

# Play Grounds: The Arenas of Game

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This talk will be a reflection on the relations between architecture and the spaces of play, gaming and sport. What is play space, I will ask, and what might be the spatial grounds of play? Can one say that when space is set aside for play, space itself must always then come into play?

There are two architectures of sport. One is the kind with which, in this age of the stadium, we are all-too-familiar; the rising, resounding torus or hollow O of the classical sports-stadium, its tiers of seats hemming the space of contention marked out below. On the outside, such edifices routinely effect some kind of compromise between high and high-visibility technology and the fluency and grace of 'natural' formations, an habituated conversation between girders and swerves that duplicates the two features of industrialised sport-as-entertainment. As stadiums are required to deliver more and more functions – restaurants, accommodation, office facilities, communications, commerce, the stadium has become a playspace for architects and civic bodies.

But the space constituted by the physical stadium is ultimately accessory to another space, a space that by definition it contains, and with which it must of necessity be conjoined, but from which it must also always stand not only physically but also ontologically apart, namely the space where the play occurs. The role of the stadium is to allow the access to this space, to accent, enhance and amplify it, while also standing apart from it, most particularly by preventing encroachment. The stadium both opens and comprehends the space of play, both discloses it, and closes it off.

On the one hand, then, there are the spaces of play. On the other, there is the play of space that is set on within the space of play. I want to try to understand some of the traffic between these two. There are other such arenas, where space is set off in order that space may be in various ways be put into play – courtrooms, cinemas, dancehalls, art galleries, theatres – but, as the prominence in such discussions of the word 'arena' might itself suggest, the spaces formally set aside for playing as such may have a particular salience and command.

Indeed, as we will come to see, such spaces may be beginning to impinge upon whatever space is left that is not in play.

## Decisions

The space of play is carefully patrolled, to the millimetre. For there can be no mid-space, no space between secular space and the space of play. Either the ball has wholly crossed the line, and it is a goal, or it has not, and play will continue from where it left off. If a lace from the fielder's boot be in contact with the boundary rope when he takes the lofted catch, it will be four runs; if not, the batsman walks. If the ball is deemed to have clipped the line – betrayed by the puff of chalk or detected by the automatic sensor – there may be a new grand slam champion; if it misses, the player's chance may have receded forever. In this sense at least, in its implacable abhorrence of the middle way, its intolerance of any *tertium quid*, there is obviously no room for play in the space of play.

What is more, these boundary decisions are not just effected at the extreme edges of the field of play. Similar caesuras shear through the play itself, the play being textured by the alternation between states of play and suspensions of play, playtime and time-out. Thus the space of play is not entirely spatial. Rather it is the place where the space and time of play are decided on. There can be endless reopening of the case of the dubious LBW or penalty decision among the spectators in their seats and in their subsequent generations, but there can be no two minds, no equivocation, no agreement to differ, no fancy *Aufhebung* lifting and preserving the thesis and antithesis in a new synthesis, in the matter of play. Instead, play solicits and precipitates decisions at each moment, forking paths that mimic and confirm the anterior and ultimate deciding on the space of play as a space of decision – from *caedere* to cut, which engenders a sizeable clan of similarly incisive words in English, including *scissors*, *abscission*, *circumcision* and the sadly obsolete *occision*, which provides a passage to the many words that link deciding with cutting down or cutting off – *homicide*, *suicide*, *genocide*, and so on. Yes, yes, there is a fatality in play. Hence perhaps the striking difference, as Jean Baudrillard has articulated it, between a rule of play and a law in social life:

A rule can be perfectly arbitrary in its enunciation, but it is much more unbreakable than the “law,” which can be transgressed. You can do anything with the law. With the rule, on the other hand,

either you play or you don't play. If you play, the rule is implacable. You can't get round it. It would be idiotic to transgress it. (Baudrillard 1987, 92).

The stadium effects the opening, the admission without access, to this arbitrary and absolute space of absolute arbitrations. In play: that is to say, in crisis.

It is for precisely this reason, that the crisis of play runs quietly and cleanly through the middle of it, that, in the space of play, space is neither given nor fixed. Instead, it is absolutely in play, which is to say, the subject of contention. Although teams have their own territories, their own end-zones, the point of every game is that such ground is dubitable, impermanent, in contention. The space of play is a mutable product of the play itself. In rugby for example, the two team's territories slide back and forth like the shuttle of a loom, as determined by the 'gain line', or front feet of the attacking team. *In extremis*, the defending team's territory may have diminished to a strip of ground fifty yards across and one foot wide. The difficulty of explaining the offside rules in rugby and more especially in football arises from the fact that it requires just this Einsteinian wrench from absolute to relative space.

We will repeatedly have to cope with the following contortion. The space of play is set off, by an act of pure decision, by the simple decision to decide the matter. In this space of play, space is decidedly *in play*, in a way that it is not in spaces not so marked off. And yet the play of space is not always limited to the space of play. Space will increasingly prove to be in play not just within the designated spaces of play, but also between those spaces and those spaces that adjoin, administer and attend on them. Wherever there is a space of play, there is a chance for the play of space within it to propagate beyond and across that constitutive division. The space of play is a semi-conductor, a black box, which is closed off on one side and open on the other.

This complexity unfolds in a number of different dimensions, of which I will for the time being distinguish five: interiority, orientation, height, proximity and time.

## Inside-Out

Interiority and exteriority are particularly in play in a sports arena.

The arena itself is a surrounding, an environment, a setting, a local habitation and an enclosure for the field of play. It is the *darin*, the *within-which* within which the sporting action plays out. If an open space is necessary for any kind of game, the bounding of that open space is also requisite. Play needs space in which to occur, but even more fundamentally, play is agoraphobic. The enclosed space of play is itself intensive, an interiority with respect to the sequestering clinch of what surrounds it. When the ball leaves the space of play, it is called 'out', and the lookers on in the enclosing stadium are an indeterminate outside to that which they have as their inside.

And yet the inverse also seems true: the game transpires in an open enclosure, which is usually unsheltered, subject to the vicissitudes of rain, wind and sun, compared to the spectators, who will usually have immediate access to the facilities characteristic of the indoor – lavatories, electricity, catering, communications and so forth. Thus the teams 'come out', and the action transpires 'out on the field'. The most striking feature of a stadium is the fact that it really has no interiority. When one enters a stadium, one finds at its innermost core aperture, exposure and expanse. A stadium has two exteriors; the outside that bounds and surrounds it, and the open expanse which it itself bounds and yet, for that reason, in a Heideggerian sense, 'opens'. The field of play and the stadium which surrounds it are configured as a Klein bottle – at once each other's inside and outside. The interior portions of a sports arena lie between the outside and the evacuated middle, in a compact zone or *périphérique*, the rind that separates the outside of the stadium from the pitch or ground that constitute the outerness at its heart.

There is a tendency to regard the enclosure of modern sports as part of the creation of passive spectacle out of participative action. According to this view, the sports activity which had previously consumed or spread out into an entire space, taking over a market square or even entire villages, is split between players and spectators, which turns the entire activity of sport into a form of display or exhibition rather than a *mêlée*, a mixed or mingled striving. An important accessory feature of this newly restricted economy of sport is the almost total concentration on human action – for the medieval world, sport was unthinkable without the involvement of animals, as quarry or accomplice, in hunting, hawking and so on.

The removal of the spectators from the action is equivalent to the isolation of the spaces of sport, which detaches them from the spaces of ordinary life and work. If it is true that in one sense sport seems more diffused than ever before – with runners a familiar sight on the streets of almost every major city (even those, like Tokyo and Amsterdam, that call for the greatest powers of alertness and endurance), and sport ubiquitous in print and electronic media – it also seems more insulated, or partitioned off than in previous eras, as sports facilities have become more and more 'artificial worlds' (Dietrich 1992, 24).

The separation of protagonists and spectators is often seen as equivalent to the great enclosures – of infants, the insane, the infirm, the criminal, the animal – that, according to Foucauldians, have sliced and diced the plenitudinous hurly-burly of the pre-modern. John Bale has tried to bring alternative evidence to bear, pointing out that, for every sport in which spectators have become more sedated and sedentary, there may be another sport – cricket and tennis would be good examples – in which spectators are becoming more raucous and assertive (Bale 1995, 316). However, the degree of apparent involvement between players and spectators is only an accessory symptom. For in fact, in any game played before a crowd of spectators, the game is always suffused from top to bottom with this condition of *being-for* its spectators, which can be emphasised or overlooked, but can never be minimised. Young boys who develop the skills of commentating on their game even as they are playing it exhibit an intuitive understanding of this interinvolvement of player and spectator. Players are nowadays increasingly required to offer commentary, in some games actually during the course of play. To play is to be inside and outside the game, to be player and spectator at once. The space of play thus begins to put the space between it and the space outside it into play.

## Orientation

The space of the stadium is theatrical, in the sense that the space is both literal and ideal, both particular and general, both this place *hic et nunc*, and an any-place-whatever. Sport, like John Donne's love, 'makes one little roome, an every where' (Donne 1965, 70). There is always some kind of home advantage in any stadium (though many stadiums are in fact not owned and occupied by particular teams or even particular sports). But the actual field of play is in fact the paradoxical particularisation of a general set of relations –between service line and net, corners and touchlines, goalposts and penalty spots – that produce a layout that is in essentials exactly the same whether the teams line up in

Brighton or Beijing. This is the first of many intersections that characterise the stadium – between place and space, here and anywhere.

Sports arenas evolve as a circling of squares, a smoothing out of corners, and an ensphering of edges. The resilient rectangle of the oxymoronic 'ring' in boxing is the obvious exception to this tendency. Bullfights in southern Spain originally took place in the central square, overlooked on four sides by high buildings, with spectators stationed at the windows and balconies. As the bullfight was relocated to a sandy arena, the area of combat became a circle, with the seats arranged tightly around it. Football stadia exhibit the same evolution. A lowly non-league club will usually only run to one stand, either on the left or the right hand side of the pitch. As the club's fortunes increase, stands may be added at either end, and gradually the awkward spaces at the corners grouted in. Finally, the most successful clubs will aspire to a purpose-built stadium, in which the pitch will be circumscribed by an unbroken oval, maximising seating and visibility on the inside while closing it off from the outside. Sports stadia tend, in other words, towards the creation of sealed or introverted environments, in an instance of the generalised 'air-conditioning' that, according to Peter Sloterdijk, characterises modern spaces. As the form evolves, it tends towards the dome or the globe, in which there is no priority of viewpoint, in which orientation gives way to omnispectivity and opacity is purged in ostentatious appearance. The dome is supplemented by the technological enhancements which ensure that all viewers have access to the authoritative view provided by the video cameras. The promise of the dome is that one can be everywhere at once. Its ritual enactment is the Mexican wave, traditionally performed as a sour comment on a boring match, but enacting a utopian assertion of the identification of the crowd with the energetically orbital forms and mobilities of the stadium.

Stadia are all designed to look cosmic, or at least extraterrestrial. They imply circuits, orbits and zodiacs, rather than a topology of positions. The form of the stadium is mimicked in the running-track, which doubles the stadium's enclosing form, and yet is part of the space of play. According to John Bale, the running track helps confirm the stadium as an Augéan 'non-place' or 'placeless plane' (Bale 2004, 38). The enclosed, perfectly-level, precisely-calibrated running-track is the endpoint of an evolution 'from being an unspecialized, unsegmented and non-territorialized place to becoming close to an isotropic plane surface' (Bale 2004, 38). It is for this reason that Bale can assert that '[t]rack is one of the most placeless of sports and in few, if any, other areas of life is there so much pressure for one place to be the same – exactly the same – as any other of its kind' (Bale 2004, 39). The closed loop of the running track

epitomises the tendency towards placelessness in modern stadia more generally, confirming Bale's judgement that '[t]he modern sports landscape can be described as tending towards “placelessness” in its geographical sense of places looking and feeling alike with “dictated and standardized values” ' (Bale 1995, 318).

This flaunted surpassing of the phenomenological requirement of oriented perspective must purge or suppress the archaic or surviving traces of orientation. This became strongly apparent to Arsenal supporters when they moved from their traditional four-square stadium to the new Emirates stadium. The rivalrous versicle and response that used to be exchanged between parishioners of the North, South, East and West stands at Highbury suddenly had no purchase in a stadium where there were no breaks in the continuity of the seating. One is never likely to build up loyalty to the *genius loci* of the Orange Quadrant as one has done to the North Stand, the Kop at Anfield, or the Shed at Chelsea.

But, as they persist through time, stadia may decay back into orientation, become susceptible to the phenomenological drag of listing, orientation, laterality. The uniform space of the stadium becomes pulled out of shape, as the open space of sensory awareness is pulled out of shape in the sensory homunculus, with its massive puffy lips and clownish hands. The uniform distribution of temperature becomes a meteorological landscape, in which hot-spots of attentiveness and intimacy are sprinkled across dark zones of indifference or abandonment.

Of course, the greatest obstacle to the alateralism of the stadium is the game itself, in which the antagonism of the two sides is indispensable and irreducible. But this is an antagonism which aims to reproduce the white uniformity of the stadium not by abstracting space, but by saturating it with movement.

At the beginning of the game, there is the immaculate, moist, geometrical green of the pitch, the wicket, the court. It represents possibility, it is possibility itself, like a wind-razored dune or the white witness of a field of fresh snow. Its laser lines are out of Euclid, abstract, absolute, unearthly, as though they were lines of light, or the luminous idea of lines. When the actual lines are doubled by electronic lines that enable one to determine absolutely whether a line has or has not been crossed, as in the system in use in tennis, the line moves even further towards the condition of electronically-absolute geometry. Anything can happen in a space like this. The form of the stadium mimics and substantiates this dwelling in possibility. When we say that we 'draw a line in

the sand', we mean to dignify the act of establishing some *arché*, some absolute, originating, governing distinction between that and this, then and now. But the real *arché*, the real *archi-ecture*, is the condition of absolute openness, allowing any and every line to be drawn, of any breadth, in any direction, but before any line, any direction, has actually appeared.

The moment play begins, this perfection, this pregnant vacancy, will be ruined irretrievably. With the first moment of play, the equilibrium of possibility is broken in on by choice, or hazard: will I kick long or short, serve wide or narrow, cut, glance or drive, pitch the ball up or try a bouncer? I am absolutely free in the space of play, that is to say, absolutely constrained to make a move to inaugurate the play of space. The only choice not available is the choice of remaining in the condition of being able to choose anything. As the play develops, it will leave its traces in the pitch, to the bitter Platonic rage of groundsmen the world over. The open space will become striated by the play, deeply rutted in certain areas, the goalmouth, the service line, relatively untouched in others. The apparition of essence will decay into a scarred cartography of accident.

The space is now no longer topographical, but rather topological. It is folded and refolded, its fixed distances subject to stretching, twisting, tilting and contraction. But this then creates the possibility of a passage beyond orientation. We can understand this in terms of the distinction that Michel Serres draws between the 'scenography' and the 'ichnography'. In the scenography, space is broken up, differentially distributed. It is diacritical, allowing for *fort* and *da*, over there and right here, locking one in location, in fixed intervals and distances. The ichnography is a mapping not of spaces, but of passages, itineraries and traversals and reversals, all of them more or less lateralised, off-balance, or like the Earth in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 'Mov'd contrarie with thwart obliquities' (Milton 2007, 229, 8.132) For Serres, the ichnography approximates to the ensemble of possible profiles, the sum of horizons... It is the complete chain of metamorphoses of the sea-god Proteus, it is Proteus himself (Serres 1995, 19). The ichnography is an integral of all actual and possible movements, a white totality, not because it is blank and therefore open to any possibility, but because it is a white noise, a brass rubbing as opposed to a blueprint, a spectrum compounded of every colour, a map at once obliterated and reconstituted in the scribbled blizzard of itineraries.

The practice of changing ends, to ensure that both teams suffer the same advantages and disadvantages of any variation in the pitch or other imbalance, belongs to the logic of the ichnography, for it creates equality, not by erasing



the space, but by maximally overwriting it, creating an equivalence between the logic of *neither...or* and that of *both...and*. The tendency of sports practised in the 'fourth-generation' arenas and stadia described by Rod Sheard of the giant architectural firm HOK Sport (Inglis 2001, 254-7), which is to say practised amid the networks of communications that such structures imply and implicate, is to move further towards this integral, for example, by action replays, that overlay unique instants, aggregating different angles, or by the data that integrates the action of this particular game with others elsewhere or in the past. Before the game begins, the stadium is an anorientated space of pure play. The beginning of the game forces a lurch away into orientation. But then the play of space begins laboriously to engender the return to an anorientated condition.

Denied physical access to the space of play, the crowd participates in the play of space through sound. There is of course an element of location and laterality in the singing and chanting of the crowd, which aims to enlarge the space of play and enhance the fortunes of one side or the other. But, like the game played on the pitch, the game of sound is played out in the attempt to annihilate the very space in which the play is taking place. The crowd aims at saturation, and the form of the stadium amplifies the tendency of sound to go in all directions, minimising sound's occasions and maximising its powers of expansion and propagation. Simultaneously a megaphone and the amplifying ear it lends itself, the stadium is an auto-auditory apparatus. The stadium prolongs and accelerates sound, giving encouragement to the ambition to make of the sound a kind of architecture or textured mass in its own right, a muniment of din to crush the opposing team. The victory at which orientation – one side opposed to another – aims is not that of one side over another, it is the obliteration of laterality, and the assertion of the one-and-all. This second neutrality or 'no-side' resembles the neutrality of the opening of the match, except that it is a uniformity not of vacancy but of assimilation. As Serres writes, 'The cause and goal of a squabble are the taking of a place, and noise occupies space. The whole point is to hold, occupy, or take a place... Noise against *noise*. Noise against weapon. Noise is a weapon that, at times, dispenses with weapons... And noise occupies space faster than weapons can' (Serres 1995, 52). As on the pitch, the play of sonorous space is formed from the desire to put an end to the play, and the space of sonorous *agon* is preserved and renewed by the contrary efforts of the rival supporters to extinguish space by cramming it with sound.

## Up and Under

Perhaps the most important instance of orientation is the relation to gravity. There is a certain aspiration to height in nearly all games. The cup is raised high above the winning captain's head, while the losing team measure their defeated lengths on the pitch. Typically, the stadium rises sharply above the pitch, receding at as steep an angle as is necessary to optimise both visibility and comfort. In a stadium, one essentially looks not at but down on the play. But there is a zone of height that the spectators do not occupy, namely the indeterminate area of play above the pitch. The dimension is unlike the other dimensions of play in that it is both invisible and infinite. There is usually no theoretical limit to this zone. The ball can be struck or kicked as high as a player is capable, and will remain in play. A few years ago, an aerial camera was introduced to cover rugby internationals at Paris's Stade de France. The camera shuttled along a line strung over the pitch, diagonally from corner to corner. The plan was abandoned, not just because the straight-down coverage it offered lacked all dynamism, but also because a camera in the apparently spare and untenanted space above the pitch was in fact a trespass into the limitless but included dimension of the upper air. It was as intrusive and in the literal sense transgressive, stepping across a line, as a camera on the pitch would be.

And yet the ground does not represent simple lowering. For many games, the scoring of goals or points is achieved by a triumphant grounding or touching down of the ball. In football, in which the goal acts as a surrogate ground, the motion is often completed by the player's ritual celebrations of the fact of scoring, which may involve a dramatic slide, either on the knees, or face down, with arms wide in a kind of magnificent, skidding prostration. Far from achieving height, the climax of the game is a kind of *superbitas* of abasement. Whatever is achieved in the time and space of play is achieved against the pull of time, fatigue and gravity, to which the players must eventually succumb. Victory is achieved over this succumbing not by disavowing it, in feeble spasms of levitation, but through the exaltation of *cadenza*, or dying fall.

There is much that is resistant to upwardness in a stadium. Greek amphitheatres often took advantage of natural slopes or gradients, and were carved out of the side of hills. The fact that, before the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989, the term 'terraces' was the favoured synecdoche for the stadium itself suggested that the space was carved out of earth rather than constructed upon it. The stadium is always a kind of pit or declivity, scooped or gouged out. Although many stadiums do rise high, the effect of the elevated perspective is to suggest looking down into the earth, rather than down on to

it, as would be the case from a tall building. The habit of filming or photographing stadia from above assists this sense that they are to be thought of as craters rather than eminences.

There is evidence that what David Larmour calls the 'agonal space' of Greek theatrical and athletic events was often synchronised with the passage of the sun across the sky (Larmour 1999, 134), a practice recalled in the 'day-night' cricket matches, inaugurated at the Sydney Cricket Ground by Kerry Packer in 1978, which begin in early evening and are concluded under floodlights. This is, in the strict sense, an 'orientation', inaugurated by the rising of the sun in the east, but the lateral passage of the sun also involves a sinking into the west. One of the effects of the closed circle of the stadium is to mitigate the ill effects of the low sun, though it remains enough of a factor in cricket grounds and tennis arenas to function as a distributor of advantage. For all its celestial annulations and concentricities, the stadium has a stronger affinity with the gorge, chasm or quarry, and other spaces of chthonic excavation, than with the heavens. Hence, perhaps, the favouring of the rainbow or arch form in stadium architecture, which seem to emblematised the up-like-a-rocket-down-like-a-stick parabola of all sporting aspirations.

Although the crowd has a kind of perspectival advantage in looking down on the pitch – for seats at ground level rarely afford a very animated or informed view of the game – they are actually marooned in their elevation, which represents a fundamental exclusion from the field of play. Although players may occasionally climb into the crowd at the end of the match, most notably in the old Wembley, when players had to undertake a long climb up to the Royal Box – a tradition mimicked by Pat Cash who climbed through the crowd to greet his girlfriend after winning the Wimbledon title – the domain of the players is the underworld. They come out of what is usually called a tunnel, as though from under the earth, and the management team will typically spend the match in a 'dugout', like goblins or other burrowing elementals.

The throwing of light materials, like balloons and streamers on to the pitch and their slow drifting to the ground also emphasises the inexorably gravitational pull to which the stadium is always subject. The floodlights slanting down at the field of play suggest that in the stadium, even brightness falls from the air. The very word *arena* seems to have some reference to this insistent declension. For *arena* means simply sand. Unlike grass, which, though porous, is tightly-textured and therefore relatively impenetrable, sand was strewn primarily to provide drainage, for blood and other bodily issues. (Of course, good drainage is also a feature of the very best grass pitches.) What blood remained to stain

the surface could be removed simply by turning the sand over it, thus visibly inhuming the last traces of the slaughtered beast or mauled combatant. The fact that most stadiums are open to the sky in fact emphasises this lowering tendency of the bowl, which can resemble a sink or sump, and its implicit evocation of the swirling away of wastes. In the days of closely-packed terraces, where one was in constant danger from the weight of the crowd behind and above one, there used to be a very literal signalling of this at the Kop end of Liverpool's Anfield stadium. Since fighting one's way to the crowded lavatories during the match or even at half-time was such an ordeal, many would relieve their bladders, distended by lunchtime pints, *illico*, where they stood, by rolling their copies of the *Liverpool Echo* into a cone and using it as a funnel. The lower down the terraces you were, the more important it was to have waterproof footwear to protect against the cascade.

### **On the Spot**

Stadia offer some strange distortions of scale. In most stadia, the players and the action they unfold are much more vividly visible and seem much closer than they in fact are, as though the space of play acted as a magnifying lens. A player on the pitch a hundred yards away seems clearer and better-defined than a member of the crowd just a couple of rows away.

There used to be a time when proximity to the action was determining. Thus, in theory, nobody could be better placed to make a ruling than a referee, who is in the thick of the action. The supplementation of human vision with automatic sensing devices and with replay facilities is in the process of changing all this. Nowadays, when there is uncertainty about whether a try has been scored in an international rugby match, we may hear the commentators say 'We'll have to go upstairs for a decision on that', meaning, that the referee is about to invoke the advice of an external official who has access to replays of the action provided from a number of different viewpoints. It would be perfectly possible for this fourth official to be sitting in front of his monitors on the touchline, or even under the pitch – and, come to think of it, he may well be, since the point is that it is entirely mysterious where he is. When the referee speaks to him via wireless headset, he never looks in any particular direction, as though to indicate that the fourth official in fact does not inhabit the visible space of the arena at all. He certainly may as well be in the car park as in the gods, for at this point somebody on the other side of the world watching the replays to which the television audience are privy will see and know more, and more quickly,

than the players and referee. The privilege of proximity here yields place to the ecstasy of pantopia.

### **Full Time**

Like sacred spaces, stadiums are outside normal, quotidian time. But where sacred time is parallel to but does not intersect with quotidian time, sporting time, the calendar of events and the chronicle of exceptional encounters and achievements, plays in and out of ordinary time. And, unlike the spaces in which other festivals and rituals take place, sports stadia also make time; they are both batteries and factories of sporting history.

Ordinary, elapsing, progressive time has no place in the experience of the stadium. This is not because time is here stalled or suspended, nor because one is unconscious of the passing of time, even if this may be the experience of the spectators. Rather, it is because in the stadium time is so remorselessly and exceptionlessly materialised. Everything now is time, time solidified, materialised, made palpable and therefore put into play. The game, whatever it may be, from hockey to tennis to volleyball, is an choreographed *agon* of speeds and durations, with the ball, puck or shuttlecock as the switcher and transmitter of these speeds. The struggle against the other team is really a struggle against their time. One side struggles to accelerate time by gaining advantage. If I am 3-0 ahead, I will have wound the clock forward, starving the other team of the time available to them by increasing the work that they must do in it. The other team responds by trying to distend time; to defend is to defer, to hold time open, to maximise the reserve of time that remains.

So, far from being a timeless space, the space of play is gravid and engrained with time. Time here has no transcendence, for it is nothing but its measurement, and everything measures it out. Rather than standing behind or having to be inferred from changes of physical form, time is here absolutely immanent in physical form, which is to say visibly displaced into it. Just as certain medical conditions produce the phenomenon of 'referred pain', pain felt in some other place than the site of an injury, so the space of play produces 'referred time'. For is not pain indeed the primary index of time in play?

All the time, of course, the time is running out, the players attempting to synchronise their chronic fatigue with its elapsing. But there are moments of recoil and resilience, pockets of time in which time is held up. We had a boy in

my school called Nigel Gallop, who played fly-half. He had the ability, at the moment he received the ball from his scrum-half, to hold time up as he leaned, say, to the right, suspended like Aphrodite amid the foam on the tip of his right toe, drawing both his team and the opposing team in the direction of his expected pass, as though with a nudge of his left hand he had tipped up a tray of marbles. But then, as the rest of the field of play slewed away to his right, he would suddenly pivot to his left, to run or kick through the corridor momentarily opened up by his feint. Just as the theory of relativity shows us that light is bent by gravity, so here the space of play was puckered together in one point and stretched out in another. By taking a stitch in time in one part of the field, he purchased for himself a precious rent in time in another. Gaps in space and gaps in time are entirely equivalent. In any sport, an *epoché* or aperture of this kind is a wormhole in time, a *lusus temporis*. The field of play winks and shimmers with these breaches and pockets, opening and closing, actual and virtual. The play of space worked within the space of play is nothing but the fluctuation of these chronotopological compossibilities.

And there are moments in the game at which something like the plenitude of original possibility can be restored. To wait to receive serve, or to try to save a penalty, is to be prepared to move in any direction whatsoever. Michel Serres has evoked this suspension of space-time:

Have you ever kept goal for your team, while an opponent rushes in to take a clean, close shot? Relaxed, as if free, the body mimes the future participle, fully ready to unwind: toward the highest point, at ground level, or halfway up in both directions, left and right; toward the center of the solar plexus, a starry plateau launches its virtual branches in all directions at once, like a bouquet of axons. This is that state of vibrating sensitivity – wakeful, alert, watchful – a call to the animal who passes close by, lying in wait, spying, a solicitation in every sense, from every direction for the whole admirable network of neurons. Run to the net, ready to volley: once again, a future participle, the racket aims for all shots at once, as if the body, unbalanced from all sides, were knotting a ball of time, a sphere of directions, and were releasing a starfish from its thorax. (Serres 1997, 9, translation modified)

Serres sees this as nothing less than the figuring of the soul, as an 'unfurled omnitude'. As opposed to the necessary Dasein, or having to 'be-there' of the animal, soul is 'the kind of space and time that can be expanded from its natal

position toward all exposures' (Serres 1997, 31). But, in the space and time, the time-held-up-as-space of play, one cannot remain in play, that is, in potential. For the space of play is one in which you are always having to make your play, to move to left or right, to stretch or dive. In the space of play, time is always being divided into, decided as space.

## World-Objects

Peter Sloterdijk has suggested that the spatiality of the contemporary world must be understood as a multiplication and diversification of the unifying images of the macrocosm that had reach and purport for previous eras. His three volume work *Sphären* reads human history – philosophical, religious, artistic, political – as the elaboration of different kinds of spheres, or spaces of introversion. The first volume concentrates on 'microspherology', the construction of the intimate and elementary spheres, typified by the simplest dyadic relations between the child and the womb, or mother. The second follows through the macrospherological evolution of larger, more inclusive, and metaphysical spheres, typified in imperial conceptions of the One World, or in Marshall McLuhan's notion of the global village. The third volume proposes, by contrast, that the modern world must be understood nonholistically, and in terms of a polyspherology, which will take account, in a 'multifocal, multiperspectival and heterarchical' manner, of the complex aggregations of different spheres that make up the world (Sloterdijk 2004, 23; my translation). Where the governing metaphor for microspherology is the bubble, and the governing metaphor of macrospherology is the globe, the aptest and most versatile metaphor for the polyspherological condition of the modern world is that of foam: 'In place of the philosophical super-soapbubble, of the All-Monad of the unitary world...there is a polycosmic agglomeration. This may be described as an assemblage of assemblages, a semi-opaque foam of world-making constructions of space' (Sloterdijk 2004, 63-4; my translation).

The stadium seems to be an anachronistic defiance of this global movement away from centring, presence and concentration. The stadium has become the most representative form of secular monument, a space of ludic reflexivity in which cities, nations and cultures offer to image themselves. Arenas are microcosmic, magnifying, monomaniac, monarchical. They feed and famish the craving for the absolute. A stadium is a pompous omphalos, which proclaims itself the centre of the world. This is surely another reason why stadiums always suggest a depression in the ground; the omphalos was the navel of the world

because it reached down into its heart. The most famous omphalos stone in the ancient world marked the place of the oracle at Delphi, the spot where two eagles released by Zeus to fly round the world met, and where Apollo defeated the earth-serpent Pytho, and where, according to a later legend, the Pythian priestess was inspired to prophecy by the mephitic vapours rising from the interior of the earth. The braggadocio profile of the stadium makes us understandably uneasy about it. There is something dangerous, hubristic, barbaric in this attempt to mass the whole world together into one place. There is much in it of the concentration camp – what is a camp, after all, but a *champs*, with champions those who command the field of tourney or battle? All stadia are dangerous places that, whatever the safety measures in place, are much harder to get out of than into. The only way to make stadia completely safe would be to have exits every few rows. But the effect of this would be to diffuse the very cramming and cramping, the very time-trap, from which the energy and excitement of being part of a stadium crowd derive. Many American stadia, which are provided with much more in the way of food and other franchises to tempt the spectators away from their seats, lack the focus of the European stadium for this reason.

Stadia connect back to the tradition in which they functioned as microcosmic concentrations, presumptive worlds; the point of the Roman circus in particular was to emphasise both the reach of the Empire and its capacity to oversee it as though its compass were no more than that of the colosseum – super-vision being precisely the mode of observation requisitioned by this kind of superbowl. And yet emperors and dictators are not always at their ease in the stadium, for it is not entirely clear from what position one may dominate it. A story from the beginning of the modern period of stadium experience makes this point. When the Austrian Emperor Joseph II visited Verona, the Governor of the town laid on a bullfight for him in the town's Roman amphitheatre. The Emperor was led to his seat, and, in the contemporary description offered by the Prussian historian, Johann Wilhem von Archenholz, 'all at once he arrived via a small opening at his seat, and saw in this confined circle all the inhabitants of the town and its neighbouring areas, filling the amphitheatre from top to bottom, who all immediately rose and applauded him. It was a sight that quite knocked the Emperor sideways' - more specifically, 'ein Anblick, der den Kaiser ganz außer sich setzte', 'a sight that set the Emperor quite outside himself' (Archenholz 1785, 2.60-1, my translation). His displacement finds its modern equivalent perhaps in the dilemma of the occupants in the Royal Box: do they join in the Mexican wave pulsating round the stadium and thus surrender their distinction, or do they abstain from it and thus in a sense endure their eviction from the space? Interestingly, stadium rock usually wrenches the round space



of the stadium into a scenography, setting the star and the audience in a more familiar and governable face-to-face relationship.

And yet, stadia help constitute and are themselves taken up in a play of space that throws this microcosmic mirroring off-centre. Not only is the space of play put into play by the fact of its *being-for* the crowd in front of whom it transpires, this play of contention is itself increasingly drawn into relation with a set of other audiences, near and far, in space and time. The stadium has become what Michel Serres calls a 'world-object' (Serres 2001, 179-80). For Serres, a world-object is distinguished by two features. The first is that it is not restricted to any one culture, tradition or locality, but spreads throughout the world, and therefore, itself transported everywhere, provides a kind of portal or *passé-partout* to all parts of the world. The second is a consequence of the first. Serres reminds us that, according to the medieval understanding, an object is that which is 'thrown before' the subject: 'Held by a subject, a technical object acts on other objects, sometimes even on other subjects; all these elements inhabit a spatiotemporal ensemble that is restricted in space and relatively invariant in time' (Serres 2001, 180). But, since they are everywhere, and provide passage to anywhere, world-objects (such as the 'World-Wide Web', for example) are not merely items set out in a world-space. Rather than being disposed in front of us, in the relation of availability signified in Heidegger's relation of *Gestell*, they form a habitat, an *Umwelt*. They are world-objects because we inhabit them as we inhabit the world. The difference between this and other kinds of habitat is that it is not a specific location or coordinated niche in space. Rather it is the opening into the generalisation of environments, the pantopic and panchronic ubiquitousisation of man that Serres has called 'incandescence' (Serres 2003, 216-27).

There have always been games which are open to the world, and perhaps none more than cricket. Whereas most games strive for the perfection of a perfectly even playing surface, that offers no advantage in any direction to either side, cricket assimilates the imperfection of the ground, building entire strategies out of the variable and inevitably entropic state of the wicket. Unlike most other sports, cricket often allows spectators to graze over the pitch during the lunchtime interval; the wicket remains roped off, but one can approach close enough to inspect it and form one's own judgement as to the likelihood of its taking spin on the fifth day. Until it was blown down in a gale in January 2005, a lime tree grew inside the boundary of the Kent County Cricket Ground in Canterbury, requiring the formulation of special local rules: a ball hit into the tree scored four, and a batsman could not be caught off it. Rather than attempting to close itself off from the contingencies introduced by

meteorology, cricket allows itself to be impregnated by them, the better to be able to draw them into play. Is there another game in which fortunes (along with the ball), can swing so dramatically as a result of a cloud covering the sun, and in which players need to pay so much anxious attention to the sky? This provides a match for the careful specifications for playing dice given by Gerolamo Cardano in his *Liber de Ludo Aleae*:

Set the round gaming boards in the middle; if they incline toward you opponent, then the dice box will incline in the opposite direction, and this is unfavorable to you. Similarly, if there is a slope toward you, then the box will be out of plumb in your favor; but if the dice box is not moved, then this does not matter. Similarly, if the board catches the light from the side opposite to you, then this is bad, since it disturbs your mind; on the other hand, it is to your advantage to have the board against a dark background. Again, they say it is of benefit to take up your position facing a rapidly rising moon. (Cardano 1953: 191)

Games like cricket in which the world enters into the play contrast with games which spill out into the world. Perhaps the game in which worldhood is most in play is baseball. As is suggested by Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc* (1968), about a man who manufactures an entire alternative world of baseball history through dice-rolling, baseball is certainly a powerful way of worldmaking. But baseball is most other games in one important respect. The dimensions of the infield, the diamond whose principal apex is the home plate, are absolutely fixed. There must be 90 feet between bases, with 13 feet arcs around each base. The distance from the apex of the pitching mound to the home plate must be 60 feet and 6 inches. But the outfield, which radiates from the central point of the diamond, can be and is, different in every ball-park (Shore 1994, 353). When one asks for a 'ball-park figure', this play between exactness and approximation is called into play. This makes baseball the perfect enactment of the ambivalently open-closed condition of the space of play in sport. Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) exploits and forms itself on this quasi-aperture. The opening scene is set in the Polo Grounds, the stadium where the New York Giants won the epic final game of a three-match pennant-deciding series against the Brooklyn Dodgers on October 3, 1951. The game was won by a home run hit by the Giants outfielder Bobby Thomson. In DeLillo's novel, the ball is caught by a skinny truanting kid called Cotter, who carries it away in secret triumph amid the elation and lamentation of the two teams' supporters. The home-run became known as 'the shot that echoed around the world', partly because of the number of servicemen in Korea who

listened to the match. But DeLillo also reminds us of the fact that news broke during the Giants-Dodgers play-off of the first nuclear test by the Russians. The purloined ball will pass from hand to hand throughout the novel, a perfect enactment of what Michel Serres and Bruno Latour have characterised as a 'quasi-object', an object that, in its passages from hand to hand, acts as a distributor of meaning and subjectivity. DeLillo gives us J.Edgar Hoover's reflections on the proliferations of secrets:

This is what he knows, that the genius of the bomb is printed not only in its physics of particles and rays but in the occasion it creates for new secrets. For every atmospheric blast, every glimpse we get of the bared force of nature, that weird peeled eyeball exploding over the desert – for every one of these he reckons a hundred plots go underground, to spawn and skein.

And what is the connection between Us and Them, how many bundled links do we find in the neural labyrinth? It's not enough to hate your enemy. You have to understand how the two of you bring each other to deep completion. (DeLillo 1997, 51)

The home-run will be both closed and open, complete and incomplete and the peregrinations of that uncompleted home-run will come to constitute the entire 'underworld' of the novel. At once closed and open, the stadium is beginning to constitute and participate in the same play of space. No longer either ancient or modern, it is a new-old transformer and transmitter of times. The stadium may continue to have the archaic look of a mimic world, monomaniacally entire and autistically closed upon itself. But stadia no longer enclose and surpass the world, they suppose and open into it. Where stadia used to be presumptuous imitations of the world, they are now its intimations.

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