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ABSTRACT

Critique of Sports Reasoning. A Philosophical Archaeology of Modern Sports.

Starting from the principle of pure immanence to avoid new normative hierarchies, this Critique of Sports Reasoning unwinds three major ontological paradigms in modern sports: the still prevailing ‘sport as play’ paradigm, its apparent antipode ‘sport as fight’ and the hidden discourse of ‘sport as sexuality’. In doing so, this philosophical archaeology integrates the continental philosophical approaches of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Julia Kristeva and Giorgio Agamben.

The first reason why such a process of ‘ungrounding’ is presumed necessary, is the growth of excessive abuses in modern sports, such as violence, sexual assaults, the use of doping and corruption. The second argument to rethink modern sports follows from its progressive instrumentalization in different societal areas, such as education, health care, inclusion politics and crime prevention. Which conceptions and thoughts underlie the justification of modern sports as a healthy, transformative field? What assumptions are structurally validated and what elements are ‘banned’ and excluded?

Chapter 1 contains the archeological analyses of the scientifically accepted ‘sport as play’ paradigm. It shows that a selective interpretation of both Huizinga’s Homo Ludens, as French phenomenology and Suits’ utopian concept of sport, merely validate the liberating, innocent aspects of sport as lusory ‘game-playing’. Chapter 2 follows the influence of psychoanalyses in the popular, yet shameful narrative of ‘sport as sexuality’. It points out that modern sports seems to accept its contribution to biopolitics in promising a continuous fulfillment of bodily desires. In modern sports, the ‘use’ of bodies is both constituted and exploited in a libidinous, self-caring practice. Finally, chapter 3 deconstructs the apparent antipode of the ‘sport as play’ myth: which assumptions in the discursive practice of sport science help to justify the ‘sport as fight’ paradigm? It appears that in centralizing the agonistic dimension of sports and the ‘will to win’, its archaic sacral roots and, as such, sacrificing power have been lost.

In concluding and opening up to future research, this inquiry explores Agambens concept of ‘potentiality’ as a way out of the repression of modern sports current paradigmatic ontology. A new ‘form-of-sport’ will only come from activating its impotentiality.