IN PROGRESS

THE WORLD OF WRESTLING

The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence which must have been that of ancient theaters. And in fact wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky (a romantic value suited rather to fashionable occasions), it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.

There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque Barthes here refers to characters in neo-classic French plays by Molière and Racine]. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrong called amateur wrestling, is performed in second-rate halls, where ing-match: with wrestling, it wold make without ever extending to the crowning sponds to the mask of antiquity meant to

the public spontaneously attunes itself the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema. Then these same people wax indignant because wrestling is a stage-managed sport (which ought, by the way, to mitigate its ignominy). The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons

no sense. A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time. The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions. Wrestling therefore demands an immediate reading of the juxtaposed

WHAT MATTERS IS NOT WHAT IT THINKS BUT WHAT IT SEES

itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it

This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence. One can bet on the outcome of a box-

meanings, so that there is no need to connect them. The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future. In other words, wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone,

Thus the function of the wrestler is not to win: it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him. It is said that judo contains a hidden symbolic aspect; even in the midst of efficiency, its gestures are measured, precise but restricted, drawn accurately but by a stroke without volume. Wrestling, on the contrary, offers excessive gestures, exploited to the limit of their meaning. In judo, a man who is down is hardly down at all, he rolls over, he draws back, he eludes defeat, or, if the latter is obvious, he immediately disappears; in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the eyes of the spectators with the intolerable spectacle of his powerlessness.

This function of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of the ancient theatre, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disgusting, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresignify the tragic mode of the spectacle. In wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, one is not ashamed of one's suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking stems from its judgment, but instead for tears

Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles. As in the theatre, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant. Thauvin, a fifty-year-old with an obese and sagging body, whose type of asexual hideousness always inspires feminine nicknames, displays in his flesh the characters of baseness, for his part is to represent what, in the classical concept of the salaud, the 'bastard' (the key-concept of any wrestling-match), appears as organically repugnant. The nausea voluntarily provoked by Thauvin shows therefore a very extended use of signs: not only is ugliness used here in order to signify baseness, but in addition ugliness is wholly gathered into a particularly repulsive quality of matter: the pallid collapse of dead

flesh (the public calls Thauvin la barbaque, 'stinking meat'), so that the passionate condemnation of the crowd no longer from the very depth of its humours. It will thereafter let itself be frenetically embroiled in an idea of Thauvin which will conform entirely with this physical origin: his actions will perfectly correspond to the essential viscosity of his personage.

It is therefore in the body of the wrestler that we find the first key to the contest. I know from the start that all of Thauvin's actions, his treacheries, cruelties, and acts of cowardice, will not fail to measure up to the first image of ignobility he gave me; I can trust him to carry out intelligently and to the last detail all the gestures of a kind of amorphous baseness, and thus fill to the brim the image of the most repugnant bastard there is: the bastard-octopus. [Barthes goes on to describe other 'character roles' in wrestling, comparing them to stock characters in the Italian tradition of Commedia del'Arte.] Wrestling is like a diacritic writing: above the fundamental meaning of his body, the wrestling

always opportune, and constantly help the reading of the fight by means of gestures, attitudes and mimicry which make the while kneeling on the good sportsman; sometimes he gives the crowd a conceited smile which forebodes an early revenge; sometimes, pinned to the ground, he hits the floor ostentatiously to make evident to all the intolerable nature of his situ-

[...]It is obvious that at such a pitch, it no longer matters whether the passion is genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what actually cruel would transgress the unwritprivate. [Barthes elaborates on this point, one to immobilize the adversary indefi-

What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice. Wrestling presents man's suf-

masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a twisted leg) offers an excessive portraval of intention utterly obvious. Sometimes the Suffering; like a primitive Pietà, he exhibwrestler triumphs with a repulsive sneer its for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. It is obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, to this Exhibition of Suffering which is the very aim of the fight. This is why all the actions which produce suffering are particularly spectacular, like the gesture of a conjuror who holds out his cards clearly to the public. Suffering which appeared without intelligible cause would not be There is no more a problem of truth in understood; a concealed action that was is expected is the intelligible representation ten rules of wrestling [...] What wrestlers tion of moral situations which are usually call a hold, that is, any figure which allows and again compares French wrestlers nitely and to have him at one's mercy, has from the 1950s to characters in classical precisely the function of preparing in a conventional, therefore intelligible, fashion the spectacle of suffering, of methodically establishing the conditions of suffering. The inertia of the vanguished allows the arranges comments which are episodic but fering with all the amplification of tragic (temporary) victor to settle in his cruelty

and to convey to the public this terrifying slowness of the torturer: [...] wrestling is the only sport which gives such an externalized image of torture. But here again, only the image is involved in the game, and the spectator does not wish for the actual suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography. It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic spectacle: it is only an intelligible spectacle.

Barthes discusses the forearm smash as a gesture signifying tragic catastrophe, then moves to the next major spectacle of wrestling: Defeat.] Deprived of all resilience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer anything but an unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits relentless reviling and jubilation. [...] At other times, there is another ancient posture which appears in the coupling of the wrestlers, that of the suppliant who, at the mercy of his opponent, on bended knees, his arms raised above his head, is slowly brought down by the vertical pressure of the victor. In wrestling, unlike judo, Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory. It is as if the wrestler is crucified in broad daylight and in the sight of all. I have heard it said of a wrestler stretched on the ground: 'He is dead, little Jesus, there, on the cross,' and these ironic words revealed the hidden roots of a spectacle which enacts the exact gestures of the most ancient purifications.

But what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to

means above all else 'Make him pay.' This s therefore, needless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. If the villain - who is of course a coward - takes refuge behind the ropes, claiming unfairly to have a right to do so by a brazen mimicry, he is inexorably pursued there and caught, and the crowd is jubilant at seeing the rules broken for the sake of a deserved punishment. [...] Naturally, it is the pattern of Justice which matters here, much more than its content: wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). This explains why sudden changes of circumstances have in the eyes of wrestling habitueés a sort of moral beauty; they enjoy them as they would enjoy an inspired episode in a novel[...]It is therefore easy to understand why out of five wrestling-matches, only about one is fair. One must realize, let it be repeated, that 'fairness' here is a role or a genre, as in the theatre: the rules do not at all constitute a real constraint; they are the conventional appearance of fairness. So that in actual fact a fair fight is nothing but an exaggeratedly polite one; the contestants confront each other with zeal, not rage [they don't keep pounding after the referee intervenes, etc.] One must of course understand here that all these polite actions are brought to the notice of the public by the most conventional gestures of fairness: shaking hands, raising the arms, ostensibly avoiding a fruitless hold which would detract from the perfection of the contest.

wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him'

excessive signs: administering a big kick for he always accomplishes completely, by to one's beaten opponent, [...]taking advantage of the end of the round to rush treacherously at the adversary from behind, fouling him while the referee is not looking (a move which obviously only has any value or function because in fact half the audience can see it and get indignant about it). Since Evil is the natural climate of wrestling, a fair fight has chiefly the value of being an exception. It surprises the aficionado, who greets it when he sees it as an anachronism and a rather sentimental throwback to the sporting tradition ('Aren't they playing fair, those two'); he feels suddenly moved at the sight of the general kindness of the world, but would probably die of boredom and indifference if wrestlers did not quickly return to the orgy of evil which alone makes

It has already been noted that in America wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil (of a quasi-political nature, the 'bad' wrestler always being supposed to be a Red [Communist]).

The process of creating heroes in French wrestling is very different, being based on ethics and not on politics. What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard.' [Barthes goes into detail about the French 'model bastard.']

[...] Wrestlers, who are very experienced, know perfectly how to direct the spontaneous episodes of the fight so as to make them conform to the image which last intelligible. the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology. A wrestler can Conversely, foul play exists only in its irritate or disgust, he never disappoints,

a progressive solidification of signs, what the public expects of him. In wrestling, nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symbol, no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively. Leaving nothing in the shade, each action discards all parasitic meanings and ceremonially offers to the public a pure and full signification, rounded like Nature. This grandiloquence is nothing but the popular and age-old image of the perfect intelligibility of reality. What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a universal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without

When the hero or the villain of the drama, the man who was seen a few minutes earlier possessed by moral rage, magnified into a sort of metaphysical sign, leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a small suitcase and arm-in-arm with his wife, no one can doubt that wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship. In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at



[ed. Note: This is the initial essay in Barthes' Mythologies, originally published in 1957. The book is a series of small structural investigations of (mass) cultural phenomena; as Barthes explains in his preface to the 1970 French second edition, "This book has a double theoretical framework: on the one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass-culture; on the other, a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanics of this language. I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating 'collective representations' as sign-systems, one might unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms petitbourgeois culture into a universal nature." You might think about why the analysis

of wrestling would lead off such a project. Also, keep in mind that professional wrestling (in Europe called 'amateur wrestling') in the 1950s had not reached the pinnacle of promotional and popular hope to go further than the pious show of success that it has today (for one thing, TV life's great occasions. was in its infancy); it was more of an 'outlaw' sport lacking the legitimization of gigantic revenues and spectatorships - not to mention wrestlers-turned-Governors.

Does Barthes' semiology of wrestling apply to the current version of the sport/entertainment? By the way, cuts in the text are indicated in square brackets.]

The grandiloquent truth of gestures on

—Baudelaire

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[...]It is obvious that at such a pitch, it to longer matters whether the passion is genuine or hot. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself there is no more a problem of truth in prestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. [Barthes elaborates on this point and again compares French wrestlers from the 1950s to characters in classical heater.]

What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice Westling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, wisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of Suffering; like a primitive Pietà, he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. It obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary estentation of the spectacle to this Exhibition of Suffering which the very aim of the fight. This is why a che actions which produce suffering an articularly spectacular, like the gesture of the public. Suffering which appears without intelligible cause would not be understood; a concealed action that was actually cruel would transgress the unwriter rules of wrestling [...]. What wrestlere rules of wrestling [...]. What wrestlere can be not on the public to the processely which allowed the spectacle of suffering of preparing in conventional, therefore intelligible, fashiothe spectacle of suffering, of nethodical

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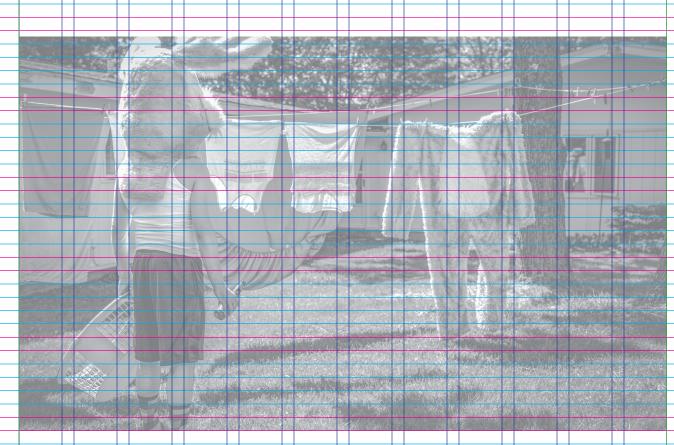
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It is therefore in the body of the wrestler ation [...] that we find the first key to the contest. I know from the start that all of Thauvin's actions, his treacheries, cruelties, and acts of cowardice, will not fail to measure up I can trust him to carry out intelligently and to the last detail all the gestures of a kind of amorphous baseness, and thus fill the 'bastard' (the key-concept of any to the brim the image of the most repugnant bastard there is: the bastard-octopus. Barthes goes on to describe other 'charprovoked by Thauvin shows therefore a acter roles' in wrestling, comparing them very extended use of signs: not only is to stock characters in the Italian tradition ugliness used here in order to signify of Commedia del'Arte.] Wrestling is like baseness, but in addition ugliness is a diacritic writing: above the fundamenand Justice. Wrestling presents man's sufwholly gathered into a particularly tal meaning of his body, the wrestling fering with all the amplification of tragic arranges comments which are episodic but always opportune, and constantly help the which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a the only sport which gives such an exter-Thauvin la barbaque, 'stinking meat'), reading of the fight by means of gestures, twisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of nalized image of torture. But here again, so that the passionate condemnation attitudes and mimicry which make the of the crowd no longer stems from its intention utterly obvious. Sometimes the its for all to see his face, exaggeratedly the spectator does not wish for the actual judgment, but instead from the very wrestler triumphs with a repulsive sneer contorted by an intolerable affliction. It is suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys while kneeling on the good sportsman;

on the spot. As soon as the adver- an idea of Thauvin which will conform smile which forebodes an early revenge; the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, sometimes, pinned to the ground, he hits the floor ostentatiously to make evident

no longer matters whether the passion is to the public. Suffering which appeared genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. to the first image of ignobility he gave me; There is no more a problem of truth in actually cruel would transgress the unwritwrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. [Barthes elaborates on this point, nitely and to have him at one's mercy, has and again compares French wrestlers precisely the function of preparing in a from the 1950s to characters in classical theater.]

the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold Suffering; like a primitive Pietà, he exhib- only the image is involved in the game, and obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve the perfection of an iconography. It is not

to this Exhibition of Suffering which is the very aim of the fight. This is why all to all the intolerable nature of his situ- the actions which produce suffering are particularly spectacular, like the gesture of [...]It is obvious that at such a pitch, it a conjuror who holds out his cards clearly without intelligible cause would not be understood; a concealed action that was ten rules of wrestling [...] What wrestlers call a hold, that is, any figure which allows one to immobilize the adversary indeficonventional, therefore intelligible, fashion the spectacle of suffering, of methodically What is thus displayed for the public is establishing the conditions of suffering. The inertia of the vanquished allows the (temporary) victor to settle in his cruelty and to convey to the public this terrifying slowness of the torturer: [...] wrestling is



it is only an intelligible spectacle.

Barthes discusses the forearm smash as a gesture signifying tragic catastrophe, then moves to the next major spectacle of wrestling: Defeat.] Deprived of all resilience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer anything but an unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits relentless reviling and jubilation. [...] At other times, there is another ancient posture which appears in the coupling of the wrestlers, that of the suppliant who, at the mercy of his opponent, on bended knees, his arms raised above his head, is slowly brought down by the vertical pressure of the victor. In wrestling, unlike judo, Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the

is crucified in broad daylight and in the sight of all. I have heard it said of a wrestler stretched on the ground: 'He is dead, little Jesus, there, on the cross,' and these ironic words revealed the hidden roots of a spectacle which enacts the exact gestures

of the most ancient purifications. But what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him' means above all else 'Make him pay.' This is therefore, needless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. If the villain - who is of course a coward - takes refuge behind the ropes, claiming unfairly to have a right to do so by a brazen mimicry, he is inexorably pursued there and caught, and the crowd is jubilant at

the pattern of Justice which matters here, much more than its content: wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). This explains why sudden changes of circumstances have in the eyes of wrestling habitueés a sort of moral beauty; they enjoy them as they would enjoy an inspired episode in a novel[...]It is therefore easy to understand why out of five wrestling-matches, only about one is fair. One must realize, let it be repeated, that 'fairness' here is a role or a genre, as in the real constraint; they are the conventional appearance of fairness. So that in actual fact a fair fight is nothing but an exaggeratedly polite one; the contestants confront each other with zeal, not rage [they don't keep pounding after the referee intervenes,

deserved punishment. [...] Naturally, it is that all these polite actions are brought to the notice of the public by the most conventional gestures of fairness: shaking hands, raising the arms, ostensibly avoiding a fruitless hold which would detract from the perfection of the contest.

Conversely, foul play exists only in its excessive signs: administering a big kick to one's beaten opponent, [...]taking advantage of the end of the round to rush treacherously at the adversary from behind, fouling him while the referee is not looking (a move which obviously only has any value or function because in fact theatre: the rules do not at all constitute a half the audience can see it and get indignant about it). Since Evil is the natural climate of wrestling, a fair fight has chiefly the value of being an exception. It surprises the aficionado, who greets it when he sees it as an anachronism and a rather sentimental throwback to the sporting cross and the pillory. It is as if the wrestler seeing the rules broken for the sake of a etc.] One must of course understand here tradition ('Aren't they playing fair, those

two'); he feels suddenly moved at the sight of the general kindness of the world, but would probably die of boredom and indifference if wrestlers did not quickly return to the orgy of evil which alone makes good wrestling.

It has already been noted that in America wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil (of a quasi-political nature, the 'bad' wrestler always being supposed to be a Red [Communist]).

The process of creating heroes in French wrestling is very different, being based on ethics and not on politics. What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard.' [Barthes goes into detail about the French 'model bastard.']

[...] Wrestlers, who are very experienced, know

perfectly how to direct the spontaneous episodes of the fight so as to make them conform to the image which the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology. A wrestler can irritate or disgust, he never disappoints, for he always accomplishes completely, by a progressive solidification of signs, what the public expects of him. In wrestling, nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symbol, no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively. Leaving nothing in the shade, each action discards all parasitic meanings and ceremonially offers to the public a pure and full signification, rounded like Nature. This grandiloquence is nothing but the popular and age-old image of the perfect intelligibility of reality. What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday

situations and placed before the panoramic view of a universal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction.

When the hero or the villain of the drama, the man who was seen a few minutes earlier possessed by moral rage, magnified into a sort of metaphysical sign, leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a small suitcase and arm-in-arm with his wife, no one can doubt that wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship. In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible.

[ed. Note: This is the initial essay in Barthes' Mythologies, originally published in 1957. The book is a series of small structural investigations of (mass) cultural phenomena; as Barthes explains in his preface to the 1970 French second edition, "This book has a double theoretical framework: on the one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass-culture; on the other, a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanics of this language. I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating collective representations' as sign-systems, one might hope to go further than the pious show of unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature."

You might think about why the analysis of wrestling would lead off such a project. Also, keep in mind that professional wrestling (in Europe called 'amateur wrestling') in the 1950s had not reached the pinnacle of promotional and popular success that it has today (for one thing, TV was in its infancy); it was more of an 'outlaw' sport lacking the legitimization of gigantic revenues and spectatorships - not to mention wrestlers- turned-Governors. Does Barthes' semiology of wrestling apply to the current version of the sport/entertainment? By the way, cuts in the text are indicated in square brackets.]

The grandiloquent truth of gestures on life's great occasions.

—-Baudelaire

The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence which must have been that of ancient theaters. And in fact wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky (a romantic value suited rather to fashionable occasions), it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even is performed in second-rate halls, where ing-match: with wrestling, it wold make erect and alone, without ever extending to hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.

There are people who think that wresa sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more of Suffering than a performance of the dons itself to the primary virtue of the juxtaposed meanings, so that there is no trary, offers excessive gestures, exploited to

[Barthes here refers to characters in neo-classic French plays by Molière and Racine]. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrong called amateur wrestling, the public spontaneously attunes itself no sense. A boxing-match is a story the crowning moment of a result. to the spectacular nature of the contest, which is constructed before the eyes of like the audience at a suburban cinema. Then these same people wax indignant because wrestling is a stage-managed sport on the passage of time. The spectator (which ought, by the way, to mitigate its tling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not ignominy). The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest of certain passions. Wrestling therefore

sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque spectacle, which is to abolish all motives need to connect them. The logical conand all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.

This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, is not interested in the rise and fall of

clusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future. In other words, wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one based on a demonstration of excellence. is a function: each moment imposes the One can bet on the outcome of a box- total knowledge of a passion which rises

Thus the function of the wrestler is not to win: it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him. It is said that judo contains a hidden symbolic aspect; even in the midst of efficiency, fortunes; he expects the transient image its gestures are measured, precise but restricted, drawn accurately but by a stroke ignoble to attend a wrestled performance is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandemands an immediate reading of the without volume. Wrestling, on the conthe limit of their meaning. In judo, a man
In wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, who is down is hardly down at all, he rolls over, he draws back, he eludes defeat, or, if the latter is obvious, he immediately disappears; in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the spectacle of his powerlessness.

This function of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of the ancient theatre, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disgusting, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to

one is not ashamed of one's suffering,

Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since eyes of the spectators with the intolerable one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles. As in the theatre, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant. Thauvin, a fifty-year-old with an obese and sagging body, whose type of asexual hideousness always inspires feminine nicknames, displays in his flesh the characters of baseness, for his part is to represent what, in the classical concept of signify the tragic mode of the spectacle. the salaud, the 'bastard' (the key-concept

of any wrestling-match), appears as organically repugnant. The nausea voluntarily one knows how to cry, one has a liking provoked by Thauvin shows therefore actions, his treacheries, cruelties, and acts a very extended use of signs: not only is ugliness used here in order to signify baseness, but in addition ugliness is wholly gathered into a particularly repulsive quality of matter: the pallid collapse of dead kind of amorphous baseness, and thus fill flesh (the public calls Thauvin la barbaque, to the brim the image of the most repug-'stinking meat'), so that the passionate nant bastard there is: the bastard-octopus. condemnation of the crowd no longer stems from its judgment, but instead from the very depth of its humours. It to stock characters in the Italian tradition will thereafter let itself be frenetically of Commedia del'Arte.] Wrestling is like embroiled in an idea of Thauvin which will conform entirely with this physical origin: tal meaning of his body, the wrestling his actions will perfectly correspond to the arranges comments which are episodic but essential viscosity of his personage.

It is therefore in the body of the wrestler reading of the fight by means of gestures,

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[...] It is obvious that at such a pitch, it no longer matters whether the passion is genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private. [Barthes elaborates on this point, and again compares French wrestlers from the 1950s to characters in classical theater.]

What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice. Wrestling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a twisted leg) offers an excessive portraval of Suffering; like a primitive Pietà, he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. It is obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, to this Exhibition of

there is another ancient posture which appears in the can see it and get indignant about it). Since Evil is the coupling of the wrestlers, that of the suppliant who, at the mercy of his opponent, on bended knees, his arms raised above his head, is slowly brought down by the vertical pressure of the victor. In wrestling, unlike judo, Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory. It is as if the wrestler is crucified in broad daylight and in the sight of all. I have heard it said of a wrestler stretched on the ground: 'He is dead, little Jesus, there, on the cross,' and these ironic words revealed the hidden roots of a spectacle which enacts the exact gestures of the most ancient purifications.

But what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him' means above all else 'Make him pay.' This is therefore, needless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. If the villain - who is of course a coward - takes refuge behind the ropes, mimicry, he is inexorably pursued there and caught, and the crowd is jubilant at seeing the rules broken for the

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WHAT MATTERS IS NOT WHAT IT THINKS BUT WHAT IT SEES

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[Barthes discusses the forearm smash as a gesture signifying tragic catastrophe, then moves to the next major spectacle of wrestling: Defeat.] Deprived of all resilience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer anything but an unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits

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WHAT MATTERS IS NOT WHAT IT THINKS BUT WHAT IT SEES

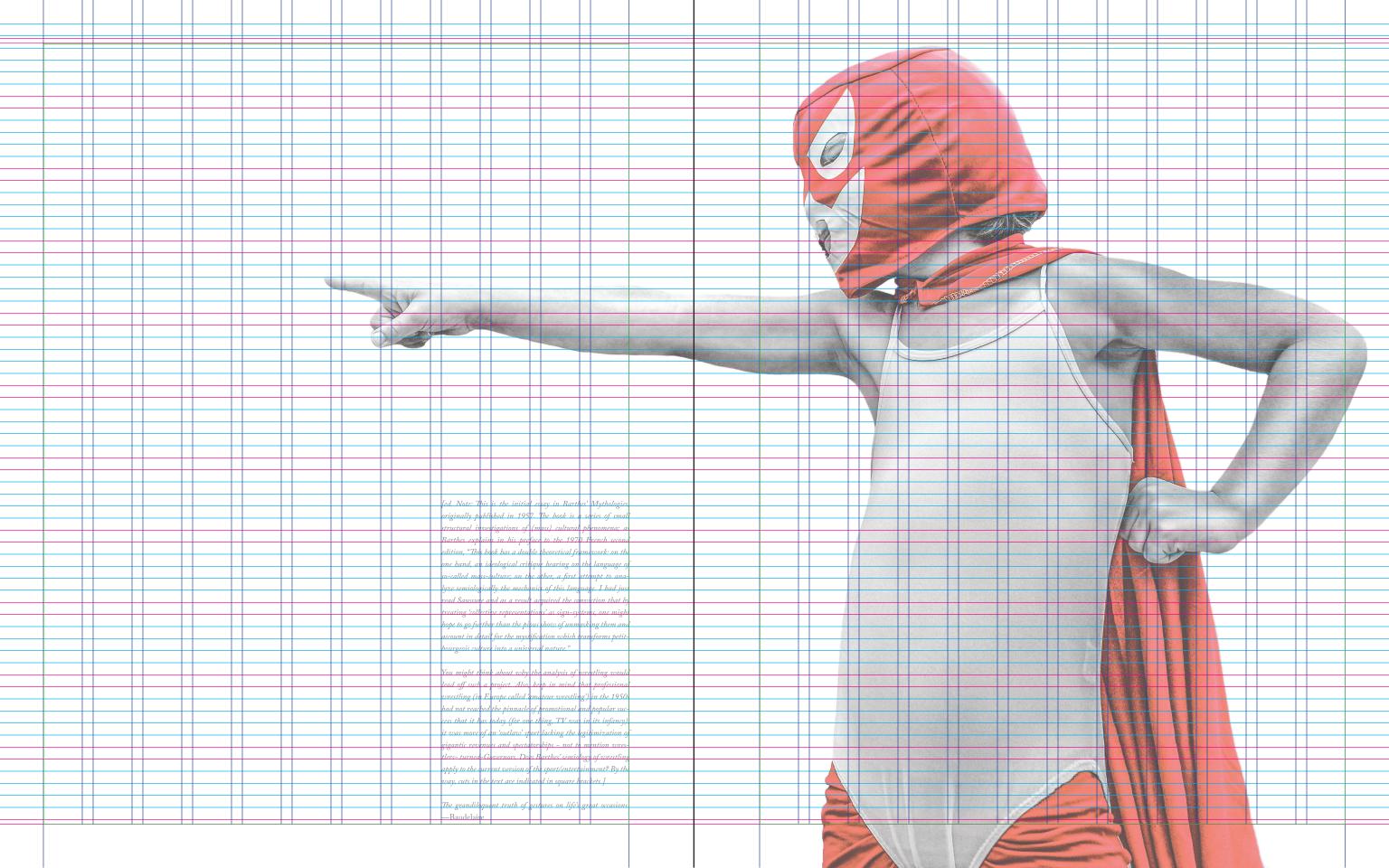
the actions which produce suffering are particularly pattern of Justice which matters here, much more than nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symb thout intelligible cause would not be understood: a ncealed action that was actually cruel would transgress in the eyes of wrestling habituees a sort of moral beauty; v figure which allows one to immobilize adversary indefinitely and to have him at one's mercy five wrestling-matches, only about one is fair. One must methodically establishing the conditions of suffering a real constraint; they are the conventional appearance ctor to settle in his cruelty and to convey to the public is terrifying slowness of the torturer: [...] wrestling is port which gives such an externalized image e is involved in game, and the spectator does not wish for the actual ntestant, he only enjoys the perfection an iconography. It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic avoiding a fruitless hold which would detract from the that wrestling holds the power of transputation whi ectacle: it is only an intelligible spectacle.

r, like the gesture of a conjuror who holds out its content; wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence arly to the public Suffering which appeared of compensations (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) This explains why sudden changes of circumstances have rules of wrestling [...] What wrestlers call they enjoy them as they would enjoy an inspired enjoyde the function of preparing in a conventional __realize, let it by repeated, that fairness here is a role or a __is the cupherial of men raised the a while altelligible, fashion the spectagle of suffering genre, as in the theatre: the rules do not at all constitute of the vanguished allows the (temporary) of fairness. So that in actual fact a fair fight is nothing but an exaggeratedly polite one; the contestants confront each other with zeal, not rage [they don't keep pounding after the referee intervenes, etc. | One must of course understand here that all these polite actions are brought to the notice of the public by the most conventional gestures of fairness: shaking hands, raising the arms, ostensibly perfection of the contest.

usses the forcarm smash as a gesture. Conversely foul play exists only in its excessive signs. In the ring and even in the ragic catastrophe, then moves to the next administering a big kick to one's beaten opponent, [...] ignominy, wrestlers remain gods becaus unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits—the referee is not looking a move which obviously only—form of a Justice which is at last intelligible. entless reviling and jubilation. [...] At other times, has any value or function because in fact half the audience

no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively. Leav meanings and full signification, rounded like Nature tutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a universal Nature at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction

When the hero or the villain of the dr who was seen a few minute is common to the Spectagle and to Religious Worsh ior, speciacle of wrestling. Defeat.] Deprived of all taking advantage of the end of the round to tush treach— a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pu lience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer abything but erously at the adversary from behind, fouling him while gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the



The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence which must have been that of ancient theaters. And in fact wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky (a romantic value suited rather to fashionable occasions), it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.

There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance

sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque Barthes here refers to characters in neo-classic French plays by Molière and Racine]. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrong called amateur wrestling, is performed in second-rate halls, where the public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema. Then these same people wax indignant because wrestling is a stage-managed sport (which ought, by the way, to mitigate its ignominy). The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it aban-

spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences; what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.

This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence. no sense. A boxing-match is a story the crowning moment of a result. which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time. The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions. Wrestling therefore demands an immediate reading of the of Suffering than a performance of the dons itself to the primary virtue of the juxtaposed meanings, so that there is no trary, offers excessive gestures, exploited to

need to connect them. The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future. In other words, wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the One can bet on the outcome of a box- total knowledge of a passion which rises ing-match: with wrestling, it wold make erect and alone, without ever extending to

Thus the function of the wrestler is not to win: it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him. It is said that judo contains a hidden symbolic aspect; even in the midst of efficiency, its gestures are measured, precise but restricted, drawn accurately but by a stroke without volume. Wrestling, on the conthe limit of their meaning. In judo, a man who is down is hardly down at all, he rolls over, he draws back, he eludes defeat, or, if the latter is obvious, he immediately disappears; in wrestling, a man who is down is exaggeratedly so, and completely fills the eyes of the spectators with the intolerable spectacle of his powerlessness.

This function of grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of the ancient theatre, whose principle, language and props (masks and buskins) concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity. The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disgusting, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to signify the tragic mode of the spectacle. In wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, one is not ashamed of one's suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking for tears.

Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries with the obviousness of the roles. As in the theatre, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant. Thauvin, a fifty-year-old with an obese and sagging body, whose type of asexual hideousness always inspires feminine nicknames, displays in his flesh

the characters of baseness, for his part is to represent what, in the classical concept of the salaud, the 'bastard' (the key-concept of any wrestling-match), appears as organically repugnant. The nausea voluntarily provoked by Thauvin shows therefore a very extended use of signs: not only is ugliness used here in order to signify baseness, but in addition ugliness is wholly gathered into a particularly repulsive quality of matter: the pallid collapse of dead flesh (the public calls Thauvin la barbaque, 'stinking meat'), so that the passionate condemnation of the crowd no longer stems from its judgment, but instead from the very depth of its humours. It will thereafter let itself be frenetically embroiled in an idea of Thauvin which will conform entirely with this physical origin: his actions will perfectly correspond to the essential viscosity of his personage.

It is therefore in the body of the wrestler that we find the first key to the contest. I know from the start that all of Thauvin's actions, his treacheries, cruelties, and acts of cowardice, will not fail to measure up to the first image of ignobility he gave me; are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed I can trust him to carry out intelligently and to the last detail all the gestures of a kind of amorphous baseness, and thus fill to the brim the image of the most repugnant bastard there is: the bastard-octopus. [Barthes goes on to describe other 'character roles' in wrestling, comparing them to stock characters in the Italian tradition

of Commedia del'Arte.] Wrestling is like a diacritic writing: above the fundamental meaning of his body, the wrestling arranges comments which are episodic but always opportune, and constantly help the reading of the fight by means of gestures, attitudes and mimicry which make the intention utterly obvious. Sometimes the wrestler triumphs with a repulsive sneer while kneeling on the good sportsman; sometimes he gives the crowd a conceited sometimes, pinned to the ground, he hits the floor ostentatiously to make evident

[...]It is obvious that at such a pitch, it no longer matters whether the passion is genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre. In both, what tion of moral situations which are usually private. [Barthes elaborates on this point,

the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice. Wrestling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a twisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of it is only an intelligible spectacle.

Suffering; like a primitive Pietà, he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. It is obvious, of course, that in wrestling reserve would be out of place, since it is opposed to the voluntary ostentation of the spectacle, to this Exhibition of Suffering which is the very aim of the fight. This is why all the actions which produce suffering are particularly spectacular, like the gesture of a conjuror who holds out his cards clearly smile which forebodes an early revenge; to the public. Suffering which appeared without intelligible cause would not be understood; a concealed action that was to all the intolerable nature of his situ- actually cruel would transgress the unwritten rules of wrestling [...] What wrestlers call a hold, that is, any figure which allows one to immobilize the adversary indefinitely and to have him at one's mercy, has precisely the function of preparing in a conventional, therefore intelligible, fashion the spectacle of suffering, of methodically is expected is the intelligible representa- establishing the conditions of suffering. The inertia of the vanguished allows the (temporary) victor to settle in his cruelty and again compares French wrestlers and to convey to the public this terrifying from the 1950s to characters in classical slowness of the torturer: [...] wrestling is the only sport which gives such an exter-What is thus displayed for the public is nalized image of torture. But here again, only the image is involved in the game, and the spectator does not wish for the actual suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography. It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic spectacle:



signifying tragic catastrophe, then moves to the next major spectacle of wrestling: Defeat.] Deprived of all resilience, the wrestler's flesh is no longer anything but an unspeakable heap out on the floor, where it solicits relentless reviling and jubilation. [...] At other times, there is another ancient posture which appears in the coupling of the wrestlers, that of the suppliant who, at the mercy of his opponent, on bended knees, his arms raised above his head, is slowly brought down by the vertical pressure of the victor. In wrestling, unlike judo, Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it

[Barthes discusses the forearm smash as a gesture the crowd is jubilant at seeing the rules broken for the sake of a deserved punishment. [...] Naturally, it is the pattern of Justice which matters here, much more than its content: wrestling is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). This explains why sudden changes of circumstances have in the eyes of wrestling habitueés a sort of moral beauty; they enjoy them as they would enjoy an inspired episode in a novel[...] It is therefore easy to understand why out of five wrestling-matches, only about one is fair. One must realize, let it be repeated, that 'fairness' here is a role or a genre, as in the theatre: the rules do not at all constitute is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, a real constraint; they are the conventional appearance

who greets it when he sees it as an anachronism and a rather sentimental throwback to the sporting tradition ('Aren't they playing fair, those two'); he feels suddenly moved at the sight of the general kindness of the world, but would probably die of boredom and indifference if wrestlers did not quickly return to the orgy of evil which alone makes good wrestling.

It has already been noted that in America wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil (of a quasi-political nature, the 'bad' wrestler always being supposed to be a Red [Communist]).

The process of creating heroes in French wrestling is very different, being based on ethics and not on politics.

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it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory. It is as if the wrestler is crucified in broad daylight and in the sight of all. I have heard it said of a wrestler stretched on the ground: 'He is dead, little Jesus, there, on the cross,' and these ironic words revealed the hidden most ancient purifications.

But what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a perfection of the contest. purely moral concept: that of justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him'

of fairness. So that in actual fact a fair fight is nothing but an exaggeratedly polite one; the contestants confront each other with zeal, not rage [they don't keep pounding after the referee intervenes, etc.] One must of course understand here that all these polite actions are brought to the notice of the public by the most conventional gestures

administering a big kick to one's beaten opponent, [...]

roots of a spectacle which enacts the exact gestures of the of fairness: shaking hands, raising the arms, ostensibly avoiding a fruitless hold which would detract from the Conversely, foul play exists only in its excessive signs:

[ed. Note: This is the initial essay in Barthes' Mythologies, originally published in 1957. The book is a series of small structural investigations of (mass) cultural phenomena; as Barthes explains in his preface to the 1970 French second edition, "This book has a double theoretical framework: on the one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language of socalled mass-culture; on the other, a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanics of this language. I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating 'collective representations' as sign-systems, one might hope to go further than the pious show of unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit- bourgeois culture into a universal nature.

You might think about why the analysis of wrestling would lead off such a project. Also, keep in mind that professional wrestling (in Europe called 'amateur wrestling') in the 1950s had not reached the pinnacle of promotional and popular success that it has today (for one thing, TV was in its infancy); it was more of an 'outlaw' sport lacking the legitimization of gigantic revenues and spectatorships - not to mention wrestlers- turned-Governors. Does Barthes' semiology of wrestling apply to the current version of the sport/entertainment? By the way, cuts in the text are indicated in square

The grandiloquent truth of gestures on life's great occasions. —Baudelaire

means above all else 'Make him pay.' This is therefore, taking advantage of the end of the round to rush treachneedless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action erously at the adversary from behind, fouling him while of the 'bastard,' the more delighted the public is by the the referee is not looking (a move which obviously only blow which he justly receives in return. If the villain - who has any value or function because in fact half the audience is of course a coward - takes refuge behind the ropes, can see it and get indignant about it). Since Evil is the claiming unfairly to have a right to do so by a brazen natural climate of wrestling, a fair fight has chiefly the mimicry, he is inexorably pursued there and caught, and value of being an exception. It surprises the aficionado,

What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard.' [Barthes goes into detail about the French 'model bastard.']

[...] Wrestlers, who are very experienced, know perfectly how to direct the spontaneous episodes of the fight so as to make them conform to the image which the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology. A wrestler can irritate or disgust, he never disappoints, for he always accomplishes completely, by a progressive solidification of signs, what the public expects of him. In wrestling, nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symbol, no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively. Leaving nothing in the shade, each action discards all parasitic meanings and ceremonially offers to the public a pure and full signification, rounded like Nature. This grandiloquence is nothing but the popular and age-old image of the perfect intelligibility of reality. What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a universal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction.

When the hero or the villain of the drama, the man who was seen a few minutes earlier possessed by moral rage, magnified into a sort of metaphysical sign, leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a small suitcase and arm-in-arm with his wife, no one can doubt that wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship. In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible.

ALL OF THE DREAMS YOU GO SELL TURN INNA HELL.

HER BED OF ROSES ARE FILLED WITH THORNS.

HER RIGHTEOUS ROBES ARE TATTERED AND TORN.

IF SHE HAD ONLY STOOD FOR LOVE....

SHE WOULDN'T HAVE TO HIDE IN HER SHAME....

IF SHE HAD ONLY STOOD FOR LOVE....

THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH....

AMERIMACKA...

OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL LIE....

AMERIMACKA...

OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL LIE....

OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL LIE....

THE LAND OF THE FREE BUILT ON SLAVERY....

THE RODISCIOUSNESS IS IN CAPTIVITY.

HER CONSCIOUSNESS IS IN CAPTIVITY.

LOOKING UP ABOVE....

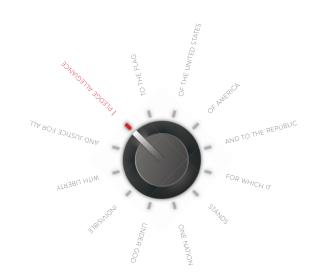
LOOKING UP ABOVE....

'TIL WATER JUST A DROP FROM THE SKY.

THEY TRY TO KEEP US IN THE MUD...

'TILLY WATER JUST A DROP FROM THE SKY.

THEY TRY TO KEEP US IN THE MUD...

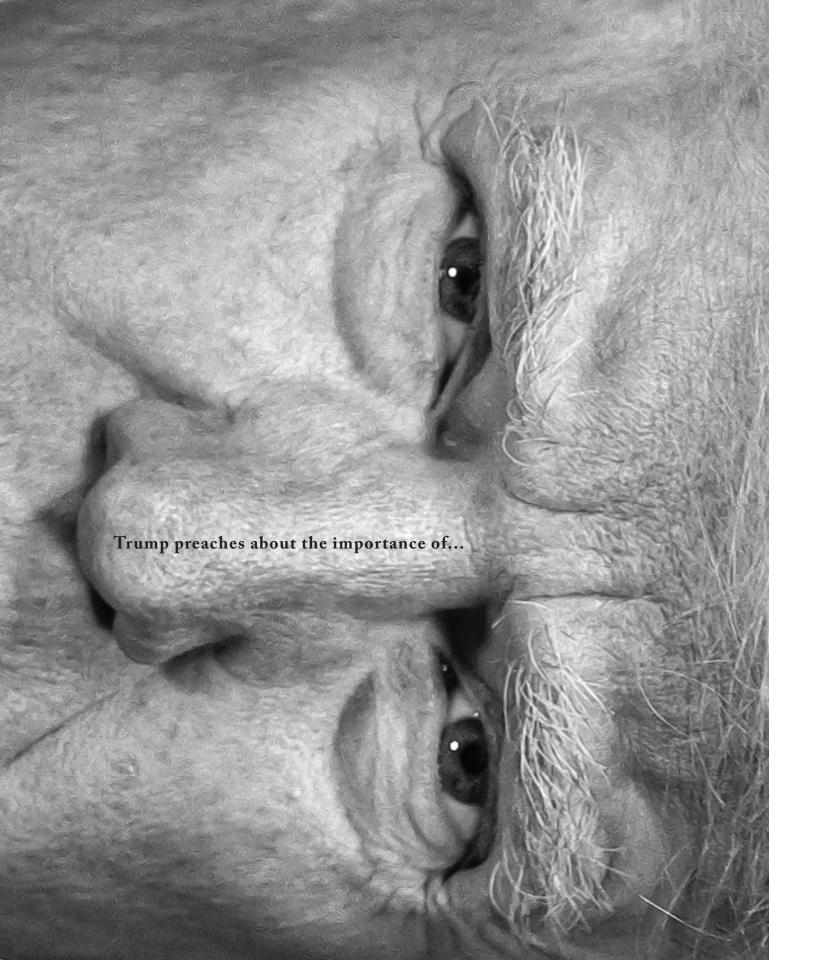


N° OF DEATHS AS A RESULT OF MASS SHOOTINGS | USA

Between 1991-2019

THIEVERY CORPORATION | AMERIMACKA

The Cosmic Game - 2005



exercise and physical fitness but is obese and out of shape.

courage in life but used a fake diagnosis of bone spurs to avoid military service.

others with civility but is discourteous and abrasive in his interactions with others.

valuing women but treats women with contempt and exploits them for his own benefit.

safe health practices in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic but won't wear a mask in public.

being patriotic when he has chosen time and time again to align with despots from around the world.

being mentally tough but is incredibly thin-skinned and frequently overreacts to the slightest criticism.

hiring "only the best people" but has chosen one incompetent buffoon after another to serve in his administration.

investigating the misdeeds of others but does everything he can to obstruct investigations into his own wrongdoings.

unity but often says divisive things, like there being good and bad people on both sides of the violence in Charlottesville.

accepting people regardless of the color of their skin but demeans people of color by saying they come from "shithole countries."

working hard but regularly gets up late, watches television hour after hour, and plays golf more often than any president in history.

personal competence in life but has handled his presidency, specifically the coronavirus pandemic, in a grossly incompetent manner.

compassion for the pain and suffering of others but told the grieving widow of a slain war hero that her husband knew what he signed up for.

HYPOCRISIES LEAGUE GOTHIC-REGULAR

PERCEPTION

BRANDON GROTESQUE –BLACK

HYPOCRISIES HYPOCRISIES HYPOCRISIES HYPOCRISIES HYPOCRISIES

LEAGUE GOTHIC-REGULAR



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WHAT

IF

THIS

IS

ALL

REAL







A FEW MORE IMAGES