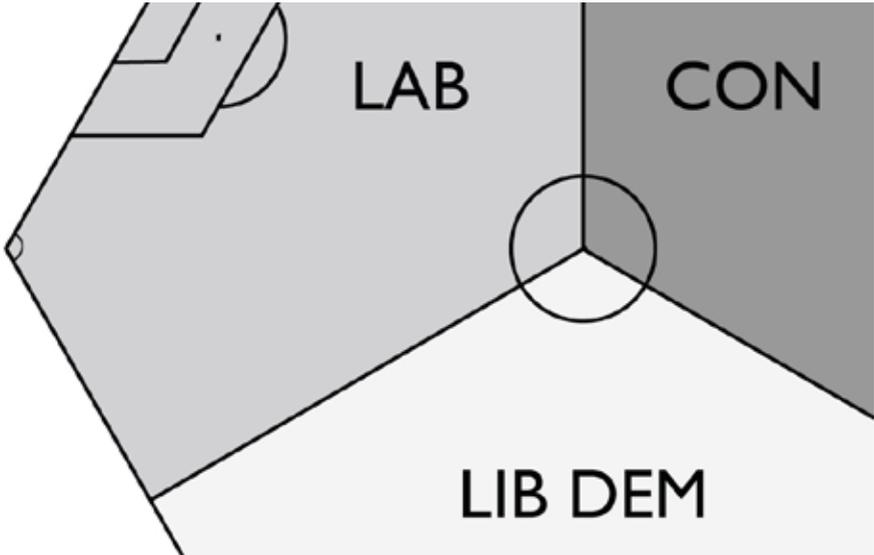


It's a Game of Three Halves

3pm, Sunday 2nd May, 2010

FREE

Haggerston Park, London E2



Three-sided football was conceived of in the 1960s by artist Asger Jorn, whose transgressive intentions are outlined overleaf. While Jorn never actually played a match, it was first played at the Anarchist Summer School in Glasgow in 1993 and later taken up by Italian art collective Luther Blissett, who took their name from the British footballer known for his disastrous 1982 season with AC Milan, allegedly in an attempt to combat identity and fixity, the enemies of communication, through nomadism and collective identity. The game was also played as part of Hackney Anarchist Week in 1996, involving such factions as London Psychogeographical Association and Autonomous Association of Astronauts. For the match today, presented by The Whitechapel Gallery as part of the Writer in Residence programme, Philosophy Football FC have refined the rules, which can be found on the back page.

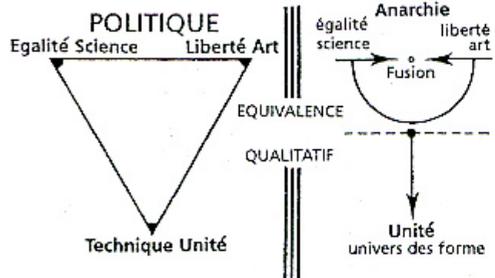
The three teams represent the three main political parties in an attempt to mirror the temporary alliances, shifting animosities and shrewd connivances of the political machine. As the Luther Blissett Three-Sided Football League claims: 'The game deconstructs the mythic bi-polar structure of conventional football, where an us-and-them struggle mediated by the referee mimics the way the media and the state pose themselves as "neutral" elements in the class struggle'. The following text collage will hopefully unravel some of these themes, but, most importantly, we hope that the experience of the game flexes and perplexes in and of itself.

In conjunction with his attempt 'to establish a context in our picture of existence' [...Asger] Jorn had undertaken an intensive study of the work of [Søren]Kierkegaard. Throughout his work, Kierkegaard had developed a habit of thinking in threes as part of his opposition to Hegelianism and the strait-jacket of the Hegelian dialectic triad practiced by so many of his contemporaries in Copenhagen. His main triadic concept, the elective progression from a passive aesthetic stage, through an active ethical one, to a subjective but higher religious stage, gave Jorn, who, despite his predilection for Nordic religious thinkers, was an atheist and an artist, some difficulties. When, however, he came across a book on the philosophy of science which contained a description of 'the normative sciences' of C.S. Peirce as 'the *ethical* which has as its object the good, the *aesthetic*, the beautiful, and the *logical*, the true...', he found a way to mobilize Kierkegaard's thought by substituting the logical for the religious, and by rejecting the idea of three stages in favour of three complimentary units. The transformation of aesthetics, ethics and logic into an analogous triad of health, truth and beauty, in Danish, *skonhed*, *sunhed*, *sandhed*, with its assonance and alliteration, obviously pleased him, for he used it frequently. [...]

There is still the problem of accommodating the uncontested and scientifically demonstrable principle of polarity. Jorn recognizes this by going beyond using dialectical materialism and complementarity as Archimidean points to move each other: 'That was my idea with this work, but the result has become something different. I am firing off artillery to all sides and

trying simultaneously to combine the two principles...'

His first salvo is to combine his triple complementarity with polarity to neutralize the deleterious effects of the latter. He imagines a football match with three teams and three goals. In such a game, the emphasis would change from scoring goals against a single opponent to preventing two other opponents from scoring. The match would be a defensive one rather than an offensive one. As Jorn remarks, 'It would not be a very exciting game.' It is quite possible that there would be a climate of tension (or of frustration?) in such a situation and that this would lead to an explosion. Jorn does not explain whether this would be beneficial or not, but his probable intention is that this would be a creative force for something new. Such an explosion is not possible in a bipartite relationship because it would 'be abreacted by the *duel's* ceaseless consumption of energy...'. He concludes triumphantly that 'Two dialectical oppositions neutralize each other, as positive and negative. Where there are three mutual oppositions, such a synthesis cannot arise...'



Peter Shield, *Comparative Vandalism: Asger Jorn and the artistic attitude to life*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998

Conflict is seen as performing group-maintaining functions insofar as it regulates systems of relationships. It "clears the air," i.e., it eliminates the accumulation of blocked and balked hostile dispositions by allowing their free behavioural expression. [...] Accumulated hostile or aggressive dispositions may be discharged not only against the original object of hostility, but against substitute objects. [...] An illustration of safety-valve mores which provide a sanctioned outlet for hostilities against the original object is supplied by the institution of the duel, both in Europe and in non-literate societies. Duelling brings potentially disruptive aggressive self-help under social control and constitutes a direct outlet for hostilities between members of the society.

Alfred Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956

Given what a football club is, it is flourishing if it is winning games and championships; and given what the surrounding society is like, if it is doing so in conditions of financial solvency. Such a collectivity's flourishing is a quite distinct matter from the flourishing of the individuals who compose it. This is best illustrated by the fact that a given set of individuals may be so hopeless at promoting the aims of the club that the best way to ensure that it begins to flourish again would be to replace them all with other individuals who are more competent at promoting its aims. It will then flourish but they may not. In a similar way, it may be that I may best promote the flourishing of a collectivity to which I belong by driving myself into the ground for its sake. At the extreme, I might literally sacrifice myself so that it can flourish.

This point does not take us far enough because the flourishing of a football club is in itself neither moral nor morally significant. Or at least so I would claim. Not everyone would agree. Bill Shankly, the former manager of the English football club Liverpool, once famously remarked: 'Somebody said "Football's a

matter of life and death to you.'" I said "Listen, it's more important than that.'" That remark dictates the need to distinguish the claim that assigning collective entities to the moral realm rises to the level of bare conceptual intelligibility from the claim that doing so has some significant degree of plausibility. It is the latter that I am concerned to establish. It is conceptually intelligible that someone should bring fervour, even moral fervour, to the flourishing of a football club, that they should regard it as something of massive importance, overriding what others would take to be the most important moral considerations. It is equally conceivable that someone should take up the same attitude towards the preservation of their family's reputation. But we (or at any rate I) would think that there was something deranged in their doing so, and my assumption is that I shall not convince many readers of the plausibility of assigning collectives to the moral realm by calling attention to the collective good of a football club.

Keith Graham, *Practical Reasoning in a Social World*, Cambridge University Press, 2002

[With] football now indelibly stamped with the core characteristics of Conservatism (stock market listings, an emphasis on individual greed, the widening gulf between rich and poor) it seems hard to imagine that the Tories once actively presented themselves as the anti-football party, secure in the knowledge that such a stance would pick up considerable support from the public.

The mood in Whitehall was echoed by a press, both tabloid and broadsheet, which rarely missed an opportunity to push the message that football stadia had become little more than a battleground for anti-social elements. Today no politician, or newspaper, would dream of denigrating football for fear of losing votes, or readers. In at least one politician's case, fear of damaging a post-election media career ensured a pro-football stance. After losing his seat in Putney, David Mellor's diatribe against the barracking he received from the Referendum Party included the comment that James Goldsmith "had behaved like a rugby fan". A few years ago he would have said "soccer fan" on the assumption that his audience would have absorbed the message without complaint.

Editorial, *When Saturday Comes*, No 124, 1997



Emlyn Hughes, Margaret Thatcher and Bob Paisley, 1976.
Courtesy *Manchester Daily Express*/ SSPL

Given that one of the purposes of intentional rudeness is to inflict harm upon another, then the chanting of football songs at players or the referee seems to be peculiarly ineffective. This seems to be well recognized, not least in the testimony of ex-players that the taunts of a crowd actually spurred them on, or in the fact that referees make unpopular decisions constantly and seem little swayed by the words directed at them. Moreover few football fans seem to think that their words have much effect in this sense. But then the question arises: Why, given their practical inefficiency as insults are such chants sung? The answer lies not in the antagonistic illocutionary force but in the perlocutionary effects of the rude chanting: the function of these songs is not to insult, but to produce a communal bond and identity through repeated performance of empty hostility.

The apparently excessive rudeness at football grounds constitutes the ongoing performance of a particular type of identity which demands specific forms of knowledge (if, what, when, how things can be articulated). This identity is not so much concerned with loyalty to the club or even the team (though both are of course included) since the reality is that both club (in terms of ownership) and team (in terms of personnel) can change radically whilst still attracting support. Being a football fan, rather than simply being a supporter of a club, is a question of occupying a specific social space and time and performing communal acts of identity.

Tony Crowley, 'When Saturday comes: The boundaries of football rudeness', Ed. Mina Gorji, *Rude Britannia*, London/New York: Routledge, 2007

THE RULES

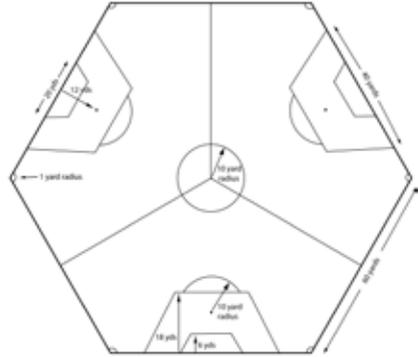
As revised by Philosophy Football FC

1. **SCORING (THIS IS NON-NEGOTIABLE)** A team does not count the goals it scores, only the goals it concedes. The winner is the team that concedes the fewest goals.
2. **THROW-INS / CORNERS** On the hexagonal pitch, each team has two sides of the six-sided pitch: the side with the goal (the 'backside') and the side opposite to your goal (the 'frontside'). If the ball goes out on one of your two sides, you get the throw-in / goal-kick. If it went out off you, the throw-in or corner goes to the team whose own goal is nearest to where the ball went out.
3. **REFEREES** While there is a temptation to have no referees in order to deconstruct the mythic bi-polar structure of conventional football (see programme leader column), we think that two referees, able to make discerning philosophical judgments, would be ideal.
4. **LENGTH OF TIME** Ideally, teams will play until people get bored, start to wander off, fall asleep, etc.; however, three thirty-minute 'halves' with teams rotating goals would work well.
5. **NO OFFSIDES**

Have you noticed how we only win the World Cup under a Labour government?

—Harold Wilson

T-shirt slogan, among many designs available at www.philosophyfootball.com



Pitch dimensions calculated by Goober Fox and marked out by Danny Neville.

Whitechapel Gallery

The Three-Sided Football Match is produced by the Whitechapel Gallery education team in collaboration with Sally O'Reilly, and with the help of The Albion in Goldsmiths Row and Top Corner.