work largely concerns the connection between the individual and the collective, and her works often involve the public to investigate the interactions between these two organically. Utilising landscape and architecture in the environments of her works, Lopez challenges conformity, social 'rules', tradition, urban spaces and the individual's experience of their own environment (Lopez, M., 'no date').

'Polder Cup' was an event organised by Lopez in 2011, that took place in the Dutch Polders. On grassy fields, she painted four football pitches; all were bisected by dykes that would split the pitch in two, forcing players to re-write the rules of the game in order to keep the ball in play (Van Rijn., 'no date'). The interventions the dykes made to the pitches of 'Polder Cup' were intended to prompt the players' ingenuity in-game, as a metaphorical challenge to Dutch social conformity (Tegelaers, T., '2011'). 'Polder Cup' had been professionally documented in films and videos that were later displayed to the public at the Kunsthal Institute in the Netherlands (Kunsthal Rotterdam, 2025). By asking the players to reconsider their relationship to rules through this disrupted football game, Lopez was asking the players to also reconsider their relationship to the social orders they find themselves a part of (Rijn, Schmitz and Tegelaers, T., 2011). Lopez used 'Polder Cup' as a metaphor to incite radical social change that started with the individual's own creativity. As Tegelaers states:

The Dutch are famous for their culture of consultation, i.e., seeking agreement through discussion that aims to create a consensus with the minimum of inconvenience for all involved. In the public space this phenomenon is frequently expressed through excessive regulation, with the result that very little room remains for spontaneous or ambiguous interpretations relating to the use of the public space. The consensus culture offers very little room for individual interpretations because these are rapidly thwarted by regulations. The lengthy discussions and negotiations about who determines the regulations and how these are implemented typify this approach. (Tegelaers, T., 2011)

In considering 'Polder Cup' as a metaphor for the process of an individual exploring social change, it can be seen to resemble Guy Debord's concept of 'Dérive', which he viewed as a 'purpose-free' act of exploration without the imposition, or limitation, of following set paths to centres of culture or attraction (Debord, 1958 p.2). Lopez's Polder cup events 'unfolded' in an otherwise conforming 'geography' and architecture of playing fields, but without precise and defined outcome for the players. In essence Lopez harnessed the fun, unpredictable nature of these games of football to provide a space for players to free themselves from traditional rules and then by extension reconsider their cultural conformity so heavily promoted in Dutch culture (Tegelaers, T., 2011).

It could then be seen that Lopez's use of football metaphor appears almost anarchic. One of the key facets of 'Deriving' is the emphasis placed on the 'fun'; deriving accomplishes nothing for the economy or wider society. It only benefits the small community deriving and the individual within said community (Debord, 1958 p.2). Lopez utilises a similar structure for 'Polder Cup' therefore making 'situationist football'. It's almost as if the fun of the game combined with the need for innovation by individuals to keep the ball in play *and* win, imbues the players with an individual sense of social innovation and a team identity; perfectly balancing the identity and ability of one person with their community's culture and identity (Tegelaers, T., 2011). This in turn challenges the viewers perspective on football. When the game is presented in a new context footballs negative associations are lifted and viewers may be able to see further into 'Polder Cup' for Lopez's political messaging.

When the photographic and film recordings of 'Polder Cup' were presented to the public, they could be seen to appear as a case study in social expression and creativity. Lopez influences the viewer by presenting them with socialisation unburdened by generations of public agreeability and conformity. Given 'Polder Cup' was an exercise in radical social change, it could be argued that in utilising the element of 'fun' of Lopez's 'situationist football', the work readdresses viewers perceived notions of obedience or compliant behaviour, though a passive fun protest to conformist politics.

Chapter 2 - Summary

Both Peake's and Lopez's artworks function on two distinct levels. 'Touch' and 'Polder Cup' both at first appear to be fun or comical or possibly playfully shocking and function initially on that level, but the works then draw their audiences into their 'experiment', so initial reactions give way to deeper political meanings. Peake asks his audience to reconsider the humour of nakedness in 'Touch', and to instead see the lack of players' clothing as the absence of being branded, of being free from attachment to a time, or culture (Brumfitt, S., 2016) and thus giving way to a focus on community and teamwork. Lopez asks her audience through 'Polder Cup' to see past the fun and frivolity of her disrupted football games to address people's adhesion to social rules and to explore the empowerment of breaking these rules with community and teamwork.

Chapter 3 – Simulations of the Game



Figure 7, Faroki, H., 'Deep Play', 2007, image from artist's website, HarunFaroki.de

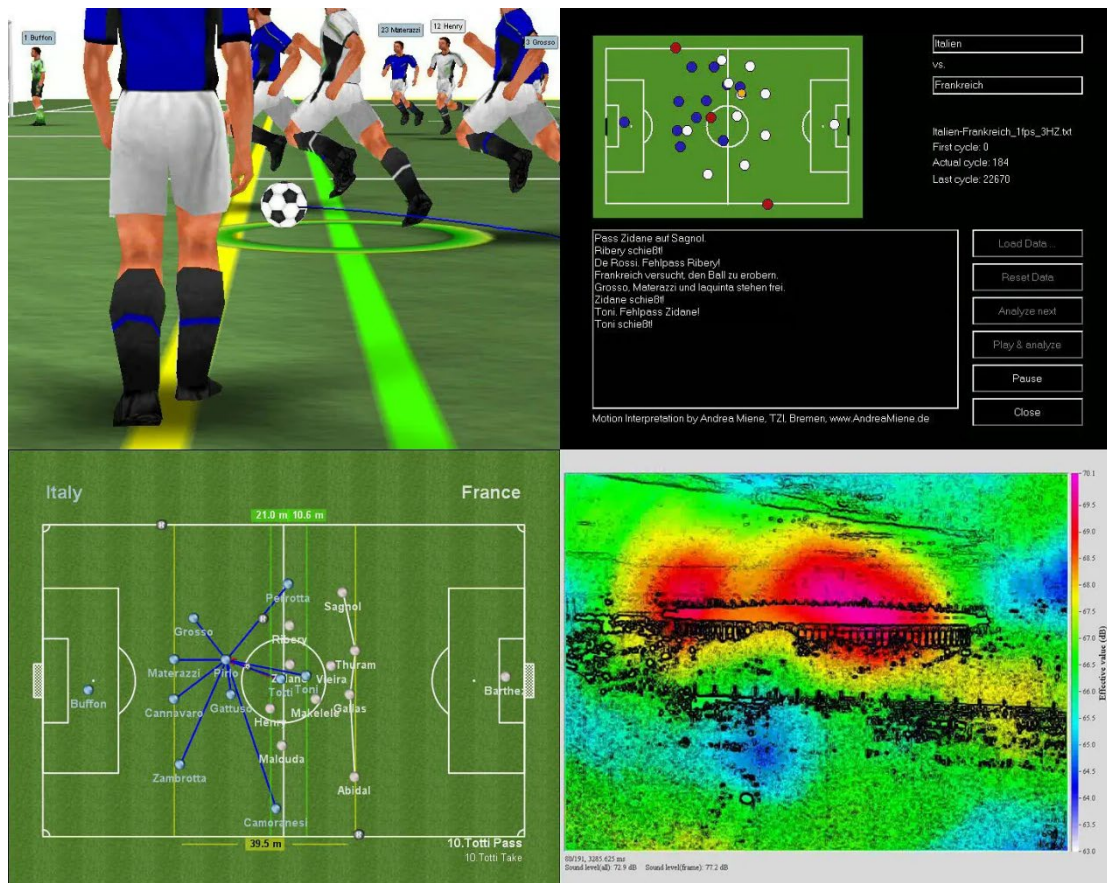


Figure 8, Faroki, H., 'Deep Play', 2007, image from Festival de L'Histoire de L'Art

'Deep Play' (2007) by Harun Faroki is a video installation on 12 screens showing various digital recordings of the 2006 World Cup final match. First shown in

documenta 12 exhibition in Germany, the installation was arranged around a large gallery room, with seating in the middle, so that the screens appeared like windows on the tall white walls they were displayed on, offering new perspectives into the drama of the match (Café, L.G, 2020).

Initially, the work bombards the viewer with an overwhelming amount of visual information; packed with 'player stats', noise level monitors, aerial view breakdowns detailing possession, passes and all other action on the pitch, emulating the intense commentary and bombarding of statistical performance information during a game (Greene Naftali, 2025). It is impossible for viewers to decipher each screen at each frame. The impact of having twelve different digitally altered screens in 'Deep Play', with their unrelenting information feed, echoes simulation theory and digital media, present in football's global reach (Moss, C., 2010). These themes investigate the mass media machine and how we sift through or succumb to the visual/electronic images being fed to us (Pantenburg, V., 2020). Diederichsen, a critic, wrote about 'Deep Play':

Above all, what we experience is how the laboratory of football is able to exhibit the most advanced technology in the production and presentation of moving images. All fans and followers of simulation and documentation, movies, TV and computer games start running a little warmer as they watch. We see how eerily close the wishes of the consumers; the trainers and the police really are to each other. Just as they are in real life. (Faroki, H., 2025b)

'Deep Play's' twelve screens can be understood through both Jean Baudrillard's 'Simulation Theory' and Ellen Seiter's book "Semiotics, Structuralism and Television"(. Faroki mimics the stages and degrees of simulation with his visually enhanced simulations of the original taping of the 2006 World Cup Final; some screens are distorted, or heavily edited, others are seen through filters or are 3D rendered (Greene Naftali, 2025). A viewer may feel like the simulations of the events are becoming

increasingly removed from the original taping, and therefore so is the inferred meaning. Each display's electronic images contort or confuse the viewer with new visual information that fundamentally changes the context of the original subject matter (Le Grand Café, 2020). Where the original taping was a signifier of the actual match, a 3D rendered version could confuse a viewer into thinking that maybe the events were pre-decided or manufactured just like the process involved in 3D rendering, or maybe a screen containing all the in-game analytics suggesting a science or formula to the play, or maybe all these altered screens suggest a need for extreme scrutiny of the game (Greene Naftali, 2025). Expanding on this observation, it could be seen that the intersection between the mass-media machine and its ability to create myths by confusing signified and signifier and by distinguishing the real from the simulation appears central in the experience of the work as a viewer. It's almost as if Faroki is exposing the viewer to these distortions of reality in a similar format to that the mass-media machine would use (analytics, graphics television surveillance). Faroki is presenting this process for the viewer to see, then they can question the distortions of these signifiers and their associated myths (Pantenburg, V., 2020).

A key facet of Seiter's 'Semiotics Structuralism and Television' is the idea of class-based associations formed about different media (1987). Seiter argues that television is perceived as 'working-class' (1987, p.42-46). This comes from the class distinctions between forms of media outwith television and is now imposed on to the various channels, news stations, movies, sports, talk shows etc. within 'television', though it is important to note that, mostly, television is perceived as being for the

working-class (Pearl, D., Bouthilet, L. and Lazar, J. 'no date'). Faroki situated 'Deep Play' at the intersections of philosophy, and politics and communicated through 'television', (the most widely accessible form of media around the globe) to reflect the act of viewing and media consumption back onto the viewer (Tate, A.U., 2016).

Viewing 'Deep Play' requires a level of patience and deep thinking typically associated with viewing art in a gallery context, rather than watching televised sport. This reinforces the necessary role of the gallery space (O'Doherty, B., 1976). Faroki asks his viewers to approach the football in 'Deep Play' with the same rich level of intellectual thinking behind his work. Once again, using football as a subject and vehicle for highly political work is achieved without reverting to the stereotypes used to address football. The use of football in 'Deep Play' illuminates the ability for this sport to act as the intersection between culture, viewership, politics and the arts.

Harun Faroki's own background as a filmmaker, writer and critic has an influence on his artworks generally, with his interests largely concerned with labour, war and signs. Faroki's fascination with 'Mythologies' by Roland Barthes (1957) is evident in consistent references throughout his work (Pantenburg, V., 2020). As he explains in a posthumous video interview by the Tate, "The era of reproduction seems to be over more or less and the era of construction of a new world seems to be, somehow, on the horizon. No, not on the horizon, it's already here." (Tate, A.U., 2016)

Chapter 3 - Summary

Faroki's compulsion to dissect the manipulative nature of the electronic image and the mass-media machine was so consistent within his work that it would be reasonable to assume 'Deep Play' employs similar intention in using football as the communicator of the message (Tate, A.U., 2016). In fact, it could perhaps be argued that the work is so powerful because it employs the cultural reach, power and universal presence of football in our lives – it is a powerful message because it uses football.

Conclusion

The dissertation has examined artworks by five artists, which utilise football to explore wider social themes and issues. The dissertation examined how the works function when placed in a public gallery context. The dissertation also attempted to highlight a research gap into the divide between ‘art world’ of taste makers and the world of football; the gap between these two monumental cultural forces is bridged. The dissertation has shown and discussed how this occurs, not only by placing works about football in a gallery setting but inviting a new kind of (football) audience into the gallery space and requiring art critics to confront and discuss football in their writing. Each artwork separately charts new, shared territory between these two worlds. Across all the artworks, various political themes of Anarchism, anti-capitalism and class theory are communicated through representations of ‘the beautiful game’ and its multi-faceted meanings. Artists explore the need for social inclusion and class representation in the gallery space and art world; using football for its associations of class distinction helps to reassert the importance of the game across social classes, but in a gallery space invites a new and underrepresented audience (Bourdieu, 1984).

A strong theoretical basis of philosophy present within these works’ grounds the thinking behind them as highly complex and nuanced. This overt theoretical basis gives the works an intellectual ‘validity’ they would have otherwise not been afforded; given the controversial nature of football, it is a traditionally ‘low-brow’ subject matter (Bourdieu, 1984). The artworks within this dissertation demand an intellectual

understanding of football, an understanding that recognises the nuance of this sport and culture honestly (Giulianotti, 2008). The crux of this understanding is in the ability of the artist not to solely reflect what they and the viewers may already know about the reputation of the sport from the media, but also to communicate diverse new perspectives on football and its wider cultural context (Thorne, H., 2018). With this new understanding of football culture, perceptions about football may start to change.

When football is represented in artworks in the gallery setting, the media's one-dimensional perspective is overwritten football can be understood as more than just its violence. For something to be ignored or largely unrepresented in the gallery space it would have to be irrelevant culturally, historically or politically - all things that cannot be applied to football (Edelman, R. and Wilson, W., 2017). No matter the reason for this separation the smaller this gap gets the better. It would be fair to assert that the cultural unifier of football is what makes the sport such a powerful signifier in art.

The sport's ability to speak across the globe and to reach any individual is a consequence of its popularity and it is this that these artists have employed to further their artwork's message. This includes rewriting the 'mythologies' that have corrupted or narrowed its image as well as shining a light on social issues such as class, and conformity (Barthes, 1957). By extension it would also be fair to assert that once these works are being displayed in major public galleries and biennials, the gallery-going

public develops an appreciation for the complex narratives of these works, and they can gain a deeper understanding of their own culture. I would argue that the potency and relevance of these works which explore football in their subject speak to communities of football followers as well as arts audiences and brings them together in a way that is long overdue. The artworks have settled within the arts as deeply thoughtful and soulful pushing for cultural representation and accessibility for an underrepresented cultural phenomenon whilst also, in representing football and its culture using it as a vehicle to reflect and critique wider social phenomena.

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