

THE SPECTACLE- COMMODITY FOOTBALL



by a rebellious footballer

First published in French in July 2004.
Translated from French by Zanzara athée,
thanks to Uluz and Spaceman.



Zanzara athée (zanzara@squat.net),
May 2014. No copyright. Copy + riot.
<https://infokiosques.net/zanzara>

The spectacle-commodity football

The situationists used to say that *the spectators don't find what they want, but they want what they find*. I have the impression that this idea is still totally true today...

I was in Lille a few weeks ago and I found by chance a free daily newspaper called *Metro*. I'm saying « by chance » but it actually wasn't so. I was in the train station, where it is more difficult not to find this newspaper than to find it. It is everywhere. Financed by advertising, this newspaper is meaningless and mimics the fake neutrality of mainstream news. It is typically a newspaper for spectators. It's being read by those who find it on their way, they read it because they have nothing better to do.

And that's how it was for me, when I found *Metro* n°91, on Friday 11th of June 2004. I instantly noticed a full-page advertisement for SFR mobile phones on the backpage of the newspaper, « official partner » of the French national football team. « Follow les Bleus* in Portugal » (that's Euro 2004, the European football championship, in case you don't know, but

* In French, « Les Bleus » means « The Blues ».

it would be surprising...). To sum up, if I'm not in Portugal, if I have no access to radio or TV to be informed about results, I can take it easy : with my « SFR mobile »'s « sport function », I'll get « all the matches, live from Portugal, minute after minute, the results and standings in real time », etc.

The advertisement's main slogan is :

« You're obsessed by football, follow it ».

This advertisement for a mobile phone brand works on the assumption that the mobile phone is an obsession, an essential tool for daily life, an object on which our attention is focused permanently (or almost). SFR knows it, and it is *so obvious* that they don't even say a word about that. The catch phrase of this mobile phone advertisement doesn't mention the quality of SFR services, it speaks about football desires, certainly considered as being inherent to everyone.

Football is so omnipresent through mass-communication (TV, radio, written press, internet, advertising medium, etc.) and daily life conversations (« have you seen the match ? », that kind of things, you know...) that it seems impossible to affirm that football can be an obsession / passion

coming from deliberate and considered thoughts. The desire of football is socially constructed, generally at the expense of our pleasure (the same for desires of money, cigarettes or sex). If we are obsessed with football, it is not because we think that football can give us joy and improve the quality of our social relations. We are obsessed by football just as we learn how to be obsessed : in a passive, compulsive and consumerist way. Unconsciously joining up a lot of values : competition (integration of capitalist values), identification with a nation or a city (integration of nationalist values), men-only gatherings (integration of male values), specialisation with football stars as idols (integration of hierarchy or even the cult of the leader), etc. Football could be a game like any other, but it has generated so much money for so many years that it seems difficult to play this game in a fulfilling way. Throughout the 20th century football has become some sort of social plague.

The slogan « You're obsessed by football, follow it » is simultaneously followed by the implicit « You're obsessed by SFR mobile, follow it ». This compulsive mentality is summarised by « Follow your obsessions (without asking yourself anything) » and brings us



back to advertising slogans like « Live your desires », « Just do it », « Be yourself », etc. that push people to consume through a twisting of post-1968 slogans such as « Live without dead time, enjoy without chains »... Desires are now locked in commodities. There's no place where we can build our own desires, individually or collectively. Everything is to be bought.

At the same time, almost everybody knows that those ready-to-be-consumed pseudo-desires are just palliatives to stand a bit better for a shitty life (made notable with a job we do not control since

it's all for the boss). We believe this situation is comfortable for ourselves. We're mistaken...

I don't want to be the spectator of my own life anymore (and not of anyone else's life either). I don't want to be a spectator. I want to live a fulfilling life. I want to think, to listen – and to listen to myself, to build and share ideas or desires, and to live them.

As Fabien Barthez, the goalkeeper of the French national football team, would say : « Never mind the opponent. We concentrate on our own game. »** But I'm not talking about football, now. In the end, the game of revolution could be played like that as well. Football should be seen as a collective activity where adversity is friendly. Football has to be a game, a practice, not a spectacle. To play together, in a team, for pleasure, beyond any idea of glory, beyond all kind of differences of generation, gender, etc. To tread upon a field with friends instead of keeping the eyes glued on TV or the feet stuck in terraces, that's a thrilling idea of football, isn't it ?

Summer 2004, *a rebellious footballer*

** Quotation by Fabien Barthez from AFP, taken in Coimbra, Portugal, on June 21st, 2004.



ZANZARA ATHEE