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Paper 19

Translanguaging, Volleyball, and Social Life

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Executive Summary

This is a summary of the research outcomes elaborated in detail in the following report, which was conducted as Phase Three of the Birmingham case study of AHRC-funded Translating Cultures project, ‘Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities’.

- Translanguaging is a process of becoming. New players arrive. Beginnings are made. For the new players there is more than volleyball to learn. There is the culture of the group.

- Translanguaging is a resource for teaching. The predominant coaching philosophy at large in the team is one that encourages all players to participate and learn.

- The coach shows the players what to do as well as telling them. He constantly demonstrates what he wants the players to do. His pedagogy plays out in translanguaging zones which are multivocal and multisemiotic.

- Translanguage as social practice is the basis of the social relations of the team.

- Mock-abuse is the order of discourse in the social interactions of the team. Sexual innuendo, stereotypical teasing, questioning each others’ resilience, abuse, curses, profanities, all are in play.

- Translanguaging is centred on the body. Players engage each other with their bodies beyond the verbal.

- The game is played out in ritual practice. It is communal; it abides by set rules and practices which must be undertaken at specific times and in a set order; it occurs in a limited time and space which is free from the normative social structure.

- The social order of the volleyball court relies on rhythm. Not one rhythm, but multiple rhythms, all different but interwoven, all in play.

- Translanguaging relies on the repetition of the sign, the repetition of the body, the repetition of the word. Rhythm opens up communicative space.

- Translanguaging is contingent on space. Communicative repertoires, available resources at a point in time and space, are subject to the contingencies of the produced space.

- In the ideological space of the volleyball court a particular type of translanguaging is the order of discourse. Translanguaging is not a set of communicative practices. It is an ideological orientation to communication in changing space.
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*Note: if you are reading online you have access to video clips, via clearly marked links in the text*
1. Introduction

The structure and rhythm of the practice is almost hypnotic. It is difficult to take your eyes off the action, even though there are no serious points to be won, and this is only training. The repetition of action as the ball is served and returned is a metaphor for social life: each instance a recontextualisation of another, yet unique in itself; each instance similar but different; each iteration commented upon by participants and onlookers; each interaction subject to evaluation; each action the subject of approval, delight, disappointment, frustration, congratulation, apology, explanation. It is more than metaphor, it is social life itself. There it is – we are looking at volleyball because all of social life is here.

Three researchers watched a volleyball team over four months of Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons in the university sports hall. The team was coached by Joe Ng, originally from Hong Kong, with players from France, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, The Philippines, Romania, Rwanda, Spain, Taiwan, and the UK. What emerges is an account of communication in the city. Observational field notes record what researchers see and hear (and smell, and taste, and touch) as they follow the communicative practices of men who come together to play. Here are the voices of the coach and the players as they joke, laugh, tease, complain, criticize, support, encourage, exclaim, celebrate, and so on. But the voices are not all. Integral to the communicative repertoires of the men is the body. So the researchers also record how the body is put to work in the process of communication. In the context of a volleyball team in the city the body is an essential and integral resource in the communicative repertoire. This is not only about volleyball, but about social life. Competence in negotiating changing city spaces demands the flexibility and adaptability to make meaning with whatever resources are available. It requires going beyond ‘language’ and ‘languages’ to communicate through repertoires in which embodied interaction is integral. That is, competence in the city requires translanguaging.

Translanguaging refers to the communicative practices in which people engage as they bring into contact different biographies, histories, and linguistic backgrounds. Translanguaging has the potential to be transformative and creative, as it can transcend apparent difference, enabling people to communicate with whatever resources are available to them, rather than constraining them within prescribed limits. Translanguaging therefore has a spatial dimension, as it occurs in a translanguaging space (Li Wei 2011), or translanguaging zone (Blackledge, Creese, and Hu 2016). Translanguaging also has an ideological dimension, as it is contingent on local attitudes to, and beliefs about, communicative practice. Attitudes and beliefs related to communication are not fixed, and may be changed within, and by, the communicative interaction itself.

Translanguaging is more than moving between languages. It is embodied communicative practice. Translanguaging repertoires include but are by no means limited to the linguistic. Rather, they include aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’, including gesture, dress, posture, and so on; they are a record of mobility and experience; they include constraints, gaps and silences as well as potentialities; and they are responsive to the places in which, and the people with whom, semiotic resources may be deployed (Blackledge, Creese, and Hu 2015). The way people walk, stand, and sit, the way they tilt their head, the gaze of their eyes, the shrug of their shoulders, the movement of their hands and fingers, their smile or frown,
all are part of the translanguaging repertoire. The integrated nature of the translanguaging repertoire is fundamental. Embodied communicative practice is not in any way separate from linguistic communicative practice. Speech is of course at all times embodied. Embodied communicative practice and linguistic communicative practice are integral to each other to the extent that they are one and the same.

Translanguaging is more than communicative practice. It is an ideological orientation to engagement with others in changing space. It is a way of being and encountering. It is a process of becoming, as the communicative practices of others are tried for size, learned, adopted, and inhabited. Translanguaging is a resource for teaching, for introducing cultural practices to new members, for showing and for telling. It is a social practice at one with laughter and abuse, foolery and seriousness, mockery and praise, regulation and transgression, greeting and farewell. It is centred on the body, and is the body: the head, the eyes, the hands, the feet; it is proximity, it is bodily contact. Translanguaging is ritual action, prescribed practice set apart from the social world in a designated time and space; it puts the unstable world to rights, keeps an even keel.

Translanguaging relies on rhythm: the rhythm of the seasons and the year, of the heartbeat and the stars, the serve and return, music and dance, high fives and low fives, spike and block. And translanguaging constitutes space and is constituted in space; translanguaging produces space and is produced in space. Translanguaging is a way of becoming, being, and encountering in the embodied rituals and rhythms of contingent space.

What the researchers observed over four months with the coach and his team was the rhythm of social life, played out on the volleyball court, whether in training or on match day. Their investigations and explorations of the rhythm and rhythms of the volleyball team are not only polyphonic and polyrhythmic, but also polysemiotic. They consider the players as they become a team, developing their knowledge and understanding of each other through a rhythm of becoming. They focus also on the coach, and the repetitive structures of teaching and learning, encouragement and reward, organization and instruction, evaluation and sympathy. They look at the social relations of the players, their banter and laughter, their convivial interaction. They analyse the rhythm of their movement as they jump and dive, block and retrieve, raise arms aloft in celebration and shrug with disappointment. They notice the repetition of small rituals and ceremonies, and they discuss the players’ and coaches’ commentaries on themselves, and on each other, as they praise and reward, encourage and chastise, support and tease. All this takes place in time and space, the cyclical and the linear, as they exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made by a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetition (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

The instinct of play pervades all human endeavors: in law, science, war, philosophy, and in the arts. Humans emerge not as Homo sapiens, the man who knows, but primarily as Homo Ludens, the man who plays (Kolb and Kolb 2010). Play exists precariously between the irrational and rational, the playful and the serious, the imaginary and the real, the arbitrary and the rule-bound. For the most part, playful situations occur in a narrow space and time when the rational and irrational reach a tenuous balance, with neither dimension overshadowing the other. Modern sport bears a transcendent quality as capable as any tribal ritual of representing the collective experiences, aspirations, values and limitations of our human beingness, but also of transforming the limits of our being within a structured, organized context (Rowe 1998).
The research

This linguistic ethnography is a polyphonic ethnography; a polysemiotic ethnography. But these terms are limiting. ‘Multi-’ and ‘poly-’ draw artificial and unnecessary boundaries around sets of communicative resources. This linguistic ethnography focuses on the social and communicative practices of a group of volleyball players and their coaches in Birmingham, UK. The voices of the players and coaches are represented verbatim. Also represented are the voices of theorists who have previously engaged in philosophical and / or empirical research. In co-existence with these voices are the voices of the researchers, in their field notes of observations. In intimate cacophony the voices of players, coaches, theorists, and researchers overlap, interrupt, misspeak, confirm, disagree, elide, contradict, overstate. Their co-existence is multivocal. In all cases single voices, and single utterances, are dialogic, and heteroglossic. This is sometimes more evident than at other times. Utterances are not framed with speech marks (quotation marks). Nor are the words of scholarly texts framed with quotation marks. This is because the text seeks to flatten as far as possible the established hierarchy which typically privileges scholarly text above (say) field notes, and field notes above (say) interview transcripts. The text searches for a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. Here many voices clamour for expression (Clifford 1986: 15). In traditional ethnographies polyvocality was restrained and orchestrated by giving to one voice a pervasive authorial function, and to others the role of sources, informants to be quoted or paraphrased. Once dialogism and polyphony are recognized as modes of textual production, monophonic authority is questioned, revealed to be characteristic of a science that has claimed to represent cultures. This ethnographic report makes no such claim. It acknowledges that however dialogical or polyphonic the form of ethnographic writing, the impetus will inevitably be towards the emergence of a hierarchical arrangement of discourses (Clifford 1986: 17), a hierarchy of understanding (Crapanzo 1986: 69). The present text aims to limit this hierarchical arrangement through its form. As far as possible the voices of much-lauded scholars are interspersed with the voices of researchers and research participants. This does not prevent hierarchy, of course. Someone (or two, or three) has the practical task of deciding which fragments make it into the ethnography, and which end up on the cutting-room floor. It is probably impossible (and possibly improbable) that hierarchies in ethnographic accounts can be entirely ‘flattened’.

The text is ambitious in setting side by side the voices of the authors of field notes (researchers), the voices of scholars, and the voices of research participants (volleyball players and coaches). But too much about voice. Communicative repertoires are inherently multimodal, and so reference should be to the sign rather than merely the voice, to semiotic repertoires rather than linguistic repertoires. Semiotic repertoires include but are by no means limited to the linguistic. Rather, they include aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’, including gesture, posture, and so on; they are a record of mobility and experience; they include constraints, gaps and silences as well as potentialities; and they are responsive to the places in which, and the people with whom, semiotic resources may be deployed (Blackledge, Creese, and Hu 2015). The integrated nature of the semiotic repertoire is fundamental. Embodied communicative practice is not in any way separate from linguistic communicative practice. They are integral to each other to the extent that they are one and the same. Communicative practice is more than voice.
Throughout, the form of the text is of significance. Material is organised and constructed in a way that enhances the meanings of social action, and creates new knowledge out of empirical material. In this process concessions have not always been made to the reader, as the integrity of the material has been prioritized at the expense of explanations of the material. The co-existence of voices means that they are not always framed by an authorial voice, but speak for themselves. There are risks in taking this approach, as voices of players and coaches, and fragments of research literature are interwoven with the observations of researchers, and there is not always the reassurance of the authorial voice explaining what it all ‘means’. It is not always evident where a field note begins and ends; nor is it always certain where an authorial / analytical comment intervenes. The full set of 75,000 words of field notes is not available to the reader; no page numbers are cited for field notes or transcripts. Readers may feel either a sense of intellectual agoraphobia, or may feel that they are being asked to do the researchers’ / authors’ work (‘analysis’) for them. There are also risks in transgressing academic convention. The avoidance of quotation marks may suggest that academic literature has not been quoted verbatim. Yet it has. It is not always evident where a quotation begins and ends. Quotation marks for the voice of (say) Lefebvre, or Bouissac, would artificially separate their discourse from the discourse of the other voices (authors) of the text, including research participants (players and coaches) and researchers (who are also participants). But a concession is offered: there are conventional Harvard-style citations with each academic author’s name, date, and page number where work is quoted. If readers are minded to check for themselves they are able to track down the source, and the context, of the quotation. Lefebvre and Bouissac are accorded a status not accorded to other voices in the text. A hierarchy creeps in, borne of the researchers’ final adherence to (and fear of transgressing) cultural (academic) norms.

This is ethnography of communication as process, communication as pedagogy, communication as social practice, communication centred in the body, communication as ritual, communication as rhythm, and not least the spatial dimension of communication. This is post-modern ethnography (Tyler 1986: 125): a co-operatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse which foregrounds dialogue over monologue, and emphasizes the co-operative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendent observer. It is a polyphonic text. Out of the extensive unmediated representation of the voices of volleyball players, scholars, and researchers emerges a text which is fragmentary because it cannot be otherwise (Tyler 186: 131). A note on form: the text is polyphonic, and the several voices in play are as far as possible presented without mediation. At times, where an interview was extensive, an extensive section of the interview is presented. Field notes are quoted in their original form, despite being structurally integrated with other voices and arguments. Transcripts of audio- and video-recordings are set out conventionally. In some cases (in the online version of the report) audio- and video-recordings are available as part of the overall text, as are photographs. And a note on style. The authorial voice that comments on the communicative actions of the participants varies in style. At times the measured voice of the ethnographic researcher makes an analytical point about observed practice, with some reference to theoretical research literature (e.g.: On the volleyball court supportive ritual extends to low fives and other ritual means of bodily contact for mutual support, shouts and exclamations, and, not least, rhythmic clapping and chanting). At other times the authorial voice is more poetic (e.g.: The game flattens distinctions. Every man, whether master or slave, is naked before the game).
Research poetry has the potential to embody the rhythms, time, and space of observed practice (Maréchal and Linstead 2010). In this report the poetic is minimally brought to bear on the interpretation of ethnographic material. It is a method that will be pursued elsewhere in the same research project, perhaps with greater commitment and success.

Analytic themes and motifs emerged through detailed analysis of material collected through ethnographic observation in a volleyball court in Birmingham, UK, over four months. The examples were generated as part of a four-year project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, ‘Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities’. The aim of the project is to investigate how people communicate when they bring different histories, biographies, and trajectories to interaction. The research was conducted across four cities in the UK: Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds, and London. In all sixteen sites across specific wards in the four cities sites were identified as places where people meet and come into contact, and where in the course of this contact they are likely to engage in communicative practices. The research sites include shops, market stalls, libraries, community centres, advice bureaux, and sports clubs. Here the focus is on sport in the Birmingham section of the study. In each city ward research teams took as one of their points of departure the National Census of 2011, indicating which languages other than English were reported to be most commonly spoken in that ward. In selecting key participants for ethnographic research the teams started with particular languages or groups of languages. Census 2011 (ONS) indicated that in the selected city centre Birmingham ward, Ladywood, Chinese languages were reported to be the most commonly spoken languages other than English.

The key participant in the research was Joe Ng, one of the coaches at the selected volleyball club. Originally from Hong Kong, Joe had arrived in the UK at the age of 14. He attended boarding school, before going on to take a degree at Southampton University. On graduation Joe worked for a while in Manchester, before going into business as co-owner of a beauty salon in Birmingham. Over a period of four months researchers (Adrian Blackledge and Rachel Hu, sometimes with Angela Creese) observed Joe’s communicative practices as he coached a multilingual, multicultural volleyball team. Joe’s coaching sessions were scheduled from 7.00 pm until 9.00 pm on Friday evenings. In addition to coaching a team in the volleyball club, Joe played for another team. This team was coached by Ildegrada da Costa Cabral (Ilde), and she too was audio-recorded as we observed weekly. Ilde’s coaching sessions were scheduled from 5.00 pm until 7.00 pm on Sundays. During the Friday observation sessions Joe wore a lapel microphone attached to a digital voice recorder. The microphone was clipped to his sports attire at the neck. He was advised that he had the right to switch off the recorder whenever he wished to do so. In none of the sessions did he do this. In the Sunday sessions Ilde similarly wore a digital voice recorder. It was decided not to ask players to wear digital voice recorders, as the small machine might be a hazard and cause injury when they were diving and falling as they played the game. A first listen to the audio-recorded material was discouraging: the sound of a dozen volleyballs being smashed around a brick-built gymnasium just about drowned out the human voice. However, on subsequent occasions it was clear that the speech of the coaches was quite clear, even if the players’ verbal communication was often indistinct. At this point the researchers decided that video-recording would be an important method, as physical action was fundamental to what we were seeing on the volleyball court. If we couldn’t hear everything clearly, we wanted to be able to see, and to be able to look again at what we had seen.
Blackledge explained the research project to the players, and they read and signed consent forms. Over sixteen weeks the researchers wrote around 75,000 words of observational field notes, made 30 hours of audio-recordings and video-recordings, took more than 200 photographs, collected online, digital, and social media material from the key participant, Joe, and conducted interviews with the coaches and the players. In addition to observing Joe in his role as volleyball coach, the researchers also observed him at work in his business, a city centre hair and beauty salon. The online and digital material presented by Joe will be reported separately, as will the observational and interview data collected from Joe’s business setting. The research team regularly presented elements of data, and emergent research outcomes, to Joe, for his comments and feedback. In more than one of these sessions he reported that the experience of viewing the video material in particular had caused him to revise his approach to coaching. A community film-maker was commissioned to make a short documentary film which focused on Joe’s role as a volleyball coach. This is available on the research project website: [http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/digital-stories/index.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/digital-stories/index.aspx). The sessions we observed regularly included players who reported that they had travelled to UK from a wide range of countries, including France, Germany, Iran, The Philippines, Romania, Rwanda, Spain, and Taiwan. Table 1 lists the players who practised and played regularly throughout the observation period. There were other players who made occasional appearances at training sessions. The irregular and occasional commitment of some of the players was a point of tension in the discourse of some of the senior players.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Period since arrival in UK</th>
<th>Period since joining UBVC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>UK / Hong Kong</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ollie</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nils</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vally</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliott</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Regular players at time of field work*

In the process of analysis and commenting on the empirical material collected in the four months observing the volleyball players, we represented and responded to data through field notes,
which we shared with each other on a weekly basis. Rachel Hu transcribed audio and video material, together with audio files of interviews with players and coaches. Towards the end of the field work period Adrian Blackledge, Rachel Hu, and Angela Creese would meet weekly to discuss excerpts from the data sets, beginning with field notes. These meetings began to shape the interpretive process, as all three researchers annotated field notes and transcripts. A substantial investment was made in viewing together excerpts from video-recordings. The research team commented in detail on the video-recordings, not only in relation to audible verbal communication, but in terms of all observable embodied action. These analytic meetings continued for two months, with comprehensive note-taking and writing of summaries and vignettes. Following this period Blackledge began a process of further annotation, returning first to field notes, and then to audio and video transcripts, and then to interview transcripts, looking across all data sets for patterns and thematic resonances. Further research team meetings consolidated and synthesized annotations into emergent themes, which became further established as the skeleton chapters of the present report.

**Volleyball**

Volleyball is supposed to have been invented in 1895 by William Morgan in Holyoke, Massachusetts, USA. He intended it to be a less stressful sport than basketball for local businessmen. From such beginnings it has grown to become one of the most popular participation sports in the world. Today a volleyball court is 18 m long and 9 m wide, divided into 9 m × 9 m halves by a one-metre wide net. The top of the net is 2.43 m above the centre of the court for men's competition, and 2.24 m for women's competition, varied for veterans and junior competitions. A line 3 m from and parallel to the net is considered the attack line. This 3 metre line divides the court into back row and front row areas (also back court and front court). Each team consists of six players.

To get play started, a team is chosen to serve by coin toss. A player from the serving team throws the ball into the air and attempts to hit the ball so it passes over the net on a course such that it will land in the opposing team's court (the serve). The opposing team must use a combination of no more than three contacts with the volleyball to return the ball to the opponent’s side of the net. These contacts usually consist first of the pass so that the ball’s trajectory is aimed towards the player designated as the setter; second of the set (usually an over-hand pass using wrists to push finger-tips at the ball) by the setter so that the ball's trajectory is aimed towards a spot where one of the players designated as an attacker can hit it, and third by the attacker who spikes (jumping, raising one arm above the head and hitting the ball so it will move quickly down to the ground on the opponent’s court) to return the ball over the net. The opposite team attempts to prevent the attacker from directing the ball into their court: players at the net jump and reach above the top of the net to block the attacked ball. If the ball is hit around, above, or through the block, the defensive players arranged in the rest of the court attempt to control the ball with a dig (usually a forearm pass of a hard-driven ball). After a successful dig, the team transitions to attack. The game continues in this manner, rallying back and forth, until the ball touches the court within the boundaries or until an error is made. The most frequent errors are either to fail to return the ball over the net within the allowed three touches, or to cause the ball to land outside
Markus, senior player and team manager. I have lived all over the world and wherever you go there will be volleyball. At the university I know there are chances to play and it’s a more international environment. And when I go to another team which also is a university team, it’s also OK, it’s better for my age to be honest because I only got most people more like students you know, hehe, sometimes we could have a bit of friction but not really, but sometimes when they don’t understand something I could be their father telling them what to do you know. And in the end it all works very well and I like the international background. Because I’ve lived in Asia, met many people and went to so many countries I have a good connection with all these people because I know how to click with all those different cultural backgrounds, and I like that.

Graeme, senior player, former coach. It’s such a multi-cultural sport, I think, volleyball is such a big sport, globally, you know, it’s one of the top team sports out there. I think that I guess it’s just because the rules are so similar in international sports you can throw six people on the court and they can play and work out how to play together, hehehe, and you don’t need so much verbal communication just start to play. But also I think there’s always, from my experience of travelling there also seems to be a bit of a small field of sports that you go somewhere you meet some people who play volleyball, you get along, you get well to sort out things.

Volleyball?

As a teacher myself – I teach people who are interpreter trainers – and when I ask students who are learning sign language I ask them when is that moment when they really understand how sign language works. Someone said ‘volleyball’. I said ‘volleyball’? They said they went to Gallaudet – this is a Deaf university in the United States – and the person said that they joined an all-Deaf volleyball group and during practice and during working together they had to continuously use their eye gaze and their body and looking at what the signs and the body language so they had to use all of these. And they would also spell but not spell normally of course they would have all these secret spelling or secret signing so they had to practice every single aspect of sign language in the most unique situations and contexts. And so the practice was when they went to the pub and they were sitting and talking to someone that was no problem, and then they would also have a review afterwards and say you see how we did this and how we did that and they could see how a deaf person would sign about all these different bodied experiences. So because they joined a Deaf volleyball team and had to enjoy all the different multimodal situations I’m wondering, I’m looking at your data, because people are from different countries is that also affecting the way they are communicating with each other? Or I would love to see whether you can analyse what’s happening within the language, in their language learning because of them joining this volleyball team, and the post-training discussions afterwards in the pub.
2. Becoming a Team

The coach of the volleyball team, Joe Ng, arrived in the UK from Hong Kong when he was fourteen years old. None of his family travelled with him other than his younger brother. The two boys attended boarding school, and returned to Hong Kong for school holidays in summer and at Christmas. The rhythm of the academic year. The rhythm of travel. The rhythm of family. In the unfolding of rhythm a panoply of concepts and oppositions is indispensable: repetition and difference, discovery and creation, cyclical and linear, continuous and discontinuous (Lefebvre 1992/2015). Joe first played volleyball at university in Southampton. He continued to play when he left university and lived in Manchester, and then in Birmingham. He took up coaching in Birmingham, and says he pushes his team to achieve things he would not be able to achieve himself. Compared to some of the players in the team Joe is small and gently-spoken. Nevertheless he has a quiet authority. His role as coach is principally to enable the players to develop specific skills. He is also concerned with the development of the team as a cohesive group, with encouraging positive team morale, and with organisation of training, matches, and social events. He is supported in these enterprises by senior players in the group. All of these enterprises are characterized by repetition and rhythm.

People participate in a historical flow of social relationships, struggles and meanings. When they engage with the words of others in a contact zone (Bakhtin 1981: 345) they selectively assimilate these words. This process of assimilation, Bakhtin proposed, is the ideological becoming of a human being (1981: 341). In the process of assimilation the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances (Bakhtin 1986: 89). The discourse of the other no longer performs as information, directions, rules, and so on, but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour (1981: 342). That is, people become what they are, and never stop becoming what they are, by engaging in social relations with others.

Ideological becoming is the dialogical process by which people come to align with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and to distance themselves from others (Rampton 2014: 276). Our speech is filled with the words of others, which we re-accent and rework. The words of others may be authoritative, and backed by legal structures. Or they may be internally persuasive – not acknowledged in society, but powerful nonetheless. In the gap between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse we learn to become ourselves: The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determines the history of an individual ideological consciousness (Bakhtin 1981: 342). Authoritative discourse is the existing order of discourse. It is the word of the other. But when the word of the other is internally persuasive, new possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself (Bakhtin 1981: 345).

Discourse is gradually wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two may be barely perceptible. The creativity and
productiveness of the word consists in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, and is freely developed, applied to new material and new contexts. The word enters into a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses, and ideological development becomes a never-ending struggle between various available points of view, approaches, directions, and values. This struggle with another’s discourse sharply influences an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness. The struggle is not the same for all speakers in all times and places. Nor do all words submit easily to assimilation, as they may remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context, and fall out of it (Bakhtin 1981: 294). This process of assimilation of the discourse of others is how people develop their way of viewing the world, their system of ideas (Freedman and Ball 2004).

When different voices, words and discourses are assimilated and brought into contact this process informs the development of one’s own voice. Independence of voice is a source of empowerment that permits the speaker to reduce the command of the other’s discourse through the autonomy granted by one’s own voice (Khan 2013: 66). Ideological development can also be understood as finding one’s voice, the crucial aspect of which is the appropriation of discourses representing different interpretations and evaluations of reality (Lähteenmäki 2010). To become a self one must speak, and in speaking one must use words that have been used by others (Wortham 2001: 147).

As people acquire new knowledge they also acquire attitudes and beliefs (what Bakhtin calls ‘ideology’) constituted in discourses with which we come into contact (Malinowski and Kramsch 2014). Language is a process teeming with future and former languages, and pregnant with possibilities (Bakhtin 1981: 356). Notions of ‘voice’ and ‘heteroglossia’ have great potential in conceptualizing new forms of linguistic diversity associated with the increased mobility of linguistic resources.

The process of ideological becoming is ever-present and ongoing. It is therefore empirically challenging, as analysis of discrete speech events offers limited purchase on change. In order to understand long-term processes such as ideological becoming it is necessary to uncover how people, signs, knowledge, and dispositions travel from one event to another and facilitate behaviour in subsequent events (Wortham and Reyes 2015). To do this consideration should be given to the pathways along which linguistic forms, utterances, cultural models, individuals and groups travel across events. The present research team previously identified the ongoing process of ideological becoming for a couple of Chinese butchers in a Birmingham meat market (Blackledge, Creese, and Hu 2015). The butchers’ repeated interactions with customers, colleagues, and other protagonists in the indoor market constituted their becoming butchers, becoming traders, and finding their voices. The ideological becoming of a volleyball team is yet more complex, multivocal, and polyrhythmic. It is a process which is crucial to the group of individuals becoming a team. It is a complex of relations between old hands and new kids on the block, between coach and players, between the committed club member and the casual enthusiast. It is a process that speaks not one rhythm but many rhythms.
Beginning

On a cool Autumn Friday evening a number of men converge on the ‘New Gym’ (the gymnasium is not new, and is about to be replaced by a state-of-the-art sports hall across campus). Some of them know each other, but some are strangers. They do not know where the others are from, how far they have travelled to meet in this space at this time. Their trajectories are different. Some are students. Others are working people. At first sight they are from different ‘cultures’. They can speak different languages, and they are different in appearance. They are different ages, and different ‘ethnicities’. But the culture that unites them is volleyball culture. For some of the players volleyball is a form of capital.

For Graham the ability to play and coach volleyball is not only symbolic capital, but is transformed into economic capital. In the narrative the main character (‘Graham’) is artistically fixed in different timespaces, or chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981).

Because I was older and I could drive the mini-buses, they kinda come to a deal that well you come and train on Monday night and you play in the local league, drive the buses, brilliant, everybody was happy, hehehaha, you know, it just made it easy for everybody. And from then on I just helped out and I got involved with the people in the club, you know the girls didn’t have a proper coach so the guys needed a proper coach so the girls can train a couple of boys’ teams.

So I just said I will give it a go for a few weeks while at that time I just wanted to help out you know, I was only coaching at level one but it was enough for the girls back then, but the following year, I think it’s the summer of 2000, asked me if I wanted to properly coach them, and they said that you can get paid, so I said, blimey, that’s fine, and you know, the Guild of Students didn’t pay that much money back in those days you know, so what they gave me could total about two or three thousands of pounds a year, you know, brilliant, you know, I don’t mind, I’ve already done that bit, and eh a little bit of that is history, I’m still there, I’m still coaching, you know the level I’ve now coached I’ve gone up to level two and I’ve coached national league, and I’ve helped to build the community up and they’ve now reached the national league, and we’re going back to sort of probably the year two thousand and eight nine and ten we kind of become a really big club, probably the top one in the regional league UK at that time, we had about nine teams and women in the superior national league two, two regional teams, and we have a junior set up, you know, we were important coach to the local community, and you know for a couple of years from that September in nineteen ninety nine, to sorry, to two thousand and nine and two thousand and eleven, because I was on the contract with the Psychology department, and I was at the end of the my contract, then I was at the Olympics, in two thousand and twelve.

I went to coach volleyball as well in the local community for a couple of years and that, you know just work on that angle, we were you know in a situation really should be on tax concerning you know, the money we received wasn’t enough for a volleyball club you know in that space, the government doesn’t care, you know, money in and money out, we don’t really make profit, you know, I was just working part time, and we have a full-time coach and sometimes students just chipped in, five or six hours in the local schools you know we were
coaching like a thousand students, you know and then I was just plugged in. Well we were just not being too political and we were just slashed a hundred and ninety million from the school sports budget.

And all of a sudden we were just called into what was called the neighbourhood development, we were paid five or six thousand pounds a year to coach those students in schools. You were looking at coaching each individual school by being paid two or three hundred pounds each school, you were just like, even when I was working full time, none of them, it’s very hard to get the money to be paid for sports and the preparation time, they only pay for you for literal contact time, yet for every hour of contact time I have to do session planning and I have to fill in a piece of paper to say how many kids I’ve been coaching and what’s the BME of this coach and everything you know, it’s just the amount of paper work and you know you just really make the niche of that

You basically just get paid to do a breakfast club, a lunch club and after school club and they only give you these three hours to do all those clubs and some of the schools just budget about doing all those works so that you could actually do a couple of curriculum slots which you could write up about which you could get money that way, but then you got home and then you know you then have to do all the paperwork, to get the grant application, you know you can’t get all the city council to make up all, to make the university commit blocks of money you know

So then I was involved in the community coaching for only a couple of years so it could be a national thing run by sports consortium to basically two or three years later to where we are now to a level that we barely exist anymore. We don’t do a community session and we don’t do a city session any more, we just you know life in the last four or three years we just slowly get back down to the club where the students manage.

I’m a software development researcher so I’m actually a psychologist by education, you know I had my masters and my undergraduate in Psychology and I started my PhD and my supervisor moved to Bath and I gave it up because I was just literally started three or four months and it didn’t make any difference. And because of that I’d known some people around because I’d done a bit of work, and my work at the Guild and the Aston University were in widening participation, and I was involved in that sort of level and they kind of needed someone in Psychology to do this

So they had what they call a school structured post of a widening participation role in which I had been working for the last six or seven years. It’s finished now and I just dropped out. And the role moves all the time and just involved a bit this and a bit of that, so it’s like when I first joined in ohh you can’t have tutorial to do with a PhD. After two or three years oh great, Graham you might have some tutorials hahah, and before I knew it I had about six tutoring groups you know, hehe, you go from one extreme to another you know, doing a bit of everything, you know, but in the end, you know, it’s always a short term contract, you know, two year, one year, three year, two year, in the end, it just didn’t get renewed properly.

So I just did volleyball and this kind of job, which actually the job I’m doing now summarises my jobs before because people knew in my department I could correct a programme which I have been doing, and all they need is a website, and we knew you could do one, Graham, and
ironically that part of my job I used to do, the department became a full-blown job, in the department which I kind of have now, a couple of people had it while I was away, ironically I kind of (xxx) at the ball and that was what crashed my contract at the time, but because at that time I had half of my eye at the volleyball cos it was such a big, big club.

Graham is author, narrator, and character. At the same time Dostoevski and Raskolnikov. As narrator he is real human being giving a public account of himself (Bakhtin 1981). Here we note the representational importance of the chronotope, a literary device for viewing human life as always concretely situated within specific time-place relationships (Bakhtin, 1994). Through his analyses of the hero in different kinds of genres, Bakhtin reveals how the aesthetic visualizing of timespace shapes our relationship to the hero. Timespace becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins (Bakhtin 1994: 187). Timespace is specific (on Monday evening; two thousand and eight), and timespace is general (back in those days; at that time). Timespace speaks of action and determination (I’m still there, I’m still coaching), and timespace speaks of rapid change (all of a sudden). Events, acts, people and themes can be set and reset in different timespace frames, in such a way that the setting and resetting enable and prompt indexicals ordered as socioculturally recognizable sets of attributions (Blommaert 2015). Time meshes with space (I’ve helped to build the community up; five or six hours in the local schools) to invoke a particular timespace which triggers an ordered complex of attributions that defines the moral universe of the story (doing good in the community / schools).

Here different verbal-ideological belief systems (Bakhtin 1981) are in dialogue: the political orientation of government doesn’t care, we were just slashed a hundred and ninety million; the avowedly apolitical stance of we were just not being too political; altruistic goodwill, from then on I just helped out, and the desire for remuneration, it’s very hard to get the money to be paid for sports; enthusiasm for the job, I just wanted to help out you know, and frustration, it’s just the amount of paper work. Each chronotope is in dialogue with another in the complex, unfolding story (Creese and Blackledge, forthcoming). Nor are the voices restricted to voices-within-voices. The narrator constructs dialogue, or snatches of dialogue, which bring the narrative to life and exemplify the tensions within the tale: you come and train on Monday night; I just said I will give it a go for a few weeks; they said that you can get paid, and so on. And the narrative is littered with indexicals which testify to the quality and status of the narrator / character: I was at the Olympics in two thousand and twelve; I’ve coached national league; people knew in my department I could correct a programme. Here too, however, the good news is tempered with its antithesis, as we learn of struggle, short-term contracts, bureaucracy, the need for the narrator /character to constantly prove himself, dropping out, taking his eye off the ball. Analysis of the timespace relationships, of the chronotope, is a means to interpret and understand identities by taking into account the complex interactions between practice, iteration, and creativity in social life (Blommaert and De Fina 2017).

The rhythm of life in the academy co-exists with the rhythm of volleyball. They interweave and intermesh. Community coaching, city sessions, regional, national league. Each has its rhythm. Breakfast club, lunch club, after school club. The rhythm of coaching, the rhythm of the day. Grant applications, paperwork, funding cuts. The rhythm of short-term public sector work. A
hundred and ninety million cut from the school sports budget. Rhythm beyond control. The rhythm of narrative. The rhythm of repetition.

For Lambert volleyball provides a route to higher education. I kept playing volleyball when I was in primary school and started to play international games when I was there. That’s why I was given a special offer to enter a secondary school and university as a sports-talented elite, without sitting any entrance exams. They had a particular requirement for your academic performance as well, otherwise they wouldn’t allow you into the good school or university since you would struggle if you weren’t able to meet the basic requirements of academic performance. I was actually admitted to my university because of my outstanding performance at volleyball, as I took part in international competition on behalf of Taiwan. Since I am short I could only play as setter. For my secondary school I was in a sports-gifted special class, and I studied in the Sports department at my university. After graduating from university I had been working for two years. I worked as a school teacher for two years and before that I went to do my military service for one year. In Taiwan if you want to be a teacher you will have to have a teaching qualification so you can teach. For that I sat the exam and got the certificate so I can teach. But there’s another level of qualification that you have to have after the teaching certification. I didn’t do it so I can only work as a supply teacher. I had been on it for two years.

Talent, and the recognition of talent, brings rewards. Ability to play volleyball to a high standard is a form of social capital, which may be converted to economic capital. Volleyball brings access to a good high school, and to a good university.

The coach, Joe, sits on the floor, changing his shoes. He greets some of the players he doesn’t know, asking them their names and introducing himself. Hi my name is Joe I’m coaching tonight. Your name is? John. And you are from? The Philippines. Joe gets to his feet, claps his hands and calls everyone over to him from where they have been hitting volleyballs against the gym walls, stretching their leg muscles, or practising their basketball shooting. Joe asks everyone to introduce themselves. Philips is from Munich, Jackson from France, one player from Malaysia, others called Dennis and Markus. Markus, an older man, is introduced by Joe as the team captain. Make sure you give him your contact details before leaving tonight, says Joe. Have you guys all played before? Yes. You? Yes. You? Yes. Joe’s key concern at this stage is not so much to know where the players are from, as to know that they are volleyball players. His focus is on what unites the group, not on what divides them.

The second week Joe is late for training. Ollie, one of the old hands in the team, leads the warm-up while they wait for the coach to arrive. Ollie cheers ironically as Joe arrives. Sorry, I’m a bit late. He waves at the team, although he doesn’t sound too apologetic. The players stop and a group of new players walk up to Joe to introduce themselves. Joe asks the new players whether they came last week. They start to introduce themselves. Elliot, not very tall, trim but flexible, is a French Erasmus student, wearing a t-shirt print of France on his back. Arthur, in white polo short-sleeve, very tall and medium build, with a European accent. A couple more introduce themselves to the whole team. Joe asks for their names and repeats the names to himself.

Introductions are not limited to formalities with the coach. The rhythm of becoming a team is not always planned or produced at the behest of the coach. It is an ongoing process, constituted in
the relations between players. A Chinese player comes into the session late and after briefly

greeting the whole team he starts to change, sitting on the floor at the edge of the court. He’s
quite tall and doesn’t speak much. Hi, hello, says Tom, turning towards the Chinese guy,
holding one foot in his hand with his leg bent backwards. Tom initiates an interaction with a
greeting, an access ritual (Goffman 1967: 34) which introduces a state of talk. Through the

greeting the interactants declare themselves open to one another for purposes of spoken

communication. The opening of an encounter marks the beginning of a period of access among

the participants. A new rhythm enters the arena, as Tom and the Chinese guy (who turns out to

be Taiwanese) enter a cycle of relations which will be renewed (at the very least) throughout the
evening and each Friday evening throughout the season. Different rhythms.

The coach wants the players to practise a drill in pairs. So you just toss through the ball so he has

try to get it, OK? So if you just work in pairs work in pairs apart from Alex, OK? Oh by the way
this is Alex, this is Dan, um, it’s new players, Alex plays with the second team and Dan just joins
the first team.

Markus asks one or two of the players where they are from. I don’t catch their responses. It is
clear that the question means which country are you from, with the assumption that everyone is
from a country other than UK.

One of the Filipino players, Nils, and a player called Arthur practise as a pair. What’s your
name? Arthur. Arthur and Nils shake hands, smiling at each other. They chat together while

practising. Joe stands next to them coaching Arthur, as he’s new to everything. Nils’ request for
Arthur’s name is more than a request for his name, acting as a greeting, initiating a new rhythm,
a new relationship. The handshake has symbolic power. It is not universal in its meaning – too
formal for some, too physically intimate for others – but here it has sufficient semiotic range to

seal the initiation of social relations. Not that the handshake works alone to put in place a new
rhythm, a new relationship. It constitutes only part of a repertoire of signs deployed together to
set in motion a relationship, including the request for Arthur’s name, Arthur’s response, their
mutual smiles, their successive chat, and the practice drill itself. There are of course rhythms in
play beyond these momentary details, rhythms that do much to bring the players to this space at
this time. These are rhythms of movement, and rhythms of globalization.

John talks about beginning life in a British university. I was more shocked by the British culture
than that I was being at the university with other students. Because I was in the university before
and the university culture was pretty much free and independent. So I was more shocked by the
British culture. And yea I feel like I was a really, really new person on campus because how the
system works I didn’t know. So that’s one shock. I didn’t know how I’ll be assessed, how to go
to class, how this word means, and like any other induction, I don’t think you can fully discuss
everything in a few hours. Like maybe after the induction you have more questions to ask, or
maybe you have some concerns that are not really about your course, but more about your stay
here in your school, so maybe the longer you stay here the more you find out what you need.

Like it’s very hard to understand the slang if you are not from the place. It’s not really a shock
because I expected it’s just hard to communicate about that because I come from a different

despite a different background, and of course it’s all part of a context like eh, if you are not
up to date like watching television, I don’t have a licence in my flat, hehe, just like that if you
don’t belong to a kind of context it’s kind of difficult to communicate in that. It’s hard to start a
conversation or keep the conversation going. When I first met my class mates I just asked how
did you get into the uni, what job did you do before you come to the uni, like the basic stuff but I
couldn’t get into like casual conversation, like the culture is different, the view is different, the
context, like how they discuss things, kind of difficult, maybe they found my accent a bit
difficult to understand. And sometimes it’s just difficult to try to find the word, cos in my head I
tried to translate, or sometimes I tried to find the words, it took too long, so the conversation just
dies down, if you know what I mean. So sometimes it’s hard to find the right word, the topics,
and things to talk about, the words I could use, maybe they don’t, they don’t use a lot, I found it
much easier to talk to the other international students, because I think we have the same
struggles, and we tend to listen more, because we know we have the same situation, but if I talk
to the locals, because they live here they tend to talk about it a lot, so if I talk to some British
person I think it’s kind of difficult, because they kind of expect you to have conversation with
you which is kind of fluid already I think, so I think that’s kind of hard to maintain and to start,
so it tends to be silence. I have got British team mates, I found it’s OK but it’s kind of hard to
find lengthy conversation.

Beginning, becoming, adapting to new conditions. The culture is different. The view is different.
It’s difficult to find the word. It tends to be silence. On court John is lively, confident, and
capable. Off court he tentatively and thoughtfully find his way.

Old hands and newcomers

Cyclical rhythms are also the rhythms of beginning again: of the returning which does not
oppose itself to the becoming. In the volleyball team the old hands return each year, to do again
what they have done before, determined to repeat the successes of yesteryear. For the new
players it is both a new beginning and a return. In this team, in this club, in this city, in this
country, this hemisphere perhaps, to play here is a new beginning. But turning again to volleyball
is a return, and renewal rather than something completely new. Some of the new players are
highly skilled and knowledgeable. Some are more skilled, and more athletic, than the old hands.
Their rhythm is both a beginning and a renewal. In contrast to the cyclical, the linear defines
itself through the consecution and reproduction of the same phenomenon, almost identical, at
roughly similar intervals. Examples include hammer blows, or the metronome. The volleyball
smashed against the wall during the warm-up, with no thought of learning, or of becoming. The
linear and its rhythms tend to oppose that which becomes (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

Each year there are new beginnings. An old hand, Ollie. We have many new players come and
others leave, so sometimes it’s difficult to see what’s actually coming, hehe. Just try to help a
little bit, because it’s a club run by students, and um it’s a bit difficult sometimes because they
don’t have the same experiences, the organisation, and also in volleyball playing, so eh I try to
help a little bit so try to be available for the club manager and others, if they have eh some
specific things that I can help with.

Students and community members of the team are viewed differently. Markus. We have a lot of
community members in this team, and students coming and going, yea. And committed people
are all the community members, to be honest. And you have some students who are also very committed and you can rely on them. And you have about fifty per cent of students at the start of a season, coming and leaving, who are not so committed because they have so many ideas. They are here for one year and they want to travel and they want to do this and that. And they want to do other things. They don’t think Friday evening is a very good time because they want to go out with friends for a beer, which I can understand in a way, yea, but most of the time also as an excuse.

Um, you know all the community members are older people, older, hehehe, I’m not the eldest, oldest, eldest, oldest? It’s Nils, you know Nils the Filipino? He’s one year older than me, same day, birthday, yea, yea, funny, and he’s one year older than me, and then we have Graham, the always grumpy guy, who’s already in his forties, and Fran, who’s also in mid thirties, or even older, I’m not sure about that, Ollie is a student in a way, but not really a student any more, and now he’s working, he’s developed a lot, he has his own business, he’s kind of community member for me really.

So this is, these are the core team really, more or less, which is every year the same. So we get some people, we lose some people, these are the people who work together. And sometimes especially after the training, after the game, we discuss, we discuss and communicate with people, because we are talking either we are committed to the season as much as we can, and we are more busy than the students, even though the students feel they are very busy, but to be honest when I was a student I felt like I’m busy all the time, but when I got to work it’s a totally different world, I couldn’t imagine even you could be more busy than you expected, you know.

You get more busy when life goes on, like last year I was even busier than before, so you work on your efficiency, your self-organisation, so you realise that probably you could do even more. But these are what these people do, we have to look for work, we have high responsibilities in our jobs, and students don’t have that, they only have the responsibility for themselves, which is OK, which is normal at that stage of life you know I’ve had the same situation.

So this is why they are not so committed. They don’t have responsibility they don’t experience taking responsibility for other things. So that’s why they don’t feel they have a responsibility to be part of the team, and also to respect the team members by being reliable. This is what it is, actually. And this is why I always have criticisms towards these people. And coming back to the core team, Joe is also a member of the core team because he’s been playing for the team a long time so he’s also part of the core team. He’s also very committed and he’s trying to do everything to be there.

So that’s kind of core team, which now I’ve been working together for four or five years now. So that’s nice you know, you have some committed team, with some students, you know. So that’s all right. If some of them leave that would be a pity. If you don’t play together that’s the problem of not being a committed team as sometimes you do that. Maybe we don’t do this that much at this level. We don’t do that because we don’t have much time playing together to practise that. There’s no, that’s why there’s no such strategy. It’s not very strong, because we are not together too long, for a long time, which is always a problem.
One of the new young French players, Elliot, works beside Markus and asks him a couple of questions. Markus speaks to him with a friendly, paternalistic air. Elliot gives Markus an appreciative smile. Through such small ceremonies the team begins to become a team. The senior players are Markus, Fran, Graham, Nils, and Ollie. Graham has for many years been a senior coach. He gives coaching tips to players on his side of the net. You’re too deep...keep the ball alive. Ollie also offers advice to one of the new players. Markus claps his hands to encourage his group. Nils speaks to some of the new players and describes himself as the oldest player now. One of the new players, John, is involved in a drill with Sam and Markus. John is receiver of Sam’s service, but because Sam’s serve is wayward his pass to Markus twice misses its mark. John glances at Markus, who waves his hand to tell him to have another turn before rotating to the next position. Finally Sam produces a better serve and John is able to deliver a beautiful ball. He moves on to the next position happily. Another patrimony of becoming. Almost unnoticeable, unremarked upon, the merest wave of the old stager’s hand offers the new player the opportunity to show his true colours, to develop an extra ounce of confidence, and so to become part of the group. The player becomes happier, the team becomes stronger.

Old hand Fran offers advice to Tom. Tom, try that with your shoulders. Fran physically adjusts Tom’s position. Tom listens and nods his head. Ollie also joins in. If you go like this. He explains how Tom should position himself when setting the ball. The next drill is digging. Ollie is in a group with Tom and Lambert. Ollie offers coaching points to Tom. You need to wait and get your timing right to set, and think about your position as well. All right, sorry. An apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended role (Goffman 1971: 113). In his apology Tom affirms that he will do better.

Tom is no longer a new player, having been at the club for three years. He understands the perspective of the new players, but also feels that he has to adjust to their needs. When the year starts we get some new players, because I play setter, I need more time to play with each individual, because they are all new I don’t know what ball they want, and I don’t get what ball I have to set for them. So I would like to have more time to work with each one of them but I don’t mind, as time goes by I can adjust. Last year I was the first setter. Sometimes when things went wrong the whole team would first blame me, which I can understand because sometimes when the setter is good, his job is to like save some bad pass and when they first send you a bad pass you have to try to do a bit better when passing it to the second person. And sometimes it couldn’t work. And sometimes they can blame me for nothing. And then I don’t mind, hehe. And sometimes when we get the time out, like any new people coming, because I was quite young, I was the youngest, or the second youngest, or the least experienced, and at the time out, they all came and talk to me, everyone, I can hear all of them, at the same time. Tom sits at the interstices of old hand and newbie, both subject to the advice of the senior players and supporting new players as they learn the ropes.

Felix says that blaming team-mates for their errors on court has a negative effect. I personally would never blame anyone for losing a match because the league we are playing it’s just for fun. I’m learning Physical Education so I know a lot stuff about Psychology, the psychological side of activity, how to motivate others, how to motivate yourself. So I think blaming others, or accusing others for faults is the worst thing you could do in this level because it would result in
not being able to enjoy the sport any more. I wouldn’t blame anyone. I think it happens from
time to time that someone isn’t very satisfied with another player’s performance, and the player
may be offended. But all in all we all support each other and it results that we play well on the
court, in the end.

When a member of the team makes a mistake in the presence of an audience, the other team-
members often must suppress their immediate desire to punish and instruct the offender until,
that is, the audience is no longer present (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 94). Immediate corrective
sanctioning of other players may have a negative effect on the performance of the whole team.
Solidarity in the face of the opposition, sticking together in adversity, is part of the code of the
team. Blaming each other is the worst thing you can do.

However, the role of the old hand is not always one of unmitigated encouragement. One of the
young French players smashes a ball straight at the face of another player. He grimaces and
Markus has a quick word with him. One of the new players tries to speak to an old hand about
joining the club. The senior player is cautious in his reply. He offers little encouragement to the
young man. Rather he tells him he will need to speak to the coach, Joe. The role of the senior
players is at times regulatory as well as supportive. The old hands move between discourses of
welcoming encouragement of new players and adherence to the norms of the culture of the team.
To enter into a society, a group or nationality is to accept values (that are taught), to learn a trade
by following the right channels, but also to bend oneself (to be bent) to its ways.

John understands that there may be tensions between the old hands and the newcomers. There
are some senior players who have been there for a long time and become pretty much the
authority, and despite the fact that he is an experienced player they view him as someone new.
It’s kind of difficult that my opinion, my voice can’t get recognized. Because they’ve been there
for too long and I’m just the new person going into the team. You could voice your opinion but
it’s rare that they would consider it, because they know more than you do.

So in terms of experience it’s kind of hard so I just keep my mind open because I know that it’s
important for us to keep the team. Like if I’d argue a lot with them it won’t be good for the team,
for the competition, for the co-operation. If I make a mistake then you should be like helping me
recover, rather than put me down, rather than pick on my mistake, you don’t pick on mistake, if I
see them doing wrong I don’t pick on them, because I can see that they are at a disadvantage
already, they feel down already, so if there’s something I could be, that should be something to
help them to come back. It’s a team right, you don’t play as an individual, so if someone made a
mistake, you should help him, rather than just getting mad at him, or blaming him: You should
receive! and then You should block that ball! blah, blah, blah. It’s just how I see it because we
are doing it as a team rather than as an individual.

I think it’s just the seniority, or the seniority effect, cos players come and go and some of us just
play here for a year. It’s like an authority figure, they’re the authority figure, because they’ve been
here for longer time but that doesn’t mean that they play better than I do. And that doesn’t mean
that they should separate themselves from us because again we should work as a team, rather
than as them doing their own thing and us doing our own thing. I guess it’s because the seniority
factor and the skill level. Because if you feel that you are better at certain things than the others
you sort of distance yourself from the others, if you get what I mean. It’s like how you tell things. It’s kind of how you behave if you are a nurturing person, even if you are the senior one you would know how to reach out to the new person. But if you have this attitude, like a selfish attitude, you’d like just pick on people.

In many interaction settings some of the participants co-operate together as a team or are in a position where they are dependent upon this co-operation in order to maintain a particular definition of the situation (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 96). This is as true of the volleyball team as it is of other interaction settings.

Markus takes a positive view, pointing to the importance of communication. When you are attending a game you need to communicate even more. Because most of the time what happened the ball of the opponent is not coming from the position you expected you have to make a decision who’s taking it. That’s why you have to communicate. Somebody has to take it by saying it’s my ball! or something like that, mine!, and be very loud, because when you are playing it’s very noisy. And if some people, you are the people who’s not very loud, mine! and he thinks he’s screaming, so nobody can really hear that.

So that’s a different character you need to scream, really. Loud, loud, you need to shout, if you think it’s your ball, and you feel good to take it then you should only do it and the rest should only go away. That’s why communication is very important. And sometimes you have to watch out for your side player, for your other player, that the set-up is correct, though we said that set-up could always be a problem, especially at the beginning. You will bring people on board with this sort of strategy we are playing. And um that’s why communication is absolutely important otherwise you lose point, point, point, point. Losing points on the wrong set-up, and people are not in the right position, and then you can’t play properly and all these kind of things. That’s why communication is quite important. I mean, from the coach’s side, communication. I think in the game, you can’t do too much. I mean you can give some hints, like what Joe sometimes was doing in the game, I like that.

Humans break themselves in like animals. They learn to hold themselves. It bases itself on repetition. One breaks in another human living being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement (Lefebvre 1992/2015). Becoming a team is not a process of becoming out of nothing. Rather, it is a process of reproduction, as the team renews itself and breaks in new blood. There is a balance to be struck between maintaining the norms of the team and accommodating a change of personnel; between staying the same (an impossibility) and accepting change.

The coach, Joe, recognises that Graham becomes frustrated with players he believes do not work hard enough for the team. He’s quite intimidating because he gets frustrated when he wants everybody to do well. They have the capability to do well but they just don’t put effort in. It’s very frustrating and I can see where he’s coming from. As a player, if I was playing myself I would definitely enjoy playing with him. He would push everybody to do their best. And we need players like that to do that in the team but the problem is that we have Asian players who are not used to that style. They would not see it as motivation. They would see that as aggression. And I think that’s what is depressing for him.
Tensions between Graham and some of the new players were remarked upon by Lambert, from Taiwan. I just feel that the atmosphere of the team can be a bit spooky sometimes. I’ve noticed this since last time we were playing against another team. The spooky thing about the team is that Joe doesn’t sound like a coach any more when Graham is talking. If you were so good why didn’t you say to Joe that you’ll be the coach on the day? If I was a coach I would never tell off my players in a match. It’s not fair. If they perform badly it only shows that I don’t train them well. Graham makes us play badly. He gives pressure to other players. I tried not to be affected by him but he pressurises the other players a lot. Actually you can tell he doesn’t know how to play properly. You can tell he only plays by using his experience but he actually hasn’t had proper training. That’s quite obvious. Some players who are playing very well at the university team performed very badly in Regional One because of him. I play so I always observe the other players, and I can tell. You can tell Graham sees himself like a big brother. But you are the coach you can’t let him talk over you as a coach. Otherwise what’s the point of being the coach? And sometimes he even suggests changing the training content.

Whenever inexperienced or temporary incumbents are given formal authority over experienced subordinates we often find that the formally empowered person is bribed with a part that has dramatic dominance while the subordinates tend to direct the show (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 106). Joe is by no means inexperienced or temporary. However, no one is in any doubt that Graham is the senior coach, despite being in the ranks in this particular team.

When one examines a team performance, one often finds that someone is given a right to direct and control the progress of the dramatic action. Sometimes the individual who dominates the show in this way and is, in a sense, the director of it, plays an actual part in the performance he directs. The members of the team will differ in the ways and the degree to which they are allowed to direct the performance. The director has the role of soothing and sanctioning those whose performance is out of line or unsuitable (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 101). Graham takes on this role in the team. However, he is not formally the director of this team, as Joe is the coach. Here lies a tension.

Graham is aware of the tensions between himself and some of the new players. In the first year as I got so used to coaching and being a player coach and I have always kind of in that way, apart from playing in the Birmingham national league and so on, it’s kind of always in a position of authority, and I guess the little thing I need to learn is there’s only one game I played in Birmingham you know, I just played and didn’t care, but I guess after ten years of always being in a position of authority it’s really hard to switch, haha, I just got along and I just played, and it was just, again, just learn, you know after the last couple of years it’s getting easier, you know, you are never too old to learn new things, I guess, you’ll just have to adapt to it and say OK and work with it.

The power of play is about the symbolic representation of self as the embodiment and actualization of what one has imagined oneself to be and become. This self-actualization extends beyond the development of the skills of the game; it extends into the arena of personal growth and development whereby some players come to grips with their inability to control anger or
extreme competitiveness, while others experience awakening toward becoming more compassionate and accepting of others (Kolb and Kolb 2010).

Felix takes a positive attitude to the team, saying that they are making positive progress. As a team we are making progress while we play on court and the coach is making progress as well. So we are more often united and I think we will work out through the season, at least this is what I am expecting and hoping. I think it will work out in the end. And that’s not only just the case for the players but also for the coach and the team. So we’ll grow together from match to match, that’s what I’d say.

Ollie is an old hand and recognizes the need for the team to be positive. I’m not the one with the most experience playing volleyball. I know I need to stay positive and I know everyone in our team have to stay positive, apart from the part of swearing, hehe. In principle I was trying to encourage others in a positive way other than pointing fingers at others. Doesn’t always work out but I tried.

Joe stops play. He explains the position of hands when they are digging. He says perpendicular and corrects himself, saying horizontal, pausing intentionally to find the correct word. The players who do it best not only retrieve but also accurately get it back to the ball handlers. There is laughter when one of the throwers gives a ball that is almost impossible to retrieve.

Joe evaluates the noise level of the team. He believes that the players could be livelier and more dynamic, and says that part of the team’s problem lies in the fact that they are quiet and subdued on court. During the first match he says to the players: Can I ask you just one thing for this set? Every point you win can you just get together and celebrate? We are just like really, really quiet on the court. You are just like strangers, like, walking past each other in the court, come along to play, you don’t seem to play as a team, OK? For Joe making a lot of noise on court, celebrating points won and demonstrating energy and enthusiasm equates to playing as a team. At the end of the same match he speaks again to the team: Guys, I just want to say something before you leave, I think you played well but the opponents are strong, you know, you are not, you know they they, they got good pass, they got good hitters, you know, we just don’t gel well enough, we have good players, but we just need more training to gel together, it’s important now you all come to training so you are able to gel as a team. I know some of you haven’t been on court today, but hopefully if you come to train more we become a better team, OK? It is important to the coach that the team is cohesive, and that it is able to play together to ‘become a better team’. Joe uses the ‘gel’ metaphor three times to impress upon the players that they should work on their team skills. One of the qualities Joe is looking for is consistency in players turning up to training sessions.

A team, may be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained. A team is a grouping, but it is a grouping not in relation to a social structure or social organization but rather in relation to an interaction or series of interactions in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained. The players in the team recognize that they need to be more than individual performers. They need to gel together as a team, a group which intimately and unreservedly co-operates.
Given the infinite variability in play in the embodied translanguaging repertoire of the volleyball court, how do we (and how do the social actors concerned) figure out which of these accumulated details are relevant? How do people in interaction know what count as communicatively relevant elements? By what mechanisms do we measure the relative efficacy of any interactional move? One important mechanism is metacommentary (Rymes 2014: 121). In any interaction, metacommentary signals an understanding of what a sign means without necessarily arbitrarily systematizing communicative elements, but by pointing to that sign’s situated communicative value. Metacommentary permeates any act of communication. On the volleyball, as anywhere, court acts of communication are embodied.

Markus calls the players together, telling them to be careful as there is water everywhere in the gym. He talks about Sunday’s away game, and tells the players to meet in the sports centre at quarter past two to travel to the game. Markus asks who has a car, and one of the players says ‘I ride a bike’, and laughs. Markus talks about the next two home games, which are on the next two Fridays. Joe says the team has lost Vally, Fran, Ollie, and Graham. Markus says Ollie might be back next week. Joe says please come every week, and the two of them give the players a pep talk about attending practice sessions. Markus says the problem is we are talking to the people here, and they are the ones who turn up. There are only nine players tonight, so they are struggling for a team on Sunday. Markus says ‘anyone want to say anything?’ but alleviates the tension with a chuckle as he walks away. Markus metapragmatically comments on the players’ silence, and (with his eventual chuckle) breaks the tension which temporarily fills the space following his question.

Pragmatic signs function metapragmatically insofar as they convey information about other pragmatic phenomena such as signs that have occurred earlier, or elsewhere, or the effects of such signs (Agha 2007: 28). The ‘signs’ which are the subject of present commentary may include miscommunication, silence, absence of noise, timing of shouts, (mis)comprehension, as well as more explicit comments on, for example, the unexpected use of a different language. The subject signs also include embodied actions such as folded arms, furrowed brows, thoughtful expressions, and raised eyebrows.

Since we all participate on teams we must all carry within ourselves something of the sweet guilt of conspirators. And since each team is engaged in maintaining the stability of some definitions of the situation, concealing or playing down certain facts in order to do this, we can expect the performer to live out his conspiratorial career in some furtiveness (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 108). The players in the team conspire and collude in the pretence that they are entirely united, that all is perfect in their collective endeavour. As we will see, one of the means by which this is achieved is ritual. In addition to on-court efforts to ensure that there no cracks in the edifice of the team are off-court efforts to become a team.

**Becoming a team off court**

When the social practice of the team ventures beyond the volleyball court the stakes are different. More rhythms, and more diverse rhythms, come into play. The group is at risk, as new hierarchies may form. On the other hand the team may become a team together. The team may
know itself in ways it could never achieve on court. To this end the senior members of the team encourage the players to socialize off court.

Graham. The better you know each other the more you are sort of becoming a community. People are just becoming easier to communicate with each other when they understand a little better about you and you understand a little bit better about them. The only thing I would say is that we probably didn’t do enough about this. Just go out for a pint of beer after training and whatever and yea it helps for sure. At the moment Markus is trying to organise a social but he’s struggling. I think often there’s a little problem comes in as that there are the community members because we have full time jobs so really we don’t want to go out on a school night. Yea because it’s just too much and so we tend to organise things at the weekends but there are so many Erasmus students especially those who are here for a year’s turn they tend to go out and visit things over the weekends as much as they can. And the students are like, you know, but also we always got a little bit more money to spend so we don’t mind going to this restaurant or that restaurant but students are like we can’t afford this we can’t, we are not available we are busy. There’s also this lack of organisation in their efforts in this whereas we are happy to plan things for us, where Markus and I am happy to plan things months in advance, trying to get the students committed to something five days in advance it’s impossible. They literally leave every correspondence to the last minute, hehehe. And we do talk about these things there and we understand that there must be like a culture there, a culture thing, a, a generational thing where we grew up in a time where we see our friends on Monday and say oh I will we will meet you for a beer on Thursday at six o’clock and so and so and you will be there. Whereas now the kids now they’re just constantly like well I can’t say yes now because there might be something better that turns up and that I can text you on the day to say whether I’m going to make it or not, hehe, and it really doesn’t work to organise things but in the end I think the students have they also have their going out call, because if they have got sports night they have to look fresh and fab so they look good you know, while I think there’s a little bit of something going on like well let’s go out, have a few pints of beer and something going that day so it could very difficult to organise something sometimes, hehe.

Felix says members of the team are good friends. We share the same interests and the big topic is always volleyball and we get along very well. Another point is that we are about the same age so you got your peer group and you got a lot of stuff to talk about, making fun of others. So I think we all enjoy the training sessions as well as the matches.

At the heart of nature, as in every grouping, attention is focused on separating out the causes and origins of multiple noises, murmurs and clamours.

Joe speaks to the team at the end of training. Have you all replied to Markus’ e-mail about dinner? Markus holds up his mobile phone and speaks loudly to the whole team about where and when they might go for a team dinner. One of the players says he is only available next week. I can’t see any messages, another player shouts. Joe says the new team will only start in early October so the first choice is the 23rd of October. Markus shouts the date, trying to insist on a decision. We don’t win we don’t have dinner! shouts Fran, grinning. Someone says they should join a Saturday gathering. Fran says we don’t do Saturday, dude! It’s my family time. You know with babies and nappies. He laughs. We don’t need you, Joe jokes. Fran throws his water bottle
at Joe and misses. All right, guys, says Joe, please do answer Markus’ message and we will
decide a date for the team dinner after the new team’s first match. See you all next week.

The following week the same routine takes place (a rhythm of sorts). Joe asks Markus whether
he has organized the team meal yet. He tells the players that every week Markus will send them a
text message. Please have the courtesy to reply, he says, sternly. In turn Markus tells the players
he will send them a WhatsApp message to invite them to the group. One of the players asks
about WhatsApp and Joe laughs and says You got to know WhatsApp! I think you need to live in
two thousand and fifteen and have WhatsApp! Download WhatsApp to your smart phone if you
still haven’t got it. The players laugh. Markus demands the players’ attention: All right, guys,
guys, I need your phone numbers and e-mails before you go. I will give you mine so you can
send me yours later. Markus calls out his phone number to the players around him.

The older players are aware that it is difficult to persuade the younger students to commit to
social engagement as a team. Ollie. It’s always split. Some people will always be there, hehe, but
some people never, and some people, basically, yea, it depends on the kind of event, so if it’s a
dinner, then probably it’s more attractive for the professional, or the older people, if it’s club
night out it’ll probably less attractive to those, hehe. It all depends on, the audience depends on
the event itself.

Joe lets Markus tell the team again about the team meal, and how they need to contact Markus
via Whatsapp or email to let him know their availability for training each week. The players
listen attentively, with much nodding of heads. Markus and Joe know that in order for the players
to become a team, to awaken the consciousness of the team as a team, requires more than the
authoritative discourse of the coach and the captain.

Thomas talks about the social side of the volleyball team. Every Wednesday every two weeks,
we go out with the BUeS team, it’s just the boys’ night we go to some places and we drink
beers, and then we go out to celebrate because every Wednesday we have games, so no matter
we win or lose.

Felix has a different view, however. I’m eh, I’m not really into going out and drinking. I prefer to
meet friends at home and play. It’s not my thing. I don’t like drinking, which is good, yea, that’s
what I want to say, drinking is kind of mandatory when you go out otherwise it’ll always be like,
you wouldn’t feel integrated I guess, because everybody is drunk in the end and I don’t like it too
much. I drank a lot when I was young and I learned my lesson. So I try my best to stay away
from that stuff.

Markus values the camaraderie of the team. You come to know people in a way as your friends.
And to be honest we don’t have many private relationships after, outside volleyball. These
people, you know sometimes you do things outside volleyball but not very often. But you see
someone, each other so many times during a year, you are kind of friends, you like them, you
like to exercise and train with them, and especially you like for these people to be successful.
And if not successful it’s always fun because everybody is in the same situation, you know how
to balance your pity, or how you call it, my English is limited, you know how to balance it out
with other people and you say come on, next time we do better. It’s fine, it’s much better than you lose the game on your own.

John explains. Ollie put it on Facebook and I didn’t answer, hehehe, because I tried to get away with it. So he just assign us to some games and I just confirm, OK, I can do this. So I think Facebook , and WhatsApp, yea, we use that a lot for announcement, for Regional One. Email, no no. I prefer to use them on my laptop, rather than check it on my phone, sometimes I did check it if there’s a notification, but I prefer to reply using my computer, because it’s easier with the keyboard. And WhatsApp, that’s for phone so I tend to text using my phone. So it’s just for announcement if there comes a game they would tell us time to meet, where to meet and how do we go there. If there’s something happening like a party, they would tell us through WhatsApp, usually put on WhatsApp, other than on Facebook, cos not everyone’s on the Facebook, for Regional One. For the BUCS team they put it on the Facebook, but for Regional One they use WhatsApp for announcement, so like last time Joe offered free hair cut for everyone, he announced that on Whatsapp, so I replied and I went. Yea, I had my hair cut. It was free so I liked it, hehehe. Yea, I like it. It’s a good haircut. Yes I get a free hair cut from Hush, care from Joe, so yes we are using that for announcement.

Nils also talks about social media for communication between the players. I do use it but I’m a bit selective, not all. Now it’s better, it’s WhatsApp. Although some of the players I accept them on the Facebook but not all of them. And also there are some mobile contact, personal, so for example Markus, I have his mobile number sometimes we don’t need to use WhatsApp so everybody can read, sometimes we need to talk privately you know about the team.

On the volleyball court the team-mates are related to each other by bonds of reciprocal dependence and reciprocal familiarity (Goffman 1959 / 1969: 88). However, off-court there is much more variable commitment to social engagement. Once they step off the court they are no longer dependent on each other. Familiarity and physical intimacy can be abandoned until next time. The players have other things to do and other people to see. Whereas they are united on court by a commitment to the game, and an engagement in competition, off court the players have diverse interests and priorities. Some will not commit to social events because they have young families; others will not because they do not drink; others prefer not to make arrangements in advance; others prefer not to go out when they have work in the morning. Despite the efforts of Joe and Markus to bring the team together socially in the interests of earning greater cohesion on court, they remain frustrated.

What Markus and Joe see is that the ideological development of the team, its creativity and productiveness, its becoming a united team in the face of apparent diversity, is contingent on finding ever newer ways to mean (Bakhtin 1981: 346). Newer ways to mean are born in zones of contact, not only in the physical contact of the volleyball court, but in zones of social contact which provide maximal interaction between another’s word and its context. In social interaction words have a dialogizing influence on each other. Words become semantically open and unfinished, and have the capacity for further creative life in the ideological consciousness.
Competition

The rhythm of volleyball is at its keenest in the competitive match. Here polyrhythmic practice shapes and is shaped by social action. The match is a world in itself, yet it is a cycle within a greater cycle of matches played that season. The season is a cycle played out within a cycle of other seasons, of the history of the volleyball club, and of the history of volleyball itself. Yet within the present match the cycle of sets has its own rhythm. And each point, played with fierce commitment and energy, sits within the cycle of other points. And each point equates to a life cycle. With the serve it is born, it has a life as the ball is retrieved, returned, set, spiked, and blocked, and returned again, set again, spiked again, blocked again, and on and on, potentially into infinity, as there is no rule to say that the game may not go on forever. But the point will end in a death. As surely as the impossibility of life going on forever, so it is hardly possible that the ball will stay alive. At some point, in the end, the ball will hit the earth and life will end. The players care intensely about this. We can see it in their straining every sinew, stretching every limb, and using every cunning strategy to ensure that their team wins the point. Does it matter whether the air-filled spherical object hits the earth on this side of the net or the other side of the net? Does it matter whether the same object comes into contact with the ground on this or that side of an inscribed line? Of course not, the game is mere recreation. Oh yes, it does.

What are the distinctions between the game and other features of social life? Sport is a kind of human medium that conjoins people. Modern sport promises playful pleasures to players and spectators; new skills are tutored and learnt. The physical endeavour of sport compensates for sedentary working practices. All sports are rule-governed, enabling easy transmission across cultures; yet the rules and techniques of sports may be transformed to suit local needs (Giulianotti 2005). Sport is structured by rules and codes of conduct, spatial and temporal frameworks, and institutions of government; goal-oriented, aimed at particular objectives; competitive; ludic, enabling playful experiences; culturally situated. In daily life games are seen as part of recreation and in principle devoid of important repercussions upon the solidity and continuity of collective and institutional life. Games can be fun to play, and fun alone is the approved reason for playing them (Goffman 1961: 17). Several individuals may come together with a single focus of attention, with a mutual willingness to communicate and participate, engaging in mutually relevant acts, in an eye-to-eye huddle that maximizes each participant’s opportunity to perceive the other participants’ monitoring. In such conditions the several individuals may have a single sense of purpose. Such encounters provide the communication base for a circular flow of feeling among participants as well as corrective compensations for deviant acts (Goffman 1961:18).

To understand the nature and significance of encounters, games can serve as a starting-point. They illustrate how participants are willing to abide by rules of irrelevance in order that the game proceeds in an orderly way (Goffman 1961: 19). Games place a frame around a spate of immediate events, determining the type of sense that will be accorded everything in the frame. Potential outcomes of activity are determined by the rules of the game, and by the players’ knowledge of previous outcomes on the volleyball court. Each drill is similar to another, but unique. Each point of a game is similar to another, but unique. A matrix of possible events through whose enactment the events occur constitute together a field for fateful dramatic action, a plane of being, an engine of meaning, a world in itself, different from all other worlds except
the ones generated when the same game is played at other times. Games, then, are world-building activities (Goffman 1961: 27).

Joe sets up an activity which seems quite complex. It is about practising defence. The activity involves teams on each side of the net competing for points. Fran says that was a point, that was a point! Joe encourages everyone, shouting and clapping his hands. Fran also shouts a lot. He is older than most of the players and wears an elastic support on his wrist. Joe demonstrates to the young player in the blue top what he should be doing. Fran shouts ‘out!’ as Nils defends. The points system seems to have introduced new energy into proceedings. Joe says to Felix: Nice, nice ball, well played. Fran shouts come on Nils old man! as Nils fails to react to a stray ball. Fran’s and Nils’ team ‘wins’. Competition as a strategy to raise the intensity and sharpen the rhythm of practice seems to be effective. One of the old hands, Fran, dominates the action. His is a particular rhythm, glimpsed through his shouts and his cries. His play is intensely competitive, but it also has a smile on its face. He is the group clown, but he is also crucial to the morale and spirit of the team. His noise is essential to the well-being of the team. He is at the same time competitor, referee (‘that was a point’, ‘out’), moral arbiter (‘nasty!’), peer supporter (‘come on Nils’), and mocking critic (‘Nils, old man’ – Nils claims to be the oldest player in the team), even if his double-voiced mockery is light-hearted and humorous. Fran’s rhythm on court is quick-fire, clownish, loud, in-your-face. This is a feature of his rhythm. Yet this is not all of him. We have heard him articulate another rhythm, that of the family man who must be at home at the weekend above all else. Are these contradictory rhythms? They are polyrhythmic rhythms, eurhythmic rhythms, and presuppose the association of different rhythms. Difference beaten into unity through the measure of time.

The intensity of the practice, its rhythm, is assured by the apparently ad hoc competition introduced by Joe. Every social, which is to say, collective, rhythm is determined by the forms of alliances that human groups give themselves (Lefebvre 1992/2015). At the same time, the alliances that human groups give themselves is shaped by their collective rhythm. The competition introduced by the coach apparently divides the group into two warring factions, creating an opposition which need not be part of the practice. In fact in this instance the geography of the game is deceptive, because (unlike volleyball) this appears to be every man for himself. There is an individual rhythm and a collective rhythm. The effect of the competitive game is the opposite of disharmony or conflict, as the players are united in their striving for points. The competition creates alliances as the players strive against each other, and it increases the commitment of the practice.

Competition comes into being as a function of the rules of the game. It unites the team in mutual endeavour. The process of mutually sustaining a definition of the situation in face-to-face interaction is socially organized through rules of relevance and irrelevance. These rules for the management of engrossment may appear to be an insubstantial element of social life. But it is to these flimsy rules that we owe our unshaking sense of realities. To be au fait with the rules, and at ease with the meanings they generate and stabilize, is to be at ease in the world (Goffman 1961: 81). This is what we see on the volleyball court.

The team begins even as it reproduces. In each interaction, each drill, each point, each serve, dig, set, and spike, relationships are formed and played out. New players become less new. The team
begins to form. Old hands lead the way with encouragement, support, cajoling, and sometimes criticism. The coach keeps an eye on all of this. He needs the team to gel into a cohesive unit. He assesses and evaluates, devises tactics and strategy. In order to create a successful team from the individuals before him he will teach them to play together.

3. Pedagogy

Philosophy

Joe’s coaching philosophy. The club’s job is to encourage as many people as possible to play volleyball, and when they leave the club they might be able to play for a higher team so it’s not healthy for us to be, you know, to specialise in one thing you know it’s better if they are good at everything. When you are playing at international level you know because the position is so specific you can specialise in everything but in our team I try to get them to be able to play everything. You know because we are so short of players as well it will be good to play, let’s say we are short of a middle player but someone who’s not specialised in that can still play in that position. The aim is to help them to understand the game better because it’s helping them to understand by playing outside, and only by knowing how to play outside they should know the job in every position. The same as in business, each person will need to know what each department does and they need to know different skills even if that’s not the skills that they’ll need for their current role.

Graham concurs with Joe’s approach. Maybe Joe’s learned a lot of his coaching from me because I’ve coached him for about four or three years and then he got into coaching and I guess for better or worse basis he learned his coaching or teaching style the most when we are younger. And I do just kind of see that Joe is kind of following a little bit of my style, but clearly he’s now moving towards to his own way, but I think the general ethos of the club has always been that education comes first. And the idea should be like we are not just there to win every volleyball match and do whatever. There should always be sufficient knowledge about how volleyball should be played. And even if we feel that our players are not in the place we would have wished, we have them for one year because it’s only for one term or one year, because they are only here for such a short time, or three years or however long we have them, we should always try to educate them in how to best play volleyball, and ensure that they make the highest level that they may make while they are here.

A large part of the education is about reading your opponent and thinking about the ball, understanding that there are many different positions in the court rather than just six, actually there are twenty one. You start to think about all the different players, and guessing the terms of ethos that we should educate the players how to understand the game better, so by the time they leave this club and they think oh I know this guy and this guy from the University of Birmingham because they understand the game. They are not just good technically they are not just going out to win the game. We just don’t care about the technical ability of the players. We are not just like it’s your bit, you can play the ball hard, but I don’t care how you can play and I
don’t care that you might injure your shoulder from playing. We are just working to make you a better player technically, and a better player in terms of understanding the game better. And Joe I certainly think takes that through a lot. But that was the ethos of the club I set out many years ago because we have many players for such a short time. And in their term or year I could say to them that they are geared up to learning.

So educate, don’t teach. Just let them play, let them learn, and teaching isn’t always about telling them what to do, sometimes it is about learning about the game, even when it is about the women’s team. And sometimes it’s just playing the most basic form the game has, even the rules, I’d say that, you can only do this when you do this, hehe, you know that kind of ethos. Hope that makes some sense, hhahah. Joe I think when he started to coach me I said to him, look, I don’t want to coach any more I just want to play for a few years now and um I know Joe and I did have a few chats where he found it’s quite intimidating because I just like turned around and I said I don’t want to play and coach.

But you know I did have concerns that you know sometimes there’s a very fine line to be you know, a head coach and then to play in a team, it wasn’t deliberately I wanted to step on Joe’s toes as a coach, it was just look at the player next to me and go what are you doing?! hahahaa. And you know the first season apparently all the guys they didn’t like me, you know but I had played at the top level in this country and I had coached for two or three years where I didn’t play at all, and you know I came back into playing just sort of in my mid-thirties or something like that, I do nationally but I also played locally, but for me the Regional league is really slow, you know, mentally and even physically it didn’t even stretch me that too much, so there are some of those players for them it was hard.

And of course I was just shouting at them too much and Joe was like you need to calm down, and the dynamic is I’ve learned a lot to play better in that kind of situation, that I’ve made a lot of fun of it, just dived in with the few players with jokes after going you know, come on, you are just rubbish, try harder, you know, hehehe. And to understand, you know, to work through Joe in the last couple of years, we got a lot better between just me and Joe you know we got a lot of non-verbal communication you know like are you happy for me to speak, we will just share a quick look or you know whatever, just to give it an added sense because you know Joe’s now got to a stage to understand that he’s still got stuff to learn, and we still chat during the training sessions about things like you know about just how it goes, you know just like anything, any sports if you’ve got experience of playing, you also coach, it’s your duty to make use of that experience you know you shouldn’t shut your mouth and you should make use of that advice but at the end of the day as a senior player Joe is the coach, he should be the one to have the first word, and the last, and if I have something to contribute I should make sure that I make it at the right time. It can be a little bit tricky sometimes, particularly the match, hehehe.

I think there are always two ways of coaching, and Joe is actually very good at what he’s doing which is coaching the team on the outcomes. The other way I’d like to do which is something when I first got into coaching and I do a lot, which is the negative thing which is telling the team players don’t make mistakes. We hated serving out and we did this wrong so many times, and that doesn’t help the team focus at all. And you spent more time watching the coaching and I bet you hear this a lot, I don’t know whether it’s a cultural thing, um but certainly with English
coaching it’s so, so common, particularly with volleyball here at a time which I think it’s such a
bad coach because I think all you are doing now is to remind your players of their mistakes, isn’t
it? Hehee, you know, heheh, how does that help? Hehe!

So, um, Joe struggled with this a little bit when he first started. I told him he’s quite negative and
I guess it’s quite easy to remember your mistakes your players made rather than coming back to
the ethos about what you want your players to achieve, and what you educate them about. You
have a vision of how you want to play volleyball, that’s what you need to communicate all the
time.

So I think the coach has to remind the players of that, of what outcomes you want for your team,
and Joe’s doing that quite well now, to remind them of that, also to remind them what sort of
tactics they are to use, and particularly as an outsider of the court you should see better than the
team about the game, because when you are ready you should see better the movement of the
ball, you know, always have the time to watch where the players should go while serving, and if
they are slow getting into the position, on the defence, of the team you play against.

Graham’s coaching philosophy is that education and knowledge about volleyball comes before a
win-at-all-costs attitude. This education includes ensuring that players understand the positions
on the court. They should learn to think about the ball, and to read their opponents. Learning
about the game is more important than technical ability. At the same time individual players
should be enabled to achieve their full potential. He says coaching is not about reminding players
of their mistakes, but about letting them play. But Graham is also reflexive about the attitude of
the players to him, saying ‘the first season apparently all the guys they didn’t like me’. He sets
out his credentials as a highly qualified and knowledgeable coach and player, but accepts that at
times he has shouted too much at the players. By his own account his own practice sometimes
appears to be at odds with his stated philosophy. He discusses his strategies for dealing with his
own instinct to criticize the shortcomings of the players. His role now, he says, is negotiated with
Joe, and they have an understanding of when Graham is permitted to speak. This is signaled in
non-verbal communication, ‘a quick look’ between the two. Graham seems to walk a line
between encouragement and criticism, and constantly tries to hold himself in check. His ability
to do so, by his account, is dependent on his relationship with Joe.

Joe would like to do more. I’ve got so much knowledge inside my head so I want to use my
knowledge, to pass it on to other people. Yes, that’s why I started coaching. I got a lot of
knowledge from watching games on TV. That’s probably where I got the information from,
where I got all those concepts. That’s in my head and once in my head I want to pass it on to
somebody else. That’s it and yes it has a lot to do with that. If I haven’t watched those matches,
especially those with Chinese commentaries, I would not be coaching, because I wouldn’t have
that kind of knowledge. But coaching is different from playing. It’s a very, very, very different
thing. I really enjoy playing. It’s very physical and you focus on one position, the one thing you
have to do. When you are coaching you have to think. It’s just like running a business. When you
are running a business there are so many aspects you have to look after. Let’s say if I work at the
reception desk I just need to focus on the reception desk. It’s a lot easier. I just like coaching. It’s
just like in business I just like to see people grow. And also because I don’t play in a top
division, so the team I play in can’t do the things I coach, so it’s nice to, my aim is trying to
make the team as good as they can. I have a set of sort of goals for them, it’s nice to see them do the things that I plan.

The philosophy of encouragement of all rather than specialization for the few does not suit everyone in the team. Lambert has played at international level, and would prefer greater intensity. I think the most important element for me in all the training I’ve had over many years is the consistency of the coaching, particularly when there is only very limited training time here at the university. No one wants to waste any time during training sessions. For me the coaching in Regional One isn’t systematic and intensive enough. It’s not something really tailored to this team. I’m not here to criticise but I wanted to say maybe it’s because Joe hasn’t had any specialised training in how to coach a volleyball team, so I feel that the training has wasted a lot of time. Of course there are many different ways you can coach a team and Joe can only coach us based on his own experience. This is not criticism as he only knows from his experience how to train us. So it’s not his fault that he doesn’t know how to coach a team properly. Did you notice that actually the training content is more or less the same each time? Applying intensive training and targeting a particular aim is very important for a team. Time is quite precious for us since we only have two hours.

So it’s particularly important to fully use these two hours, the players could totally work out during the period and learn something new to improve the co-ordination of their hands and feet working together. Apart from intensity time control is also very important. For example Joe sometimes will take time to think what’s the plan for the next drill, while actually he should have planned things before each training session. He should have a plan for everything beforehand. Like OK one minute for a drink and then we will come back for this and that. You can’t ask your players to wait there after coming back from their drink break, as their bodies will get cold. Haven’t you noticed that sometimes training was interrupted because he hasn’t made up his mind? OK, OK, stop, stop. He often says that because what the players do isn’t what he had in mind beforehand. So too much interruption can cause confusion. For example a lot of time has been wasted in between different training drills like spiking, setting, and things like that, because of the interruption. So roughly the time wasted in between those practice sessions can amount to twenty or thirty minutes, which reduces the training time to about one and half hours. Less the time for warm-up at the very beginning, the true training time can amount to one hour ten minutes.

Joe expresses his frustration that he is unable to command a consistent set of players. It’s difficult with this team. Every time I have a different number of players and I have different players playing different positions so previously, the first two years, like Ilde I have material written down. But then a lot of times, because the numbers are all different each time, let’s say I need a lot of middles for the drills, I don’t have middles so I have to scrap the drill on the day. So a lot of them I can’t plan the coaching session so now I come in and see who’s here and I figure out what we got. At the moment, if I’m being very honest with you, I got quite tired with coaching because the players are not very committed at the moment and it’s not very, it’s a bit difficult time at the moment, yea, yea. That’s why I’m having a meeting with another guy, to see what we are going to do next year, to eh, restructure the team, to re-energise the team.
Markus supports the coach, but says Joe does not always clearly communicate what he wants from the players. The coach is very important, I mean, depending on the coach, how committed sometimes people are, because if the coach, sometimes aggressive some people can’t take it, or when the coach is talking a lot, and you are standing there and getting cold, and colder, and that’s not very encouraging, and you don’t like it, they have a lot of things to say and you are cooling down again. It’s very different coaches you know we don’t do much, or enough for fitness, which is good for me, hehehe, it’s all right, because what it is it totally depends on what you do afterwards. So if it’s very intense you know you need to do special fitness things, and to achieve a certain fitness level for the game, so Joe isn’t very focused on that because you have many different people as well. If you have such a team you would need to do a lot of different things. And yea, the coach is very important like I said, and I think Joe has a very good balance. He does it in a good way. Sometimes he makes it a bit complicated and sometimes he doesn’t know himself what he wanted to do while we are training, hahaha, sometimes he’s confusing himself, hehe, I think that’s because he wants to do it properly, that’s why. And the problem with Joe is that he’s not a very loud, noisy character. So sometimes he’s so quiet it’s quite hard to understand what he’s saying. And people don’t understand that they shouldn’t bounce the ball as if they bounce the ball, it’s not a big thing, but it’s extremely noisy in the hall, it’s hard to understand Joe if you are not close by.

Joe argues that because he is never certain who will turn up to training, some of the practice drills are inevitably impromptu. This is why he takes time to set up each drill. There are different voices here, different coaching philosophies, different needs and desires. Despite the common sense of purpose in the action of the volleyball practice, the team is characterized by diversity. The philosophical orientation to volleyball is multivocal. This is evident not only in the different perspectives of individuals, but also within the discourse of individuals. Most strikingly, Graham represents different philosophical positions in his representation of himself as player, coach, expert, mentor, and critic.

**Showing**

Showing and telling are integral to each other in the communicative repertoire of the coach. But sometimes the verbal appears more salient than the non-verbal in Joe’s practice, and sometimes vice-versa.

Joe is aware that non-verbal communication is a central dimension of the communicative repertoire. Sometimes I think they understand what I’m talking about in my head but actually they don’t quite understand. And so I use a lot of body language as well, and yea mainly it would be verbally. Your arm, how your shoulder should be, it’s easier to show them than talk about it. I try to keep it very simple so they understand it. Especially for the foreign students. Some of them they come here for only one year and when they first arrive their English is not great. Especially like very technical terms they wouldn’t understand. So it’s better to show them how to do it, using your body language and then slowly they would understand you more throughout the season.
Joe’s coaching skills come from several directions. For the first couple of years Graham has given me a lot of advice and I have done a lot of research myself on YouTube to see what are the drills. And also I watched a lot of volleyball games when I was young, the commentary they talked about, so you know a lot from the commentary they gave for the games. That’s where I get my knowledge from. And the coaching element would be a lot from Graham.

You need to focus, Joe tells the players. Where are your arms when passing the ball? When you go to the right, your hands are like this. Joe raises both his arms. When you go to the left, your hands go like this. Joe moves his feet swiftly on the floor, tilting his arms in the opposite direction to follow the ball. The players spread out to do the drill. Five minutes later Joe stops and asks the players to change over so they each have the chance to practise passing and digging. The players swap and continue the drill, following Joe’s instruction. Joe walks in between the players, stops and gives advice when he spots a problem. He then stands outside the court and watches, arms folded across his chest, checking on the players to make sure they are doing their job. All the players are working hard and practising well. They must have played volleyball for a few years or they could not perform this well. Joe stops the players and pulls the ball cart to the middle of the court. He asks Lambert, Graham and Olli to stand close by the net and each serves a ball for one player to catch. The rest rotate after the first player catches three balls. The players soon split into two big groups and start practising on the two sides of the court divided by the net. Can you just stop stop stop stop! Joe calls the practice to a halt a few minutes into the drill. He comes to the middle of the court and demonstrates how body position should be adjusted when taking the ball from different directions, tilting his upper body in different positions with both legs bent to defend. After the demonstration the team continues but is stopped again very soon.

Demonstration – embodied practice – is a core feature of Joe’s communicative repertoire. Watch me and copy me, he seems to say. Often he focuses on an individual player when teaching through demonstration. He takes Lambert to one side and shows him that he has been twisting his body when passing the ball. Joe walks up to Lambert, and asks Ollie to feed him a ball. Joe catches the ball and passes it backwards over his head for the person standing behind him to catch. Joe corrects Lambert’s habitual movement of twisting his waist to pass the ball. Joe shows Lambert the correct way and the wrong way to pass the ball. Lambert laughs and nods his head, and successfully follows Joe’s instruction. Joe reiterates the same point to the same player on other occasions. This repetition is part of the pedagogical rhythm of instruction. Lambert, when you set the ball, says Joe, it’s easier to set this way. Joe stops beside Lambert, sets a ball to the person standing behind him with hands pushing backwards without twisting his upper body, as Lambert just did. Joe laughs and moves his upper body two different ways to make his point clear to Lambert. Lambert laughs and nods his head, knowing this is his old problem. The body is fundamental here. It is indistinguishable from Joe’s speech. All human communicative practice (including speech) is embodied. The interaction between Joe and Lambert is characterized by smiles, laughter, nodding of the head, hands pushing, body twisting. The contact zone between the coach and the player is one in which a relationship between teacher and student forms, develops, and is played out in pedagogy. Embodied communicative practice is a feature of the relationship. But the relationship is what counts.
When teaching ‘digging’ to another new player, John, Joe corrects the position of John’s hands and demonstrates by shaping his own hands into a bowl instead of using flat palms. Another time he speaks to Sam. When digging, he says, showing Sam a technique for receiving the ball on either side of the body, this side when the ball comes in this direction, that side if the ball’s from that side. Joe stretches his forearms straight out and tilts them sideways to receive from different directions. Sam stops and listens to Joe, trying to tilt his forearms in the way Joe asks him to do. Joe goes to coach the spare player, as they are practising in pairs. He throws the ball hard at the young player, Alex, and he has to dig it out. Joe immediately gives him advice, demonstrating with his hands, arms, and body position. But it is not only the new players or the young players who benefit from Joe’s modelling of good technique. He walks around the hall, quietly encouraging the pairs as they practise skills. He goes to Ollie and his partner and makes a point, demonstrating the push action as Ollie runs from side to side digging the ball out. Guys when you’re passing, he says, when the ball comes try to pass it taking it on one side because rarely will the ball come straight at you, so if the ball comes in the middle you can use both arms, but if it comes sideways try to choose one side so you have good control of the ball. Joe stops the players and asks them to stand in a small circle, talking through the technique of passing and receiving, tilting one of his arms depending which side the ball arrives.

John appreciates Joe’s approach of showing what he wants through embodied action. When it comes to speaking the language it’s difficult to listen to the accent, it’s difficult to understand the meaning, because it will be hard to have registered when you listen to it carefully. Because the accent is different and you are not used to listening to that kind of speech. Yea, it’s just that for language and I think it’s not that difficult to understand. And definitely it would help if Joe would demonstrate the drills and also something he wants us to do, because sometimes I also get confused when it comes to instructions, like back in The Philippines it’s different, the convention is different on the court, so we call things a bit differently in The Philippines compared to here, so it was confusing to me at first, and the pattern is different too. So it’s just the technical side of it, it’s the convention here it’s different, that’s the thing I got confused about first and now I have tried to get used to it, for myself, and that again I just do it for our team, but it’s easier to demo the drill rather than explaining it. Some of the drills are familiar to me because we do that back in The Philippines, but sometimes it is better they demonstrate it because you see it straight away rather than explaining it.

At times Joe integrates different skills in the same demonstration. He takes up a position with his feet for Sam, and says bend down. Push, says Graham each time Lambert goes to set. Joe again goes to speak to Sam, demonstrating that he needs to bend lower. Nils is very athletic in retrieving smashes, diving full length. Joe speaks to the group with Ollie, Markus, Felix and Tom, showing them a spike position. Now he speaks to Tom, demonstrating the dig position, repeatedly moving his open fists upwards and downwards. Sam is taking a rest while waiting for his turn to practise. He asks Joe some questions, and Joe starts to explain by moving his legs and arms to demonstrate for him. Sam watches and follows closely. Another time Lambert, Tom and Nils are practising as a group, setting and digging and co-operating with each other. Joe stands outside the court, watching closely, and walks over to the newcomers to correct their actions.

When coaching a blocking technique Joe says you don’t just run, you watch where the ball goes and you decide where you go to be the blocker. He shows the putative blocker what to do by
moving his own body accordingly. So if the ball goes up, he says, you follow. You don’t just duck. At other times Joe stops the practice session and demonstrates his point to the whole group. Guys when you dig a short ball, your arms are like this. Joe stretches out his arms and presses his elbows close together. The players adjust their body positions to follow the instruction.

The coach adopts the same strategy to teach techniques for serving. He stops the practice and runs to the middle of the court where all the players stand in a circle to listen to him. I’ll just quickly talk about serving, he says. When you’re serving, don’t spin. Hit the ball like that. Joe flips the palm of his hand straight down and up again. So when you serve, you either serve from line to line here, or you serve across court. Joe adjusts his position on the court to illustrate different positions where you can serve. After a brief explanation Joe asks the players to practise serving and receiving. Another time he directs his instruction to two Erasmus exchange students, Jackson and Phillips, saying don’t be scared, you need to stand straight. Joe holds the ball in one hand and shows Jackson to hit the ball with the end of his palm instead of flat with the whole hand. And on another occasion he says hit the ball with this part of your palm. He presses the end of his right palm to show the newcomers in particular how to gain better control of the ball with the palms of their hands. The newcomers listen and nod their heads. The repeated demonstrations, reiterated over time and measured out over different sessions, beat out a rhythm of their own.

**Telling**

Joe’s teaching repertoire does not consist solely of the demonstration of techniques. Showing the players what to do corresponds with, and intermeshes with, spoken instruction. Three blockers stand in front of the net, arms stretched up with both palms open. Joe drags a chair and sits at the side of the court, watching closely. The server serves. Cover, cover, cover, cover! shouts Joe. He stops the drill to give instruction. There’s one thing, for the middle player, don’t just stand there and let the ball go. He waves his hand in disapproval and the drill continues. Can we have a position six passing as well, so you always rotate at position six, he says. Stop stop stop! Joe runs up to a player and corrects the position of his arms. He waves his hands and asks the players to start a new round of drills. Rotate, he says, too slow, too slow, quicker, quicker. Joe is not in a happy mood as the players practise badly. Stop, stop, he says again. You need two servers there, one player there. Tom, you need to set the ball higher. And when you are passing, you need to position the ball. Joe runs back to his seat and the drill starts again.

Joe sets up the next activity. I’ll just quickly talk about serving OK. What I want you to do is when you serve don’t spin the ball, just hit it in the middle. He moves around the court, saying serve in this channel, and so on. I expect flat serves, he says, and tells them to get into groups of three. So if you, the two not receiving, just serve, and you two not serving just receive, and swap at every twenty balls. Joe continues to organise the players for different training drills. They soon follow Joe’s instruction and start serving and receiving in a group of three, one serving, the other receiving and the third one standing by the net, catching and passing the ball from the receiver to the server so the cycle continues until twenty balls have been done and they swap positions.
Keep it rigid and tight, rigid, says Joe. He is watching and giving tips to each group while moving between them. You need to keep your timing right, he says.

Timing is important. Timing, the rhythm and measure of time. The synchrony of rhythm and movement. The leap into space to meet the ball at its zenith. The interaction of time and space. The mathematics of time and space. The geometry and physiology of time and space. You need to keep your timing right. Volleyball brings together very diverse practices and skills, and very different types of knowledge. Timing is about bringing together these different practices, skills, and knowledge sets in a single, fleeting moment.

The coaches normally comment on non-verbal action rather than on speech activity. But on occasions metapragmatic discourse draws attention to how language is functioning. One more, one more! Ilde claps her hands and shouts loudly at her players. Oh shit! Joe misses and is not happy with himself. A Chinese player is very good as a setter and the other players cheer his performance. Three! One big guy jumps to spike and calls out the number. Five! The next player jumps and shouts another number. They call out numbers to give orders to the setter so he can pass the ball to the position the spiker asks. People clap at good passing of the ball. Decide earlier, decide earlier! Ilde complains to the players. Ilde is not happy with the timing of the shouted signs, and wants the shouts to come earlier. On other occasions she contrasts the spoken comment with practical action. Even if it’s a very bad ball, don’t just say shit, you do whatever you need to do to save it or do whatever you can. You move to follow the ball, you move, keep it low and stable. The profanation is of no use, says the coach. Move, follow, do whatever you need to, do whatever you can. Through metapragmatic commentary she signals her evaluation.

Joe watches, evaluates, and makes coaching points. Guys I’ll just say one thing, defenders, you need to get to the position, you are not moving. You need to move to defend. He stops the drill and points to a common problem among the players. The drill continues and the players adjust their body movement to follow Joe’s instruction. Graham helps out, explaining to those close by him what Joe means. Change! The attacking and defending team swap positions. Dennis, just play on this side. Arthur you rock! says the coach approvingly. Organisation of the coaching drills is not straightforward, and communicating what is required does not always run smoothly. Voices echo and bounce around the sports hall. English is the medium of instruction, but proficiency in this language is variable. Guys you split yourselves in groups of three, we do serve and receive, says the coach. One receiver, one target and one server, all right? So middle players, Tom, Lambert, Sam, or, hang on, Sam and Phillips if you join any of the groups. Phillips you join the middle group. The players follow Joe’s instructions obediently and position themselves as told. Once they are in the right places Joe shouts guys come on, and claps his hands. He tells them each group has two balls, one serve, one receive. The drill starts but he quickly calls it to a halt. This group receives, so you serve while the other team receives. How many do you do, asks a player. You do ten and then rotate. What did I say in the instructions? You don’t receive here, you serve. The coach is less than happy with one of the players who seems not to understand his instructions. Listen to the instructions! Markus shouts and laughs as the drill continues. In a subsequent session Markus will be the butt of a recontextualised version of his own mock-abuse, as Graham and Fran both shout to him to listen to the instructions of the coach.
Joe constantly checks that the players have understood what he requires them to do. He asks Ollie to demonstrate a serve, saying so you have three in the group, one server, one receiver, and one returning the balls, get into groups of three – Sam, Tom, Nando, OK? Are we all clear? Guys come on! Balls, get two balls between three. The comprehension check is not always adequate. The proof of the pudding is in practical action. Often Joe watches for a moment and brings the drill to an early halt: stop stop stop stop! waving his arms above his head. He explains the activity again. You do ten, ten passes then you swop OK. The rhythm of instruction / explanation, comprehension check, practice, stop, repeated instruction / explanation, repeated practice, and on we go. What is repetition? What is its meaning? How, when and why are there constant restarts and returns? Absolute repetition is only a fiction of logical and mathematical thought (Lefebvre 1992/2015). Every repeated explanation is the same as and different from the last. Every precise instruction may be identical to the previous instruction, but is newly delivered. Every repeated drill, perhaps repeated a thousand times over a season or a career, is unique in itself. Training, information and communication pass through rhythms: repetitions and differences, linearly and cyclically (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

On match day Joe sees his role differently. My job is to analyse the other team, what’s their weakness and how we can explore that weakness, and analyse our team, what’s our weakness, well basically it’s just there to analyse both teams, how we can maximise our strength and minimise our weakness to explore their weakness to win the game, technically, to encourage them, because I watch a lot of volleyball, I watch a lot of international matches at home so I know hopefully a little more like what to look out for during the game.

**Miscommunication**

Joe constantly communicates with his players. However, he is aware that miscommunication can occur. How many have we got? Joe counts the players. One more this side. Sam, he of the long beard, runs to the other side of the net. Right, this side you have one blocker, so you take up position here. Joe moves his body and lands at a point closer to the middle of the court. This is the defending position when the other team’s attacking. So this the drill. I will give you a free ball, you need to set position for control of the ball, pass the ball, defend the ball. Got it? So basically, defend, set and spike. You only set the ball. When the other side is attacking, I need four defending, three passing the ball, two spiking. Got it? OK. The drill starts but Joe stops it in a couple of minutes. Stop stop! He waves his hands in the air. Hit the ball. Joe, I’m six, am I? One of the players looks confused about which position he should be in. Joe explains once again how the drill should run and starts the practice again. OK guys I need to see some defending. Stop guys, rotate, you are not rotating. Tom, stay in the middle, everybody rotate except the setter. Sam you stay behind. Five. Keep the defending going, guys. All right, rotate. The players finally get it right and Joe lets the drill continue.

Sunday. Ilde splits the players into two groups, telling them who’s going on which team. So you receive, serve. After that you block. If you want to spike give a good ball. You can serve if you like in any direction. Ilde stands in the middle of the circle of her players, giving instructions on the next drill routine. Yea, all clear? Ilde raises her voice. So you have to come and let him do that? Fran looks a bit confused. I will show you. Ilde moves towards Fran and repeats the
sequence of the drill. No no, you spike. Fran asks again. Ilde explains the sequence again. So basically each player will start by serving a ball, then running to the other side of the court to catch a ball served by another player. He will then catch the ball a setter passes to him, spikes and then run to the other end of the court to serve. Once the sequence is clear the team follows the cycle with no interruption.

There is some confusion. Graham explains to Felix what rotation means in this context, and he steps off court to watch. Rotate! shouts Graham. Felix doesn’t move, so Graham calls to him to come on court. There is still confusion. Felix goes back off court and Graham apologises. Rotate says Graham. Hang on hang on. He organises his side. Applause for a strong block. Graham ushers Markus back with his arm. Rotate he says. Another good block from Sam. A smash from Ollie. Joe makes a joke. Sam applauds a good block from Felix, who is on the other team. Rotate says Graham. There appears to be incomprehension about where everyone should be. Joe tries to sort it out, as does Graham. Joe speaks to Arthur about his positioning at the net. Graham speaks again. Tom you need to be in the middle between these two, just look at these two. Joe is giving a coaching point to Elliot. Graham completes a good smash and takes the low fives with something of a swagger. He is still trying to organize players into the right positions. Joe helps, saying one of the players is too far forward. Elliot makes a mess of a set and holds his hands to his face and apologises. Miscommunication permeates the practice but it is an accepted feature of the spatial repertoire. Graham endeavours to stabilize the action through repetition. Rotate. Rotate. Rotate.

Joe is alert to players failing to comprehend his instructions. One or two players haven’t got the idea what they need to do. They stay in the same position so Joe stops one player and explains to him individually outside the court. He listens and nods his head and soon runs back to join the drill. Several rounds later everyone gets the idea and the drill runs smoothly. Coaching is about observation and awareness. Each season new players arrive. Joe sorts out who is playing middle, who is collecting balls. He keeps the players up to the mark, circulating through the space and offering instruction and advice. Elliot, you can feed, OK, so you need to work with a partner. After you feed fifteen balls you swop around OK. Everyone rotate. Basically just swop around and I’ll see how it goes. Sorry this side your job is to block OK. The ball is fed in. Set, spike, and block. Even in this practice the players are quite competitive, wanting their side to win each point, applauding and shouting. They swop round and rotate. No-one seems to know where they are supposed to go. Graham tells one player to change sides, and organises his side of the net. He apologises, and says Sam, Sam, too many new names. New players, new names. New players to be taught the ropes. The rhythm of dressage goes on.

Markus comments. No problems as everything is in English. Hmm, no problem is not one hundred per cent correct. I know for certain people only understand fifty per cent, language barrier. It’s about, nothing to do with nationality, it’s about level of English. You know they don’t understand but you can’t take care of these people too much. You can’t tell everybody, very slowly what exactly you want them to do. You have to try to make them understand or they have to understand what to do by seeing some other examples. And sometimes you are right it’s a problem, it’s a problem. And sometimes people just don’t want to show that their English level is not so good, so they don’t say anything.
Ollie. We all speak English so, I mean there isn’t major issues. I mean sometimes we might struggle to find the specific word to communicate but in principle I don’t think it’s a real burden. Felix agrees. Luckily nowadays we all learn English when we were at school and our English is good enough for us to communicate. And most of the players actually have been here longer than me, for example, I’ve been here for three months now, what is it yea not even three months. So they are really really capable of speaking good English so we understand each other. And I think even if we are, for example, for Markus and Ollie, they are both German, we tend to speak English even when there’s no other people listening because we are just used to speaking English. We just stick to it. Maybe because we all feel comfortable speaking English and a big point for me is that I want to learn to speak English and it wouldn’t help if we speak German all the time, although I could I think if there are enough German people around I think I would speak German, more or less all day long, hehe, and have no problems. There are a lot students from Germany, at least the Erasmus students, which is the programme I’m doing, and the majority is either German or French so I’d say about seventy or eighty of us are either German or French. I try to avoid just sticking with German guys because of the reason I just told you, because I don’t want to speak German all the time. So I really just avoid socialising with just Erasmus students in particular. I really just make friends with the UK people, hehehe.

Who’s going to be here in two weeks’ time for the first match? Hands up. They put their hands up but Lambert doesn’t. Markus speaks to him quietly and he puts up his hand. Lambert is new to the team and new to the country. By his own report his English is not yet proficient. The old lag Markus notices the instance of miscommunication and helps him out. Metapragmatic discourse refers not only to how language functions, but also to miscommunication. Joe is aware that Lambert may not always understand his instructions. He calls some names and asks them to demonstrate a drill. As he explains he does a good deal of pointing. Two attackers, three defenders. Are you clear? Lambert shows him the forefinger and thumb joined in a circle to indicate that he understands. The embodied communicative repertoire includes checking comprehension and gestural typification. The communicative repertoire is metapragmatic.

Miscommunication, the missed beat, the lost rhythm, applies not only to the new players. Joe explains the next activity, and asks old timer Markus to demonstrate. But Markus doesn’t seem to understand. Joe walks him through the exercise as everyone watches. It involves working in threes and practising setting and spiking. Felix asks what do we have to focus on. Sorry? Felix repeats. It’s just to warm up, about ball control. The activity starts, working in threes. Nils misses a ball and typically gives a high-pitched shriek of mock anguish. After a while the players get the hang of the exercise, and apply themselves to it. Rhythm is required of all players. The game cannot be practised without rhythm. It must be restored. In sport as elsewhere in social life intervention through rhythm has a goal, an objective: to strengthen or re-establish eurhythmia (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

Stereotypes

Joe deploys stereotypes as a resource to explain what he perceives as established differences between ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ players. If you’ve seen a lot of Asian players which I come across some who have left now, they have a different culture from European players, even the
international terms they have to coach. I read a lot of interviews where Asian players are playing in international leagues that they can’t adjust themselves to the training because they train in a different way, even Jenny Lang Ping, she coaches the American team, she said it’s quite different from coaching Chinese players. She said when coaching American players, or European players, they are quite intelligent, they use their brains to think why they need to do this, while Chinese players just do whatever the coach tells them to do, which is exactly the same as in Chinese education. In Europe the kids are just given this task to do and they will just do it and they wouldn’t think why they have to do it in the Western culture. The kids are more, they might not do as good as the Asian kids, but they would think why am I doing this. I think it’s a quite different culture and things like that. So when I was coaching Asian players they were just doing whatever I say. They don’t think why and yea they won’t challenge you. I divide them into Asian players, European players and British players. Um, for girls especially, I think you can divide them into Asian and European. I think for Asian players you can be, you need to be very strict, giving them very clear instruction because they wouldn’t give you any feedback so you need to tell them very clearly that you need to do this, do this and this; but for European players I would give them more like what do you think of this, I plan to do this, how do you feel about that and they would give you the feedback. But if you ask the Asian players they wouldn’t give you any feedback you just need to tell them you need to do this and I think for Asian players they are not, they might be as competitive, but they don’t show it, but for, the only exception I would say, in terms of girls, they are no way as competitive as European players, they are just not brought up, they are just not trained to be like that at all. When they go to school they are just not trained to be like that. So you have to talk to them in different ways, especially male and female you have to talk to them differently. For girls you have to talk to them like you are their friends, but for boys you can just shout at them sometimes, but if you shout at girls they might cry. It’s the same thing here for boys and girls you have to talk to them differently.

Ollie is not sure that cultural differences are important in coaching volleyball. I’m not sure if it relates to the culture, I think it’s more to the individual coaches. But well I didn’t play in say twenty BUCS teams so I don’t know, hehe. But my perception is it’s more related to the individual coach rather than cultures. And also to the level, the higher level is usually more strict which is probably you would expect.

Stereotypes are deployed to explain ‘cultural’ differences not only between ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ practices. Markus and Joe are discussing which players will turn up to training this evening:

1 Joe so it’s Graeme, Ollie, Nils, you, Zac
2 Mar John
3 Joe Dan
4 Mar Muna
5 Joe oh Muna’s coming? Felix
6 Mar Muna’s not coming essentially because I asked him for three appointments now, today, tomorrow, and Sunday, and you know the people one say I am coming on Sunday the next but he doesn’t say if he will come tomorrow or or today you know they have to ask three times what about Friday then what about Sat I’m not such a guy. it’s crazy. Lambert is coming Lambert is here
Markus and Joe, effectively the manager and coach of the team, are frustrated that some of the players do not communicate effectively with them, and are not consistent in attending training sessions. Markus ventriloquates the inconsistent, unreliable player, and sets himself in opposition to such an approach, ‘I’m not such a guy’. At the same time, Markus identifies a reliable player, Lambert, whose name becomes indexical of a more consistent and dependable member of the team. Joe introduces a social category, ‘university students’, which allows both interactants to invoke a typification which further unites them in opposition to the feckless young academic. Markus makes hay with the stereotype of the typical student’s lack of urgency (‘they answer one question, and it takes them ten hours to answer the second question’), and Joe deploys an even more familiar typification, ‘probably they are still drunk’. Markus aligns himself in opposition to the cultural practices of the typical student. Joe’s loud laughter masks Markus’s point that he answers questions immediately, and cannot understand the slowness of university students. Joe continues to laugh at his introduction of the stereotype of the inebriated student.

Stereotypes are not necessarily or always discriminatory and prejudicial. Nor is it crucial to determine whether they are ‘true’ or ‘false’ (Reyes 2009). Rather, they are typical features, approximate descriptors that individuals need to move about the world. Without stereotypes people would be unable to draw on prior understandings of objects or people (Reyes 2006: 6). Stereotypes are often constituted through metapragmatic evaluations (Silverstein1993). That is, sometimes stereotypes are stated explicitly by interactants and sometimes they are accomplished implicitly (Reyes 2005). In any interaction, metacommentary signals an understanding of what a sign means by pointing to that sign’s situated communicative value (Rymes 2014). Comments about how language is functioning are ‘metapragmatic’ because they are calling attention to how utterances are functioning in a particular context. This can happen explicitly, as when Markus refers to the typical student as slow to respond to questions. More often, however, metacommentary is not explicit, but signals the function of a communicative act through implicit metapragmatic activity. Every utterance is saturated with metapragmatic function.

‘Metapragmatic stereotypes’ is a technical term for talking about typifications of the pragmatics of language use and associated signs (Agha 1998). They are essentializations or reifications which are not only based on what others do; they also help us to deal with others, to do whatever we do with them or to them. They are observable social regularities of metapragmatic typification, typical features of a kind, with which speakers position themselves and others in socially meaningful ways (Reyes 2009: 53). They are not ideas in the head, but observable behaviours that evaluate the pragmatic properties of linguistic expressions (Agha 2007: 154). Typifications include the relation of some aspects of behaviour (predication) to a certain category of persons (reference). Chinese volleyball players do what they are told, European players ask why they are doing it. Speakers may locate themselves as members of both a typical behaviour (including linguistic behaviour) and a particular person-type. For typifications to
develop into stereotypes they must be shared at the level of groups or societies (Reyes 2006). Typifications constitute stereotypes insofar as they recur in the reflexive evaluations of many language users (Agha 2007:279). That is, for evaluation of a register to be a stereotype it is necessary for it to recur in the metapragmatic discourse of the many. This raises the question how many similar utterances constitute ‘recurrence’, and how many language users uttering similar metapragmatic evaluations constitutes ‘enough’ for an evaluation to become a stereotype.

The answer lies in the context: a family unit may recurrently invoke metapragmatic typifications as a means of identifying the family as a group, reproducing social identification across generations; in other cases stereotypes make possible the large-scale replication of register stereotypes across social populations (Agha 2004:27). Reyes (2009) suggests that metapragmatic stereotypes are circulating resources that can be creatively recontextualised in interaction. Metapragmatic stereotypes are not only constituted in explicit commentary on typifications, but also in the stylized representation of typifications (Rampton 1995, 1999, 2006, forthcoming). That is, one of the ways in which speakers comment on how others speak, and therefore on how types of persons are, is by representing their speech in a way that sets it apart from the ongoing interaction. In setting speech apart from the ongoing interaction it may be evaluated, either implicitly or explicitly. University students’ slowness to respond to questions is indexically linked to their feckless drunkenness.

The circulation of stereotypes precipitates certain beliefs among individuals, but these are experienced with varying degrees of intensity, durational constancy and force over a life span (Agha 2007:154). Stereotypes can be fragile as well as stable, and circulate in media discourses with national and global reach as well as in local discourses. In her ethnographic study of Asian American young people in the United States Reyes found that although stereotypes were sometimes seen as oppressive, at other times they were appropriated as sources of power, good humour, and in-group cohesiveness. These various understandings of stereotypes made her aware of their slippery and elusive nature (2006: 16). She found that Asian Americans often stereotype themselves, and in doing so stereotypes became intricate and flexible tools with which to fashion their identities and relationships with others (Reyes 2006: 28). Stereotypes can be incorporated into people’s lives to various effects, and sought out as a means of identifying and imagining oneself, others, and connections between individuals and groups (Reyes 2009:58). Investigation of the ways in which people interactionally define and deploy stereotypes in everyday speech contributes to an understanding of how participants perceive and construct their identities.

Joe’s pedagogy plays out in translanguaging zones which are multivocal and multisemiotic, and sometimes characterized by miscommunication. Different philosophies jostle with each other for position, in dynamic equilibrium between a commitment to the education of all, and the imperative for success. These multivocal discourses are never more evident than in the struggles of the former senior coach to step away from his former position of authority. Repertoires in play are multisemiotic, as the present coach, Joe, demonstrates with his own body what he wants the players to do. Integral to showing the players, Joe provides explanations which can be relatively complex for some of the players to follow. And always present, if not always evident, are the voices of typifications which construct Asians as passive learners, Europeans as active; girls as
more likely to cry, boys less so; students as slow and lazy and inclined to inebriation. So the world is made and remade in the enregistered multivocality of stereotypes.

4. Social Relations

When people come into contact, or into interaction, each participant enters a social situation carrying an already established biography of prior dealings with the other participants – or at least with participants of their kind, and enters also with a vast array of cultural assumptions presumed to be shared (Goffman 1983). But social relations between people can be a complex and precarious matter. If parties in an interaction transgress the rules (jump the queue, physically abuse the other party, swear coarsely, or behave in a range of other unpredictable or offensive ways) they may destabilize the interaction. An interaction may be subject to the interaction order of the institutionalized service arrangement. That is, the parties involved may have a highly developed knowledge, based on experience, of the type of transactions that may be conducted in that particular setting. In the volleyball game – whether in practice or in match play – the norms and rules are known to all participants. On occasions they may be argued about and negotiated, but in the main they are agreed upon and uncontested. Within the rules and regulations that formally structure the playing of the game, however, rhythms and rituals maintain the social relations of the group.

When a team becomes a team the party line may be unequally congenial to the members of the team. We may expect ironic remarks by which a team-mate jokingly rejects the line while seriously accepting it. On the other hand, there will be the new factor of loyalty to one’s team and one’s team-mates to provide support for the team’s line. Public disagreement among the members of the team not only incapacitates them for united action but also embarrasses the reality sponsored by the team (Goffman 1959: 91).

Joe speaks to the group on one side of the net. Can you hear me Lambert? Yes says Lambert, who probably can’t from where he is at the far end of the other side of the court. We’ll just try this and see how it goes. Felix asks something. Sam blocks successfully. Nice, Sam. Nice block, Sam, echoes Graham. Joe speaks to Markus and demonstrates jumping to block. Markus is about three times the size of Joe. Tom asks Ollie something about the calls. Joe tells Tom about his position when there is a good pass. Graham also coaches as they play. Joe speaks to Tom about his position when there is a good pass. Graham also coaches as they play. Joe tells them to rotate. Tom makes an error. Tom, it’s the same drill as we did before, just with more people around, calm down. Graham says just don’t panic man. Come on guys we’re getting too lazy, and claps his hands. Come on lads we need to improve! Joe asks whether they had decided to go wider on the set and spike. Graham explains that that was just the way it happened. Joe changes the teams around. Ollie speaks to Lambert and explains where he should be. Lambert, do you get it? You think so? Joe speaks to Lambert and explains where he should be. Lambert, do you get it? You think so? Joe speaks to Lambert and Ollie about their calls. He speaks to Lambert again, and Felix asks a question. That’s too slow, you need to go quicker. OK, says Felix. Come on Lambert, says Graham, and Joe echoes him. Nice Felix, as Felix kills a spike. Joe speaks to Sam. Lambert says to Joe he has got to leave early. What’s the time? It’s only nine. I forgot you have to go early. Lambert goes. Sam, remember if you’re going to volley, volley to the corner. The
new guy talks to Felix at the net. Ah another point, says Markus after he wins a point. Joe speaks to Sam about his spike, saying turn, turn, showing him the action he means. Sam says the ball was behind him, but in a voice that doesn’t carry to Joe. Joe sorts out the positions again. Graham serves. The return goes wrong as the calls seem to be confused. Markus and Tom talk about what happened. Lambert is leaving. See you Lambert! Call two or three of the players. They are affectionate towards Lambert, but also teasing him for leaving the session early. Nils misses a reply to the serve and claps his hands fiercely. Sam blocks Ollie’s smash. You have to dig it a bit higher because it’s very difficult to slice the ball. Joe speaks to Tom and Ollie about their positions. Ollie is vociferous in putting his point of view. Joe says he will see how it goes. Just play the simple ball, as soon as it’s hit you have to be quick.

Mock abuse

It is characteristic for the familiar speech of the market-place to use abusive language, insulting words or expressions, some of them quite lengthy and complex. In the market-place abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted (Bakhtin 1965/1984). We can speak of abusive language as a special genre of billingsgate. Abuse contributes to the creation of the free carnival atmosphere, to the droll aspect of the world. So too the volleyball court. At the earliest stages of cultural development comic and abusive rituals mimicked serious rituals, building a second world, a second life (Bakhtin 1994:197). Comic life is carnivalesque life. For a temporary period the people live according to laws which are different from the laws of the official world. Carnival renews and re-energises. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants (Bakhtin 1994: 198). Here live clowns and fools. They stand at the borderline between art and life. The carnival, like the official feast, is always related to time, either to the recurrence of an event in the natural cycle, or to biological or historic timeliness. The carnival is tied to rhythm. It lives in the cycle of repetition and renewal. It is a world of death and revival, of change and renewal (Bakhtin 1994:199). The unofficial world is no less subject to rhythm than the official world. In each dimension of the two-world condition what we live are rhythms – rhythms experienced subjectively. The laws of nature and the laws governing our bodies tend to overlap with each other – as perhaps with the laws of so-called social reality. A rhythm embodies its own law, its own regularity, which it derives from space – from its own space – and from a relationship between space and time. Social practice is made up of rhythms daily, monthly, yearly, and so on (Lefebvre 1991:206). At prescribed moments in time and space the carnival (the mocking abuse of the volleyball court, the laughter of the fool, embodied clowning, mock-fighting, ritual embrace) celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival is the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It is hostile to all that is immortalized and completed.

Ilde notices that Fran is not moving easily and orders him to take a rest. Have a good rest, says Graham, patting Fran on the shoulder. Fran looks worn out, red-faced, breathing heavily. OK? Fran nods his head and goes to the corner of the court, sitting on the floor to do stretches. In five minutes he runs back on to court and joins the queue for the drill. He shouts loudly in a stylized, exaggerated tone: I’m ready! Come on! That’s my position! Come on! Fran pushes Graham out of the way. Graham laughs and moves to queue behind Fran. When Graham lies on the floor to
stretch his leg, Ilde asks whether he is OK. Boo, boo! Fran exacts his revenge from the other side of the court. You can all get better while I’m watching! laughs Graham as he continues stretching. Come on, mean person! Fran does not want to give up his revenge easily. Graham’s pat on the shoulder lives in two worlds: the sympathetic and the mocking. Graham checks on the older player’s condition, but mocks him in double-voiced discourse (‘have a good rest’) and in (what we might term) double-bodied discourse (‘patting Fran on the shoulder’). The embodied action, like the ironic mockery, lies at the interstices of care and abuse. The action is not separable from the speech. They are of the same. Fran responds after five minutes with a return to court which is full of stylized enthusiasm. His stylized speech is at once an announcement that he is fit to play, and a retort to Graham’s mock (and mocking) abuse. But it is not only speech that trumpets his return to the fray. Again the body is inseparable from the word, as ‘Fran pushes Graham out of the way’. The push is a mock-fight, as the speech is a mock-exclamation. But it is more than this. Playful it is, but meaningful it also is. The pride of the senior player must be restored, and Fran deploys both embodied action and dialogic discourse in its restoration. Mock abuse serves in this direction. Boo, boo! shouts Fran to Graham. Fran’s subsequent further abuse of Graham (‘mean person’) lacks force, and it may be that Fran is not able to easily bring to mind an English term of abuse that will serve both his comic and restorative purposes. The banter between the two seasoned players weaves the fabric of the group. Graham gently mock-abuses the whole group, saying he will watch them all try to improve while (for the moment) he rests and stretches. So mock abuse goes on, a normative discourse that walks a fine line between offence and humour, renewing, restoring, reproducing the culture of the group.

Tom dives and lands on the floor, having missed the ball. The players cheer and deride Tom, calling come on, get up! The cheer is a mock cheer, a stylized cheer. But it is not a negative cheer. It serves both as encouragement and as a means to unify the group.

Graham is coaching Sam, talking loudly while demonstrating a particular position. They go again and Graham says better, OK, down, down, better this side, not so much that side. Now Joe takes over and gives Sam a tip, and Graham says he’s just copying what I did because I kept it easy for him. Graham and Joe smile at each other and Joe moves on. Tension between the award-winning club coach, Graham, and the team coach, Joe, occasionally surfaces. The removal of societal hierarchies which obtain outside the volleyball court does not mean that they are not replaced by new hierarchies on the volleyball court.

Nils shouts to Sam, come on, serve like a man! Nils has a grin on his face. The mock abuse is not intended to offend, but to introduce humour. At the same time it comments on Sam’s serve, pushing him to do better. Such mock abuse targeted at an individual who is guilty of no more than serving a ball into the net is an accepted part of the spatial repertoire of the volleyball court.

Graham shouts, high-pitched and loud, how is that a block, how is that a block? Get your hands over the net. This is both in good humour and a serious coaching point. It is both mock abuse and real abuse. Any lack of effort will be noted and publicly addressed.

When two players move in opposite directions there is some mock cheering and laughter. Joe says stop stop stop stop! just make sure (xxxx) and players laugh. Elliot, you need to turn your
body. When rhythm breaks down and arrhythmia ensues there is mock cheering and laughter. It is double voiced cheering, stylized laughter.

Profanities and oaths are in many ways similar to abusive language. In the carnival atmosphere they acquire the nature of laughter and become ambivalent. Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They breach the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability. Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally (Bakhtin 1994:220). Every age has its own norms of official speech and propriety. And every age has its own type of words and expressions that are given as a signal to speak freely, to call things by their own names, without restrictions or euphemisms.

All are considered equal during carnival. In the town square a special form of free and familiar contact reigns among people who are usually divided by barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. So too the volleyball court. The bank manager and the unemployed, professor and fresher, business man and labourer, street sweeper and entrepreneur, flower seller and executive, all are stripped down to their body. Status is suspended, each becomes merely a player. People are reborn for new, purely human, relations. This temporary suspension of hierarchical rank creates a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. It leads to the creation of special forms of speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who come in contact with each other and liberating them from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special style of expression forms on the volleyball court, as it did in the medieval market-place. The carnival idiom is filled with change and renewal. It is a logic of the turnabout, the logic of inside out. We see a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations. A second life is constructed. It denies, but it revives and renews at the same time (Bakhtin 1994: 200). The abuse and mockery of the volleyball court likewise revives and renews.

Before one of the training sessions Joe greets the players as they arrive. It is only a short time before he seizes an opportunity to tease Nils through sexual innuendo. Markus joins Joe in the joke:

1 J  hello Dan you all right, hi John, hi Markus
2 Mar hey hi
3 J  in fact you are very early today
4 Mar  you know (xxx)
5 Nils (xxx) I stay in the shower room
6 J  what for?
7 Nils shower and er extra warm-up extra stretching you know
8 J  you shower before you play sport?
9 Nils yea
10 J  mmm
11 Mar don’t you shower before you play, no?
12 J  no I I
When Nils tells Joe that he takes a shower before the training session, Joe asks with an incredulous voice, ‘you shower before you play sport?’. On receiving an affirmative response he makes a skeptical but amused sound (‘mmm’), disapproving of what he indicates is a non-normative practice. Markus attempts to turn the joke back on Joe (‘don’t you shower before you play no?’), but Joe makes hay with Nils’ admission, at lines 14 and 16 introducing sexual innuendo to add a new dimension to the locker-room banter, in a voice which rises with teasing insinuation. There is loud and emphatic laughter, especially from Joe, who is highly amused by his opportunistic teasing of one of his senior players.

Two minutes later Joe is still in the mood to tease the players. His target this time is Fran, not averse to a joke himself. Rachel is attempting to schedule an interview with Fran, and he gives an account of his busy schedule:

Joe is within earshot of Rachel’s conversation with Fran, and he does not fail to take up the opportunity to tease the Spanish player as the latter gives an extended account of the reason why he is unable to find time for Rachel to interview him. Joe’s mockery is relatively gentle, but it relies on a powerful stereotype. Furthermore, it is double-voiced. Fran, for his part, accepts and inhabits the stereotype. Joe knows quite well that Fran has two daughters. His apparent defence of Fran’s hectic schedule, ‘he’s very busy man he’s got three daughters at home’, is therefore not all that it seems. Joe’s statement is double-voiced, less concerned with protecting Fran’s time, and more concerned with setting up the joke with which he will lampoon his senior player. Joe
allows Fran to correct him (‘no two daughters daughters and a wife’) before delivering his punch-line, ‘no, one big daughter hahaha’. The joke relies on the stereotype of the ‘hen-pecked husband’. In Joe’s invocation of the stereotype Fran not only has to look after his children, but also his wife, who is therefore a supplementary daughter. When Fran persists with his account of his busy life (11-13), Joe pitches in again, once more deploying the stereotype of the put-upon domestic man not permitted leisure time until he has completed his domestic chores: ‘he has to do extra house work in order for him to come here’. There is perhaps a hint of sympathy in Joe’s intervention, but no more than a hint. His purpose is to make a joke at Fran’s expense, using Fran’s own account as a resource with which to drive the joke home. As we will see in the next section, Fran is a clown in his own right, and as such is subject to the barbs and darts of others. Here he submits to the joke, inhabiting the stereotype, not resisting it but owning the subject position imposed upon him by Joe. If Fran is clown now, he is Pierrot, his tear one of (mock) self-pity. Inhabiting the stereotype is in itself a resource for Fran: his acceptance deflects the implied criticism, and although a softer target, he is less wounded. There is anyway a sense that this is an interaction that has been rehearsed before, and is being performed for Rachel’s benefit. Joe and Fran (respectively) deploy and inhabit stereotypes which allow them to spark off each other. No offence is done, and the stereotype becomes a resource for building social relationships (Reyes 2004).

The clown-fool

Clowns embody the opposition between the lowest commoners who are close to a state of nature and the upper social elites who epitomize highbrow culture (Bouissac 2014: 144). Clowns have been traced as far back as Egypt’s Old Kingdom Fifth Dynasty, some 4,500 years ago. Nearly 4,000 years ago one of China’s rulers filled his court with clowns. Many of his successors continued the tradition. YuSze was a jester in the Chinese Imperial Court in 300 BCE and is remembered as saving thousands of lives when he teased the Emperor out of having the “other” side of the Great Wall whitewashed, thus preventing the death of multitudes. In addition to these clown figures who served in ancient royal courts, organized clown societies have served socio-religious functions for their communities. The Navaho, Pueblo, Hopi, and Zuni peoples all had ritual clowns who served an essential role in social and sacred ceremonies through both crossing and maintaining boundaries. In doing so, the clowns anchored the ceremonies in the immediate experience of the people (Bala 2010).

The chaotic abandon of the carnival is tightly bound with the history of the clown-fool. The fool harnesses and embodies the licence and privilege of the carnivalesque, with which he has traditionally been associated. Indeed, his presence is intrinsic to the materialization of the carnivalesque and its licentious ridicule of authority – the clown can survive anything and get away with anything. The fool can create an imaginative breathing space in which the normal categories of order and hierarchy seem less than completely inevitable. The clown-fool is not simply associated with the temporary eruption of carnivalesque misrule. Rather, the clown has been a consistent presence within sovereign courts from earliest history. Whether in the form of ‘natural idiots’, professional buffoons or deformed mascots of ancient courts, or the famous court fools or fool societies of the Middle Ages, or even the archetypal Elizabethan jesters, the fool enjoys a distinct place in the sovereign court. As a witty performer, ridiculous joker or half-
witted madman, the fool skirts the line between ridicule, flattery and criticism. He is tolerated, celebrated and deplored.

The themes of subversion and mockery are found throughout the long and knotted cultural history of the fool, the clown and the trickster in literature, myth and drama. From the professional buffoons of the ancient Hellenic courts, through to medieval court jesters, from carnivalesque fools to mythical tricksters and the theatrical clown, the clown-fool has always occupied an ambiguous and troublesome social and political position, embodying incongruity, disorder and chaos. The fool’s liminality – as a subject who is neither ‘here nor there’ but ‘betwixt and between’ – has conferred on him a transgressive and ambivalent status. The clown is a lowly, comical breaker of rules who is also frequently considered important and sacred (Amoore and Hall 2013: 99). He might be a traveller, an entertainer of children, a simple-minded or uncomplicated person without money, status, power, or intellect. Yet, the fool can be the one who, being an outsider and having little power, presents the unseen possibility or expresses the unthinkable thoughts; the fool speaks profound truth sometimes clearly and plainly, sometimes in mythic or poetic fashion, and sometimes in language that at first seems to be nonsense. The clown breaks taboos and receives both praise and punishment for doing so. He offers himself for the hostility of the audience as his art becomes greater when he gives up his dignity. The clown’s marginality, his accepting rejection and rejecting acceptance, finds its roots in religious foundations. The clown stands outside of human order. He is in the service of the power that is the declared enemy of well-behaved and organized society. The clown stands outside of decorum, propriety, and society’s censure. Fran does not dress like the typical circus clown, but he is recognisable as the clown nonetheless. His transgressive behaviour is immune to prosecution and retaliation as surely as if he wore a red nose and outsize shoes. The realm of the clown is one of humour and play, order and disorder, the sacred and the profane. (Bala 2010: 52).

The figure of the ‘sage fool’ is a particularly prevalent motif in cultural history – not simply a figure of fun, but a lowly subject able to use his wits to outdo his ‘superiors’ and speak truth with impunity, exposing the ridiculousness of those around him. The folly of the clown becomes a mask for the wise and an armour for the critic, as well as a technique for revealing the folly of the wise (Amoore and Hall 2013: 100). It is not merely the case that the carnivalesque confuses and inverts sovereign power, but also that, abstracted from law, rights and responsibility, the clown-fool embodies a different line of sight. The fool’s idiocy and madness confers clarity or expansion of vision: the fool can expose what others cannot or choose not to see. The fool deploys this clear, lateral vision as an unintentional or intentional critical ruse. By breaking or challenging frames of sensible conduct and thought, the clown points baldly to the prickly issues of everyday life.

A break in training. Joe asks does anyone want a drink. Cue Fran, the clown-fool.

A nice beer

1 Fran a packet of crisps, or chocolate
2 Alex chocolate
Laughter builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state (Bakhtin 1984:88). Laughter celebrates its masses, professes its faith, celebrates marriages and funerals, writes its epitaphs, elects kings and bishops. Laughter participates in the rituals of everyday life. Laughter overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority. Fran responds to Joe’s invitation that everyone has a drink with interdiscursive humour, taking Joe’s words and recontextualising them in a more social setting. The anachronistic ‘a packet of crisps, or chocolate, and a nice beer’ is humorous because it is out of place. Fran’s pretence of the simpleton is at odds with Joe’s thoughtful, organised coaching style. The coupling of the fool and the coach creates a recognisable dialogic opposition. The fool and the poet, the fool and the scholar-pedant, the fool and the moralist, the fool and the priest, the fool and the holy man, the fool and the politician, the fool and the representative of the law. In all these dialogic juxtapositions the fool makes strange the world of social conventionality (Bakhtin 1981: 404).

The clown is a rogue who dons the mask of the fool in order to motivate distortions and shufflings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them. The clown is the one who has the right to speak in otherwise unacceptable languages and the right to maliciously distort languages that are acceptable. At line 6 Fran grabs the arm of Vally and turns him towards the video-camera. They both grin into the lens, Vally perhaps a little sheepishly. He has been dragged into the festivity against his will, but he does not resist. Fran continues to laugh. Joe is trying to be serious. True ambivalent and universal laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it (Bakhtin 1984: 123). Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïvité and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness.

Joe is trying to organise a complex drill, and becomes slightly irritated, asking Fran what’s so funny?, but in a light-hearted voice. Joe tolerates Fran as he deprecates him. ‘How old are you
Fran?, he asks (15), a little bewildered and annoyed that Fran continues to giggle hysterically while the coach is giving instructions. ‘You’re like a little kid’, says Joe, when Fran points at Vally on the other side of the net, still laughing helplessly, and says ‘he make me laugh’. But Joe also grins in the face of the contagious laughter. The clown is always concerned with something that is embarrassing, shocking, and astonishing. He maintains an intimate relationship to the improper, to the personally and culturally taboo. The role of the clown is to disrupt ceremonies, thereby lightening the seriousness of the event; paradoxically his opposition highlights the important cultural values being expressed. He disrupts and mocks the serious sacred ritual (Bala 2010: 59). The ritual of the game is at all times serious. At the same time the clown shows us the absurdity of the serious ritual.

The clown-fool has his moment, but the authority of the coach is not seriously challenged. Indeed at this moment Fran is like a little kid, or like a fool, behaving as though he has lost his senses. He is not further sanctioned because, being the fool, he is beyond the reach of the law. The clown-fool occupies an uneasy and frequently dangerous position in relation to sovereign power. The fool is invited in, tolerated, even lauded. He occupies a privileged, protected position, and the licence he enjoys allows him to speak and act in a way that no one else can. He is outside the norms and laws that govern those around him, but he is also dependent on and vulnerable to the whims of the sovereign, or, in this case, the authority figure of the coach. It would not be the same if one of the new players adopted the same idiocy. Fran can behave as he does because he is the clown in this court, the fool in this play. The coach permits Fran’s clownish behaviour because his larger-than-life character benefits the team. When he is not present the team suffers: you know what - Fran’s not in this match, he’s in some other match, if he’s in the match he would be the person to get the team together. This particular match we haven’t got our hands on it. Fran is the motivator in the team, the maker of noise. The clown-fool has a key role in the team.

The coach continues to explain the drill, unperturbed by the clown’s antics. Seriousness co-exists with carnival, and order is restored.

19 Joe right you defend five if you defend one you just block
20 Joe here OK so this side Vally if you set basically the same
21 drill, they have three attackers you just need to try to
22 defend the ball and send it back three balls to them. But
23 this time, this time, can you try to, I don’t need you to
24 hit the ball hard, I just need you to try to place the
25 ball in different areas so you can tip the ball in the
26 three metre line. try to score er against them OK doesn’t
27 matter how you’re gonna score you can tip you can hit you
28 can roll, OK so Alex you play middle, you play opposite
29 you just play outside for now OK?
30 Ollie (xxx)
31 Joe you two can block
32 Felix but every position cause you just said
33 Joe sorry can only block the mid er the two wings, OK? if, if
34 they were going to hit through there where would you be
defending? if Zac’s going to hit  
but you play opposite now where would you play?  
you have to cover the setter so just block alone  
but now you’re playing position two, so you play as  
an opposite or setter so if Zac is gonna hit you need to  
come no no you need to come to cover the short ball  
if Dan’s gonna hit through there you block Ollie will  
come in to cover OK so you three have to work with the  
block to defend. same same again don’t try to set it too  
close in there because they’ve only got one blocker  
two touches or three touches?  
two touches same go back OK?  
I think it would be useful for me to er block all  
three positions because that is what I have to do in the  
match  
yes but we were trying to work the defence so I need  
one blocker just to stay there so that they can work  
these three can work round you, so this drill is for one  
two well for all of you to work but you just play  
opposite now because we have no setter, we’re not doing a  
blocking drill at the moment OK you don’t need to try to  
score anything you just need to try to put a block up OK  
you just try to block someone will try to defend  
don’t worry about what you do in a match (xxx)  
yes we’re just practising defending OK  
two set two touches. oh over  
mm? if you can defend the ball into here obviously that’s  
where you want to defend, if the ball is hit hard you  
just need to bump it up high  
nice hit Zac. come on come on watch the setter. set it  
set it

The social norms of the team permit negotiation with the coach. He is no tyrannical ruler, and he listens to the pleas of Felix with patience. However, he does not agree with the young German player, and dismisses his case – ‘we’re just practising defending OK’. One of Joe’s seasoned lieutenants, Vally, takes up the issue, apparently explaining the situation, but equally closing off Felix’s argument. The young player’s point is that he should block all positions because ‘that is what I have to do in a match’. Vally takes up Felix’s words and reproduces them to reject his case: ‘don’t worry about what you do in a match’. The repetition denies the plaintiff, and he is silenced.
The clown-fool’s association with a disordered ‘outside’ (madness, chaos, nature) threatens the king, but his expanded line of sight makes him necessary – he may act as a scapegoat, a lucky mascot or ritual substitute. The fool expresses something of the indistinction between inside and outside that plagues, but is necessary for, the exercise of sovereign power. In this specific sense, sovereign power requires the slippery figure of the fool, who embodies the blurred distinction between inside and outside, and who speaks from a place and with a voice that is otherwise unavailable to the king (Amoore and Hall 2013).

The rhythm of life determines that the clown-fool will never be out of the picture for long. There are times when the clown-fool is at the centre of things, pulling the strings of the puppets of the court. At most other times, however, power returns to where it commonly resides. The privilege and protection earned through unruly wit and the wearing of motley will only extend so far. The clown’s sharp tongue ultimately leaves him vulnerable to abuse and revenge. The status of the clown in the social order is lowly, and any member of the court may tease and abuse him. A short time after Fran’s clownish disruption of Joe’s rhythm, the coach introduces another drill, which he calls ‘king of the court’. Fran doesn’t miss the opportunity for word-play, and rechristens the game ‘king of the castle’, chuckling as he invokes the name of the children’s game. But his come-uppanace is only round the corner.

King of the court

1 Joe king of, king of the court
2 Fran king of the castle, hehehe
3 Joe OK. so, they only have three players OK so you need to
4 try and get them off, er
5 John the court
6 Joe off the court, so if they are off you three comes in
7 you three goes to the back court you three goes to the
8 front so you keep moving like that. OK?
9 Ollie you can only score on this side, yea?
10 Vally (xxx)
11 Joe no if you score you this side always get a free ball
12 OK? so you always get the first attack, if you score you
13 stay, if they beat you then you have to go OK?
14 Fran if you lost the point you go out we come in (xxx)
15 Joe so you think how you are gonna set up
16 Vally this is now for this point we are a team (xxx) we need to
17 score a point to get to other side
18 Joe so between your team you need to suss out how you are
19 going to score. are you ready? come on OK sorry, if you
20 keep the score, the team who gets to fifteen first wins.
21 so one, fifteen points. so if you’re if you’re on this
22 side you get you score one point you get one point
23 and if you’re on the other side you will never score, you
24 have to score on this side OK. fifteen one zer er one.
come on Dan work on the defence play it high. right
swap. Ollie’s team got one point. come on, Felix. one
point. two points. did it touch? three. OK guys if the
ball just kick it us because we haven’t got time because
we need all of you to stay on court. defence defence
defence, watch. ayy, four. come on guys, you need to get
them out, they’ve only got three players. five
Fran come onnnn, guys!
Joe six. seven, that was lower than the net
Fran yes!
Joe seven right you have one, seven come on seven one.
come on they’re gonna lose. ahh, one, two, come on, hit
it Fran four, that’s it, four. how many points have
you got, one?
Felix Ollie
Joe change, no point one seven. ohhh, seven
Nils out!
Fran out!
Joe five. in in. five. we need you on court come on
Nils (xxx)
Joe I told you leave the balls. change. one.
what’s your score?
John seven
Joe seven. come on come on come on get in position
Fran raaaay!
Joe is it five or four you’re on
Fran five
Joe five?
Fran yes sir! ball in here! ball in here!
Joe come on!
Fran it’s free ball here
Joe and you got five points?
Fran yes five points. yay, jeez! referee!
Joe come on, change
Fran that’s no good, you talking to the players
Joe you need to calm down, don’t panic

Even in this quite insignificant practice drill Fran’s larger-than-life role as motivator of the team is in evidence: ‘come onnnn, guys!’ (line 32), ‘yes!’ (34), ‘out!’ (42), ‘raaaaay!’ (49). But now it is time for the master to turn the tables on the clown-fool. What kind of relation is it that holds the sovereign together with the fool? What gives the fool the ability to speak uncomfortable truths to sovereign power? The fool does not enjoy a position of utter impunity. Just as Lear’s fool meets an indeterminate and uncertain end – most likely hanged – so real jesters and court clowns frequently find their unimpeachable position revoked: they can be punished, banished, whipped and fall from favour (Amoore and Hall 2013: 101). The game relies on the coach
throwing in a free ball to the team of three, who are playing against a team of six. The game is fast-moving and breathless, requiring the rhythm and quick action of the participants. Points are scored by the team of three, and if they lose a rally they are replaced by another team of three. At line 50 Joe checks with Fran how many points his team has scored. Instead of throwing the ball in to Fran’s team he lobbs it to the opposite court. Joe has a broad grin on his face. Now the fool is fooled, and the lord has his revenge on the clown. Fran stands aghast, astonished and indignant that the rules of the game have been transgressed, and the ball given to the opposition. As he shouts his protest Joe throws another ball to Fran without warning. Taken off guard, Fran makes an error, the ball crashes into the ceiling and the point is lost. The players on the other side of the net cheer loudly and laugh. The clown is the butt of the master’s joke, and the social world is restored. Once again the master lets the clown know his place in the social order. As the players change ends Fran protests bitterly, complaining that Joe threw the ball in when he was not ready to receive. Joe will hear no argument, however (‘you need to calm down, don’t panic’), and the game goes on despite Fran’s indignation. Order is restored and renewed. For now the carnival is over, and the usual rules obtain. Feasting and disorder must come to an end.

Another moment on the same evening. Joe watches the players as they run through a drill which practises defence. His coaching point is that the defended ball should arrive at the setter at a height which allows defence to be turned into attack. As usual the coach is encouraging, picking out for particular mention the new players, in this case Dan and Alex.

1 Joe nice. come on, Dan. six! you could have saved that point, come on! nice.
2 nice. nice Alex. ohh! come on, come on! nice. higher higher higher! guys! three
3 now!
4 Fran what?
5 Joe higher! that was shit!
6 Fran I played clever!
7 Joe no! you volleyed the ball like that, how was the setter gonna set it?
8 Fran yea but he’s playing for the other team hahahaha
9 Joe yea but that doesn’t matter
10 Fran I passed the ball hahaha
11 Joe you are defending the ball for the setter, OK. come on, come on!

Early fool mascots were kept for luck and could draw ill fortune from superiors. The fool in this sense performed a vital duty, but he could also be banished, excommunicated or even slain as a substitute for the king, ritually or literally (Amoore and Hall 2013). The new players are encouraged and praised for the slightest thing. Yet at this moment the clown-fool Fran is berated by the master, who adopts the profane to abuse his skills. In the tradition of the clown, Fran tries to outwit his abusive master, laughing in the face of adversity and accounting for his actions. But Joe will not have it, and the insult stands. Fran is subject to the abuse and cruelty of his master precisely because he is the master’s fool. Despite all his highly-prized talents, the fool will always be the master’s fool. The clown-fool Fran retreats to lick his wounds, in the knowledge that he will have another day. Like other clown-fools, he is the embodiment of the ongoing tension and conflict between order and disorder (Bala 2010: 62).
Laughter

Carnival is the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Carnival laughter is festive laughter. It is not an individual reaction to an isolated comic event. It is the laughter of all the people. It is universal. It is directed at all the people. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect. This laughter is ambivalent: it is triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (Bakhtin 1994: 200). The people’s ambivalent laughter expresses the point of view of the whole world. He who is laughing also belongs to it. Laughter is the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commendments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than the earth itself. From such brief moments unofficial truth emerges.

The sports hall is double booked. The players congregate outside the hall, some of them stretching, others chatting. It is the beginning of the season, and some of the players are new. A tall woman makes a comment and Joe exclaims oh, a new coach! The woman says she is not a coach. Well you just put your hand up. Graham says you know how to coach, you’ve seen me often enough. The woman says yes, just shout at everyone. The group laughs. The players seem to get on well together. Laughter and humour are at the same time unifying and mocking. In laughter social tensions become visible.

The men start their warm-up, running around the court in circuits. Fran says how much he likes the smell of the place. Joe jokes it’s the smell of sweat. Fran says it’s like his other favourite smells like cookies. Everyone teases him. Finally he concedes that the sports centre staff need to clean the place more. When Fran is not present the atmosphere is more subdued, less convivial. He is at the heart of the team, and through humour he positions himself there.

Joe calls a halt to the drill and gives his players a few seconds for a quick break. His arms are folded across his chest while he thinks about how to split up his players for the next drill. His head is bent in concentration. Ollie chuckles. We can see you are thinking. Markus picks up the cue: Ears up! The two German old stagers laugh together, and Joe smiles. The coach is fair game for teasing, and the teasing is a metapragmatic commentary on Joe’s embodied action.

Humour and laughter are everywhere in the practice session. It binds the players together. It opens up spaces for communication and interaction. It overcomes fear and inhibition. But it is never neutral. It can be double-voiced, stylized, and can carry evaluation and even a hint of threat. Laughter allows the hierarchies of the outside world to be discarded, and new hierarchies to be constituted within the volleyball court. In this sense this is a carnivalesque world. But it is a carnivalesque world in which some have a more established right to laugh than others. The carnivalesque may temporarily change relations of power. But it does not erase relations of power entirely.

Reward

Laughter and mockery, praise and denigration, co-exist. The passing from excessive praise to excessive invective is characteristic, and the change from one to the other is perfectly legitimate.
Praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin. If the right side is praise, the wrong side is abuse, and vice versa. The billingsgate idiom is a two-faced Janus. Praise and abuse belong to the same body, or to the two bodies in one, which abuses while praising and praises while abusing. This is why in familiar billingsgate talk abusive words, especially indecent ones, are used in the affectionate and complimentary sense (Bakhtin 1994).

Ilde says no, you receive and attack. OK. They whistle. It’s a clever exercise and they finally get into the swing of it. Keep it high, keep it high. The drill momentarily breaks down. Come on, Ilde encourages. Graham says out! when the serves are too long. There are claps of frustration as well as for success. When Graham gets it wrong somebody cries out! Come on. Unlucky. Fran is also vocal. He is quite hyped up now. This exercise feels like the real thing. Martin is praised for a block. There is also a praise for a good serve. Shouts out for a near block which is just missed. Fran really wants that ball as he tries to block. Graham congratulates Joe. He also praises a good server when he fails to retrieve. Praise is a key resource in the spatial repertoire of the team. It build intensity. It is rhythmic, superimposing itself on the rhythm of play. It is the obverse of abuse (whether mock or literal), which equally has its rhythm. Praise, like abuse, brings cohesion to the group.

Good position. Ilde watches and comments at the side of the court. Out! Graham raises his index finger to the player who serves the ball long. Markus is disappointed in himself when failing to spike. Spike! Spike! Spike! Joe encourages his team mates, shouting very loudly. He misses the ball and bangs his hands on the floor. Soon he stands up and makes a good dig, passing the ball back to the other side of the net. Nice Joe! Graham compliments each good move. Nice Joe! Ilde praises Joe as well. After serving, move to the front of the net to block. She shouts at Tom who is in the wrong position. Jump to spike! Nice Joe, good spike! Graham claps his hands. Good serve Michael!

When members of a team have different formal statuses and rank in a social establishment, as is often the case, then we can see that the mutual dependence created by membership in the team is likely to cut across structural or social cleavages in the establishment and thus provide a source of cohesion for the establishment (Goffman 1959: 88). Among team-mates, the privilege of familiarity – which may constitute a kind of intimacy without warmth – need not be something of an organic kind, slowly developing with the passage of time together, but rather a formal relationship that is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team. Praise and encouragement establish and cement the formal relationship of the team. Graham offers encouragement – Nice, Martin. Several other voices say Nice, well done. Ilde repeats very quickly go go go. There is a lot of clapping for a good retrieval.

After a few rounds Joe stops them again and gives some tips about how they can organise better defence. He then lets the team continue. Nice spike! Nice ball! Way-hey! Good ball! Ollie cheers at each good spike. All the players are engaged in the drill. Graham cheers as each player practises well. Joe dismisses the team and announces that the session tonight has finished. He thanks all the members of the team, saying they were playing very well. Jackson, you are very good at hitting, you are very good. And you. Joe looks at another player. Thank you for coming, you are very good.
A set of individuals who might be dissimilar in important respects, and hence desirous of maintaining social distance from one another, find they are in a relation of enforced familiarity of team-mates engaged in a single purpose (Goffman 1959: 89). Individuals may be bound together formally or informally into an action group in order to further collective ends by any means available to them.

Greetings

In order to initiate an interaction the participants must enter a state of talk, which they achieve by declaring themselves officially open to one another for purposes of spoken communication, and guarantee to maintain a flow of words (Goffman 1967: 34). The initiation of an encounter marks the beginning of a period of heightened access among the participants. Such an initiation is likely to be marked by a greeting. When an interaction is to be terminated a supportive ritual will again occur, namely, some form of farewell display performed during leave-taking (Goffman 1971: 79). Taken together, greetings and farewells provide ritual brackets around a spate of joint activity, and are both ritual displays that mark a change in degree of access – access rituals (1971: 79). On the volleyball court participation may indeed be marked by a greeting. However, the access ritual may open up not only (and perhaps not at all) a state of talk, so much as a state of play. The access ritual marks the beginning of heightened access among the participants. But it need not be that they are open to each other for the purposes of spoken communication. They mark their openness to other embodied action. Moreover, the ritual display that marks access among the participants may not be a word but an action. How are you Graham? Fran shouts at Graham, who just walked in, wearing the university sports uniform. Graham greets him back while eating an apple, switching off some lights with an air of one who knows the place well and does such things naturally, as if it was it was his home.

A member of the sports centre staff in a black shirt comes in and Ilde gives him a high-five. Guten abend! Fran greets the guy in German, with his eyes twinkling. ‘He’s German!’ Seeing the other players looking at him curiously, Fran laughs and explains what he just said: ‘Why? He’s German!’ Fran comments on his greeting here because it is not delivered in the language typically expected of him (he is Spanish) or of the spatial repertoire of the team (the team is highly multilingual, but most of their speech during volleyball sessions is English). Several of the players are German. Fran’s comment calls attention to his non-normative, convivial greeting. At the same time, his metapragmatic comment responds to the other players’ curiosity, which is implicit metapragmatic activity. The unspoken question, the raised eyebrow, draws attention to Fran’s use of language. While speakers do not usually explicitly draw attention to how specific linguistic forms or languages function, they signal the function of any communicative act through implicit metapragmatic activity (Silverstein 1993).

Team spirit

The coach believes that team spirit is very low. Players used to socialize more. This is exactly it, we don’t do things outside volleyball together. We used to have a few core players that we know very well. We would go to each other’s house for dinner or whatever, while this team, we don’t,
and the focus of the team has gone more to the students than to the community members. So students, they obviously know each other very well and this is why there’s a lack of team spirit in our team. This is why we are losing all the time.

Markus, the team manager, values team spirit above all. I like the team spirit. Although I also play badminton and squash I enjoy the team spirit especially when you win. And I enjoy the feeling that you work together and you achieve something together. That’s what it is. In volleyball the team spirit is more important than in any other game. In other sports you can see one or other player can, can kill your opponent, beat the game and do everything on their own and they could still win, even though the rest of the team wasn’t doing well. But in volleyball if you have somebody who is very weak, for example, two out of six aren’t very clever, it can kill your game because you always have to play with all these people. And it’s why it’s even more important that the team works. And you need to, there are so many different situations, you know the passing, the attacking, the different situations where you have to work as a team, as an organ in a way, yea because when you have people attacking you have to close up, to cover, and when the others are spiking you probably have to go to the back, so always working as an organ, or similar. I think for volleyball it is very important that everybody is working together, everybody is co-operating otherwise it is very easy to create problems. And that makes it more exciting and that’s eh, yea, that’s what it is all about.

Graham remarks on the international dimension of volleyball. When I went to the university, at seventeen, eighteen while I was twenty one, twenty, and you know they are more twenty two, twenty three, and you know my idea of responsibility is you know, totally different. I just felt more like at home now, you know, and it’s great to chat with people and instead of going out for a drink for the sake of getting drunk, we went out for social, if it happens to get drunk, hehe, haha, because we haven’t socialised for a long time and this sudden change of emphasis you know, and I just found that cosmopolitan atmosphere is very nice for me you know, and from the perspective of where I grew up on a farm, where we call basically from a low social economic status background, and we are hard to get in universities back in those days, you know, I’ve never been abroad and I never worked in a non-English company you know and I just found it so nice to meet all these people and to talk to them and discuss things about volleyball, you know it made such a difference you know that we are so different people, Korean, Polish, you know, every nationality you could think of kind of coming through the doors of volleyball. It was so nice! You know I stay in touch with a lot of people you know at the time when I was at the university.

Even now when I moved to Birmingham you know, I got involved in running the clubs with the staff when I came here, and when I was involved in running the club here I was asked to coach, and you know I’m still in touch with people because we are of the similar age when I came when I was twenty five, when I started to coach I was twenty six, again, wasn’t so much older than those Erasmus students coming in, and going back to those years you know as 2000, 2001, I was still in touch with people I coached, you know, living in Italy, and all over the place, you know, we still chat on Facebook. A French guy who appeared to be a PhD student here, and we two being the two newcomers that week, so obviously we got into chatting and he said you know what I’m doing my PhD here at Birmingham and actually I worked here so we called each other for lunch. And we are still friends now, hehe, and you know that was fifteen, sixteen years later.
It’s such a multi-cultural sport. I think, volleyball is such a big sport, globally, you know, it’s one of the top team sports out there. I think that I guess it’s just because the rules are so similar in international sports you can throw six people on the court and they can play and work out how to play together, hehehe, and you don’t need so much verbal communication just start to play. But also I think there’s always, from my experience of travelling there also seems to be a bit of a small field of sports that you go somewhere you meet some people who play volleyball, you get along, you get well to sort out things. For example in a couple of years ago in Mexico I was in one of the resorts, one of the staff there was a volleyball coach there so we chat away and he said, you know what so and so every Thursday night we were playing volleyball down the beach, come along! You know, and there’s never any hesitation if you also want to play volleyball and you want the offer again. I never get that from someone that you know, chatting about football, do you follow me? I don’t know why but they would never dream to invite you to play football along to a team, for a knock-about, hehe, you know, I don’t know why it is.

And I don’t know whether if it’s a reflection on sports, or if it’s a reflection on volleyball, or is it a reflection how volleyball is played. Does it make sense? It’s different from the culture as it is from how volleyball is played, you know, and it’s easy to find a random person in a random country to play a random beach volleyball game. You need two to play beach volleyball and I used to play beach volleyball. OK we didn’t know each other five minutes ago but yes I could because it’s just digs, sets and spikes where football might need five or six people you can’t just invite them down. You follow me? Hehe. I don’t know I’ve always found that atmosphere that, you go and you pick up a couple of games you know what I mean, coming back to 2006 I was travelling to Australia trying to play volleyball and then we are in Germany for the volleyball game and then we are in Switzerland that we just happened to go past a couple of parks and some of the volleyball courses are held there and you just rock up and say can we get to play a few games and the guy says oh yea where you are from and welcome to play, you know, it’s just that kind of atmosphere, but like I said it’s hard to distinguish why it happens and whatever else.

Felix says the team benefits from there being different characters in the group. The players can push each other to achieve. Playing volleyball you always play with five guys on the court you always push each other. And I think it really works within our team. And the point is really interesting the different characters you got in a team. For example, Graham is a person who’s always outgoing, shouts from time to time, he’s like a coach on court, yea, it’s a good way to put it; and some are quiet, like Lambert, he’s always there, he’s the one puts the effort in the game, but he will not push others to the limit. And I would describe myself as loud as well because I don’t really like to just stick my head in the sand when it’s not everything going according to plan. You have to push yourself to the maximum limit even if it doesn’t work sometimes. You have to always show your emotions because I think sports are generally closely connected to your emotions. You always express your emotions by your movement, more or less.

Ollie. I quite like it here because when I started in Germany about ninety five per cent are Germans so it can be boring sometimes. And here I met more people who are international in the first week here than the whole year when I studied in Germany. That’s one of the reasons why I like this place so much I think because so many different cultures, different languages. And yea I would very much prefer that.
The players view volleyball not only as a game but as a place where social relations come into being. This is a multi-cultural place, a cosmopolitan place, a place where long-term friendships are made, a place where collective effort and collective action is rewarded. It is a place where regulation and authority are essential to the success of the game, but where regulation and authority may be mocked, derided, and temporarily discarded. It is a place of laughter, and a place of tension, a place of seriousness and a place of fun. It is a place of many voices and many characters playing out small dramas on court.

5. The Body

The body serves both as point of departure and as destination. Bodies resemble each other, but the differences between them are more striking than the similarities (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991). The actions of each individual involve his or her multiple affiliations and basic constitution, with its dual aspect: first, the axes and planes of symmetry, which govern the movements of arms, legs, hands and limbs in general; secondly, the rotations and the gyrations which govern all sorts of movements of trunk or head – circular, spiral, figures of eight, and so on. The body repeats actions but preserves difference within repetition, and as such is responsible for the emergence of the new from the repetitive.

Graham. As a team sport it does require that you know, particularly with volleyball, the way how the attack or offence works out you know, the ball is delivered to a particular zone, three zones, you know, simplified to the three zones, there’s reverse, or the left side, and there’s the middle and right side. And the team has to understand the dynamic this zone attack is capable of OK what speed we have to set up, the setter has a particular role to communicate with people who are spiking to understand well at a very basic level of what ball do you want, where do you want it, how high do you want it, you know how fast do you want me to deliver the ball, you know, it’s easier when you are on the right or the left side because you can see the ball when it’s high up you have a little bit more time to adjust. But particularly if you are in the middle there is really just non-verbal understanding where the setter wants you to be, whether the offence like to go up and from the defence perspective you have to understand the quality of your setter, does he like the ball above the net, or does he like it one metre off, and things like that, I think there is a communication there in terms of co-ordinating the offence but a huge amount of it is actually non-verbal, in just learning to understand what that player prefers, at any moment of the time of their default setting. And then you work out the different things they’d like in the defence from there, the different things they’d like to do from there.

Habitus, the product of a historical acquisition, is what enables the legacy of history to be appropriated (Bourdieu 2000:151). More precisely, it is the deep-rooted dispositions of the bodily hexis (1991:88), rooted in posture, a way of bearing the body (2000:144), that articulates a more-or-less unconscious sense of ‘how to be’ and ‘how to behave’ in a social arena. The historical body situates bodily memories in the individual body (Scollon and Scollon 2004). A lifetime of personal habits come to feel so natural that the body carries out actions seemingly
without being told (2004:13). Habitus ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (Bourdieu 1990:54). That is, we know how to be because we have been in the world and experienced how people act in certain social situations. We come to understand the rituals and ceremonies of social practice by engaging in social practice. Social practices seem entirely ‘natural’ to the person in whose historical body they reside (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 23). The notion of habitus is most illuminating when viewed (as it always should be) in relation to field – the social arena in which habits and dispositions become practice. Similarly (if a little differently) the ‘historical body’ is most illuminating when viewed in relation to discourses in place at the time of action, and the interaction order (the social groupings) within which they occur (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 23).

When individuals come into one another’s immediate presence in circumstances where no spoken communication is called for, they nonetheless inevitably engage one another in communication of a sort, for in all situations significance is ascribed to certain matters that are not necessarily connected with particular verbal communications. These comprise bodily appearance and personal acts: dress, bearing, movement and position, sound level, physical gestures such as waving or saluting, facial decorations, and broad emotional expression (Goffman 1963:33). There is a body symbolism, an idiom of individual appearances and gestures that tends to call forth in the actor what it calls forth in others, the others drawn from those who are immediately present.

Body idiom is a conventionalized discourse, a normative discourse. There is an obligation to convey certain information when in the presence of others and an obligation not to convey other impressions, just as there is an expectation that others will present themselves in certain ways (Goffman 1963:35). The understanding of a common body idiom is one reason for calling an aggregate of individuals a society. Just as the individual must convey something through body idiom, and is required to convey the right thing, so he/she also finds that while present to others he/she will inevitably convey information about the allocation of his or her involvement. Instead of speaking of a body idiom we can speak of an involvement idiom, and of rules regarding the allocation of involvement. The same general type of gathering in different cultures may be organized on the basis of different involvement obligations (Goffman 1963:38). That is, the body idiom, or involvement idiom, will be different in different ‘cultures’, or in the same ‘culture’ over time. Here we come to the heart of things. In conditions of superdiversity (in the culturally diverse volleyball team in the superdiverse city) does the involvement idiom therefore divide or unite? Is ‘culture’ national, or ethnic, or is it volleyball culture? Or does the body idiom sit at the interstices of practical norms (normative practices)?

**Involvement**

Involvement refers to the capacity of an individual to give, or withhold from giving, concerted attention to some activity at hand. It implies a certain closeness between the individual and the object of involvement, a certain overt engrossment on the part of the one who is involved. Involvement in an activity is taken to express the purpose or aim of the actor (Goffman 1963:43).
On arrival at volleyball practice (and perhaps even more so on match day) players give notice of their involvement in the activity in several ways. They are physically present. It is seven o’clock on a Friday evening. They are not at the pub with friends, they have not gone to the cinema to watch the latest movie, they are not at home on the settee with take-away curry and a soap opera. Instead they are physically present in the sports hall, and this in itself establishes that they are ready to be involved in volleyball. Further, they indicate their involvement through dress. Most players in the team do not use the changing room, but arrive at the sports centre dressed to play. If it is cold or raining outside they might discard an outer training jacket, but in general they are ready to play on arrival. And their involvement is embodied. They are ready to run laps of the gym to warm up, to do press-ups and sit-ups, bends and stretches. This is part of their embodied repertoire. Factory workers, or agricultural labourers, may do more physically demanding tasks than the volleyball players, and for much longer periods. But never are they required to embark on co-ordinated, collective stretching and bending before setting to work. Warming up is part of the enregistered repertoire of the volleyball court. It is not part of the repertoire of the manufacturing production line. On the volleyball court players indicate their involvement in the game (at least partly) by submitting to the warm-up routine.

After the first round of warm-up, Ollie leads the players to do a sideways walking lunge along the net, and then they jump up to block with both hands. Joe watches from the side and supervises where necessary. Get around in a circle! Ollie shouts out at the players and he lies on the floor. The rest follow. Twenty sit ups! Ollie starts. Come on, Sam! Joe keeps his eyes on the players. How many? Twenty. And fifty press ups with one hand. Ollie moves on to another exercise. Argh! Markus sighs, knees on the floor, struggling to keep up. He is the oldest, quite big and heavily built. And twenty seconds running on the spot, change legs, down on the floor! Ollie shouts another order. Someone lets out a big shout and chuckles as the echo of his voice fills the hall. Joe is talking to a new player, correcting his action. There are now eleven players in the hall.

And related to this, but beyond this, the players indicate their involvement in the activity of volleyball practice and play through their embodied readiness to perform physical actions which are specific to the volleyball court. This involvement is barely discernible before the actions are performed, but discernible it is. Players may look ready to play, ready to perform, or they may appear disinterested and inattentive. Pre-play involvement may be indicated by performing additional stretches, by bouncing the volleyball heavily into the floor, by digging the ball repeatedly against the wall, by a spring in the step. On match day the players’ indication of their involvement is a ritual performance.
7   Joe Graham can you go and sign. and Markus you are
8 starting at five er Nils you are starting at six
9   OK, who’s eleven?
10  Felix me
11  Joe Felix you’re starting at two one two no one one
12  OK
13  Ollie sorry I didn’t er
14  Joe you are not on there first OK. guys come around come
15 around come around. so middles you need to try and
16 track their two main attackers who are twenty three
17 and twelve OK um their passing their basic is not
18 very good they are good at attacking so we have to
19 keep our serve strong and try to don’t try to rush
20 into attack we just need to try to recycle the ball
21 try to play a rally with them you don’t need to rush
22 because the more rally we play the easier we will
23 win the game OK. Lambert if there’s good pass try to
24 use two and three to score, ok. are you ready?
25  Grah if you’re back court twenty three you have to defend
26 your line. if you’re one metre inside the court it
27 kills the points. you have to be there so don’t be
28 lazy. when we’re tra tra transferring between
29 offence and defence be quicker, ok, last week we
30 were really slow guys so we have to sharpen it up
31 by the time the setter is touching the ball everyone
32 needs to be in and be ready, OK
33  Joe come on
34  Ollie right guys let’s go!
35  All [two three Brum!]

Match day. On the opponents’ bench several female supporters, including a woman with a
pushchair and a toddler taking it all in. Around four of their players are speaking Polish to one
another, occasionally on the court and also during the timeouts. But overall English is the team
language, despite the majority of what appear to be Polish nationals. The players on both sides
go through their warm-up drills – first hitting the ball between them on their side of the net, then
serving the ball into the opponents’ space. The warm-up drill has a meaning beyond practising
the serve. It is rhythmic, and it is ritualistic. It is a show of strength, a show of competence. The
players fire missiles from their home camp into enemy territory. Missiles are returned with equal
force. The activity is not necessary for the game – no points are available for a sweetly-timed
serve. Nothing is saved by a full-length dive. But the absence of the ritual would be marked. The
warm-up is not merely to coax into life ageing muscles on a cold winter’s night (although it is
this to some extent). It also makes a statement to the opposition: we are here, and we are ready.
No less a ritual than the Haka of the All Blacks rugby team, the players’ performance indicates
that they are ready to enter a state of play. The banter and laughter of the practice court has been
replaced by a determined seriousness as the teams size each other up and ready themselves for competition.

Individuals know how to do the appropriate rituals in a corporeal sense. They learn and enact those rituals with others who possess the same embodied understanding and who are predisposed to engage in that particular form of ritual, so as to move from one particular corporeal and interactional state of being to another (Hockey 2009: 79). The ritual of serving the ball fiercely over the net into the opponents’ space functions to propel the players through a transformation in which they are prepared for competition. The ritual performance indicates that they are ready.

The referee’s whistle blows, and the players and coaches all interpret the signal to stop their ritual performance of readiness to compete, and engage in another ritual: the pre-match team-talk from the coach. Joe tells the players to come around. He gives a mundane job to Alex (sort out all the balls), one of the youngest and newest players in the group. He would not give this kind of task to a senior player. One of the match officials interrupts Joe, asking him to sign the team sheet. This is a minor bureaucratic task, but at the same time it is an important job: until the team sheet is signed off the game cannot go ahead. Joe quietly delegates the task to Graham, one of the most senior and experienced players in the group. Graham goes without a word and completes the registration. Joe is telling the players in which position they will start the match. Felix at one, Lambert at two, Graham at three, Zac four, Markus five, Nils six. Ollie comes close to Joe, and peers at the yellow Post-it note in Joe’s hand. Sorry I didn’t, er… Joe gives him the news that he has not been selected in the starting line-up. He turns on his heel and collects his training top from his bag, then smartly returns to the group huddle. The unity of the team must be protected, and if Ollie is disappointed he does not allow it to disrupt the coach’s talk.

Joe again asks the players to come closer: come around come around come around. They move into a tighter huddle, some stretching limbs as they do so. The players pay attention to the coach as a congregation pays attention to the priest. Nils stretches his hamstrings. Felix rotates his hips. Something must be said, it is part of the ritual. There is little expectation that new knowledge will be gained. The players attend passively, seriously, and without protest. Fran pats young Alex firmly on the back, encouraging, aligning. No clowning around now. Track their attackers, don’t rush, recycle the ball, use two and three to score. The liturgy demands no response, but Joe requests one: are you ready? Into the space created by the coach comes Graham. Firmer and fiercer than Joe, his preaching is more fire and brimstone than gentle persuasion. Those who commit sin will suffer the pain of Hell’s furnace. Defend your line, you have to be there, don’t be lazy, be quicker, sharpen it up, be ready. OK? Graham claps his hands. They must do better than last week. They must atone for their sins. Let’s go, says the coach, and in unison the players lean away as each places one hand on the hands of the others, such that they are all connected at the centre, the spokes of a wheel. As they make contact the players shout their ritual slogan: Two, three, BRUM! On BRUM! they quickly release themselves from their contact, and are ready for the game. They have ritually entered a state of play.

Spartans take an early lead. When the Birmingham team makes a comeback in the third set, the Spartans players become quieter. There is a hierarchy of referees. The senior position requires standing on a kind of platform at the net. He is the match referee and is the final arbiter of decisions. There is controversy at one point as Joe calls a timeout when he has already had his
allocated number. At first the second referee says it is his fault. However, after play commences and between points, the Spartans captain approaches the match referee, which prompts the Birmingham captain to immediately join him there. Spartans want Birmingham to be given a yellow card and the referees seem to agree, as ultimately Joe should not have called an additional timeout. A young woman on the sidelines whispers that she hates it when teams are so extra about the rules. The rules are the rules, and they must not be transgressed. The match cannot proceed if the agreed rules are no longer agreed. The rules of the game are normally not negotiable. They serve as the regulatory apparatus to which all players and coaches must conform if the game is to proceed. The rules of the game have been handed down by previous generations of players. They are sacrosanct. They have the status of ritual: they enable people to come together in collective action which has no practical purpose other than that very coming together in collective action. Transgression of the rules carries a penalty. Normally the penalty is not negotiable. Here we are suddenly in the realms of ambiguity. The rules are subject to debate and interpretation. We move from the ritual of ceremony to the debating chamber. The judge is unsure what penalty shall be imposed.

Ilde briefly explains what diving means and asks Nils to come forward to do a demonstration. Ilde throws the ball to him, Nils dives by throwing himself onto the floor, his hands pressed firmly on the floor by the sides of his body so the body is pushed upwards and slides along the floor. His legs curl up with his feet high in the air. Nils is good at diving and the team members all laugh at his performance and clap as he holds the position with a cheeky smile on his face. The players stand in a queue and take turns to practise the dive and slide. This is quite tricky and not very easy to do, but everyone is eager to try the new trick. Ilde feeds the ball to the players who are standing in a long queue. Chin up, remember, hands pressed against the floor. Ilde shows them, sliding herself onto the floor, lying with her hands pressed against both sides of her body. Chin up, feet up! She pats her legs and feet and points up her chin while talking to her team. First get the ball, then slide. The players look excited to have another go at diving, which isn’t as straightforward as the other drills. Always land like a fish, yea yea! Nils stops to give tips to his mates. But it hurts if I land on my side, says Jackson, and rubs his side with his hand.

In about fifteen minutes they move on to the next training routine. Ilde and Joe do a demonstration first for the whole team to watch. They are standing face to face, with both knees bent, arms straight, upper body tipping forward to meet the ball with their wrists and forearms close together. After the demonstration the players stand in two lines, face to face, passing the ball to each other below the net with their upper bodies bent low, leaning forward. Then they start catching and throwing balls above the net, changing partners and moving down the line as they finish the drill with their current partner. Joe joins in with one group and demonstrates a technique. The players look quite athletic, except perhaps the captain, Markus, who on the other hand is bigger and stronger than the others.

Joe serves, Markus receives, Tom sets, but it is too low for Felix to spike, and they both grin. Markus fails to get down to the ball when receiving a serve and rolls over on his back, causing some mirth among the other players. Some of the players say ooooh! when Felix is just unable to tip a ball over the net. Someone applauds a player on his own team. Joe says fourteen. The players are beginning to get more into match mode now – competitive. Joe sets up another activity, changing players’ positions. He has brought the trolley of balls on court. Spikers,
everyone near the net, blocking. When I slap the ball you can go back, OK. This seems to be about moving positions on court during or before a point. Guys, it’s scrappy boys, scrappy. Next point he nods and grins. Thirteen, he says. Fourteen. Front players swop. Tom asks Markus to go to the front of the court. A new player blocks a spike from Markus, and Markus makes a comment. They both grin. Each point is a unique event in itself, to be commented upon, admired, laughed about, even though it is not a match situation. Markus puts a spike away and says to Zac, his opponent, what did I say? The young player gestures with one hand, as if the spike was unstoppable. Joe says OK swop again, the front two players. He gestures with his hands to clarify his point. Nils takes over his role of putting the ball into play. Tom seems to have found himself on the wrong side of the net, and he returns sheepishly. Markus laughs. Dan tips the ball gently over Markus’ attempted block, and Markus shakes his head at him with a smile.

Each point is a self-contained event, but related to hundreds or thousands of other events which are both similar and different. The players stop for a drink and Nils seems to say something like he is not going to play. Markus tries to cajole him. Markus asks whether Nils is in Sunday’s team. He says yes. Markus says that makes more sense. Nils still appears to be playing, but wanders around looking for somewhere to plug in his phone charger. He finds somewhere.

OK guys are we ready? Markus and the new player are chatting and laughing together. Joe puts the players into groups on each side of the net. John play in position two, Felix in four. Joe tells the players to spike between the blockers. He demonstrates with his arms. As often happens, the first attempt to do what Joe asks doesn’t quite work. Markus spikes, and Tom and Felix both laugh. John smashes a spike, and Felix comments ooh. Felix wins a point, and Tom, next to him says I don’t know, see me, I don’t know. Felix smashes another, and Tom jokes with him, holding up fingers of each hand. Mine, shouts Tom, and produces a poor shot, which makes him laugh at himself. Joe tells Nils to hit between the two blockers. Cross court? Asks Nils. Not cross court, between these two, pointing to Markus and Felix. A spike gets between Felix and John. Felix tousles John’s hair. After the next point John and Felix slap hands, grinning at each other. John is on his knees and Nils offers a hand to help him up. Nils beats Markus with a spike at the net, Markus eyeballs him with a big smile, Nils gives him a backhand low five. John smashes, Tom applauds with a smile. After the next point Tom and Markus stretch to make a low five.

Sometimes evaluation is explicit from Joe: good Markus, well done John. Joe says everyone have drink. Someone says finished? Joe says no we’ve still got half an hour. Some of the players keep practising rather than having a drink. Tom and Felix smash balls at the net. Joe says when you’re ready. Joe says the new guy’s name – Maczek. The next activity starts. Six on one side of the court. You can only score by hitting the ball. Tom says John, you’re receiving. He retreats. Joe says Lambert are you playing? Lambert is out of position on the three-player team. John smashes, Felix says ooh! The six man team wins a point. Markus claps. John misses a ball, Tom says aaah! Markus asks rotation? Yea rotation. They discuss this at some length. Markus is three, Tom is six, so he should be there. Tom joins in the discussion, as does Felix. Markus spikes and says ow! He flexes his arm in pain. Tom sets for Markus and it is too low so he shouts ohhh mid-point. But they win the point and Markus shouts yea! with his right arm raised in triumph. This is only a six versus three practice. The triumph is both mock and real. Nils misses the ball and holds up his hand in apology. Felix puts away a smash, Tom shouts ahh! Markus claps. The serve clips the top of the net, putting both Markus and Tom on the wrong foot, and Tom raises his hand with a grin. Markus laughs too. Markus seems to notice the intensity drop, and shouts,
clapping his hands repeatedly. Nils misses a return, John says ooh! claps, and Markus gives Nils a low five, stretching to do so. Zac hits a spike into the net, says ahh! and smiles ruefully.

Maczek serves, throwing the ball very high, generating a lot of speed. After the ball whistles past him Markus says throw it higher, pointing upwards with his finger and smiling. Joe misses a return and shakes his head, grinning. Zac takes over the serving. He juggles the ball with his head as he waits for the six players to organise their positions. When they do so Markus laughs and slaps Nils on the shoulder. After Maczek lets a ball past his defence he rehearses his block. John wins with a smash and he gets cheers, claps, and low fives from his team mates. Felix wins a smash and the whole team give each other low fives. Joe is still trying to organise Nils and Markus at the back of the court. John wins another smash and Felix claps, Tom gives him a low five. This time John’s smash goes into the net and he rehearses the shot. After the next point is won Markus cheers and says yeeaaa! The three-man team wins a point and Maczek claps three times in appreciation. Nils wins a point and Markus says nice, and claps. Joe helps Nils to his feet. Right rotate. This is done with less discussion than before. The six win a point and several claps. Joe lets a ball go over his head, thinking it’s out. It isn’t and Zac raises both arms in celebration. Felix wins a smash and his team roars approval, led by Markus. Tom gives him an emphatic low five. Markus puts one in the net, Felix says whooo! Markus says something and Felix and Tom laugh. Nils misses a return. Markus says come on, and Felix says come on, laughs, and claps his hands. The six lose a point, Tom turns to his team mates, Felix gives him a walking low five. Come on, says Markus, and claps again. There are only a couple of minutes to go. Last one says Joe. John smashes, and the team give each other low fives. Finish guys.

This typical end-of-session activity is shot through with embodied interaction. Evaluation, enthusiasm, commitment, humour, commentary, apology, checking, compliments, clarification, self-chastisement, affection, pain, encouragement, embarrassment, teaching, irony, celebration, all are evident in the embodied communicative repertoire in play. All of this speaks of involvement. Players applaud each other in compliment and praise. They cheer and clap in celebration. They grin ruefully and sheepishly, and also in apology. They smile in recognition of a clever move, and laugh at their own and others’ clownish movements. They gesture with a shrug to indicate their helplessness to prevent temporary defeat, they give each other high fives in celebration, and low fives of encouragement. They slap each other on the back, they help each other up off the floor, they tousle each others’ hair in friendly affection. They flex their limbs to deal with the pain of physical exercise. They shout constantly, their oohs and aahs, their cheers and yeas, all commentary on the embodied action, and embodied action themselves. When they make a mistake they shake their heads, laugh at their error, hold up a contrite hand, rehearse the action again, saving face, showing that despite the present failure they are able to perform the action competently. One of the old hands, Markus, makes an ironic comment to a new player who throws the ball unusually high when serving. Joe periodically checks the players’ involvement, and that they are ready to go. Almost all of the players almost always are. But we also see, for a moment at least, one of the players less involved in the main activity, and looking instead for somewhere to charge his mobile phone. This does not disrupt the rhythm of the session, however. The phone is plugged in, and the game continues.

Language is part of a multimodal ensemble (Jewitt 2009a). Representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which have the potential to contribute to meaning.
Multimodal research provides tools for analyzing and describing the full repertoire of meaning-making resources which people use to communicate and represent. Language is only one mode nestled among a multimodal ensemble of modes. Second, multimodality assumes that all modes have, like language, been shaped through their cultural, historical, and social uses to realise social functions. Third, the interaction between modes is significant for meaning-making. People orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes. Fourth, the meaning of signs fashioned from multimodal semiotic resources are, like speech, social. The concept of semiotic resources offers a starting-point for thinking about semiotic systems and the role of the sign maker in the process of making meaning.

Three theoretical approaches to multimodal analysis: social semiotic multimodality; multimodal discourse analysis; and multimodal interactional analysis (Jewitt 2009b). The first of these is based on systemic functional grammar, and argues for the need to socially situate language and to understand texts as complex signs. A primary focus of social semiotic multimodality is on mapping how modal resources are used by people in a given community / social context, in other words sign-making as a social process. A primary analytical focus of a social semiotic focus is how meaning potentials are selected and orchestrated by people in particular contexts to realise specific social meaning. Multimodal discourse analysis is also founded on systemic functional grammar, but emphasises the metafunctional systems underlying semiotic resources. Multimodal discourse analysis is concerned with the development of focused systemic grammars which map the semiotic resources available. The focus is on exploring the system in use and the social contexts that it is embedded in. Thus the multimodal phenomenon, and not the sign-maker, is the focus of this perspective on multimodality. Multimodal interactional analysis explores how the physical and material aspects of language as it is situated in the world give meaning to people’s actions. This way of looking has emerged from the ethnographic study of everyday identity construction, in which identity is constructed on multiple levels in multiple modes. The focus is on the action taken by a social actor with or through multimodal mediational means. Multimodal interactional analysis looks at how a variety of modes are brought into and constitutive of social interaction, identities and relations, with a particular interest in habitus and embodiment. Here multimodality expands the focus of interaction, moving away from interaction as merely linguistic to explore how people employ gesture, gaze, posture, movement, space and objects to mediate interaction in a given context. The focus is on the rules and regularities that come about while social actors use systems of representation. It is fatal to the research endeavor to simply transport linguistic analysis over into the analysis of other modes. The question of modality must necessarily be developed within each mode (Scollon and Scollon 2009: 180). Furthermore, the separation of modes is of course artificial. To refer to multimodality is not to suggest that communicative repertoires are constituted as sets of separate modes which function alongside each other. Instead multimodality is a shorthand with which to acknowledge that communication is embodied, and that inasmuch as modes may be identifiable, they are integral rather than separate.

The way people have access to each other’s bodies is subject to complex organization in both space and time within moment-to-moment interaction (Goodwin 2009). This access may be characterized as the proximity of each other’s bodies, the (reciprocal) gaze upon the body, the position of the body, movement of the head, and the gestural movement of the hands and arms.
In many cases different stages of analysis and presentation will require multiple transcriptions. There is a recursive interplay between analysis and methods of description (Goodwin 2001:161).

Proxemics refers to the distance that individuals take up with respect to others and relevant objects (Norris 2004). Proxemics is the study of the ways in which individuals arrange and utilize their space. The space we take up in relation to another person indicates a social relationship. Proxemic behaviour is culturally conditioned, and gives insight into the kind of social interaction that is going on. It is possible to interpret the level of intimacy and/or formality of an interaction by investigating the distance that participants take up to one another. Understanding of individuals’ proxemics behaviour can be gained through ethnographic observation. Once we understand the proxemic behaviour of the individuals and/or groups that we are studying, we find that the study of proxemics gives us a great deal of insight into their interactions, because proxemic behaviour is binding on all concerned. Proxemics is concerned with space along three dimensions: the intimate, the social, and the public (Stenglin 2009).

Intimate space refers to the bubble of space around a person, social spaces are those in which people engage in everyday social interactions with acquaintances and strangers, while public spaces are those concerned with more impersonal interactions. Also related to proxemics is Lefebvre’s notion of the production of space, which explores space within the context of the social sphere (1991).

Posture refers to the ways in which participants position their bodies in a given interaction.

Posture includes the form of the body position, and the postural direction that an individual takes up towards others. Body position is not only formed by the limbs, but is also formed by bending/straightening of the torso, and by lifting/lowering of the head. Thus, the complete body of an individual has to be considered in order to analyse the degree of any open or closed positions (Norris 2004: 24). Generally, we can surmise that the directional positioning of the body towards others indicates an engagement – however remote – in an interaction, while the positioning of the body away from others communicates a disengagement – again, however remote – in a given interaction.

Gestures are verbal. That is, the whole of gesture and speech can be encompassed in a unified conception, and to separate them is an artificial process (McNeill 1985: 351). Gesture is visible action used as an utterance or part of an utterance, where ‘utterance’ refers to an intentional communicative move (Kendon 2004). Gesture is often integrated with speech in such a way that it must be taken into account in any full understanding of communicative encounters. It is not useful to separate gestures from the language with which they co-occur (Norris 2004). Communicative practice is more than voice. Gesture is often integrated with speech in such a way that it must be taken into account in any full understanding of communicative encounters. Gesture and movement are heavily implicated in the production of space, just as they are shaped by the material and social organization of space (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009). We can distinguish between: ‘iconic gestures’, which possess a pictorial content, often mimicking what is conveyed verbally; ‘metaphoric gestures’, which possess a pictorial content, but present an abstract idea or category; ‘deictic gestures’, which point to objects or people or to abstract ideas or people; and ‘beat gestures’, which appear to beat musical time. We can distinguish between deictic gestures and ‘representational gestures’, in which the latter can co-occur with, alternate with, or replace speech, and are associated with overcoming a difficulty in linguistic expression,
for example due to distance, or to a noisy environment. These include iconic and metaphoric gestures. Gesture is a signalling behaviour which is always situated and communicatively significant (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009: 255). Gestures are localized not only in space but also in time (Goodwin 2009:35). Gestures are often tied to the duration of talk. Language often plays a crucial part in the performance of gestures, and without language it is difficult to recognize whether a person is performing an iconic or a metaphoric gesture. However, when looking at deictic gestures we can often understand the message by viewing the gesture alone. Much analysis of gestures has focused on what they ‘mean’. However, gestures are not simply symbolic, but physical actions with their own distinct properties – they occur at particular moments in time and at specific points in space. As a type of action gesture can tie together the behaviour of separate individuals, and make relevant a form of recipient response that is quite different socially from that which is given some other types of body movement. Moreover gestures emerge within recognizable interactive activities, and as such are socially organised. Indeed gesture provides a resource for negotiating features of the moment-to-moment organization of the interactive processes within which it emerges. Gesture is not simply a way to display meaning, but an activity with specific temporal, spatial, and social properties that participants not only recognise but actively use in the organization of their interaction.

We also consider head movement, gaze, and layout. Head movement is the study of the ways individuals position their heads. These include rotational (shaking the head), lateral (tilting the head to the side), and sagittal (nodding) movements (Norris 2004: 33). Gaze refers to the organization, direction, and intensity of looking. Gaze may play a subordinate role in interaction when people are conversing and are not engaged in other activities, but may play a superordinate role when people are simultaneously engaged in other activities. Layout refers to the setting and the objects found within it. In multimodal interaction analysis the focus is on how the participants utilize the layout and communicate through this mode. The precisely delimited layout of the volleyball court determines the way in which players move and interact within that space.

Ensembles of gestures are made up, like language, of symbols, signs, and signals (Lefebvre 1974/1991). Symbols embody their own meaning; signs refer from a signifier to what is signified; signals elicit an immediate or deferred action which may be aggressive, affective and so on. Lambert mentions codes. Signs, or we call them codes. Generally speaking we will agree some signs which are only known by your team. For example, two means long ball, or high ball. I can’t shout it out in a game otherwise the opposition will know. I will give some signs with my hands to tell my team how and where I will set the ball for them. In training for example we will agree with some signs, for example I will set a ball at such a height and we call it two. If higher it’s three. And we all know what the se numbers mean. So the setter has a very important role in a game. He will have to decide the trend in the court and set the ball based on the current situation at each game. Otherwise the team’s attack could easily be spotted and blocked by the opposition.

Gestures are linked on the basis of oppositions and on the basis of ritualised rules. Such codes are specific to a particular society. Indeed they stipulate an affiliation to that society. To belong to a given society is to know and use its codes for politeness, courtesy, affection, parley, negotiation. Gestural systems embody ideology and bind it to practice. Through gestures, ideology escapes from pure abstraction and performs actions. Gestural systems connect
representations of space with representational spaces. Representation of space is the dominant space in any society: conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, social engineers. Conceptions of space tend towards a system of verbal signs. Representational space is space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users. This is the dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. It tends towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991). With their liturgical gestures, for instance, priests evoke the divine gestures which created the universe by mimicking them in a consecrated space. Gestures are also closely bound up with the objects which fill space – with furniture, clothing, tools, games. All of which testifies to the complexity of the gestural realm. Organised gestures, which is to say ritualised and codified gestures, are not simply performed in a physical space, in the space of bodies. Bodies themselves generate spaces, and are produced by and for their gestures. The linking of gestures corresponds to the articulation and linking of well-defined spatial segments, segments which repeat, but whose repetition gives rise to novelty. Many social spaces are given rhythm by the gestures which are produced within them, and which produce them (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991: 216).

Joe speaks to Felix, pointing to the space in front of Markus. He seems to want him to make Markus run, by lobbing short balls as well as fierce smashes. Ollie shouts out in frustration after making an error. He is very passionate about his sport. The young French player smashes a ball straight at the face of another. He grimaces and Markus has a quick word with him. As he explains he does a good deal of pointing. Two attackers, three defenders. Graham coaches his side of the net. You’re too deep, keep the ball alive. Ollie also offers advice to one of the players. Markus claps in his group. The senior players are Markus, Graham, Ollie, and Nils, who describes himself as the oldest player now. Joe is speaking to the group with the young French player. He is demonstrating something which involves standing with his face to the wall. The wall appears to represent the net, as he is demonstrating the block. Again this is rather balletic. I can’t hear, but it seems that he is saying one, two, jump, with one two each corresponding to a step. That group is now left to practise blocking against the wall. Everyone else is doing a spike – dig –set – spike activity. A ball goes astray and Markus really strains to reach it. There’s no real reason for him to do so, but he seems to be leading by example. Stop stop says Joe, erm can you grab a drink? He introduces the next activity. Sorry, seven on one side eight on the other side. This is the blocking practice they did last week, involving leaping at the net to touch fingers with another player, taking two steps to the left or right and repeating in a four. After the first go there is some chatter and laughter, before they settle into the routine. Everything is in the body. Showing, telling, straining, grimacing, clapping, shouting, pointing, touching, laughing.

During face-to-face interaction participants are present to each other as living physical bodies in a particular situation (Goodwin 1986/2009: 29). Gesture is a typical but often unnoticed feature of communicative repertoire. Sometimes gesture is essential to the speech it accompanies, and at other times it is less essential. In some instances gesture is made particularly salient, as in the market-place when a customer does not speak, but points to a display of pigs’ hearts and holds up six fingers (Blackledge et. al. 2015). Furthermore, gesture may be more than a simply visual phenomenon (Goodwin 1986/2009). A handclap, for example, contributes sound to the
communicative interaction. In other instances a gesture may be extended to attract attention through touch. Gesture plays a key role in the complex organization in both space and time of the access participants have to each others’ bodies as visible phenomena within moment-to-moment interaction. Gesture may be used to organize, dismantle, and re-assemble the spatial configuration of an interaction. It provides a resource for negotiating features of the moment-by-moment organisation of the interactive processes within which it emerges. Gesture is not simply a way to display meaning but an activity with distinctive temporal, spatial, and social properties that participants not only recognise but actively use in the organization of their interaction (Goodwin 1986/2009: 47).

Joe is talking to another player, a tall, young man. Joe has his palms raised to demonstrate the ‘set’. He asks the players to have a go, and then stops them again to make another point. Joe stops the activity: just two things, OK. He explains his technical points. Your position should be like this. He demonstrates a position which shows them how to prepare to receive the smash, knees bent, arms together, fists together.

Joe changes some of the players’ positions. Ollie: So where shall we serve, across? He makes a diagonal gesture with his arm. Cross court. Stop stop stop! You need only two servers there, otherwise you’ll be too slow. He goes on to explain further.

Low fives between Graham and Tom. At the end of one point the whole team low five one another.

Gesture is a normative resource in the embodied communicative repertoire of the volleyball court. It is unmarked, and not separate from speech. Indeed the vocal is at times as much gesture as speech, as sounds emanate from the players, cries of pain and anguish, triumph and ecstasy, mortification and humiliation. All are resources in the translanguaging repertoire.

Included in embodied communication is mutual eye-to-eye activity, or what we might more simply term eye contact, which plays a special role in the communication life of the community, ritually establishing an avowed openness to verbal statements and a rightfully heightened mutual relevance of acts (Goffman 1963: 92). Sustained eye contact in an interaction allows the participants to monitor one another’s mutual perceivings. In contexts where interactants’ mutual perceivings are at question, sustained eye contact offers scope for evaluation. We cannot assume that all people are equally comfortable with sustained eye contact, however. For some people such behaviour may be construed as inappropriate or even offensive. When Sam finishes the blocking drill he grabs the ball, running across court to join the queue for the next drill. Nils stops him with one hand, Don’t walk in the middle of the court. He looks into Sam’s eyes in mock-intimidation, then laughs. Sam looks back at him and also laughs, giving a light punch on Nils’ shoulder. The threat is a mock threat. It refers to the potential for tension. But all is well, and the exchange ends in laughter. Similarly, when Markus, from Germany, and Lambert, from Taiwan, are practising blocking drill on opposite sides of the net, Markus eyeballs his partner, points his finger and says with a mock-sinister laugh, hehe, I’m watching you. Lambert laughs, perhaps a little nervously.
Everything is embodied, including clowning around and banter between the players. Laughter is dialogic. Laughter is also embodied. At times, too, the subject of humour is embodied. Players horse around, pretending to fight, mock-wrestling, playing out physical struggle. Fran and Graham are standing behind each other. Fran says something and Graham knee-kicks his bottom but soon realises that two women might look at them so they both glance at us and laugh with embarrassment.

There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space. Each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. The body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies (Lefebvre 1974/1991:170).

6. Ritual

Habitual and mundane ritual practices can move participants through a series of subjective and intersubjective states, whilst simultaneously sustaining particular social orders of experience. Each ritualised practice is laden with significance, which when combined with other practices produces a sequence of events, full of import specific to the social world in question (Hockey 2009). Particular social orders of experience are built and maintained by mundane ritual practices. Mundane, routine, individual and collective ritual practices constitute the foundation of social activity, for they sustain minor and major social processes which underpin the general order of social life. Volleyball is no exception, as its order is also based on mundane ritual practices.

The game is an activity of utmost seriousness which is played out within a consecrated spot mentally and physically, with strict rules of its own. Since it begins and ends within a limited time, it demands order, and a slight deviation from it will collapse the play space. The rules of play are internalized and transmitted through repetition and practice, which in turn becomes the inner structure of the play itself. The play space expands beyond its limited existence in time and space to form a self-organizing community with tradition of its own (Kolb and Kolb 2010). From an anthropological perspective, the play space is defined as a liminal zone (Turner, 1977), a sacred transitional phase observed in the primitive societies, where cultural and communal practices take place free from the normative social structure.

Interaction Ritual

Interwoven with the rhythms of the game are its rituals. These include embodied practices which conform to the rules of the game. They also include interaction rituals which oil the wheels of exchange. Interaction ritual actions are evasive or redressive, and are aimed at the restoration or preservation of normal relations (Rampton 2014). Interaction ritual offers a defence against the vulnerabilities of the ordinary world, and is oriented to the maintenance and recovery of stability.
Ritual is a perfunctory, conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value or its stand-in (Goffman 1971: 62). We can distinguish between ‘positive ritual’ and ‘negative ritual’. Positive ritual includes small acts of kindness or generosity, or at least civility, which speak of the performer’s good will. Such an act provides a sign of an individual’s involvement in and connection to another, and offers the recipient the opportunity to affirm the relationship (however fleeting it may be) through a show of gratitude, and both moves, taken together, form a little ceremony – a ‘supportive interchange’ (Goffman 1971: 63). Negative ritual is characterised by interdictions, avoidance, and staying away. Nevertheless, it may also lead to dialogue, particularly when the offender is required to account or apologise for an action. Such a transaction involves a ‘remedial interchange’ (Goffman 1971: 64). These two basic interchanges, the supportive and the remedial, are among the most conventionalized and perfunctory doings we engage in, and yet they are crucial to our understanding of interaction. Underneath their differences, people everywhere are the same. Thus societies must mobilise their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters, and one way of mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual (Goffman 1967: 43).

By learning how to behave in a social encounter, we maintain a kind of ritual equilibrium, and adhere to the ritual organization of social encounters.

Forms of face-to-face life are worn smooth by constant repetition on the part of participants who are heterogeneous in many ways and yet must quickly reach a working understanding (Goffman 1983). Social interaction is suffused with brief rituals one individual performs for another, attesting to civility and good will on the performer’s part and to the recipient’s possession of a small patrimony of sacredness (Goffman 1983: 63). What remains in exchanges between people are interpersonal rituals, little pieties which are worth examining. Through ‘ritual’ acts the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it. When persons are present together, many contingencies arise that could reflect discreditably on them, and when individuals come into one another’s immediate presence, territories of the self bring to the scene a vast filigree of trip wires which individuals are uniquely equipped to trip over (Goffman 1971: 106). On the volleyball court we saw interactants offering apologies and explanations, making light of problems, and appreciating efforts at reconciliation. Ritual and ceremony offer a defence against the collapse of interaction.

Ritual is a form of action which may be deployed to re-establish the flow of everyday life. Interaction ritual draws both analysts and participants into the unfolding moment, into all the pressures and promise of situated, contingent, cultural and corporeal experience where people search for some semiotic rendering of the stance in social relations they can sense and assess, but where there can be problems in the coding (Rampton 2014: 295). In analyzing communication we might ask what kinds of change, tension or uncertainty are particular types of action orienting to, how are the interactants dealing with them, and what rituals are invoked in this cause (Rampton 2006). In reviewing his own analysis of his early empirical material, Rampton proposes that in their apprehensions of social stratification and efforts to develop new solidarities from ethnolinguistic difference, it looks as though people draw on interaction ritual practices that may well be fundamental to human society in general (2014: 297).

Ritual action is evident in both practice sessions and on match day. These take the form of sets of actions which follow compulsory patterns, and supportive and remedial interchange. In both
practice sessions and competitive matches with other clubs ritual moves include those in which an offender’s remedial effort takes the form of a broad gesture for anyone who cares to receive it, enabling the player to clarify the character and legitimacy of what it is he or she is about (Goffman 1971:125). Through ritual interaction the player externalizes inward feelings, and provides a gloss on his or her situation, a bodily enactment of alignment to the events at hand, a gesture in the round. A failure to return the ball to the other side of the net, therefore costing the team a precious point, may be succeeded by gestures of apology which are not directed at an individual, but are a ‘body gloss’ for the team.

Are we clear?

A regular practice session on a Friday evening. Joe explains the next drill in some elaborate detail. Interactions between people are set with trip wires. Tensions can surface, and must be stabilized, or even remedied.

1 Joe so this side if they set to position four
2 you can only er roll the ball you can’t spike it hard
3 so you can only tip or roll, you can only spike hard balls
4 through position two or middle. OK, are we clear?
5 Ollie we just play as normal
6 Joe you just play as normal four of you OK so they are not
7 going to hit hard ball if they’re gonna position four
8 but they are going to hit hard through that side and middle OK
9 and then they will have to so you will win a point by just
10 if you when you serve you win a point you win one point, if
11 they win one if they win a serve they will have to win a free
12 ball before they win one point, OK? if the free balls nobody
13 wins a point nobody gets a point OK?
14  
15 Joe one zero. Markus, can you keep the score Markus you are one,
16 Graham zero. you play up to fifteen
17 [cheering]
18 Joe two zero
19 Gra [laughs]
20 Joe er one point to that side. two one?
21 [clapping]
22 Joe actually, sorry this side can you rotate er every three
23 service, ok? three one. come on come on come on come on!
24 come on get down to defend
25 Mar [cheers]
26 Joe four one
27 John [to Dan:] you OK?
28 Joe four two
29 [clapping]
30 Joe sorry, when you win a point can you rotate (4)
Nils you’re not passing
Gra (xxx) no no you can’t receive then (xxx) opposite that’s it
Joe as he says then you go to out to hit through two OK

[clapping]
[cheering]
Joe no points
Gra setting can be either side yea
Joe nice Zac
Gra free ball
Joe come on come on. no points
[laughing cheering shouting]
Joe is this six? five or six?
Gra six
Joe six two?
Gra six two? you’re just shouting out numbers in the middle of a serve
Joe no they they won five points, they’ve won six points you won two points
Gra yes, ok, right hehaha
Joe you can only win points by winning the serve and the free ball yea
you’ve got six people and your passing is actually quite shit
[laughter]
Gra you shout out in the middle of a serve
[clapping]
Fran (xxx) get this right
Joe good pass
Fran come on guys
Joe seven two
Fran come on! come on come on boys come on guys! the second one is important we need to win a point! (xxx)
Joe nice serve Dan

The players listen with hands on their hips, or resting on their knees, or arms folded across their chests, as Joe elaborates on the rules of the new game. If when you serve you win a point you win a point. If nobody wins a point nobody wins a point. The players wait for the circular explanation to finish, so they can resume action. Graham stands centre stage, and makes an embodied representation of the space in which the ball may be spiked, his arms held parallel to each other with a narrow space between them. The game begins. Markus serves, deploying his trademark whistle as he does so. Fran misses his return, and players on the server’s team cheer in celebration. The cheering is somewhat double-voiced. It is a minor celebration, but is reflexive and self-aware. Not fully authentic as celebration, it nevertheless contributes to the creation of a competitive environment.

Now Markus puts his spike into the net. He shakes his head, and walks quickly away from the scene of the crime. His body (his posture, his walk, his slight shake of the head, the expression on his face, then his bowed head) expresses disappointment and frustration. Embodied communication directed towards himself as much as others, but communication nevertheless.
Another point is won by the opposition, with Markus out of reach of the ball and insufficiently nimble to put in a dive on this occasion. Graham gives a high-pitched laugh, and Ollie and Lambert offer each other low fives of quiet celebration. Competition is warming up. Markus defeats Graham with the serve, and Felix claps loud encouragement. Joe adds new rules as the game progresses. Can you rotate every three service OK. Zac loses a point at the net and folds in on himself with despair. Ollie smiles ruefully, his team having lost a point, and low-fives Lambert. Markus roars his approval, raising one arm to the sky and high-fiving Felix in celebration. Zac’s response to losing the point is remedial action, offering a kind of apology to his team, an apology, a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended role (Goffman 1971: 113). Zac’s embodied remark tells of his determination to do well, and his disappointment in himself on this occasion. Almost every ‘point’ in volleyball is accompanied by a communicative response: an apology, an account, a celebration, a compliment, appreciation, or other examples of supportive and remedial interchange. These are not verbal interactions, or embodied interactions. Instead they rely on the repertoire of the players, which include all their available resources. There is no separation of verbal and non-verbal, or embodied and non-embodied communicative acts. They are integral to each other, rely on each other, and are complementary. John attempts to play the ball as it rebounds off the net, and in doing so knocks it into the face of his team-mate Dan. Dan turns away, stung for a moment, and checks with his hand that he has not shed blood. John follows him. Are you OK? Dan nods, and the obligatory low-five seals the remedial interaction ritual. There is no distinction here between verbal interaction ritual and other embodied interaction ritual. They are one and the same.

Markus’s team loses a point as John dives full length but fails to reach the ball. Markus claps loudly and repeatedly to encourage his team. Joe reminds Graham’s team: when you win a point can you rotate. He laughs, implying that they should know this. They do so, but Nils finds himself in the wrong position. Graham pushes him firmly towards the net. This kind of physicality is permitted. Certain categories of people are permitted to touch other persons as a means of conveying friendly support or familiarity (Goffman 1967). In some contexts, on the other hand, touching is not permitted, and rights of apartness and inviolability hold sway. Here Graham is permitted to touch Nils, and permits himself to touch Nils, because they are both old hands. They have played together many times in the past, and this familiarity permits intimacy. Touching the younger, newer players may have to be earned over time, through relationships built on shared activity. In their different ways Graham and Joe tell Nils that he is in the wrong position, and Graham gestures with a wave of his hand, again moving Nils towards the net. Graham’s repertoire in this brief interaction involves touch, speech, and gesture. But even to introduce such a typology is liable to artificially separate the integrated communicative repertoire.

Markus’s team loses another point and he leans back slightly in consternation, fists clenched at his sides. But there is no time to dwell on disappointment, as another free ball is in play. Now Markus’s team wins a point and he punches the air in delight, cheering loudly as he does so. He low fives John to complete his celebration. Markus organises his team by using his arm and the index finger of one hand to remind the players to rotate. He directs his signs first towards Felix, giving an elaborate sequence of gestures, in several stages, to communicate what he might easily have spoken, and then towards John, to move him closer to the net. At the same time Graham,
the opposing captain, instructs one of his players to move forward, deploying both speech and
gesture in an integrated way. Graham’s team loses a point. Fran expresses his disappointment at failing to retrieve the ball before it bounced on his side of the net, throwing back his head and walking off towards the back of the court. He receives a sympathetic hand slap of identificatory sympathy (Goffman 1971) from Graham. Meanwhile Ollie raises an arm to acknowledge his own role in the team’s failure to win the point. His apology is a remedial interaction ritual, but it seems to go unrewarded, as his team-mates do not respond. At the same time Lambert holds the flat palm of his hand above his head with closed fingers, and shakes the hand back and forth. This looks like a version of the referee’s signal that there was an ‘attack hit fault’, and appears to be directed towards Joe, who is acting as de facto referee. The next serve rebounds from Ollie’s arm to the ceiling, where it lodges and refuses to come down. The incident causes great hilarity, comment, and pointing towards where the ball remains. The unusual event brings the teams together, for this moment no longer in opposition, but united in laughter.

Joe keeps the game competitive by regularly announcing the score. Six two. Graham reacts to the score by stopping play, aiming a kick at the ball instead of making a usual service return. Six two? You’re just shouting out numbers in the middle of a serve! His voice is loud and combative. Joe steps onto the court to engage with Graham. Joe confirms the score. They’ve won six points you won two points. Yes OK right says Graham. His words accept the decision of the referee (who is officially the coach and not actually the referee), but his voice does not. Graham follows yes OK right with a high-pitched laugh which makes it clear that he disagrees. He must accept the authority of the referee, and the authority of the coach, as the congregation must accept the authority of the priest, and the people accept the authority of the king or queen. Joe continues to argue his case, first explaining the scoring system again, then suggesting that Graham’s team’s numerical advantage ought to make things easy. He then resorts to abuse: your passing is actually quite shit. Joe does all this with a lightness of touch, and a smiling voice, which allows him to fend off real conflict. His resort to the profane indicates that he will brook no more insubordination. However, Graham continues to press his point: you shout out in the middle of a serve! Markus claps his hands loudly to refocus the players on the game. Fran shouts loudly to encourage his team. Come on guys! We need to win a point! The king has been challenged but not deposed. It was more noise and smoke than action, and he survives to rule another day.

Markus, are you all right? Joe nods his head towards Markus, who has stopped training and has withdrawn himself to the end of the court for a rest. Markus do you need help? I’m all right at the moment. In contemporary society rituals performed to stand-ins for supernatural entities are everywhere in decay, as are extensive ceremonial agendas involving long strings of obligatory rites. What remains are brief rituals one individual performs for and to another, attesting to civility, and good will on the performer’s part and to the recipient’s possession of a small patrimony of sacredness (Goffman 1971: 63). A small offering, a supportive ritual.

Do you walk here or do you cycle? Joe moves towards the new player, Lambert, who is from Taiwan, and chats to him. No I walk. Lambert tells Joe which student accommodation block he’s in. A small ceremony performed as a supportive interchange. A small courtesy, an inclusive ritual. Rituals are forms of interaction which follow set patterns and convey meanings attached to the forms themselves rather than the particular individualized contents (Bouissac 2014). Greeting formulas, including enquiring after someone’s health, shaking hands, kissing on the cheek (one,
two, or three?), all have ritual status. A ritual, in the proper sense of the term, carries a religious meaning. It is a prescribed performance involving action, gesture, objects, and words, whose purpose is to interact with supernatural entities (Bouissac 2014: 23). What counts as ritual is the formal accomplishment of stereotypical actions as exactly as possible as traditions prescribe them. As the role of religious practice in societies has largely diminished, secular practices have become ritualised. A need to break away from the social grid, and to transcend individual rationality has led to the development of ritualised collective practices characterized by repetition. One such set of practices is sport.

Ollie hits a smash into the net and laughs loudly, turning to Joe. He hits another into the net and holds his hands to his head. Low fives between Ollie and Thomas. Dennis hits a serve into the net and says oh no! One of his own team says don’t worry about it. Joe: you have to set the ball high, gesturing with his hands. Felix jumps in the air and hits the ball with an excellent spike. Joe claps his hands in praise and encouragement. Nice spike, nice spike! Zac makes a mistake in setting the ball and hides his face in his hands in embarrassment, although no-one else seems to have noticed it. Ollie spikes the ball into the net, but his team-mates still cheer him on. Yes, Ollie, take the ball! Joe shouts and Ollie jumps and spikes but misses again. He holds his hands in front of his lips in mortification, eyes closed in embarrassment, as if not wanting to see his failure once again.

In each of these cases the player causing the offence (a minor offence to be sure, of performing a mistimed shot in a practice session) feels the need to perform a relatively self-conscious gesture in order to give pointed evidence that they recognize their error, that the error was not typical or representative of their competence (or their character), and that in the usual order of things they would have completed the action successfully. By such an action the player ritually atones for his sin, in a body gloss, or behavioral gloss (Goffman 1971). In some cases the atonement is acknowledged, the sin forgiven, and the remedial interchange, the ritual dialogue, complete. In other cases the remedy is not taken up, deemed to be unnecessary rather than inadequate, as the play moves on. Body gloss is a means by which the individual can try to free himself from what otherwise would be undesirable characterological implications of his actions.

Remedial interaction may be required not only when a player commits the offence of mistiming the ball, but also when an actual or potential offence is caused to another player. A new player hits the ball at Felix by accident and apologises by holding his hand up and patting Felix on the shoulder. Old hand Markus complains that Dan, one of the new players, collides with him during a blocking drill, and says be careful, don’t do that. Dan asks if Markus is all right, and remedies the offence with a low five hand slap. The offence can also be of the mock variety. Nils misses a ball and falls onto the floor, letting out a loud sigh. The receiver behind him catches the ball as it bounces up and bangs it an inch away from Nils’ body as he lies on the floor, pretending to aim to hit him. They both laugh and Joe shakes his head in disapproval - be gentle!

Joe sets up another activity, serving from the back of the court. Twenty, fifteen balls, then change. Guys, he says, more loudly, fifteen balls then change! Felix serves his fifteen balls and says ‘serve’ before each one, holding his arm aloft. He serves one into the net and Markus says it doesn’t count. Felix replies with a grin, Oh yes it does. Joe organises the players in positions to receive. The new player serves now. Joe receives, Tom sets, Markus spikes. Alex is also serving,
alternating with Felix. Tom gives a poor set and shouts in frustration, before grinning and saying sorry about that. Joe counts how many serves have gone. Felix roars after missing a ball. The session is becoming a little livelier. Fran arrives, and is greeted by a cheer. He says a convivial hello to Rachel, and to me. He doesn’t look like he is ready to play volleyball. He says he needs to go and he will come back at some point, he doesn’t know when. So sorry guys, and he leaves, speaking to Rachel on the way out.

Nils is serving to Felix and says seven, eight, nine, ten, counting each serve. They swap at fifteen. Tom and Lambert sit this one out, doing a static exercise with a ball. Joe has a word with Felix, saying they need to practise digging. Sam serves now, and Joe watches, before offering him advice. Actually swap servers, he says. Joe sits on the chair near me, not for the first time. He seems a little less involved this week, perhaps because there are fewer players. Low fives between Sam and Felix as they swap positions. Joe speaks to Felix, giving him tips on his serve. They joke together about his service action, oh good serve, says Joe, yes, good serve. Nils is serving, and shouts ‘aye’ before each serve. How many? he says. Felix says three more. Graham shouts loudly at himself after his serve hits the net, come on, focus! His next serve also hits the net and he punishes himself with ten press-ups. Joe coaches Sam to serve moving forwards. He then lies on his back, arms behind his head. Nils shouts ‘out’. To the next serve he makes a gorilla-like noise as it goes into the net. Sam puts another into the net. Nils repeats his gorilla cry. They stop for a drink. Nils says give me the ball! and he hammers it over the net to the far end of the gym. Joe takes out a basket of balls. So, now we split the court into two sides OK, so we have Tom with Ollie and Graham and Lambert. He explains how he is dividing the court, and asks Ollie to demonstrate. So Ollie will be serving two balls. Graham will receive one. Graham says it never works, it never works. Joe explains to Ollie that he needs to serve the second ball straight after the first. Graham tells Tom off fiercely for his set, my pass wasn’t good but that was terrible. Graham shouts high high high high! but doesn’t make the smash. He says shit! and looks at the floor where he stumbled. Tom says that was too high, and he has a conversation with Felix, his spiker, which seems both serious and sympathetic.

Ritual interaction on the volleyball court is by no means limited to remedial interchange. It is at least as often the case that positive rites affirm and support relationships within the team. When a ritual offering occurs, when people provide a sign of involvement in and connectedness to each other, such supportive acts create and maintain positive relations. Within the realm of supportive acts are not only greetings and farewells, compliments, congratulations and other courtesies. On the volleyball court supportive ritual extends to low fives and other ritual means of bodily contact for mutual support, shouts and exclamations, and, not least, rhythmic clapping and chanting. When a player performs a good spike all his team-mates come to clap his hand, and cheer loudly.

The game as ritual

Religious ritual often takes place in a specified, delimited space, a sacred space separated from the profane world, a temple set apart for specific practices. Where we no longer require temples we create other places to worship (football stadia) and practice (volleyball courts). Another constant formal property of rituals is that ritual actions include the performance of sets of actions
which follow compulsory patterns. The actions must be performed, and the rules followed, for the ritual to be effective. The practices are meant to be repeated regularly without great variation. A further characteristic of rituals is that they are transformative. They perform a change of status in their participants. They unfold in time through stages. Their temporal structure is as marked as their spatial template with respect to the ordinary open-ended duration of individual and social life. In summary, ritual can be summarised as: (1) delimitation of a social space; (2) periodicity; (3) stereotypy; (4) repetitiveness; (5) transformative impact on the group (Bouissac 2014). In this sense volleyball is not only suffused with Goffmanian interaction ritual. It is endowed with features of rituals – the construction of a special place and time; the formality of its unfolding, point by point; the emotional involvement it provokes in participants (including spectators); and its transformative power.

A match against Tamworth. While the players are warming up the referee scrutinizes the players. He has in his hand sheets of paper which appear to be the registration forms for each player, complete with passport-size photographs. He is comparing the photographs with the players, to check that the teams are only playing registered players. Joe gathers the players together in a huddle. There are eleven or twelve Birmingham players, whereas there appear to be a bare six Tamworth players. One of the Tamworth players wears a shirt while practising which says Polska on the back. I wonder whether there is a strong Polish presence in their team. Poland are the leading men’s volleyball team in the world. The referee is now on a raised platform at the net. He blows his whistle to call the players into position to begin the match. As the Tamworth player prepares to serve four members of his team clap loudly and rhythmically in unison. Whistles, chants, rhythmic clapping, and cries of success and disappointment delivered by teams in unity. The noise is huge. Every sport has its own noise and volleyball is a revelation. The home team’s players are quiet compared to the opposition, whose clapping as their server prepares is intimidating and in its aggression feels like a war chant. There is also a kind of posturing at the net as the clapping continues. A man stands in a state of readiness which is highly symbolic as arms are held wide open at shoulder height. He does not join in with the clapping. This again is a ritual act, repeated throughout the match. His arms are not raised in order to prepare him to better hit the ball – he drops his arms as soon as the ball is served. The posturing may be designed to confuse the opposition about future placement of the ball. Or perhaps it is a symbolic posture. The Tamworth team wins the first point as Ollie puts a spike into the net. As soon as the ball goes into the net all six Tamworth players converge on each other in the middle of the court and engage in a co-ordinated, celebratory embrace. As they do so they in chorus emit a loud and well-rehearsed chant: ‘AHH-HOO!’. This ritual tight embrace and choral chant is repeated seventy-four times during the evening. The rhythmic clapping and choral chanting goes on as Tamworth quickly gain the upper hand. Birmingham are slow out of the blocks in the first set of five. The referee on his podium keeps order with a smile on his face. Almost all his communications are through his whistle, which seems to remain in his mouth throughout, and hand / arm signals. Whenever a point is completed the players of each side give each other fives, often going out of their way to make sure that they have touched hands with each of the other players. This ritual is as much performed when a team has lost a point (and even when the point has been lost with, say, a serve into the net) as when a team has won a point.

Joe comments. Some teams they have special chanting, hehehe, and some teams they have special actions that they hehe they shout, yea, you see the other team, if I think, if in terms of
skills I think our team has got better skills than that of the other team, but the other team, they sort of, for every point they win, they come together and celebrate, but for our team, if you look at them, they are just sort of, hum, very quiet, because we haven’t played that long and they haven’t known each other that well as well. You know what Fran’s not in this match, he’s in some other match, if he was in the match he would be the person to get them together to do these things. This particular match we haven’t got our hands on it. Put pressure on these three, it will distract them, make your hearts beat faster, make your heads dizzy, so put pressure on the receiving unit. This is quite a lot, especially when they play the second team. The other team, technically they are not very strong, but they are very vocal, every time they win they would celebrate, especially when they are in their home court, every time they play a home game their performance is at least twenty, thirty per cent better than they should have been, so they won medals when they played home games and their performance is a lot better at a home situation because they have like people trying to make a lot of noise and they have used it, Japanese teams used it, the other teams not used it, they have a lot, but they have put a lot of pressure on the other teams. and usually if you see, if elsewhere we win the point we don’t put effort in that, we don’t celebrate as much, but when you see, let’s say if we score by spiking the ball down, we would get together, you would see it later, but I think it doesn’t matter what, as long as they win a point, they would celebrate, yea. Now you see that at our side we got the three players at the front, if you watch Graham, he’s got some eh, he’s got something in his body language, you see we celebrate when we win a point, but if they serve and we win, we don’t celebrate much.

Secular ritual

Before the game begins players must be registered, and must be wearing the correct shirt number. A team must not have two players with the same shirt number. This can lead to last-minute amendments.

1 Joe so you two swop
2 Felix so then I (xxx)
3 Joe no no you are five
4 Ollie usually it starts from four change the backs but
5 Joe changing today yea. [to players:] um, every, touch,
6 Graham as long as Kieran knows that
7 Joe yes every touch counts, guys. every touch counts guys
8 Graham [to referee:] they swopped shirts
9 Joe you’re number seventeen now you are seventeen not seventy-one
10 Markus no was it a seven before?
11 Joe Graham is number seven, he’s they swopped shirts
12 Ollie we made it as complicated as possible
13 Joe two three Brum!
14 John hahahaha
15 Joe sorry there are two players swopped shirts do you know about that?
16 Referee (xxx)
17 Joe because they em
18 Referee is that the one?
19 Joe yes so seventeen and number eleven swopped number
Referee: right hold on
Official: so that was right as it was
Referee: that was right as it was
Joe: so seventeen and s- no no seventeen and eleven swapped number,
Referee: I can switch them back
Joe: no it’s these two swapped yea, Graham’s still seven so it’s fine
Official: so eleven
Joe: eleven is seventeen, seven is still seven, and seventeen is eleven hehe
complicated! [to players:] sorry passers can we have one two three to pass? John, John, you are not passing you are on court but not passing.

The administration of the bureaucratic requirements of the game cause Joe to take his eye off the usual pre-match rituals. The team talk is aborted as the coach returns to the officials’ desk to explain the complexities of changes to the players’ shirt numbers. He is forced to prioritise. If the shirt numbers are not as they should be punitive consequences will follow. He has little choice but to leave the players to their own devices and sort out the administrative disorder. He is barely able to focus on the ritual collective action which is designed to bring the players into a unified and engaged state of involvement, into a state of play. In his absence the ritual chant with which the team presents itself as a team collapses. We might take a closer look at the brief ritual.

Two, three, Brum!

The coach has gathered the players together for the ritual pre-match team talk. However, he is required to deal with bureaucratic matters, and it is to these matters that he has given his focus. When the match is about to begin the prescribed ritual, as we will see at the end of the later team talk, is one in which the players make physical contact together, and engage in a mutual chant of ‘Two three Brum!’. On this occasion, however, the chant is quiet and disjointed, and Joe rushes away to the officials’ desk almost before the ritual release of hands is complete. One of the players, John, laughs broadly, in a metacomment on the inadequacy of the ritual action. Having initially walked away, Graham returns to the group, and all the players place a hand towards the centre to repeat the ritual. But Joe is absent now, and the second attempt at united action is even less co-ordinated than the first. The players’ hands barely meet, and the chant is at best indistinct. Now almost all of the players laugh loudly at their ineffectual efforts, mocking themselves for their failure to produce their signature battle-cry. Ollie raises his hands and grins in a ritual gesture which acknowledges the team’s embarrassment. Remedial interaction ritual comments on ritual action. Other ritual practices which precede the start of the match are visible here, but at the individual level: Nils crosses himself and kisses his hand; Felix kisses his girl-friend.

The volleyball match is a secular ritual, and the space is replete with ritual performance. A ritual, in the proper sense of the term, carries a religious meaning. It is a prescribed performance involving action, gesture, objects, and words, whose purpose is to interact with supernatural entities. An extreme form of ritual is a human sacrifice, the stage killing of a human being by priests who perform the action according to precise rules with an assortment of props, chants, and incense. What counts as ritual is the formal accomplishment of stereotyped actions as exactly as possible as traditions prescribe them. They may or may not be accompanied by conscious meanings and emotions. They must be set apart, remain unquestioned, and require a
radical suspension of disbelief. The age of the Enlightenment has deflated the claims of rituals as ways of relating to the sacred. They have, however, proved to be resilient as if there was a ritual imperative in the human psyche, a deep need to transcend individual rationality and circumstances through relating to more general defining forces and break away, at least periodically, from the prescribed behaviours of the social world. But, in general a ritual exceeds its rational justification, even its symbolic value. It transcends the sphere of the individual (Bouissac 2014:24). The rhythmic clapping and chanting that precedes the service is resonant of the ceremony of sacrifice. It has no functional purpose, but is symbolic, creating an atmosphere of fierce intensity. It carries the seal of a transcendent order. It is repeated with almost every serve, reiterated without significant variation. The ritual clapping and chanting transforms the environment. It is more than a means of representing and constituting alignment and co-membership of the team. It creates an emotional surge that has an effect on all those present. The same can be said of the celebratory coming-together and loud expression of triumph with which the Tamworth team greets a successful point. In the sacred temple of the volleyball court ritual action is transformative.

Each ‘point’ in the match is a communicative event. Within each communicative event there are three identifiable elements: social practice before the ball is served, social practice during play, and social practice after the point is played. There are clearly overlaps between action after one point and before the next. However, in most cases the communicative action can be linked to a particular point in the play. The Tamworth players’ loud, rhythmic clapping has a feel of ritual, of ceremony. The rhythmic clapping communicates to the Birmingham players, and it also indexes a determination and intent around which the Tamworth players cohere. The clapping is for intimidation as well as for mutual encouragement and involvement. It is a powerful, emblematic practice with which to begin play. It is a ritual action which signals co-membership and alignment. During the first point there is shouting from the players. A Birmingham player shouts ‘three’ as the ball is set for the spiker. This is coded language in play. Birmingham loses the point as Ollie smashes the ball over the back line. The Tamworth players come together as a group, arms held wide. They push their chests together, wrap their arms about each other, and shout loudly together. Ollie throws his head back, then turns and marches towards the back line on his side of the court, furious with himself for his error. As he walks Ollie acknowledges his sin, holding up his left arm to signal his contrition. Four of Ollie’s team-mates move towards him and give him ‘low fives’ of support and encouragement. The ritual low fives, a repeated practice on both sides of the net throughout the match, are features which index alignment. Alignment during an interaction is contingent more on extra-linguistic cues – such as body language, gestures, and intonation – than on language itself (Rymes 2014: 4). Ollie marches quickly around the court and returns to his position. The physical manifestation of frustration and disappointment, and the embodied action of support and encouragement, act as commentary on the recent action. Arriving at co-membership is less like an exchange of information than a dance, a pas de deux in which each partner carefully negotiates with the other physically and emotionally to arrive at a shared sense of order (Rymes 2014:4).

The next point begins immediately, with no further time for preliminaries or ritual clapping. The ball is served by Tamworth, and as before a Birmingham player shouts ‘three’. The set again goes to Ollie, who this time fails to spike the ball over the net, finding himself having to use his left hand. The Tamworth players again come together for a ritual group clinch, arms around each
other, chests together, and a synchronized ahr-hoo!. This time the ritual low fives of the Birmingham team seem a little more subdued.

Again it is the turn of the visiting team to serve. The clapping ceremony takes place on this occasion. Ollie contributes to Birmingham winning the point, as the ball cannons off a Tamworth player and hits the ceiling. The Birmingham players converge in unison on the centre of their side of the court, and engage in embodied mutual congratulation and celebration. Ollie, Sam, and Nils raise their arms high and wide. Graham touches Ollie on the chest with his hands. John and Nils hold each other by the wrists in a double-handed handshake, as John produces a wide grin. Birmingham’s celebratory ceremony is rather less synchronized than that of their opponents. In preparation for the next point the Birmingham players take up their offensive positions. Ollie is at the net, and, in a deictic gesture typical of this old hand in the team, points to where Sam should take up his position beside him. Sam does as he is asked, and moves into place facing the net. He raises his arms high, in a posture that seems to be both a ritual and a practical action.

After a fiercely contested point, Nils wins it for Birmingham with a heavy spike. The Birmingham players again converge on the centre of the court to engage in ritual congratulation. One or two of them cheer, ray! They touch hands and pat each other on shoulders and bottoms in a relatively uncoordinated state of involvement. Joe applauds from the sidelines. Nils and Sam get ready for the next point with their arms raised above their heads, facing the net. Joe takes a step onto court, leans forward, and says to Sam, Sam, track the middle. Sam glances over his shoulder towards Joe, without lowering his arms. The serve, from Graham, hits the net. The Tamworth players on the other side of the net raise their arms, cheer, and converge in the same co-ordinated and synchronized way as before, emitting a loud ahh-hoo! as they do so. There is no protocol of politeness or sympathy for the unfortunate server here: their aim is to win, and they celebrate every point, however earned. There is no low-fiving for Graham on the Birmingham side of the net either. Instead the players prepare for the next point.

The Tamworth players again engage in involvement activity, clapping loudly and rhythmically. Graham engages in organisational behaviour, pointing first towards the other side of the net, then to a position on the floor beside him, and then gesturing to one of his team-mates to move into position. Graham was frequently a de facto captain on court, always willing to support the less experienced players. On this occasion, however, his enthusiasm to ensure that everyone was in position may have been born of his frustration at his own serving error. Now the Tamworth players accompany their clapping with a ritual, rhythmic chant, ey – ey – ey – ey, which is synchronized with the clapping rhythm – one chant for every two claps. The serve comes over the net, and following a fierce spike Tamworth wins the point. The opposition players cheer and repeat their ritual celebration. In an action that more or less mirrors his behaviour before the serve, Graham points and gestures. He directs his gaze towards Muna, pointing to him and then towards the floor of the court, apparently in admonition. Graham then shrugs, shoulders hunched, holding open and outward the palms of his hands, as if to point out that given the situation he was put in there was nothing he could have done to prevent the point going to the opposition.

The Tamworth players begin ritual rhythmic clapping as they prepare for the next point. Again the clapping is accompanied by powerful chanting, which chimes with alternate claps. The whistle blows, and the clapping stops as the serve comes over the net. One of the Tamworth
players has his hands raised, facing the net. While the ball is in play there are indeterminate
shouts from Birmingham players. After a robust rally, in which Graham pulls off a remarkable
return, Tamworth wins the point. Graham immediately raises both arms and walks forward
towards his team-mates at the net. He then directs his gaze towards the umpire and shrugs
ostentatiously, points to the opposition, and then redirects his gaze towards Sam, the nearest
player to him, and points to his own temple. The latter gesture seems to indicate (at least) that
Graham is critical of Sam’s thought processes in the most recent point.

The Tamworth players repeat their ritual clapping and chanting. The one at the centre of the net
holds his hands wide and aloft. Ollie speaks to his opponent through the net. Muna puts a hand
on Ollie’s shoulder. Ollie and his opponent shake hands under the net, and Ollie resumes his
previous position on the right. Graham again gestures to John to move forward into the centre of
the court. The point is won by Tamworth, and Ollie responds to the loss by moving from a
position of preparation to dig out the ball to a double-fisted representation of disappointment.
The opposition players engage in their ritual celebration as before.

Ollie shouts right guys! to his team-mates to offer encouragement. The Tamworth players again
begin rhythmic clapping and chanting. Their serve goes long and out of court, and players on
each side engage in low fives with their team-mates, walking around the space as they do so.
Graham directs his gaze to a player, Felix, who is coming on to court as substitute for John.
Graham has a determined look on his face. He says come on Felix! and points to the position at
the net where Felix is to take his place. Graham welcomes Felix to the action with an emphatic
low five, his right hand to Felix’s left. Felix is greeted by the other players with low fives. He
also low-fives John as they pass each other during the substitution. Felix takes his position at the
net beside Nils. Felix raises his hands above his head, elbows bent. Nils also has his hands
raised, with almost straight arms. At the same moment, Ollie, also positioned at the net but on
the right side, makes a sign with his right hand which is invisible to the opposition. The signal is
to Sam, who is about to serve. The sign is two fingers pointing downwards, the thumb and
remaining fingers closed. Sam’s serve goes into the net. The opposition team celebrates,
cheering, bumping chests in a huddle, and emitting a co-ordinated ah-oooh!. Graham gestures
with the fingers of one hand for John to return to the court, and points to where John should
position himself.

The Tamworth players clap in rhythm as they wait for their server to prepare himself to serve.
Graham gestures to Ollie in front of him, John behind him, and Nils to his left, organising the
players in the positions he thinks best. The serve comes in, and after a short rally Birmingham
win the point with a robust block at the net. The players celebrate by converging towards each
other and offering low fives and hand slaps. John walks to the side of the court, fixes Sam with
his gaze, and says ‘Sam’. Sam stands up from the bench where he is sitting, and gives John a low
five, preparing to substitute for him. But Joe says no, you’re staying in. Sam sits down again and
John returns to his position on court. Felix, Nils, and Muna all line up at the net with their hands
raised over their heads. Tamworth win the point, and once again there is ritual celebration. At
this point the Tamworth coach calls a time out.
As the players gather together for the coach’s time out talk, Graham and Ollie speak first, debating an issue related to positioning on the court. Joe intervenes, and finds space to make his own coaching points:

1. Joe: OK, the passing is not there we need to focus on the passing OK (xxx) at the moment all the passing you’re trying to pass too hard too close the net OK just need to relax OK and er when you’re setting all of the points we’re scoring it’s just outside outside OK try to spread your er options OK
2. Muna: I try but it’s not good pass for me
3. Joe: no so we need to work on the passing’s not there er the only the passing’s er all s-five rotations we’re passing the only rotation we won is three OK that’s it OK
4. G: let’s tighten it up a little [bit yea]
5. Joe: [this is this is this] is their weak rotation so we need to try and score as many as we can OK TWO THREE BRUM
6. All: TWO THREE BRUM!

Throughout the team talk Joe uses his hands with great expression. While Ollie and Graham debate their positions on court Joe engages in what we might call ‘hand-wringing’, folding his hands together in an action reminiscent of washing. In order to bring the local discursive activity of Ollie and Graham to a close Joe holds up the palm of each hand in a metaphoric gesture. This gesture appears to have the effect of stopping the heated discussion of the senior players, and creating a space in which Joe is able to speak to the team. Joe then rotates both hands outwards almost 180°, from a position with the fingers pointing down and the palms towards him, to a position with palms open and facing upwards towards the players. He then joins the palms of his hands, with the fingers a little spread, and shakes the hands slightly, as if to emphasise his point. He then swings his right hand and arm from right to left, up and then down across his chest, with the index finger extended. When he says you’re trying to pass too hard he moves both hands down towards his knees with almost straight arms, in an iconic gesture that to an extent mimics the action of digging a return. Joe’s next gesture is again with an extended index finger, which swings in a high arc from left to right as he says too hard too close the net. The raised finger gesture may again be partly iconic and partly metaphoric, referring to the height of the net, but inexplicitly. He completes the arc gesture with his index finger raised towards the sky. As he says just need to relax he again opens the palm of each hand and spreads the fingers wide, and turns each palm so that it is facing upwards. Joe then deploys what may be his most iconic gesture in this sequence, saying when you’re setting as he explicitly mimics the setting action in volleyball, with the heel of each hand strong, and the fingers slightly curved. As Joe finishes speaking each player places one hand on another player’s hand, so that they are again physically joined in a gesture of unity and mutual involvement. In unison (more or less) they shout ‘Two three Brum!’ and on ‘Brum’ they release their hands and head back on to court.

Birmingham start to find a way back into the match, winning the third set, and the Tamworth team becomes quieter, no longer clapping in unison. Their coach, a small man with an American accent and a stud earring, speaks sharply to one or two of his players. The fourth set is very close, going to 23-23 before Tamworth capture the final couple of points to complete the victory.
The players of each team form lines in single file and pass by each other at the net, shaking hands with symbolic respect to complete the proceedings.

In this brief exchange of twelve points at the start of the volleyball match we can see ceremonial, ritual behaviour, sets of actions which follow compulsory patterns (Bouissac 2014). The purpose of the secular ceremonial behaviour has the quality of religious ritual, reiterated periodically without significant variations, and with the capacity to transform. We also see multiple embodied interactions which constitute involvement and engagement strategies, and which constitute alignment. Furthermore, we see facial expression, head movement, and gaze which bespeak frustration, disappointment, joy, and determination.

A women’s match, in the same venue. Let’s go Birmingham let’s go! Let’s go Birmingham let’s go! The Birmingham captain starts chanting loudly with more players and supporters joining in. Birmingham are behind on the scoreboard so the team needs to shake up a bit. Two three Brum! The captain sticks out her arm, palm down for the others to put their hands on top of hers. Then they all shout and press down their hands down at the word Brum! They run back on to the court, clapping and shouting, encouraging each other. Ollie is the referee, dressed in black, whistle in mouth, standing high up at one side of the net. There is a young Chinese woman in the Birmingham team and seems to be one of the strikers. Each time the players win a point they gather in a small circle, lifting both their arms high up in the air, stopping and holding them up together for a second before all dropping them at the same time, and sending out a loud cheer. Come on! Let’s go! The captain is good at charging up her players. Two three, Brum! The players start chanting together, clapping their hands in rhythm. During the time out Joe gives tips. The Chinese player scores quite a few points. She doesn’t join the chanting with the others, only claps her hands. At the end of the match both teams, including the players who were sitting on the benches, line up in their own court, and then walk up to the referee in a neat queue, led by the captain. Then they walk along the net in a straight line, shaking hands with each player of the other team, saying thank you or congratulations to each other. Ritualistic clapping and chanting once again transforms the space. Ritual celebration is embodied, gestures made in unison, performance of sets of actions which follow compulsory patterns (Bouissac 2014:24). Ritual celebration is also embodied in its vocality. The cheer in unison is powerful, sending a message to the opposition, the spectators, and the gods. They mean business. The end of the match is marked by ritual courtesy. It is conventionalized ritual passed down from team to team, from generation to generation. This is what we do because this is the way it is done. By this small ceremony we mark the end of this spate of contact, and we do so in courtesy and civility.

7. Rhythm

Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and they hide. Much more diverse than in music, they are texts in relation to the city. Rhythms perceived from the invisible window, pierced into the wall of the façade (Lefebvre 1992/2015). Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm. Rhythm analysis has a transdisciplinary character. It gives itself the objective, amongst others, of separating as little as possible the scientific from the
poetic (Lefebvre and Régulier 1992/2015). To understand the rhythm of social life – and thus to come to elaborated comprehension of social life itself – we must open our eyes and ears to analyses beyond the sociolinguistic and sociological. We strive to ‘listen’ to a house, a street, a town, a sports centre, a volleyball court, as an audience listens to a symphony. We hear the game, and we hear the city, as multivocal, and as polyrhythmic. We start with the rhythm of the self – the heart, and respiration, at least – and attend to the rhythm of the other. We unpick cyclical rhythm from linear rhythm, consider each in itself, and restore them to each other, almost as if they had never been unravelled. We consider the use and regulation of space, and the production of social space.

Polyrhythmia is composed of diverse rhythms. The social practice of the volleyball court, whether in training or on match day, is polyrhythmic, but at the same time relatively predictable. However creative the practice routine, multiple rhythms are maintained through repetition. Eurhythmia presupposes the association of different rhythms (Lefebvre 1992 / 2015).

The relations of cyclical and linear rhythm are not simple: there is between them an antagonistic unity. They penetrate one another, but in an interminable struggle: sometimes compromise, sometimes disruption. However, there is between them an indissoluble unity: the repetitive tick-tock of the clock measures the cycle of hours and days, and vice versa. For there to be rhythm there must be repetition in a movement, but not just any repetition. For there to be rhythm there must be strong and weak times, which return in accordance with a rule or law – long and short times, recurring in a recognizable way, stops, silences, blanks, resumptions and intervals in accordance with regularity, must appear in a movement (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

Rhythm is always linked to its place, be that the heart, the fluttering of the eyelids, the movement of a street or the tempo of a waltz. This does not prevent it from being a time, an aspect of a movement or of a becoming (Lefebvre 1992/2015). The rhythm of repetition is never mere repetition. Rhythm changes, rhythms change, rhythm changes. Rhythms are present in every being, every entity, and every body, symphonically, or polyrhythmically. Rhythms are present in their space-time; in houses and buildings, towns and landscapes; in practices and relationships; in approximate becoming.

As surely as the rhythm of each new dawn, the turning of the tide, the arrival of the seasons, the celebration of festivals, the regular march to work, the annual industrial holidays, the daily news, the awakening and demise of galaxies, and as surely as the rhythm of birth and death, so the rhythm of the game is all of life. Rhythms are the music of the city (Lefebvre 1992/2015: 45). No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires more than technology: attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart. What are these rhythms we perceive from the ethnographer’s invisible window, to which we are attentive with all our senses and all our being? They are the rhythms of teaching (coaching) and learning. They are the rhythms of becoming. They are the rhythms of social relations. They are the rhythms of movement. They are the rhythms of ritual and ceremony. They are the rhythms of commentary and evaluation. They are the rhythms of the body. This polyrhythmia is evident in repeated observations written as field notes, audio-recordings of speech, video-recordings of movement, interviews with players and coaches, collection of digital communications, and in photographs taken on and off court. Empirical analysis starts from the beginnings of social life (Lefebvre 1992/2015: 79). At the
heart of the game, as in every grouping, attention is focused on separating out the causes and origins of multiple noises, murmurs and clamours, by focusing on movement in space. And this is done by discerning and following rhythms.

Rhythm is not so much a feature of the action of the volleyball team as the action itself. It is the heartbeat, the practice, the rites and rituals, the social relations and the becoming. Action is repeated over and over again. There is no rhythm without repetition, without reprises, without returns; no social life without what Lefebvre (1992/2015) calls ‘measure’ – the beating out of time in cyclical and linear rhythms. Time is measured out not so much in coffee spoons as in serves, digs, sets, and spikes, in comments and shouts, in banter and laughter, in handclaps and low fives, in gesture and posture, in praise and reward, in crime and punishment. But there is no identical absolute repetition. There is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive. There is always difference. Not only does repetition not exclude differences, but it also gives birth to them (Lefebvre 1992/2015:17). Sooner or later repetition encounters the event that arrives or rather arises in relation to the sequence or series produced repetitively. In other words: difference.

We are attentive not only to words or pieces of information, but we listen to the world, and above all to ‘noises’, which are said without meaning, and to murmurs, full of meaning – and finally we listen to silences. We also watch. With notebooks, iPhones, and video-cameras in hand we look closely as the coaches and their players repeat the same actions again and again, almost identically, but not quite, not quite - in fact always differently. A theory of rhythm has empirical support from the possibility of reproducing rhythms, studying rhythms by recording them, therefore of grasping them in their diversity: slow or fast, syncopated or continuous, interfering or distinct. Recording what we see, hear, smell, and taste enables us to reflect on rhythms, which no longer vanish whenever they appear. In this way we are able to generate knowledge about the rhythm of social life.

We come into contact with rhythms of becoming. The volleyball team is one of several which constitute University of Birmingham Volleyball Club. The club is open to members from the local community. Some, like the coach and the captain, are people who have no role in the university. But some are students, and the club would probably not survive without the students. This means that each year many of the players leave the city, and new players arrive. There is a constant, repeated rhythm of loss and renewal as established players depart and new players arrive. The beginning of every academic year, and correspondingly the start of every volleyball season, offers a rhythm of becoming, as players learn the ropes at this particular club, and find their way around this particular city, and (often) this particular country. This does not apply to all the players. The trajectories and rhythms of the old hands are on a different plane and a different curve from the trajectories and rhythms of the newbies. These rhythms intersect and interplay as the players become a team, moulded by their coach.

The rhythms of the game are sometimes clearly evident. In some instances rehearsal of defensive techniques on the practice court is reminiscent of the more refined spaces of the ballet school. The next drill is a blocking drill, so we have wing blockers. Felix, do you know the step to block? Felix says yes. Demonstrate please. Felix demonstrates, and Ollie joins in. They practise blocking in pairs. You should be jumping together. They do so, in pairs and then in fours, by
turns. There is something balletic about the activity, very co-ordinated and heavily elegant, fingers meeting above the net, touching, then training shoes in unison landing on the wooden floor.

Felix, an exchange student from Germany, is partnered by Ollie, who is also German, and has been a member of the volleyball club for five years. The rhythms in play here are multiple. There are rhythms described by the movement of the players, from their balletic leaps, their fingers meeting and touching above the net, and their feet landing again, all in co-ordinated rhythm. There are also the rhythms of movement on the different scale of migration. Ollie moved from Germany to the UK for one year, but liked Birmingham and stayed to continue his studies. Felix has travelled from Germany to the UK on a one-year exchange programme. Their rhythms and trajectories, their cycles of movement and return, may be different, or may be similar. Their country of origin, and their linguistic background, unite them. Their age (Ollie is older), their relationship to Birmingham, and their trajectories, perhaps divide them.

The balletic movement of the blocking practice becomes a regular feature of the training sessions – another rhythm, as the routine is repeated each week. On occasions the delicacy of the movements required of the men cause them to laugh at themselves and each other, and to engage in playful banter as they settle into the routine. At times individuals are taken aside for further practice, as happens when Joe takes a new young player from France under his wing. Joe asks the player to face the wall at the back of the hall. Joe demonstrates the same steps practised by Felix and Ollie, with the same rhythmic, dance-like steps. One-two-jump, one-two-jump. Each number corresponds to a step, just as if Joe were rehearsing a Broadway musical show. Blocking practice is fundamental to the routines and rhythms of the game. Whether without a ball in play, or in practice blocking a fiercely hit spike, or on match day, blocking is a significant feature of rhythm and movement. The players have to time jumping in pairs and then in fours. It is like a dance. It goes wrong quite a lot though. Men touch fingers with one another. Markus finds it difficult to get off the ground. Graham calls out how was that a block? Good natured, but a telling off none the less. Blocking is on several occasions the site of teasing humour. There is an occasional awkwardness as the players perform the elegant, rhythmic ballet. To start with, three pairs of players are lined up along the net, jumping up and blocking at the same time; then the middle pair move down to join one of the end pair either at the right or the left, then jump up and block in a four; new pairs of players take up vacancies and the drill continues. It is not easy to figure out the order of rotation and it seems the players are sometimes confused themselves. They laugh at each other as often one guy from a pair will go in the wrong direction, leaving his partner heading for the opposite direction alone so the block as a four can’t deliver, and the three of them have to stop and look at the odd one, laughing loudly. Joe makes the coaching point that blocking is about timing. He tells the players that they have to work on their timing to become more effective blockers. For timing we might read rhythm, the measure of time. Wherever there is rhythm, there is measure, that is, law, calculated and expected obligation, a project (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

The aesthetics of the players’ rhythmic movement is frequently in evidence. When the ball is set high in the air at the net the spiker jumps and makes a dummy spike, while another runs to jump and smash the ball, both of them jumping and landing at the same time, with a swift and beautiful cover for each other. A clever technique to confuse the opposition, and standard at
almost any level of volleyball, but to our untrained eyes beautiful in their rhythm. Whenever we look and listen there is rhythm. Drills are characterized by repetition. Players practise digging in pairs, lining up across the net, one feeding balls while the other stoops to run under the net to be on the same side of the court as the feeder. The digger runs back to the side of the court where he started, and repeats the same movement. The players swap positions after every fifteen balls. Repetition, repetition, repetition. Practise a skill (serve, dig, set, spike, block) often enough and frequently enough and finally you will never miss. Practice makes perfect. But repetition is never repetition. Before the birth of volleyball Heraclitus knew that you can’t step twice into the same river. No movement is the same as the last, nor is it identical to the next. Serve, dig, set, spike, block. The same rhythm but always difference. Rhythms imply repetitions and can be defined as movements and differences within repetition. Difference, like sameness, has its rhythm.

We know that a rhythm is slow or lively only in relation to other rhythms. This is the case even though each rhythm has its own and specific measure: speed, frequency, consistency. Spontaneously, each of us has our preferences, references, frequencies. Each must appreciate rhythms by referring them to oneself, one’s heart or breathing, but also to one’s hours of work, of rest, of waking and of sleep. On the volleyball court we encounter the corporeal rhythm of each player and each coach. In practice the warm-up routine, the repeated action, the taking of turns, the leaps and falls, the synchronization and disharmony, the banter and laughter, all are rhythmic. We record the rhythm of the game – the regularity of the serve, the return, the set, the spike, the response by the other team, the block, and on and on. In matches we note the repeated whistle of the referee, the ‘time out’ calls by the coaches, the rituals of celebration and reward, the shouts of the spectators, the echo of the ball, the turning of the scoreboard, the smiles and scowls of the players. All this is polyrhythmic, different measures and beats co-existing with each other, overlapping, intertwined, and complex.

Rhythm

Here the same blocking drill is being practised. Before the players begin Joe gives the players instruction in what he wants. He focuses particularly on two of the new players, Zac and Dan.

1 Joe two wing blockers and then queue in the middle, can you two pair up
2 so that you two can work together
3 Fran yes, yes sir
4 Joe ok yea eh, so if you can set up yourself, please. so if you two start off
5 the net first. So both of you start in the middle first. so when you ok
6 mm hm hm Fran can you go to there
7 Fran yes
8 Joe Markus that side keep behind these two. OK, when these two are
9 sorry everybody else you just go one side or the other side
10 when these two are at the net can you go to one side come back
11 to the middle go to the other side, so you two have to do double, ok?
12 Fran ha-ha!
13 Graham haha you need practice
14 Joe so first of all well Zak you pick which side you want to go to
15 remember the footwork is one two jump and come back to the middle
16 and do that way ok? oh sorry are you clear what you are doing? yea ok
Markus: you know which side?

Joe: that side first so you block the middle first block in the middle first one
two block and go back to the middle, ready go and go back to the
middle that side, and queue at the back oh sorry sorry and replace

John, here and then

Markus: (xxx)

Graham: (xxx) no no only those two. listen to the instructions old man!

Joe: listen to the instructions!

Graham: um Zac when you go back to the middle take a break before you go
because he need to work on the footwork he’s sort of tripping

Graham: ohh the outside didn’t jump hahaha

Joe: come on

Fran: raaay! listen to the instructions hahaha

Joe: you’re all right you know when you go to that side you’re fine but
when you go to the this side we normally turn this way right foot

Joe: going first so turn yea turn and then right left

Graham: are you two gonna learn?

Joe: hold on guys! ayyyyyyy!

Graham: you are not doing it. you just don’t do it

Fran: I practise!

Joe: just watch eh the side blocker’s foot when you jump you don’t want to

Joe: jump on his foot ok. yep that’s great Dan. ok stop stop this time can

Joe: you go this side first back from that side

Markus: come on guys

Graham: none of them jump together you know that do you?

Joe: uh-hum

Graham: they just run out here and jump whenever they feel like it watch, see?

Fran: I do! I DO!

Graham: you have to go on the outside (xxxx)

Joe: no look at them! no look at the four of them! watch this!

Graham: see?

Joe: that side is, it’s only this side, that side is because he’s not familiar

Markus: Dan be careful, don’t do that

Dan: are you all right?

Graham: they’re all over the place all (xxx) timings

Joe: eh Fran it will be the last one now last one

Graham: I know you have to wait for me (xxx) you see?

Joe: perfect!

Graham: because you’ve been talking to them.

Joe: no it wasn’t look at this one it’s gapped

Graham: see, see? hahaha every time no one’s jumped hahahaaaaa

Joe: right OK

Graham: wait for the outside blocker basically before you jump

Joe: so OK, if you can get a um
To enter into a society or group is to accept values, like learning a trade by following the right channels, bending oneself to its ways. Humans break themselves in by learning how to hold themselves in the new environment. This is a process based on repetition. One breaks in another human being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement (Lefebvre 1992/2015). As Joe instructs the new players he makes extravagant deictic gestures with his hands and arms, pointing to the positions on court to which the players must move. As he does so he tells Zac and Dan light-heartedly that because they are starting in the middle of the court they will have to do double. One of the other players says haa ha! in a stylized, ironic voice which mimics (recontextualises) the voice of Nelson Muntz, a character from The Simpsons. Other players laugh at the banter. Graham tells the new players you have to practice. Dan and Zac give each other a high five. Having finished giving instructions to Dan and Zac, Joe retreats to the side of the court. However, he does not appear confident that they have understood him, and returns to the centre, adding to his instructions. Joe moves to the side of the court. Zac makes a slight shrug with his arms, and Joe notices and again takes a step towards Dan and Zac, saying oh sorry are you clear what you are doing? yea? OK. At this point one of the players says to Dan and Zac, do you know which side?, and before they can answer Joe repeats his instructions, this time remaining at the side of the court and performing explicit, iconic gestures which model how he wants the players to perform. They will mimic him and become him. People make gestures; they gesticulate. Legs twitch. Gestures are sometimes made with arms, hands, fingers, the head; sometimes with hips and legs. Each segment of the body has its rhythm. Gestures cannot be attributed to nature. They are acquired, are learned (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

Finally Joe initiates the activity, saying ready, go, clapping his hands together on ‘go’. Even before the activity begins there is rhythm in the instruction, as Joe three times explains what he wants. There is also rhythm in Joe’s speech, as he both repeats phrases and instructions, and aligns his spoken instructions with his gestures. When he says one two jump! he makes a small jump before saying ‘jump’. The combination of speech and gesture has the effect of laying out the space of action and the figures of movement. Moreover, it is a means of creating the rhythm of the piece. If everything is in rhythm it can proceed. Once we discern relations of force in social relations and relations of alliance, we perceive their link with rhythm (Lefebvre 1992/2015).

Joe offers instructions as the first attempt at the exercise runs through, saying back to the middle, and then back here. As the players come to a standstill some of the senior players engage in banter with each other. Markus asks a question and Graham says ‘no just those two, listen to the instructions old man!’ and Fran immediately repeats (part of) Graham’s mock-offensive directive, ‘listen to the instructions’. In their mock-abusive imperative Graham and Fran recontextualise Markus’ own complaint to one of the other players, issued two weeks earlier (Listen to the instructions! page 38). Anything said may be recalled and subsequently used against you. Nothing is forgotten. Graham looks at the video camera with a wide grin. This is only banter, and no offence will be taken. Joe goes on court to have a quiet word with Zac. At this point Graham fails to jump together with Fran, John, and Lambert at the appropriate
moment. Graham makes an evaluative roar, and says ‘the outside leads the jump!’, focusing his gaze on Lambert. Graham laughs loudly at the error, and shouts something across the net to Fran.

At more or less the same time the other experienced player in the group, Ollie, finds himself in the wrong position at the net. When he realises this he retreats, walking backwards and almost colliding with Fran behind him. One of the other players sees Ollie’s mistake and cheers ironically. Fran says loudly and deliberately to Ollie, ‘listen to the instructions’, for the second time recontextualising the words of Graham. With each iteration the directive adds new layers of irony, as double voiced discourse becomes a regular player on the practice court. Fran’s comment prompts Ollie to turn round with a big grin on his face, and the pair engage in physical banter, with ritual mock-shoving from Ollie and loud bursts of laughter from Fran. Irony is the order of discourse here, exemplified in the voice of Nelson Muntz, in the mockery of ‘old man’ Markus, in the ironic cheering of Ollie’s misplaced positioning, and in the mock fighting. In the course of the teasing, banter and humour, ritual and rhythm bring structure and order to apparent chaos, with repeated, ritual mockery, exemplified in the thrice-repeated ‘listen to the instructions’. Always the same but always different, rhythms imply repetitions and can be defined as movements and differences within repetition (Lefebvre 1992/2015). By such means the team reproduces itself, in a sense always the same – always serve-dig-set-spike – but always different, always accommodating the new. Through humour, irony, and rhythm the team becomes a team, renewing and reproducing itself.

Dan wanders out of position at the net and John takes his arm and leads him back into the correct place. The activity only runs smoothly if everyone moves into the right position at the right time. In order to effect this the players help each other out, working collectively and collaboratively for the good of everyone. The collective endeavour requires that rhythm is maintained. Now Joe speaks quietly to Dan and Zac, giving them coaching tips about footwork at the net, showing them with movements of his body and telling them in words what he wants them to do. Again his repertoire is characterized by rhythm as he deploys what could easily be the language of dance, ‘and then you turn, and then right-left’, as he does so turning his hips and his trunk, and making dancing steps with his feet. His speech is rhythmic, matching the syncopated contours of his bodily movement. The activity continues rhythmically, each leap, touch, fall, landing, sideways step, leap again, and so on, both producing and produced by rhythm. The activity is hypnotic. It is purposeful, and has a functional role in practising the block technique required in volleyball. At the same time it is akin to art, a dance which is aesthetic as well as practical. But as in the first rehearsals of a new musical theatre show, the steps are not perfect, the rhythm occasionally breaks. Here the rhythm is disrupted when Dan and Zac find themselves in the same position as Lambert and John. Dan and Zac grin sheepishly and stop. Joe halts the activity, shouting hold on guys! and giving a loud ironic cheer, yaaaaay! One of the senior players adds a high-pitched whoop, also ironic in its celebration. The ironic teasing of errors keeps the players at their task. Markus speaks to Dan quietly, and Dan says I don’t know what happened. Graham says something to Dan and Zac, like play the game then, let’s go. Joe gestures to them to resume the practice, and they are off again.

The practice resumes in the same way, and again Graham misses his timing and fails to get off the ground. Rhythm is everything in this activity, and Graham is not synchronized with Lambert and John. As he walks away from the net he fixes them with his gaze and says loudly ‘are you...
two gonna learn?’. Although not the coach of this team, Graham is an award-winning coach of many years’ experience, and a dominant character in the practice session. Lambert and John, new to the club and newly arrived in the UK, make no audible response to the criticism. Lambert turns his head towards Graham and smiles sheepishly. When the rhythmic cycle repeats, and their turn comes round again, Graham, Fran, Lambert and John jump in unison. Graham appears to nod approvingly to Lambert, and laughs loudly. Lambert makes a gesture towards Graham, attempting a low five or a pat on the backside. The gesture does not quite achieve either, but it is significant in the social relations between Lambert and Graham. The rhythm of repetition allows failure to transform into success, and the mocking laughter of reproach to transform into the laughter of appreciation. Joe says that’s great Dan. Joe comes back onto court, stops the players, and tells them to change direction. Graham says to Joe none of them jump together, you know that don’t you, they just run out here and jump when they feel like it. As he is talking to Joe he misses his moment to jump again and says watch - see, as if his own missed jump were evidence of others’ failings. Fran says to Graham what are you doing? I do! Joe counters Graham, defending the players, saying no look at them, look at the four of them, watch this. They watch four of the players jump together. Graham again says ‘see’, but Joe argues with him, saying it’s only one side that is not good, because Dan is not familiar with the drill. Graham continues to argue his point loudly from the other side of the net, saying something about ‘block timings’. Meanwhile Markus has collected an injury to his shoulder, colliding with Dan when they leapt together. Markus winces and rotates his shoulder, saying Dan be careful, don’t do that. Dan asks Markus if he is all right and gives him a low five of sympathy and apology. The gesture is a negative interaction ritual, making good again the relationship when it is threatened with instability. The gesture is cultural: it is recognised on the volleyball court. Linked to other gestures of a similar type which are performed normatively here but not elsewhere, it produces and is a product of the volleyball space.

Joe says ‘last one now’. Fran faces Graham at the net, and there is again mock-hostile banter as Graham says (something like) now you have to wait for me. Graham makes his jumps, and immediately turns to Joe and says you see! Joe counters Graham, saying in a loud, high-pitched voice, that’s perfect, and Graham says that’s because we’ve been talking to them. He gives Joe an impish grin. Joe says no it wasn’t. For there to be rhythm there must be repetition in a movement, but not just any repetition. For there to be rhythm there must be strong and weak times, which return in accordance with a rule or law – long and short times, recurring in a recognisable way, stops, silences, blanks, resumptions and intervals in accordance with regularity, must appear in a movement (Lefebvre and Régulier 1992/2015). There is rhythm in the extended back-and-forth of Graham and Joe’s disagreement. Rhythm is not dependent on constant accord, any more than social relations require universal agreement. Joe watches another group and adds an evaluative comment of his own, look at this one, it’s gapped. Graham now misses his jump again, this time failing to synchronise his rhythm with that of Markus and Nils, two of the oldest and most experienced players. Graham laughs loudly and walks away from the net, saying in a high-pitched voice, every time!, throwing his right hand dismissively in the direction of Markus and Nils. Markus says something to Graham, and Graham says loudly, wait for the outside blocker basically, before you jump. Joe concludes this activity and moves on to another.
Rhythms in all their multiplicity interpenetrate one another. In the body and around it rhythms are forever crossing and recrossing, superimposing things themselves upon each other, always bound to space. The blocking exercise is composed of diverse rhythms; it presupposes the association of different rhythms. It is polyrhythmic, and eurhythmic. Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made by a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions. Cycles invigorate repetition by cutting through it (Lefebvre and Régulier 1992/2015). Rhythms of volleyball are cyclical and linear. Cyclical rhythms are the rhythms of beginning again: of the returning which does not oppose itself to the becoming. The dawn is always new. Concrete times have rhythms, or rather are rhythms – and all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localized time, or a temporalized space. Rhythm is always linked to its place, be that the beating of the heart, the fluttering of the eyelids, the movement of a street or the tempo of a waltz. It is an aspect of a movement or of a becoming.

The rhythm of the turning of the seasons and the arrival of new players. Markus. It’s exciting who’s coming this year, who’s new, which nationality there might be, which kind of people would come, would I keep my position or would I have to go the second level because now we have good people and I’m a bit behind now, hehehe, and that’s all right. Also you have people leaving again, new people coming so sometimes you want to see more stability in your team as obviously you can be (xxx) your opponents as usually they would train four or five times before we start a new game. They play very well with each other, you know, they know each other very well but we always have problems with the set-up of all the positions within the team because we always have new people new set-ups, and this always makes it very difficult, but also it is exciting because you always have new people and it’s nice to know more new people, I like that.

Joe speaks of the rhythm of volleyball. With football, you will see massive celebration after they score, and for basketball, I think the rhythm for basketball is so quick, after you score, you have to keep doing it, there is no pause. But for volleyball there is this pause, I think between each rally, you got the time to celebrate each, so it’s quite typical for volleyball.

A poetics of coaching

There is rhythm in Joe’s coaching style. As he watches his charges he encourages them, repeating words and phrases, creating an intonational rhythm that is sustained for relatively long stretches of activity. Dig the ball backwards, come on come on. Nice. You need to be closer to the net, yea come on, hit it hit it good nice, Fran closer, closer come on Alex! One of you need to get the ball, hit it, roll it nice come on, Alex, go and get it. Doesn’t matter, any side, if it goes off try not to touch it, come on come on, try to get the ball over the net even if you can’t hit it. Nice! Sorry, nice. Fran, you are too far away from the net, try again. You are too far away from the net. Yes, get under, under the ball, nice, nice Felix. Come on, Zak, ahh! Get under the ball, yes! Sorry, sorry, get under the ball, that’s it. Good good nice nice John, perfect! Nice! Difficult for you, hahhaa nice Zak, good play come on, come on nice strike, nice hey nice.

The coach’s commentary offers verbal reward to the players (nice John, perfect!; nice, Zac), and also picks up specific coaching points (too far away from the net; get under the ball). Most of
all, though, the rhythm and pace of Joe’s feedback generates intensity, enthusiasm, and engagement. The repetition of ‘nice’ (12 times here) structures the commentary so that it is almost staccato, as the speech of the coach constitutes rapidity of action. The meanings of the words themselves are not the most significant feature of the coach’s feedback. ‘Nice’ is a less-than-effusive term of praise. But its frequent repetition, its sound rather than its literal meaning, pushes the players to greater endeavour.

Repetition is not only a feature of Joe’s speech when he is praising, encouraging, and motivating the players. Repeated lexis also structures his sometimes elaborate explanations of practice drills. Through attention to repetition and ‘sameness’ in a text (including an oral text) we are able to make comprehensible its poetic structure (Jakobson 1960). Any noticeable reiteration of the same grammatical concept becomes an effective poetic device (Jakobson 1985: 42). Repetitions such as parallelisms, whether based on sound, or on grammatical categories, or on lexical categories, are a result of the raising of equivalence to the constitutive device of the sequence. Oral narratives are organized in terms of lines, verses, stanzas, scenes, and what one may call acts (Hymes 1981: 309). Analysis of the poetic structure of narrative will add to understanding of language itself and contribute to the many fields of inquiry for which the use of language in telling stories is a part (Hymes 2003: viii). Here we set out one of Joe’s explanations in a way similar to that of Hymesian ethnopoetics. He is telling the players the format of the next exercise.

1   Joe   So if John and Ollie you go to that side OK
2   So if you two oh god we’ve got like odd number doesn’t matter
3   So you will take three defending positions OK
4   So position five six and one

5   So you will be coming as groups of three
6   groups of three OK
7   every time you er defend a ball
8   you come out the next groups come in

9   So every time the ball
10  goes over the net you two groups switch OK

11  So what you need to do is
12  they will spike the ball to your side
13  you need to defend the ball up
14  and then dig a free ball

15  So you will only have two touches to get the ball back
16  to the other side

17  Nils  two touches
18  Joe   yea two touches OK
19  Fran  one two
Fran (xxxx)

Joe So we’ll play up to

we’ll play up to five points to start off with OK

So

Fran (xxx)

Joe no no no you two against each other

group one and group two

against each other

So Dan if you can keep the score on your side

and Fran

So you win a point

sorry five points to lose

So you lose a point if you can’t get the ball over with two touches OK

So Dan if you keep score on this side

Fran if you keep score on that side

Zak can you change with Alex

So this side you just have wing er wing players position two position four

you just want to hit the ball onto that side

yea off the net so you’re hitting a longer shot or roll shot

So they have to dive in to pick up

but er probably it will have to be if you are going to roll

roll it somewhere here

not not not in the front court OK

So every time they defend

they would dig a free ball back

So you just need to dig a free ball to Vally

and Vally would set OK ready

Ethnopoetic transcription and analysis has the potential to make visible and audible something more than is evident on first hearing. Ethnopoetics helps us to see more of what is there (Hymes 1996: 182). Repetition of words, phrases, or grammatical structures may mark lines of equivalence. An ethnopoetics approach is one in which speech is re-organised through attention to prosodic features, syntactic features, morpho-grammatical features, phonetic features, and
lexico-syntactic features (Blommaert 2006). Lines combine into larger units, verses, stanzas, scenes, and acts, and Jakobsonian equivalence is the formal principle that identifies such units. Artistic patterns in narrative such as parallel structures, rhythmic repetitions and lexical oppositions indicate a high level of formal skills and sophistication. Parallelism in poetry can apply as well to conversation (Tannen 2007: 101). Repetition is a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement, and is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy” (Tannen 2007: 101). A failure to treat speech in this way is to treat everyday discourse as the country cousin to the citified sophistication of deliberately composed prose (Collins 2009: 335). Ethnopoetic analysis attempts to unearth culturally embedded ways of speaking, materials and forms of using them, that belong to the sociolinguistic system of a group, and that have a particular place in a repertoire due to their specific form-function relationships (Blommaert 2009: 269).

The principle of equivalence implies a text that is a sequence of units. Complex artistry in the organisation of lines may be natural to users of language and flourish wherever language does (Hymes 2003: 311). Nessa Wolfson collected Native American narratives as part of a study of the historical present. Hymes reformatted one of the narratives collected by Wolfson (‘She’s a Widow’). Whereas Wolfson presented it as one block paragraph, Hymes displayed it in terms of lines, verses, stanzas, and scenes. However, Hymes later revised his analysis of Wolfson’s transcript, saying the analysis passed through many stages (Hymes 1996: 214), and that a given analysis may be one of a series of approximations. Hymes described his initial analysis as ‘dumb’ (1996: 222”). He noticed that the overriding signal of organisation of the text was initial ‘So’, outranking other features such as turns at talk in the narrative. It is perhaps not surprising that Hymes took some time to come to this analysis, since he acknowledged that neither Virginia (his collaborator Virginia Hymes) nor he had heard the tape of the narrative. Intonation contours are structures which organise lines of equivalence, and are easily recognised in speech, being marked by the intonational contours of the language (Hymes 1994). However, it is not so simple for the analyst to recognise the intonation contours of speech which he or she has not heard. The present example is of course not narrative. However, we suggest that attention to repetition, and lines of equivalence, gives insight into how speech is structured beyond narrative. Paying attention to the intonation patterns in Joe’s instructions enables us to understand not only culturally embedded ways of speaking, but also to understand something about the cultural values and ideologies of the group.

Ethnopoetic analysis enables us to view Joe’s speech generically – that is, in segmenting the speech into lines and verses we are able to see more clearly that it is not a text of a single generic type, but is structured in different but related genres. The generic chunks of text are united in a structure of repetition, or equivalence. Setting aside for a moment the intervention of the clown-fool, Joe’s pedagogic speech is structured in chunks of texts which are (i) organizational, (ii) action-oriented, and (iii) rules-oriented. At the start of his speech Joe is concerned to ensure that the players are in position to play the new game. At lines 1-8 he repeats ‘positions’ and ‘groups’ as he moves players into the appropriate spaces. Lines 9-14 are of a slightly different order, oriented both to action, and to the future. Lines 15-16 are more specifically concerned with the rules of the game (‘you will have only two touches to get the ball back’). Lines 22-23, like 31-33, are similarly instructions about the rules of the game.
Like the ‘She’s A Widow’ narrative collected by Wolfson and analysed by Hymes, Joe’s instructional text is organized through the initial ‘So’. It is also permeated with embodied actions which are integral to the speech. These are largely gestures with the arms and hands. The beginning of the speech (lines 1-2) is hesitant, as Joe attempts to count the players while at the same time beginning to organize them. However, by line 3 the contours of his speech are rhythmic, each line beginning with the initial ‘So’. With rhythm comes authority, and the status of the coach is emphatically underpinned by the repetition of the discourse marker. Each stanza, and a number of other lines within stanzas, begins with the initial ‘So’. If the first two stanzas are organisational, the following two are future-oriented, urgent, and imperative (‘what you need to do is’). They are characterized by technical terminology of volleyball (‘spike’, ‘dig’, ‘defend’), and as such act as features of alignment. The players and the coach coalesce around his ‘in-group’ talk. This is the language of their culture, and their culture is volleyball. Lines 15-16 articulate rules specific to this game. Joe constantly creates new games to motivate the players and so maintain the intensity of training sessions. In volleyball each team is permitted three touches. The constraint of allowing only two touches alters the routine and challenges the players. Joe continues to organize the players, as ever creating a competitive environment for the practice. He gives Dan and Fran tasks as score-keepers (Dan will be reprimanded later for failing to announce the score of his team). As the beginning of the action approaches (lines 37-47) Joe’s pedagogic talk becomes more action-oriented: ‘hit’, ‘dive’, ‘roll’, ‘dig’, ‘defend’, ‘set’. OK, says Joe, ready.

Half way through Joe’s organizational, action-oriented, rules-based pedagogic talk, enters the fool-clown. It may be that Fran dons the fool’s motley at this moment because he views Joe’s talk as unnecessarily complex. As Nils picks up Joe’s ‘two touches’ and repeats it as a clarification question, Joe confirms the rule, and Fran responds: ‘one, two’ (19). All the players laugh loudly. Joe, as so often when challenged by the clown-fool, takes no notice. Fran’s comment is literally directed towards Nils, who asked the clarification question, but in fact his target is Joe. There appears to be nothing intrinsically funny about Fran’s comment, but all of the players laugh loudly and look approvingly at him. Fran holds up two fingers in synchrony with his spoken ‘one two’. This is an artistic, and embodied, representation of Joe’s pedagogy. Only seconds earlier, in synchrony with his own spoken ‘two touches’, Joe had held up two fingers to emphasise the new rule (Figure 1). Fran’s intervention, hardly a joke in itself, elicits laughter because it lays out Joe’s pedagogic style and parodies it. Fran’s spoken ‘one, two’ is inseparable from his digital gesture (Figure 2). Speech and body are integral to each other. Both are key components of the joke, and of the parody. Also essential in the repertoire of the clown is comic timing. In Fran’s response to Nils he speaks on behalf of the coach, representing the words of authority, but in doing so comically undermining them and making hay with them. His joke is at the expense of all teachers, and on behalf of all students, all learners who are required to listen in silence to tedious explanations. For the briefest moment the players are able to share in liberation from the constraints and demands of paying respectful attention (Figure 3). The moment passes, the comic interlude is over, and the clown, for now, returns to his box. It will be almost half an hour before Joe, in the course of explaining another drill, says ‘I’m giving you clues – two’. The clown-fool Fran, without missing a beat, reprises the earlier joke, saying ‘Two? One, two’. Again the players laugh at the recontextualised comic intervention.
Figure 1    Joe: two touches

Figure 2    Fran: one, two

Figure 3    Laughter
Joe permits the carnivalesque hiatus, waits for it to subside, and presses on with his structured explanation, introducing the next stanza with initial ‘So’ (line 22). Joe tells the players how many points they will play initially. He insists on competition (‘against each other / group one and group two / against each other’), and continues in the next stanza to explain the scoring system. He gives responsibility to individual players (Dan and Fran) to keep the score of their team. It is fundamental to Joe’s pedagogy that practice sessions involve a competitive element. He sees that the players are more committed and engaged when there are points to be won and lost. However the stakes may seem, to the outsider at least, not to be too high, the coach understands that greater intensity comes with competition.

The intonation contours of Joe’s instructional speech reveal him as a measured and thoughtful coach. He is rarely ruffled by the players, and speaks in a consistent, even tone. Segmented into lines and verses, his talk is highly structured, with eighteen lines beginning with the initial ‘So’. The rhythm of the intonation of his voice, the rhythm of the repeated lexical item, and the rhythm of the repeated sense of ‘So’, which always leads on to the next point, establish a sense of organization, order, and respect for the rule of law (or the law of the rules). Deliberate, methodical, and thoughtful, the coach is a target for pastiche, and at times parody. The clown-fool does not miss his opportunity, but his fooling is not malicious, and the coach continues without taking the bait. The rhythm of repeated action, and the rhythm of poetic equivalence, overcome the brief flirtation with the carnivalesque.

The rhythm of play

It is match day. Joe calls a time-out. Come on guys, it’s too eh, we, we are not playing with any kind of rhythm at all. You are just sort of chasing the ball at the moment. You are not controlling the game at all, OK? we need to try to stop this scrap, you need to try to take control, in the passing and in the free ball we are not doing anything at the moment. And you know when we are defending we are not defending at the right position. Everybody is defending the tip you should just let the tip drop, ok? we need to do our own job trying to play our own rhythm out, OK? don’t let the game drag you, you need to take control of the game. Come on! The coach sees, and the players know, that without rhythm the team will not do well.

Remembered rhythms

Lambert recalls the rhythm of intensive volleyball training in Taiwan. Three times during a day we train, the morning drill, day time and the afternoon training. We normally run for 20 or 30 tracks in the morning before breakfast to warm up. Then the morning and afternoon training sessions. We could only go back to have a shower and a rest in the late afternoon, before going to the classroom for evening classes which we had missed during the day time. Most of the time we were exhausted so you can imagine.

Similarly John remembers the rhythm of volleyball training in The Philippines. Compared with here volleyball is really very much bigger than it is here or Europe. And when I was doing it as
an athlete it was like a routine for us. At least I would train three times a week and maximum maybe six if it was in season we would have games during the weekends. So we would just train that much compared to here we would just train once a week. And then the games would just be once or twice a week because I am in two teams right now. The BUCS team and the Regional One which you are observing right now. So if I were just to be in one team, for example, in just Regional One, I would just have one training day a week, and more or less one game a week. But since the game falls on Friday I just do volleyball once a week. So it’s really like compared to what I used to have, it’s really like more of a free time, hehehe. And the training itself, back in Philippine, it’s like really strict. Then we would have a conditional program, we would have a complete program, while like here I don’t think it’s really focused, or it’s not technically focused. So when we do the drills we don’t focus on the skills we focus on how things are going during the game. Here, unlike in The Philippines we do the complete, like we focus on the attack, we focus on the pass, like technique wise, we study that. And usually, back in The Philippines, after training I can’t eat anymore, hehahaha, just go to sleep sometimes, and it’s very tiring and we do that three to five times a week. And here it’s just like fun to me, I just, it’s time to relax for me, yea. And I’m OK with that because I’m getting old.

Rhythms change, and rhythm changes. Here is the rhythm of mobility, of migration, of movement across territories, of travel from The Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Iran, Spain, Germany, France; here is the rhythm of mobility from the rural to the urban, from the farm to the city. Here too is the rhythm of work and leisure, people leaving their places of business, people leaving their homes, drawn together in common pursuit. Here is the rhythm of the academic year, students here now because the cycle has turned. Here is the rhythm of the new volleyball season, another beginning, a renewal and repetition. Here is the weekly rhythm of the training session. Here is the rhythm of repeated practice. Here is the rhythm of collective activity. Here is the rhythm of the leap and fall, touch and part, step and move, turn and return. Here is the rhythm of the heart, the rhythm of respiration, of the blinking of eyes. Here is the rhythm of gesture. And here is the rhythm and poetry of speech, with all its repeated structures and signs.
8. Space

I sit on a long wooden bench beside the training court, studying the colourful lines printed on the floor of the gym, trying to figure out which is for volleyball, but decide to give up. All the lines seem to be tangled up and we don’t want to confuse ourselves before the event starts.

Space may be marked physically, as with animals’ use of smells or human groups’ use of visual or auditory indicators; alternatively it may be marked abstractly, by means of discourse, by means of signs. Space thus acquires symbolic value. Early agricultural and pastoral societies knew no such split between the practical and the symbolic. It is reasonable to ask whether one may properly speak of a production of space so long as marking and symbolization are the only way of relating to space (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991).

Does it make sense to speak of a ‘reading’ of space? It is possible to envisage a ‘reader’ who deciphers or decodes and a ‘speaker’ who expresses himself by translating his progression into a discourse. But social space can in no way be compared to a blank page upon which a specific message has been inscribed. Both natural and urban spaces are, if anything, over-inscribed: everything therein resembles a rough draft, jumbled and self-contradictory. Rather than signs, what we encounter are directions – multifarious and overlapping instructions. If there is text, inscription or writing, it is in a context of conventions, intentions and order (in the sense of social order versus disorder). That space signifies is incontestable. But what it signifies is dos and don’ts – and this brings us back to power. Power’s message is invariably confused – deliberately so. Dissimulation is necessarily part of any message from power. Thus space indeed ‘speaks’ – but it does not tell all. Space is at once result and cause, product and producer; it is also a stake, the locus of projects and actions deployed as part of specific strategies, and hence also the object of wagers on the future – wagers which are articulated, if never completely.
The empty space of the gymnasium is more than empty space. It is all potential. Without players it is not a sports hall. But it is not mere empty space; it is inscribed space. Set out in tape on the floor of the gym are lines of different colours: white, black, blue, yellow, green, red. Thus inscribed, they mark out space in which games may be played: basketball, netball, football, hockey, badminton. Some of the inscriptions are less determinate, and have to be guessed at. The origins of others are long forgotten, no longer current, beginning to fade. Some activity in the gym requires no floor markings: trampolining, table tennis. But for sports which require a prescribed floor space, the lines are essential. There will be consensus that the lines define the regulation of space. This side of the line and the ball is declared ‘in’, so the point is with us. That side of the line and the ball is declared ‘out’, and the point is against us. Agreement about which lines count is unnecessary. Before the game is played there is no question of ‘shall we use the green lines or the red lines?’ The players recognise the inscriptions that apply to their particular sport, and are attentive to them and them only, disregarding all other inscription as if it does not exist. Nor is the regulatory role of the lines discussed or negotiated. Rather, it is taken as read that the lines inscribed on the floor of the gym (that is, the lines specific to the sport at hand) are unimpeachable in defining the parameters of the game. Each time two sets of players set up each side of the net the space is produced anew. A section of the gym becomes a volleyball court (or a badminton court, netball court, and so on). The space is transformed by the activity of the players. Until the players are present and ready to play the space is not a volleyball court. Although they have not newly inscribed the lines on the floor, and although they did not themselves raise the net, it is they produce the space as a volleyball space. It is their tacit consensus, their unthinking, unspoken agreement that produces the space as a volleyball court. Ten minutes ago it was a space for badminton; in two hours it will be a space for netball. For now it is unquestionably a volleyball space. On one occasion we arrive and the gym is transformed from a trampolining space to a medical space, as a serious injury is attended by paramedics.

Figure 5 Produced space
Space commands bodies, prescribing and proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its raison d’être. The ‘reading’ of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and lived obedience.

What, then, of volleyball played without inscription? And what of volleyball played in spite of inscription. In Lima, Peru, to temporarily transform the urban landscape into a volleyball court is no easy task, and the players and spectators are constantly fighting to maintain their legitimacy in a space that is not designed for this particular use (Perez 2011). In fact, in the newer neighborhoods of Lima, called pueblos jóvenes, the dirt roads and lack of electricity make it appear as though the streets are not even designed for traffic. Inasmuch as the game is a contest for the players, competing against each other in the game to win the small bet waged, it is also a contest of territorialization, for the legitimization of their particular use of the space against other users and against the urban landscape itself. Sometimes, the players and spectators are successful in this transformation, and their play goes unquestioned and unchallenged by other users throughout the entire afternoon. For the most part, however, play is interrupted by other users. For example, if an elderly man or woman is walking by, the game stops so the ball does not accidentally knock an unsuspecting senior citizen over. For a car or bus to pass, the game must be stopped again so that the net can be raised and the vehicle can pass under. However, when many spectators are surrounding the court, a car may be unable to pass and must turn around and find another route, indicating to all a successful invasion of the street. While the intention is to only temporarily modify the built environment of the urban landscape, the street volleyball activity also has the potential to induce longer-lasting change. For instance, a hard hit ball can shatter a window. The facades of the buildings have markings on them from when a dirty ball bounced off them. In some places, the lines of the court are permanently painted onto the street. Yet, the built environment is not just to be manipulated by the players for it is also an active force with which the players and spectators are in constant negotiation. Objects common to this urban landscape not only serve to demarcate the boundaries of the game, they also play an active role during game play itself. The net is strategically strung across the street, tied to lamp-posts and knotted to buildings. Although the boundaries of the court are delineated by chalk or painted onto the street, the built environment also frames game play. The pavement, for instance, may serve as a line for the court. However, its presence also affects the game in that players must maneuver on and off it when chasing after the ball. The electrical lines canopy the space. During game play they interrupt and redirect the trajectory of the ball. The ball can accidentally end up stuck in roofs or on the other side of walls. Players must alter the angles of their hits and passes to direct balls away from a roof or electrical line. When the built environment consumes the ball, the flow of play is interrupted so someone can retrieve the ball, or it is terminated because the ball is irretrievable.

We watch the players in the sports hall practices and train. Much of the session is devoted to practising skills: blocking, digging, spiking, the routines of volleyball. The drills often pay no attention to the inscribed lines on the floor. Embodied action is the focus. There are no points to be won, so the lines on the floor are out of the game. Yet when the coach determines that there will be a competitive game for the last part of the session, the lines come back into play. The space is produced locally and in the moment. The inscribed space is also a flexible space.
A group of friends on holiday on the beach has a plastic ball, which they kick and throw among themselves. They find a ready-erected volleyball net, and divide themselves into teams, three on one side, two on the other. They play a game of volleyball. There are no lines inscribed in the sand, no markings uncontestably agreed. Yet the game goes ahead, convivial if competitive; points are scored; there is occasional light-hearted disagreement about whether the ball was ‘in’ or ‘out’. All this goes on without the marking of lines (it would be possible to draw the lines in the sand with a stick, but in this instance this does not happen). The space is produced as a volleyball space, and the inscription is in the minds of the players. It is also in the consensus of the players. The game can only be played when there is consensus about the spatial parameters and the rules of the game. The space of the game is produced locally and in the moment. It also relies on every game of volleyball that precedes it, from the Olympic final to a million other casual games on the beach. The players are able to quickly agree (without the need to agree) how the game will be played because they know how it is usually played. They know where the lines are (more or less) because they know where they usually are. Space is produced not only locally but also historically. Space is the memory of space.

But the floor inscription plays another role. Joe explains to new player John where he should position himself on the court in his role as ‘libero’:

1. John: so as a libero I should be five
2. Joe: so I would say so face position would be where the green line, the white line, somewhere around that, (xxx) a bit closer to the white line. so always at the net side, where the green line crosses the white line
3. John: yes so I will be waiting for the (xxx)
4. Joe: yea and wait for the (xxx) John, the setter is going to set up and you need to spike as it come. if it goes up straight you defend the line (xxxx) if he says reverse you defend like that
5. John: so if it’s here I defend there, and if there I defend there
6. Joe: you start here yea, if it’s red line you go there, if he spikes across the court then obviously you defend right across the court you defend it where it was yea
7. John: yea so I won’t go dig
8. Joe: no no no dig would be six, coming at six, yea? this, this is your area and anything else the team would defend it by themselves, yea? and you just defend it hard here and the line, OK? and and free ball, obviously [to Lambert:]
9. 今天的队伍不是很强， 所以他去打主二传， 你去打替补二传 <today our opponent is not very strong so he’s playing setter and you be the back-up one>
10. L: 可以可以 <sure sure>

Each team can designate one specialised player as ‘libero’. The libero is a player specialized in defensive skills: the libero must wear a contrasting jersey colour from his or her teammates and cannot block or attack the ball when it is entirely above net height. When the ball is not in play, the libero can replace any back-row player, without prior notice to the officials. In this interaction Joe explains to John where he should be positioned in the libero role. In doing so he both indicates areas of the court deictically (‘here’, ‘there’), and also makes specific reference to
‘the green line’, ‘the white line’, ‘red line’, and ‘where the green line crosses the white line’. Only the green line is in play. However, Joe deploys the white line and the red line as orientation devices to help John to locate himself in the specialist position.

Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short, every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics. In the history of space the historical and diachronic realms and the generative past are forever leaving their inscriptions upon the writing-tablet of space. The uncertain traces left by events are not only the marks on (or in) space: society in its actuality also deposits its script, the result and product of social activities. The space of the volleyball court is historically inscribed.

What we are concerned with is the long history of space, even though space is neither a ‘subject’ or an ‘object’ but rather a social reality – that is to say, a set of relations and forms. A history of space would explain the development, and hence the temporal conditions, of those realities which some geographers call ‘networks’ and which are subordinated to the frameworks of politics. The departure point for this history of space is not to be found in geographical descriptions of natural space, but rather in the study of natural rhythms, and the modification of those rhythms and their inscription in space by means of human actions. The rhythm, the repetition, of the game is a historical rhythm, which creates a historical space. The history of space begins, then, with the spatio-temporal rhythms of nature as transformed by a social practice (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991: 117).

It is possible, even normal, to decipher and decode spaces. This presupposes coding, a message, a reading and readers. The codes in question, however, still have to be named and enumerated.

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Figure 6  Historical space
There is a proper role for the decoding of space: it helps us to understand the transition from representational spaces to representations of space, showing up correspondences, analogies and a certain unity in spatial practice and in the theory of space.

Figure 7   Match day

The lines inscribed on the court have greater significance during a match played against another club than during practice sessions. The same inscriptions are differently produced depending on the local contingencies of the game. Joe explains a practice drill. The lines in play for this drill are not the lines normally in play in volleyball. Instead of the straight lines of the volleyball court, the only inscribed space that matters now is the newly-designated ‘zone’ of the black circle in the centre of the hall, which is typically an inscription of the basketball court. OK Sam, this side, um, Markus, this side. So one two three, you are passing at this side, you three are servers. Joe splits the group into two and tells them that they are going to play a game, but the rules are a bit different this time. If you pass in the black circle you get three points. Joe runs over to the middle of the court and shows the team the black circle printed on the floor underneath the net. It does not belong to volleyball, but Joe appropriates it for his creative purpose. If you pass outside the box but very close you get two points, if you pass over the side one point and if you pass badly and it’s nowhere near the box you get zero points. I will shout out the points each time you pass and you need to count your own points. The team to reach twenty five first wins. Joe doesn’t give much time for the players to raise questions about his new rules, and starts the match immediately after his explanation. Joe shouts out the scoring: one, three, two, two, three, three, nice passing. The match goes on fiercely. I got twenty five! Felix shouts, and Joe stops the match. OK, let’s swap servers, passers stay in the same place. Joe thinks for a moment before letting the game continue. Rotate, rotate! Markus asks his team-mates to move down a position. Minus one. No points. Three. Minus one. Joe shouts the scores loudly. What?! Felix isn’t happy about the score given by Joe as he thought he passed OK. Joe waves his hand in the air firmly, giving no space or time for Felix to argue about the score. Two. One. What’s the points, twenty three? Come on, come on if you get one point you win! Joe shouts at the players and stops the match once twenty five points are reached by one of the players.
The circle belongs to another sport, but now is appropriated and halved for the purposes of practising a defensive technique.

1 Joe right so you got two teams, now if you can, ah-lalalala
2 Ollie if you be the feeder, OK no actually Vally you be the feeder on this team
3 Ollie you will be the feeder on that team, OK? so you three will be the defenders
4 queue up from the base line, no no, not base line, sorry sort of, where Zac is, OK?
5 so the feeder you can either feed a hard spike, or you can feed a ball there.
6 come on, come on be quick, bloody hell, come on, COME ON OK, nice, perfect
7 OK so let’s say Zac just dig a ball and dig it to there, let’s say Zac dig a ball
8 defend a ball up but the ball comes to here, then you need to come to bail his ball
9 back into the zone, OK. if the second ball you can’t get back to that zone
10 you lose one point
11 XX the zone is the black?
12 Joe the black circle is the zone. so one of you has to get the ball back for each feed
13 OK? then when the ball’s back then the next person will come in to
14 defend, OK? you just keep going until
15 XX (xxxx)
16 Joe then you just go back to the queue, so every ball you touch it and you go back to
17 queue, OK? if you defend the ball goes over the net you lose a point straight away
18 so we’ll play fifteen points, you will be the feeder for this team and you will be
19 the feeder for that team
20 Ollie can we also win points?
21 Joe sorry? no you can’t win points, you can only lose points.
22 OK you need to monitor the other side, sorry, whichever team lose fifteen
23 points first, whichever team lose the fifteen points first lose the game
24 Ollie as a team not just as individuals?
25 Joe as a team. so we will just do a quick demonstration, OK? so let’s say, come on,
26 that, so so they lose a point because they couldn’t get the ball back here
27 Fran so the (xxxx) and the next is to get the ball back up?
28 Joe yea let’s say now you lose a point let’s try again good so one ball back
29 so you get off the next person, so your ball back, next one, nice,
30 so you lose a point go
31 Fran (xxx) what happens if the feeder eh mistake
32 Joe sorry? feeders need to be fair, you need to adjust to what their eh ability
33 is OK, so every time the ball goes back to the circle
34 Felix I think the first person goes back to the circle and the next one comes up, and you
35 lose one point
36 Vally (xxx) can the second person go and get it?
37 Joe yes the second person, he needs to get the ball back, every time the ball goes back
38 to the circle, you just grab er hold the ball and start again ok? OK, let’s go!

It is noticeable that although Joe knows where the ‘zone’ is situated, it is only when one of the players asks a clarification question (line 11) that he confirms it as the ‘black circle’. Joe
demonstrates the practice drill, with the help of Zac. He is unusually impatient with Zac’s attempts to join in the demonstration (come on be quick, bloody hell), but finally the exercise is performed, and the players know what they have to do. The black circle is the key space at this moment in time. Twice Joe refers to the ‘zone’, and three times to the ‘circle’. The circle is a socially produced space, a zone which is of key importance to these men now, but which will be of no consequence at all once this particular drill is completed. As he speaks to the players and explains the changing space Joe stands in the circle and describes it with his hands, his arms moving like a pair of compasses to indicate the circle. In the following video clip we see the drill in action.

Magic circle

1    Joe    come on come on he’s all right that one let him off
2    Joe    come on high high there’s no power you need to give
3  Joe      the power into the ball. nice Dan
4  Joe      Alex you’re not supposed to catch the ball and throw it
5    Joe    you’re supposed to be doing this OK [laughs]
6    Joe    come on come on!
7  Joe      come on John nice good one John come on come on nice one
8    Joe    nice Nils
9  Joe      if you have to run then just dig OK
10  Joe    come on Fran volley volley nice
11  Joe      what’s the score?
12  Fran     eleven
13  Joe      come on Felix get in nice
14  Fran     out!
15  Joe      come on get in get in nice
16  Joe      come on come on aaah
17  Joe      come on Felix defend defend
18  Joe      nice nice ball perfect
19  Zac    Zac we need higher ball. nice Dan, nice
20  Joe      oh it’s gone over
21  Joe      what’s?
22  John    fourteen
23  Joe      fourteen this side what’s your score?
24  Fran     eleven
25  Joe      eleven twelve twelve fourteen ah hahahaha
26  Joe      is it done yea?
27  Vally    that’s fourteen
28  Joe      sorry?
29  Vally    that’s fourteen it was hitting the net
30  Joe      ok fourteen twelve
31  Ollie    fourteen?
32  Joe      come on fourteen all hohoho right stop, fifteen fourteen OK
33  Vally    raaaay
34  John     only three of us
35  Joe      hahaha
At line 1 Vally catches the ball nimbly with one hand high above his head. He stands and holds the pose, as if waiting to be praised or photographed or both. His achievement is greater because his movement is constrained by the boundary of the black circle in which he stands. For now at least he abides by the rule that he must not step out of the newly appropriated circle. The demands of the regulated zone are in evidence again at 00:17, as John misdirects the ball vertically, and Vally is unable to reach it from where he is positioned in the black circle. He extends his arms towards the ball, and then makes a gesture as if to encourage the ball to come to him. This is unsuccessful, and Vally is forced to step out of the zone to retrieve the ball. However, this is no transgression, as the ball is effectively ‘dead’ until he serves it back into play. At 00:27, however, Vally steps out of the restrictive zone with his left foot in order to return the ball. It is not clear whether he makes the error unknowingly, or he has unilaterally relaxed the rule about leaving the zone. Alternatively, he might be interpreting Joe’s rule to mean that at least one foot must remain in the circle at all times. In any event, there is no consequence for the apparent transgression.

Throughout the drill Joe gives praise and encouragement to the players (nice Dan, nice Nils, good one John) and also teaching points to keep them up to the mark. He demonstrates an error in Alex’s passing technique, tells Zac there’s no power in his defensive shot, and has a quiet word with Alex about how to return a ball on the run. Nils grins broadly when Joe corrects Alex’s passing technique, but at the same time offers an open hand for a low five with the new player. Don’t worry, he seems to say, we’re all in this together. The old hand is supportive of the new kid on the block. Joe constantly announces the score, recognizing that the players work with greater intensity when there is competition involved, however inconsequential it may be in the scheme of things. The embodied responses of the players to their own efforts tell of their commitment to the exercise. When Zac plays a poor shot he holds his head and seems to crumple with disappointment. Vally misdirects a ball, hitting it away from the receiver. He immediately holds up his left hand to apologise, acknowledging his error, and then taps his chest with his right hand in contrition. When Vally’s team appears to have won the contest the players celebrate with great enthusiasm. John goes to each of his team-mates with an emphatic low-five, and Vally punches both fists in the air with a wide grin on his face, turning towards the opposition on the other side of the net as does so. Fran, for his part, cheers loudly for his team. The scoring system of the game was not immediately transparent, and it may be that both sides believe themselves to be the victor. It is perhaps more likely that Fran, as so often, is playing the clown.

The space created by and for the game, the ludic learning space, allows players to control negative emotion and competitiveness, to develop empathy and personal authenticity (Kolb and Kolb 2010). For a learner to engage fully in the ludic space, a space must be provided which is a hospitable, welcoming space, one characterized by respect for all. It needs to be safe and supportive, but also challenging. It must allow learners to be in charge of their own learning and allow time for the repetitive practice that develops expertise.
**Remembered space**

Thomas remembers the space provided for volleyball in Rwanda. In high school I think we have better teams, some of the high school teams from where I came from are better than the university here. It’s a bit strange. Yea. It’s because volleyball is the second most popular game from where I’m from. So football, volleyball and basketball, yea. So many children, yea, and some older people, but here you can dive because the floor is all right, but there you can’t always dive because sometimes it’s risky. It’s not as smooth like here but you know the techniques.

Match day. The space is the same space as it was last Friday, when there was no match, techniques were practised, and routines rehearsed. Yet it is a different space altogether, a space in which success and defeat, winning and losing, elation and disappointment, triumph and despair, will be played out over the next hour or two. It is a space in which the players of each team are clad in uniform, indicating their alignment and affiliation to their cause. It is a space of formality and a space of regulation. Rules must be obeyed, and there normally be no room for negotiation. The rules are the rules, and the referee must be respected at all times.
Translanguaging is more than moving between languages. As our analysis of action and communication on the volleyball court has progressed it has become clear that translanguaging is a way of being, a way of engaging with other humans, a way of encountering change. Translanguaging is multimodal and polysemiotic. Yet these are limited definitions which emphasise the separation of languages from each other, the separation of the verbal from the embodied, the separation of one mode of communication from another. Such separation is not borne out in our observation of action and communication on the volleyball court. Rather, what we have seen is that translanguaging is fundamentally ideological. That is, it is a form of communication which relies on the willingness of one or more participant in an encounter to engage in communicative practice which blurs or breaks through apparent boundaries between languages, signs, and codes. Ideologies, or attitudes to, and practices of communication, are constituted in different but related layers. Ideologies about communicative practice may come into being, and be influential, (inter alia) at a global level, at a national level, and at a local level. Just as there are no clear distinctions between languages, and no clear distinctions between verbal and non-verbal communication, so the boundaries and borders between ideological scales are socially constructed. Ideologies that play out in (often fleeting) quotidian interactions between people are constituted in ideologies at (economic, political,) national and global levels; conversely, or perhaps comcomitantly, ideologies that play out in (economic, political,) national and global levels are the stuff of everyday exchanges between people.

On the volleyball court players and coaches from many different biographical, historical, political, economic, and linguistic backgrounds and trajectories play together. In order to do so they must communicate. The coaches and players are unanimous in the view that communication is an essential asset in the success of the team. What we see in the practices of the team is translanguaging (a way of being, engaging, and encountering) as a process of becoming; it is a resource for teaching; it is a social practice; it is centred on the body; it is ritual action; it relies on rhythm; and it is spatial.

Translanguaging is a process of becoming. New players arrive. Hands are shaken, names requested and given; requests are reciprocated, names are given in return. Beginnings are made. Where are you from? Everyone is from away. Some are new to the country, some are new to the city, others new to the university. Some are all of the above. None are new to the game. The game unites. The game communicates. Effort, commitment, concentration, don’t get it wrong in your first session. Listen. Follow what the others are doing. Low fives of congratulation, commiseration, empathy, forgiveness. Not everyone is new. The experienced players who have been in the club several years encourage and bring on the new boys, moving them into the right positions, showing them what to do. But, like old dogs with new pups, they let them know that there is a hierarchy here. They will play together, but the senior players are the senior players. For the new players there is more than volleyball to learn. There is the culture of the group. Don’t be strangers to each other, counsels the coach. Make noise, celebrate your successes. Be supportive of each other, don’t blame your team-mate. But now and again tensions surface. One or two of the older players know that they need to bite their tongue when the younger players miss a beat. Sometimes criticism is direct. It is all part of the process of becoming a team. It is
more of a challenge to bind the group together through social time off court. That which unites the group on court – the game – has no such effect off court. The diversity of the group (businessmen, Erasmus students, undergraduates, graduate students, Europeans, Asians, Africans, drinkers, non-drinkers, parents) disperses them in all directions. Some will not be pinned down to arrangements; some don’t like the pub; some don’t want to go out on school nights; some are looking after the baby. Unity and communication must be found on the volleyball court, in the limited time available between bookings for trampolining and table-tennis. Competition helps. The coach knows that the players respond to any opportunity to win points. He sets up new games with new rules, pushing the players to train with greater intensity. It is all part of the process of becoming a team. Competition brings intensity, it unites the team in mutual endeavour; intensity on the practice court brings intensity at game time. So the theory goes.

Translanguaging is a resource for teaching. The predominant coaching philosophy at large in the team is one that encourages all players to participate and learn. The philosophy of the coach is oriented towards the players’ learning rather than towards winning at all costs. His communicative practice is to show the players what to do as well as to tell them. He constantly demonstrates what he wants the players to do. If he wants them to jump he jumps; if he wants them to dig he clenches his fists with strong arms; if he wants them to set he slightly cups his flat palms and pushes an imaginary ball. He is quick and agile, both in his movement around the court and in the fluidity of his communicative repertoire. He notices that a new player is not sure of a drill, so he goes and gives him two minutes’ individual coaching. He watches the players practising and goes to speak to a small group, demonstrating a skill and talking them through the change he wants them to make, performing the change with his own body. Joe’s teaching repertoire also includes frequent verbal feedback and reward for the players. Nice, nice, good, good, nice one, good. On occasions it also includes a stern word to a player who makes a mistake. On other occasions it is necessary to stand up to the criticism of a senior player who criticizes something he has said or done. Communication in the group is not universally and uniformly successful, however. Joe speaks quietly, and players sometimes miss parts of his explanations. Some of the players are English language learners, and are not able to keep up with the pace of the instructions. Instead of asking what to do they follow the other players. Miscommunication comes with communication. Rarely does it impede the rhythm of the practice. Joe’s communicative repertoire for teaching also includes the deployment of stereotypes as a resource. Stereotypes are multivocal. They are necessarily the voices which have many times before constructed typifications of Asians as passive learners, Europeans as active, girls as more likely to cry, boys less so, students as slow and lazy and inclined to inebriation. Joe’s pedagogy plays out in translanguaging zones which are multivocal and multisemiotic.

On the volleyball court translanguaging as a social practice is the basis of the social relations of the team. The team must abide by the rules of the game, or the game may not proceed, and the team will not succeed. The rules of the game are laid down, and are not negotiable. However, as we have seen, new games are invented and come into being, with new rules, which may be negotiated, changed, and transgressed. The social dynamics of the team are hierarchical. However, within the assumed structure of the team transgressive discourses co-exist with the discourse of order and regulation. One element of the social practice of the team is mock-abuse. Sexual innuendo, stereotypical teasing, questioning another player’s resilience, abuse, curses,
profanities, all are in play as the coach and his players engage in teasing of each other. This is only mock abuse (‘mock-mockery’), double-voiced abuse that stands in for friendly, even affectionate discourse in the (largely) all-male environment. As such it performs the same function as friendly, affectionate discourse, strengthening the bonds within the group. This is part of the culture of the team. For newcomers it is something to learn. Carnivalesque banter comes and goes. It is not reserved for feast days as in the Middle Ages. But the same principle is in play here. Mock abuse has the role of tearing down the usual structures temporarily, before order is restored. On the volleyball court there is not time for too much carnival and feasting. Time is short. Order is restored quickly, and the master rules again. The case of the clown-fool is a particular one. He is permitted to challenge the master at will because he is the clown-fool. He wears motley, and is to be both laughed with and laughed at. In the group Fran, a Spanish player, takes the role of the clown-fool. He stands outside of regulation and order, living in the world of chaos and instability. He can be a wise fool, speaking the truth others dare not speak. But he is always the master’s fool, and when the master wishes to turn the tables the clown-fool has no recourse, here fooled by the coach not once but twice, and verbally cudgelled about the ears for his pains. He retires to lick his wounds until next time. Yet even the clown-fool is not fool enough to bring his chaos to the authentic game, the match against another club. On match day Fran no longer wears motley, swopping it for the uniform of the home team. The discourse of the social relations of the group is the discourse of team spirit. The coach worries that the team is too quiet, and that morale could be higher. But the players are optimistic. They believe in the spirit of the team.

Translanguaging is centred on the body. But we should be wary of interpreting non-verbal signs as proxy for verbal signs. The body is itself, it is not speech or language. The body repeats similar actions again and again, but preserves and constitutes difference. As the body may be closed or open to interaction, the body may be closed or open to involvement. The body indicates its openness to involvement through the presentation of self. On the volleyball court a willingness to play is indicated by clothing (Nike shirt, Adidas training shoes, numbered baggy shorts, knee pads, elbow pads). It is also indicated by the posture of the putative player (flexing of knees, touching of toes, jumping, whirling of arms, rotation of the head and neck, bending forward and backward at the hip, vertical jumping). It is further indicated by warming up, joining in collective activity which includes running around the perimeter of the gym, or following the direction of a senior player or coach in sit-ups, press-ups, star jumps, running on the spot, squats. Openness to involvement merges with involvement itself. Smash the ball into the floor, a partner receives it and smashes it back. The action warms up the hands and arms, and warms up the volleyballs. Readiness to be involved, and involvement itself. The noise of a dozen volleyballs smashed repeatedly into the floor. Readiness to be involved, and being involved, are indicated through ritual. The body’s readiness to be involved indicates more. It opens up another’s access to the body. The game does this. The culture of the game does this. Play together in close physical proximity and we give each other access to each others’ bodies. In much of social life the touch system (Goffman 1967) determines that certain categories of people are permitted to touch other persons as a means of conveying friendly support or familiarity. Other persons are not permitted to touch. The game permits the men to touch. Low fives, high fives, back-slaps, bottom-smacks, embrace. In training mock-fighting, faux-wrestling. Every instance is a translanguaging event, in which players adopt a way of being, a way of engaging with other humans, a way of encountering change which is multimodal and polysemiotic, and pays little
attention to borders. The game flattens distinctions. Every man, whether master or slave, is naked before the game. But if this is true it is only partially true. The new player must earn his right to touch and be touched. Hierarchies may hide at moments, but they rarely vanish entirely.

Social life is played out in ritual practice. This is nowhere more visible than in sport, and is exemplified on the volleyball court. The game is communal; it abides by set rules and practices which must be undertaken at specific times and in a set order; it occurs in a limited time and space which is free from the normative social structure; departure from the rules is heresy. Repetition, repetition, repetition. Repetition, perhaps mechanical in animals, is ritualized in humans. Thus, presenting ourselves or presenting another entails operations that are not only stereotyped but also consecrated: rites (Lefebvre 1992 / 2015). Repeated, rhythmic clapping. Repeated, rhythmic chanting. The repeated serve, dig, set, spike, dig, set, spike, dig, set, spike. Two, three, BRUM! The coach leads the players in a ritual chant which intends to indicate a readiness to play. None of it means anything except as ritual. The referee’s whistle, the referee’s hand signals, the whistle again, another signal. Thus is ritual without which the game can hardly proceed. But this is not all. Ritual in volleyball, as in social life, stabilizes relationships and allows them to move on. A hand raised in apology for a ball in the net, a low five of identificatory sympathy for a return not quite dug out, a group hug for a well-won point, a shake of the head, an arm raised, a fist punching the sky: all are ritual interaction, oiling the wheels of relationships in the team. Ritual brings the team together as a team. No more gods, so rituals are performed to attest to civility, and good will on the performer’s part and to the recipient’s possession of a small patrimony of sacredness (Goffman 1971: 63). Thus we mobilise ourselves and each other as self-regulating participants in social encounters, and one way we do this is through ritual (Goffman 1967: 43). By learning how to behave in relation to each other (in volleyball as in social life) we maintain a kind of ritual equilibrium, and conform to the ritual dimensions of social encounters. Ritual action must be learned – it is not merely known. New players must learn the significance of signs as they play out in the local ecology and ideology of the team. Just about every action in volleyball is accompanied by a communicative response: an apology, an account, a celebration, a compliment, appreciation, or other examples of supportive and remedial interchange. Communicative action relies on the repertoire of the players, which include all their available resources. There is no separation of verbal and non-verbal, or embodied and non-embodied communicative acts. They are integral to each other, rely on each other, and are complementary. Verbal communicative action is embodied action. Non-verbal communicative action is embodied action. As often as not it is ritual action, symbolic, apparently arbitrary, yet essential to the well-being and future of the group.

The social order of the volleyball court relies on rhythm. Not one rhythm, but multiple rhythms, all different but interwoven, all in play. The everyday is simultaneously the site of, the theatre for, and what is at stake in, a conflict between the great indestructible rhythms and the processes imposed by the socioeconomic organization of production, consumption, circulation and habitat (Lefebvre and Régulier 1992 / 2015). The social practice of the volleyball court, whether in training or on match day, is polyrhythmic. Multiple rhythms maintained through repetition. Societies are composed of crowds, of groups, of bodies, of classes, and constitute peoples. We listen to the rhythms of which living beings, social bodies, local groups are made up, from corpuscles to galaxies (Lefebvre 1992 / 2015). Accidental or determined encounters, hurried carryings or nonchalant meanderings of people who go home in order to withdraw from the
external world, or of those who leave their homes in order to make contact with the outside, business people and people of leisure; as many elements that compose a polyrhythmia. Rhythm and ritual come together in the experience and knowledge of the body; rhythm derives from the consciousness and this knowledge, simultaneously banal and full of surprises – of the unknown and the misunderstood. We have seen that there are (at least) two types of repetition: cyclical repetition and linear repetition. Cyclical repetitions include days and nights, hours and months, seasons and years, and tides. Linear repetition originates from human and social activities. Volleyball incorporates cyclical and linear rhythms; they overlap, intermesh, and are mutually dependent. The co-existence of rhythms: euhythmia. The body begins, learns, accounts for itself, returns, repeats. But there is no repetition. The same thing done again is rhythm but is not identical. So it goes on: beginning, learning, accounting, returning, repeating, not repeating. And ritual has a double relation with rhythm, each ritualization creates its own time and particular rhythm, that of gestures, solemn words, acts prescribed in a certain sequence; also rites and ritualisations intervening in everyday life, punctuating it, but keeping it afloat. This includes everything that enters into the everyday in order to impress upon it an extra-everyday rhythm without interrupting it in so doing. Analysis of these multiple rhythms enables us to see the relation of the human being with his own body, his gestures and ensemble of gestures, and also his relation with public space, with the entire society (Lefebvre and Régulier 1992 / 2015). The rhythm of religious rites (fasting, prayers, ablutions, ringing of bells), the rhythm of carnal and carnival, rites of intimate convivialities or external sociability, political rites, ceremonies, commemorations, votes. The rhythm of life and the body, the rhythm of repetition. The rhythm of communication. The rhythm of translanguage. Repertoires are not repertoires without repetition. Repetition is not repetition without rhythm. Translanguaging relies on the repetition of the sign, the repetition of the body, the repetition of the word. Without repetition and rhythm the sign becomes random, redundant, discarded. Rhythm opens up communicative space.

Translanguaging is contingent on space. Analysis of the social production of space must involve the introduction of new ideas – the idea of a diversity or multiplicity of spaces quite distinct from that multiplicity which results from segmenting and cross-sectioning space ad infinitum. Such new ideas must then be inserted into the context of what is generally known as ‘history’ (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991). Social space incorporates social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act. From the point of view of those subjects the behaviour of their space is at once vital and mortal: within it they develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions; then they perish, and that same space contains their graves. Social space works as a tool for the analysis of society. This is never more evident than on the volleyball court. Space is produced anew with every social action. Space interweaves with time, with rhythm. The space of the gym is subject to the rhythm of the timetable, the rhythm of the schedule. 1 pm – 2 pm: Badminton; 2 pm – 3 pm: Aerobics; 3 pm – 5 pm: Trampolining; 6 pm – 7 pm: Table Tennis; 7 pm – 9 pm: Volleyball; 9 pm – 10 pm: Circuit Training. Each activity constitutes the space anew. With each activity the space is re-inscribed, as some coloured lines on the floor become newly salient, while others recede and fade. Man does not live by words alone, all subjects are situated in a space in which they must either recognise or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify (Lefebvre 1974 / 1991). Beyond the (re-)production of space for each sport, space is re-made for different drills on the volleyball court. For the warm-up no account is taken of the coloured inscriptions on the floor, or of the net. But each drill brings new rules, new regulation. Space is reorganised,
reassembled, reproduced as a resource for competition. Previously invisible circles are invested with magical power, such that to step outside (or inside) them brings dire consequences of the worst kind. The spatial body, produced by and constitutive of a space, is subject to the determinant of that space: symmetries, interactions and reciprocal actions, axes and planes, centres and peripheries, and concrete oppositions. The spatial body’s material character derives from space, from the energy that is deployed and put to use there. And communication is not remote from this. Communicative repertoires, available resources at a point in time and space, are subject to the contingencies of the produced space (‘spatial repertoires’). The spatial repertoire links the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories to the particular spaces in which these linguistic resources are deployed. Spatial repertoires draw on individual as well as other available resources, while individual repertoires contribute to and draw from spatial repertoires (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). Certain communicative practices are enregistered as orders of discourse in certain spaces. When the space is a volleyball court specific communicative practices, certain spatial repertoires, are indexical orders. Shouts, cheers, roars, profanities, yells, screams, fist-pumps, hand-claps, chants, stares, grimaces, all are present in the spatial repertoire of the volleyball court. These are not the indexical orders of the city library. Take these same individuals to the city library and they will behave as studious visitors to the library. It is the space that produces translanguage practice, as it is translanguage practice that produces the space. And this is because in the ideological space of the volleyball court a particular type of translanguage is the order of discourse. Translanguage is not a mere set of communicative practices. It is an ideological orientation to communication in changing space.

What we are left with is the game. It is the game that brings these people together in all their diversity. It is the game that unites them. It is the game that is the site of their learning to be human. It is the game that constitutes their relationships. The game is their body, the body is their game. The game is played out in ritual action. The game is the rhythm of embodied life. The game produces space, space produces the game. The game means nothing. It is all of life.

Transcription conventions:

(xxxx) unclear speech
! animated tone or exclamation
, a brief interval within an utterance
(2) a brief interval within an utterance, in seconds
[word] paralinguistic features and situational descriptions
< > English translation of speech

Mandarin speech has been transcribed in Chinese script to represent spoken interactions. Interview data has been translated into English without representation through Chinese characters.
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