

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

January 16, 2007

## Joy in Mudville

Filed under: [baseball](#), [lists](#) — alecsothblog @ 10:08 pm

For years I've been a listener of Sports Talk radio. I don't watch the games. I don't care who wins. I just enjoy the mindless but detailed debate. It is a joy to listen to the nerds and statisticians sink their teeth into something entirely meaningless.

I have a craving for a similar kind of discussion in the arts. Awhile back I toyed with an exercise on [charting photographers](#). (I never did figure out the Y axis). Not long afterward I encountered a much more elaborate [literature map](#). I'm waiting for someone to apply a similar algorithm to the visual arts. The closest I've seen is Peter Schjeldahl's appropriation of the ultimate nerd-stat paradigm, the baseball lineup:

**Cindy Sherman**, third base: middling range but super quickness, Gold Glove, hasn't missed a ball hit her way in two seasons...disciplined hitter, pulls inside pitch for distance...selfless player, cinch to sac bunt or hit behind runner

**Anselm Kiefer**, first base: two-ton Teuton, just adequate at position, can be bunted on...fearsome slugger, aggressive, bad-ball hitter, can take anything downtown...slow but intimidating on bases, catcher advised not to block.

**Brice Marden**, second base: keystone pro, range limited but good jump, unreal pivot...tough out, sometime power...knows the game, team captain.

**Frank Stella**, starting pitcher: ageless vet, owns the ball...heat diminished but sneaky with awesome pitch assortment, super control, mixes speeds, throws changeup for strike...competitor, will brushback.

**Ed Rusha**, short relief: submarine delivery...indifferent heat but slider and screwball sparkle, keeps everything low.

**General Managers:** Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns

**Grounds crew:** Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer

I'm sorry for turning this into Schjeldahl Week, but I've been reading [Hydrogen Jukebox](#) and it is just too good. The only problem with the baseball lineup is that it is dated. (1982, from the essay *Clemente to Marden*)

to Kiefer). What would the lineup look like 25 years later? Who would be playing in Mudville – Barney at the bat?

## 16 Comments

1. The first piece I ever read by Peter Schjeldahl was about Rackstraw Downes in the New Yorker (still available online). It made me want to drop everything I was doing and find those paintings.

*Comment by paul christensen — January 17, 2007 @ [2:04 am](#)*

2. Initial tangential memory of the [Map of Rock Music](#) from the rather silly film, School of Rock. Fun.

Can't help with the Y-axis, but got to thinking about beauty and shit. Dessoir, the German philosopher, postured that there are five aspects to aesthetic quality: the beautiful, the sublime, the tragic, the ugly (the shit?), and the comic. I suppose most photographers adhere to a recipe of these 5 ingredients of different measure.

*Comment by rob — January 17, 2007 @ [4:06 am](#)*

3. Rob, I've looked at that map for 1/2 hour now and can't find KISS or Steely Dan. Do you think fusion (Steely Dan, Blood Sweat & Tears, Chicago) would be a fork off of Jazz or off of Prog Rock?

Also, thanks for the Dessoir reference! A neo-Kantian aestheticist? Great, there go 3 months reading and \$200 on books from Magers & Quinn. \*grin\*

*Comment by Clint — January 17, 2007 @ [4:54 am](#)*

4. Alec,

As a sportsfan with an unhealthy concern for the outcome of games (and as an artist, who, looking back on childhood, sees the roots of my deepest aesthetic concerns reflected in the way I organized by baseball card collection), I will take the following stab:

Starting Pitcher: Jasper Johns (near the end, but unhittable curveball)  
Centerfield: Nina Katchadorian (always able to decode the other team's signs)  
Second Base: Takashi Murakami (signed to a huge contract, but will he deliver?)  
Pitching Coach: Janet Cohen ([here](#))  
Leadoff Hitter: Roy McMakin (wily, always confuses opposing defenses)  
Uniform Design: John Baldessari (couldn't do worse than Tampa Bay D-rays)  
Organist: Christian Patterson (great record collection at fingertips)  
Scoreboard operator: Olafur Eliasson (duh)

Oh man, that's fun, but difficult!

*Comment by [Nick](#) — January 17, 2007 @ [8:10 am](#)*

5. Alec,

Reading this post made me wonder if you are familiar with Photographer Baseball Cards. Black and white baseball cards featuring well known photographers (and other photo personalities) in baseball uniforms, photographed and published by Mike Mandel, 1975. Mandel traveled around the country with uniforms and equipment and produced a series of 132 portraits of photographers in baseball uniforms. The individual cards are now collectable. I have never seen a complete set offered for sale.

*Comment by Jeff — January 17, 2007 @ [8:24 am](#)*

6. Jeff, have a look at [this](#)

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — January 17, 2007 @ [11:32 am](#)*

7. Alec,

I should have known. I must have started following your great blog about September 15th and had not taken the time to look back. The only Mandel card I actually own is number 35 Jim Hajicek. At any rate, keep up your great blog and greetings from Atlanta.

Jeff

*Comment by Jeff — January 17, 2007 @ [12:51 pm](#)*

8. Hmm... Snow Week is followed by Shit Week, featuring a person named Snow, which is followed by Schjeldahl week ... There's a pattern here, and I know you're toying with us. But we'll figure it out, Kaiser Sothe.

*Comment by [Mike C.](#) — January 17, 2007 @ [1:32 pm](#)*

9. Wait.

What kind of person listens to sportstalk radio but doesn't actually watch sports? Isn't that a bit like a vegetarian reading *Pork Roasters Digest*?

*Comment by [Lux Iconic](#) — January 17, 2007 @ [3:14 pm](#)*

10. Schjeldahl self-parody, really. Not that there's anything bad or unexpected about that.

*Comment by zbs — January 17, 2007 @ [3:25 pm](#)*

11. I remember that Rackstraw Downes piece also! And I like to read P.S. even when I totally disagree with him –his writing is just so evocative. Thanks for the reminder about that book, which is on my shelf, half read.

*Comment by Susan — January 17, 2007 @ [6:08 pm](#)*

12. jeff koons: mascot

*Comment by dan — January 17, 2007 @ [7:14 pm](#)*

13. Here is Bukowski's line up from a poem published after his death...

9 bad boys

Celine will bat  
lead-off,  
Shostakovich is the  
second  
spot,  
Dostoevsky should hit  
3rd,  
Beethoven will definitely bat  
clean-up,  
Jeffers is in the 5th  
spot,  
Dreiser can hit  
6th  
and batting 7th  
lets have  
Boccaccio  
and 8th the

catcher:  
Hemingway.

the pitcher?  
hell, give me the  
fucking  
ball.

*Comment by Will Steacy — January 17, 2007 @ [10:18 pm](#)*

14. As a photo-grapher and sometimes sports talk radio host, I understand your current "listening" of the inane babble and your desire to somehow tie this to photographers...maybe the best way to do this would be for us to somehow start a "fantasy league" of shooters since that has now become the nerds way of "playing" a sport...as for Peter Schjeldahl, at every opportunity I re-check Hydrogen Jukebox to re-fresh my will to go on making creative...

*Comment by [tread](#) — January 18, 2007 @ [10:38 am](#)*

15. Not all charts HAVE a Y-axis: Did you ever see "the Periodic Table of Visualization Methods"?

[http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic\\_table/periodic\\_table.html](http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html)

X-Y is just a subset. How about bars with extreme outliers?

*Comment by [Kevin Bjorke](#) — February 8, 2007 @ [12:05 pm](#)*

16. have complete set of mike mandel's baseball cards. Any idea of how much there worth?

*Comment by don — February 5, 2008 @ [3:30 pm](#)*