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Lev Kreft

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# AESTHETIC IMAGINATION IN FOOTBALL

**Lev Kreft**

*In my previous texts on aesthetics of sport and of football, the accent was on dramatic aesthetic properties and on everyday aesthetics as a proper framework for the aesthetics of sport in general and football in particular. Here, following this starting point, the character of football as a game of social interactions (a feature pointed out by many sociologists) and its character of purposive sport are examined, to find out what could be the most important aesthetic condition for playing the game and being-in-the-game. To get at the core of the aesthetic side of football, the concept of aesthetic imagination is introduced as a necessary condition for playing the game of football, and three aesthetic regimes for creation of possible worlds or symbolic forms such as football are discussed (mimesis, representation and simulation). There are two steps where the aesthetic imagination helps. The first one is at the entrance where we are leaving ordinary everyday life behind, being ready to accept the world of football as an extraordinary possible universe. The other one is there to allow playing the game: incessant movement of two teams and their 22 members together with a ball creates a space in which one (be it an individual member or the team as a whole) cannot move according to rules and purpose of football without plugging in the aesthetic imagination which makes being-in-the-game possible.*

KEYWORDS aesthetics of football; aesthetic imagination; aesthetic regimes; strategic interaction; simulation; possible worlds

## Introduction

During the 2014 Mundial final game between Argentina and Germany, after regular and even most of the additional time had expired, the penalties which might decide the winner in just a few minutes entered as a possibility into imagination of players and spectators. Movements of players testified that they were getting tired. The game had lost its tempo. TV commentators, hardly following what was going on the field, started to list goods and bads of potential strikers on both sides, and of their goalkeepers. The public became less noisy but more nervous, as if in great expectation to get more thrills from the final penalties than they got from a tactically sophisticated game. In 113th minute, when Argentina's defence moved somehow mechanically, probably believing that the last few minutes before the final whistle will be just a formality, German player André Schürrle made it down the left hand side and passed the ball to Mario Götze (both substitutes) who scored with technical brilliance. Argentina's defenders were there but they failed, being late and moving without full attentiveness. They could not imagine that something like that could happen: they were no more fully in-the-game, as if already waiting for the final whistle of the referee Nicola Rizzoli. The

Germans seemingly agreed but still tried one more time, as Germans proverbially do. How come that the Argentinians were thrown out of the game? It was good German action, but not so perfect that it could not be prevented. Both German players found themselves formally covered, but in reality as free as birds in a meadow. The usual expression for such a state is that concentration in the defence fell, and that they did not see it coming, as they did before, throughout the whole game when they were (as were the Germans) on the right spot at the right time. For one hundred and thirteen minutes they saw ahead of the game, but now, at the last moment, the Argentinians had lost their touch with the reality of the game, just for a moment, and in that one just-a-moment they lost.

On what does this presentation of the Argentinian defeat insist, and what do expressions like 'could not imagine', 'to be in the game, or not', 'see it coming, or not', 'to be thrown out of the game', 'to see ahead of the game, or not', 'to lose one's touch with reality, or not' and many others with a similar 'metaphoric' approach mean? These kinds of expressions do not denote psychological state of players, nor do they suggest that the audience and commentators had an insight into the players' souls. They describe a possible meaning of their body movement understood as an index of their presence in the game. They suggest that to play a game a kind of visionary approach produced by our imagination is needed, and that without such presence in the game we are unable to play it well. What does imagination mean for the lusory attitude, and what could be the aesthetic side of such imagination? These two questions are not directly connected with calling football 'a beautiful game', which was touched upon in my previous paper on 'Aesthetics of the beautiful game' (Kreft 2014), where new systematic approaches to aesthetics of everyday life were proposed. Neither can the answer be found in another article, where the fundamental aesthetic in sport was, instead of insisting on the beautiful taken from (modernist) art, introduced as the dramatic (Kreft 2012). These questions call for further understanding of the aesthetic in that extraordinary addition to everyday life to which football belongs.

To follow the way from these questions to possible answers, I propose first to approach the social sciences to see what they have to say about team sports in general and football in particular. Then, it is necessary to sketch what reality status football may have in philosophy and aesthetics. Thirdly, we have to discuss Best's distinction between purposive and aesthetic sports again, this time from the point of view of football as purposive sport, to find out what function the aesthetic could have in purposive sports and in football. We will find out that stoic ethics of human practice can be supportive of a claim that even in strictly following of a purpose, an aesthetic component is necessary. Through these three steps, we will arrive at a proposal to introduce the aesthetic imagination as a necessary moment in our understanding of football. Finally, this will help us to explain that we need two kinds of aesthetic imagination to play the game of football.

### **Football and the Social Sciences**

Millions of people are engaged in and with football all around the world. In the society of the spectacle, with its contemporary global digital media network, it represents one of the most attractive and profitable products. During last decades, football has become an inescapable component of everyday life. Broadly speaking, what is

interesting about such a success story is the relationship between football and society. To narrow this from the point of view of everyday life, we should examine the relationship between social interactions in everyday life and in football, with special attention being played to the aesthetic and dramatic dimensions of human encounters on both sides. Sport and Modern Social Theorists (Giulianotti 2004) offers a list of social theorists who have to say something about sport, and extracts of what they have written about sport. Some of them refer to football directly, some do not. For the purposes of this examination, only those theories which can contribute to an understanding of football as a game of social interactions which has its aesthetic side, will be briefly examined: Richard Giulianotti, Norbert Elias (with Eric Dunning), Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman.

For Richard Giulianotti, the sport event is a condensation of socio-cultural elements. Football, the most popular sport, is a cultural map, 'a metaphorical representation' (Giulianotti 1999, xii). He puts forward the aesthetic content of football (Giulianotti 1999, 128) as a dramatization of social tensions. 'Games are more than "models" of social existence; they are microcosms of the fundamental nature of social life,' says Norbert Elias (Giulianotti 2004, 147). His and Dunning's view of sport accentuates the human need for excitement which has to happen outside civilized, but boring, routines of everyday life. Sport is the figuration of excitement, especially team sport with football as the most outstanding case of those sports which need and use imagination: 'While excitement is severely curbed in the pursuit of what one usually regards as the serious business of life—apart from sexual excitement which is more strictly confined to privacy—many leisure pursuits provide an imaginary setting which is meant to elicit excitement of some kind imitating that produced by real life situations, yet without its dangers and risks'. (Elias and Dunning 1993, 42) The mimetic character of these imaginary settings is discussed and defined further. 'Mimetic excitement is socially and personally without danger and can have a cathartic effect ... The term "mimetic" is thus used here in a specific sense. It might be taken to refer primarily to the relationship between the mimetic events themselves and certain seriously critical situations which they seem to resemble, but in point of fact the connectedness to which the term "mimetic" refers, as it is used here, is, in the first place, the connectedness between the affects aroused by mimetic events and by specific serious life situations'. (Elias and Dunning 1993, 80–81)

Pierre Bourdieu finds that, beside the body aesthetics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois, there are sports which represent body aesthetics, values and virtues which repel the dominant class: football, rugby, wrestling, boxing and similar. If one uses Elias' language, these sports figure as uncivilized, insisting on strength, endurance, violence, sacrifice, docility, submission to collective discipline and the exaltation of competition. He uses football as his master metaphor, which makes the concept of the 'field' concrete and understandable. As in many other treatments of football in social theories, it comes handy as a metaphor for social life as such, for its organization follows power lines, for social movement and networks etc.

All three establish a relationship between football, sport or games, and society, a relationship which, be it metaphorical (football 'is like' society) or mimetic (football 'imitates' society), puts society as it appears to be without sport and games in the position of original, pre-existing 'reality', while games are treated as a breakout from (everyday) reality which has its social place somewhere after or/and beyond social

reality. As mimetic or metaphorical addition, football contains some real and destructive conflicts, but without their socially destructive dangers.

Erving Goffman starts the other way around: everyday face-to-face social interactions are games. His role theory, introduced through the dramaturgical model of everyday life behaviour and encounters, is well known. Ten years later (1969), he developed a game theory which formatted ground for modelling strategic interaction. This study, even if football is not its subject, has much more to say about games such as football, and about their fundamental social nature. Goffman is interested in communication and its divide between sender and recipient in a framework of an antagonistic game. He puts game theories, which were well developed and quite influential at that time, to a test of immediate social contact situations, and reduces the game of social interaction to five basic kinds of moves: unwitting move made by an actor regardless of observer and ignorant of the presence of the observer (Goffman 1971, 11), naïve move as an assessment of the unwitting move on the side of the observer who believes that the observed person is acting in a transparent way (Goffman 1971, 11–12); control move as a real opening of a game with the intention to master it (Goffman 1971, 12); uncovering move with which the observer attacks this masquerade (Goffman 1971, 18); and counter-uncovering move which comes as a final draw, because the observed person unmasks the observer's intention (Goffman 1971, 19–20). Goffman does not mention sport games; he is more interested in spying and similar situations where one looks for information knowing that the observed subject is trying to hide them—a situation he calls expression games. But it corresponds to strategic moves in a football game very well, as Aggerholm's, Jespersen's and Ronglan's concluding remarks on the phenomenology of the football feint prove in philosophical language from a different source to Goffman's: 'The description and analysis of the feint has provided an example of a creative performance in football. It has shown how the feint mirrors the logics of the game configuration in invasion games and incarnates a fundamental strategy in such dynamic and social situations, where each player struggles to get the balance right while making the opponent lose it ... Existential philosophy has thrown light on central existential phenomena involved in creative performance, with appearance, seduction, commitment and value being the main foci'. (Aggerholm, Jespersen, and Ronglan 2011, 356–357) As Ivana Spasić rightfully stressed in her comprehensive study (Spasić 1996), Goffman's use of the game metaphor for the social world and its interactions is more profound than what he found in game theories of the time. His idea of games is that they are 'world-building activities' (Goffman 1961, 26; from Spasić 1996, 81) where world building is a result of human encounters (social occurrence when people orient to one another in a face-to-face way) which create a realm of meanings that are real for participants and demand, even when the social game is antagonistic, a shared involvement.

Goffman's approach, which examines everyday social interaction as a game, is the most promising of the three social theories, because it has the potential to include sport games as a special case of social interaction without the need to involve the use of metaphor or mimesis. But, all these theories agree that games create an imaginary setting; and that sport games involve body aesthetics and offer aesthetic experience to players and spectators, so that they cannot be studied just as record- or victory-oriented activities. As for the reality status of games, i.e. their relationship with everyday social reality, authors other than Goffman use mimesis, metaphor or metaphoric representation and condensation.

To proceed from this point in the direction of the fundamental features of football aesthetics, we need a more detailed understanding of this kind of contest, and of the status within this contest of the world built with imagination.

### **Contest in Games and Their Reality-status**

A contest can engage different human abilities, or one of them more than the others, and it can happen under different conditions which concern its reality status, and the degree to which the body or whole being is involved. Because of football and other sport games, our interest is focused on those contests which engage two teams in strategic interaction in expressive games, where teams try to hide their next move from each other, or they try to read from its movements what an opponent is trying to do, and to get advantage from that, immediately starting a counter-movement.

To compare intellectual practices in a contest with those which involve the body, we can use the examples of the university dispute and football. Both of them are outstanding strategic games with established rules. Not all intellectual or sport contests are of that kind. A university dispute in the strict sense involves a teacher and an audience in the position of the judge and jury, and two or more active parties arguing pro or contra a certain statement. The first one has to expose the thesis; the other's job is easier because he has just to attack exposed arguments, but is not obliged to prove that the contrary is true. It is a kind of court, but without legal risks. The game framework does not allow for slow thinking and long analysis. Both parties have to react quickly, as in blitz chess—anything else would be embarrassing, and would lead to defeat. Rules for correct argument are involved. Teacher and audience comment on persuasiveness and skill in argumentation on both sides with applause or comments. The outcome of the dispute is in the development of the student's skills of argumentation; to play this game gives them a feeling for those strategies of discourse which allow for the appearance of truthful, or at least better, hypotheses, and/or which open a way to intellectual victory over the opponent. All present have to engage their intellects and ability to follow the most rational way of argument and conclusion, evaluating the whole process; parties involved in a dispute do not necessarily hold to their positions in the dispute for real, but because of the conditions of the dispute it is expected that they take their roles seriously and with passion. They are expected to use intellectual imagination to become seriously involved. It is an intellectual activity which, without engagement of their physical bodies, demands that they embody themselves in the process of developing ideas, concepts and in the overall method of argumentation. This ultimate level may resemble struggles in parliamentary democracy, but it was deadly serious in comparison with other disputes. However, no dispute is worth its name if all parties involved do not play seriously, i.e. with a lusory attitude (Suits 2005, 49).

On the other side is a game of football. Two sides, each consisting of 11 players, have two tasks at the same time: to score, and to prevent the other side from scoring. Their contest is physical, with rules which allow for some forms of contact and disqualify others, and the context demands an advanced ability in body movement together with numerous physical skills, starting from the ability to control the

movement of a ball using mostly, but with some exceptions, just one's feet and head. Intellect is necessary for football's moves, but this intellect is not expressed in rational discourse but in body movement. One has to know the rules, but this is believed to be no obstacle because they are easily learned by anybody. To enter the game, a serious attitude is expected, which means that all players should play for real and with enthusiasm for the game, and with certain level of respect for other players of their own and the opposition team. Confrontation can be harsh and bodies can touch, sometimes with risk of injuries, but any direct violent attack is out of order. Victory is important as much as it is expected that the winners do not exaggerate in their triumph by humiliating losers, if not for any ethical reason then because there is no team which could just win all the time—defeat is an experience nobody can avoid if he or she plays continuously. But what one really needs for football is a certain level of control over body movement which includes control of the ball, control over the movement of teammates and control over the movement of opponents. Mapping movements and their possible outcomes, and reacting to an ever-changing situation, not with a rational consideration of next move, but with the immediate reaction of body movement, is what playing the game is about.

Not all sports are a direct confrontation between two opposed sides which takes the form of a strategic interactions, and not all contests have the character of rational deliberation: football is a sport game because it involves body movement at its core, and it is a contest because it is oriented towards deciding between two parties. On one side, it participates in sport-specific embodiment in a game: on the other it participates in dispute-like confrontation. Football involves embodied confrontation of bodies in movement where each player is trying to follow changes in the situation by taking the right position on the field. Has one to think and make rational decisions about it? Or, does one move automatically following pre-arranged schema learned at training sessions, if there were any? Or maybe one moves without thinking and rational decisions, proving that 'the body thinks'? I do not intend to enter this kind of dispute here. In any of these possibilities, it is imagination which has a crucial impact on individual and team being-in-a-game. One has to be able to see the situation from the position of a teammate expecting a pass, or from an opponent intending to break the defensive bunker. The best players have a vision of the whole field. They even have a feeling for movement behind their backs. All of these involve imagination, but not of an intellectual kind when one imagines what path could the opponent take in an argument, and where one is already prepared to intercept it with a well-prepared refutation. To imagine a football game as an involved actor, one has to be bodily, sensually and perceptually immersed in all the movements happening on the field.

Disputes, as we mentioned, can be 'for real', i.e. they can be organized as disputation which has consequences in real life. Play and counter play are basic elements of all dramatic fiction, but dramatic fiction is not expected to have real consequences. Football is sport, and sports are competitions with results, but these results are not of the same reality status as events in everyday life. It is possible to feel a kind of relief when, after an unjust war has put part of the territory from our country into the hands of an aggressive neighbour, our team defeats them. But everybody knows that a hockey or football victory cannot change real-life circumstances. It has been heard that two parties

went to war, to finish what happened at a football game, but that a real-life dispute was solved by a football game instead of war? In social theories, we found enough use of mimesis, representation, model and metaphor as characteristics of football in relation to (everyday) social life that the status of reality involved in a football game has to be discussed before we enter the aesthetics of football.

Is football mimetic in relation to social reality? 'Mimesis' means to produce the presence of an absent thing by resembling it as much as possible. 'Representation' means standing for something else in its absence, and includes knowing that representation is just what it is: the absence of real presence, but also the presence of something else which is allowed and/or accepted to stand for the absent 'real thing'. Simulation means creation of new layers and worlds which multiply the one and only real world into manifold complex of realities, which sometimes include a process of embodiment of simulated worlds into the real one (the symbolizing process). Mimesis is present in football, but not as its link with social reality as such. When, at Bayern, Guardiola starts to change the pattern of playing the game, his idea is a kind of mimesis of Barcelona's tika-taka system; when any minor team confronts a much better one, they could mime what Mourinho applied in such situations—they mime total defence and destruction of the opponent's game. But mimesis is not a core of football, because football is much more similar to other sport games than to social reality, especially to those with which it has common roots (rugby, American football etc.), and nobody can claim that football is mimetic of rugby, or vice versa. Games are not mimetic, and do not have a tendency to resemble real-life situations as much as possible.

There are moments of representation in football. Each team, on the level of local clubs or national teams, represents its place of origin, or its country; some most traditional rivalries are a fight about such representational status. Latino-American, African and European ways of playing football may represent different understandings of strategic and tactic approach, or even different understandings of football as such. But football as such does not represent something else, not even social reality. Football has a presence of its own.

Simulation has a bad reputation of a fake and misleading pretension, but (as Baudrillard claims) simulacrum is true (Baudrillard 1994, 1). In principle, any metaphor is already a simulation, because by bringing something distant into proximity, and comparing one with the other, it puts *tertium comparationis* in the position of simulacrum. The laboratorial methods of modern science in the greatest part consist of simulation, which is neither mimetic resemblance nor representation of reality but construction of a surrogate reality which can help us to get at the truth. Football, in relation to everyday life, can be taken as simulacrum and surrogate with a life of its own; but, on the other hand, it has to be understood as a place which one can inhabit as a separate world, without any thought about its relationship with other places but that of its advantage over them, including ordinary everyday life. There is no pretence in playing ball: it is for real, but it does not belong to the 'natural' reality as it pre-exists, or exists independently of our imagination. When we use the term 'natural', it means not only nature independent of our social existence but the nature of our social existence as well, because society is always already there and exists independently of our imagination. Football exists independently of our existence or our imagination as one of many institutionalized cultural simulations, but one cannot enter the game of football without use of imagination, because (as simulation) it was and still is constructed by it. This



simulation was initially constructed from the point of view of plebeian culture, and was therefore not part of fine culture or fine sport; this origin was pacified by the association's rules, but it still shows now, when football is the most universally popular sport on the planet.

All three cases of pretence—mimesis, representation and simulation—can be taken as real or as fictitious, and the aesthetic is an important moment of it. But to develop the aesthetic of football calls for some difference in understanding Best's division between aesthetic and purposive sports, and his distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic. From this point of view, football cannot be treated as an aesthetic sport because its purpose is just to score, 'regardless of the manner of achieving the purpose' (Best 1980, 70). If we want to speak about the aesthetic in football after Best, we have to find a way to introduce it into purposive sports. There are two possible approaches to manage it, and both are worth trying.

Firstly, Best uses 'purpose' for purposive sports, and 'aim' for aesthetic sports. Let us look at the direction taken by reforming processes in 'aesthetic' sports concerning measuring aesthetic impression, artistic merit or whatever expression is used in the different sports: the direction is to turn subjective into objective criteria, so that athletes and public would know exactly what is expected, and the final score could be considered objectively fair. That way, 'aesthetic' sports are becoming purposive, but the way to reach this purpose still matters. For instance, in ski jumping a subjective second score given for 'style' is now regulated in a percentage as to which the required elements have in the total score (flight—steady skis and body, no fluttering; landing—regular telemark, and outrun—again steady skis and body, no touching of the ground) which cannot get over 20, and each of the elements is defined in objective terms, so that judges may expect some questioning if their scores differ too much between each other, or, if an individual judge gives a significantly different evaluation than all the others. Is ski jumping a purposive sport? The answer is yes, and its purpose is to jump as far as possible and to demonstrate steadiness and good skill in the air and on the ground. Is ski jumping an aesthetic sport? The answer is yes, because the manner of execution counts. This is not a paradox. There are similar processes of objectification going on in (what is traditionally called artistic) gymnastics, in figure skating and more or less all similar sports which would be given the status of 'aesthetic' sports by David Best. The difference between sports in which only achieved goal counts, and sports where a way of getting there counts as well is not overcome by those changes, but the meaning of the term 'aesthetic' is. It cannot be subjective judgement of taste, as in traditional aesthetics, and it cannot be that different from purposive sports, because these sports now offer more certain purposes to be achieved by the manner of execution: the aesthetic is not without purpose, and the way to achieve aesthetic/artistic/style points is purposive, albeit not in Best's sense.

Secondly, football is definitely a purposive sport. It seems that the manner of achieving the result does not matter. But is the result the only thing that matters when we discuss the aesthetic in sport? What we search for is the aesthetic in playing football as a purposive game; in other words, a position from which the manner of realizing football's purpose does matter. We have to go back to Stoa. Its ethics has an extremely good metaphor which explains the human stance—that of archery. What is the purpose of an archer? Cicero followed the Stoic metaphor in *On Moral Ends* (*De Finibus Bonum et Malorum*): 'For though if a man were to make it his purpose to take a true aim with

a spear or arrow at some mark, his ultimate end, corresponding to the ultimate good as one pronounce it, would be to do all he could to aim straight: the man in this illustration would have to do everything to aim straight, yet, although he did everything to obtain his purpose, his "ultimate end", so to speak, would be what corresponded to what we call the Chief Good in the conduct of life, whereas the actual hitting of the mark would be in our phrase "to be chosen" but not to be desired'. (Cicero 1931, 241) Stoic ethics does not allow for a certain purpose to become our ultimate end. And this is not (just) a moralistic demand: the archer or archeress cannot become successful if they concentrate themselves just upon hitting a target. If they wish to hit the target, they have to consider their ultimate end first, not hitting the target. If this sounds too much like Zen in the art of archery, so popular with my generation during the 1960s, we may consult the great wizard of theoretical psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, who followed the Stoic approach to purposiveness in his own manner. The first important difference concerning the nature of purpose is the one between biological needs and drives (pulsion), because needs could be and are satisfied, but drives cannot. To explain his thought, Lacan here uses English instead of French (!), to introduce the duality of goal and aim. The purpose of a drive is not to reach its goal (a final destination) but to circle around it, which brings about achievement of its aim. Lacan says that aim is about a mission, and mission does not involve (just) reaching or taking something from here to there, or vice versa. It means the way one has to pass: 'I have chosen to notate them here in a language in which they are particularly expressive, English. When you entrust someone with a mission, the aim is not what he brings back, but the itinerary he must take. The aim is the way taken. The French word but may be translated by another word in English, goal. In archery, the goal is not the but either, it is not the bird you shoot, it is having scored a shot and thereby attained your but'. (Lacan 1978, 179; in French: Lacan 1984, 163) If football would be just about the purpose, i.e. the final score, aesthetic sports would be just about beauty expressed by bodies. To win once would be enough. Why bother and try repeatedly if you have already won once? To be defeated next time? Football too, as archery or any other game or play, has a mission, real or fictitious, in real or in pretence. 'In play we have to do with simulated images which may become so vivid and impressive as to be taken for realities'. (Cassirer 1976, 164) As humans, we produce symbolic forms to orient ourselves and to find our place in the world. Here lies something that art and sport, both being symbolic forms, really have in common: to build these otherwise different worlds—symbolic forms, we have to put in action productive imagination, because to play a game of football is an aim which can never be exhausted just through achieving its goal. The weight of football's purpose lies on the manner in which we pass. As much as aesthetic sports have their purpose as well, purposive sports such as football have their aesthetic side, which is not just 'incidental' (Best 1980, 70) but, at least for football players, essential. Without aesthetic imagination, football would be really just a bunch of guys running like mad after a ball all around the field.

### **The Aesthetic Imagination**

Without imagination, there is no play, and there certainly is no game. To get excited by the game of football, as Steffen Borge explained neatly, proves that 'football is fictional in character in the sense that it involves make-believe or pretence ...'

(Borge 2014, 2) My proposal is to take relationship between ordinary world and the pretence which belongs to 'the extra ordinary world of football' (Borge 2014, 1) as simulation, because it is such a well-developed model of strategic interactions within a social group, without some of the reality risks, that it deserves the status of symbolic form in itself (on symbolic forms, see Cassirer 1976). If the reproductive imagination is an association of already produced objects in empirical sense, and productive imagination means the constitution of objects for us in a transcendental sense, then the imagination needed by football players is a sort of productive imagination (on productive imagination, see Kant 1929, 164–165). The field (Borge evokes the inscription above the entrance into Anfield) with symbolic meaning which arises at the players' entrance symbolizes that we are entering another, extraordinary world; each line on the field marks its borders and special zones; the strategic initial position of players on the field expresses their roles in the contest; even the numbers chosen and worn by them have a symbolic appearance and meaning. This investment of symbolic meaning into a field which becomes an extraordinary possible world engages a kind of productive imagination I propose to call the aesthetic imagination. Why the aesthetic? In theories of imagination, aesthetic imagination does not occupy a prominent place, and is rarely mentioned as a special kind of imagination. My proposal to call it aesthetic does not come from traditional aesthetics, which reduced it to the artistic (and, as Best mentions, to the contemplative—Best 1980, 70), to the purity of disinterestedness and to purposefulness without purpose. Here, I propose to understand the aesthetic starting from its original meaning, still present in Baumgarten's founding gesture, which covers sensation and perception together. What our senses get from football is a lot of movement with or after a ball, and in cooperation or against the other players; what perception gets are multiple orientation data about our own movement, and about movement of all the others. This level could be enough for a 100 m race, but it is not enough for football. To play ball, we need a productive imagination which organizes sensual data and their perceptive outcome into a meaningful image. But it is not a kind of productive imagination which produces concepts; neither is it an imagination enabling us to play a role in Doctor Faustus. It is an imagination which enables us to enter the football field as a possible world and symbolic form, and supports our meaningful movement in the game.

'Imagination' in our everyday use means the ability to see or to form images of what is not available to our senses and perception, including the possible outcome of on-going social interactions. As a technical term in psychology it is used differently, denoting a process of reviving perceptions of objects formerly given by the senses. In cognitive sciences and neuroscience, imagination figures nearer to the everyday use and is fundamental to the most important mental processes; as expected from other cases, it does not have one certain centre in the brain from where it would act, but many. Or, in other words: even if there is certain common productive principle of all imagination (production of images), imagination is not a limb, so that we may have one or symmetrically two of them: we have a pack of imaginations. Stretching imagination too far would invest it, however, with too many features of fantasy, which is always producing images which are far away from ordinary and expected reality. In constructing fantastic images, we have to use our imagination as well, but imagination without such fantastic outcomes is used for everyday encounters with reality, as an ability which is not restrained by objective sensual and perceived data, but is still bound by reality because it produces images of what these data

could mean or develop into. When we say that a person has no imagination, we want to say that he or she is deprived of the ability to sense or feel above and outside pure empirical data; they are drowned in immediate existence.

If imagination is so important and so vague, what to say about the aesthetic which has more different and contradictory meanings than there are letters in it?! To avoid all the mystifications invented by aesthetics, it is best to start with the original meaning of aesthesis (sensitivity and perception), and with original meaning of aesthetics (as a lower kind of knowledge, if the higher kind is conceptual). This is what Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten started from, and defined the aesthetic as lower knowledge consisting of the recognition of an individual thing from all of its many perspectives using abilities of sense and perception. This knowledge (in his interpretation) gets an articulated response and consequence in language. The aesthetic statements communicate only sensual knowledge about characteristics of the individual thing and no conceptual knowledge on common, general or universal features of the world. But—and that has to be added to Baumgarten's approach to the aesthetic—the consequence of the aesthetic knowledge, beside its articulation in a linguistic form, gets a form of response in body movement. If the aesthetic is about what attracts us and what we disagree with, or recognize as repulsive, then our primordial reaction is not articulated in a statement but in a bodily reaction of attraction or repulsion. Whatever the information about the world, it is equipped with an attitude, and from this attitude, if it is strong enough or if we pay attention to it on purpose, imagination builds our response in the form of body movement, i.e. we are all the time in a process of embodied responsiveness.

A special kind of responsiveness is simulation. Research into simulation as a tool for understanding others (and perhaps anthropologizing non-human beings) in cognitive and neuroscience has been focused on mindreading. Because we cannot read the mind of the other directly (which some would still claim is possible), we use simulation in two ways: mirroring and self-projection (Waytz and Mitchell 2011, 197). Mirroring, known from long before, got most of the attention after 'mirroring neurons' were discovered. It is the ability to experience the same states of mind as another person. Self-projection is the reverse phenomenon of imagining one's self in the position of the other. We have to keep in mind, however, that theories of simulation and imagination deal specifically with mindreading, which is part of an old science of physiognomics: we 'read' other people's minds through their body signs and overall outlook. In case of football and other games, where the movements of players are essential for following the development of the game, and therefore for being-in-the-game, we are interested in mindreading only vicariously, because the intention is already known from the rules of the game and because what we are interested in is the players' next move. Also, as a player, one does not have time to deliberate much on the others' or one's own mind processes; one has to react with one's own movement to movements of all the others. What we want to 'read' is not the other's mind but his or her next move. The original model of the simulation approach was oriented towards the mindreading of propositional attitudes, while later variants put intentional motions forward, and included the social cognitive component and the social perceptual component. They make a distinction between a low and high level, where the low level is slow, reflective and controlled, and the high level is fast, stimulus-driven and automatic. This suggests that movement-reading, if taken as something similar to mindreading, reads movements as

unfinished, non-propositional, intentions woven into a pattern of all other movements which are part of a game, where game is taken as a social construction, i.e. it has some laws of movement together with, but also beyond, rules of the game. Following the movements of others with the response of one's bodily movement demands both mirroring and self-projection, and both imagination and simulation. It even reads the movement of the ball as if it has an intention. Goldman and Jordan call this 'the power of imagination': 'It follows that if simulational mindreading is to succeed, imagination must be highly precise mechanism, capable not only of generating suitable pretend states but of firmly holding their progeny in mind while a multi-step simulational exercise unfold'. (Goldman and Jordan 2013, 15) Enactment imagination (to enact a state of another person) is not enough to explain how the social game of football is possible at the phenomenal level. Goal-directed motor action, as Waytz and Mitchell call it (Waytz and Mitchell 2011), has to use imagination on all levels of embodied cognition: 'In suggesting that the human mind uses at least two forms of simulation (i.e. mirroring and self-projection, L.K.), these findings support a view of social cognition as a collection of mental processes, each specialized for making sense of others under specific circumstances'. (Waytz and Mitchell 2011, 199)

In mental processes that are specialized for football, there has to be the ability to follow the game with one's bodily movement, enacting these movements by reading the movements of the others, and the movement of the ball, as intentional movements, and to produce an immediate reaction to these movements and their potential intentions with your own bodily movement. Imagination and simulation have to include both mirroring and self-projection, and provide for seeing oneself as part of an evolving situation, i.e. experiencing one's own position and movement as seen from the position of the other(s). Seeing oneself immersed in a social situation which one has to read with the support of mirroring and self-projection needs a special kind of imagination which enables me to play my own game as part of the game of my teammates and our opponents, and at the same time not just read the others' intentions or react to these intentions with my own movement, but produce for myself a movement which my teammates can read and my opponents may not. This is what I call aesthetic imagination, because in playing the game I put myself into a picture which involves much more detailed information and a response to it than one could ever collect just by senses and perception. Imagination is not just a prerequisite for mindreading; it is also a consequence of the mirroring and simulation which makes possible the completion of the following of the game by my own movement. Whatever automatism may be learned through training and other preparations for a game, to be in the game requires an active imagination which gives me a picture of the whole moving process that is going on, and not just what I can directly experience and perceive from my physical position and point of view in the game.

Therefore, two kinds or parts of imagination are involved in playing the game of football.

### **The Aesthetic Imagination in Football**

The aesthetic imagination, understood in a broader sense than the artistic imagination, is not discussed as much as some other kinds of imagination, and is used

mostly in support of artistic and aesthetic education in schools from elementary level up (with Maxine Greene as best known promoter and theorist; the article 'The Role of Imagination in Aesthetic Experience' by Anne Shepard is a good example of the systematic development of Greene's intentions) (Greene 1995; Shepard 1991). Here, it is used in accordance with the Kantian tradition and his German term *Einbildungskraft*, which at the same time evokes production of images, power of creativity and an ability to educate oneself into a complete person (as in famous German term *Bildung*). Without re-opening a well-developed conflict on the distinctions and similarity of imagination and fantasy, which Kant endorsed with his distinction between productive and reproductive imagination, from this pedagogic tradition of dealing with the aesthetic imagination we may conclude that there are at least two kinds of aesthetic imagination which cannot be reduced to pure fantasy, or to simple representation of the sensual experience to higher abilities of our mind. For one, there is an attitude of as-if or make-believe which we are capable of in relationship to fiction, knowing that it is fiction, but taking it as if it would be for real. Second, there is an aesthetic imagination involved with our orientation within reality because we domesticate this reality by embracing and reshaping it with and into symbolic forms produced by ourselves. The aesthetic imagination is the building of new possible worlds which may not exist in our reality, but can be imagined as possible, while utopias cannot because they are absolutely impossible—utopias can only be conceptually constructed. In his *Poetics*, Baumgarten builds a whole scale of imaginative structures. This scale includes differentiation between those fictions which are not possible in the existing world and those which are impossible in all possible worlds. The first, relatively impossible, i.e. impossible only if we insist that our existing world is the only reality, are called heterocosmic, the other is absolutely impossible and is therefore called utopian. Heterocosmic fictions are poetic because we can construct their images, while it is not possible to produce any image of the utopian, i.e. absolutely impossible worlds, so that utopias are not poetic—they demand a form and discourse of conceptualized treatise, but do not allow for images (Baumgarten 1985, 40). These ways of aesthetic imagination have something in common: with the use of imagination, we experience sensually and perceptively given data differently to the way in which we do in everyday life, be it in a make-believe way, or in the symbolic forms into which we embrace the world, or with the creation of new possible worlds.

As a team sport of social interactions with a ball and a determined goal, football involves many kinds of imagination, but not all of them are typical or essential. Aesthetic imagination, in all of its appearances mentioned above, is essential for football.

The first case, that of as-if and make-believe, which is a prerequisite for experiencing art, is something you want to enforce upon your opponents and escape in your own case. As a player, I want my opponent to get a fictitious image of my movement, and I am using all my skills with the ball and my body to give him or her false, fictitious, ideas about my intentions. On the other side, I want to 'read' his or her movements without falling for his or her ability to create fiction inside reality—a lime twig to catch an unaware and naïve player. This does not happen just in the individual face-to-face encounter. Both teams create collective make-believe appearances, and try to produce fictitious consequences in the other team's movements. On both sides and in both cases, to create as-if reactions in the opponent, or to fight against falling under his or her fictitious spell, means a use of imagination. Football is a contest of the

imaginations as well as a contest of physical, body skills. Kenneth Aggerholm (Aggerholm, Jespersen, and Ronglan 2011) explains the steps of the feint as attracting attention, seduction and commitment. Seduction is a show of false intentions on both sides, which has to be executed so that it still allows the following of the goal of a game. To follow the game, all the players, divided in two teams, have to use their aesthetic imagination; falling to a feint means that what seemed to be real imagination turns out to be just a fantasy. Aggerholm refers to Kierkegaard and Baudrillard who call the drama of seduction 'a spiritual duel' (Aggerholm, Jespersen, and Ronglan 2011, 350). In case of football, this duel is a duel of embodied aesthetic imaginations.

The second kind of use of the aesthetic imagination, that of building symbolic forms which change the meaning of the real world, is best described by an antagonistic and anti-symbolic description of football from the point of view of its 'aliens': 'a bunch of blokes running after a ball like mad'. One cannot really enter the game of football without adopting its symbolic form of extraordinary strategic social interaction without words, using just body movement. To see that football is really a game of strategic social interactions is necessary for watching it, and a step from seeing a bunch of running blokes with a ball to watching a football game means using the imagination. It has already become proverbial that this step is so easy that anybody can start to enjoy football. But to play football needs more than that: to see one and the others actually involved, acting with intention where this intentional action is generated by the rules of the game, does not allow for a gap between watching and doing. When watching, we may react with comments and start to analyse what is going on. What we do is follow the development of a game through our own eyes. To follow the development of a game as a player, one has to watch it with different eyes and from a different level, never at peace and all the time adjusting body movement. The aesthetic imagination demands that players inhabit symbolic forms in embodied reality, not just in their heads or in virtual possible worlds. Baumgarten's imagination which produces heterocosmic possible worlds as poetic fictions might be adapted to explain what kind of imagination one needs to watch football. To play it, to be in one of the possible worlds of symbolic forms, and still remain in this real world, just changing the meaning of what goes on as mere 'running after a ball', demands that a player sees himself or herself at the same time from the position of the strategic spectator, mapping the game and his or her position in it, and from the ground where he or she moves to create opportunities and to ruin opportunities for opponents. Without imagination, which accepts football to be a symbolic form and opens an entrance to its embodied inhabitation, this cannot function. And the world of football is not virtual but simulated. A virtual world is a world which we inhabit through an avatar, and for that we still use pretention together with imagination. A simulated world we have to live in for real, and to accept its symbolic form and meaning as our own life world.

At first, we enter the new symbolic world of football and accept it as one of our possible worlds. When we do that, we soon find out that this is not enough to play the game. Players would like to progress with their skills to cope with the game better, if not for other reasons, and to be able to win as a team and to excel as an individual player. There are many necessary skills which we have to learn and to learn better, from physical conditions to control of a ball, and perhaps a bit later we arrive at mastering tactical and strategic skills. To be able to do so, we have to introduce the aesthetic

imagination as a special skill that comes to be necessary once we are inhabitants of the world of football due to the first kind of aesthetic imagination.

The aesthetic imagination in football is necessary because football is a game which, as the best simulation of social strategic interactions among competitive team games with physical contact, demands that we enter football's symbolic form of the imaginary world with the right pretence, and inhabit this fiction with body movement which is able to read the body movements of all the other players.

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**Lev Kreft**, Department for Philosophy, University of Ljubljana, Askerceva 2, Ljubljana 1000, Slovenia. E-mail: [lev.kreft@guest.arnes.si](mailto:lev.kreft@guest.arnes.si)