



CORPORALITY, SPORT AND EROTICA*

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes interrelations that exist between sport and eroticism. It rejects the propagation of sex through sport and the propagation of sport through sex. The author of the paper asks the question whether erotica is a phenomenon which only recently is valued in sports or whether it is an epiphenomenon. We believe that the topic “corporality, sport and erotica” could be discussed from various aspects, the esthetical, ethical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, sexological, gender and commercial could be included. We can say beforehand that the esthetical aspect plays the largest role when addressing such a topic. Both eroticism and beauty are important categories of esthetics. A naked and exposed body (when considering sport and athletes) can often express much more than a covered body. The naked body has the ability to show the dynamics of sports both authentically and truthfully. Erotica in sport, as it is portrayed through the rules and esthetical nature of each individual sport and through the accepted taste and norms of both athletes and spectators, can be considered a cultural relic of sport itself.

Key words: corporality, sport, erotica, categories of esthetics, beauty, sensuality

Introduction

The aim of this paper, keeping in mind the associations between sport and erotica, is to analyze the interrelation between these two important phenomena, i.e. not the propagation of sex through sport nor the propagation of sport through sex. Another aim of this work is to ask the question whether erotica is a value shaping a phenomenon of modern sport or if it is only its epiphenomenon. An epiphenomenon is a secondary phenomenon accompanying some thing or process, which is basically not influenced by the presence of a given phenomenon. The last aim of this work is to answer the question – what are the causes of erotica’s penetration into sport as well as the search for erotica in sport. This is a very important question, as when the causes of some phenomenon, affair or action is known, we can foresee the consequences of such a phenomenon. Sport, or in that case any another related science, will seriously start to deal with the interrelation between sport and erotica only if it is evident that erotica does in fact influence sport. As of now, this influence is only speculated on or talked about unofficially.

The basic aspects of “sport and erotica”

We believe that the topic “corporality, sport and erotica” could be discussed from various aspects: the esthetical, ethical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, sexological, gender, commercial and others. In this paper we shall discuss very briefly only three aspects of “corporality, sport and erotica”, which we consider the most fundamental.

The esthetical aspect

We can say beforehand that the esthetical aspect figures as the most dominant aspect of the topic at hand from some points of view. Eroticism and beauty are important categories of esthetics. Beauty could be characterized as the harmony, symmetry, complexity and impressiveness of something which forms a whole. Both beauty and eroticism are defined by their own and separate ideas. “Erotic and esthetic mean two things; if we want to assimilate them, it means we do not want to understand the nature of them.” [1, p. 85]. Eroticism and beauty are important values of many human activities and belong by nature to sport, whether we look at it from a historical or current point of view. In the creative and undistorted perception of a sports event, sport motility and the athletic body, each of them is understood as a part of the other two but not dependant on the others. If modern sport is able to stimulate a person esthetically, it is also more or less able to stimulate them erotically.

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When speaking about beauty and erotica in sports, it is common to associate it with the corporality of sport, which involves the body, shapes, movements and gestures of an athlete. Yet, this is only a partial picture. It is created on the basis of an initial impulse, most often as a visual perception. However, the entire process of perception does not end on the visual cue. According to Michelangelo, man first perceives “the visible beauty, but from this beauty it is the human soul which uplifts to the beauty itself and by force of visible beauty the man perceives the pure, divine, immortal beauty.” [2, p. 135]. In other words, it is important for the eye to be first steeped in beauty and eroticism and only thus the hedonistic need of a human could be satisfied at the same time.

Ethos, the spirit of sport, goes together with a sport’s esthetical and erotic expressions. If we can divide the beauty of sport into the sensual and spiritual, we can divide the erotica into sensual and spiritual. In such a context Jirásek used an excellent set of esthetical terms. “Elegance and grace, harmony, rhythm, the purity of movement, individual creativity and interpretation, are the values which underline the kinetic art.” [3, p. 17]. The art of sport and erotica establish the relations which inspire the intelligent creator of artistic, sport and erotic values, yet but do not scandalize it.

Eroticism of sport derives from the corporality of athletes and it is identified with the sensuality (and sensuousness) of the human body. Vulgar and aggressive erotica is in today’s modern sport promoted by nudity, which changes the sensual into sexual. However, we do not accept such a development in sport, with an example illustrating what was said above. There is a page in the Slovak sport newspaper *Šport* with classifieds offering sex service of not only women but also men. This kind of advertising is pornographic. The texts and pictures on this page have the style of a porn magazine [4]. We consider such erotica vulgar, inadequate and, what is more, irrelevant to sport and to the daily newspaper *Šport*, as well.

The naked and exposed body (in that of sport and athletes) can often express more than a covered one. The naked body has the ability to show the dynamics of sports both authentically and truthfully. Sports clothing also have their esthetical aspects and are also advantageous from the technical and methodological points of view. For example, the coach of a high jumper can interpret the movement and find any technical mistakes of an athlete easier if he/she can see the particular areas of the body as authentically as possible. The exposure of an athlete’s body allows us to marvel at the impres-

siveness of what sport performance there is in sport. This is possible through the esthetical expression (interpretation) of human corporality in the athlete. Also, the first people, Adam and Eve, were represented in “erotic clothes”.

When speaking about the process of the gradual exposure of an athlete’s body, we find the first such examples in ancient times. It is known that then athletes used to engage in some sport disciplines completely naked. However, in those times nudity was perceived in a different way. Several years ago we performed a case study which involved an athlete, a runner to be exact. We chose an area which we hoped would not cause any undesired attention. With our “experiment” we did not want to elicit any unwanted curiosity, voyeurism or morally shock any accidental spectators. The athlete ran approximately 2 km only in his shoes, without any clothes. The result of this case study was quite banal, irrelevant but telling. Such sport discipline (and we suppose that every sport discipline) requires appropriate and, nowadays, scientifically tested clothes. The esthetical and ethical needs of the athlete do not play a main role when it comes to choosing garments in sports competitions, but objectively tested and validated principles as well as norms which determine what sportswear is worn. If an athlete is driven by their own erotic needs while choosing what to wear, it means that he or she is trying to satisfy their need of becoming a spectacle.

Erotica in sport, as it is portrayed through the rules and esthetical nature of each individual sport and through the accepted tastes and norms of both athletes and spectators, can be considered a cultural relic of sport itself. If comparing it to biological or sexual sexism we can only speak about a simple “natural” instinctive or commercial matter.

An important factor for esthetical thinking and esthetical relation is taste. The gentle and only indicative form of erotica in sport must not be offensive to taste. “In esthetical relation of beauty we take into consideration nobleness, too.” [1, p. 85]. Vulgar, obtrusive and vacuous eroticism in sport is therefore an offence to taste, because of the lack of nobility.

The ethical aspect

Ethics is just as much a part of sport. We can say that the ethical aspect is one of the most discussed topics in sport, and even beyond this arena. Huizinga, while analyzing the role of sport in social culture, critically notes that sport is distancing itself from culture. “Sport has been completely profaned and does not relate to the structure

of society organically, even if the performance is ordered by government. It is more an independent display of agonal instincts than a worthwhile factor for society.” [5, p. 353]. Whenever we talk about the “unification” of sport and erotica, we do it only in private, in unofficial discussions, never at a convention or in other open forum.

The ethical aspect is another very important element in the analysis of the relationships between sport, corporality and erotica. We need also mention the plurality of ethical attitudes in regards to the plurality of ethical concepts, which are based on such attitudes. The spectrum of these attitudes begins with an uncritical acceptance. Then comes an indifference to this matter and ends up with *a priori* rejection of any erotica and cult of the body in sport.

The primal expression of ethical understanding of this topic is by it being made taboo. Sport by itself was in the past considered immoral and did not have any support from society. However, creating taboo of any existing topic is hypocrisy. Pretending that there exists no relation between sport and erotica is an example of such hypocrisy. In such a context we can try to make an analogy. Freud describes how child sexuality was understood in his times and from a medical point of view on this issue. Allowing for such sexuality to exist meant it was “an attack on one of the strongest human prejudices.” Childhood should be “innocent”, without any sexual desires. If people noticed manifestations of children’s carnality, they would consider them as signs of degeneration, corruptness or as freaks of nature [6, p. 28].

An interesting factor in the ethical aspect in the relationship between sport and erotica is sport arriviste. In a terminological dictionary sport arriviste (German *Arriviste*) is defined as an unhealthy ambition, arrogance, careerism, frantic effort to stand out from society, an uncontrolled effort to become number one in a sports team, or some sport discipline, over-ambitiousness, a will to succeed. Sport arriviste has, therefore, signs of some overblown, extremely strong desire to win no matter what; it shows signs of over-competitiveness, an unhealthy desire to distinguish oneself and to be the best, even if it means using unfair practices, tools, or by breaking the rules of fair play. One of these “forbidden” practices is the erotic propagation of corporality values and the sensuality of the athlete [7, p. 204]. The forms of corporality propagation are mainly body language gestures and its nakedness.

Nakedness is “an exciter” for moralists and puritans. Therefore, they denounce it wholly. The erotic side of sport and any erotic correlations always bring

forward the potency of provocation. Provocation itself is not immoral, it is obviously morally indifferent. However, if the form of provocation purposefully focuses on the ethical feelings of some group of spectators, the ethical value becomes very disputable. We can say that in sport nakedness is considered as a form exposing of the body, its parts, proportions, force, but not as a form of “artistic” sports act or as pornography. Not every manifestation of nakedness is perceived as a manifestation of sexuality. “It is not necessary to perceive the nakedness under the terms of sexuality. It is not the nakedness that is a question of morality, but imagination which is aiming at sexual levels of nakedness.” [5, p. 11]. The exposure of athlete’s bodies (both male and female) should contribute to the understanding of the beauty and spirit of sport as well as to the beauty and soulfulness of human. The body and its gestures combined with a touch of eroticism can be understood as a means of communication between the athlete and the spectator and with the other co-actors of a sport event. Probably there is some specific self-satisfaction present in athletes while exposing themselves in front of spectators. Such self-satisfaction is gladly accepted as a variegation when participating in sport events. We do not support the notion that such exposure can be understood as a public aphrodisiac for spectators. If it sexually excites a person in the audience, it is not the consequence of such an expression in sport, but the consequences of a spectator’s desires.

The issue of the nakedness of the body, eroticism and sensuality does differentiate genders from the ethical point of view. The gender perception of a given topic is subordinated by the culture of a given society. Many societies consider themselves modern and progressive in the full sense of these words, although, in reality, prejudice prevails and stereotypes continue to dominate in many modern societies. The norms of women and men are applied to both erotica and sport to judge what is not right, because it is immoral, provocative, tempting and aimed against traditional values. Straková pointed out this problem in general [8, p. 407–408]. “In our society it is not appropriate even nowadays to satisfy the woman’s needs independently, or to treat them as a part of her personality without any sense of guilt. The autonomous female sexuality is still, in our society, connected to the terms like shamelessness, unsoundness, or immorality and, in extreme cases, evokes the sense of guilt among girls and women.” We can compare it to an analysis of the word shyness made by Max Scheler in 1923. According to him, shyness can be divided into two different forms: “physical shyness, in other words,

the vital shame where the sexual shyness is only the strongest vital shyness (...), the other one is spiritual shyness, in other words, spiritual shame (...). Both forms are used only when "I" defend myself from the whole sphere of general." [9, p. 85]. In that matter, the human being, whether woman or man, can feel shyness as well in the dictation of moral norms.

The protagonists of modern-day sport are people of different age and health. Children and seniors, the able and disabled, all of them engage in sport. The sport and erotica relation is always present in its moral form. We believe that this relation between sport and erotica is relevant only (or mainly) for sport done by able adults and young people, through responsible athletes, both women and men. Sport and erotic cultural forms are only permissible in the sport of adults. These reasons lead us to think that erotica in sport is inadmissible for children and adolescents from the moral and legal points of view; the infiltration of erotica in sport could be perceived as an instigation of pedophilia and would be a flagrant threat to the moral development of young athletes.

The sport and erotica relationship is suitable mainly for young athletes who use it to form their own esthetical and ethical perspectives. Erotica is natural for adolescents as it expresses their personal and inner needs, as well as their need for external communication. With all due respect to seniors who take part in sport, any erotic symbols used would be distasteful, offensive, comical, and what is more, they could exhort to gerontophilia.

A similar problem occurs in disabled athletes taking part in sport. Here, the relationship of sport and erotica could also be offensive, tragicomic, cynical, or even deviant, therefore it is applicable only to able-bodied athletes. It is possible that the level of infiltration of erotica in sport depends on the kind and the degree of disability present and on the visibility of this health impairment or disability. From this point of view, one could surmise if erotica and sport are tolerable in the case of deaf athletes.

The philosophical aspect

At the end of our paper we wish to describe several possible philosophical takes on the erotica and sport relationship. Mainly we think that "erotic" is subjective. The same object, the same behavior is perceived by every person in different erotic ways. Our optical system is "adjusted" individually. The same happens to our erotic perception. If we want to see something in a given thing, we mainly have to want to see it. The dimension and quality of erotica in sport, to some extent, depends

on the individual. If we want to understand each other, we have to be quite empathic.

Erotica is also objective, otherwise there would not *de facto* be any reason to discuss it. It is obvious that erotica exists in sport; what we do not know is what it actually is, how it is identified, what the real expressions of it are. Sport is a cultural activity in which there are strict and exact rules. Sport has a system character, therefore, the same strict and exact rules should be valid also in its subsystems. We cannot determine the rules of tolerable existence of erotica in sport with a scientific consistency. In spite of that, we believe there are given "common" criteria of eroticism in sport, mainly the social convention. Contemporary sport is a proof that these (unwritten) criteria are respected.

The word erotica itself derives from the name Eros. According to original ancient Greek mythology, and as it is well known, it was the name of the god of love who had a dignified position in mythology. Gods were not all born at the same time, but they came into being one after another. "For the Greeks, Chaos was the first god, followed by Earth or Gaia, while Eros came third." [10, p. 115]. Hand in hand with the topic of sport and erotica goes along the topic of sport and love. Yet, not for this reason alone did we return to ancient times. Making use of what is known from these times, we want to point to the creative power of erotica. Each god represents some principles. From the very beginning, Eros had creative and eternal power. According to the ideas of ancient Greeks, immortality for gods was only guaranteed when they came into the world and when they deserved such immortality. According to the ideas of Plato, which are presented in the dialogues included in the Symposium, Eros leads the human soul from the desire of beautiful bodies to the desire of spiritual beauty. He uplifts this beauty up to a cognition of what the idea of beauty is [11, p. 707–708].

Conclusions

We suppose that in the philosophical aspect the form of coexistence between sport and erotica and the variability of the course of genesis of this coexistence must be distinguished. In the former case, "sport" erotica arises as a natural but unplanned product of sport; it arises spontaneously. In the latter case we reflect the moment of "sports" erotica as a consequence created by an unexpected situation (the simplest example could be a defect of an athlete's garment). The phenomenon of "sports" erotica appears in sport also as a natural and calculated product of playing a sport. The basic reason

why comes from animal nature and social substance and natural character. We understand these moments of sports erotica are a result of a satisfied need in seeing, feeling and experiencing eroticism in sport. Yet, not everybody has this ability. *Esse est percipi* – to be is to be perceived. Erotica occurs in sport only when its existence is perceived by a spectator or any other sport protagonist. The world around us only exists if it is in fact perceived by us.

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