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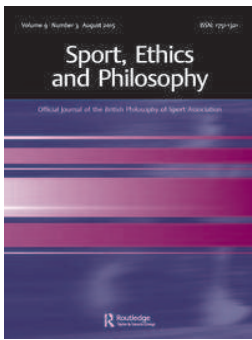
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# READJUSTING OUR SPORTING SITES/ SIGHT: SPORTIFICATION AND THE THEATRICALITY OF SOCIAL LIFE

Ivo Jirásek and Geoffery Zain Kohe

*This paper points out the potential of using sport for the analysis of society. Cultivated human movement is a specific social and cultural subsystem (involving sport, movement culture and physical culture), yet it becomes a part of wider social discourses by extending some of its characteristics into various other spheres. This process, theorised as sportification, provides a useful concept to examine the permeation of certain phenomena from the area of sport into the social reality outside of sport. In this paper, we investigate the phenomena of sportification which we parallel with visual culture and spectatorship practices in the Renaissance era. The emphasis in our investigation is on theatricality and performativity; particularly, the superficial spectator engagement with modern sport and sporting spectacles. Unlike the significance afforded to visualisation and deeper symbolic interpretation in Renaissance art, contemporary cultural shifts have changed and challenged the ways in which the active and interacting body is positioned, politicised, symbolised and ultimately understood. We suggest here that the ways in which we view sport and sporting bodies within a (post)modern context (particularly with the confounding amalgamations of signs and symbols and emphasis on hyper-realities) has invariably become detached from sports' profound metaphysical meanings and resonance. Subsequently, by emphasising the associations between social theatrics and the sporting complex, this paper aims to remind readers of ways that sport—as a nuanced phenomenon—can be operationalised to help us to contemplate questions about nature, society, ourselves and the complex worlds in which we live.*

KEYWORDS: sport; visualisation; theatricality

## Introduction

Social desires for collective expression, shared revelry, public demonstration, cathartic pleasure and existential experience has long been a part of social life. Sport (in its broadest conceptualisation) has played its part in providing a public outlet for articulating cultural and social values, corporeal possibilities and performative capabilities. Such has the situation become, however, that the similarities and interdependencies between sporting practices and the construction of other aspects of social life has become entrenched, profound and pervasive. Adopting Grupe's (1994) notion of 'sportification' (in which performative, interpretative and superficial elements of sporting phenomena are transferred beyond the sporting realm), in this paper we examine instances

of social spectatorship and spectacle. Utilising examples from sport, leisure and health contexts we argue that the pervasive sportification of cultural practices and experiences is congruent, and to a degree synonymous and harmonious with, an overarching theatricification of social life. Extending the work of Blair (1997), Kennedy (2009), Kreft (2012, 2014), Oddey and White (2009) and others, such theatricification is characterised, variously, by overt symbolism in social interaction, a quest for sensationalism and dramatics in the mediated performances of everyday life, and, seemingly insatiable cravings by the public for transcendental, hyper-realistic, affective experiences in and through forms of popular culture.

To this end, and with their emphasis on the physicality, performativity and popularisation of the active body, the realms of sport, leisure and health are useful sites to investigate the ways theatricality underscores, crafts, and gives resonance to our social lives and worlds. Through an emphasis on visual culture and spectatorship, media sport, popular culture and postmodernity, we argue that sportification has, essentially, consolidated a close relationship between sport, leisure and health practices and the social world; and in particular, popularised and populated meanings we ascribe to active and inactive bodies (in and beyond sporting contexts). The quest within sportification for ever-increasing heights of theatricality has, we suggest, continued to blur the lines (and ethical and moral judgements) regarding athletes' private bodies and public ownership, sporting 'reality' and mediated sport experiences, and, embodiment and social symbolism. As such, we reiterate in this paper that the sportsperson (through his/her performing and active physicality) serves as a constant reminder, and powerful public metaphor, for modern society's seduction with spectacle and spectatorship. In addition, however, the constant evolutions of sport cultures (and the existential dilemmas presented within) afford opportunities to critique our own performing bodies and the nuanced social fabric to which we are a part. We begin with an explanation of sportification and its consequences for social life. To aid our contextualisation we then draw examples from Renaissance culture and corporeal ideologies. We follow by highlighting links between sportification and theatricality. Our specific emphasis here is with mediated nature of sporting spectacles. Lastly, we consider the consequences of the sportification process for our postmodern visualisations of sport and society.

### **Sportification: Sport and Its Social Influence**

The proliferation, popularity and pervasiveness of modern sport and its associated spectatorship cultures have provided scholars with a distinct phenomena with which to critique social life, and, examine the idiosyncratic characteristics, processes and meanings of human experience and interaction (Cottingham 2012; Carlsson and Hedenborg 2014; Guschwan 2014). As a part of this examination, academic investigation has focused particularly on the ways in which sport (as a distinct social component) and the processes involved with the creation of sport as a cultural entity have contoured other civic domains (Maguire 1991; Hughson 2005). To note, we conceive of sport fairly broadly, and, take our use of the word beyond merely the physical. For example, our conceptualisation of sport encompasses not merely a focus on the active, living and moving body; but, in addition, also the ways in which the body/bodies are captured, (re)produced, mediated, politicised, socialised, visualised and rendered by ideological

meanings and values. The act of sport will, as such, not be the de facto issue. To clarify, the paper is not about the social influence on sport, but, instead on the ways in which sport operates as a site in which the social act of visualization may be played out and experienced. Our focus here, in particular, is in visual representations of sport and its slightly indirectly affiliated derivation and expressions (e.g. those found in advertising, media or politics) (see Maguire 1994, Silk and Andrews 2001, Lynn, Hardin, and Walsdorf 2004). One aspect of the theorisation on sport, however, has been an ongoing development of the sportification concept as means for understanding the transmission of sporting structures, values, processes, meanings, spectatorship characteristics and performative qualities into other facets of social and cultural life.

With its genesis in the early works of Elias (1971) and latterly Dunning and Rojek (1992), the notion of sportification has been well articulated by Grupe (1994) and furthered by Skjerk (1999), Ingham (2004), Pfister (2007) and others. The central tenet of the arguments put forth by Grupe (1994) and peers is that sport is not only crafted, and enacted upon, by social forces and processes, but also, that sport too interacts and contours the societies (and constituent parts therein) to which it is a part. Such a functionalist perspective of the relationship may appear commonsensical. Sport, in its various forms and guises, does constitute a legitimate social realm, cultural form and site for human experience. However, more so than this, the very nature of sport (with its popular appeal, theatricality, performative qualities, ethical, moral and philosophical dimensions, universality, mediation and commercialisation and public pervasiveness) has been so profound that the characteristics and qualities of sport now lend themselves to other social domains, and, uses in the construction of social phenomenon. That is, simply put, processes distinctive to the development, modernisation, production, reproduction and consumption of sport have now been reappropriated across a wider spectrum of social institutions. This, in essence, lies at the heart of the sportification thesis.

While the sociological dimensions of sportification are of concern (e.g. in terms of understanding structural relationships and dependencies), in this paper we consider some of the philosophical underpinnings. Specifically, our interest lies in understanding synchronicities between sportification and theatricality, spectatorship and visual gratification in popular culture and the transference of the corporeal symbolism and physical metaphor found in sport to broader social life. We take as our starting point the naked (or partially nude) human body. In its various states *the body* has served not only to titillate and tease through its various expressions of physicality and repose, but also, has continued to provide a legitimate cultural form; overlaid with social symbolism and a subject ripe for the ethical evaluation and aesthetic critique. The fascination with flesh does, we recognise, transcend temporal periods, geographic spaces and academic disciplines. For our purposes, a number of scholars within sport have variously focused on the natural form and physicality of the human body, its allure as an artistic product, its performative qualities and public gaze, covert and overt sexualisation and exploitative corporeal commodification (Guttmann 1996; Schiff 1999; McKay and Johnson 2008; Jirásek, Kohe, and Hurych 2013).

A cogent thread across such work is that the increase in attention afforded the physical body (especially in instances that reveal its 'natural state') is seemingly symptomatic, and at times, consequential of inherent various social desires for drama, voyeurism, sensationalism, narcissistic delight, sexual gratification and vicarious pleasure that transcend the sporting realm (Kohe 2012). Consider here the distinct presence of

cameras on the sporting sidelines whose fine-tuned telephoto lenses provide evermore extreme (and arguably invasive) snapshots/recordings/representations of athletes that tend towards to the dynamic, expressive, grotesque, provocative, sexual and often pornographic. We can conjure images here of runners' distorted facial expressions, sweat-soaked faces and clothing, ripped shirts and shorts that reveal undergarments or expose flesh, glimpses of genitalia or unnecessary focus on particular body parts, incidents of blood and gore or death/injury inducing collisions (Pelcová 1999; Jirásek, Kohe, and Hurych 2013). Consider the examples of the tattooed, sculpted and sultry physique of footballer David Beckham (and any of his equally proportioned peers) prostrated in alluring poses to sell all manner of commercial goods; the dedicated social media sites established in adoration of explicit images of the 'hot/sexy' *\*insert popular athlete name here\**; or, the jock banter employed by journalists, pundits and commentators that denudes, derides and diminishing athletic bodies (most often female) to their raw sexualised form and potential. The point here is that the body, especially in its expressive physical (albeit through carefully crafted mediated) sporting form, serves as a clear site upon which spectators can project a variety of meanings and interpretations. Moreover, sport (and sporting bodies) which emphasise hype and exaggeration is demonstrable of entrenched social tendencies that privilege, and invariably appreciate and enjoy, a sense of the theatrical.

### Renaissance Echoes and Theatricalisation

A useful preface to our remarks about sportification (and particularly the utility of the body in stimulating critical social commentary and deeper cultural symbolism in expressive corporeal-themed art) is to underscore the importance of the Renaissance as a distinct phase which altered perspectives about the body, social assumptions about art, and, specifically, ways of seeing (Inglis and Hughson 2005). In so doing, we seek to raise the possibilities that can be found in returning to Renaissance culture and reflections about visualisations of the body during this period. Aside from perhaps the current late-modern/postmodern period, the Renaissance is invariably considered as one of the most poignant historical junctures at which the emphasis on the possibilities of seeing has been significantly advanced (Martin 2013; Undusk 2014). During this period, in the evolution of fine art (or the trend towards a discernable fine art movement) visual presentation changed entirely. Namely, the representation and articulation of colour schemas, compositional choices, form contrasts, thematic decisions, symbolic expressionism and iconic and canonical reference points took on pronounced significance. Painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, architects all sought, in their various ways, to depict the values of world cultures and their ideologies in their work. Painters in particular, who often sought to 'capture' the body in various states of repose, utilised the canvas and brush in ways that would best demonstrate aspects (and often moral, ethical and philosophical dilemmas) of social and cultural life, and, provide resonating symbolism for public audiences (Huyghe 1969). Fundamentally, between the Medieval and Renaissance periods there were shifts in epistemological paradigms vis-à-vis cultural understanding and visualisation that influenced the rationale for and the ways in which art was produced and consumed (Dvořák 1936; Sorabella 2000; Martin 2013).

In Medieval art, the symbolism of meaning and structure was more valuable than any effort to capture a realistic essence of the subject matter. For example, in depictions of God the form of the divine is given greater symbolic significance by the precise placement, for example, to have God located in the centre or near the top not only provides the viewer depth of perspective, but, makes a distinct, powerful and valuable symbolic comment about spiritual power, omnipresence and religious hierarchy. However, in the Renaissance period there was a discernible shift in artwork towards more realistic depictions and renderings, and, a change in use of perspective to provide audiences with closer (and potentially more authentic) engagement and/familiarity with the subject matter (Martin 2013).

Renaissance art, in this regard, provided an aesthetically important means for the expression of ideas, and, invariably a manifestation of the human spirit (however defined) (Dvořák 1936). Renaissance paintings, for example, were not merely a celebration of nature, creation and the creator, but also of the tangible and visible reality including the human experiences, as is apparent in the vividness of facial expressions and in the expressive value of grimaces and gestures (Pijoan 1989). The interpretations derived in/through our spectatorship, to further, are emotionally extensive; we see not only the beautiful naked bodies, but also the pain of suffering. The simplified and trivialised approach describing the Renaissance as a period when religion lost its significance (which is supposed to be documented by the secularisation of the themes in fine art) ignores the intrinsic reproduction and pronouncement of religious themes. For instance, the above-mentioned pain began to be captured already by the predecessors of the Renaissance masters in a fascinating way, as can be seen in the various depictions of the Passion of Christ (e.g. Giotto, Masaccio, Fra Angelico) (Sorabella 2000). Here, and notwithstanding the variances in the iterations, it is possible to note a transition from the symbolic stylised representation towards a product that is more naturalistic and synonymous with human reality and experience. The Renaissance was not only a period of discovery of the visible world, but even more so a period of self-awareness and appreciation for the existence of knowledgeable observers (Ulrich 1971). Moreover, the period of artistic explosion and cultural expressionism, much of which draw inspiration from the body the arrest of the human form for symbolic means, attended also to wider social change and discord, uncertainties about 'the public' and 'the private', and, prevailing ethical, moral and spiritual malaise of the times.

In looking at Renaissance art with contemporary eyes, we may completely miss (or misinterpret) their intentional message. Values, ethics, morals and the sociocultural contexts in which we reside and form our interpretations from have drastically changed. As such, the original meanings, significance and value of the work may be lost, skewed, blurred or be incomprehensible for modern audiences. Although this could, of course, be the case for most art forms. However, in Renaissance art there is, we contend, a familiarity spectators may find with the expressionism of the body, the mediation of the human form to demonstrate its innate physicality, and, the concern with revealing 'something' about the nature of human interaction and experience because the associations we make with the subject matter (specifically, in this case, the body) does not rely (necessarily) on a deep understanding and comprehension of colour symbolism and/or composition nuances. The generalised point here being that while a contemporary audiences' subsequent reading/visualisation of a work may thus, as a result, be superficial, it



nonetheless may enable a closer engagement with the work because of its closer depiction and association with knowable human forms.

From the Renaissance, it is possible to follow these ideas about spectatorship and visual culture, symbolism in corporeal art forms, creative expressions of the physical and ideas about the body as a spectacle into the realm of theatre and theatrics. Within some aspects Renaissance culture, the theatre served as a symbolic space for the knowledge acquisition. The theatre, with its manifestations of the human form and links to the dramatisation of social life—served a predominant space for ‘seeing’, interpreting, understanding and evaluating deeper epistemological questions about life, social interaction, ethics and existence (Floss 1970; Blair 1997). Theatre, such scholars argued, became a rhetorical figure symbolically defining the entire world. At the most basic, the world serves as a stage upon which human interactions take place and are interpreted by audiences who may glean deeper understandings about the world, their ethical positions, moral experiences and specific social understandings. Like with fine art that displays provocative illustrations of the body, the spectator is a knowledge seeker whose cognition and experiences are influenced by the contextual framework and personal interpretations. In so doing, the act of ‘seeing’ is a politicised visual exercise in which he/she mediates their understanding about nature, society, the world, realities and the imaginary.

A good example of such understanding of the cognitive principles associated with seeing can be found in the work Czech philosopher, theologian and pedagogue John Amos Comenius, living at the turn of the sixteenth century (1592–1670). In his treatise called characteristically *Theatrum universitatis rerum* (Comenius 1914), he confirms the transmission of social theatrics in cultural life, and transmission of human experiences and interactions that manifest themselves through aesthetic engagement. In the only preserved volume (out of the originally planned 4 parts of 16, or even 28 books) dealing with the ‘*theatrum naturae*’ (the theatre of nature/naturalness), there are terms interconnecting the theme of cognition with light and the process of seeing: ‘human enlightenment’, ‘the light of wisdom’, ‘seeing through the things in the world’ and so forth. The fundamental abilities allowing one to gain wisdom are linked to sight: ‘beholding’, ‘seeing through’, regardless of whether it concerns the stars and celestial processes, stories of the world or human deeds and things. Briefly, Comenius uses the act of seeing (‘seeing through’) as the symbol of cognition and wisdom, for he works with the parallel of the world and the theatre: even invisible phenomena can be seen through the act of seeing, since beauty, purity, joy, and grace present in the structure of the world become a mirror ‘wherein we can behold God, Who is invisible otherwise’ (Ibid., 64). Comenius even states that ‘whoever cannot see the beauty in this world, can see but little’ (Ibid., 108). The point we labour here is to underline and emphasise the shift in perception, the change of vision, the turn in the visualisation of the world and its conversion from the substantial values and meanings into a visible forms (as experienced and expressed within Renaissance culture), towards postmodernity (and cultural phenomenon fixated less on context and substance than on superficiality of the spectacle and its consumption).

As a particular form of physical human expressionism, we reiterate here our central premise that selected aspects of sport have been transferred into contexts that are beyond sport itself and their message influences other phenomena occurring in these contexts. In so doing, sport provides as with a useful space in which to further our



understandings of nature, society and the world. However, our point of departure here is as follows. In an era demarcated by overt commercialisation and social desire for hyper-realistic experiences and interactions, degradation of sport by media outlets fixated on sexualisation and pornographic representations, and new forms of progressive and reactionary body politics (think here of the most ardent provocateur and entertainer Lady Gaga), sports' semantic and symbolic anchoring (the essence given by the context of its occurrence and interconnections and meanings drawn from personal interpretations and the wider social sphere) has, to a degree, been lost. Essentially, profound metaphysical contemplations about sport have it seems been replaced with more instant gratification found in superficial interpretations and quick acts of consumption that rarely satisfy. We do not imply here that this sort of metaphysical contemplation or spectatorship gratification is a relatively new phenomenon within sport (indeed these have been present in some form or another since antiquity). Rather, we contend, that sport has become disassociated from its conventional semantic orientations around the active and engaged corpus. The *sign* of sport, for example, remains visible, yet its *symbol* (or meaning) does not. Consider here the ironic and paradoxes demonstrated, for example, when an obese 'couch potato' lays inert, with no connection to sporting activity or sporting situations, and yet still clothes himself in sportswear.

The point here is that our perceptions of cultural forms, be they religious painting or nude rendering, are not only mediated by artistic licence, but in so doing, function formally as symbolic descriptors and reference points for particular moral, ethical, socio-cultural, political, historical and/or ideological narratives. That is, in essence, they stand in for, and concomitantly reflect and reproduce, a variety of nuanced social meaning and interpretations. We can apply this assessment to our considerations about sportification of non-sport culture; namely, to underscore the idea that the physical and corporeal expressionism we find exhibited in sporting forms is: (a) mediated in many ways; (b) imbued with symbolism that reflects and reproduces enduring and contemporary social issues, concerns, sensitivities and sensibilities; and (c) this symbolism, at least as far as sportification is concerned, is closely aligned with seeking social gratification through theatricalised spectacle.

### **The Theatrics of Sport**

Recalling the work of Grupe (1994), we have alluded thus far to the idea that there are qualities, dimensions and characteristics of contemporary sport culture which are adopted, adapted and articulated elsewhere in social life; conceptually referred to as sportification. In the following section, and returning to paper's thesis, we extend our philosophical thoughts to consider how sportification is in itself suggestive of a wider theatricisation of society. We admit the theatricisation of sport is not new and has in variable forms been enmeshed with physical practices for considerable time (consider the religious symbolism that overlaid Ancient Greek sporting festivals, ritualistic Mayan dance or running event in Incan culture). All of which, in their own ways, privileged spectators' gaze. However, the mechanism and modes of production have fundamentally changed, and, so too has the visualisation and meaning-making processes that surround sporting activity. The most obvious one is arguably the reappropriation of sporting signs and symbols; for example, theatrical mimetic simulation in sport

broadcasting evidenced in the advertisement of various products from clothing to cosmetics to food that utilise the signs of a sports lifestyle. Further examples can be found with politicians who, in their quest to win favour with the public, display their interests in active sporting activities. We can also point to the consumption and advertisement of a multitude of non-sporting commercial goods (cars, drinks, furniture, stationary etc.). In order to generate revenue and profit for the corporation the goods may frequently be linked to the appearance of an athletic body; essentially visually confirming that using this brand will ensure the identification with other typical manifestations of the attractive externals of male and female models. It is almost self-evident then that sport plays a similar role as the female body in mediated proliferation of nakedness and sexuality (where sex, seduction and sexuality sells) (Indruchová 1995, Oates-Indruchová 1999), especially in advertising. In this case, sport, and sport metaphors, can be operationalised as part of neoliberal market exercises.

In another iteration of the sportification thesis, it is not only the desire to have the good looks of advertising models, but also the trend to bring sport outfits into non-sport environments. Attitudes towards the body and acceptable styles of dress at sporting and social events, for instance, have changed. Today even people whose lifestyle may be totally devoid of any sport-associated movement or praxis exhibit their bodies as 'active', 'physical' and 'performative' by wearing sporting attire. The tragicomical self-presentation of these individuals in tennis shoes and outdoor outfits only intensifies the paradox of the present-day value of external signs with no connection to the essence revealed through them. Such persons do not (as far as the spectator might perceive, suppose, interpret or imagine) appear to reflect or embody what social conventions may dictate as 'sporty', or at least, 'physically active'. The clothed body in this case yields to conventions of social behaviour; in particular, that wearing sport clothes is normative, and, that there is acceptable discord between the rendering of the body in athletic attire and the symbolism and values associated with the outfit as a sign of sport.

A deeper and more inconspicuous level of sportification is when the behaviour on the sporting field becomes a model for human behaviour in the figurative sense. For instance, a football player may pretend to move his or her body or shoot the ball in a certain direction, but in reality he or she performs the action differently. This is classic mimicry that adequately enriches and develops the dynamics and dramatics of the game. Yet, there is another form of pretence, ethically different, such as the expressive performance of tricks, pretend fouls and spectacular body language when the player perfectly knows he or she is just pretending, but for the sake of victory, he or she overplays the situation and transforms his or her act into a genuinely dramatic performance. Theatricality can also be extended further and taken to the extreme, for example, with regards to the corruption among players and club managers involved in match fixing. For the players and club the lucrative financial outcomes of their carefully orchestrated theatrical performance can often be, irrespective of ethical and legal consequences, sufficient justification for the theatricality of the sporting event. This pretentious behaviour, this acting for effect, simulated and motivated only by financial gain, can (if nurtured and left unchecked) develop in socially normative practice. Moreover, the careful crafting of performances (on and off the pitch) to manipulate interactions, outcomes and spectator reactions and engagements is, we respect, not distinct

to sport. Theatrics, or performative politics, manifests itself too in governance and businesses across the social spectrum.

The theatricification of society is also present in sport in other ways. Consider the construction of the sporting spectacle in response to, or as part of producing, and heightening audience entertainment and arousal. Referees, umpires and athletes all have the power to increase or decrease the appeal of the event for its spectators, since they can introduce certain important atmosphere inducing moments and elements in the course of the event. Such drama and theatre place the sporting event out of the mode of everyday experiencing and into the artistic dimension of aesthetic experience. As Van Bottenburg and Heilbron (2006) remark with regards to the construction of No Holds Barred deregulated fighting events,

Their main concern was to attract as large a viewing public as possible, and they modified their regulations accordingly. What counted was not so much the preferences and enjoyment of contestants, but those of the spectators and viewers. For the benefit of the public, technique and style were subordinated to the sensation that the fights had to offer as *spectacles*. (p. 268)

Here we might join the wide-ranging discussion about the aesthetics of sport, the connection of sport and art, and the specification of sport as a kind of drama (Saraf 1980; Best 1985; Platchias 2003; Welsch 2005; Kreft 2012). With this discussion of theatricification we are mindful not to overstate and/or overplay the pseudo-religiosity and myth-making that is frequently overlaid on sport (Zowislo 2001). Our point here is to merely again highlight that the sporting landscape is a site in and upon which the drama, tension, hype, performative politics, emotions are played out (this being the very essence of theatricification). However, dialectically and concomitantly, the characteristics, processes, qualities and dimensions that are seemingly intrinsic to sport cultures also find their way into life beyond sport (which we, and other scholars theorise, as sportification). The debates and analysis here are embryonic. More work is needed to fully articulate and critique not only sportification and theatricification processes, but also, better understand the trajectories upon which sporting cultures, sport spectatorship, sporting symbolisms and the dramatic characteristics of social life are heading.

### **From Classical to Postmodern Visualisations**

With our call-to-arms above in mind, we turn lastly to consider contradistinctive interpretations of sport across classical and postmodern contexts. Unlike the ancient Greek or Hebrew societies—that is, cultures perceiving the word and the idea as the intermediaries of knowledge (e.g. consider the emphasis on the Torah as the centre of identity of a nation living in the diaspora, or the value of education manifested by the recitation of the entire Homer epics)—present society relies quite substantially on visual representation as a key mechanism for the transmission of social and cultural values and meanings. The symbolic image becomes of utmost importance. Contemporary theatricification (that which we experience in postmodernity) does, we respect, considerably differ from the Renaissance era. Whereas, the Renaissance *theatrum mundi* essentially aimed towards demonstrating an ‘essence’ of the natural and human world via hidden symbolism, meaning making and truth seeking, the postmodern social manifestations of

theatricalisation aim at recrafting multiple realities and juxtaposing artificial and unnatural phenomena separated from their substantial essence. The theatrical stage has, so to speak, changed its sets. Instead of the stage and auditorium, we get *in media res* through cameras (often hidden), television broadcasts, internet websites, nanotechnologies or information communication devices.

Looking back at the Renaissance way of thinking and using the metaphor of the theatre may help us the better to understand the present; particularly in the ways contemporary civilisation appreciates visualisation. However, while the goal of the Renaissance may have been the attempt to grasp the essence of human existence through cultural products, today it is not the hidden meanings and the significance that matters, but the phenomenon itself. In essence, an understanding of the Renaissance epoch is useful in reminding us of the centrality of seeing (e.g. appreciate the theatre as a stage for worldly issues and dilemmas) to the process of symbolic knowledge acquisition and deeper existential understanding. In contradistinction then, we might also acknowledge and better appreciate how our attitudes towards seeing have shifted, invariably, towards a more instantaneous (and perhaps superficial/shallow) gratification with consuming signs and signifiers. We might consider here, for example, the ways we view/see deplete the uniqueness of original artefacts and phenomena. As with the inactive 'couch potato', contemplate here the invariably sad superficialness, banal symbolism and tragic irony of those individuals and/or groups who make conscious (or unconscious) decisions to wear military/military-esque attire (think here of camouflage couture) in urban civilian environments. Essentially, such examples highlight the complicated nature of reality; namely by exposing the fraught relationship between reality, virtuality and hyper-reality. To recall here, of course, the conceptualisations offered by Jean Baudrillard, for whom 'hyper-reality' meant systemic simulation; in particular, when recognisable signs replaced the actual thing, and, ultimately become more than reality itself. This happens, for example, when the hyper-reality of depicted anatomical details transforms culture into a porn-culture—see Baudrillard 1996). The technologisation changes human self-presentation into a transhuman and posthuman being of a cyborg (e.g. androids, robots etc.) (Roden 2003; Bostrom 2005, Edgar 2009).

While the objective of the Renaissance way of seeing was to grasp the essence through the seen, postmodern visualisation, on the contrary, tends to conceal further the hidden value of the essential: what is valued is not the process of seeing, but the show, which means all kinds of disguises, masks and other theatrical devices as legitimate ways of social roleplaying. The superficial adjustments do not involve merely human self-presentation (cosmetic interventions in order to visually beautify the body), but the entire approach to the social reality: the consultants and coaches help in improving the political image, paperback bestsellers advise one on how to impress others, 'public appearance' and 'public opinion' are more important than the value of political ideas. What kind of significance and what manifestations does sport offer in the above-described social context of the visualising approach to the world?

Let us remind ourselves of at least two characteristic features of these almost theatrical images: the public availability of death during sporting events, and the decreasing age of the dying sportspersons. Death loses the halo of an intimate event and the radical finality becomes public property, changing the setting of death from compassionate participation into a form of some dramatic activity. Whoever could not make it to the television set in order to shudder with horror, can watch the shocking videos

uploaded on the internet anytime in the comfort of their homes. The unnaturalness of death in sport (commonly brought on by old age, illness, physical depletion) due to the inadvertent overstrain of a trained organism or an encounter with some of the technical devices can be further escalated by the untimeliness somehow defining the peculiar heroism of tragic death. The 13-year-old motorcycle racer who died in August 2010 as the result of injuries inflicted in the race by his one year younger rival becomes a memento for a deeper reflection of the role of paternalism versus liberalism in the sports environment (Jirásek 2010).

Akin to the thoughts of other scholars, sport has, we believe, become more of a theatre where the meanings of ideas such as justice, honour, performance and character are not significant. Although sport apologists will always highlight such idealistic mottos (Arnold 1996, Lenk 1980, Lipiec 1999, Wischmann 1992), the reality is somewhere else. What is seen is considered valuable, no matter how superficial the phenomena appear: the incidentally revealed intimate parts of bodies, twisted faces of athletes, fatal accidents. The rare occurrences of death within sport, for example, become an interesting product. As it makes dying available publicly via live broadcasting, mediated by television cameras, the presence of death (however abhorrent) can have the potential to make the sporting events more attractive. The conscious attention paid to the phenomenon of death in sport points to the role of visual theatricisation of this area of movement culture.

## Conclusion

The main attention to the process of theatricality in sport area typically attends to aesthetic evaluations of sport that prioritise and highlight its dramatic characteristics. This work is, of course, useful in helping frame political and social criticism of sport (and particularly its manipulation and detachments from reality). Consequently, within this paper our intention has been to briefly articulate some of the ways a return to Renaissance thoughts on theatricisation (in which theatre and processes of visualisation serve to symbolically connect the audience with forms of knowledge making) might address some of the concerns about the superficiality of sight and meaning making within contemporary sport cultures. In so doing, we might rethink the ways our collective spectatorship and engagements with sport (as a visual product) might become more substantive, demonstrative and attentive to some of the deepest values of nature, culture and the world. Following this we considered the disjuncture between this mode of thinking and postmodern visualisation (when the theatricality in sport is understandable as part of wider process, when it is not necessary to grasp the essence through the phenomena). Here, we can also look towards Kreft's (2014) articulate forthcoming work on anti-ocularcentrism as a critique of the sporting spectacles. The emphasis in Kreft's work is in the utility (and inadequacies) of radical social critique (e.g. de Certeau, Debord and Heller) for better understanding ways of seeing sport, the audiences loss of engagement with the 'real', spectators' manipulation by ideology and the creation of sport spectacles as banal illusion that entice and seduce with superficial promises and allure. With Kreft's critique of sport and seeing in mind, we acknowledge that today the goal of seeing (in our case in regards to sport) might be considered initially a fairly superficial act in which symbolic/hidden meanings and the significance of phenomena *may* be present, but, are invariably superseded by the spectators quests for hyperrealism and instance visual

gratification. Modern day sporting spectacles (Football Super Bowls, Olympic Games, Rugby World Cups, Formula One races, e.g.) are typical exemplars of broader social changes that have been increasingly directed towards the construction of drama and affective qualities of the theatrical. The spectacle of the show has, we might accept, become as important, if not more so, than the performance.

In a philosophical sense, this falsification of sport as a spectacle of constructed reality present us with a new set of metaphysical truths (particularly in this case regarding symbolism and image, the body and mind, its capabilities, its mediated manipulation and representations and ethical and moral qualities). With this in mind, in this paper we have utilised the notion of sportification as simple conceptual framework to analyse the ways in which 'realities' that are constructed in sport (e.g. the dramaturgical characteristics of sport) are reappropriated into other social spheres (and vice versa, how the theatrics of everyday social life are found manifest in and through sport). We respect that such a view may be overly simplistic, and, does not account for many of sports' physical and metaphysical idiosyncrasies or contextual social specificities. This admission notwithstanding, we believe that by reminding ourselves of the historical shifts in visual culture and spectatorship, and considering this within landscape of contemporary society, is a useful exercise. Namely, in that it allows us to continue to evaluate sport not merely as a physical and social phenomenon, but also, as a metaphysical spectacle in which questions of ethics, morals and values inherent to being and the human experience are placed at the fore and remind us of our connections to 'the essence', *eidos* or a collective human spirit.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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