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# The Great Soccer Stadium: Ruptures and (Re)significations of (New) Maracanã

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*Abstract.* The aim of the current study is to analyze meanings and resignifications of soccer stadiums based on the concept of *ambiance*, by taking into consideration physical changes applied to them and affective relationships set with them by fans. The study has focused on Maracanã stadium (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) after the 2014 World Cup renovation. The herein adopted analysis methodology consisted in assessing fans' narratives about the stadium and in listing metaphorical expressions that emphasize the (re)signification process of the new stadium. This (re)signification operates in the atmospheric reconstructions of these "temples of the ball" and in ruptures inherent to any transformation process.

**Keywords.** *Ambiance, Rupture, Resignification, Maracanã*

## Introduction

Ambiance precedes and determines the modes of action and integration of all space elements associated with human relationships (Thibaud, 2004). Everything composing a given environment is surrounded by this "moral and material atmosphere" called *ambiance*. According to the aforementioned author, *ambiance* can only be understood through the embodiment of the space, whereas experience - i.e., body involvement with/movement in the environment - is what enables this environment to be (re)acknowledged. The awareness about the atmosphere of a given place is what allows users to understand it based on its emotional and affective aspects; this process also makes it liable to be stored in users' memories.

Soccer match is the event where the *ambiance* of the stadium emerges. It is in the space-time of a match that bodies/fans - with their passions and affections for soccer - move and get involved with other fans, as well as with the materialities of the place. The *ambiance* of the stadium (re)emerges in these gatherings by moving and involving sensations and symbols that (re)affect individuals and local things, and leave mnemonic marks in the atmospheric corpus of the match. Thus, every new match - which is always unique and different from the others - is a reunion experience, even if the team has changed, or the public is no longer the same, or because the materialities of the place have changed. It is the ritual of soccer that is perpetuated in the stadiums every new match.

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Soccer stadiums are an important part of Brazilian culture, architecture and daily life. Renovations made in the main Brazilian soccer stadiums before the 2014 World Cup were justified by improvements in safety, cleanliness and in the soccer spectacle. However, these ‘supposed’ improvements resulted in higher ticket prices, excessive surveillance and new cheering habits.

Soccer stadiums comprise a set of social relationships that corroborate the ownership taking and resignification of these places as territory (Mascarenhas, 2005). However, taking ownership of a given space is not enough to territorialize it; it is necessary accepting it as part of that territory, i.e., it is necessary “legitimizing” it as such (Raffestin, 1980). Based on the analysis conducted by Montaner and Muxi (2011), contemporary times show strong trend to intervene in cities by disregarding social and community networks. According to Roux (2014), improvements made by designers in the construction and renovation of many recently-built stadiums have emphasized another side of this process, namely: the impoverishment of the sensitive quality of these places for fans.

Did these renovations made in Brazilian stadiums change the atmosphere of these places? It was one of the issues that motivated the ethnographic study about Maracanã Stadium after the 2014 World Cup (Melo, 2018), whose main aim was to get to know and understand whether, and how, this renovation had impact on the soccer ritual taking place in the stadium and, consequently, on the atmosphere of the place, based on fans’ perspective. The current study presents metaphorical expressions taken from fans’ narratives about the meanings attributed by them to (new) Maracanã. These narratives indicate that the atmosphere of the place is remade in the experience of every new match.

### **Maracanã Archive**

Maracanã was built for the 1950 World Cup; it was designed to be the “greatest soccer stadium” in the world. The stadium has undergone several changes throughout its extensive history of continuously hosting important matches of national and international championships. Maracanã was acknowledged by UNESCO as World Heritage Site in the 2000s; since then, renovations carried out in the stadium must, as a matter of principle, pay attention to, and respect, its original design and the cultural value linked to occupation by fans (Girão, 2013). Nevertheless, the renovation carried out in the stadium for the 2014 World Cup has significantly changed its architecture, mainly in the inside. In addition, the stadium also underwent a hyper-sectorization process that, according to Ferreira (2017), consisted in rules focused on confining fans within specific sectors that were set based on ticket price. This, and other renovations carried out in stadiums distributed all over the country, before the 2014 World Cup, were wrapped in speeches and promises to improve safety, cleanliness and the spectacle itself; consequently, they brought along higher ticket prices, excessive surveillance and new cheering habits.

The study carried out at Maracanã was based on the ethno-topographic analysis developed by the Laboratory of Architecture, Subjectivity and Culture (LASC), whose scope lied on investigating the configuration of attributes associated with a given space, in order to understand it as the materialization of cultures, subjectivities and projects of life (Duarte et. al., 2007). Participant observations and interviews with fans were also carried out. Report frameworks were built based on collected narratives. These frameworks were inspired in the “Mnemonic Place Archive” tool (Uglione, 2008) used to build collective stories about the place. MARACANÃ ARCHIVE was then

created by gathering together metaphors extracted from the fragments and traces of fans' narratives. The Archives' work lied on collecting and interweaving individual narratives by taking the metaphors shared by them as guiding thread. This procedure enabled identifying metaphorical expressions taken as signs applied to define and qualify the place for a certain group of individuals/narrators. The next section presents the five metaphorical expressions associated with Maracanã, which were identified in the interweaving of narratives by 26 fans who attended matches in the site from 2016 to 2017. The metaphorical expressions comprised Campo de Batalha (Battlefield), Lugar Mágico (Magic Place), Colosso (Colossus), Teatro de Sonhos e Emoções (Theater of Dreams and Emotions) and Engomadinho (Gussied-up).

## Metaphorical Expressions

The first metaphorical expression - **Battlefield** - describes soccer matches as a “war,” whereas the stadium is the territory of dispute between opponents. The enemy is temporary, but the ambiance generated in the combat taking place in the stadium creates and invokes the symbolism capable of sustaining present and future battles.

This expression highlights the formation of micro-ambiances<sup>4</sup>, as well as of waves capable of dissolving them. Although both micro-ambiances and waves are different in each match, they accumulate and reproduce great behavioral and symbolic similarities. Micro-ambiances are like trenches created for confrontations outspread throughout the territory. Organized fan groups are an example of micro-ambiance often observed in stadiums. Members of these groups were forced by stadium managers to establish their trenches in the center of the Northern and Southern sectors, at the upper level; however, they spontaneously expanded their territory to the sides and to the lower level of these very same sectors, where they created a border emphasized by chants, flags and t-shirts with team colors and symbols of each organized fan group. Another micro-ambiance typical of Maracanã stadium is the one formed by “former terrace goers,” i.e., fans who used to watch matches from terraces - this term refers to a well-known standing area close to the field, where fans watched soccer matches before the area was terminated in the 2007 renovation. These fans form borders when they lean over the partitions next to the field, sometimes cursing the players and sometimes cheering; thus, they reinforce their territory.

Micro-ambiances help better understanding territory domination due to part of the right acquired in the **Battlefield**. There is no longer the “free territorialization” featured by the free circulation of individuals seen in the past, which is currently hampered by hyper-sectorization into predetermined areas. On match days, fans can transform the stadium into a dispute field; consequently, they take ownership of this territory. According to Haesbaert (2011), this process often takes place through identification, as well as through the combination of controls, functions and symbolizations.

The second metaphorical expression - **Magic Place** - represents the transcendence of Maracanã stadium. It reflects the ascendancy of the ambiance embedded in the enchantment produced by the “soccer giant” in its fans. This expression refers to the

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4. *Micro-ambiances are smaller fragments circumscribed to a larger ambiance. They comprise small groups of individuals who “share and/or experience the same event, the same activity in a given space, whose sensitive features enable social practices that constitute lesser reverberating borders” (Lira, 2015, 64). Based on Edensor (2015), micro-ambiances clarify constant changes in sensitive elements and space occupation dynamics. Stadium micro-ambiances exist due to fans' need to mark their territory, to be identified and to give visceral responses to their club.*

magic dimension of the place ‘Maracanã’, which is wrapped in rites and bears a soul. This soccer temple has launched mass cheering patterns, “invented” idols and created unusual ways to encourage teams. It shelters memories of unlikely championship finals and ghosts of great defeats. It enabled creating a fan identity and resolved differences.

One of the examples of Maracanã’s magic emerges when idols, or even great decisive matches, are remembered, which means that this place worked as stage for something memorable. However, the stadium does not lose its magic when it is also remembered for having been the place of defeats. These fragments are activated by fans, who use their memories to find their place and feel like they belong to Maracanã. According to Tuan (1977), the construction of myths is not a thing of the past; it is based on the knowledge people have as individuals and as members of a certain society, and it is strongly adhered to the place.

According to many fans, Maracanã remains the largest stadium in the world. Although its maximum capacity was reduced in the last renovation to approximately 79,000 fans, as opposed to the 200,000 seats that it had before, it remains giant in its potential, echo and representativeness of soccer and world architecture. It is an icon and a monument; many individuals think that way, since the idea of the third metaphorical expression - *Colossus* - has significantly emerged in the narratives of some fans.

However, this dimension of Maracanã’s grandeur is mainly guided by the symbolic field and by marks left in time. In addition, the grandeur of the stadium changes based on the ambiance of each match, since it is not only represented by the physical size of it, but mainly by the circulation of sensitive elements.

The fourth metaphorical expression - *Theater of Dreams and Emotions* - synthesizes the role-playing taking place in the stadium during soccer matches, where fans are both spectators and participants of what happens on the football stage. This expression focuses, above all, on representations involving soccer matches and the whole ritual developed by this role-playing.

It is possible saying that the theatricalization of Maracanã’s *Theater of Dreams and Emotions* on match days starts with the preparation rituals and extends to the urban surroundings of the stadium before each match. For example, fans duly dressed in their team’s jerseys can be seen drinking, talking and singing in bars in the stadiums’ surroundings. There are always many vendors selling food, drinks, souvenirs, as well as fans dressed in the colors of their teams, fulfilling the role of pre-match cheerleaders. Although the match is seen as a great battle, the ritual preceding it is quite festive, effusive, with hints of tension, but, above all, it is very representative.

The *Theater of Dreams and Emotions* is the rupture in the everyday life. Cheering is a party where ordinary people dress up as fans, transform themselves and give themselves body and soul to this joyous event of cheering for their teams. At the end of the match, fans go back to their homes and the final ambiance gradually fades away, while their remnants still hang over the stadium and the fans until none of them are seen anymore. The curtain falls.

Finally, the fifth metaphorical expression - *Gussied-up* - summarizes the reverberation of anguish, sadness and outrage associated with the renovation carried in Maracanã stadium. The sentence “it is no longer the same Maracanã” was uttered several times by fans.

According to some fans, Maracanã remains the giant. However, others think that it was greater in the past since its greatness was associated with its previous welcoming and popular nature. The fact that fans were not consulted about the changes made in Maracanã made them feel marginalized and even more resistant to changes, which increased the feeling that the place was diminished.

Fans also feel stunted and monitored by what they consider an excess of security in the *Gussied-up* stadium. The ambiance of the stadium is permeated by controlled surveillance, and it gives a lesser spontaneous nature to the match. However, fans are transgressors; little by little they take ownership of what is rightfully theirs, namely: the right to encourage their teams. They no longer follow the numbering of chairs, they use empty spaces like improvised bleachers (stairs, places with broken seats, sector divisions, ramps), they stand up, jump and try to break away from every order of control. According to Roux (2014), the symbolic victims of the paradigm shift in these facilities - i.e., the “standing places” - are vigorously combated by new stadium designers. *Gussied-up* certainly refers to a process that can be called dis-belonging. According to Heidegger (1966), this process is always associated with the pursuit of meaning when one experiences some loss, which, in the case of these fans, refers to the fact that they no longer feel like part of Maracanã stadium.

### **Final Considerations**

Although the renovation carried out in Maracanã stadium has caused undeniable ruptures in fans’ habits and visions, it is still possible finding traces of the past and seeing how they affect new occupations and new adherence to the current version of the stadium.

The observations of metaphorical expressions enabled noticing the global trend to change the physical space and to dictate fans’ behavior inside new arena-stadiums. However, new signs and syntaxes are adapted, violated or incorporated as fans are introduced to the ambiance of each match.

Maracanã is no longer the same and that is undeniable, but the ambiance remains in the stadium! The herein analyzed metaphoric expressions enabled perceiving some fans will never be able to re-signify the stadium, whereas others will be able to do it by attributing new meaning to the place based on its ambiances, although they know that the stadium will always change, either due to necessity or imposition (Peixoto, 1996). The renewed Maracanã is a palimpsest comprising symbolic layers linked to other symbols and capable of leading to a new order of understanding, perception and affection.

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