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Playing and displaying identity
- about bodily movement, political ideologies and the question of Olympic humanism

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Abstract
Does post-modernity in the age of globalization confront us with a completely new formation of society and culture, growing out of classical modernity with evolutionary necessity? Is sport a neutral base of physical activities, which only secondarily is used or "misused" by political ideologies? Does the process of global destabilization make it urgent – and is it possible – to turn back to some form of original Olympic humanism furnishinng us with a politically neutral framework for a better sport?

We look closer at these crucial questions by focusing on the construction of national identity and related political ideologies.

Sport has a social and psychological dimension of identity building. When people are playing, they form social patterns expressing whom "we" are. Identity develops by nostrification: "This is us". Movement and identification can, however, be linked to each other in very different ways. This is illustrated by three situations of Danish sports showing very different patterns of identification and belonging, each related to specific ways of bodily display.

The first pattern of movement is characterized by competition and result**,** and what comes out of it, is an identity of production. This model is hegemonic in modern sport, especially represented by Olympic sport. The other pattern of movement stresses discipline and fitness for the purpose of an identity of integration. The third pattern of movement centres around festivity and play, related to popular identity.

The different types of sport and movement correspond to different types of explicit political identification. Nationalism of production corresponds to the logic of the market and its rationality of competition. Nationalism of integration follows the logic of the state and its national pedagogy. The model of popular identity or civic nationalism corresponds to the logic of civil society with its self-organization and mutual communication.

This method of thinking in configurations and contradictions helps us critically to evaluate the actual questions about globalism and ideological neutrality of sports as well as chances and traps of Olympic humanism.

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5. Together, with and between – inter-body and inter-humanism

Does post-modernity in the age of globalization confront us with a completely new formation of society and culture, which has been growing out of classical modernity with evolutionary necessity? This is what some social theories postulate.

Furthermore: Is sport a neutral base of physical activities, which only secondarily is used or "misused" by political ideologies? This is an assumption, which many theories of sports take as granted.

And furthermore: Does the process of global destabilization make it urgent – and is it possible – to turn back to some form of original Olympic humanism, which might furnish us with a politically neutral framework for a better sport? This hope can be heard at many places in the world of sports.

Methodologically, the questions of Olympic sport and humanism can be approached in very different ways. One the one hand, we can try to construct an Olympic humanism on the basis of Greek Platonic and Coubertinian neo-humanistic thinking, which may furnish us with idealistic values (Andrzej Pawlucki). On the other hand, the real existing Olympism provokes critique of corruption and mafia-like structures, of authoritarian attitudes and technological subjection of the body (Wojciech Liponski and Jerzy Kosiewicz alongside with Jennings 1992, 1996, 2002 and Lenskyj 2000, 2002). What I want to propose in the following paper is a third way: an analytical approach to the inner contradictions of modern sports as movement culture.

1. Different ways of saying "we" in sports

Sport has a social and psychological dimension of identity building. When people are playing, they form social patterns expressing whom "we" are. Identity develops by nostrification, saying by practical action: "This is us".

Movement and identification can, however, be linked to each other in very different ways. This may be illustrated by three situations of saying "we" in Danish sports.

(1.) The first situation may seem well-known to any observer of the world of spectator sport. A Danish boy of twelve years experiences the European soccer championship in 1992, which brought Danish football to the top.

> *"We travelled to Copenhagen (… and) got some good places in front of the large screen, which was erected on the place of the city hall. At first we sat down on the asphalt and regarded the singing roligans (soccer fans … When) the first goal was shot, the mood rose extremely high, and the jubilation became wilder and wilder. (… When) the second goal was shown on the screen, the mood really was up to the heat of cooking. A total chaos seemed to break out, and in the midst of the crowd one really had to take care in order not to fall and to be kicked down. (…) But even if it became dangerous at last, this was one of the greatest experiences I have had in my life."*
> (From a school composition).

The soccer victory and especially the fact that the final match was won against a German team, became a national event in Denmark. When the victorious soccer team was welcomed by thousands of supporters in Copenhagen, they shouted from the balcony of the town hall: "*Deutschland, Deutschland alles ist vorbei, alles ist vorbei, alles ist vorbei…*" (Germany, Germany, everything is over…). The significance of the event transgressed by far the limits of sport. Some observers related this triumph in sports to the referendum the same year, when the majority of the Danish voted "No" against the Maastrich treaty of the European Union.

(2.) The second story is about quite another type of movement, the Danish tradition of gymnastics. In 1931, the Danish gymnastic leader Niels Bukh organized a tour around the world with his gymnastic team. This is what he experienced in Korea, which at that time was under Japanese military rule.

> *"Our good reminiscences from China and Korea are related to crowds of people and Danish flags at the reception at the railway stations of Mukden and Seoul and to children's choirs singing Danish songs there. When we demonstrated our gymnastics in the stadium of Seoul and let our flag down in front of 35 000 amazed people who were jubilating for Denmark, and when the large students' choir was singing 'King Christian' (the Danish national anthem), we all felt stronger than ever before how wonderful it was to be Danish and to serve Denmark"* (quoted by Krogshede 1980).

The Niels Bukh gymnastics had their roots in the democratic farmers' *folkelig* gymnastics and were presented in the Olympics of Stockholm 1912, Antwerp 1920 and Berlin 1936. Their new form was met by an especially warm welcome in Japan as well in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Niels Bukh was himself impressed by the Germany of 1933, which he, though not exactly a National Socialist himself, regarded as a model for Denmark (Eichberg in Mangan 1996, Bonde 2003).

(3.) The third situation differs fundamentally both from the sportive and the gymnastic pattern. The story is about a tug-of-war contest, which was the high-light of *Fagenes Fest*, the workers' "festival of professions" in Copenhagen 1938. The Danish daily "*Social Demokraten*" described it like this:

> *"There was a gigantic performance. The blacksmiths quickly defeated the bakers, and the tailors could not stand long time against the coal-heavers who weighed at least twice as much. But there arose a gigantic competition between the dairy workers and the brewery men – and much to the distress of the agitators for abstinence, the beer won. The final was between the brewers and the coalmen, and here the brewery workers had 'to bite the dust'. 'This is not at all surprising', said the captain of the coal-heavers. 'You only carry the beer, but it is us who drink it'"* (quoted from Hansen 1993).

Tug-of-war was an Olympic discipline from 1900 to 1920 (Eichberg 2003a). The "Festival of the Professions" started in 1938 as an annual sport event of the Danish workers' movement, stimulated by similar arrangements in France and Germany. It combined competitive sports events with more carnival-like competitions like running-matches of domestic servants with buckets and scrubbers, going-matches of pottery workers with piles of plates on their heads, hammer cast of blacksmiths and obstacle races of socialist scouts eating cream puffs on their way. During the Second World War when Nazi German held Denmark occupied, *Fagenes Fest* developed towards a demonstration of national togetherness and attracted at that time the largest spectatorship in its history (Hansen 1993).

Production, integration and encounter by movement

In the three described cases of sport, very different patterns of identification or nostrification become visible, different ways of "we"-building and belonging. And these are related to different ways of bodily display.

(1.) The first pattern of movement is characterized by *competition and result*, and what comes out of it, is an *identity of production*. Sport of achievement produces "wares" in centimetres, grams, seconds, points, goals, medal listing ranks or victorious names, which are

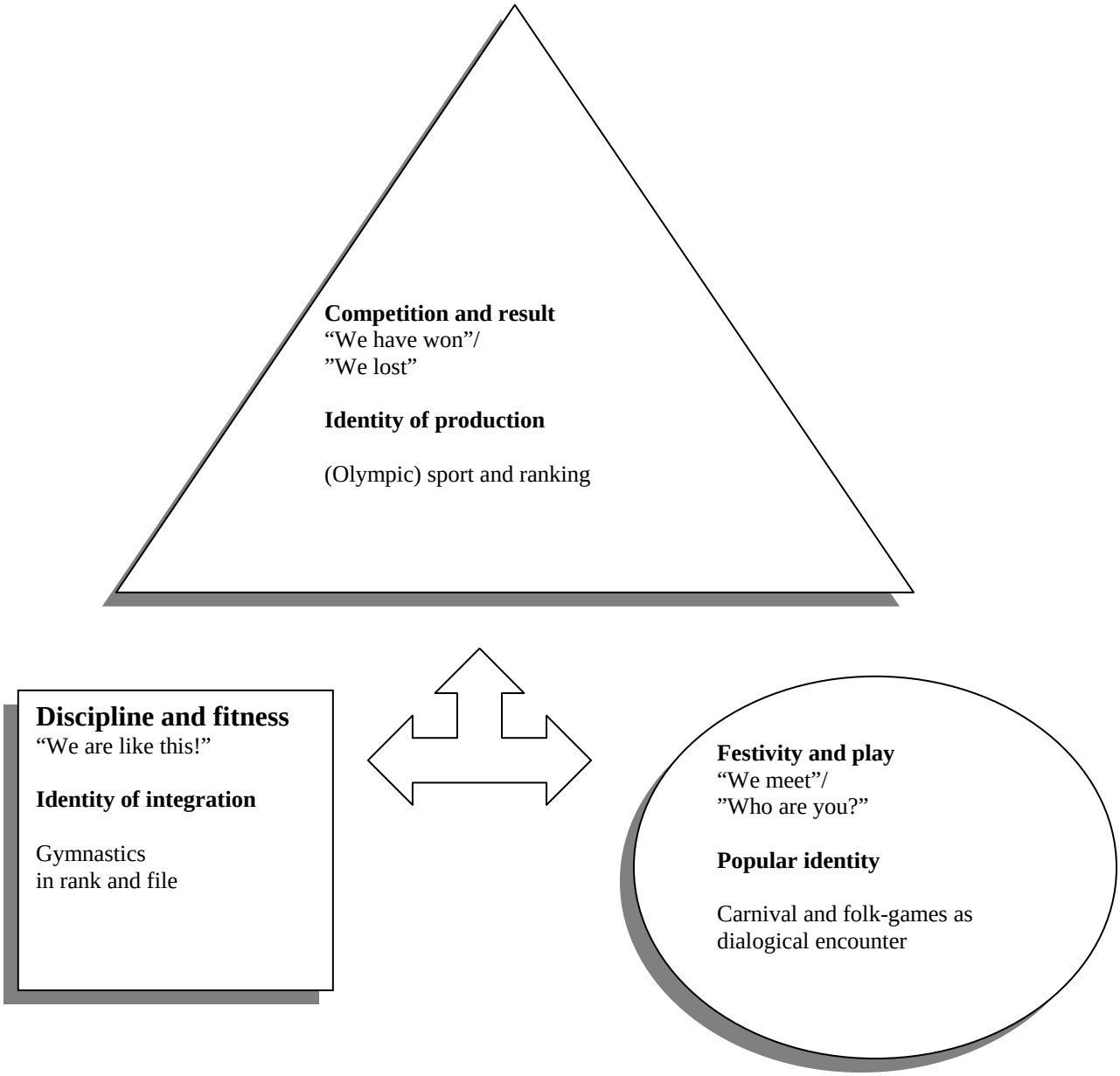
taken as an indicator for "who we are". By linking identification to these results, the competitive encounter in sports is stirring up feelings of connection and togetherness. Outcomes and records of sport are regarded as representative, as collective results: “Two-zero for us.” The result can release strong emotions: "We have won" – or: "We were defeated." This model is hegemonic in modern sport, typically represented by Olympic sport and consequently overexposed in the media display of sports.

(2.) The other pattern of movement stresses *discipline and fitness* for the purpose of an *identity of integration*. Gymnastics contrasts to sport by being independent of the measurement of results. Competition is not needed here either, and it can be one single team alone, which arouses the impression of collective identity and the feeling of community. In this case the presentation and production of "we"-feeling is effected by discipline and a collective demonstration of fitness and by together keeping to the rule. A team of dynamic young people moves in rank and file, with flag and hymn, radiating by its joint force and precision, “who we are”. Display of aesthetic processes and choreographies plays a more important role than the list of results.

(3.) The third pattern of movement centres around *festivity and play*, related to *popular identity*. In popular festivity, dance, play and game, all people can participate, whether old or young, male or female, folk from different ethnic origins and different languages, top athletes as well as handicapped persons. The feeling of “we” is produced by *encounter*, the meeting in a temporary community of participation. In this situation, tradition and surprise are mixing, competition and laughter, skill and drunkenness. Local associations with their continual work may function as elements of continuity, but the festive encounter is the important event – a moment of discontinuity, surprise and becoming “high” in the here-and-now. The differences inside the group are not treated by streamlining or uniforming them, but by displaying or even overstressing them, often in grotesque and carnivalistic forms. In popular festival, people play theatre, using roles and masks. They display the dialectic of identity and non-identity, of “who I am” and otherness. The eccentricity of popular culture follows the logics of *mutual communication*: The truth is neither here nor there, it is in-between**.**

Sport is not only one.

Fig. 1: Contradictions of movement culture



2. National identity is not one

The different types of sport and movement correspond to different types of explicit political identification. Three patterns of – more or less explicit – identification become visible:

(1.) The first model is the *nationalism of production*. It is following the logic of the *market*. The model of competitive sport is correlated with a type of nationalism, which is oriented towards achievement and production, growth and expansion. The nation is in this context understood as an economic unit, competing with other nations on the market and developing step by step in an historical evolution from the local to the global level. This nationalism as well as the corresponding sport appears as "un-ideological", needing no explicit nationalist theory. Historically, this model has especially been developed by the Anglophone nations and sport cultures.

(2.) The second model is the *nationalism of integration*. It is following the logic of

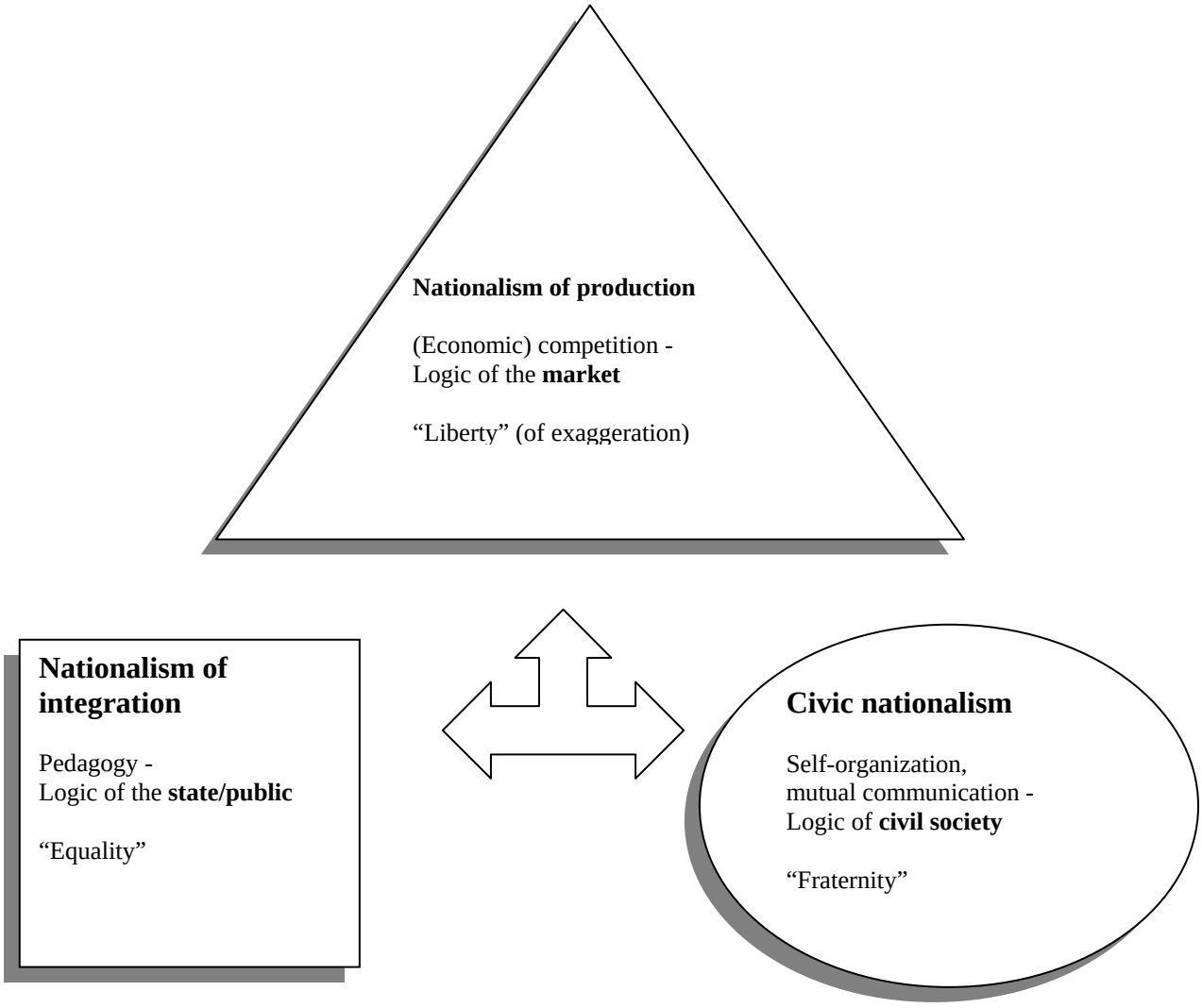
the *state* or the public. The patriotic gymnastics looks much more explicit and "ideological" than sport. It corresponds to a nationalism of integration, stressing the national-pedagogical unity of all citizens. In this type of nation building, sport may on one hand serve as a means of national representation and demonstration, which is directed outward. On the other, it functions – or is intended – as an instrument of inward directed discipline.

Niels Bukh's gymnastics, fascinating both Japanese militarism and German Nazism, showed some possible authoritarian and corporatist potentials of this model. Yet, the nationalism of integration has a much wider significance, following the logic of the territorial state-nation and its rationality of public order more generally. As such, the disciplining type of national identification and integrative movement culture became also visible in the revolutionary France of the Jacobins after 1789, in the Spartakiads of Soviet type and in many countries of the Third World after de-colonization.

(3.) The third model is *popular identification* or *civic nationalism*. It is following the logic of *civil society*. Democracy and nation building is an action of civil society and of mutual communication. Revolution, association and togetherness in practical action have built modern political identity by saying: "We are the people", whether in 1789 or in 1989. In Denmark, the culture of associations and festivities of sports goes back to the *folkelig* movements of the early nineteenth century, which have shaped the atmosphere and paved the way towards co-operative production, alternative *folkehøjskole* pedagogics and *folkelig* gymnastics in free associations. In the Third World, the peoples' anti-colonial uprisings have had similar effects. Nation building, just like popular sport, has been growing from below.

The different models of sport – as well as those of identification and nation building – thus point into very different directions. Just as sport is not only one, there are fundamental differences in the psychology of identity building. Like sport, nation building is not one, nor is national democracy just one.

Fig. 2: Contradictions of national identity



The troll, the golem and the joker

This may look like a situation of choice, and indeed, it is – in some respect. However, each of the three sectors and logics – commercial, public and civil societal – is necessary, and none can be spared away. Nevertheless, they call for a separate and differentiated evaluation.

(1.) The market is needed for supplying society with wares and services. The dimension of commercial interest cannot be excluded from social life, this is what the experiences of state monopolism - whether of Eastern European Soviet type or of East Asian Confucian type - have shown. But the market cannot or can only to very limited degree be regulated along democratic or social lines. The market appeals to the greediness of the individual, it cultivates dreams of voracity, eagerness for entertainment and waste, it favours prodigality.

With a picture from popular culture one can say that the market is the troll. The troll, the demon, is a picture of human ugliness, which is part of our existence, whether we like it or not. The human being cannot exclude the ugly from its life without damageing itself and humanity. The troll is in us, we are ourselves actors in the market. Expressed in the terms of psychoanalysis: The market, the troll, is our shadow.

The troll shows his face in sport as soon, as the peaceful supporter culture turns into violence. By the racist construction of the "natural" body, the othering of the troll - "the unathletic Jew", "the unintelligent, athletic Negro" - points towards one's own troll inside. The ugly troll is also present in the culture of doping which is not a contradiction to the principle of sport, but a logical prolongation of the strive of performance towards technology and scientification, towards chemistry and genetics, towards growth and maximation (Hoberman 1992). The principle of achievement itself is the home of the troll. However, without performance, achievement and excellence - what would be our life?

(2.) In a similar way we cannot imagine modern life without the state. But power always corrupts. Dreams about some sort of state-guaranteed justice or about state socialism did not lead to any humanistic solution. The state is a golem. The old Jewish legend tells about the golem as a human-like being made of loam for serving the human beings. But the golem has the tendency to make himself autonomous and turn against his master. The golem withdraws from the control of the human being who should give the orders. The golem wants to become the master himself. Fascism and Soviet state monopolism have shown the golem rising to tremendous power, and the disciplinary gymnastics of Niels Bukh delivered a picture of the golem culture.

(3.) That is why one can expect only limited help from the golem against the troll, only little support from the state against the totalitarianism of the market. But there is a third factor in the game. Civil society, the people, is the joker. Where two main actors clash - West against East, bourgeoisie against proletariat, market against state, or how ever one has defined the main-contradiction in society - there is always a third figure, suddenly giving the game an unexpected turn. The people rise and enter into the game - the joker, the fool, the trickster appears on the scene. Democracy can be understood as an official recognition that the people is the decisive joker.

The picture of the joker is, however, not only positive or unproblematical as it may appear to a romantic observer. There is something unserious about the fool - as well as about the festivities of civil society, the joking relations of the workers' tug-of-war. There is carnival. We hear a tone of situational laughter, aroused quickly and disappearing as quick again.

Anyway, market, state and civil society are parts of our own daily practice, of our personal psychology. The pictures of the troll, the golem and the joker tell about the inner logic contradictions of the human being. The personal identity of "the individual" is not just one, but a field of permanent social contradiction.

Thus, in spite of regarding the actual globalization of the market and of the Olympic type of sport as a "new" and "evolutionary", "post-modern" phenomenon, we can look at it with the perspective of inner contradictions.

3. Globalization in contradictions

A first conclusion could be: Ideologies do not only "use" sport and movement culture, but they are themselves based on basic patterns of bodily practice. *Different forms of movement and sport favour different forms of ideology*.

One of these ideological constructions is the imagination of "post-modernity" and "globalization" itself. The analysis of sport can add some concrete understanding to the theory of globalization, which the general sociology has difficult to grasp (Bauman 1998).

A way to this concrete understanding can be the actual panorama of Olympic sports under the conditions of globalization. What we meet is a variety of scenarios, some more hypothetical, others more concrete. All together, they form a pattern of contradictions, which produces the actual impression of "global post-modernity":

(1.) *Individual competition*. The hypothesis of individualization is based on the assumption of the lonely athlete. The Olympic sport develops – and constructs – "the

individual human being" irrespectively of his or her cultural connection. You are the smith of your own luck – this corresponds to the logic of neo-liberalism and the market.

This is a central element of the ideological complex of "globalization". Globalized sport tries to solve the (post-) colonial question by among others "putting Negroes on the skis". In the 1990s, two Kenyan runners were brought to Finland in order to turn them into skiers. Indeed, one of them gained Olympic experience in 1998, but as soon as the media had satisfied their curiosity, the sponsor scrapped the project.

The individual athlete, free from cultural connection, reminds of the description, which Frantz Fanon (1969) once has given about the "*psycho-affective mutilations*" of colonial power: "*human beings without horizon, without borders, without colour, no home, no roots, angels*". There is a connection between individualization and alienation.

Empirically, the hypothesis of the lonely and self-installed athlete contains an abstraction, contrasting with the collective expressions of sports by national anthems, national flags and accompanying ethno-pop, which are still customary or even expanding. It is only during the recent events that the victory lap, the run of the winner with the national flag around the stadium, has become a general ritual. But also the teams of powerful economic corporations – for instance in Tour de France – continuing the "totalization of sport" (Heinilä 1982) in new commercial forms, reveal the hypothesis of individualization as ideology: The athlete is not alone in the world. But whom is she or he together with? One answer is: the "race".

(2.) *The competition of "races"*. The strong presence of African and Afro American athletes in certain running competitions has given rise to a new debate about "black" and "white" in sports, especially in America. In China, experts work on medal strategies to avoid ineffective investment into disciplines like basketball, boxing and sprint, where black athletes dominate. With scientific assumptions about blood groups and similar biological factors, sport is classified after different types of "race".

Modernity has dreamt through centuries of a sport without colours. This is challenged now: Is the colourless sport an illusion?

Anyway, the actual "globalization of racial folklore" (Hoberman 1997) with its dichotomization of "black and white" falls even back before the "tribal" differentiations, which the classical colonialism once had elaborated (Bale 2002). Indeed, the case of the Kenyan runners' succes shows at nearer examination relevant ethnic differentiations inside the Kenyan society (Bale/Sang 1996). Does this mean that we have to think a new ethnic tribalization?

(3.) *Tribal competitions*. In 1989, the revolutionary move of "We are the people!" spread in Eastern Europe, in Central Asia and on the Balkan. Larger state-political units dissolved with the break-down of the Soviet Empire, and minor national units saw the light also in sports. We did not only witness the birth of Slovenian and Macedonian, Belorussian and Estonian Olympic committees, of teams from Uzbekistan, Latvia and Turkmenistan etc., but there was also uprising in the West. The Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992 gave lift to Catalan "tribal" politics of identity (Hargreaves in Heinemann 2001). Scotland and other Celtic countries are developing their own sports identity – all this in prolongation of classical modern processes of tribalization (Mangan 1996). Will we soon meet teams and Olympic committees from East Timor and Kosovo, and then from Tibet, Pays Basque, Kurdistan, Quebec, Tjetjenia, Tatarstan, Corsica, Brittany etc.? Maybe, the nations of the future are rarely known to us at the time being.

The new tribalizations have often undertones of cultural multiplicity and richness, of autonomy and liberation. But tribal war is another possibility. The massacres between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda are not placed in a past time, closed and finished.

The classical national state as well as its ideological correlate, the "individual

citizen", is, thus, not only challenged by the market (the trans-national corporation team), but also – and in accordance with its own public logic – by tendencies towards larger units, the "race", and towards minor units, the "tribal" neo-nation. Meanwhile, other practices develop outside the logic of Olympic sport, and public strategies try to open up into the direction of welfare and integration.

Post-Olympism?

(4.) *Welfare sport*. An increasing part of modern body culture is organized around health and social integration. In prolongation of the classical model of gymnastics, new practices appeal to the individual wish of fitness on one hand and to the state-political interest in public health on the other. The public is furthermore interested in social integration of "marginal groups". The Australian Olympics in 2000 used the boomerang of the Aboriginals as logo, postulating a "*harmonious society, united in its patriotism"*. The Sydney case shows, how welfare sport is embraced by Olympism, but the Olympic model of hierarchical achievement and the welfare model of equality remain nevertheless in tension.

(5.) *Anti-sport*. Quite outside the Olympic system, some tendencies of militant anti-sportive politics of the body have seen the light. While earlier Islamism like the Egypt Muslim Brotherhood once had tried to copy – and thereby to counter – British colonial sport and American YMCA sport, some wings of the most recent Muslim fundamentalism tend to reject sport as such. Traditions of Wahabism as a special type of Puritanism gain terrain. The Afghan Taliban combined the anti-sport line with a violent policy of prohibition against music and dance as well as against the popular New Year festivity *Nawroz*.

A global strategy of prohibition is, thus, directed against both Olympic sport and its popular alternatives. This tendency arises from civil society but is striving towards a public policy of repression, with a marked gender bias. New, surprising identities are thus growing from civil society, which shows as not at all harmless.

(6.) *Popular festivity and non-sports*. On the other side of the spectrum of civil society, "non-sports" as they were observed already in 1984, are expanding. Popular festivities, play and games are developing to new extent and in new organizational frameworks. Some old games have become "new games" and found attention in the Third World. In Western countries they have given birth to a new festival culture across the borders. Consequently, research has developed a new attention towards play and games in civil society (Barreau/Jaouen 1998 and 2001). And inside the metropoles of immigration, the indigenous festivities and games are regarded as a way to meet the psychological and cultural problems of alienation.

Outdoor activities have developed, too. They use the nature in different ways, from high-tech risk sport to soft activities "without leaving traces". The Scandinavian tradition of *natur- og friluftsliv* is one element in this spectrum.

Expressive activities develop currently, among others out of indigenous dance culture and martial arts and their combination. Indonesian *pencak silat* held its first international tournament in Vienna in 1986. Brazilian *capoeira* has a place on *folkehøjskoler* in the Danish countryside. Gymnastics as popular festivity attract large participation and spectatorship, with Zulu warrior dance from South Africa included.

While expressive activities represent an outward turn of popular movement, other activities turn inward, to the human psyche. This inward turn of body culture shows a broad spectrum, with risk sport side by side with meditative deepening, with therapeutic concentration and the ecstatic sound of drums… Bungee jump is one example. From its starting point as a popular festivity, the Melanesian "land diving" of Vanuatu, it was transferred to an outdoor practice in New Zealand and placed into a neo-colonial and commercial frame-work, and expanded further to the world-wide bungee jump as adventure

sport and risk test. By this cultural "translation", bungee jump is a case of what can be called the "decentring of the West".

Is there any over-all pattern in these changes, or do we find just a panorama of whatever? New methodological questions are rising. When analysing globalization from below, from the body – when analysing movement in connection with identity – when analysing body culture under the aspect of contradictions – the way opens towards finding patterns in the multitude of varieties. The (un-) balance of power between market, state and civil society is one promising approach: the market with its affinity to individual competition (scenario 1), the state with its special relations to welfare sport (scenario 4) and civil society with its manifestations in popular festivity (scenario 6).

This leads to the *second conclusion*: Globalization is not just one new phase in the historical evolution – step by step – towards larger units, but a new arrangement of *contradictions under the hegemony of the market*.

"Olympic humanism" is not neutral in relation to this. It raises questions of values in the relation between sport, democracy and recognition of difference – and about the contents of "humanism" itself.

4. Sameness and otherness – culture of difference

The multiplicity in the field of body culture has practical consequences for the ways, in which societies treat internal varieties and differences. In relation to "otherness" – especially alterity of minorities – it really matters, which model of sport a society is choosing.

The mainstream sport functionalism tells that sport – meaning "the one sport" – is good for the function of nation building. Competitive sport teaches streamlining the body and keeping to rules of competition. It homogenizes and normalizes the individual human being by adapting it to the rational body technique of winning and producing results. In the hierarchical order of a competitive sport, there is not place for otherness except "down there", where the losers are declassified. (Otherwise you have to leave the discipline and turn to another set of standardized rules, from boxing to ski jump etc.). We are all united in the striving for achievement and excellence, but some are better, and some are worse. This is what the first model of sport – and nation – is telling, turning alterity into a pyramidal order.

The second model, exercise and gymnastics, works on the integration of the individual into the social system by choreographic body formation, typically in straight lines, in rank and file. The individual movements are synchronized, typically on the command of a leader. The authoritarian physical discipline and body control does not favour difference, deviation or dissidence, or it even explicitly suppresses them. It treats alterity by "normalizing" it.

Both models – the competitive as well as the disciplinary – give priority to the production of sameness. They assort "the correct" and "the incorrect", whether by the means of competition or by the rules of discipline.

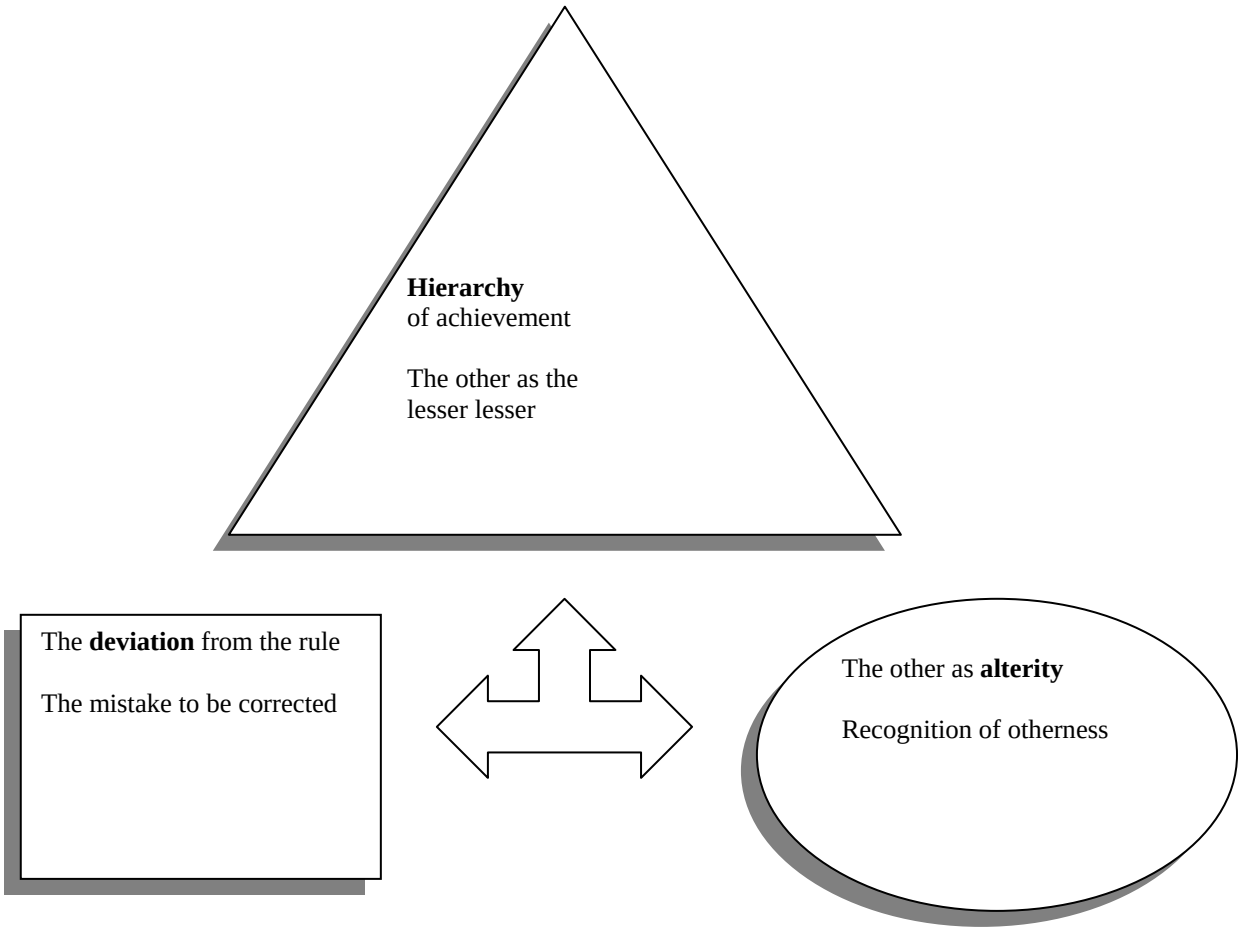
Popular culture as a third model contrasts by its display of diversity. In popular festivity, people meet otherness, irreducible difference. The non-panoptical order of *folkelig* festivity makes survey impossible, otherwise the festival would just be a "show". The non-panoptical (dis-) order of the bodies is a picture of communication in democracy, where nobody has the authoritative survey. Everybody belongs in some way or other to a minority.

This popular relation to otherness is not arguing in an intellectual way, it is not expressed by serious words, but bodily – and especially by laughter. The "other" is also somebody we can laugh at and laugh about. The "other" body, isn't it grotesque? That is why the fool or the jolly joker plays an important role in popular festivity, making it some sort of carnival.

Body culture and popular democracy are, thus, related to each other – or may come

into contradiction – by the right of difference. And more than a right, more than a mere acceptance of deviation, democratic life is based on a culture of difference. The culture of democracy does not only tolerate otherness, but identity needs otherness. Only by the difference of the other, the own identity can be discerned. If the existence of the other should not provoke war or civil war, democracy demands a cultivation of diversity.

Fig. 3: Contradictions of diversity – who is the other body?



Sumo wrestling and the crippled body

In relation to otherness, two typical (mis-) understandings can be found in the world of sports: the construction of the enemy and the objectification of the other.

In competitive team sport, otherness is often occasion to construct "the opposite" as the negative of one's own identity. The fans create mythical pictures about "the other". In the heated situation of confrontation, the enemy is constructed.

Another way to handle otherness is its control by rules. The colourful world of differences has to be structured by objective criteria. Sport tries to match this multitude by organized disciplines. Characteristic is the treatment of gender. The rich diversity of men, women and third is reduced by the gender test: either man or woman. Identity is constructed by (pseudo-) scientific laboratory technique and definition – sometimes with tragic consequences for the athletes.

In contrast, the recognition of the otherness of the other, which cannot be assimilated to one's own identity, means irreducible variety. It is the value of popular movement culture, that it delivers living pictures and practices for the culture of difference.

Japanese *sumo* wrestling is an example, expressing cultivated diversity in the form of the extraordinary. The body of the sumo wrestler is far from the "normal" body of the Japanese. In contrast to what is regarded as ideal, the body of the real existing human being can be fat, huge and even grotesque, indeed. Some societies may discriminate this, demanding a "normal" or slim shape, as in Western fitness culture. Japanese popular culture, however, has by sumo opened a way for the "other" body. Japanese folk mythology has created pictures for this: The *kappa*, grotesque river demons, are said to challenge the passing farmers to sumo matches. And as *onna-sumo*, sumo wrestling had also place for the extraordinary body of the women.

The sumo wrestler may be a national hero, but he or she is definitely not a national body model. In contrast to the streamlining national body politics of Niels Bukh's disciplinary gymnastics and to the (inter-) national standardizing body image of Olympism, folk culture can value the eccentricity of bodily otherness. The monstrous body of the sumo wrestler anticipates, in some way, the democratic acceptance of the outsider.

Quite another example from the world of Danish sports: In the time of the Sydney Olympics 2000, Danish sport reviews showed cripples on their foreside. *"Ungdom og idræt"*, the weekly of popular sports (*Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations*/DGI), documented a photo exposition of crippled "strange bodies" (no. 26, September 2000), while *"Idrætsliv"*, the review of the competitive sport (*Sports Confederation of Denmark*/DIF), commented the Handicap Olympics (no. 10, October 2000). The cripples on the sport papers might look shocking, especially when at the same time people around the globe were hailing the streamlined quickest men or women of the world. Yet, it tells a story about body and democracy.

Indeed, elements of popular otherness are not quite absent in modern sports. Gymnastics have sometimes carnival-like elements, working on the grotesque potentials of the body. And sport consists of a diversity of games, the patterns of which can only by the artificial construction of points be made comparable to each other. Otherness in sport would become explicit when the weight lifter would spring synchronous jump, the ice dancer would enter the wrestling arena and the boxer would dance on the gymnastic beam. The theatrical sport of wrestling (catch) displays this diversity in a show of contradicting roles.

The culture of diversity and difference works on the bodily relations of the human beings. In this respect, democracy is expressed in body cultures, just like anti-democratic attitudes can be expressed bodily, but with opposite configurations, as repressive production of uniformity. *Radical democracy has a bodily base – in the culture of diversity*.

This *third conclusion* opens a critical perspective on the Olympic model of modern sports, as it is realized by individualizing the human being and putting it into a hierarchy of achievement. Is this the way, we want?

5. Together, with and between – inter-body and inter-humanism

Under this aspect, the question of international encounter, which has always been a main topic of the Olympic appeal, has also to be revisited. Wee have to be precise with our terminology:

The *international* is as relation and – in best case – solidarity in the world of public and *state*. This was the level where Pierre de Coubertin placed the national pedagogy of his neo-Olympic games.

The *global* means promoting uniformity and sameness under the premises of the *market*. It is in this direction that the Olympic system as a multinational enterprise of sports-ware industry, media and advertisement actually is working. It is a machinery for the world-wide standardization of sports.

The *folk-to-folk* relation means encounter and exchange, based on *civil self-organization*. It is what in Danish language is called *mellemfolkelig* – difficult to translate –

inter-folk solidarity. Whether it has chances in the Olympic system, can be doubted.

The understanding of sport on the base of bodily configurations and their contradictions differs fundamentally from mainstream theories about sport, which trace a system on the base of the individual athlete and his or her achievement, which is only secondarily superstructured by social "use" and ideologies. The athlete is not alone in the world and moves always in social relations. Bodily movement is existentially a relation between body and body. The body of sport, dance and game is the inter-body.

The same is true for democracy: The inter-bodily relations between the human beings, based on the recognition of otherness and the culture of difference, are the conditions of living democracy.

The inter-bodily perspective on sport as well as on democracy implies a fundamental revision of our conventional concept of "humanism". Whilst the traditional Western view focuses on the human individual in singular, sports – both as competitive sports, sport of (gymnastic) integration and popular sports, games, dance and festivities – show the human beings in plural, body-to-body. If the "substance" of humanism is not primarily seen inside the skin-body of the human being in singular, but between the human beings in plural, a new understanding of the human as the inter-human arises.

The human being is not alone in the world – this is what popular sport tells us. The human existence is movement *together*, i.e. an existence *with* others, an existence *between* and *among* others. Whenever we are in movement, we are moving *also*, in a visible or invisible – social, biographical, historical – relation to others who also move. The human being of sport and movement as well as of democracy is an Also, a With, an among and Between. Basically, humanism is inter-humanism.

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