



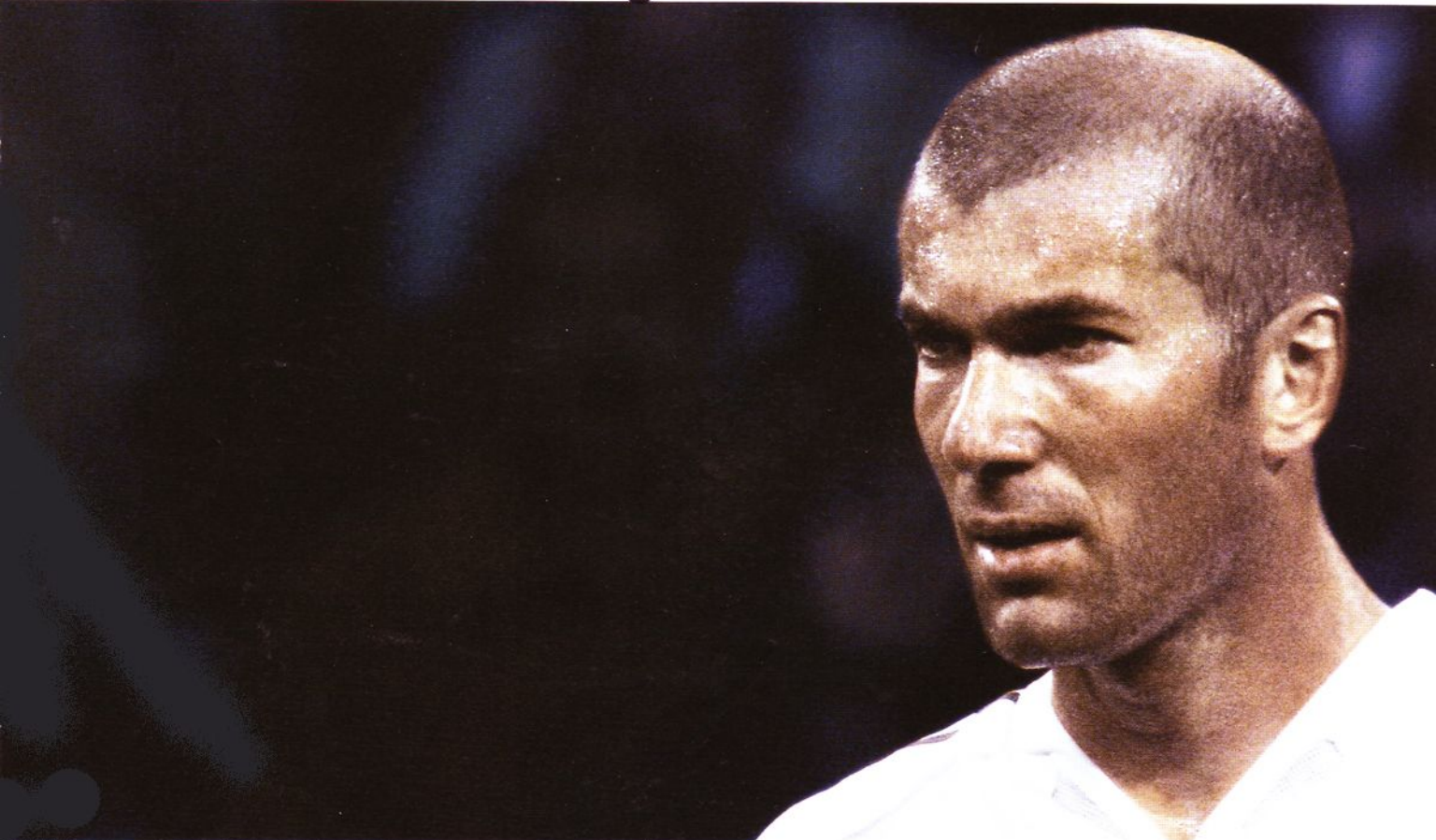
21st

DOUGLAS GORDON & PHILIPPE PARRENO
Zidane - a 21st Century Portrait, 2005
Filmstills
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Century Portrait



»Zidane – a 21st Century Portrait« is Douglas Gordon's and Philippe Parreno's cinematic portrait of a French football hero. Filmed during a Real Madrid match in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium, its 90-minute length equals exactly that of the actual game, but contrary to traditional television broadcasts, it is not the ball which is the focal point of the action. Instead, 17 synchronised cameras distributed around the entire stadium are directed solely on Zidane.

Hans Ulrich Obrist talks with *Douglas Gordon* and *Philippe Parreno* about the »writing of an ultimate story«.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: It's almost like a *feedback loop*, a really large *feedback loop*. Something happened on television that is now taken back into the film using some TV footage. Can you tell me the story? *Douglas Gordon*: In a way, it's like the beginning and the end. At the end of last week we found the beginning of a commentary that was a public television broadcast of the Real Madrid game, which has now become the Zidane game, which has now become the Zidane film. So in a way it is a bizarre thing that our project, which was a private thing, actually enveloped a public event, and the public event started to refer to our filming as an influence on the game, which is a strange...

...reality production. *Gordon*: Yes, *re-reality* or something.

Re-reality production? *Parreno*: We were in the process of editing and we had these pictures with no sound and really by accident we added the TV commentary that described the fact that we were actually shooting a film that day. There is this metaphor that we often used of kids commenting their action on the field using the voice of a TV anchor while playing football, it's even something that Zidane used to do. So yes, it was odd to hear a TV anchor commenting on the fact that we were shooting a picture while we were shooting a picture.

Gordon: Actually, the way it happened was that everyone involved in the production, I think especially us, were so intensely focused on the event that the event itself actually passed us by. We were sitting in a trailer outside of the stadium.

Parreno: We never really had a taste of the real thing until someone finally sent us a tape of the public television broadcast.

You found out how the game ended on TV? *Gordon*: At the end of the game the Spanish commentator said, »This is the end of the Zidane film.« He announced the ending to our project, or he announced one ending to our project, and in a way it was confirmation that this really happened; otherwise it was so much like a dream that it almost might never have existed outside of our fiction.

You mentioned that you were really traumatized when the red card was drawn. *Gordon*: On a purely practical level, the producers involved in the film were always asking, »What if?« What if he breaks his leg, what if he falls? **What if the coach wants to make a substitution?**

Like a Liam Gillick »What if?« scenario. *Gordon*: Even more dense than a Liam Gillick »What if?« scenario. But we refused in a way to think of a Plan B because if you're working on a Plan A, there can only be a Plan A, so a Plan A was what we had. But part of Plan A was that there was

bound to be some inbuilt drama, so actually when the red card happened most of the 80,000 people in the stadium knew what was happening; 95 percent of our crew didn't know what was happening, and Philippe and I just had to be as calm as possible. We knew there were only seconds to go, so it was actually perfect drama.

Parreno: You could say that the shooting of the film influenced the event!

That's what I wanted to ask you. *Parreno*: The day of the shooting, some interviews of the players of the opposing team were published, they said that they would do everything they could to keep Zidane from playing a good game so that we wouldn't have that much to film. So **in a way the fact that we were shooting influenced the event, and that was slightly traumatizing.**

Gordon: In a way, almost like the radical sixties notion that an artist's intervention could change reality, but the focus of attention could change by the mere fact of the artist's involvement. It reminds me of John Latham's project in Scotland, *The Nebris Woman*.

Is this part of the APG, the Artist Placement Group? *Gordon*: Actually, what we did in Madrid was part of an extended practice of a 1960s idea of the Artist Placement Group. We placed ourselves with the help of many, many, many people but in keeping with the idea of the Artist Placement Group we didn't construct an event, we included ourselves in the event. By our inclusion, as Philippe says, you include yourself in a pool of water; there's a ripple effect. We included ourselves in the event and there was an effect.

Parreno: That was something we didn't expect. We didn't expect that when we saw it coming.

In many of our previous conversations, you have both always talked about the issue of the production of reality. Here you are in the midst of things.

Parreno: We were supposed to be on the sidelines of the event, just observing an ordinary game. **The entire project was to step aside, the way TV camera films events based reality.** At the end, those two realities crossed each other...

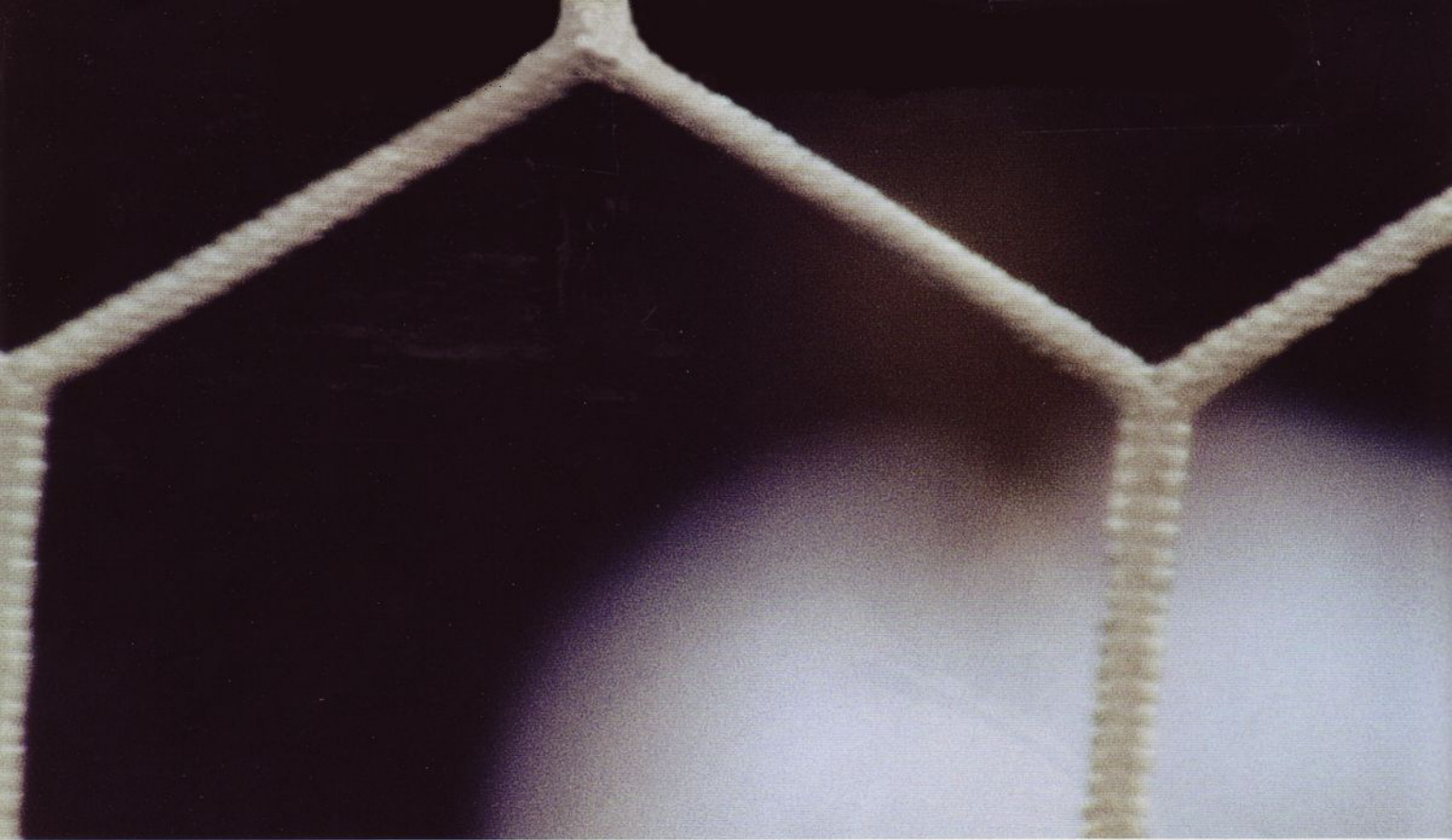
Gordon: It's like when you went to a rock concert as a kid and took a very bad photograph of the event, and then compared it with the photographs in the newspapers. It always seemed like a shabby, sub-real event that you experienced. This was like a hyper-real experience with the same kind of mechanism. Certainly when we saw the footage of the television broadcast compared to what we did, compared to what we had, it was bizarre. There was no link; it was like parallel truths.

Parreno: We only discovered two or three days ago what really happened that day.

Gordon: Like in courtroom drama just before the verdict is going to be announced the prosecution or the defense calls one new witness who suddenly gives new evidence that changes everything. In a way, that was what happened on Friday. Suddenly a new witness appeared in the editing room, which was the evidence seen by a million Spanish people. It wasn't our version of the story but we need to make our version as credible as that one.

How did the editing process work? It was in a linear fashion, right? *Gordon*: The composition is linear because we are working with a professional editor. I think that one of the great things about working with all these people who know their craft, who know their art, is they know what they are doing more than we know what they are doing, so we have to conform to certain orthodoxies. One of the orthodoxies that he's suggesting is that we build a skeleton that goes from head to toe in that order.





A temporal order? *Gordon:* The temporal order is physical: head to toe. I had a fantasy that we could use Godard's idea that a film exists with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order. However, for editing purposes we have 35 hours of material; we need a beginning, a middle, and an end (at least this week!)

Parreno: The structure of the film is quite musical. Since the event is a given, our work consists in reading it, playing it back. The event literally needs to be read, treated like a score, interpreted. Reality needs to be interpreted as it was played, and reinvented. Each time we refer to Zidane, his effect on the game, to his way of being in the image.

Gordon: We set out with this project to make a portrait for cinema so we have certain ... well, not obligations, but you can imagine...

Responsibilities. *Gordon:* And certain formal structures that we want to address. In a way the film has been edited constantly since we talked about this in 1996.

1996. That's exactly nine years ago. To start at the beginning, what was the initial spark? How was the idea born? What was the conversation? Was there a catalyst? *Parreno:* I think it was during a dinner ... no, it was in Jerusalem.

Gordon: It started in Jerusalem.

Parreno: We were playing football.

Gordon: Yes. Maybe it was Haifa. I can't remember exactly the genesis of the thing, but we were playing football, we talked about football, and after that we'd email about football, and if I was in Paris it just so happened that whenever I'd come to Paris there were amazing games. Before 1998, we had already decided we wanted to do something. We made a decision to do something with Zidane, I'd say in 1997.

So that was the casting. You've been saying a lot about the camera director, the director of photography, about the sound person, but usually casting is about actors. Here, there's no casting of actors because there's only one protagonist. *Parreno:* A player. Or as Bresson says, model. Here, it's a player.

Gordon: It's a mélange between sport, television, cinema and art.

Parreno: It is a connection of two subjective points of view.

Gordon: It's an interesting thing we were speaking about when we come to the editing stage is that one of the difficulties for people when they watch the film is that they expect to see the ball. When most people watch a football match on TV the thing they see most is the ball but they are always watching for the unseen player that they like, so in a way it's a perversion of that. The other thing is that when you watch sports and performance on TV, the players are never credited when the credits go up. So we are theatricalizing the televisual event. It's the difference that we are interested in between cinema and television. Cinema has an *auteur*, television has no responsibility in a way. When you watch a football match on TV there is no signature. It's an event that's public. And this is why we fell in love with the sport, why we fell in love with those people that are heroes. And we knew when we saw the first assemblage cut there was something missing from it, and that we were that something.

Parreno: We constantly tried to remind one another of that. It is a simple statement »One single player is observed throughout the entire game, while the television records the factual, that the artistic shaping makes it necessary to forget the project. **Splicing together the best moments of course does not make a film.** We had to ask ourselves about the main figure and the narrative. How can we maintain the focus on one single character, what narrative is possible?« Its very Beckett ... In the radio drama *Cascando*, a narrator named Voice struggles to create the ultimate story. The narrator ultimately fails to capture »the right

one« and decides to start over. The characters in Beckett plays attempt to complete their speeches, whereas their stories should never come to an end. This leads us to identify the characters as a writer who is in the throes of creating texts. This idea of characters with a persistent desire for the ultimate story seems to derive from Beckett.

Gordon: Again, I think it was interesting that we didn't have to make the storyboard. We had to take television into the film culture in order to let them know that our difficulty was a normal difficulty in a way. We had to normalize this, to have them solve it for us, or at least let them believe that.

Parreno: to go back to Bresson.

Gordon: It's problematic when you read the word »model.« I have a problem now when I think through it. **Actors are actors; in theater you don't call them actors, they're called players.** In athletics or in the world of athletes, team sports have players.

There's obviously also that other connotation of the term, painting as a model, a Mondrian kind of thing, there's also an interesting connection to that. *Gordon:* In art history, if you make a portrait it is not a model, it is a subject. If you have someone assume the pose that you want, like *The Raft of the Medusa*, that's about models, whereas the *Mona Lisa* isn't a model, she's a subject. It's fairly clear that there is a difference between a model and a subject when it comes to that. The puzzle is to work out who is who.

Parreno: Both of them have an ambivalent relation with classical narrations, possibilities of narration without the use of fiction.

Gordon: The beautiful thing about what we've been doing is that it's not our film. The beautiful thing is that the viewer has to decide if they are a subject or a model or a so-called innocent viewer. The model has an implication, the subject has an implication but they are not the same, they don't have the same responsibility. +

DOUGLAS GORDON, 1966 in Glasgow, England, geboren. Lebt und arbeitet in Glasgow und New York / Born in 1966 in Glasgow, England. Lives and works in Glasgow and New York.

PHILIPPE PARRENO, 1964 in Oran, Algerien, geboren. Lebt und arbeitet in Paris / Born in 1964 in Oran, Algeria Lives and works in Paris.

AUSGEWÄHLTE AUSSTELLUNGEN SEIT 2002 / SELECTED EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2002

DOUGLAS GORDON

- 2006 *The Rules of the Game*, Galeria Estrany De La Mota (solo)
- 2005 *Evergreen*, Paul Nesbitt, Inverleith House, Edinburgh
- 2004 *Fog*, Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills (solo)
- 2003 *Douglas Gordon. Play Dead*, Gagosian Gallery, NY (solo)
- Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mexico (solo)
- Point of view Anthology of the Moving Image*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY
- 2002/03 *Douglas Gordon. What Have I Done*, Hayward Gallery, London (solo)
- 2002 *Tempo*, Douglas Gordon, The Museum of Modern Art, Queens, NY (solo)
- 2001/02 *Loop*, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, München, PSI, NY

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Gagosian Gallery, New York / Beverly Hills / London www.gagosian.com
Yvon Lambert Paris / New York www.yvon-lambert.com

PHILIPPE PARRENO

- 2006 *Briannnnnn & Ferryyyyyy/Law and Creativity*, mit / with Liam Gillick, Kunsthalle Malmö (solo)
- Vamiali's, Athens; Kunsthalle Zürich / Zurich (solo)
- Tate Triennial, Tate Britain, London
- 2005 *The Boy from Mars*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, NY (solo)
- Guangzhou Triennial
- Expérience de la durée*, Biennale de Lyon
- 2004 *Fade away*, Kunstverein München / Munich (solo)
- 2003 *The Sky of Seven Colours*, Kitakyushu (solo)
- Utopia Station, Biennale di Venezia, Venedig / Venice
- 2002 *Alien Seasons*, ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris (solo)
- Anywhere out of the world*, Kunstverein München / Munich (solo)

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