

Sport in Society¹

An Essay on Brazilian Football²

Roberto DaMatta

What I intend to do in this article is to show how a specific sport, Association Football (from now on just football), provides a space for a series of dramatizations of Brazilian society. So instead of studying football in contrast with society, which is common practice I analyze football *together* with society. Part of my argument is that when I acquire a certain sociological understanding of football as practiced in Brazil I simultaneously increase my chances of a better interpretation of Brazilian society. On the other hand, I believe that this approach allows us to discover how a particular activity may be appropriated in different ways in different societies. It seems to me that this is at stake when a modern and markedly cosmopolitan institution such as football is subjected to sociological analysis.

My use of the concept of dramatization is inspired by the work of Victor Turner and Max Gluckman (Turner, 1957, 1974; Gluckman, 1958, 1962), but I hope to expand it by treating it as a form of ritual and of ritualization. Or, better, as a basic ingredient in the process of ritualization (Damatta, 1973, 1977, 1979 and 1981). I thus argue that without drama there is no ritual and that the distinctive characteristic of dramatization is to draw attention to

1 (*) Partial versions of this essay were presented in October 1979 at the Ibero-American Studies Center of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and I wish to thank Prof. Thomas E. Skidmore for his generous invitation and for his encouragement. Another version was presented at a colloquium on March 12, 1980 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Yet another version was presented in May 1981 in Paris at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and I thank Ignace, Viola and Celine Sachs for the opportunity and for the support they have given to my work. Finally, a shorter version was published in the French journal, *Le Débat*, n. 19, 1982.

2 This version was published in Roberto DaMatta, L.F. Baêta Neves Flores, S. L. Guedes and A. Vogel (Eds.). 1982. *Universo do Futebol: esporte e sociedade brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Pinakothek. (Translator's note)

relationships, values or ideologies which would not otherwise be isolated from the routines of daily life (or “real life” as this is understood by our dominant ideology). By studying football and sport as a drama, I aim to analyze them as special modes through which society allows itself to be perceived or “read” by its members. I therefore follow closely Clifford Geertz’s well known and profound observation that ritual (and drama) are a particular means through which a given people tells its own story to itself. (Geertz, 1973) The way football is practiced, lived, discussed and theorized in Brazil may be seen as a means through which Brazilian society speaks, presents itself, reveals itself, allowing itself, as you might say, to be discovered. One of the main objectives of this article, then, is to provide a sociological appreciation of the specificity of the way in which the Brazilian social system perceives and “reads” football.

1. Football as opiate of the people

First of all it is necessary to relativize the typical way in which the domain of “sport” is studied. I notice that when we study “sport” we generally tend to see it in a relation of opposition to society. The opposition sport/society appears to be as natural as nature is to society, ritual to society, politics to society, economy to society and so on, where what is supposed is a clear relation of confrontation, of determination or of reduction between the elements. On the one side we have an individualized entity, society; and on the other we have another individualized entity. The idea is that one can postulate a functional or instrumentalized relation between one term and the other. Thus, sport *does* something *for, with* or *against* society. It may be a neutral, negative or positive instrument *vis-à-vis* the social system. In the case of football and Brazilian society, a relation of mystification is often postulated between the two terms. Football is seen as an opiate just as the domain of the economy is seen as the foundation of society. It is as if football and the economy were exogenous realities that could exist quite isolated from society. From this point of view, football is seen as a means of diverting the attention of the people away from more basic problems. By the same token, if we were to look at a political party or a certain economic activity, the same argument could be put forward, but in all likelihood our social scientist would take more care in saying that a particular party was “an opiate of the people”, simply because

in his understanding of society, “politics” or “the economy” are more serious and relevant than “sport” or football.

In other words, the football/society relation is socially demarcated. It is neither a “natural” nor “self-evident” truth but rather an equation, which even the most perfunctory analysis reveals as socially charged and valued.

To say then that “football is the opiate of the people” is to accentuate a relationship between two terms as if they were “natural”. Then, it is to insist that the relationship is one of opposition—for football in some sense fights *against* Brazilian society and its “real interests.” Finally, football fights against Brazilian society in a special way.

The thesis has a clear structural-functionalist flavour so prevalent in contemporary social science as Marshall Sahlins has shown. (1976, 1978) According to the utilitarian thesis, if football exists socially as an important institution this is because it must be playing a clear social role *in relation to society*. In this case, its role is to illude and mystify the people. In other words, the only people who can know the true role of football are the dominant strata (who utilize it as an opiate of the people) and social critics. The mass of the people remain in the darkness of their chronic idiocy, unable to perceive that they are being systematically fooled.

Everything suggests that the thesis “football is the opiate of the people” is a projection of our perspective on society and the place within it which we reserve for sporting activity. So a reflection on all that we classify as “opiate” reveals how the theorem of sport as mystification has, even beyond its “practical reasons” profoundly social motives. These, however, are within our own society, which is why it is so difficult to perceive and discuss them.

In fact it is easy to see that all “opiates” are always activities we consider “facile”, “dispensable”, “illusory”; dimensions of our social life that cannot have the same value as *work* or *war*. These are truly “real”, determining and final and—for these reasons—causal. It is because we have such conceptions that we are able to situate *religion* as an *opiate*; *work* as a necessity, virtue and punishment; *war* as obligation and duty, establishing scales of differentiated reality between them. Thus, devotion to religion would be less important than the obligation to work and the duty to go to war.

In our own social system, work is that which allows us to transform nature and man himself. It is the most privileged instrument to enter into contact with true reality. The *real* in its purest (and hardest) state is intimately

related to work in our social ideology. Likewise, *war* is an activity, which takes us to no man's land where we meet with "others", our enemies; those who do not follow our customs. It is said that without work (which keeps us alive) and power (which keeps us in order) society could not exist. So here we are, in accordance with our dominant ideology, facing two activities that cannot be reduced to anything else, and which are both linked to what we conceive of as truly human. Since primary school we have learned that "man is a political animal" and that he is also an animal who has been punished with the necessity to work. And work is almost always a form of exploitation.

But in contrast to work and power, the spheres of "sport", "art" and "religion" are situated *within* society and are associated with values such as love, devotion and diversion (or leisure). While work and war take us to our limits (the other as enemy and nature as the source of reality and reason, for man must modify her by his own efforts), art, sport and religion are classified as inconsequential or marginal activities which are part of that battery of instruments destined to mystify us and to hide the absolute and inevitable "realities" and the "fight for survival."

If we take a wider perspective as our first step in the study of sport, we soon discover that the typical way in which sport is placed in opposition to society is related to the way sport is understood according to our classificatory system. Thus, since work is—as the Bible allows us to discover—the activity that is the very foundation of society, it is practically impossible or at least very difficult to see it as opposed to society. But in the case of "sport", the separation is much more visible. In fact, work and society were invented at the same time, while sport together with religiosity and the arts, came afterwards.

2. Sport in Society and Society in Sport: a perspective

Since we have rejected the theory that establishes a contrast between sport and society, and have claimed that sport is not the opiate of the people, it is necessary to make our own position clearer. It is not a question of confirming functionalities between two reified terms but to focus on inclusions, relationships and transformations. Sport is part of society just as society is part of sport so it is impossible to understand one activity (or a set of activities) without reference to the totality within which it exists. Sport and society

are as two sides of a coin and not as the roof is to the foundations of a house. The relations between sport and society are not marked by “stratification”, as Geertz put it (1973: 46). They are expressive and dramatic where the beginning meets the end; where the rules, as we shall see later, become themselves actors. For society reveals itself as much through work as through sport, religion, rituals and politics. Each one of these spheres is a sort of filter or operator, through which the social order makes and remakes itself, becomes inverted, and reaffirms itself in a game that is fundamental for its perception of itself as a significant totality. The thesis of sport as a derivative activity must be replaced by a perspective that views the social as a phenomenon that is at once total and specific. The world did not begin with men in search of food and fighting wars. The primordial impulse, if we can really talk of such a thing, was given as much by the body as by the spirit. If I may paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, I would say that the first dart was not only good to kill, but *also* to amuse, decorate and think.

Our basic question is not therefore to discern the “functions” or “utilities” of sport in a given system, but to discover the implications and consequences that this domain of social life which we call “sport” allows us to see. At bottom, what we look for is a good reply to the following question: as we participate or reflect upon sporting activities what are we talking about? When we are involved in the sporting world what kind of experience is being opened by and for society? What relationships can we enjoy and what feelings can we leave aside when we are in a football stadium or watching a game of tennis? What regions of chaos and what dimensions of order are opened to us in the world of sport? What environments, clothing, objects, rules, social relations and values are conceptualized and experienced through sport? Or, what clothing is this that society puts on as it manifests itself totalized in the dimension of sport?³

3 At least one journalist has been sympathetic to this way of looking at Sport: see Henry Fairlie, 1977. Among social scientists Stemme’s work (Stemm, 1981) is original. Evon Vogt promises a study of Sport along lines similar to my own but it is ignored in recent monographs such as Guttman, 1978. Similarly one can cite the work of Arens (1975 and 1978) and Novak’s curious book (1976), which is a North American version of an authentic phenomenology of sport along the same lines discovered in Brazilian journalism and immortalized in articles by Nelson Rodrigues and José Lins do Rego. For reflections on Brazilian football, see Rosenfeld (1976); Martins Neto (1976); Miceli (1977); Lever (1969); Soares (1979) and Levine (1980) and Ross’s brilliant article in which he compares football and baseball in the US.

These are some of the questions that we must answer when we think of football in Brazil and of sport in general *as an activity of society* and not *as an activity in opposition or in competition with society*. As a social activity, sport is society itself expressing itself through a certain perspective, through rules, relations, objects, gestures, ideologies, etc., allowing for the opening of a particular social space, the space of sport and of the “game”. And this is the way that a productive sociology of sport may be practiced without the risk of reification and routine projections, which appear when sport is treated as an epiphenomenon or an unnecessary and secondary activity and society is seen as an individualized and monolithic reality.

3. Football in different societies

The first step in replying to all these questions will be to begin a subtle yet basic discussion in the direction of an authentic sociology of sport. This means studying the relative meaning of the sporting domain in comparative perspective, and within this domain, of football in different societies. To begin this demarche and as a revealing example, I look at the way sport (and football) is conceptualized in English and American society in contrast to the way in which the same activities are conceived of and lived in Brazil. The first difference is that for the Americans and English, football, tennis, baseball, soccer, golf, etc. are *sports...*; while for Brazilians the word football never appears by itself but always preceded by the qualifier *game [jogo]*.⁴ So in Brazil a football game [*jogo de futebol*] takes place and it may be good or bad. It is not simply a question of talking of football, but of commenting or discussing a game-of-football [*jogo-de-futebol*]. This point is fundamental since, as I shall try to show later, the specific position of football (and of sport in general) varies from society to society. In the case of Brazil the fact that there is a link between football and game suggests two ideas that are separate in American society. One of them is the notion of “game of chance” [*jogo de azar*] which is indicated in Brazil by the word “game”, while in England and the U.S. it is designated by the word “gamble”, something which is quite distant from sporting activity itself even though it obviously part of global organizations

4 I have put the Portuguese words in square brackets since the argument here is based on the specific meanings of words in Brazil as opposed to the U.S. or the United Kingdom. (Translator's note)

which may be articulated by sport. The other idea relates to sporting activity, which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a diversion of the nature of a context, played according to rules and decided by superior skill, strength, or good fortune”. I notice here that the essence of the conceptualization of sport in the Anglo-Saxon world is competition, through technique and strength while the sport itself comes in last. It seems, then, that in the U.S. and England, the domain of sport is based on the idea of emphasizing physical control and the coordination of individuals to form a collectivity. Everything leads to a fight to control the external world or anything that comes from outside. In Brazil, on the other hand, sport is lived and conceived of as a *game*. It is an activity that requires tactics, strength, psychological and physical determination, technical ability, but it *also* depends on the uncontrollable forces of luck and destiny. In the discussions that follow football games, there are many situations in which it is known that one of the teams was not fighting against time and its opponent, but also against *destiny*, that must be modified or corrected to bring about the smiles of victory.⁵

It should not come as a surprise therefore that in certain countries football is associated with national lottery systems. In the specific case of Brazil the so called “Sporting Lottery” brings to the fore a whole series of values linked to the Brazilian system of luck and bad luck which includes appealing to the supernatural beings of the so called Afro-Brazilian religions (such as Umbanda) and of popular Catholicism. The association between football and the sporting lottery (that gives out thousands of dollars in prize money) means that various games of football are played simultaneously in multiple planes. One game is played on the football field. Another game is played in *real life* [*vida real*] by the population as a whole in its continuous attempt to alter its destiny. And there is a third game played in the “other world” where spiritual beings are called to influence the event thus bringing about

5 These ideas present serious problems for the strictly analytical and formalist transformation of the domain of the game like those put forward by John Robert and his associates (Cf. Roberts, Meeker and Allen, 1972). When Roberts suggests that game can be classified as strategic, of chance and of physical skills, the scheme is theoretically impeccable. But Who could guarantee that certain games might not be conceived of socially as combining these dimensions in ways which the analyst has not foreseen? In Brazil, a game like football which demands great physical ability is intimately linked to notions of luck or the lack thereof and that this puts the football aficionado in the face of specific divinatory strategies as a matter of course – as part and parcel of the sporting activity in question. In relation to this problem, I recommend the work of Ricardo Benzaquem de Araújo (1980 and 1982) where he addresses similar topics and issues.

transformations in the different social positions involved and implicated in the sporting event. Or better, in the **total event** since it is a sporting event only in its name and origin. Maybe it is for this reason that supporters in Brazil are called *cheerers*, those who cheer. The expression which is derived from the verb to “to cheer for” [*torcer*], which also means to twist or wring, suggests the idea of twisting and turning and contortion as if subjected to a physical tournament or even torture. It seems to me that one can only understand why supporters are called *torcedores*, once one has taken into account all the important social connotations of sport and football in Brazil.

All of this shows how a given institution, in this case Association Football, which was invented by the English, can be appropriated in different ways in different places. So the football practiced in Brazil must be seen not only as a sport (as an individualized activity with specific connotations), but also as a *game* at the service of another set of values and social relations. In the Brazilian case, football could be seen as being an institution that is able to bring together many spheres of social life. That is why we utilize Mauss’ term “total social fact”. What we want to study then is how the Association Football of the English becomes so much more complex in Brazil where it has been transformed into *futebol*.

It is also possible that soccer is related to a powerful form of collectivization in England and the U.S. Pickford notes that in football, “everybody gets something and nobody gets everything, and, from the point of social psychology, essentially the something which everybody gets is the comradeship of everybody else” (Cf. Pickford, 1940: 81). This statement is significant in that it draws attention to the collective aspect of football in a society strongly characterized by the ideology of individualism. In the individualistic social universe of England and the U.S., football in its various forms, might well be a mechanism that orients the system collectively, creating comradeship and fair play, which are essential attributes in the Anglo-Saxon understanding of sport. In other words, in England football is lived as a *sport* while in Brazil it is lived as a *game*, where one distinguishes between gambling [*jogar*] and playing [*brincar*]. One plays during Carnival, as I have tried to show (Cf. DaMatta, 1979 and 1981), while one gambles at football [*joga-se futebol*], and gambles in a football team [*joga-se num time de futebol*] which means that one can practise football as a member of a team and also bet on the victory of a given team. But the verb, as we have observed, is the same – *jogar*, even though it is used with it two quite distinct meanings.

Along with these differences, we know that Brazilian *futebol* is distinct from European football because of the capacity of individual players to improvise and maintain a strong control of the ball. Football in Brazil is therefore a source of individualization and the possibility of individual expression more than an instrument for collectivization either on the personal level or that of the masses. Indeed, the Brazilian people can feel individualized and personalized through the way in which football is practiced in Brazilian cities in clubs, which have nothing ideological about them. At the same time, and following the same logic, it is football that permits a few members of the anonymous masses to achieve stardom and become the centre of attention as individuals with a unique personality. (Cf. DaMatta, 1979: Chapter IV)

I believe because football in Brazil allows for a dialectic between individualization and collectivization it is able to express the conflict between impersonal “destiny” and individual desire. Football games in Brazil may thus be “read” as paradigms for a combat between collective and impersonal forces (destiny) and individual desires to escape from the cycle of defeat and poverty. I believe that this important dilemma of Brazilian society is brought into focus as drama by football as game. That is why when people talk about football in Brazil they *discuss* it. You only *discuss* [*discutir*] serious things and you must take a position. Football and politics are *discussed* and significantly enough they are not considered appropriate for women. In Brazil one *talks* about money and women, but one *discusses* politics and football. There is plenty in common between football and politics. In football as in politics we find the same confrontation between individual desires and destiny, biographies on the one side and collectivities governed by impersonal laws on the other. In both activities you need to know how to play and how to develop tactics to win. But in both cases unpredictable factors may intervene giving victory to an obscure candidate for example. The result depends so much on “luck”. Finally, both spheres provide opportunities for social mobility, and people are “called” to be football players or politicians. You have to have “talent” and/or “vocation” to enter both football and politics.

So certain expressions circulate freely in both spheres. I’ll give one example, which expresses quite clearly what I have been arguing up to now. It is the extremely popular expression “having (or not having) *jogo de cintura*”⁶,

6 Literally “play, or game of the waist”. (Translator’s note)

which is the way one refers to the flexibility and sensitivity that one has (or does not have) in certain social situations. So, a person with *jogo de cintura* is a person who can bend over without breaking, allowing the situation to develop in such a way as to benefit him/her in the end. The football player or the samba dancer with *jogo de cintura* knows how to move in a certain direction so as to provoke confusion and fascination in his/her opponents and creating unimagined harmonies also. It is known that Brazilian football has *jogo de cintura*; malice and *malandragem*⁷ which are absent from football in other countries, above all Europe, where football is based on physical force, muscular preparation, absence of improvisation or control of the ball by individual players. In contrast to Brazilian football which is full of improvisation and *jogo de cintura* European football appears as a “square” and authoritarian version of the same sport. When we talk of *jogo de cintura* we use it as a metaphor for the so-called art of *malandragem*. With *malandragem* as with *jogo de cintura* we refer to an authentically Brazilian form of defence, which consists in allowing an opposing force to pass by, avoiding it with a simple—yet precise—movement of the body. Instead of direct confrontation, avoiding the enemy with a shrewd body movement is always preferred. The good football player and the wise politician know that the golden rule of the Brazilian social world consists precisely in knowing how to emerge well from any situation; in knowing to survive difficult situations with great dissimulation and elegance so that others will think that the player had an easy enough task. As I have argued before (DaMatta, 1979) *malandragem* and *jogo de cintura* are arts that transform the general into the particular through dissimulation and the use of a universal rule for personal benefit. As a good politician, the *malandro* is the “player” who is able to transform misfortune into good luck.

There is abundant proof that commentaries on football are always taken seriously in Brazil. Some of these have a clear moral or philosophical character and refer to the physical condition of the players or to the condition of the playing field and sporting equipment. But transcendental problems are also discussed such as the opposition between destiny and individual desire; between dedication and training on the one side and luck on the other.

7 The word *malandro* is usually translated as “(loveable) rogue” or “trickster”. *Malandragem* is what *malandros* are supposed to do, i.e. breaking the rules without being discovered. (Translator’s note)

All this brings us back to our argument that football is a complex social phenomenon that can be socially appropriated in various ways in different societies. A particular sport can be a form of leisure in the U.S. and an instrument for social communication and the construction of national identity in countries like Brazil. In the first case football is fun to watch but not serious... In the second case it is a highly significant means to the articulation of messages about what it is to be truly Brazilian, about the meaning of life and the relative importance of destiny and technique in the social world. And all this is at once direct, literal, profound and dramatic. For *futebol* is not a game of words that is played only with the intelligencer, but rather a system of closed rules which operates through actions and relationships. It is a game in which absolute rules and men in action are put in systematic relationship: intelligence and desire; truth and mystification; technique and the necessity for collective action.

Seen in this light, Brazilian football can be studied as being able to provoke a series of dramatizations of the social world. One of the essential characteristics of dramas is their capacity to draw attention to, to reveal, represent and discover relations, values and ideologies that might otherwise be in a latent state or have merely virtual presence within the social system. But to concentrate only on what ritual reveals would be a mistake, because dramas, exactly because they draw attention totally and sometimes exclusively to a particular set of objects or relations, dialectically hide and mystify other sets. While *futebol* brings to the forefront of social consciousness values such as total loyalty to a given team, the segmentation of society in particular and compact collectivities, and an idea of cyclical time, it positively hides the facts of daily life like the fact that clubs are made up of socially distinct people which means that they can never become permanent entities. Daily life divides rich and poor, healthy and infirm, dominant and dominated. So while *futebol* shows us a momentarily homogeneous world, it is to conceal heterogeneity. The question that *futebol* allows us to ask is a *relational question*. It may be expressed more or less as follows: since we are all so different, how can it be that at the moment of the game we are able to be together and united?

But ritual and the forms it takes such as the game, sport, the theatre, therapy and shows in general are clearly demarcated in social life. They exist in a region that is separate from daily life which means that everything

represented in the drama is socially and temporally circumscribed. This demarcation makes it possible to control the social repercussions that might arise within the social space of the ritual. So we learn to separate “real life” from theatrical tragedy, or the “history” which is told on cinema screens. The advantage of *futebol* is that it is capable of raising many fundamental problems and yet remain a game and a sport. Maybe this is the central meaning of sport in modern society.

Let us now look at two basic dramatizations that *futebol* brings about and then consider their most important social and political implications.

4. The dramatizations of *futebol*

4.1. The question of destiny in opposition to biography

I have already mentioned that one of the most important dramatizations that *futebol* brings to the fore is the opposition between a closed system with fixed rules and the possibilities to modify such a system through individual desires through the use of force, planning and technique. Through *futebol* we see a projection of the drama of a controlled world in permanent strife with the idea that the world is, contrarily, a system which men are unaware of and will never be able to control. Everything leads us to believe that the notion of *destiny* as a social category is an attempt on the part of some societies to mediate between the set of impersonal forces which move the world without the concurrence of men; and the people, with their biographies, desires and specific needs who live in this world. As a social (or cultural) category, then, the idea of *destiny* allows for the construction of a “bridge” between the individualized plane of biographies, motivations, projects and needs and the forces which are seen to “play” with each biography and each desire. In certain societies where there is a strong structural lack of confidence in the global system of rules which the State or the Government control, *destiny* seems to express the conflict between personal desire and social forces. I believe that this shock or conflict is one of the critical aspects of social systems marked by a non-radical individualism, such as that which seems to characterize societies most involved with the Protestant Reformation and the Industrial Revolution. In systems that lie half way between these two forms of individualism and a social world where relations and gradations play a fundamental

role in the social order, the idea seems to be a basic category.⁸

This drama emerges clearly in *futebol*, which is constituted on the basis of fixed rules. What I am trying to say here is that football games mark out clearly a complex interaction between universal rules (the rules of the game) and individual desires (of teams and players in confrontation). The result of this, either victory or defeat, is a good metaphor for the game as destiny and biography, a basic issue in Brazilian society itself.

In *futebol* (as in so-called “real life”), men are brought together in teams (and families); they wish to win and to behave in a particular way. But they cannot control the actions of the opposing team, neither its capacity nor the coincidences, the successes and the mistakes which go to make up the game. Even when a team employs magic to win (this is very common in Brazilian football at all levels), victory is on the plane of the possible but never of certainty. It is precisely this complex interaction between teams, within teams, of teams with the rules that govern the spectacle, and the teams, rules and the public with the controllers of the match (referees and linesmen), that bring about the fascination exercised by *futebol* as *game* and *drama*. It is without doubt this complexity that allows a football game to become a metaphor for life itself. In this way it expresses the basic conflict within Brazilian society between men and the impersonal forces, which appear in their path. [...]

Imagine, now, a professional team of highly motivated and able players, all of them fit and obedient. Imagine also a perfect football campaign of endless victories. In the last game, which is decisive for winning the World Cup, our team must confront another team, also very powerful, but whose campaign was more erratic and visibly inferior according to all objective criteria. In fact it was so erratic that the team could only win the World Cup on the basis of this one victory. A draw will give victory to our perfect team. Nobody doubts that the team that was motivated and well trained will be champion. It is a question of justice and order. And yet, the invincible team with everything in its favour lost.

8 The opposition is the conflict between impersonal and universal rule (valid for all domains and individuals in a given social system) and the existence of multiple ethics in different domains of the same society [...]. This seems to be the case in traditional and semi traditional societies such as Brazil. For studies on this issue, see DaMatta, 1979; 1981b and, obviously Max Weber, 1967:36. Problems relating to the sociological study of the “individual” and of “individualism” as value, morality and ideology, have been studied in a new and vigorous manner by Louis Dumont, 1970^a and 1970b. Later on I will return to this issue.

How could this have happened?

This was the question everyone asked in Brazil when in 1950 the Brazilian team was defeated in Rio de Janeiro by Uruguay in the final of the World Cup. This defeat has great social weight and deserves to be investigated from our point of view. First, it is probably the greatest tragedy in contemporary Brazilian history because it brought about a collective feeling of the loss of an historical opportunity. Second, because it took place at the beginning of a decade when Brazil tried to achieve its destiny as a great nation. The result led to an endless quest for explanations and responsibilities. And it is in this process of the “allocation of responsibility” (Cf. Gluckman, 1972) that we must find the social reasons for the dramatizations that I am studying.

After the defeat, there was a lot of talk of *destiny* and *bad luck*. [...] In this case, the notion of destiny led many Brazilians to feel overcome by tremendous disillusionment in relation to plans, motivations, detailed projects and the like. What was the point of all this, they asked in their sorrow, if in the end they were to be defeated and that good luck would not smile upon them? But the explanations went further. As Guedes (1977) has shown, various journalists went further in their investigation of *fate* or *destiny*, identifying them as *racial factors*. The defeat was explicitly attributed to our unhappy racial constitution and the enormous burden we carry as a society made up of inferior groups such as “Indians” and “Blacks”. Two of the Brazilian defenders, both black, were cited as examples of the sad destiny of a sick, sad and inferior country.⁹

We see here how the game of life and the game of football are conjoined. The defeat to Uruguay was seen as a metaphor for the “defeats” of Brazilian society itself, constantly submitted to the impersonal forces of destiny. *Futebol* brought national ideology to the surface; the dilemma between the desire to succeed and the impersonal and uncontrollable “racial” configurations which lead to defeat. The defeat in *futebol* ended up reviving an old and pessimistic cultural model expressed in the drama of a society, which

9 Mário Filho, author of a study which as for years the only example of an attempt to understand the importance of *futebol* had this to say: “The cause [of the 1950 defeat] was attributed to hand-chosen scapegoats and by coincidence all Black: Barbosa, Juvenal and Bigode. The Whites were not accused of anything.” Mário Filho is clearly an optimist. The players were chosen *precisely* because they were Black and in the Brazilian defence. For we know that when allocating responsibility for defeat the backs are always more guilty than the forwards. In the case of victory the situation is the inverse.

believes itself “racially impure”. In the crudest way football dramatizes the old racist theories that are a dominant component of Brazilian ideology.¹⁰

I believe that this is where we should look for the relations between sport and society; those dramatic occasions when the game of *futebol* brings about a frame that encompasses society. If *futebol* is good to watch it is also good for dramatizing and bringing into focus a society’s dilemmas. The theme of *destiny* as a category that expresses the conflict between individual desires and impersonal collective forces is also present in the “erudite racism” of the intellectuals for whom Brazil’s destiny is (or was) determined by the impersonal forces of a biological history whose internal dynamics were so far away from the desire of men. On the other side, in *Carnaval* and popular music, not to mention Brazilian religions such as Umbanda, *fate* plays a fundamental role in ordering and explaining human sufferings and successes.

One should not be surprised to find that *Carnaval* and *futebol* come together as basic instruments for the manifestation of Brazilian national identity. For a basic component of this identity is the way in which shocks with destiny tend to lead society to defeat. “Its destiny...” we say in situations where there is no space for hope.

Within this cultural matrix where destiny plays such a vital role, it is possible to understand Brazil’s third World Cup victory in 1970 as a kind of *national revenge*; a unique moment when society as a whole could finally enjoy victory over all those impersonal forces which had always thrown us to the bottom of the heap. At the same time, the way race was understood changed radically. The “black race” acquired a fundamentally positive value. I believe that this helps understand the Pelé phenomenon and how he came to be crowned “King of Football”. While black players, seen as inferior by Brazilian racists, were blamed for the tragic defeat of 1950, the super-black Pelé with his art and *malandragem* was responsible for Brazil’s victories in subsequent World Cups. On the other hand, an explosion of *Carnaval* accompanied this celebration of “race” every time the Brazilian team won and got closer to the title. After each game, multitudes of people went to the streets to sing crude and depreciative slogans against the foreign teams that had been defeated. It was as if the world had been totalised (or encompassed) by *futebol* so that the

10 Thomas Skidmore (1974) shows how such racist doctrines permeate the Brazilian intellectual world. For social anthropologists the notion of “race” (like that of “destiny”) expresses the idea of an obstacle that impedes progress. [...]

performance of the players served as a measure for everything else. No longer was the World Cup a stage for competing teams but for societies whose essence was measured by their football. In the end after Brazil's victory over Italy, there was a Civic-Nationalist *Carnaval* with the people singing the praises of Brazil and the weakness of the Italians. The victory was a "ritual of revenge" when finally Brazilian society could enjoy having overcome a *destiny* always understood as negative and inferior.

And this is not all, since football allows for the reification of "countries" and "peoples" which cease to be abstract concepts to become visible and concrete entities. They become a team, which suffers, vibrates and beats its opponents and reacts to our cheers and boos. In a country where the people as a whole have no voice of its own and when they do speak it is through their leaders within the hierarchies of power, football seems to allow for a levelling of power. The people see and talk to Brazil without recourse to the usually intermediaries who systematically control the Brazilian social world for them and in their name. Football then allows the mass of the people to feel intimacy with their national symbols. It is only on the days when the Brazilian team plays that you can see the people dressed in their national colours living the concrete experience of "national unity".¹¹ In these moments of "civic *Carnaval*", engendered by *futebol* the sacred national symbols (which are surrounded by complex rules for their use in Brazil) cease to be the property of the dominant classes, above all the "government" and the "authorities", and spread among the anonymous masses, who celebrate them in frank and uninhibited intimacy.

This experience of national unity and the bringing together of the country through the dramatization of football transcends the uses and abuses of this sport by government. Anything can be utilised by authoritarian governments, but the experiences of the solidarity of victory are—in my opinion—the basic ingredients for social transformation, above all in a society where the people are "the masses" who, as such, will never be heard clearly. Far from seeing this football experience as the prototype for material that authoritarian governments can use for their own ends, I would like to stress the positive (or liminal) quality of the football experience in the most ample and generous

¹¹ Evidence of this is Otto Lara Resende's rather emotional article entitled "Brazil Ball Brazil – Pelé country Pelé", published after the conquest of the 1970 World Cup in the *Jornal do Brasil*, June 29, 1970.

sense when it allows the people to experience a feeling of national totality, of the value of the people represented by their idols and, more importantly than all of this, of a full and deserved victory.

4.2 The problem of universal rules in opposition to the desires of groups and individuals

A good part of the discussion about football in Brazil is over the acceptability or not of the rules as an immutable system. In other words as a system that is in fact over and above the political, economic and religious power of the clubs and, naturally, of the will of the supporters, above all the powerful ones. [...] The question of the “sporting spirit” or the “Olympic spirit” is basic to this form of dramatization. As we say in Brazil, teams “should know how to lose” and it is certainly for this reason that referees and linesmen are often blamed for a team’s defeat and then having to suffer the consequences. Aggressions against referees and linesmen are legion.

But “knowing how to lose” signifies accepting equality as the axiom and fundamental condition of the game. Without this principle the very idea of a game would be impossible to think. As Lévi-Strauss suggested, in a justly famous passage, the basic idea is the notion of equality at the beginning of the dispute. But it is exactly this initial equality that must become transformed during the game, leading to disassociation at the end (Cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1962: Chapter 1). But one must observe that the game can only persist as an institution if both parties (and society as a whole) agree with the final disassociation between winners and losers. Equality in relation to the same universal rules is, then, the central point of the activities we call games. In the case of rituals, things seem to happen in a profoundly different way. In rituals, the person in charge knows far more about the “rules” or the “etiquette” of the sacred that do those for whom he is performing the ritual. So the quality of the game in contrast with the inequality of ritual is an equality of those in dispute in relation to rules, which in one case operate universally and must be obeyed by all, and in the case of ritual operate with gradations and hierarchies. In ritual, the officiant is closer to the sacred than his client or follower.

With all this in mind it will not be a surprise to anyone that the development of sport as an institution that mobilizes national and international

human and material resources runs parallel to the birth of modern individualist and egalitarian society. Or in other words, a society based on the recognition of universal laws applicable to all individuals. One of the distinctive traits of traditional society is—as the historians have taught us (Cf. Rémond, 1976)—the fact that inequality is perceived as natural. The result of the institutionalization of inequality at all levels of society is the multiplication of legal and juridical regimes within a given society. So in traditional society the same crime committed by persons situated in diverse social orders would be judged differently. As Rémond reminds us, there were specific laws, since it was thought that there should be as many laws as there were situations and interested parties. This is the regime of privilege, of particularistic laws enacted for a particular person or social group.

The institutionalization of sporting disputes (and to a certain degree military ones also) depends directly on the existence of universal laws followed by all. In my view this is one of the most basic aspects of sport as a modern activity. Without this, individualized competition, as we understand it would be impossible.

On the other hand, the acceptance of universal rules is a mere reproduction—in another domain—of the bourgeois ethic of equality before the market and the law.

In the Brazilian case, however, we know that this structural equality is a point of tension between groups in the same way that we know that there are present clear remnants of the traditional order. So, for example, soldiers and members of the liberal professions enjoy the right to a special prison if they are convicted of crimes, while the parents of those who occupy positions of prestige and power enjoy “rights” which they consider perfectly legitimate. From a certain point of view the Brazilian dilemma—as I have said elsewhere (Cf. DaMatta, 1979)—may be understood as a tension between personal relationships that guarantee a world of relations and gradations; and universal rules that demand the opposite since they promise a theoretical equality for all those who demand the end of personal and familial privileges.

We have, therefore, a social system with difficulties with respect to relationships that must be governed by universal rules. In this connection, the institutional forms of society (the Constitution and certain federal laws for example) have been changed frequently to eliminate or slow down manifestations where the banner of equality had been clearly unfurled. In

societies like this egalitarian and impersonal rules operate so long as they don't threaten entrenched privilege. Societies with a strong traditional slant have difficulty in fully accepting the postulate of equality for all, especially when it comes to the rules governing the transmission of power and political decision-making.

In these kinds of societies, I believe that the popularity of sports like *futebol* lies in their ability to make an experience on the basis of "permanent structures" possible where that which is permanent are the universal rules that no-one may change. So, contrary to the world of politics where at each defeat (or threatened defeat) those in power seem to alter the rules of the game, *futebol*, (this humble instrument which appears to mystify the masses) brings about an exemplary experience of obedience to legitimate laws. Since the rules don't change, all are equal on the field of dispute. Victory is the prize for those who play best.

Football allows for the experience of equality; an open and highly democratic equality since it is based entirely on performance. This is so different from routine situations in which people are defined by their relationships (belonging to a certain family, having a degree, being possessed by a certain spirits with whom they maintain relationships of god parenthood, working for some powerful person, etc.). In football—and in all recreation in general—people are classified by their performance. They are individuals. So no-one may be promoted to stardom in football by their family, by their fellow godparent, by presidential decree, but by proving his or her abilities in practice—a most rare experience in Brazilian society where everyone has his or her place and "the good are born good" (*quem é bom já nasce feito*).

In highly hierarchical environments, such as Brazilian society, the space created by football (and other recreational activities such as *Carnaval* and popular religion) open a possibility for free and individualised experience where the individual may reveal how he or she is, with strengths and weaknesses, but without any risk to his or her network of social relations.

The fundamental point I wish to make is the structural relation of the possibilities of individualized expression with certain domains within Brazilian society. [...] In other words, in the institutionalised and "structured" areas of Brazilian society, the dominant and explicit form of relationship is stratification and hierarchization in networks of personal relationships. In these areas everything has its place and individual variations are impossible.

But in *futebol*, *Carnaval* and *umbanda*, individual variations are what really count, so that individualism and “star-ism” are the dominant ideologies .

These considerations lead us to another important point. If, in fact, *carnaval*, religiosity and *futebol* are so basic in Brazil, everything suggests that differently from countries of Europe and North America, our sources of social identity are not the central institutions of the social order, such as the laws, the Constitution, the university system, the financial sector, etc., but certain activities which are regarded as secondary or marginal to the production of identity and social solidarity in the dominant countries of the developed world. Music, a relationship with spirits and saints, hospitality and, naturally, *Carnaval* and *futebol* allow Brazilians to enter into contact with that which is *permanent* in the social world. In these domains, the rules do not change and are accepted by all. This is the opposite of what occurs in the U.S. which is sociologically most interesting. In the U.S., society is reproduced through a civic and individualistic mould, which is the same for the nation and society. In Brazil, national identity is multiple. On one side, it is formed by the popular institutions I have referred to. On the other, it continues to reproduce (even with difficulty) European and North American models for “nation” and “government”.

Futebol is a sport and a machine, which socializes people in Brazil. It is a highly complex system for the communication of essential values (Cf., Levine, 1980), and a domain which guarantees cultural continuity and permanence. While the forms of government and the Constitution constantly change, while the universities, the currency and the political parties cause Brazilians to have serious doubts as to whether their country can ever attain modernity, with a place in the sun in the international consort of nations, *futebol*, *carnaval* and personal relationships proclaim that Brazil is great, creative and generous, having—as happens with *futebol*—a glorious future.

5. Conclusions

Our journey has been a long one, from an initial critique of the thesis of football as opiate of the people to a discussion of the place of rules in sport in modern society. The central focus has been the thesis that *futebol* is a drama of social life, a privileged way of situating a set of social significant problems facing Brazilian society. I believe that these dramatizations can explain

why certain sports are so popular in certain societies, above all when they were imported relatively recently, which is the case of Association Football in Brazil. *Futebol* is popular in Brazil because it permits the expression of a series of national problems, alternating intellectual perception and elaboration with concretely lived experiences of emotions and sentiments. In a society internally divided into many spheres, each with its own ethic, even opposite ones (even though complementary), institutions that join together the *house* and the *street*, the *citizen* with the *paterfamilias*, the *member of the government* with the *urban masses*, the omnipotent and omniscient *gods* with the men who worship them here below, are institutions which must be successful in their role as privileged means whereby life may be defined in all its strength and plenitude. If everything leads to the division of the social world in daily life, *Carnaval*, *futebol* and feasts [*festas*] in general bring things together, momentarily allowing one to see the world as governed by universal laws where “choice” is possible. Through *futebol* we are led to the kingdom of equality and social justice.

On the other hand, the study of the “dramatizations” of *futebol* allows us to see how the sources of Brazilian identity are linked to so-called “popular culture”, areas which are liminal in those modern social systems governed by general laws and the market.

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Tradução: Peter Fry