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Clichés, Football and The Philosophy of Language (Games): Edited Highlights

A Two Blokes From Kent Production, Starring:

Dr. Tom Grimwood, Lancaster University

Dr. Paul Miller, University of Cumbria

The Project...

- To explore the insights that the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Ludwig Wittgenstein can provide for an understanding of the place and role of clichés in the English language, using the particularly rich field of football clichés as our initial subject material.
- First publication arising as a chapter in Richards, E. (Ed.) – forthcoming - 'Soccer and Philosophy'. Open Court Publishing.
 - Details conceptual underpinnings.

Back of the Net! Football and Cliché.

- Punditry, analysis and general chatter steeped in cliché.
 - 'Game of two halves,' 'The boy done good,' 'We gave 100% out there.'
- Academic work tends to evaluate this kind of language as simply 'lazy' or 'unoriginal', or not bother engaging with it at all.
 - Anton Zijderveld.
- However! The ubiquity of cliché at all levels of football, and popular language-use in general, would seem to evidence a more important purpose.
- Think what happens when someone doesn't use cliché...

Ian Holloway, In Top Form!

'To put it in gentleman's terms if you've been out for a night and you're looking for a young lady and you pull one, some weeks they're good looking and some weeks they're not the best. Our performance today would have been not the best looking bird but at least we got her in the taxi. She weren't the best looking lady we ended up taking home but she was very pleasant and very nice, so thanks very much, let's have a coffee.'

- Holloway, as a pundit, tried to sidestep cliché and use metaphor instead. Total mystification all round!
- So: Problem No: #1. - It's very hard to dismiss cliché as simply lazy language. Sometimes it's clearly necessary!

Early Doors: Defining 'Cliché'.

- Academically, we might try to start from the position of defining our subject material.
- So, WHAT is a cliché, then?
 - An over-familiar or predictable phrase?
 - A stereotype?
 - Repetition *ad-nauseam*?
- Problem No. #2. - Cliché seems to resist easy definition!

Tricky Fixtures: Analysing Cliché.

- The impetus with much linguistic analysis is to establish the real, logical 'meaning' of a word or phrase.
- However, exploring what a cliché *designates* is a real problem...
 - Could you really drive a bus through it?
 - Is the ref really blind?
 - How exactly did they give 100%?
- So problem No. #3 - Clichés might seem to make no logical sense, but are people really just talking nonsense all the time? How do they understand each other, then?

So, In Sum...

- Clichés are not simple lazy language use, but...
- Clichés are very hard to define.
- Clichés are often, apparently, meaningless.
- So why bother?! Well...



Head-To-Head



Wittgenstein Gadamer

Austrian-British	German
Born 1889 in Vienna	Born 1900 in Marburg
'Philosophical Investigations'	'Truth and Method'
Certififiable Headcase	Good Mate of Heidegger
Dead for Ages	Lived For 102 Years

Some divergence between the two, but both linked by the assertion that linguistic and gestural action is symbolic and expressive, rather than designative.

A Bit of Wittgenstein.

'Actually I would like to say that...the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life...*Practice* gives words their significance.'

Ludwig Wittgenstein
"Culture and Value"

- This anthropological-hermeneutic stance can tell us a lot about the operation of cliché in the world of football, and culture more broadly.

Anthropology: A Good Place To Start...

- Wittgenstein vs. Frazer – The Golden Bough.
- Fraser argues that tribal rituals such as rain dances are basically clichés:
 - Illogical – rain dance won't make it rain.
 - Reproduced without thinking – lazy.
- However, this misses the symbolic function of the ritual and the fact that they make perfectly logical sense to other people steeped in the pertinent culture:
 - Rain dances only performed in rainy season.
 - Always performed with an audience.

A Footballing Cliché?

- What does the player really mean to do here?
 - Change the scoreline?
 - Bring 'good fortune'?
- Or a symbolic gesture tacitly taken to be meaningful to other people who understand the culture of football?
 - Loyalty?
 - Celebration?
 - When is it done?
 - Alone/With audience?
 - During/Outside of a celebration?
 - When the player's standing at a club is in doubt?



Linguistic Clichés and Shibboleth.

- Verbal/written language works in much the same way to gesture.
- Vehicle *for* meaning, understood to be held in common with other acculturated folks:
 - 'A symmetrically dichotomised competitive physical practice' vs. 'A game of two halves'
- The latter:
 - Gets meaning across in a manner most likely to be understood, showing speaker's inference regarding co-interlocutors, and;
 - Reflexively marks speaker as part of football culture. Certain familiar phrases have totemic/shibboleth value.
 - Think also academia, business.

However...

- These meanings are not 'fixed', the specific meanings are how they function in a given situation, which may vary:
 - Kissing the badge:
 - Heartfelt loyalty or hackneyed attempt to win favour?
 - Depends on how the crowd read it!
- If all language is functional, who labels a given gesture or phrase a cliché at all, and when? To what ends?
 - Cultural elitism? Oft repeated academic phrases are 'formal language'. Popular cultural phrases are 'clichés'.

Next Phase...

- To explore the socio-cultural mechanisms and contexts through which given phrases are constituted as clichés or otherwise.
- Basically, to explore cultural anatomy of cliché in the contexts that they actually arise, rather than presume to understand what they are, and how they work, in advance...
- All questions welcome!