Introduction

“In Europe if you are dancing in the team bus before a World Cup final match it would be viewed as not concentrating. But in Brazil if you are not speaking and laughing on the bus that is seen as being afraid.”

Leonardo Arajuo (in Benson and Sinnott, 2006)

During extra-time in the men’s 2006 FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cup final in Berlin, about 715 million television viewers saw Zinedine Zidane sent off in disgrace for violently ramming his head into the chest of the stalwart Italian defender Marco Materazzi. Captain of the French national team, revered as one of the world’s greatest footballers, and playing in his final international match, Zidane’s act incited widespread shock and condemnation. Interviews with Zidane and Materazzi did little to explain the reasons behind Zidane’s enigmatic assault. Even the forensic lip-readers hired by the international press could not decode Materazzi’s nettlesome remark and answer the two questions that burned on everyone’s lips: What did Materazzi say? Why did Zidane snap? These questions, however, are perhaps overshadowed by an even greater mystery that surrounded the 2006 World Cup final: Why did approximately 715 million people(1) gather around television sets to watch this game in the first place? Why did nearly a sixth of the world’s population watch a game consisting of twenty-two men on a large patch of grass kicking, heading, and throwing an “air filled-sphere with a circumference of 68 – 70 cm, a weight of 410 – 450g... covered in leather or ‘other suitable material’”?(2)

This paper engages the latter questions by drawing on one month of research on the 2006 World Cup on Commercial Drive (hereafter the Drive—as it is known locally) in Vancouver, Canada. Each day, hundreds and eventually thousands of fans descended on the Drive with its multiethnic (especially Italian and Portuguese) cafés, restaurants, and social clubs to watch games as part of the Soccer Rio Festival. Between 8 AM (kick-off time for initial matches) and 7 PM (full-time for later matches) the Drive was transformed into a “theater of sport” (Raitz, 1999) with football-jersey-wearing, flag-waving, and song-singing football fans crammed into cafés and sports bars getting carried away by the World Cup’s dramatic spectacle. The vast majority of the Drive’s carnival-cum-festival scenes (Jackson, 1988; Willems-Braun, 1994) revolved around the various objects, practices, and emotions of everyday nationalism (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995). While a significant body of research already addresses the nationalist socioeconomies of ‘mega-events’, such as the Olympics (Close et al 2007; Roche, 2000;) and the World Cup (Fiore, 2006; Stark and Stark, 2010), few studies theoretically and empirically investigate how nationalist emotions are embodied individually and collectively in the concrete local settings of, for example, cafés, streets, and sports bars. Moreover, while many studies highlight, sometimes begrudgingly, the World Cup’s indubitable allures—that is, its singular ability to attract so many spectators (Turnbull et al, 2008)—there is a paucity of theoretical and empirical research on why nationalist sports spectacles are so emotive for so many people in the first place. In what follows, I explore where, why, and how the World Cup incites “a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated” (Žižek, 1993, page 201) in terms of the sociopsychical spaces of community, belief, and anxiety.

Briefly, Žižek argues that nations are not merely contingent, discursive, and socio-historically constructed “ways of life”. Rather, a “nation exists only as long as its specific mode of enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices” (Žižek, 1993, page 202, emphasis in original). Enjoyment is an extremely complex concept in Žižek’s corpus (see Kingsbury, 2008). For the purposes of my argument, I focus on enjoyment in terms of Žižek’s translation of what Lacan calls “jouissance”: a fundamental and multifaceted concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis that draws on Freud’s notion of “libido” and Marx’s notion of “surplus-value”. Enjoyment is a stubborn yet elusive, exquisite yet agonistic form of pleasure that can be likened to “an excessive quantity of excitation” (Evans, 1996, page 148) that is “embodied, materialized, in the effective functioning of the social field” (Žižek, 1989, page 36). From a Lacanian perspective, enjoyment helps consolidate and divide social groups through rapture, antagonism, and sacrifice.

By drawing on Žižek’s Lacanian concept of the “national Thing”, I argue that the World Cup’s spaces of nationalism not only take place in the frequently researched sociopsychical registers of the Imaginary (eg national meanings and illusory national harmony) and the Symbolic (eg national symbols and customs) but also through the less researched register of the Real: a “nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency” (Žižek, 1993, page 202). The Real—“a paradoxical, chimerical entity which, although it does not exist, has a series of properties and can produce a series of effects” (Žižek, 1989, page 164)—is associated with the excesses and allures of phenomena such as rapture, anxiety, and enjoyment. The Thing is an enigmatic leftover or stain of the Real that lacks determinate existence and eludes straightforward interpretation. Crucially, the Thing “is not so much the inert presence that ‘curves’ the symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it) but rather the effect of these gaps and
inconsistencies’ (Zižek, 2002, page xxx; see also Secor, 2008). For Zižek (1989, pages 201–207) the Thing is intimately associated with the sublime not only because it incarnates the failure of (Symbolic and Imaginary) representation but also because it evokes giddy feelings of pleasure and pain, inaccessibility and suffocation, attraction and repulsion.

My main argument is that taking into account the sociospatial practices of enjoyment qua the national Thing can enhance our theoretical and empirical understandings of the nationalism, critical infrastructure, and ideological struggles associated with global sports events such as the World Cup. The paper begins by evaluating two interrelated literatures. First, the critical geography of sport that seeks to understand the spatial nexuses of sport, commodification, and the critical infrastructure. And, second the burgeoning writings on the globalization of nationalism and football. I argue that these literatures’ conceptualizations of sport downplay the theoretical and empirical complexities of enjoyment. Furthermore, they are constrained by binary thinking that pits global oppressive ‘dystopic’ political economic structures against local celebratory ‘utopic’ forces of resistance. I then turn to elaborate on Zižek’s reworking of Lacan’s notion of the Thing. Next, I outline the empirical background of the Drive, which is exemplary of a multiethnic urban space in Canada, before turning to the main section that draws on one month of participant observation and thirty-five semistructured interviews. In this section I explore how the World Cup national Thing takes place in terms of the Drive’s modes of communal enjoyment, practices of belief, and feelings of anxiety. I conclude by considering how the paradoxes of enjoyment can enhance our theorizations about society and space, as well as the sublimity of the so-called ‘beautiful game’.

The critical infrastructure and the problem of enjoyment
Recently in this journal, Ross (2008, page 998) observed, “something resembling a critical geography of sport has begun to emerge”. For Ross this nascent field of study can be furthered by understanding how sport is (re)produced through commodification as part of the “critical infrastructure” (Zukin, 1993). The critical infrastructure, a key component of the cultural economy, consists of a broad range of public intermediaries, including entrepreneurs, advertising agencies, celebrities, ‘lifestyle’ gurus, sociocultural critics, tourism boards, and local dignitaries who promulgate cultural values, tastes, distinctions, and ideas (Mitchell, 2000; Zukin, 1995). International football’s critical infrastructure involves ticket sales for matches, clubs’ marketing of merchandise and services, and the branding of European clubs across the world (especially in Southeast Asia) (Foer, 2004; Manzenreiter and Horne, 2004; Slack, 2004).

Much of football’s recent boom as a multibillion dollar global industry depends on the critical infrastructure. According to Deloitte and Touche between 2007 and 2008 the European football market grew by €1 billion to €14.6 billion as a result of new television broadcasting deals. The success—that is, the excitement and profits generated by the World Cup—relies on a critical infrastructure that consists of alliances of the national state, regional politics, and expansion of the global consumer markets” (Tomlinson and Young, 2006, page 4) as part of countries’ and cities’ boosterist attempts to host World Cup matches, secure corporate sponsorships, and attract media promotion. Silk et al (2005, page 2, emphasis in original) usefully argue

that considerations of the critical infrastructure of global sports events such as the World Cup must take into account geographies of “transnationalisms and localities”. To date, however, most research focuses on the global scales of the World Cup’s nationhood and nationalism (Bellos, 2002; Dauncey and Hare, 1999; Manzenreiter and Horne, 2004; Whannel, 2008). Yet, given the legacy of leftist critiques of the culture industries (Debord, 2002 [1967]; Harvey, 1990; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002 [1942], pages 94–136; see also Baudrillard, 1998 [1970]) that inform the research on the World Cup, national enjoyment is frequently condemned for its complicity in capitalist hegemony and ideology (Carrington et al., 2009). For example, Whannel (2008, page 108) argues that national sport “creates a largely artificial sense of national-belongingness, an imaginary coherence. It masks social divisions and antagonisms, offering a unity which we all too easily fall in with.... National sport fosters a xenophobic attitude to foreigners—it is us against them. It helps to circulate unreal expectations of our own merits and derogatory stereotypes of everyone else. Yet more remains to be said. The world is structured by national divisions which are not simply imaginary. But for international sport their prime significance is perhaps symbolic.”

Much of sport’s promulgation of an alleged delusionary “spectacle [that] hides the reality of a system of actors competing over commercial stakes” (Bourdieu, 1999, page 17) takes place via television. In the 2006 World Cup, for example, “if all the 2006 [television] coverage were shown on just one channel, it would take over eight years to broadcast non-stop”. By falling prey to simplistic and “imperialist” (MacAloon, 2006) conceptions of the spectacle, research on the critical infrastructure of football has neglected grounded ethnographic work that investigates the locales and communities of, for example, television’s “gathering places” (Adams, 1992; see also Ingham and McDonald, 2003; Silk, 2004). Responding to the rise of television shows, websites, and internet-based fan sites dedicated to football, Tomlinson and Young’s (2006) edited book is one of the most in-depth study of the various geographical and historical contexts of the World Cup’s spectacle and national identities. Yet these studies do not examine the street-level nationalist consumption of the World Cup. When researchers do explore the locales of sports events, they usually draw on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analyses and Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “habitus” to consider how local subcultures oppose the staging of malignant mega-events composed of ahistorical and decontextualized “pseudo-religious metaphors of Olympic spirit” (Lenskyj, 2000, page 8; see also Falcos and Maguire, 2005). In sum, contemporary analyses of sport usually fall into two camps: on the one hand are the global analyses that bemoan the dystopic elements of nationalism, and on the other are the local studies that celebrate political resistance. Both of these approaches are distrustful of people’s enjoyment of sport. In the former scenario, enjoyment qua nationalist sentiment buttresses hegemonic acquiescence and ideological delusions. In the latter scenario, enjoyment is a phenomenon that must be shunned or channeled into subversive activities. Those studies that do not reject the social intricacies and importance of spectators’ enjoyment are, for the most part, theoretically vague and/or empirically underdeveloped. Only a few studies take seriously the

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embodied and emotional experiences of football fans, as well as the extent to which football provides people with “an opportunity to have fun, to enjoy themselves, to get excited, worked up, to feel certain intense emotions that daily routine rarely offers them” (Llosa, 2008, page 241; see also Whang, 2004). Such spaces of fun and enjoyment, however, are theorized in terms of the vague and desiccating concepts of “empty pleasure” (Llosa, 2008) and “empty forms” of enjoyment (MacAloon, 1984).

The paucity of empirical studies on the transnationalisms and localities of the World Cup, as well as the undertheorizations about football fans' enjoyment, severely constrains our ability to think critically about the World Cup’s critical infrastructure and nationalisms. By chiding the fallaciousness of people’s enjoyment of, for example, World Cup fever and the Olympic spirit, we also risk overlooking the extent to which sociopolitical struggles are themselves infused with enjoyment (Kingsbury, 2008). In addition, insofar as research on the critical infrastructure and commodification of sports regards nationalist enjoyment as vacuous, then the commodification of sports events will continue to remain “a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx, 1990, page 163). My contention is that a critical geography of sport can be greatly enhanced by taking into account the “paradoxes of surplus-enjoyment” (Žižek, 1989, page 53) that infuse sports events such as the World Cup. Our task is to take seriously the extent to which material practices of enjoyment (exemplified by the national Thing) permeate the objects, practices, and relations of sports. It is well known that the critical infrastructure enables certain people to enjoy certain ideas, values, and objects (Mitchell, 2000, page 83). What is less known, however, is how enjoyment as such emerges in social spaces and how enjoyment animates the consumption of sports events in terms of people’s nationalist sentiments, feelings of unity, as well as xenophobic attitudes towards Other social groupings. Žižek’s notion of the national Thing can be of considerable help in clarifying these issues.

From the Thing to the national Thing

In his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–60), Lacan (1992) uses the concept of the Thing to theorize a wide range of themes, including subjectivity, modernity, sublimation, aesthetics, religion, courtly love, moral law, and ethics. Drawing on Kant’s the “thing-in-itself”, Heidegger’s essay on “the Thing”, and Freud’s distinction between the “word-presentations” (*Wortvorstellungen*) in everyday speech and unconscious “thing-presentations” (*Sachvorstellungen*) that resist meaning, Lacan uses the notion of the Thing (he used the German term “das Ding”) to refer to phenomena that exceed or threaten to dissolve the imagination, representation, and pleasure. Central to Lacan’s theorization of the emergence of the social subject, the Thing first arises as “strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any case the first outside” (1992, page 52). The “first outside” arises out of the dyadic interactions between the child and the primordial (m)Other. In the Lacanian account, the child’s separation from the (m)Other “opens up a hole in being... not that the mother escapes representation or thought, but that the jouissance [enjoyment] that attached me to her has been lost and this loss depletes the whole of my being” (Copjec, 2002, pages 35 – 36). The subject is unable to forget the loss of enjoyment and the Thing “because some trace of it remains behind even if the nature of that trace must be reconceived” (Copjec, 2002, pages 35 – 36). Thus, the subject is forever buffeted by the trace of the Thing that serves as “points of reference... with the world of desires” (Lacan, 1992, page 52).
Lacan’s reference to a “world” is not merely metaphoric. One of Lacan’s aims is to theorize the psychoanalytic subject via the Thing’s sociospatialities in terms of, for example, how it defines the limits of representation and morality (Lacan, 1992, page 63), different modes of enjoyment that characterize socialist and American entertainment (pages 79–80), and the unnerving otherness of the neighbor (page 186). The Thing, then, is not a psychological entity, that is, something inside people’s psyches; rather, the Thing is first and foremost intersubjective, that is, a social phenomenon. For Žižek the Thing is enigmatic, its materializations are frequently illusive and fragmentary, and it is best understood as a “place” rather than a thing. For Žižek (1989, page 194) the Thing is characterized by a

“fundamental feature of the logic of the Lacanian object: the place logically precedes objects which occupy it: what the objects, in their positivity, are masking is not some other, more substantial order of objects but simply the emptiness, the void they are filling out” (emphasis in original).

One of the most frequent criticisms of psychoanalytic social theories, however, is to claim that psychoanalysis disregards social power and material practices. Harvey (1996, pages 98–100), for example, asserts that Žižek’s understanding of the “ideology of nationhood” in an Eastern European context ignores “social relationships”, treats the population as “homogenous”, denies “power to... discourse or material practices”, and reductively omits an analysis of “how a nationalist politics is... actually taking root in daily life.” In short, Harvey claims that psychoanalysis focuses on the human psyche at the expense of concrete sociality. Yet Žižek’s work teems with pages and paragraphs that affirm the materialist and quotidian spaces of politics that evade Harvey’s non-dialectical reading of Žižek. In addition, as a self-affirmed dialectical-materialist, much of Žižek’s corpus is driven by critiques of the idealist intrapsychic approaches to political economy that Harvey attacks (Žižek, 1989; see also Johnston, 2008). Throughout his four decades of work, Lacan argued that psychoanalysis radically opposed psychology because the former affirms the radical intersubjectivity of desire, fantasy, enjoyment, and so on. Lacan rejects ego-centered or psychologistic approaches to the subject because (following the poet Arthur Rimbaud) the “I is an Other” (2002, page 24). Lacanian psychoanalysis (much like other paradigms such as Marxism and poststructuralism) always privileges discourses over individuals, but with a twist. As Žižek puts it, in psychoanalysis

“the Social, the field of social practices and socially held beliefs, is not simply on a different level from individual experience, but something to which the individual himself has to relate, which the individual himself has to experience as an order which is minimally ‘reified’, externalized. The problem, therefore, is not ‘how to jump from the individual to the social level’; the problem is: how should the external-impersonal socio-symbolic order of institutionalized practices and beliefs be structured, if the subject is to retain his ‘sanity,’ his ‘normal’ functioning?... In other words, the gap between the individual and the ‘impersonal’ social dimension is to be inscribed back within the individual himself: this ‘objective’ order of the Social Substance exists only insofar as individuals treat it as such, relate to it as such” (2006, page 6, emphasis in original).

Below I illustrate how the national Thing becomes inscribed within football fans’ practices on the Drive in terms of their presuppositions of the existence of other passionate fans that share an enjoyment of and belief in the national team. Lacan’s notion of the Thing is particularly useful for understanding the enjoyment or “Social Substance” of sports because the Thing takes place wherein things (e.g., commodities, people, events, images, signifiers, and so on) are endowed with value and desirability whenever the everyday and sublime overlap. Specifically, an object
occupies “the place of the Thing” (Lacan, 1992, page 140) whenever an object “reveal[s] itself from outside the structure of representation and disclose[s] its cosmic relevance” (Kay, 2003, page 172). Sport, mediated by the critical infrastructure, is the global activity par excellence that offers people social fantasies that coordinate people’s desire for objects teeming with sublimity and cosmic relevance. Crucially, the national Thing is not an ultimate truth or authentic reality that is blocked or hidden by discourse. Rather, the Thing emerges out of the limits, inconsistencies, and impasses of discourses. In short, the Thing is the difference or deadlock between (at least) two opposing viewpoints (Secor, 2008, pages 2624–2625).

For example, six weeks before the start of England’s 2006 World Cup campaign, Wayne Rooney—an integral part of England’s chances of winning the World Cup—fractured a metatarsal bone in his right foot. In the following hours and days, an estimated 3000 articles in newspapers, on the Web, and even academic medical journals focused on Rooney’s metatarsal by speculating on whether or not he would be fit to play, and, if so, whether he would be effective or not. Media speculation even incited the creation of healrooney.com, a website established to expedite Rooney’s recovery. Users were invited to move their cursor arrow over an image of Rooney’s foot and tap into the “power of positivity”. In this example, Rooney’s metatarsal occupies the place of the Thing and becomes a sublime object because of all the fuss and panic. One of the most frequent examples of the Thing in Žižek’s corpus is the nation. From a Žižekian perspective, the imagined community of a nation is concretized via people’s enjoyment of a “national Thing” that “appears as what gives plenitude and vivacity to our life.... If we are asked how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called ‘our way of life.’ All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which it is made visible in the unique way a community organizes its enjoyment” (Žižek, 1993, page 201, emphasis in original).

In other words, a nation exists insofar as it is a national Thing that is materialized through social practices of enjoyment. To the forms of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) wherein the nation is “indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of citizenry” and its “ideological habits” (Billig, 1995, page 6), we can usefully add forms of “sublime nationalism”, wherein people become swept up and gripped—often in the name of love and sometimes in the sacrifice of lives—by the allures of the nation. The notion of sublime nationalism alerts us to the extent to which spaces of banal or everyday nationalism are permeated and sustained by unusually intense outbreaks of enjoyment. The sublimity of the national Thing means that it not only resists banal (or everyday Symbolic and Imaginary) experiences, but it also disturbs (as instances of the Real) fixed meanings and discourse itself. As Keohane (1992, page 20) notes: “If you ask me what it is that makes me Irish, or I ask you what it is that makes you Canadian, we find that ‘it’s hard to say, exactly,’ so we resort to listening to each other’s unique aspects of ‘our way of life’. ....While it is impossible to say what this Thing is essentially, it is definitely there, because we can readily point to cultural practices where it is apparent as ‘the real thing’ or ‘a Western Thing,’ some Thing that is ‘just SO Toronto’.”

The registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, then, provide a useful analytical framework to understand different (eg banal and sublime) kinds of national identifications. In Lacanian theory identification is closely related to a subject’s (Imaginary) Ideal Ego (“the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing ‘what we would like to be’” (Žižek, 1989, page 105)) and the
Symbolic) Ego Ideal [“the very place from where we are being observed, from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love” (page 105, emphasis in original)]. The Real is a significant component of identification insofar as the Real pertains to narcissistic enjoyment. Lacan avoids (pace Fuss, 1994) an “unexceptional definition of narcissism” (Copjec, 1994, page 23) because he does not reduce narcissism to a matter of mirrored similitude between oneself, a visual image of oneself, or another person as a reflection of oneself. In Lacanian psychoanalysis one does not discover in the loved object of identification an image of the self; rather, one finds the corporeal enjoyment of the self (see Copjec, 2002, page 79).

Zizek’s theorization of identification and the national Thing has inspired research on diasporas (eg see Harney, 2006; Mishra, 2007, pages 14 – 17), colonialism (eg see MacCannell, 1996), race (eg see Hage, 2000, pages 48 – 77), and forced migration (eg see Chen, 2007). These Lacanian approaches critique influential studies of diasporas and transnationalism (eg see Appadurai, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978) insofar as they neglect how instances of the Real such as enjoyment disturb sociopsychical relations. Yet these Lacanian studies often elide the complex sociospatialities of enjoyment. Lacanian theorizations about the nation and nationalism offer unique ways in which to explore the overlaps between enjoyment and social formations of nationalism, yet they invite (not foreclose as Harvey would have it) careful geographical empirical research (Easthope, 1999, pages 221 – 223). Thus the national Thing poses a series of questions for spatially oriented social scientists: how do national Things take place across different diasporic contexts and in multicultural states? How are national Things influenced by transnational “long-distance nationalism” (Agnew, 2004, page 229)? How do national Things take place in, across, and within different sports venues and events (Bairner, 2001; Cronin and Mayall, 1998)?

The following section tackles these questions by exploring the various ways the national Thing takes place in the nationalist consumption of the World Cup on the Drive. My conceptual framework helps illustrate the extent to which the Drive is animated by and permeated with sociospatial practices of enjoyment, belief, and anxiety. While I mainly focus on people’s activities in sports bars and on the street, the World Cup tournament means that much of Commercial Drive’s built environment is spatially implicated in Imaginary scenes on posters, billboards, and televisions; the Symbolic order and paraphernalia of flags, jerseys, and rituals; and outbreaks of the Real such as the strains of anxiety and the thrills of enjoyment. From a Lacanian perspective, the Drive’s sociospatial practices take place topologically wherein people’s feelings are registered and felt through objects without losing their sincerity and intensity (see Kingsbury, 2007).

Commercial Drive, Vancouver
With nearly half of its 2.1 million residents (Statistics Canada, 2007) born outside Canada, the Greater Vancouver Regional District is one of the most culturally diverse places in the world. Like other major Canadian cities, Vancouver manages and profits from its ethnocultural diversity by fostering multicultural policies and practices that assert “different cultural or ethnic groups have the right to remain distinct rather than assimilating to ‘mainstream’ norms” (Jackson, 2000, page 528; see also Ley, 2004; Mitchell, 2004). As I will show, football fans’ non-Canadian or quasi-Canadian identities are particularly important for studying the World Cup’s national Things because Canada did not qualify for the 2006 World Cup.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Notably, Canada’s women’s national team (as of August 2010 ranked 13 out of 159 teams by FIFA) is far more successful than the men’s national team (as of August 2010 ranked 101 out of 203 teams by FIFA).
Commercial Drive, exemplary of an ‘urban village’ and located in one of Vancouver’s Business Improvement Areas, is a 3-km-long road that passes through the Grandview-Woodland district to the east of Downtown Vancouver. The Drive neighborhood, which is bounded by the Port of Vancouver’s docks in the north and a Sky Train monorail station in the south, consists of approximately 28,000 middle-income to low-income residents and more than 300 businesses, including restaurants, bistros, bakeries, music and bookstores, delicatessens, theaters, food markets, clothes stores, and salons. First built as a road alongside a major streetcar line in 1891, the Drive flourished during the 1920s and later became known as Little Italy, with the arrival of Italian immigrants after the Second World War. Since the 1970s, the Drive has attracted immigrants from China, Portugal, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. Today the Drive is renowned for its laid-back European-style cafés and restaurants, countercultural art scene, lesbian community, radical politics (one graffito tag on the Drive reads: “warning this area unsafe for yuppies”), as well as annual parades, including the Halloween-inspired Parade of Lost Souls. According to its website, the Drive’s “Italian roots, complemented by its multi-national diversity, and vibrant art community makes for a treasure trove of shopping finds and experiences! The perfect fusion of community, art, and commerce.”

Such a fusion helped consolidate the Drive’s reputation as one of the most exciting places in Vancouver to watch the 2006 World Cup.

The eighteenth World Cup of 2006 consisted of thirty-two teams and sixty-four matches that took place in Germany between June 9 and July 9. The research consisted of twenty-five days of participant observation and fifty-two semistructured interviews conducted before, during, and after the matches. The interviews, conducted by my research assistant Jesse Proudfoot, took place in and around the dozen designated World Cup viewing locations of the Soccer Rio Festival (Proudfoot, forthcoming). These settings included the Rio Theatre, Riddim and Spice, the Portuguese Club of Vancouver, the Abruzzo Cappuccino Bar, and the Caffè Roma (the main site for the research). Questions focused on how long interviewees had lived in Canada, their nationality, and their motives for going to the Drive. Most questions were deliberately unstructured and designed to elicit interviewees’ understandings, identifications, and feelings towards the players, teams, matches, the World Cup, as well as the Drive’s settings. Three main themes emerged out of fans’ nationalist consumption of the World Cup: communal enjoyment, belief, and anxiety.

Communities of enjoyment
This scene (see figure 1) typifies the ecstatic celebrations of fans of Italy winning the 2006 World Cup on the Drive. Repetitive chants of “Italia! Italia! Italia! Italia!” pulsed from a rapturous crowd who reveled not only in Italy’s victory but also in the enjoyment of taking and posing for photographs, holding aloft fake World Cup trophies, waving a hockey stick with an Italian flag tied to one end, and standing on tricolor painted cars that blared out Italian football songs (see figure 2). British Columbia’s The Province newspaper described the celebrations on the Drive as “wall-to-wall humanity... hooting fans... armed with trumpets, air horns, drums and rhythmic chants” (Austin, 2006). The day following Italy’s triumph, the Il Messaggero newspaper’s headline read: “Italy could beat anyone—even the Martians”.

(7) See http://www.thedrive.ca/index.shtml
(9) Interviewees’ names have been changed in the text.
Almost a month before the tournament’s dramatic climax, Sergio (an Italian-Canadian male in his late forties), when asked about his feelings of national pride during the World Cup, replied:

“Absolutely. It's just what it is. You know, I heard an interesting thing on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation]. Jian Ghomeshi, who's Iranian, and the other fellow, George Stroumboulopoulos, who happens to be like eight different nationalities, he's pulling for England. He says that what happens to Canadians is that you're Canadian second at the World Cup, you're whatever your country of origin first. And that's true. My daughters are both here, and they're pulling for Italy.
And they even asked people: ‘What if Canada was in the World Cup?’ and your people were playing Canada and they say ‘I’d have to go for my team’. And they asked Polish people, Czech, Italians, Brazilians. They all said ‘no’. That’s just the way it is. It’s something where you gel as a society. When the young and old get into it, you have parties, get together, you talk forever.”

Given the multiethnic and multinational context of the Drive and Vancouver, people’s favored national teams were often informed by their ethnic identifications. For example, Marco (an Argentine male in his early thirties) commented: “It might not show, but here we are all very close, we all support all the Latin teams. It doesn’t matter if you are from Mexico or Argentina, or Brazil, or you are from Ecuador.”

While research has examined similar spaces of celebration comparable to the Drive, such as multicultural festivals (Duffy, 2005), nationalist music and emotions (Wood, 2007), and ethnic consumption (Cook and Harrison, 2003), few studies inquire into “a tougher issue: how...can social order evidently generate itself” (Saldanha, 2005, pages 710–711), or in Sergio’s words, the “something where” people “gel as a society”? For Žižek, the emergence of nationalist social orders cannot be adequately explained as the result of people’s shared biological characteristics or as the result of historically and geographically contingent social constructions. Žižek (1993, page 201) asserts that the “element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated.”

Enjoyment is what gels people together as it bonds the social and the psychical. The Drive’s SoccerRio festival, with its slogan of “Friends. Food. Football”, promoted nationalist enjoyment in terms of the practices, relations, and objects of consumption in cafés, sports bars, and the Rio movie theatre. For example, Riddim and Spice (a Jamaican and Caribbean restaurant) was especially popular with fans of Trinidad and Tobago and Ecuador. For Roberto (an Italian-Canadian male in his late thirties), Caffè Roma’s (named after the football team in Rome) smells of cappuccino and sausage all added to the Drive’s “Atmosphere. The most cosmopolitan place in the city. You can find anyone down here: Portugal, Brazil, Italy, Czech Republic, you name it. They’ve got the BBQ going, an outdoor patio. They get into it. I think last year they had a $5 cover charge. There were so many people wanting to get in here! If they get past the next round, I bet they’ll have a cover charge again.”

Football is by far Italy’s most popular sport and its national team has now won four World Cup titles (only one less than Brazil). Even Italian-Canadians who were not football fans would revel in sharing an “Oceanic feeling...of being one with the external world as a whole” (Freud, 1961, page 11) by flocking to the Drive. Marielle (an Italian-Canadian female in her early twenties) admitted:

“I’m not that into soccer, but now I’m just like ‘Yes! It’s the World Cup!’ It’s like all bets are off. It’s just like community. And that’s the great thing about World Cup. It’s a beautiful time when humans can come together and stop fighting and stop bitching and stop moaning and just celebrate the game.”

Other fans of Italy shared their enjoyment of the national Thing by displaying an Italian football shirt on a dog, donning gold crucifixes, parading a mock statue of David on a pickup truck, and wearing Roman Gladiator costumes (see figure 3). These practices of enjoyment echo what Barthes (1977, page 48) called “Italianicity” (emphasis in original): “the condensed essence of all that can be Italian, from spaghetti to painting”. Part of sociospatial practices, the “condensed essence” of “Italianicity”, or, the Italian Thing proliferates through modes of collecting qua the enjoyment of amassing, accumulation, and abundance. These practices are key to the materialization of the nation via enjoyment.
In Seminar VII Lacan fondly recalls visiting the home of Jacques Prévert, a famous surrealist poet and screenwriter. During the visit Lacan was struck by his friend's collection of match boxes, which “were all threaded so as to form a continuous ribbon that ran along the mantelpiece, climbed the wall, extended to the moulding, and climbed down again next to a door” (1992, page 114). Struck by the “wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd character” of the ornamental collection, Lacan suggests that each box of matches was “not simply an object, but that, in the form of an Erscheinung [shining or glowing appearance or apparition], as it appeared in its imposing multiplicity, it may be a Thing” (page 114). One of the striking aspects of the Drive’s football matches was the “imposing multiplicity” of fans’ team shirts, scarves, flags, and so on. For example, Portugal’s qualification for the tournament’s knockout stages precipitated in the sounding of horns and the waving of flags that resembled nationalist marches. Martin (a Dutch-Canadian male in his late twenties), when asked whether he felt more Dutch during the World Cup, emphatically replied: “Yeah, absolutely. You get the orange out. You watch the games.” Getting the “orange out” refers to the orange color of the Dutch jersey.(10) The association of national teams with color is key to defining one’s uniquely shared relation to the national Thing. In terms of the color blue, for example, team nicknames include Argentina as the Albicelestes (White and Sky Blues), the France as Les Bleus (the Blues), Italy as the Azzurri (the Light Blues or Azures), and Uruguay as La Celeste (the Sky Blues).

From a Lacanian perspective, displaying an object means that it can become “a point of imaginary fixation which gives satisfaction to a drive” (Lacan, 1992, page 113). Here, the Imaginary includes social forms of rivalry exemplified by what Freud (1961 [1930], page 19) calls the “narcissism of minor differences”. This notion refers to the feuding and ridicule of closely related neighboring peoples (Freud’s examples are the Germans and the South Germans, the English and the Scottish) wherein small cultural

(10) Orange is also the color of the current Dutch royal family or Huis van Oranje-Nassau (House of Orange-Nassau).
differences are accentuated. The narcissism of minor differences is brought to the fore in terms of people's investments in the various hues of national team colors. Nick (an English male in his twenties) describes his reasons for going to the Drive as follows:

"I'm always going to enjoy watching it [the World Cup] in my own home. In the comfort of my own home but ultimately it's always more enjoyable to watch it out... the atmosphere, the vibe, that's what it's all about! [laughs]."

The national Thing—a sublime “vibe” or “non-discursive kernel of enjoyment” (Žižek, 1993, page 202)—is not only difficult to enjoy in isolation; it is also sustained by shared practices of belief. That is to say, the national Thing “exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally the effect of this belief in itself” (page 202). It is to how people's practices of belief supported their national Things on the Drive that I now turn.

Belief in the national Thing

"It was a spectacle; no, no I mean a miracle.”

Conor Oberst, From a Balance Beam

Many critical social theorists assert that mass media spectacles rely on the “manipulation of meaning” (Cosgrove, 1997, page 99) to further capitalist hegemony and ideology (Debord, 2002; Harvey, 1990; cf D'Arcus, 2006). While capitalist ideologies certainly (re)produce World Cup spectacles, there is more at stake than the mere manipulation of meaning. Sports also generate, thrive, and depend on belief: fans’ belief (evinced by the perennial placards that declare “I believe”) that their team (usually an underdog) can win a game or even a cup; belief in oneself to defy the odds of achieving a goal; and belief in one’s teammates. If, as Ross (2008) asserts, it is crucial that we better understand the role of power and struggle in sport, it is equally important that we acknowledge the importance of belief in sport. To begin with, belief cannot be equated with illusion.

Football has often been compared to a religion or church (Turnbull et al, 2008, pages 221 – 284) and in some cases directly linked with religion, such as in the Vatican’s annual Clericus Cup that consists of a football match between priests and seminarians. In addition, football often gathers sectarian rivalries, such as the Glasgow Rangers FC (Protestant, British Unionist) and Glasgow Celtic FC (Roman Catholic, Irish Republican) (Jack, 2008). Arguably, football has established itself as a global religion par excellence. According to Hegel,

"Reading the morning newspaper is the realist’s morning prayer. One orients one's attitude toward the world either by God, or what the world is. The former gives as much security as the latter, in that one knows how one stands" (Hegel quoted in Pinkard, 2000, page 242, emphasis in original).\(^{(11)}\)

In other words, Hegel contends that modern people do not pray in the morning because reading the morning paper is their morning prayer. As a result of the global critical infrastructure, the World Cup consists of practices (albeit for a month that takes place every four years) that resemble the realist’s prayer. Team formations, league tables, World Cup Wall Charts, football’s heroes and villains, oriented the attitude toward the football world for more than 26 billion people—the World Cup’s cumulative television audience. These mechanisms of belief supported Ursula's (a German female in her late twenties) belief in supporting Germany:

\(^{(11)}\)Hegel also appears as “Nobby” Hegel (skipper) in the memorable Monty Python sketch that depicts a Germany-versus-Greece philosopher football match.
“Because I’ve got a lot of relatives there [Germany] and I’m probably there half the year, so. Because, [laughs] I would never wear a German shirt at home and I would never wear a flag and here it’s okay because it’s the World Cup and it’s once in every four years... so you have to stand for your country, you have to be together and celebrate when they win.”

Researching the social dimensions of belief is a “thorny” task (Engelke, 2002). For the most part, belief is regarded as a psychological phenomenon that takes place inside people’s heads or psyches. From a Žižekian perspective, belief is materially externalized in material social practices: “belief, far from being an ‘intimate’, purely mental state, is always, materialized in our effective social activity” (Žižek, 1989, page 36, emphasis in original; see also Fleming and Spicer, 2005). The Drive’s national Things, then, do not merely consist of communities of enjoyment; they are also sustained by people’s shared practices of belief. Why? Because it is “erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features composing a specific ‘way of life.’ The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is ‘something more’ in it, something that is present in these features, that appears through them. Members of a community who partake in a given ‘way of life’ believe in their Thing” (Žižek 1993, page 201, emphasis in original).

The national Thing, then, cannot be reduced to the Italianicity of pasta or Caffé Roma’s Italian sausages and cappuccinos. The national Thing is concretized through the effects of belief via the social practices of loyalty, service, and even sacrifice for a nation. The overlap between duty and belief is often elided in appraisals of sports and nationalism. For example, Billig (1995, page 125) asserts that sport “is curious as an innocent leisure: No sense of duty attends the reading of sports reports” (Billig, 1995, page 125). In contrast, the World Cup on the Drive illustrates how belief and duty are bonded through enjoyment. Enjoyment is neither wholly innocent nor spontaneous. From a Lacanian perspective, enjoyment is issued by the superego’s commandments to “Enjoy!” The World Cup, for example, is replete with superegoic instances where people are supposed to and even required to enjoy cheering loudly for their team, bombarding the opposition with insults, and grow anxious before the final whistle. George (a Portuguese male in his late twenties) described his compulsion to watch the matches on the Drive as follows:

“That’s funny, because my girlfriend asked me that last night. I told her, I gotta go, I gotta get up early. [She said] ‘Why, it’s not going to be on TV? You don’t catch it on TV here?’ [I said] Yeah, I know, baby. ‘Why you don’t watch it here then?’ No, man, I can’t watch the game by myself, or with you! I gotta be surrounded by these people, cheering, and you know, powerful energy to win the game. I can’t do it [stay at home], I can’t do it!”

The irony here, of course, is that the game is still on the television (albeit on the Drive). Crucially, George’s enjoyment of and belief in the national Thing depends on being part of a community of believers in the World Cup’s national Things. So often in football people believe that the outcome of a game can be influenced by or even determined by a shared belief in a team’s capacity to win. The cafés on The Drive were packed with people offering perceptive analyses to fellow fans about how the game was progressing and collectively shouting directions, praises, or condemnations at players on television screens (see figure 4). These communities of belief also stretched across space beyond the cafés and even nation-states. Eric (a Ghanaian-Canadian male in his mid twenties), a supporter who lived in Ghana for six months, had been “text messaging with a number of my friends in Ghana throughout the game and they’re saying the whole place is shut down and there are people everywhere.”
That George has “gotta be surrounded by” people’s “powerful energy to win the game”, and Eric's virtual connection to friends on the other side of the globe, illustrates how ‘belief has a reflexive structure proper to intersubjective space: ‘I believe in the (national) Thing’ equals ‘I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing’. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself” (Žižek, 1993, page 202).

From this perspective, belief is “ex-centric” (Lacan, 1991, page 9) because it takes place through fans on the Drive (or Ghana) who believe in their Thing through each other. As Neville (an English male in his mid-twenties) noted, watching the games on the Drive involved a “sort of group consciousness. If you're watching the game today you've seen how people are cheering for England. When England scored their first goal, the first thing I did was start pumping my fist in the air and chanting ‘In-gur-land’ and shaking a man's hand, who I don’t know.”

While it is commonplace to emphasize the importance of “lack” in Lacan’s theorizations about subjectivity, equally important for Lacan is the lack in the “big Other”, that is, the inconsistencies of authoritative sociosymbolic constructions such as the Law, the Environment, the Team, and the Nation. As Žižek (2006, page 10) notes, “in spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile....It only exists in so far as subjects act as if it exists” (emphasis in original). The national Thing, then, is liable to dissolution whenever fans waver in or resist acts of belief. Prior to a kickoff in the Caffé Roma, Pridica (an Indian-Canadian in her early thirties) bemoaned how “everybody stood up for the Italian national anthem—which we did as well—but a majority of people sat down for the Ghanaian national anthem so that was a little disappointing.” Football's numerous lacks, that is, the unpredictability of the outcome of a football match (eg so-called ‘Cupsets’, where a highly favored team loses to a weaker team) and its panoply of ‘negative’ experiences that range from mild half-expected disappointment to crushing depression in defeat are not so much obstacles as the very stuff of the national Thing.
The Thing with anxiety

Every Saturday evening, during the football season in the UK, football fans are able to call the BBC Radio Five Live's show 606 Football Phone-in to vent their fury or revel in their ecstasy. The show illustrates how football easily incites chronic frustration, despair, and agony. Alan Green, the show’s main host, regularly laments the pain that accompanies fans’ devotion to their football teams. By finding jouissance (painful, pleasurable enjoyment) in lamenting their team’s misfortunes, these callers “elevate” or “raise” (to use Lacan’s preferred verbs) their team to “the place of the Thing” (Lacan, 1992 [1986], page 140). The place of the Thing is “a pressure point that lies outside the symbolic and the imaginary orders, where the weight of the real is sensed” (Kay, 2003, page 53) and anxiety takes hold. Pressure points of the Real are fundamental to the national Thing on the Drive. Asked about the intensity of feelings towards the World Cup, Cosme (an Argentinian male in his mid-thirties) suggested that there

“is more feeling over there [South America] than here in Canada. North Americans, they usually don’t have that feeling for the World Cup and except newly arrived Europeans they do feel that thing. It’s just that feeling that you, it’s very hard to describe. So, you know.”

The elusive enjoyment of the national Thing does not simply depend on a group of people possessing (via collective enjoyment or belief) their national Thing. Paradoxically, the emergence of the national Thing can coincide with its loss. Žižek (1993, page 201) notes that the Thing “appears to us as ‘our Thing’ (perhaps we could say cosa nostra), as something accessible only to us, as something ‘they,’ the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless it is something constantly menaced by ‘them’.” For Žižek (1993, page 203) the Other is also perceived as someone who threatens to “steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life)”. The national Thing, then, oscillates between fulfilling plenitude and negation through the imputations of the Other’s excessive, over-proximate enjoyment that simultaneously threatens to suffocate yet sustains our own national enjoyment.

On the Drive, people’s attachments to their national Thing regularly emerged out of homesickness. For Paulo (a Mexican male in his late teens) when Mexico loses it “feels very sad, it’s almost like you’ve experienced a loss in the family. Almost.” Some interviews were even stopped because people began to weep (see Proudfoot, forthcoming). Other people were simply lost for words to describe their experiences of winning a game. Christopher (an Italian-Canadian male in his late thirties) described his feelings of Italy winning a game as follows: “It’s just huge, cause it’s this, like, I don’t know, you cannot describe how much you want it. It’s... I can’t explain it. I’m speechless right now yeah.” Asked about how it felt to be on the winning side, Anthony (an Italian-Canadian in his mid-forties) replied:

“You know, I was in Europe last year and, uh, this is not even half as crazy as it is over there. But you know you gotta be prepared for when these guys lose, you know, psychologically. Some of these guys just go down the tubes. And you know, it’s nice to be, you know, I’ve had my heart broken as well as everybody in the world.”

Tony’s reference to “tubes” and “heart” evinces the somatic dimension of the national Thing (Ó Tuathail, 2003). For Mikel (a Portugese-Canadian in his mid-twenties), “my blood is Portuguese. You know, I love Portugal. Portugal is what I am. And if it wasn’t for my bloodlines, you know, then there’s nothing, right? So, I’m Portuguese all the way; I’ll always love Portugal and always be patriotic to Portugal.” Javier (an Argentine-Canadian in his early twenties) asserted, “My bones are closest to the Argentinians, so that’s the reason I am supporting them.” And, Joanne (a Portugese-Canadian in her early thirties)
observed that before a game, peoples’ “heartbeats were going crazy, hearts were stopping; you couldn't talk, you couldn't breathe. Like, people had their heads down cause they were too nerve-wracking to even watch it happen. It was crazy.”

The above extracts show how the national Thing is borne out of what Žižek (2005, page 192) calls the “driving force of desiring” and the “very universe of drives” (page 193). It is important not to conflate the psychoanalytic notion of drives with instincts. Whereas objects such as food and water can satiate the instincts of hunger and thirst, the drives derive satisfaction by *encircling* and *missing* the object of the drives. Put differently, the drives attach themselves to activities (eg looking, listening, and talking) that bring to the fore deference, deviation, and repetition because the drives have “no goal, but only an aim, this is because its object is no longer a means of attaining satisfaction, it is an end in itself; it is directly satisfying” (Copjec, 2002, page 38). The continual playing of music during a game illustrates the way of the drives in the World Cup. Jo (a Brazilian male in his late twenties) notes that “we play with our instruments and keep the team going on and going on and going on... . Even if the team is losing ‘keep playing’, just incentive to the guy... it’s try again, try again, please go ahead. To go further.” The drives also garner enjoyment through listening and looking, as well as by “making oneself heard and making oneself seen” (Lacan, 1981, page 195, emphasis in original) (see figure 5). In terms of making one's national Thing visible and audible, Tom (an Angolan male in his late thirties) claimed that the main attraction of the World Cup was “to get Angola recognized by the outside world... because it’s not recognized by the outside world.” For Samuel (a Ghanaian male in his late thirties) the World Cup allowed Ghana “to show... we have something to show—to show our culture, that we can play”.

![Figure 5](source: author)

The national Thing, as part of the traumatic Real, can also become “a place of menace, because it is where the deadly impulses of the drives are gathered” (Kay, 2003, page 53). To be sure, football is sometimes afflicted by eruptions of violence in the name of loyalty and sacrifice. From a Lacanian perspective, the “subject keeps its distance” (Lacan, 1992, page 54) from the deadly allures of the Thing through practices of desire, that is, practices that affirm doubt, speculation, and suspicion.
Mario (an Italian male in his mid-forties) claimed: “Brazil got five [World Cup championships], Italy got three, and they’re always saying ‘If! If! If!’ Like the last one in ’94 in Los Angeles: ‘if Baggio hadn’t kicked it over the net!’ So they look towards that and the way they’re set up now, if Italy keeps coming first and if Brazil keeps coming first, they will meet in the final if they keep going.” The lack of desire means that the subject encounters the Thing as “the outer extremity of pleasure [that] is bearable to us” (Lacan 1992, page 80). The Thing can embody the suffocating enjoyment of the “neighbor” (Lacan, 1992) or rival fan who could be on the other side of the street, café, table, and so on. This neighbor Thing can threaten people’s enjoyment of their national Thing. Cosme (a Brazilian male in his early twenties) condemned the national enjoyment of other fans on the Drive after the World Cup final as follows:

“I hate the Frenchmen, I hate the way that they cheered for their team in front of everybody and ridiculed all the Brazilians. As you can see, when Brazil wins, everybody’s happy, they’re on the street dancing, when the French are, they’re just basically annoying people…. I just came here to express the fact that I’m Brazilian and my Mom is Brazilian and that we enjoy our lives and I wish there was a party tonight but there’s just a whole bunch of arrogant French assholes drinking coffee and eating their baguettes.”

The above criticism illustrates how a disgruntled fan can so easily reduce an entire nation (France) in terms of a specific mode of enjoyment and consumption. Such instances of nationalist antagonism were rare on the Drive. In addition to a police presence during the final match, many fans made attempts to avoid or dissipate the possibility of anxiety turning into aggressiveness. Joseph (an Italian male in his mid-thirties) responded to an argument in Caffè Roma by simply asserting that football is “called the beautiful game, so we should keep it beautiful”.

**Conclusion**

Every four years, for one month, television and Web broadcasts of the World Cup incite more than a billion people to cheer, pray, and scream at television screens in more than 200 countries. By drawing on the work of Žižek and the case study of Commercial Drive in Vancouver, I hope to have shown how the World Cup on Commercial Drive, Vancouver, like many other sports events, is wrapped up in the enjoyment, belief, and anxieties associated with national Things. While we are adept at taking into account the Imaginary and Symbolic dimensions of nationalism, we often overlook the paradoxes of the Real. The Real refers to sublime sociopsychical phenomena that disturb our usual Imaginary senses of self and other, as well as the Symbolic codes that comprise our cultural and moral sensibilities.

The national Thing brings to the fore four paradoxes of enjoyment that can enhance our theorizations about sports, space, and society. The first paradox refers to how enjoyment, far from being something entirely spontaneous and voluntary, is often issued as an injunction or duty. Exemplary here is a slogan emblazoned on a scarf in Caffè Roma: “La Roma non si discute, si ama! Forza Magica, facce sogna! [Rome you do not argue, you love it! Come on Magica, make us dream!]”.

The second paradox refers to how people’s obedience to rules can yield intense feelings of enjoyment. In Joe’s Caffè, approximately 100 Portuguese (many in tears) fans stood up to sing the national anthem. Among them were two women holding a handmade sign with a paraphrased extract from the national anthem: “Heroes of the sea and now heroes of the field. Who’s next? We play soccer like champions. Even against killers”.

(12) Thanks to Allesandra Capperdoni for helping me with the English translation.
we survive.” The third paradox concerns how enjoyment is not a fleeting psychological entity, but rather a bond that can unite and divide people amidst their material social practices. Enjoyment turns things into Things so that they can “stick” in the mind and in the world” (Rose, 2002, page 455, emphasis added). Finally, given the “emerging society of enjoyment” (McGowan, 2003), the task today for many people is not overcoming restrictive inhibitions and prohibitions but, rather, finding respite from popular culture’s incessant commandments to “Enjoy!”.

The above paradoxes of enjoyment will forever elude researchers insofar as enjoyment is cynically dismissed as an innocent, distasteful, and neutral phenomenon (Hedges, 2009). By taking into account the role of enjoyment in football, we can begin to fathom the massive increases in revenue in football exemplified by the English Premier League. On an online fan forum for Everton FC, Mark O’Brien suggested that “getting supporters to simultaneously hand over huge amounts of their own cash and think in the same terms as the people fleecing them has been one of the greatest marketing tricks of modern times.” Yet, enjoyment can also generate progressive sports activities such as the renowned leftist causes associated with the Turkish team Besiktas FC. To be sure, the World Cup’s national Things afforded some people tremendous feelings of grace and healing. Roger (an Angolan male in his late twenties) stated:

“I hope they [Angola] win today to make us little bit happy, you know. Just to heal us, to get that heal cause Angola been so much war and that’s the most important [thing for] people to know about Angola. And that’s gonna be a beautiful thing you know? You know, to show people what Angola’s all about. And that would be beautiful to get people to go to visit Angola and experience the culture and everything. That’s the place to be right now.”

Whether one is skeptical or convinced about football’s capacity to create social justice, we would do well to remember that [to paraphrase Paul Allen Miller (2008, page 35)] the World Cup don’t mean a thing, if it ain’t got that national Thing! Tackling the spatial politics of enjoyment in sport can incite belated discussions about the social aesthetics of sport. While it is a cliché to cite Pelé’s (Edson Arantes do Nascimento) declaration that football is “the beautiful game”, few studies critically inquire into why football is considered beautiful by billions of people. Football’s beauty blooms not only in its spectacular goals and graceful passing movements but also in its convulsive Things of enjoyment.

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