

# AN AESTHETIC CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO SOCCER

*UNA APROXIMACIÓN CONCEPTUAL A LA ESTÉTICA DEL FÚTBOL*

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RECIBIDO EL 18 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 2014, APROBADO EL 25 DE OCTUBRE DE 2014

## **ABSTRACT    RESUMEN**

The article aims to make a hermeneutic and a conceptual analysis of the relationship between philosophy and soccer.

El artículo tiene como objetivo hacer un análisis hermenéutico y conceptual de la relación entre la filosofía y el fútbol.

## **KEY WORDS    PALABRAS CLAVE**

Gadamer, hermeneutics, philosophy, Ricoeur, Vattimo.

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## I Introduction

For some philosophical schools —notably those with a metaphysical inclination— soccer would be a lesser theme, as the term ‘philosophy’ is generally applied to universal and abstract matters rather than matters that are contingent and related to everyday life. Thus, to address the ‘culture of the masses’ would be, in this case, decadent and deviant from the theoretical essence of thinking. Contrary to this view, authors of contemporary hermeneutics, especially Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Vattimo, shall be our interlocutors and partners in facing the challenge presented herein. In this hermeneutic enterprise, the conceptual entanglement in the subject matter, which shall serve as an interpretation axis, will function as an analytical ‘tool’ to address the complexity of such a multifarious phenomenon.

## II The philosophical anthropology potential of soccer

When Gadamer wrote *Truth and Method*, he analysed the ninth paragraph of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. Games appear in this work as an articulation between art and anthropology (Cf. Vattimo 64). In Gadamer’s interpretation of Kant, ‘free play’ arises due to a reflexivity of ‘judgements of taste.’ The play (*Spiel*) is free because it does not bind to the thing in itself, unlike moral and scientific discourse. In spite of this difference, the judgement of taste also presents a ‘universality of pure form.’ This judgement has the pretension of universality, for it presents specific rules for its formulation, although such rules are different from those befitting other social spheres.

The play, in this case, does not correspond to something external to its participants; the ‘spectator’ is included. The judgement of taste is characterised by the pertinence of the players to the play (Ibid. 66). Gadamer overcomes the Kantian aesthetic subjectivity to ascertain that beauty engenders a community of pertinence through broadened reasoning. Broadening reason is imperative to permit a universal recognition of the beauty of a given work of art. The work of art and the ‘free play’ present in it bring people together — not because it is good or useful but because it is beautiful (Ibid. 64). This is where the universal and reflexive character of the ‘judgement of taste’ is found.

Play and art are not, however, within a cultural sphere that is independent from other spheres, such as the play is part of culture and do not precede it (Cf. Miranda, Nóbrega and Lourenço). Outgrowing the modern model of instrumental rationality, the collective feeling of supporting a soccer team is connected mainly to an aesthetic experience. Similar to the appreciation of a poem, only those involved in the metaphor are capable of understanding it as they experience together the movement of the match. The spectator has an expectation about a game of soccer. This expectation and the participation in the movement of the match are what confer meaning to a soccer game.

From this idea comes the outline of a virtuous and hermeneutic circle of the symbol of identification with a soccer club. This outline characterises the complexity of the soccer tradition in its ever-continuing broadening cultural horizons: fan base, player, sports commentators, media influence, marketing, hiring, and scores. All of these factors increase admiration for the game and thus increase the number of supporters a team enjoys. There is, in essence, only one way to increase the number of soccer admirers: to feed the passion for soccer. The hermeneutic circularity, therefore, is not theoretical.

Soccer is a collective, simple sport that is easy to understand. To understand the game is to participate in it, hermeneutically identifying oneself with what has been seen, expecting its repetition or the recreation of a sensation. The rules of soccer express the non-conceptual character of the play (Cf. Gadamer). Recalling its Latin roots, the rules regulate the game's execution based on a movement steered by the game itself. The game is like an aria that is heard and is accompanied by the dancing of the players and supporters. To better appreciate the beauty of a soccer game, however, it is necessary to listen carefully, i.e., to know the basic elements and the movement of the game of soccer. These two skills are acquired over time with the experience of watching and experiencing many matches.

Soccer fans play along with the game and thus are not mere spectators; they do not simply contemplate the match. They take part in the plays and interfere in the game's movement. Soccer is a party owned by no individual. Nobody owns a party that is afforded to all, by all, and with all. The game has, in its essence, a non-linear paradigm in comparison to the Cartesian hierarchisation model of the components in a clock. In the cosmology of soccer, everything is interconnected, so a small,

unexpected accident may have far-reaching consequences. The stadium acts as a secularised temple that ritualises its various components —the supporters, players, managers, stadium, weather, board of directors—, and a spark is sufficient to ignite the passion for soccer, as noted by Boff (2002): “as soon as someone starts making the wave and, suddenly, the whole stadium is infected and an immeasurable wave appears — the butterfly effect: a small gesture can bring great transformations about.” Thus, the stadium might symbolise a similar cultural universe in the Brazilian culture.

Soccer could be a modern archetype of the ‘beautiful ethicality’ found in ancient Greece, according to Hegel (Cf. Coutinho 3). The Parthenon, for example, symbolised the ethical and political spirit of that culture, a culture that transcended the players-citizens and was used repeatedly as participation in a common rite that expressed its mythical matrix. This relationship between rites and myths was found in theatre and temple, cultural institutions that perfectly parallel the importance of the soccer stadium in Brazil. Soccer becomes, in this way, a way of thinking about our culture. The identity of a people is expressed in shared cultural experiences, such as those related to sports (Cf. Wisnik 407). Such experiences serve as a nexus of sociability and citizenship in a ritual revitalisation of identity myths.

The 19th century can be regarded as the century of English imperialism. Soccer and other cultural elements were disseminated in the wake of the British commercial expansion. However, soccer was culturally recreated in the colonies. Its traits of ‘colonialist’ heritage went, then, through a process of translation along with the *ethos* ontologically inscribed in the mythical matrix of the local people. Tradition is not a synonym for conservation but, rather, is an ample and dynamic hermeneutical process that contributes to an attitude of recollection (*Andenken*), i.e., a feeling for the past that is radically different from reactive nostalgia (Cf. Barreira “A Versenkung”).

Existing traditions send a message that it is culturally relevant. The repetition of messages from the past (Cf. Pecoraro) allows a living tradition to reassign meaning to new information that arises, such as a new sport. The secularisation dissolves and substitutes ‘universalist’ values in an inessential vision of what is real. This inessentiality enables cultural manifestations as varied as the ways to play or enjoy soccer. Soccer, like any other symbol, has a historical and existential weight

that depends on the continual reconstruction of its meaning. This task enriches or deflates, in particular, the association of soccer with a colonialist view of culture. Although it may have originated in England, the initial dynamics of soccer underwent a distortion and transformation (*Verwindung*) when they encountered other cultures. The heterotopy (Cf. Barreira, “A reflexão”), which is a product of this transfiguration, gave new meaning to the practice of soccer, revealing it as a symbol of sociocultural transformation.

From a general point of view, soccer mirrors culture, morality, religion, and politics. Soccer is, therefore, like a window through which other horizons can be glimpsed. Soccer aids citizenship. In its institutional website, the NGO “Gol de Letra”, founded by former Brazilian players Rai and Leonardo, exemplifies how the passion for soccer can be used to promote good citizenship among children and youths from socially vulnerable communities, which is in keeping with the famous quote of former goal-keeper and writer Albert Camus: “What I know most surely about morality and the duty of man [sic] I owe to soccer.” Thus, soccer reveals and teaches aspects of morality.

In the Movement of the Landless (Movimento Sem Terra —MST—) in Brazil, according to an interview given by Stédile to the “Histórias do Futebol” program on ESPN Brazil (2010), the first events that occur after a piece of land is occupied are the establishment of an itinerant school and a soccer field because these two cultural elements favour sociability. The way a sport is practiced also reveals the inherent characteristics of people, e.g., arrogant, collaborative, or individualistic. Just like Plato’s ideal State, which is detailed in Book VII of *The Republic* (1990), the philosophical observation of gymnastic exercises permits the recognition of the true nature of each individual. Thus, granted the leap in comparison, we could say that from a macro-structural perspective, the *ethos* of a people is revealed in the way they experience soccer. Because of this experience, we consider that soccer unites a people and can facilitate citizenship when the *ethos* of a people is inextricably marked by the practice of this sport.

The tradition of a soccer team is larger than the individuals —given the respective weight each role represents, be it the ‘team’s star’ or the club’s president—, and has its foundations in a deeper sentiment. This sentiment consequently is cumulative in nature and thus becomes historically more relevant than geopolitical aspects. The great competitions portray the

cultural traits of a people through the ways in which they celebrate and ritualise soccer. This ritualization goes beyond simply supporting a team, as observed with the controversial vuvuzelas in the World Cup of 2010 in South Africa. This cultural idiosyncrasy is also observed in the cultural styles in which soccer is played, such as the schools of Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Europe, and Latin-America. These schools possess a style that parallels the dynamics of each cultural *ethos* and vice-versa: these schools reveal the essence of the identity of a people through a collective sentiment, one which stems from the romantic notion of *Volksgeist*, from Herder, which is associated with the concept of 'nationality.' The risk of this idea is that of the "aestheticisation of the political" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 241), which aids the rise of authoritarian regimes, as occurred in Nazi Germany. Unfortunately, we observed this 'aestheticisation of the political' in a dictatorial regime's political-ideological manipulation of the World Cup of 1970 to gather popular support.

To better comprehend this culturalising view of games in general and soccer in particular, let us briefly review its origin in England. Many factors created a cultural atmosphere conducive to the rise of soccer in the English context: the structure of social life and local autonomous governments, the spirit of association, school education, and geography. The English aristocracy understood the word 'game' as pertinent to equitation, game hunting, and fencing; soccer was considered too violent, and moreover, something that was more suited to the 'common folk', in reference to the working class. The beginning of the 19th century was the apogee of the first Industrial Revolution. Gradually, the working class acquired an awareness of class, taking part in union struggles. With the migration from rural to urban areas, soccer provided an emotional outlet, relieving the tensions of everyday life and integrating human groups into a collective endeavour. New identities emerged from these relationships of solidarity and mutual trust. However, one aspect of soccer demanded greater control by the ruling powers over this practice: injuries and exhaustion were detrimental to profit. With the objective of regulating the sport, the Soccer Association was created in 1863. Assembled by working men from various cities of the country, this association drafted a schedule of games for non-working days, usually on Saturday afternoon — a tradition that remains today in the English Soccer Championship.

The rules anchored soccer to the principles of egalitarianism: the rules and means to practice the game are equal for all players on the

field. Breaking this basic rule through foul play is, therefore, utterly unacceptable. The only legitimate inequality arises based on the talent and determination of certain players. These transcendences, even if they are only partial, reveal an aristocracy that is no longer based on bloodlines. Human greatness does not oppose the radical egalitarianism assumed in the obedience to the common rule but, rather, implies it (*Cf.* Ferry). The radical equality before the match begins is transformed once the ball comes into contact with those players who stand out admirably: the soccer stars. The soccer stars are superior beings relative to simple amateurs (*Cf.* Huizinga). These simple amateurs, in turn, imitate the professionals by belittling the ‘wooden leg’ players who play ‘just for fun.’ Herein lies the contradiction. The increasing seriousness of the game can be observed also in a street match; despite the rhetorical label of ‘simple inoffensive play’, it is a dispute in which the ‘friendly’ aspect of the game lasts only until the first goal is scored.

One must note the following: a tactical foul does not violate the rules of soccer. The characterisation of a foul as ‘tactical’ is its adherence to the rules and opposition to violence. Acts of violence should be punished with warning, expulsion, or banishment from the sport. Boxing and Judo are considered sports because technique is as important as strength. An act of violence is the use of strength merely to physically destroy the opponent in a fight (*Cf.* Murad). This attitude is not based in rules and is therefore considered to be ‘unsportsmanlike.’ After all, refereeing and the referee himself—remnants of the absolutist monarchy of the field—do not prevent an official championship from being more beautiful and emotionally engaging than a second division game.

The aristocratic splendours are ambiguously re-enacted not only amongst the players but also in the fantasies of the fans. At the heart of its contingency on and disbelief in politics, as well as in terms of financial and family-related difficulties, some supporters use soccer to overcome the finitude of their existence. Soccer, in particular, offers its supporters a means to transcend the ontological shortcomings of their fragile and shifting freedom. Soccer displaces its supporters’ ‘world of life’, opening them to the symbolic possibility of victory against bad odds. As if the fan were playing in the field, the win of the championship by his or her favourite team is internalised and takes on the semblance of a personal victory and redemption; this explains why fans will pay exorbitant prices for a ticket to watch a soccer match.

### III

#### The spectacularisation of soccer

In recent years, soccer has been transformed from an occasional entertainment to a very large business. Soccer has turned into an 'entertainment industry', providing a product with broadcasting rights as well as other associated rights that generate profits and losses for sponsoring companies such as Nike as well as for their respective investors. In a way, we could say that there is a modern process of general autonomisation of culture that institutionally fragments it. The institutionalisation —through clubs, officials, and professional athletes— and the judicialisation of sports, in general —each with its own Higher Court of Sports Justice (Superior Tribunal de Justiça Desportiva, STJD)— involves this broader trend of autonomisation, specialisation, and technification.

The game of soccer, in particular, is played with an allegory of irrationality: the feet, in this interpretation, provide significance that is antagonistic to the objectivity of the hands. From the lightness of its ludic form, a specific experience of rationality is born. The initial ludic aspect of soccer has always had, since its origins in England, a purpose or goal; it must be noted that the word *goal* refers to a purpose, objective, or target. Scoring a goal requires discipline in the movements in the game. A coach is a craftsman skilled in the art of setting up a team so that it will play soccer efficiently. The game has a rhythm that is built in the tempo of the dribble. The players' objective to target the goal does not prevent them from feigning; on the contrary, the dribble adds colour, spice, and merriment to the search for results in soccer. The dribble is a metaphor designed as a ballet step or a 'capoeira' swing. The technical skill is not just analytically 'technical' and thus incapable of producing beauty. The Spanish coach Josep 'Pep' Guardiola became a symbol of the reconciliation between 'soccer as art' and 'soccer for results' when he put together the spectacular and yet effective Barcelona team, as observed in the final match of the Club World Cup of 2011 against Brazil's Santos. One optimistic element of this recent spectacularisation of soccer, therefore, involves overcoming this dichotomy.

The organisation of soccer has slowly altered the original intentions of the game as being for entertainment purposes, i.e., a ludic activity that is carefree and spontaneous. The sport is now characterised by specialisation and professionalism and is considered a business that

generally dismisses amateurs as mere romantics in love with a form of entertainment they can no longer afford. By transforming itself into something that requires extreme financial investment, the players have been turned into media stars with increasing costs in terms of discipline and sacrifice and enduring pain and injuries so that their contracts are valued in the market. In a way, the current intensification of training and isolation periods breaks from Didi's famous saying —“training is training, game time is game time” — and is crucial to achieve good physical and psychological performance on the field as well as a good financial return off the field. The specialisation of soccer know-how ushered in a new era of soccer — its spectacularisation.

The period of João Havelange as president of FIFA (1974-1998) revolutionised the role of this institution. From an exclusively administrative perspective, it made soccer a spectacle:

Over the last 25 years, FIFA has managed to extend its influence all over the world, not only in the field of sports, but also in other sectors of our society, such as the commercial and political sectors. Soccer, in more than one aspect, has expanded itself over whole regions and their populations. With more than 200 million active players, soccer has turned into one of the best entertainment industries, opening new markets in the world not only for FIFA, but for all nations. (Baldy 6)

This spectacularisation brought a new historical purpose to the art of playing soccer. With this new media scenery came an upgrade of the traditional aesthetic; in other words, there was a post-auratic and secularised 'overcoming' in relation to the previous, contemplative manner of understanding and watching the game. In this current situation of spectacularisation, soccer is a desacralised ritual (*Cf.* Huizinga) mediated by image and technology. The mass culture brought by media secularisation contributes to a growing fragmentation of the cultural universe.

In the historical-cultural conditions of the manifestation of being in the age of the end of metaphysics, the manifestation of the truth of art accompanies the secularisation that acts, in our time, through the mass culture. Hegel already indicated a 'loss of substantiality' of contemplative and sacred art once it is lowered to the fleeting contingency of the taste of the masses. Benjamin (*Cf. Textos 27*) writes that this loss brings a 'shock'

(*Schok*): in section XV of his famous article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1993), Benjamin (*Cf. Textos* 27) shows that this shock consists of a change brought about by modern times. The current shift towards using technology will gradually change the folklore of discussions about errors of interpretation by soccer referees. Another point is immediately noticeable: we no longer need to be physically present at the soccer stadium to fully enjoy the whole performance of our team in a match. Technology and different forms of media allow a soccer match to be leisurely watched on TV or through the Internet. The relationship between soccer and media is complex; nevertheless, it promotes soccer, and this relationship contributes to the financial status of the clubs (*Cf. Murad*). Defending this position is controversial based on a classical conception that blames anyone interested in leisurely watching the match while sitting on the couch or through the Internet.

The social consequence of this shock is explored in the first chapter of the book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1992) by Debord. The *mass media* creates a consensus of ideas, tastes, feelings, and world views (*Cf. Vattimo*). The spectacle is an instrument for social unification because it establishes an interpersonal relationship embedded in images in the media, such as people gathering to watch a match while drinking beer at a bar. The ritualisation of soccer has the traits of a drama (*Cf. Miranda, Nóbrega and Lourenço*) — a secularised drama that is ritualised through the images produced by technical rationality and weakens the metaphysical interpretation of what is ‘real’, thereby rendering this interpretation empty. The spectacle brings forth an “abundance of dispossession”.

The way soccer seduces transforms the importance of this sport into something larger than what it actually is: a sport, even with its strong media appeal, that mobilises and constitutes the ‘mass culture’. The world of soccer is like a secularised religion and can be discussed as part of an articulation between art and religion. To support a given team would be a divine privilege granted to a few. Following the poetic irony of Murilo Mendes, in a hypothetical original creational blessing: “Zelins, então como é Deus? Em forma de esfera. Uma bola de futebol. Do Flamengo [Zelins, so how is God? In the shape of a sphere. A soccer ball. From Flamengo].” (*Murad* 27). The devotion to a soccer team can rise to an uncommon level in a rather exotic fashion: choosing the names of one’s children or getting tattoos or, in an offensive way, reaching the limit of what is advisable, when supporters put themselves at personal and social risk by becoming violent. We have, in this case, an inflection

that equates the supporter to the religious fanatic. One cannot disrespect those who have a different view. Sometimes the lack of dialogue is apparent even in the form of strong opposition between passionate supporters of the same team but without the 'purity' or 'absoluteness' of view from an intolerant interlocutor.

A soccer match should not be something critical for the public space, for it is only in private life that soccer represents an opportunity to have fun and meet new people, an emphasis that is not in opposition to a healthy rivalry between fans. Full of stars and with rivalry between the organised supporters of different teams, one of the pleasant aspects of watching a match of one's favourite team with others is the opportunity to debate key moments of the game with them and, more importantly, the opportunity to be with friends and make new friendships. Moreover, there is nothing like having a supporter of the opposing team at one's side to stimulate a pleasant atmosphere of friendly mutual teasing and taunting.

The rivalry in soccer stimulates an atmosphere of emotion. When excessive, such an atmosphere, however, becomes poisonous, leading to the fatuity of crossing the line and putting one's own life and financial resources at risk because of a soccer match. Such a state of affairs raises the level of emotional involvement far above what is socially advisable in a perversion of its agonistic aspect. When organised groups of supporters first appeared in Brazil in 1969, they provided an opportunity to appreciate the spectacle of soccer with a beautiful show of colours, sounds, and encouraging messages to the team. The murderous nature of some supporters uses soccer as an excuse to spill blood, as is unfortunately observed among some groups of organised supporters who have deviated from their original purpose. Acts of vandalism and murder can be explained by group psychology, as developed by Freud (2011). Harmless people change when they are part of groups in specific contexts.

To address this problem of violence in soccer, perhaps the best solution would be to separate the public and private spheres to accommodate those who think differently. One curious difference must be noted: in the past, commentators such as João Saldanha, Nelson Rodrigues, and José Lins do Rego did not conceal which team was their favourite, something that is now rarely observed. In modern writings, it is difficult and seemingly impossible for sports writers to disclose their soccer team

preferences. Nevertheless, the separation of the personal choices of a commentator for one team from his public function would allow for a disarmed, colloquial, and fraternal setting to discuss a sport critically and technically, even though this subject may be contaminated by intense emotion. While soccer can be discussed in the context of its technical and political aspects, that is very different from discussing the best team to support. In fact, it makes no sense to discuss choices about private issues — in this sense, the same can be said about religious choices. To publicly reveal one's beloved team would not compromise the professional capacity of any commentator and would model a democratic practice of coexisting with different perspectives.

It would not be fitting to theoretically justify why someone supports a specific soccer team. Justifications are based on the 'superior' belonging to a colony of immigrants or that demand the acceptance of the 'truth' of the 'revolutionary' value of a soccer club in its political and historical factors. Attempts at explaining these justifications will always be impoverishing and a 'rational' motive for the violence of those who made a 'wrong' choice in terms of the soccer game. From a liberal standpoint, democratic life represents the ability of individuals to have their beliefs or disbeliefs be respected by other individuals and society, thus favouring a liberal policy of 'live and let live.'

Tolerance towards the views of others is a democratic practice. The choice of a team is made in a semi-private language, closer to literature, where myth and truth mix in the idiosyncrasy of a world view. I briefly summarise what Ricoeur wrote about the literary metaphor. Literature, as narrative, recalls the famous critique by Nelson Rodrigues of the "idiots of objectivity". In his chronicles, he favoured a passionate view of a soccer match over a factual description of it. Given the imponderability of plays in soccer, most of all in the unexpected goals against Fluminense, Nelson Rodrigues attributed them to a ghost.

#### IV Soccer as metaphor

The understanding of the game as metaphor, as in literature in general, refers to 'something'; however, this reference does not encompass a first-order description. The first-order reference is describable and is grounded on "familiar objects of perception" (Ricoeur 187) of the visible and factual order, indirectly allowing for the technical focus of empirical

reality. The second-order reference is not descriptive and recognises multiple ways of pertaining to the world, prior to the modern distinction between the 'subject' and the 'object'.

One of the cultural ways of experiencing soccer is by listening to the narration of a match on the radio while watching the game on television. The narration on the radio transmits emotion, proximity, and dynamism. Imagining or feeling a match through radio does not depend on its factual reality. We could say that the narration transfigures the 'real' game into a transcendent sublimity, granted a hypothetical 'objective' monotony of the match that is disguised by the emotion of the narrator or by impassioned comments about the match. In an increasingly imaginary and media-saturated world, there is anthropological potential in soccer as a spectacle of beauty. The exercise in imagining and the fantasy of narrating or commenting on a soccer match —not reproductions or representations— already suggests the lyrical and dramatic character of the game. It is the question of the chicken and the egg: do we like soccer because we like the radio or is it the other way around? Because of this, Ricoeur prefers to value poetic language. Poetry speaks more closely to our 'original roots' than the cold discourse of technical-scientific objectivism (*Cf.* Ricoeur 188). In this Rodriguean line of thought, soccer, with its multiple cultural ways of being experienced, both symbolically and imaginatively represents our 'world of life.'

In Brazil, it is common to be bound to cultural traditions of soccer clubs — even athletes of other sports have their favourite soccer team. To be influenced by family to support a specific team is like being influenced to adopt the family's religious tradition without having made a conscious choice. Only the plural and collective tradition of a team has 'durability' — not implying the overlooking of the merit or fault of those who individually contributed to increase or decrease the passion for the symbol. This passion feeds the institutional reality of a soccer club. A central point to a tradition is its durability, but this durability opens itself to new historical-cultural aspects. Supporting a team of national prominence, such as some from the Southeast of Brazil, does represent a denial of one's aboriginal culture. Due to the old influence of the National Radio throughout the country, many fans support teams of national prominence due to emotional ties to people of previous generations who listened to the matches on the radio; thus, some incomprehensible xenophobia against countrymen who have family roots in their support for teams of national renown —national clubs, regardless of geographic origin— instead of local teams is not justifiable.

## Conclusions

In summary and to illustrate the points made above, I will now share a family experience. I recall the joy that my daughter felt at the age of nine when she saw the flag of Flamengo, the team that we support, at the Brazilian kiosk in Berkeley, California. To see something like this immediately generates a feeling of proximity, empathy, and homecoming. The flag of Flamengo is a familiar symbol in a strange and distant land. Through the symbol came the recognition of a common sentiment, the passion for a soccer team. The love for a soccer club, symbolised by its flag or jersey, is like the other half of an object given a long time ago — a *tessera hospitalis*. This symbol allows the host to recognise in the guest a past shared between their ancestors. This symbol embodies an affinity, at the least, thus providing the opportunity to share the joys and pains related to the commonality.

The manners of uniting and reuniting this ‘catholicity’ of soccer do not deny any aboriginal cultures, maintaining the validity of their gestures and their idiosyncratic conceptions of world and life. On the contrary, there is a sentiment of empathy when fans identify themselves, at least in part, with another cultural community upon having the joyful satisfaction of recognising themselves as loving the same soccer team — a feeling of being at home. Soccer, in the end, should motivate a greater integration of people and social groups; thus, let us not allow it to become the opposite: a cause for division and prejudice.

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**Como citar:**

Martins, Marcelo. "An aesthetic conceptual approach to soccer". *Discusiones Filosóficas*. Jul.-dic. 2014: 15-29.