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Football as format. Sport entertainment between rite, television and seriality

*Futebol como formato televisivo. O desporto
de entretenimento entre o rito, a televisão e a
serialidade*

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Abstract:

From anthropology to sociology, various disciplines have investigated football, highlighting its peculiar characteristics linked to the secularization of the rite and to the production phenomena of capitalism. At the same time it is one of the most consumed audiovisual products and, nevertheless, within the literature there is a void of contributions about the obvious similarities between football, format and television series. Through the comparative analysis of the main characteristics shared by football and television products, which is the fundamental core of this text, it is possible to affirm that football is a serial product and a format: television has not distorted football, but has illuminated its foundations.

Keywords: Football; television; seriality; rite; entertainment; format.

Resumo:

Começando pela antropologia e sociologia, várias disciplinas têm investigado sobre futebol, destacando as suas características peculiares ligadas à secularização do ritual e aos fenómenos produtivos do capitalismo. De mesma forma é um dos produtos audiovisuais mais utilizados e, mesmo assim, a literatura mostra uma carência de contributos acerca da clara semelhança entre futebol, formato televisivo e séries de TV. Passando pela análise comparativa das principais características entre futebol e produtos de televisão, que é o cerne deste artigo, consegue-se afirmar que o futebol é um produto de série e também um formato. O futebol não foi distorcido pela televisão, pelo contrário, esta acabou por destacar as suas características fundamentais.

Palavras-Chave: Futebol; televisão; serialidade; rito; entretenimento; formato.

Introduction

The major criticism against modern football is that it has been radically changed by television and this particularity emerges from texts written by fans or players who experience a sense of loss even if football was never free from capitalist interest (Brooks, 2019). Football is a secularized rite of a society that changes as a result of industrialization and manifests the typical characteristics of serials entertainment products that have developed since the Nineteenth century and even more with the mass mediatisation. By comparing football and television series, I will try to demonstrate how football is nothing but a television format and an audiovisual serial product that has found its own dimension since the advent of *neo-television*.

Football as rite

According to Pasolini, football is the last rite of contemporaneity (1970). The importance of the rite in the life of modern societies is fundamental: secularization has not led to the disappearance of the rite

(Dal Lago, 1995), on the contrary it is necessary to affirm that modern society experiences a displacement of the ritual field, or a shift of the rite into new areas of collective life and this can be seen in the modern use of free time, in politics and in sporting events which are loaded with a characteristic symbolic force and convey new forms of identity and claims (Segalen, 1998).

Football seems a religious phenomenon (Augé, 2016) and it is a ritual as there is a temporal and a spatial dimension in which the actors involved are not only the players, but also the spectators: it is a public event attended by a community which takes place following a pre-established calendar that elects a day of the week to its existence in a dedicated space that is the Stadium. Precisely in football there is that shift of the rite from the field of the sacred to that of the profane typical of secularization: the fans crowd their temple like faithful on pre-established occasions organized according to a calendar during which they attend, through participation in the liturgy of the game - played both by the priests-footballers and by the

faithful-fans - to renew the founding myth of their own urban community. This liturgy includes a series of codified and repetitive bodily and linguistic acts such as the taboos inherent in the rules of the game (only the goalkeeper can touch the ball with his hands, offside, penalty foul and so on), superstitious gestures, collective encouragement - choirs, clapping, choreography, coordinated jumps - with which you try to encourage your athletes-priests and exorcise the fear of defeat, almost as if trying to evoke benign spirits - as well as the establishment of a sense of deep communion between participants who can strengthen social cohesion (Barba, 2007, 2016; King, 2016; Schwell *et al.*, 2016). The match becomes a moment during which the community finds itself in the time and place appointed to carry out a ritual rich in codified gestures and finds a series of symbols that refer to the social stratification and the intrinsic characteristics of modernization, fruit of the industrialization and urbanization.

The symbolic dimension can be determined not only by the reference

to the profane liturgy, the social stratification and the modernization of the industrialized game, but also by the tribal residue of football intended as a simulated war in which the players would be a sort of prey-enemy and in which the spectators can be produced in bellicose choruses against the adversaries, and at times make real violent gestures as in a simulated and ritual war (Morris, 1981). Jackets and symbols (such as the lily or the she-wolf) would be nothing more than those totems that bind the members of a community and help to increase their social bond. The identity dimension of the ritual is fundamental: due to urbanization and the displacement of populations from the countryside to the cities in search of a job in the factory, the game of football provides that possibility of recognizing oneself in a community within the new industrial society, in such a way as to escape from the condition of alienation of the working class in expanding urban centers - a necessity exacerbated by the progressive secularization of society and by the social changes connected with the turn of the time of capitalism that

tears people from the countryside, from secular rhythms and times, from networks of community relations that create an identity, and which needs to reconstitute new times and rhythms, new networks of community relations and therefore new identities that are both urban and industrial. Cheering for a football club could therefore become representative of a link with the territory (the city, the neighborhood, the region or even one's own nation); of a family bond; of a social bond (the team that is the symbol of the proletariat rather than that of the middle class); or even ethnic (Bifulco & Pirrone, 2014; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Koller & Brändle, 2015; Porter, 2019; Settani Giglio & Weishaupt Proni, 2021).

Football as entertainment industry

Although popular forms and rituals of ball play are present in different latitudes and in different historical periods, football as we know it was born around the 1840s, within public schools and colleges intended for the education of children

of the English upper middle class such as Eton, Oxford and Cambridge who, in 1848, drew up the rules of the game for the first time, while in London, in 1863, the Football Association was born: the date of adoption of the rules of football intended as a *dribbling game* to distinguish it from the rules of Rugby and other Public schools is not unique in the various studies, given that some consider the Cambridge rules of 1856 as a starting point (Dietschy, 2010; Porro, 2008). A parallel can be established between tribal and industrial civilizations. The former create the *liminal* in rites as a temporary phenomenon that compensates for the rigidity and injustices of the social structure; the latter correspondingly create delights characterized by the *liminoid* which have within themselves a latent and potential system of social alternatives (Turner, 1969). The *liminod* phenomena such as literature, theater, sport, developed after industrialization and capitalist mechanization, with the birth of social classes and the transformation of work into commodities. The main differences with respect to the former concern in being

collective phenomena that contemplate a sphere of individualized and specialized creation; being linked to a continuous and non-cyclical creation, even if it occurs in extra-daily spaces and times; being separated from fundamental economic and political processes; being playful products offered for sale; being the bearers of potentially critical instances and revolutionizing rather than temporary forms of inversion that support the status quo (Turner, 1969).

The new game is spreading rapidly and it is not only the ways of reproducing the labor force imposed by the industries that need to entertain the working masses that contribute (this is the case of the clubs of Lancashire and the Midlands, of West Ham and others, born at will of industrialists), but also: the reduction of working hours on Saturdays and the need for workers to appropriate an autonomous time for the body (the case of Arsenal and other popular clubs that affirm the style of the *passing game* compared to the *dribbling game* of the most elite clubs); the interests of religious associations for the body (*mens sana in corpore sano*);

progressive urbanization (Dietschy, 2010). In a short time we arrive, following the principles of organization and rationalization of work, to professionalism and specialization of the players in various activities related to their respective roles on the field, with football crossing the British borders following the commercial ships and technicians of industry to break into the rest of the world. Like Music Halls and other entertainments of the urban masses, football spreads from the driving force of the first European industrialization, colonizing the whole world (Jackson, 2019).

The entertainment ritual of football and its serial production

Football initially maintains a strong ritual vocation, especially in light of the fact that almost everywhere the first tournaments are held in a single day or condensed into a few days or weeks, such as on the occasion of popular ball games and medieval festivals made up of jousting, acrobatics and warrior tournaments. In short, however, this sport begins to

show a different temporality made up of regular weekly intervals inserted in a structured and programmed flow of continuous production and no longer an exclusive break from the everyday: in Italy the first tournament is played during a single day - May the 8th, 1898 - while the duration of the tournaments progressively lengthened until the championship lasted from November to May in the 1909/1910 season; in Germany the first edition of Verbandsliga in the 1903 was played in May; in France the first tournament was played in April and May 1894; in Argentina the first championship was played during the 1891 from April to May; in England the FA Cup as early as 1871/1872 was held over several months from October to March (spring and summer were dedicated to cricket), an unequivocal sign of the fact that, where football and industrialization are born, the phenomenon of continuous and mass production of sports as entertainment occurs chronologically earlier than in countries that have imported both.

Moreover, it is not difficult to see in the genesis of modern football the similarity with the structuring of the

modes of production of capitalism: the seven characteristics highlighted by Guttmann (1978) of modern sport - secularism, equality, specialization of roles, rationalization of rules, bureaucratic organization, performance quantification, search for the record - these are nothing more than characters that permeate everything that arises since the industrial revolution, including forms of entertainment. To these characters we can add an eighth: the seriality of the show. It is precisely in the same period that the first forms of serialized cultural productions are reached, such as the appendix novels published in installments, of which the classic example is the 1836 series *The Pickwick Circle* by Dickens. It should therefore come as no surprise that in England football was structured as early as the 1870s as an entertainment product produced in series throughout the autumn and winter period. The seriality of football is represented by the creation of sporting events on a regular and weekly basis along two horizontal and vertical axes: on the horizontal axis, championship days developed over long periods of time

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(from five to nine months) during which the clubs clash among them to climb positions in the standings and win championships; on the vertical axis leagues of the first division, second division, etc., with the principles of free competition and social advancement that allow you to climb positions in the standings and enter the higher series.

That football is imbued with the *Zeitgeist* of industrialization can be seen from its own historical evolution: the technological and organizational innovations that have increased industrial productivity since the Nineteenth century find a symbolic equivalent in the forms of organization and rationalization of football, as in the case of introductions of new rules between 1850 and 1890 which lead to the specialization of sports work among the various roles of footballers. These same forms of organization and rationalization contribute to making the product of this new form of entertainment uniform: in this way we pass from artisanal forms of sports entertainment (the different ways of playing it in the pioneering period) to industrial and mass, replicable

anywhere, thus decreeing its industrial and global standardized structure through the establishment of FIFA in 1904 which establishes the rules of the game worldwide. From this point of view, even Taylorism and Fordism ended up permeating football. The first one with the progressive importance that game tactics assume and which are mutations of the progressive importance that rationalization, division and specialization of work assumed; the second one with the organization of private life and leisure time of workers and technicians. As we have seen, various industrialists have found football clubs during the pioneering era to give organized entertainment to their employees, welding them to a certain identity with respect to work and class dynamics. If fun is the extension of work in the late stage of capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944), football manifests an ideological matrix that hides, behind fun and presumed freedom inherent in the activity of the game, a concrete function of reproduction together of the workforce and of the modes of production that permeate all free time (Vinnai, 1970).

Football and television: a periodization

In the evolution of the relations between television and football we are witnessing three different phases which correspond to the three stratifications of the European television eras different from the American model which from the beginning is based on competition: the age of scarcity, which lasts until the Seventies and sees the public monopoly and the pedagogical vocation; age of competition, from the Seventies onwards and sees the market open to private broadcasters, while on television entertainment, advertising and the resale of contacts to advertisers rage; age of abundance, with the introduction of digital technologies, audience segmentation, web and social TV boom (Scaglioni, 2017). These phases can be renamed - based on the classical distinction between *paleotelevision* and *neotelevision* (Eco, 1983) - *paleofootball*, *neofootball*, *postfootball*.

The first phase (*paleofootball*) is that of TVs that broadcast a few football matches, keeping faith with the pedagogical and non-commercial vocation that sees football as an

exceptional event to be told through the audiovisual. Since the 1939 FA Cup Final it is common for the cameras to frame the match from the privileged point of view of the Royal Box at Wembley Stadium to replicate for all the viewers the same view of the Royal Box. In this way, television creates a standardization of the audience: «television football has substituted an individual perspective in a collective environment (the football stadium) with a collective perspective in an individual environment» (Sandvoss, 2003, p. 146). Rai in Italy has been broadcasting live matches since the 1950s, but does not give a preview of which match will be broadcast so as not to erode live football spectators (Frisoli & De Luca, 2010). During the same decade BBC's live football is limited to England's national team, amateur and schoolboy matches, the FA Cup Finals. In 1950 the finals decreased the attendance of other matches played in the same time in London and Birmingham (the only covered by the television signal) and for this reason only the second half of the 1951 finals was live broadcasted (Barwick, 2014).

Broadcasting football matches remains a sort of documentary of an independent event with respect to television. The match is a festive and non-weekday event that we could include in the definition of *media events* that, as regards sport, Dayan and Katz limit to the Olympics and World Cup of Football but that we can extend to the first live broadcasted championship matches: “they are interruptions of routine, they intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives. Like the holidays that halt everyday routines, television events propose exceptional things” (Dayan & Katz, 1991, p. 5). Media events of this kind presuppose a reduced television intervention in its development, are often enjoyed in groups rather than individually and involve an interruption of the television flow. Football is, in this way, safeguarded in what is its ritual function: since media events are suspended between “documentary and fiction, the televising of such events serves to highlight the way audiences are provoked to teeter between reality and play, and being there and being home” (Dayan &

Catz, 1991, pp. 29-30) their characteristic is that of being festive since there is an interruption in the daily routine that makes them resemble religious ceremonies in which there is no consumption passive but active participation to which one cannot have direct access *hic et nunc*, but which is guaranteed by the *medium* who takes charge of prolonging the ceremony outside the place where it occurs. These are events documented by cameras, not created by television, whose existence is independent from the television networks that “do not typically mobilize their entertainment division or drama department; they turn, rather, to the department of news and public affair” (Dayan & Katz, 1991, p. 32). These events also have a fixed and cyclical periodicity: in the case of the sporting events examined by Dayan and Katz it is four years, but in the case of the paleotelevision championship games it is weekly. What matters is that, as in any ritual, the calendar is autonomous with respect to television needs.

With the advent of *neotelevision* and *neo-football* during the Seventies, broadcasted football starts to begin

an industry in itself, and, furthermore, in order to simulate reality and the presence of the viewers *hic et nunc*, television inserts supporters’ images during the broadcast; the cost of media rights of the most important tournaments begun to rise, and the first tournaments produced directly by televisions emerge, such as the Mundialito created in Italy by Berlusconi for AC Milan and its private television channels. Over the years the techniques of television editing were made better and «as television represents the game event with ever more varying shots (...) it constructs a new event in itself» (Sandvoss, 2003, p. 146). This is how we arrive at the era of *post-television (post-football)* since the Nineties with satellite, cable, internet, and games that become part of the normal daily media flow. Championships’ matches begin to invade schedules to ensure greater audience and more expensive broadcast licences. In fact, since 2000 the growth of revenues for football club was driven by broadcast rights and during the 2018/19 season top twenty europeans’ clubs reached 4.1 billions in television revenues, with a

percentage on total revenues that goes from the 25% for PSG to the 71% for Everton, while the average revenues that comes from matchdays are less than 20% and have a much lower impact than the former (Deloitte, 2020).

Football as a serial product and format

Football is increasingly a television matter. Is it possible to compare it to a format or a television series? According to Chalaby, a television format has four fundamental traits. It is the remake of a licensed product; it has a core of immutable rules which are accompanied by elements that are adaptable to the cultural context of use (there is in this case a parallel with football which is characterized by a controlled unpredictability that leads to letting the spectator know that there will be an outcome for a story, even if the outcome is left open to different options); it is something profitable in terms of audience; it is a production method that is sold through the production bible that contain the indications for the realization (Chalaby, 2016). Instead, the

peculiarities of the serial television product concern: *anthology plot* (self-contained plot of the single episode); *running plot* (plot that develops over several episodes or seasons); ritual consumption aimed at retaining the viewer; resorting to the *cliffhanger* to keep the attention high; evolution of single and collective characters; dramatization and fictional effect of the narrative; identification with the protagonists; close-up shots that emphasize tension; importance of the commercial factor (serials or soap operas produced by advertisers for advertising); creation of the product by companies that resell the broadcasting rights or the format to broadcasters; narrative times that vary between forty-five and ninety minutes; scheduling strategies that must ensure audience during the *autumn & spring guarantee*; hybridization between serial and series (Cardini, 2004; Melodia, 2004; Barra, 2015; Graffignani & Bernardelli, 2017; Scaglioni & Sfardini, 2017).

If we look more closely at football, we will understand that it is itself a format: every national league is a reproduction of an original product

(the english one), even if there is not a license for the reproduction, as it happens for a lot of format during the pioneering era of television; standard rules are established by the FIFA and adapt to different ways of playing football (Italian Catenaccio, the Brazilian Ginga, the Dutch Total Football, etc.); there are enormous profits in terms of audience; the production rules (the bible) are replicated everywhere (the captain must reflect club's values and history while some iconic players have to represent an embodiment of some fixed roles – number 10 has to be the most talented, number 9 must scores a lot of goals - just like series' character must respect some stable features; the settings are fixed and correspond to the stadiums; there are relationships between characters, players or clubs that can be various or fixed and include forms of antagonism). However, sporting events cannot be predicted in advance and the script produces itself during league matches, as it happens in game shows and talent shows.

At the same time football reflects the same serial dynamics of other television products. The custom of

playing tournaments in different championship following weekly matchdays creates in itself a serialized narration of the sporting event that goes well with the dynamics that produce horizontal and vertical narrative lines. If on the one hand the single match played by a club has the characteristics of the *anthology plot* (the story that is self-contained is the one that sees one team opposed to the other in the single match and it is similar to the plot of a single episode of a serial drama in which the protagonist faces and solves a case different from the previous episode and from the following one), it also has the explicit characteristics of the *running plot* (the intertwining of further stories-matches is that of the entire championship-serial drama. In this case the protagonist faces an event that takes place in several episodes throughout the narrative arc of the season and each episode is a continuation of the previous one). It is clear that the concept of *cliffhanger*, a twist or a moment of strong emotional impact that suspends the narrative and renews the encounter between the viewer and the serial

television product is inherent also in football. At the end of the match the fans want to know if their club will win the championship or if it will be relegated, and at the same time the audience of a serial drama at the end of an episode want to know how the story will proceed and end. Furthermore, from season to season, the attention to the developments of the events does not fail and this determines an almost infinite potential development of the sports series that makes it not unlike the serialized drama that lasts several seasons. The same duration of a football match is analogous to the durations of the different forms of television series: if on the one hand it is consistent with the ninety-minute duration of the Italian series that proposes the duration of the cinematographic product, on the other hand it is consistent with two episodes lasting forty-five minutes, format roughly similar to those fifty minutes of American products. Such a structure is perfect for the construction of schedules capable of perpetually conquering and retaining the audience that is the goal of broadcasters.

Schedules and audience conquest

Narrative infinity, everyday life, choral and rituality are explicit characters of seriality shared by football. On the one hand, the national football tournaments, following a calendar that starts between the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, make it possible to cover the entire time frame that goes from the *autumn guarantee* to the *spring guarantee*, following the natural serial structuring, repetitive, with regular and restricted intervals of football leagues. The championship days are played every week with the matches spread over several days, followed on the mid-week days by international competitions and national cups - in such a way as to fill the schedule of every day of the week, from Monday to Sunday. The summer friendlies and the various international tournaments played by the most important clubs (obviously covered by live or pre-recorded television) act as *spin-offs* of the most famous products, being events created solely for television and commercial needs (eg. The International Champions Cup organized by Relevant Sports in the States,

The Birra Moretti Trophy organized in Italy by Heineken, Parmalat Cup and The Luigi Berlusconi Trophy are a sort of *spin-off* or a re-adapted edition of The Champions' League, Serie A or other club tournaments, just like *The Young Sheldon* is a *spin-off* based on the character of Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory* and several television dramas are re-adapted in other countries using the same or a similar script); while the matches of the national selections can represent *crossovers* in which the protagonists of the respective series/clubs appear (eg. the movie series with the heroes from various Marvel's comics). These tournaments cover the summer programming and are the driving force behind the start of national club tournaments in the second half of August, creating a full schedule all year round.

The programming strategies and the intrinsic characteristics of football tournaments correspond to a narrative structure that goes well with all the loyalty practices of the spectator throughout the series. The fan is loyal to his club and the television networks do not need to strive to ensure a consistent audience that follows the

entire evolution of the story generated by the horizontal plot of the tournament. The strategies for constructing the schedules are organized not only throughout the sports-television year, but also throughout the individual days. In Italy the Serie A matchdays are divided in seven slots for ten matches from Friday to Monday and 100% of them are broadcasted live. Liga, Bundesliga and Ligue 1 have the same percentage of live matches on tv from a minimum of five slots to a maximum of ten for ten matches. In Premier League less than 50% of the matches are broadcasted on tv, percentage that has been increasing in recent years, with at least five or six slots for ten matches. Big Five are the top rated tournaments in Europe, and I argue that what happens with football is comparable with what happens with lots of West tv series that dominate the global market as products of great appeal while other national championships (and other series) have less demand on the global market even if they can dominate their respective national markets. Media-rights values of football in Europe, for example, are in fact dominated by the

Big Five and driven by macroeconomic factors (like domestic market size), leagues' and clubs' appeal (including star players), media products (innovation, diversification, match schedules), sales and partner approach (European Leagues, 2020).

In Italy, that represents the extreme case that shows how football is similar to series, the production of television images is now handled entirely by Serie A League through a platform equipped with its own professionals and technicians and this involves a relational dynamic with broadcasters that is analogous to those of fiction production companies that sell exclusive broadcasting rights to other international broadcasters (similar to the production and commercial dynamics of companies like Endemol or Netflix). Obviously the football product has production costs sustained and quantifiable in billions of euros, but it has low creative costs: we could say that the sports plot is written performatively by itself, in its very fulfillment game after game.

As regards post-production and commercial promotion, we must note how it is information that gives

strength to the product: not only is football a habitual consumption of a large portion of the audience, but precisely its being still partially a residue of an autonomous event with respect to the television mechanism ensures that it is covered by newspapers, magazines, news broadcasts, sports broadcasts and other various products that are programmed in daily or weekly strips in a mechanism of continuous reciprocal references capable of engulfing the viewer. From this point of view, we must think above all of those clubs with their own official television that offer the fan-customer a series of additional pay-per-view services such as behind the scenes, specials, training sessions, so much so that everything appears very similar to reality shows with dedicated channels 24 hours a day. This represents a typical hybridization. Football has characteristics of infotainment, reality show, drama and other serial products.

Dramatization, Fandom and Stardom

Sports dramaturgy manages to guarantee the affection of the public

that follows the stories of heroes inserted in the flow of events that will have to lead them to reach a goal that is also a path of maturation and personal growth (think of the “drama” of the separation between Messi and Barça or the legendary love story between Totti and AS Roma, two players who grew up in those clubs becoming their icons). Dramatization is also realized by the information apparatus that invades the private lives of sportspeople, telling us everything outside of sport, as happens with cinematographic stardom. Even the commentaries both of radio and television act as elements that novelize and dramatize, as narrative voices that in the third person participate in the construction of the epic narrative of the heroes of football through the narration of their technical exploits on the pitch, so much so that we have a confirmation in the methods narratives adopted by radio and television commentators who are increasingly marked by the exaltation of physical effort through rhetorical artifice, accompanied by close-ups and shots on the faces of athletes to create pathos and identification just like in soap operas.

Iconic football players, as heroes in fictional series, can create mechanisms of identification with the protagonist produced by the narrative and representative rules of television (shots, editing, commentaries, storytelling, dramatization). Although sport does not include a subject or a screenplay written by an author, it is possible to affirm that phenomena of evolution of the characters still occur along the narrative arc. The individual athletes that we can have in sympathy, Cristiano Ronaldo or Leo Messi, are in effect the heroes within these choral narratives that can guarantee further loyalty by opening the market also to the fandom of the individual athlete: if on the one hand we have the team as the protagonist of the evolutions and stories of football seriality (team-based identification), on the other hand we have the single hero, the champion, whose parable we can follow within the group, from a simple extra or supporting actor or from rookie to absolute protagonist able to take the lead of the group in the various adventures (athlete-based identification). Fandom created by the stardom of the single athlete

is crucial in a market where 75% of clubs have fewer Instagram followers than their most famous players and where Generazione Z fans and fans who do not live close to their club are less loyal and can choose other products (Deloitte, 2020).

It does not seem so risky to propose the new definition of *foot-acteur* (*calciatore* in Italian) for the football stars who are the protagonists of these stories. Thus the champion is not only a star who sells his image and his sporting performances, but intertwines his market with that of other champions and the same club to which he belongs to the conquest of the spectator-consumer as well as trophies. From this point of view, following the logic of the star-strategy based on the phenomena of stardom (Séguéla, 1981; McDonald, 2013; Ricci, 2013), Cristiano Ronaldo who signs with Juventus or Manchester United is not so much an athlete who sells his sports performances, but is a personal-brand that binds his own brand to a sports club-brand to exploit the link from a purely commercial point of view (advertisements, merchandising, etc.). On television it

would be like seeing George Clooney pass by *E.R.* to *Grey's Anatomy*.

Conclusions

In conclusion, football is not only a rite and an industrial entertainment, but it is also a serial product and even a television format. Football is a complex and integrated cultural product that is made up of several specific partitions (entertainment, sport, drama, soap, information, etc.), but that on the whole it probably represents since its birth a prototype of what have become television formats. The public present *hic et nunc* during the match is still important to build a frame for the simulation made by televisual images but, as demonstrated by the championships resumed in 2020 despite the pandemic without the presence of spectators in the stands - replaced by puppets, tarps, digital choreographies, audio recordings of choirs - it becomes a non-essential accessory element. The spectators present *hic et nunc* have become replaceable like the audience that attends the recording of the sitcoms and if necessary is replaced by applause and recorded laughter.

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