

# Bern, Beverwijk, and the Representation of Cities

by Joost Meuwissen

Some cities keep their stories only for themselves. Even their possible mental images or memories (*Gestalt*) are not meant to be discussed in public. They are not kept as secrets but are not shown either. Such cities try to avoid producing some sorts of self-representations, and they may do so for the sake of an inner peace. For instance, practically nobody in the world knows what the city of Beverwijk in the Netherlands looks like. Ten years ago it had a well-known bazaar. Besides its visitors at the time nobody cared. And who is afraid of Bern, Switzerland? Some people do know it is the capital of that fine country where bears are held in captivity, and others may think of the famous clock tower (*Uhrturm*) which inspired a part of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity after the tram he was sitting in moved away from that tower with a certain speed, and up came the thought that if the tram would move faster, which is something most people like the trams to do, for instance with the speed of light, the clock you are moving away from would stand still. This idea might have occurred in any city at any time but the only content of that story as far as Bern's urbanism is concerned is that it is a city you want to move away from with the speed of light, which is something of a wish the tramways over there do not fulfill. That is all there is. Time stands still or rather it does not. For that, you need not wear one of the notorious Swiss watches. Most people, however, especially from the German-speaking countries, would remember Bern from the 1954 soccer tournament, which made Germany world champion for the first time after the war. This was a turning point in German esteem both home and abroad, and as such became a part of world history.

Big cities or urbanisms such as Paris or London have their main histories which absorb all the little gossips, connect them together, and make them part of world history. Most of the smaller cities, however, have no history; or rather the stories that are told there mostly have so little in common that it is practically impossible to unite them into a single narrative or image. Judenburg in Austria, for example had the Wittgenstein steel factories which are in ruins now but which were only important because of the Wittgenstein family. But from that legacy, the city council had, and still has, Austria's largest amount of communist representatives. Another narrative might be the very name of Judenburg, which lasted over the Nazi occupation. "This proved to be no problem", the urban planning

director once said to me, "since the trick was to declare that *Juden* did not mean Jews; it would be a corruption of *Wotein* (Woteinburg) which in turn be a genitive of *Luitpold* (Luitpoldsburg). After all", he added, "the difference between socialism and national-socialism was not that big over here". Thinking of Judenburg most people might think of the serial killer Johann Unterweger though or of the sports star Renate Götschl, who ran away from her hometown on skis as fast as possible. Such stories have nothing in common with the cities they take place at.

Yet, what do they have in common then? I would argue that all those minor stories are real narratives, they all tell about tragic events (captivity, escape, death, and ruins) but they do so only after the real events have taken place. They do not coincide with the events they relate to but represent them in the aftermath (1). They are negative representations of what has happened in a small town, and what could not have any other representation since world history is simply not there. However, as existing forms of representation they might be interesting for architecture and urbanism, which also happen to be representations of the environments they recreate, to implement those dramas into their designs, i.e. to carefully research into the quality of such stories in the particular case of the unknown town concerned, and to develop new design methods which are able to deal with such negativity. And there is one type of gossip that is shared by all cities big or small all over the world, and that is their football club(s). It might be interesting to look at football (or soccer), in order to find out what kind of story it represents.



Congratulations to world soccer champion Germany at Bern-Wankdorf, 1954.

## Soccer

Soccer certainly is a major cultural institution in our society. In designing the architecture for this institution, however, there are a lot of questions that remain unanswered. For example how public or how private a soccer stadium space should be, or how the relationship between players and audience might be improved through architecture. We are dealing with a phenomenon that goes beyond collective feeling or simple mass hysteria, since it is not spontaneity but a complicated set of representations that is implied. From the match itself to the behavior of the audience, from all the security measurements to the way media representation reflects upon the field, stand, and the stadium's surroundings.

In handling this complexity, most measurements that are taken lately, such as the banning of private transportation and liquor, personal pass control and, above all, the much discussed substitution of common open stands through fixed personal seats (2) , tend to individualize what is considered to be collective behavior beyond control. A narcotics gang can easily be prosecuted as a collective, as a criminal organization; yet even after severe misconduct a soccer fan club is hardly ever treated that way. Such an individualization, however, prevents us from seeing and understanding the possible expression of historic feeling soccer might add to today's culture or the city where it

takes place for that matter, through what Frank Ankersmit would call the supercollective "conservative inertia" of soccer (3). The notorious homophobia of fans and players, for instance, when some of them are together, does not mean at all that these persons are homophobic as individuals or would be so in gatherings of another kind. It is playing conservatism, a representation from the past, from history. Therefore, it is as important or unimportant as any aesthetic representation is or, as one soccer fan summed it up when discussing these matters: "In our culture, soccer is the most important thing of no importance". To learn what soccer means or could mean in that sense, might be a tremendous help in dealing with other phenomena in which negative public-ness and positive security are important, such as urban spaces that in the past were designed for a more quiet life than they show today, and to which there are no design solutions, only police solutions which albeit in a partial, fragmentary sense may work.

## **Something that has rules**

Traditionally, architecture, and urbanism for that matter, are not able to easily deal with negativity. Both are reluctant to recognize the recent change in urban space, which no longer derives its meaning from the public realm and in many cases is not even governed by public bodies anymore. Urban space, the streets and squares as a public realm, is, compared to the nineteenth century, subject to a slow but steady process of being emptied, in its relation to that wholly different public realm that can be accessed by everyone in the core of the home, the internet or the interactive TV. It can no more be argued that distance, the 'tele' in television would only imply a 'passive' public realm, to which we would not have an active relation. With the many choices we have these days, with competition of the many channels, with the interweaving of TV and Internet, the idea of information as a marketplace substitutes the traditional marketplace space as a source for information. We have streets through which we move and we have streets that we never step on to and that we only see on TV, as places of crime, high risks and racism. Between both extremes, the streets of San Francisco and Miami Vice and the nice and quiet marketplace with its outdoor cafés and trees in a sun-filled, clean European town such as Bern, Switzerland, we find endless possibilities but the remarkable thing is that architects in their imagery always seemed to prefer the latter possibility, the marketplace without much problems. The first possibility, with the cultural questions for which there are no simple solutions, is preferably omitted in the final proposals. It might be a source of inspiration, seldom is it the final proposal - but in many cases it turns out to be the final result. In this way important questions of urban space now are left untouched.

Nowadays the question of the public realm and urbanity is much more complicated. We can no longer, as we could in the 1960s and 1970s, approach the public realm as the unknown and think of it merely as the opposite of the private. Because all that was public has already become private or it will soon. The television is, the hospital is, the mail, the train, the house where you receive the TV. Even the rules and regulations of traffic and public space are

increasingly controlled by private companies. In the near future the army will be privatized. The privatization of prisons in England, this most public of institutions, is a good example. I would like to put forward the hypothesis that the public realm - and with it urbanity - can now be defined as a play of cultural and social, continually changing games of which the rules are made clear and transparent. With 'games' I do not mean something existential as Huizinga's 'Homo Ludens' but I define it purely as 'something that has rules'. Then the most modest task of space and the buildings in the city would be that they should not make these games impossible.

The public realm moves from one area to the other, from soccer hooliganism to a house party, from one minority to the other, from gay pride to right-wing extremism, from a war memorial to racism. In order to shape it architectonically or at least to deal with it in architecture, we would have to think very deeply about the transparency of these continually altering manifestations of the public, how one builds for something that is fluid, how one builds a soccer stadium.

In the soccer stadium we find on the one hand the rules of the game of soccer but on the other hand we had the rules of soccer hooliganism that somewhat resembled the rules of soccer. At least it was like that some fifteen years back in England and Holland - it came suddenly and disappeared just as suddenly, only to suddenly be resurrected a few years later. Because not only the soccer players but also the supporters know they are on TV, in the distance, in the 'tele' of the television, they play along. A large amount of sociological research demonstrates how this vandalism was not a spontaneous or abrupt explosion of violence but an expression of the desire to be part of the game. People who participated were generally well educated (4).

Vandalism is not something that destroys the already minimized public realm of the soccer stadium. To the contrary, it creates an expanded public realm, a public realm of the second degree, the public realm of television in space, which leads to the point that the public realm of the stadium does not appear as purely positive, the crowd's chanting and supporting of the players, but also and especially in a negative way, as police, dogs, fences and wiring. Such an urbanity is not formulated in terms of habit and customs, it does not work as a type but is based on hidden rules like the rules of security and guards, but now at the soccer game. My guess would be that truly claiming the public realm, so that a true public realm can appear, is only possible if all that is hidden is made public. This would ask for an aesthetic inquiry, with no moral judgment, of the violence as a representation of something unknown, which is to be discovered.

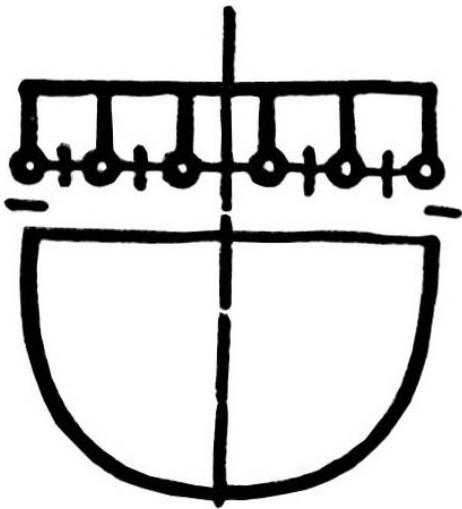
When, for instance, supporters of Feyenoord, Rotterdam, enter the stadium of Ajax, Amsterdam, shouting "Ajax, club of Jews!" or worse, this is generally considered to be a deplorable manifestation of anti-semitism. But is it? The words themselves are not. It merely looks that way. Like at

the homophobia case, it would not mean that these persons are sort of Nazis themselves. On the contrary, although I would not go that far and call it a lamento about the fact that Ajax after the Holocaust could not possibly become a club of Jews anymore but in any case something of an awareness about the history of Amsterdam has been expressed that way, something that people would normally not associate with soccer - as if soccer did not know. What hooliganism is representing that way is remarkably not the history of soccer itself but the history of true life, in this case exactly that part of the history of Amsterdam that Ajax supporters supposedly would forget when going to their stadium.

When discussing these examples, I in no way mean to promote discrimination and violence, of which I strongly disapprove. Yet these things happen again and again, and therefore they are somehow part of the puzzle of the stadium program. The question thereby is: What is it that makes soccer so important? Why, at the millenium party at the Dam Square in Amsterdam, where Amsterdam celebrities such as moviestar Jeroen Krabbé and Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok held short reassuring speeches on big video screens through the music, only the legendary Johan Cruyff got an ovation? Although many soccer fans would strongly disagree with me on this point, in my opinion the high importance of soccer as a social cohesion factor really cannot be caused by the game itself but only by the game as a basic, enduring and lasting aesthetic representation in our society. This goes for all the stories that are told in small and forgettable towns.

By aesthetic representation I mean neither the direct, unmediated beauty of the match itself, being looked at as if it were real ballet, as the Amsterdam choreographer Rudy van Dantzig did, nor the self-exposure of a bunch of men as if the soccer ball were a kind of pretext to show the beauty of their legs. If you look at the soccer match as if it were ballet, then the narrative of this ballet, what it relates to, would probably be the soccer match itself. The perspective would be aesthetic but the match as such would not be a representation of something else. If you look at the game from the theatrical point of view though, from the history of theatre design, the soccer field belongs to the most primitive type of stage design we have had in Europe. You have the playground and you have two doors, one to the left and one to the right, one for the bad guys and one for the good guys. This is even more primitive than the most primitive European stage, the Terencean stage from Early Renaissance, which had more doors.

The Terencean stage was developed at Florence in the fifteenth century, to re-perform soap pieces by the Roman soap author Terence in Antiquity. They tell the usual stories about a number of families who do not like each other all that much. On the wide shallow stage setting only a number of doors were visible, each with the inscription of a family name, from those the actors entered to recite their verses. Since little action was visually shown, there was no need for the illusionist stage decoration as we know



Renaissance Terencean stage, also called "locker room stage".

it today (5). Like soccer, the setting was completely comprehensible, with the important, offensive guys entering from the doors in the middle, the unimportant, defensive guys entering from doors at either side, the good ones from one side, the bad ones from another. Like at soccer, there was absolutely no need for illusionist decoration. Actually, when illusionist decoration began to develop, in the sixteenth century, it did so not on stage but behind the stage, as decorations that were more elaborate and were to be more communicative than the mere inscriptions of names above the doors had been. These were decorations of the rooms behind the doors, and as such no direct parts of the play itself, the most famous example being the built and therefore within the play not usable - not meant for use - perspectives at Andrea Palladio's Olympic Theatre in Vicenza.

In soccer history, there has been no need for developing an illusionist theatre space outside the playground. Illusionist locker rooms might be there but they are mostly kept away from the eyes of the spectators. This might be the reason that after the arrival of television something began to change. The audience found itself suddenly confronted with being within an illusionist theatre space. The question, with regard to security, would then be how one could get the audience to adopt a more consumerist attitude towards this illusionist space, which at the moment still would present itself as a shop with nothing to buy.

## Battle of Beverwijk

Fifteen years ago there was still the discussion whether security at, say, museums or libraries should be provided for by means of either physical boundaries or electronic equipment: Fence or camera. Both alternatives were devised for panoptical spatial organizations with one single entrance to be surveyed. Today electronic equipment is so refined and easily distributed through the whole of the organization, that institutions as well as cities can be completely open and, as was already proposed by architects such as Herman Hertzberger in the 1960s, having entrances everywhere, the result being that the organizing diagram shifts from the panoptical public building towards the shopping mall, from elitism towards consumerism. That way, the audience is not only taken more seriously than before, it can also be treated in a friendlier way, and be more actively involved. This might also be important to think about in the case of the organization of a soccer stadium. Hooliganism might be considered a form of consumerism, which in front of the current stadium security measures finds itself as if shopping on the empty shelves of a former Soviet Union store. At least one example of fighting has shown indeed, in the past few years, how lovers of hooliganism themselves tried to escape from the negative, I'd say the too technical, too industrial image of fences, wiring and guards, which now is an integral part of any soccer stadium. On March 23, 1997, Feyenoord fans from Rotterdam and Ajax fans from Amsterdam met on a meadow near the small town of Beverwijk, to deliver a fight in which Ajax fan Carlo Picornie was killed. The arrangement to fight was made via the internet. As a



Battle of Beverwijk, 1997.

public realm in the second degree, this time hooliganism created a real distance from the soccer field itself. Beverwijk is not lying between Amsterdam and Rotterdam at all. The setting was a rather remote landscape near the coastal sand dunes, which is far older and has a longer history than the ones near the club stadiums or the landscape in between them. The battle, including the killing, was videotaped. With the tape, the judge had big trouble to decide which of the three men who actually slew Carlo Picornie had caused death. With all its metal weaponry, the battle looked more medieval than the sort of middle ages that are represented in a Paul Verhoeven movie.

"Reinvent the collective", as Rem Koolhaas argued (6). The collective as something that does not exist culturally anymore and thus needs to be invented, is based on the premise that the rules, or as we could say in architecture, the processes that may generate forms, can be considered in itself as immaterial. That means that they can be used in the design as transparent, as purely visual, as the fact that representations are seen and observed. In that sense, the ultimate model of any institution, including the soccer stadium, would be the shopping mall.



To the left: the Swiss national soccer stadium at Bern-Wankdorf as it became realised in 2005, next to the old stadium which now functions as a training field. To the right: the Grossi Allmand meadow which is a favourite place for recreation.

## Memories don't cling to grass

A combination of shopping mall and soccer stadium, including other consumerist programs like cinemas, in addition to a huge amount of private offices, was asked for at a competition at Wankdorf, Bern, Switzerland, in 1998. The site was next to a worn-out concrete building which happened to be the national Swiss soccer stadium. You probably know it from the Rainer Werner Fassbinder movie 'The Marriage of Maria Braun' from 1979, at the end of which, just before the gas explosion, the radio reports the Wankdorf final that in 1954 made Germany world champion. You may know this but you will probably not remember the place. You remember the play, not the place or rather, you would remember the place through the play only. That might be an architectural definition of soccer. For instance, when the new Arena stadium in Amsterdam was finished, the beautiful old Ajax stadium, designed by Rem's grandfather Dirk Roosenburg (7), despite all its highlights of soccer history, was demolished without much protest. Memories don't cling to grass.

Situated in the Bern periphery, Wankdorf, being smoothly disclosed by highways but also because of the national stadium, happened to be extremely well accessible through both public and private transport, which subsequently made the site highly attractive for developers too. Since the stadium area was highly important for recreation, and has a beautiful scenery, city officials did not want to promote just any periphery like development and only consented to the client's wish to do periphery-development if he would also develop a new national soccer stadium.

This was an invited competition, with ten Swiss offices and three from abroad. As jury member Roger Riewe nominated my office One Architecture from Amsterdam, the client said: "Yeah, of course, soccer, we do need an architect from Hol-

land, let's take Rem Koolhaas". But Rem had his doubts, because the client happened to be also the contractor, and because at that time still, the contractor's structural engineer should be the advisor to collaborate with. After Rem refused, they asked us.

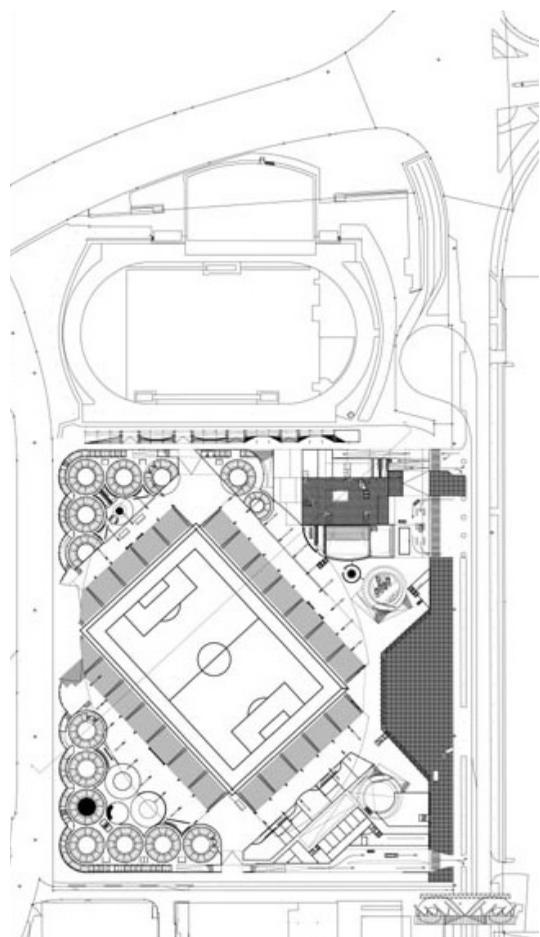
We lost the competition, because we thought - especially my partner in the office Matthijs Bouw thought so, since he is a soccer fanatic and an Ajax fan - that when you are commissioned to design a soccer stadium this soccer stadium thing itself would be of some importance. All the non-Swiss offices thought so. Since this would be the national stadium, and maybe at some point in the future Switzerland would like to organize or co-organize the European Championships, all offices from abroad aligned the pitch north-south, according to the rules of the FIFA International Federation of Soccer Associations, the result being that the field would have a diagonal position on the narrow site. This would be a disadvantage for handling the huge amount of other functions freely. The best solution in this case was to accommodate all the functions in one big building. Since the brief asked for an identifying stadium, we accommodated all other functions into a rectangular plinth volume, with the stadium rising above it.

The Swiss offices knew better. Abandoning FIFA rules and thus the possibility of European Championships, they aligned the pitch according to the direction of the site, thus creating the possibility of accommodating all the different functions into independent Swiss boxes, so that the client would be able to develop all functions independent from one another and subsequently could build all buildings except the national stadium; the client, while developing his own original proposal, might build the stadium later on or might endlessly postpone it. The building was finished in 2005, though.

Since everybody knows that a soccer stadium to be economically viable cannot have soccer as its only function, the idea of combining it with cinemas and shopping malls might be welcomed. The reason obviously not being that these consumerist functions would add something to the soccer function - a soccer match might be organized in a more consumerist way but nobody goes shopping *before* or *after* it - but they might be an enrichment to other stadium programs, such as fairs or rock concerts. As experiences from German railway stations as well as from airports all over the world show, there are certain advantages connected to bringing these different consumerist functions together into one big building.

## Lifting the pitch

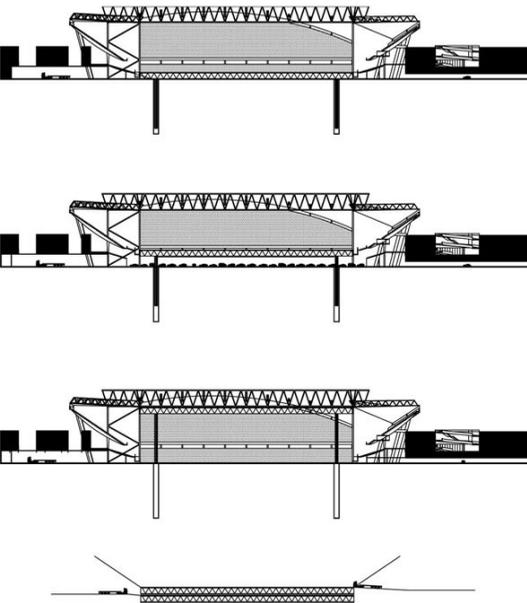
By making one big building with the stadium diagonally lying in the middle of it, the corners of the stadium would be closest to the perimeter of the building. The - still - independent disclosure of the stadium might be through its corners and, would always be somewhere in the middle of the four facades of the rectangular big building, making it easily possible to separate supporters from different



One Architecture (Matthijs Bouw and Joost Meuwissen), Invited competition design for the Swiss national soccer stadium at Bern-Wankdorf, 1998, plan with surroundings.

clubs or countries. The other functions were zoned according to that same division. The possibility to recognize the stadium as a stadium, and as this stadium in particular, which the brief required, was achieved by a hybridization of existing typologies. Mixing the rectangular open corner Wembley type with the continental closed oval shape.

As inner court of a big building, the pitch is architecturally distant from the natural ground level around the building, the result being that the pitch level might be completely unnatural. Although the brief did not ask for the possibility of covering the stadium in case of bad weather conditions, we did know from experience that after covering the stands the next step will be to cover the pitch, in order to be able to organize, for instance, European Championships. Yet, through this tendency of gradually having more roof, grass quality had become a still bigger concern than it should have been in the Bern weather. At the Amsterdam Arena the grass has to be completely replaced every three months, which is very expensive. Therefore at the Gelredome stadium in Arnhem, Netherlands, the structural engineering firm ABT designed a pitch which can completely slide out from the stadium. As the narrow site in Bern did not allow the possibility to do this horizontally, the Wankdorf pitch would be moved out vertically. That way, it might form a desirable roof, if not over the soccer match, still over the art fair or the rock concert underneath.



Lifting the pitch.

Lifting the grass towards the light, instead of bringing the light to the grass, might be an event that makes the place into a public space which would be there also without the medium of television, then there is still another direction within the Terencean stage setting and that is the vertical one which I forgot to mention before. Figures who do not pop up from doors on stage level but who pop up from underneath, who pop up from a hole in the stage floor, who therefore take no part in the good and the bad, are able, for that very reason, to comment on the play. They are the ugly. They are the fools. In Hamlet they are the gravediggers. Having no role in the play, they are the only ones who can say the truth. Now it might be a nice idea, for instance, at the soccer stadium to have the referee appear from below, from an elevator, because the referee does neither belong to the good guys nor to the bad guys, but then nobody would take him or her seriously anymore, and the game would turn into a mess. In my opinion, however, since all the players might vertically move with the pitch being lifted, the soccer players would not only be the good and the bad but also the ugly, the fools and the gravediggers. This has nothing to do with such a thing as collective memory. It is the structure of theatre everybody knows by heart.

Actually, lifting the pitch had been the first idea which had come up to the ABT firm when designing the Arnhem Gelredome in order to let the grass grow. To move it up was the first idea. To do it horizontally was just a second idea which only came up because it was less expensive, and, unlike the Wankdorf site, since there was enough space around to do

so. Still, the first idea is always the best idea, because it relates directly to experience and a sense of historic knowledge, whereas the second idea only relates to the first one in a reduced, technical way, and therefore fails to convey historic content or rather, I mean, soccer players may be really the gravediggers from Hamlet, and the soccer ball is really the skull, and this not only through the very way it is decorated today. In the newspapers you will find recurring photographs of African boys playing soccer with a skull. At the Venice Biennale this year an Italian artist showed a video of a lonely African boy practicing soccer all alone, and only halfway through the video he appears to do so with a skull. Most critics think that it is political art, warning for the horrors of war. For such a warning we need no art though. In my opinion the political statement by that video is another one: the boy simply cannot afford to buy a normal football. To consider the football being a skull is as old as the game itself (8).

If the soccer players are gravediggers, who comment upon past horrors, then a vertical lifting of the ground level would somehow visualize this hidden rule, whereas a horizontal move of the pitch would be no more than a repetition of the hiding of that hidden rule. Soccer is not a war, it is a story of that war, after the war is over. Any small-town narrative, the way it is represented, has such an organizational depth. Let architecture and urbanism eventually develop such methods too.

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- (4) Gary Armstrong, *Football Hooligans. Knowing the Score* (Oxford, UK, and New York, NY: Berg, 1998). See also the classic Bill Buford, *Among the Tugs* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1991).
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- (7) Dorine van Hoogstraten, *Dirk Roosenburg 1887-1962* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2005), 207-214, however does not mention the Ajax stadium De Meer, Amsterdam, on the office's official list of works.
- (8) Horst Bredekamp, *Florentiner Fussball: Die Renaissance der Spiele* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2001), 13: „till I can play at footeball with thy head“.

#### Source Images

Image 1 - 3  
No source

Image 4  
Google Earth

Image 5 - 6  
Courtesy of One Architecture